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**BALANCING HUMAN TOUCH AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE  
AT BLAUMAR HOTEL**

**DISSERTATION**

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# 1. Foundation and Purpose of the Study

## 1.1. Significance of the Study

In today's rapidly evolving hospitality landscape, the integration of technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become increasingly prevalent (Nannelli et al., 2023). This integration presents both opportunities and challenges for hotels seeking to provide exceptional guest experiences while remaining competitive in the digital age. As technology continues to advance, it is essential for hoteliers to leverage AI-driven innovations without “jeopardising the human ties that visitors seek and enjoy” (Rekha et al., 2022).

This study explores AI's potential to optimise operations in hospitality and enhance guest experiences. Focusing on Blaumar Hotel, it investigates how AI and human interaction intersect, aiming to understand guest perceptions and preferences.

The ultimate goal is to provide insights into how Hotels, specifically Blaumar Hotel, can effectively integrate AI while maintaining a personalised approach to hospitality and striking a balance between technology and human touch.

## 1.2. Conceptual Framework

### 1.2.1. Human Touch

The interactions between staff and guests play a significant role in shaping the overall guest experience in hotels. Some of the key elements of human touch highlighted in research by authors, such as Harkison (2017), are:

- **Personalised Service:** Human interaction allows for personalised experiences that can cater to the specific needs and preferences of each guest. A friendly and attentive staff can anticipate and fulfil guest requirements, creating a sense of comfort and satisfaction.
- **Emotional Connection:** Building an emotional connection with guests can significantly enhance their overall experience. Genuine interactions, empathy, and understanding can make guests feel valued and appreciated, leading to increased customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

- **Problem-Solving and Adaptability:** Hotel staff members are trained to handle various situations and resolve issues promptly. Their ability to adapt to different guest demands and preferences is crucial in ensuring that guests feel heard and understood during their stay.
- **Upselling and Cross-Selling:** Skilled staff members can effectively upsell and cross-sell hotel services and amenities, contributing to increased revenue and a more fulfilling experience for guests who may not be aware of all the services available to them.
- **Cultural and Language Understanding:** A diverse team can cater to the needs of guests from different cultural backgrounds. Language skills and cultural awareness contribute to effective communication and a more welcoming environment for international guests.

### 1.2.2. Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to technologies that enable machines, such as computer systems, to perform tasks traditionally associated with human intelligence (Sharma and Rawal, 2021), for example, reasoning, learning, problem-solving and decision-making. These technologies have made significant strides in the hospitality industry, positively influencing in the following ways:

- **Streamlining Guest Services:** AI-powered systems, such as facial recognition, chatbots and virtual assistants can handle routine guest queries and requests, providing quick and efficient responses outside regular business hours. They can automate various processes such as booking, check-in, and check-out (Sharma and Rawal, 2021).
- **Data Analytics:** By analysing historical data, current market trends and competitor pricing, as well as forecasting future demand, AI algorithms can optimise room rates and maximise revenue.  
Moreover, AI offers the capability to sift through extensive datasets, pinpointing trends and guest behavioural patterns, as well as monitoring online reviews and social media mentions, thereby empowering hotels to assess customer satisfaction, identify issues, and address concerns in real-time.

In addition, AI allows better control of the supply and demand of products and services by analysing purchasing trends to determine which ones are the most popular and adjust stock accordingly. (Karagiannis, 2024).

- Security enhancement: Hotels can also rely on AI to detect and prevent fraud in financial transactions, such as credit card payments, by analysing guests' transaction history and spending patterns to observe if there are any suspicious or fraudulent transactions. (Jurca, and Falling 2004)
- Energy Management Systems: AI can optimise energy consumption by monitoring and controlling heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, lighting, and other utilities. In this way, hotel companies save on costs and reduce environmental impact. A good example of this is Smart air conditioning systems that adjust to weather conditions and room occupancy. (Kansakar et al., 2018)
- Enhancing Guest Experience: AI can analyse guest data and preferences to provide personalised recommendations for dining, sightseeing, and other activities. Virtual in-room assistance allows guests to control different aspects of the room on-site and personally with their voice, such as lighting, temperature or television, enhancing the overall guest experience (Kansakar, 2018). Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality are used to create immersive experiences for guests, showcase hotel facilities, and assist with virtual tours of rooms and amenities (Leung et al, 2020).
- Service Robots: Robotics are employed for tasks such as room service delivery, housekeeping, and concierge services, enhancing operational efficiency and reducing labour costs. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines robots as “automatically controlled, reprogrammable, multipurpose manipulators, programmable in three or more axes, which can be either fixed in place or mobile for use in industrial automation applications.” These robots may be zoomorphic (animal-shaped), figurative (cartoon or toy-shaped), or anthropomorphic (human-like). Incorporating AI technologies enables robots to perform tasks autonomously or semi-autonomously.

### **1.3. Blaumar Hotel Background**

Blaumar Hotel is a 4-star superior hotel for family holidays, run by Grupo Blaumar.

It was established in 1987 and is located on the seafront, in the residential area of Salou, Spain. It consists of 250 Mediterranean Suites, renovated in 2020, each with ample space for up to 4 people. For large families, it also has 26 independent, pet-friendly apartments next to the hotel, with a capacity of 2 to 5 people.

The hotel's location is renowned for its picturesque beaches and lively ambiance and its notable beachfront position provides easy access to the Mediterranean Sea, allowing guests to enjoy various beach activities like sunbathing, swimming and watersports. Moreover, the hotel's proximity to Salou's main promenade offers convenient access to numerous shops and cafes. Nearby attractions include PortAventura World, one of Europe's largest theme parks, as well as Aquopolis water park, Ferrari Land, and the historic city of Tarragona, famous for its Roman ruins and mediaeval architecture.

Among the hotel's facilities, there are 2 sustainable swimming pools with large terraces, a spa centre, children's play area, baby corner, lounge area and private parking.

In addition, it offers a space suitable for meetings, the Eco Corner, decorated with certificates and information about the hotel's sustainable actions.

Blaumar has a firm commitment to the environment and is the only hotel in Salou that sports the "Q" certificate for Quality, EMAS and ISO 14001 for environmental management, something that allows it to differentiate itself from its competitors.

Thanks to this differentiation, together with its geographical location and its objective of providing a high standard of quality in facilities and service, Blaumar has been positioning itself throughout all these years as a benchmark in the area.

Regarding restaurants, Hotel Blaumar provides different options: the "Xaloc" buffet restaurant with a wide variety of Mediterranean and international cuisine dishes, the Pool Bar and the Arena Tapas Restaurant, with a great diversity of tapas and portions of local and high-quality products.

Grupo Blaumar's mission is to manage and provide hotel, catering, and leisure products characterised by high-quality facilities and services. Its vision is to be recognized in the industry and area as a group committed to delivering quality service while prioritising environmental protection across all establishments. In line with its mission and vision, the group aims to guide guests towards satisfaction while also ensuring the well-being of internal and external customers, suppliers, and shareholders.

#### **1.4. Research Objectives**

1. To examine the impact of human touch on guest satisfaction at Blaumar Hotel.
2. To assess the current level of integration of AI at Blaumar Hotel and evaluate the impact of specific applications.
3. To understand guest perceptions and preferences regarding human touch and AI at Blaumar Hotel.
4. To explore the challenges and opportunities of integrating AI while maintaining a balance with human touch at Blaumar Hotel.
5. To provide recommendations for Blaumar Hotel on balancing human touch and AI for an enhanced guest experience.

## **2. Literature review**

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the topics pertinent to the study, research was conducted across multiple academic databases and platforms, including ResearchGate, Academia.edu, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect and Emerald Insight. Keywords and keyphrases such as "Human Touch", "Artificial Intelligence", "AI in hospitality", "Customer Service" and "Robots" were used, ensuring a thorough exploration of scholarly perspectives and findings relevant to the study.

### **2.1. The Role of Human Touch in Hospitality**

The hospitality industry is a people-orientated business, as Harkison (2017) aptly asserts, "It needs people to serve people."

Lashley (2008) further emphasises the significance of the host-guest relationship in shaping the guest experience, highlighting how staff performance and hospitableness directly influence customer satisfaction.

Scott et al. (2009) took this point further by stating that "the interaction between the producer and customer is more important than the product itself."

Service quality in hospitality is inherently personal, with staff often knowing guests by name and personal details, fostering a sense of importance and special treatment (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012).

Along with the increasing awareness of the importance of the emotional dimensions in service delivery, "frontline employees are expected to display certain emotions and suppress others in their daily interactions" (Yoo et al., 2019).

Harkison (2017) emphasises that creating memorable experiences hinges on staff's ability to engage customers on a sensory level.

Lashley stresses the importance of emotional intelligence, along with traits like compassion and the desire to please others, as fundamental hosting qualities.

Emotional intelligence is deemed essential for organisational success, particularly in hospitality and tourism, where employee relations directly impact customer experiences (Fineman, 2000).

In order to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction, staff are encouraged to display emotions which they may not feel. (Lashley 2008).

However, the demand for emotional labour can lead to job stress and burnout among workers, resulting in staff retention problems as noted by Hochschild (1983) and implicitly agreed upon by Fineman (2000), who states that added stresses are created in service organisations due to the need to provide an emotional performance.

## **2.2. Emergence and Impact of Artificial Intelligence in Hospitality**

Taking into account the importance of human touch and emotional intelligence in hospitality as discussed previously, the emergence of AI in this industry raises the question of whether it will complement or undermine the personalised, empathetic service that has long been synonymous with the sector.

According to Naik and Daptardar (2019), there are three types of applications of AI technology, the first of which being conversational, such as chatbots, that allow value-added interface at various interaction levels, including hotel room bookings, inquiries, concierge and feedback.

Dash and Bakshi (2019) affirm that this technology is an efficient customer service tool for simple questions. However, research by Hjerpbakk et al. (2021) indicates that while most individuals are familiar with chatbots and use them occasionally, there is a prevalent preference for human interaction over chatbots. Despite this preference, many people acknowledge the utility of chatbots for answering simple inquiries that could otherwise be found through website searches and would generally prefer having a chatbot available rather than no customer service at all.

The second type of application refers to mass-individualisation, which assists in providing customised services. The data of customers' attitudes, needs, behaviour, buying and browsing history collected by conversational AI applications and algorithms are used to shape and offer personalised hotel services (Naik & Daptardar, 2019).

Finally, the application of convergence pertains to the development of AI systems capable of performing human tasks with increased sophistication, thereby improving service interactions (Naik and Daptardar, 2019). This category of AI technology includes the utilisation of robots.

Japan is a destination that has already implemented several robotic services throughout the tourism and hospitality industry to greet guests, complete check-ins and deliver room service (Business Traveler, 2020).

Examples of robotic services include concierges, receptionists, cleaning systems and bartenders, which can be displayed as anthropomorphic (human-like), robot-like, and in some hotels, even zoomorphic, (animal-like) (Söderberg et al., 2023).

There is an ongoing debate about using robots in the service sector. Some argue that the use of service robots is not compatible with the principle of hospitality, while others claim that service robots are part of the inevitable development of technology (Yıldız et al., 2022).

Supporters maintain that service robots will eventually alleviate the labour-intensive aspects of the tourism sector and can be technically helpful since they can navigate complex service environments and interact with humans thanks to advanced image recognition and natural language processing techniques. Nevertheless, they do not believe they can fully meet emotional expectations. On the other hand, some people believe, service robots are likely to replace human staff in the future.

Examples of hotels that have already implemented robotic services include Marriott with the robot Mario welcoming guests, helping execute check-ins, talking, supervising the rooms, discussing the menu, and making presentations.

The Fairfield Inn & Suites in California has a delivery robot, Hubert, made by Savioke. Its use has increased their satisfaction ratings, tripling sales, diminishing the need for trades and delivering security at night (Belias and Varelas, 2019). Maidbot developed a robot for cleanliness, Rosie, with the aim of reducing the cleaning time of the rooms and giving the workers a rest. Yotel automated its luggage storage system with Yobot (Yotel, 2012). Aloft Hotels and InterContinental Hotels have robot butlers to deliver amenities to guests (Aloft Hotels, 2014; IHG Corporation, 2015). In addition, Hilton Worldwide collaborated with IBM to introduce the first robot concierge, Connie, in their lobby, who provides hotel and local information to hotel guests through speech communication (Hilton Worldwide, 2016).

Boston-based robotics company, Piaggio Fast Forward, designed a new robotic flatbed with 4 wheels, that can carry heavy loads, such as luggage. The company uses the term "cobot" to describe its technology's capability to work alongside human beings.

"The idea is to relieve wear and tear on the physical well-being of the employee, avoid workplace injuries, have a safer environment and create more efficiency for the employees" stated Locascio, director of hospitality at Piaggio (as cited in Hotel Dive, 2024).

The Henn-na Hotel in Japan was the first hotel with human-like robots at the reception counter. It was opened in 2015 in a theme park in Japan and was the world's first hotel with no human staff visible on the premises, as all frontline services are performed by robots (Leung, 2022).

The chain has 22 hotels in operation in Japan, and South Korea and one in New York, USA. The hotels are equipped with anthropomorphic receptionists (see image 1 on the following page), robot concierges, mechanical robots for handling luggage and robot butlers for escorting guests to their rooms

The in-room robot provides room ambience control, responds to inquiries and interacts with guests through speech. The robot receptionists have sensors that will play a pre-recorded welcome message when guests approach the reception counter. However, they do not have a voice recognition system and cannot respond to guests' verbal requests.



Image 1: Robot receptionist at Henn-na Hotel  
Source: [unihotels.com](http://unihotels.com)

Research by Leung (2022) explores hotel visitors' attitudes and anxiety regarding service robots, focusing on perceptions of aesthetically human-like robots. The study was conducted in May 2018 at Henn-na Hotel Hamamatsucho in Tokyo's Shinagawa district, known for its business-centric rather than tourist-oriented location. The hotel featured two android robot receptionists and one concierge robot, although it lacked amenities like luggage storage and robot butler service.

Findings revealed that most visitors displayed a positive initial attitude towards the robots, offering compliments upon seeing them, despite maintaining some distance and exhibiting hesitation. However, guests expressed disappointment with the limited human-robot interaction due to the absence of voice recognition systems, with check-in processes completed via tablets, leading to minimal interaction with the robot receptionist. This disappointment stemmed from higher expectations and highlighted a gap in assessing the interactive capabilities of robots in hotels.

The study, based on limited research involving 24 Asian visitors, primarily Japanese, underscores the need for further investigation into the evolving role of service robots in hospitality.

In another examination of Henn-na hotels, Söderberg Granström, Pronk, and Criscione-Naylor (2023) explore the technological readiness of guests of this chain.

The study reveals that guests find value in the utilisation of such services for standardised tasks like carrying luggage. On the flip side, negative perceptions arise due to the limitations associated with anthropomorphic robots, as well as concerns about the potential replacement of human jobs. Notably, the study suggests that current robotic technology is not fully prepared to replace human labour in the hotel industry.

The adoption of mobile technology, virtual reality, chatbots, and robotic services are identified as pivotal for the sustained growth of businesses operating in the tourism and hospitality sector. This adoption brings forth benefits such as cost efficiency, as a result of the use of technology instead of human work (Dash & Bakshi, 2019).

The ability to use the data from the technology to analyse the guests' behaviour, can lead to better personalisation of the customer service. (Kansakar et al., 2018). In addition, as this technology functions all hours of the day, access is increased, which can lead to better customer satisfaction.

Another technological advantage that hotels utilise is the ability to manage energy consumption, for instance through automatically adjusted climate and lighting control, based on natural lighting in the room or whenever it is unoccupied (Kansakar et al., 2018).

Virtual reality is another AI-powered tool that can be used to provide a simulation of a travel experience before visiting a destination. This can be a great marketing tool for businesses, helping guests with their decision-making (Leung et al, 2020).

Guest-facing systems, including mobile applications, point-of-sale terminals and hand-held devices, offer automatic check-ins, keyless entry services and control of in-room functions. Hilton and Starwood are just two examples of hotels that offer guests automatic check-in and keyless entry service using their mobile apps. Mondarian SoHo, The Plaza and The Marlin are placing tablets in their hotel rooms to control in-room products and provide location-based services, such as recommendations of restaurants, experiences and tours (Kansakar et al., 2018).

Based on research by Naik and Daptardar (2019), AI-enabled applications in hotels positively influence customer perceptions across various dimensions including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The utilisation of Natural Language Processing technology in robots enables them to understand guests' demands, predict service delivery times, and reduce waiting times. Additionally, AI can analyse foot traffic patterns, optimise staff deployment, and enhance security through evolving surveillance systems.

In terms of empathy, AI-driven online advertising networks, chatbots, and Network Intelligence personalise services, offer individual attention, and improve customer convenience. AI voice assistants further contribute to inclusivity and accessibility in service delivery, benefiting senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

The significant role of AI in the hotel industry extends to cost savings, revenue enhancement, and reputation management. AI systems optimise energy usage, procurement processes, and supply chain management, ensuring efficient service performance and minimising wastage. Revenue enhancement is achieved through dynamic pricing strategies based on occupancy patterns, while high returns on investment are facilitated by informed strategic decisions and proactive property management. Moreover, AI assists in reputation management by monitoring the hotel's public image and facilitating responses to negative reviews, while providing competitive intelligence through advanced pattern testing and learning capabilities beyond human capacity.

On the other hand, there are safety concerns, particularly regarding the operation of robotic services through the Internet, due to the risk of a cyberattack where guests' personal data could be in jeopardy (Paskoski, 2022). Additionally, the unrealistic expectations of guests, especially when interacting with anthropomorphic robots, and language barriers, pose significant obstacles to the seamless integration of technology, as well as the fear of job replacement (Söderberg et al., 2023).

In addition, a study by Yasin et al. (2021) suggests that “technological change and technostress during artificial intelligence adoption in the hotel sector have a negative impact on employees’ performance.” According to the research, this is down to “constant connectivity, a variety of new applications (some of which are hard to understand), multitasking, information overload, a high level of uncertainty, job insecurities, and technical issues.”

According to Choi et al. (2021), Japanese culture is more accepting of robotic services than Western culture. In Japan, robots have been an important part of popular culture where robots are used in animation, stories, and television. The opposite is described for Western cultures where Robots tend to be used to paint a picture of horror.

### **2.3. Future Concerns and Implications**

Carvalho et al. (2022) delve into the perceptions of undergraduate and master's students in tourism and hospitality regarding the integration of robots in the hotel industry. Conducted through open-ended questions applied to 358 students in Portugal, the study captures diverse opinions on the use of robots in hospitality.

Participants expressed predominantly negative views towards robots in hospitality, primarily driven by concerns about job displacement and the perceived lack of emotional connection inherent in robot-human interactions. However, opinions diverged regarding the potential impact of robots on service quality, with some foreseeing increased efficiency while others anticipate diminished service quality due to robot limitations.

The introduction of robots challenges traditional notions of hospitality, which are deeply rooted in human interaction, raising questions about the boundary between human and robotic roles. The study emphasises the importance of the gradual integration of robotics into hospitality operations, emphasising task-based rather than job-based replacement of human workers.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for human-centred AI systems that understand human behaviour while facilitating human understanding of AI systems. The "Computers Are Social Actors" (CASA) paradigm underscores the tendency for individuals to attribute social qualities to computers, shaping their interactions and expectations as if they were human, thus identifying their social potential.

The research also identifies demographic and contextual factors influencing receptivity towards robotics in hospitality. Urban populations and individuals with higher education levels tend to be more receptive, while women exhibit greater scepticism. Business travellers and customers of luxury hotels display varying degrees of acceptance towards robotic services, with concerns about compatibility with existing service standards in luxury settings.

Segmented perceptions suggest that introverted and tech-savvy customers may embrace robotic services, yet concerns arise for those valuing social interaction.

The analysis delineates the advantages and drawbacks of integrating robots into hotel service delivery. Negative aspects include a perceived lack of trust, loyalty, and emotional connection, as well as limitations in verbal and nonverbal communication and less authentic and spontaneous interaction “Robots are programmed to perform specific tasks and not to deal with the unexpected, which is part of everyday life in this industry” (Carvalho et al., 2022, p.10). These aspects are coupled with concerns about large initial investments and potential job displacement. However, a shift in perception could occur if employees perceive robots as collaborators rather than threats, thus facilitating a smoother transition.

On the flip side, positive aspects of automation identified by Carvalho et al. (2022), include increased efficiency, consistency and accuracy in service delivery.

The approach emphasises task division rather than complete human labour replacement, allowing robots to handle routine tasks while humans focus on more specialised roles that require human expertise and creativity. Robots can eliminate unnecessary conflicts and emotional issues, enhance service delivery speed and optimization, and foster unique guest experiences.

The staff-robot relationship and service delivery reveal a mixed sentiment, with some expressing positivity about improved service quality and efficiency, while others voice concerns about the lack of human empathy and potential job loss. The necessity for robots to complement rather than replace human staff is emphasised, especially in customer-facing roles.

Concerns about robots lacking empathy and disrupting the essence of hospitality underscore the need for thoughtful integration and continuous development of social robots capable of engaging with humans on a deeper level.

Future professionals in the hospitality industry may need to adapt to a partially or fully robotized environment, highlighting the importance of education and training in this evolving landscape to prepare them for this scenario.

Ultimately, while the initial investment in technology may be substantial, the tourism and hospitality industry stands to gain from improved service delivery and operational efficiency.

As highlighted by Kansakar et al. (2018), it is imperative for businesses to embrace the latest technological advancements to appeal to the emerging generation of technophile consumers, who wield limited discretionary income and seek competitive prices and tailored experiences, both of which are facilitated by AI technologies, which help reduce operational costs, as well as offer a more personalised service.

Businesses must prioritise complementarity between robotic and human functions, ensuring a smooth transition and promoting better working conditions, remuneration and recognition of staff qualifications.

Moreover, “human-centred artificial intelligence ought to create systems that can understand humans while simultaneously helping humans understand AI systems” (Carvalho et al., 2022, p.2) This acknowledgement underscores the importance of AI systems being developed with a focus on enhancing human experiences and interactions in the hospitality industry.

Ivanov and Webster (2017) suggest designing hospitality facilities conducive to robot utilisation, with robots assuming supportive roles in services of minor importance as preferred by consumers. Additionally, Ivanov et al. (2018) highlight the attitudes of young Russian adults towards robots in hotels, emphasising the potential for robots to alleviate human errors due to fatigue, dissatisfaction with their work, or some momentary inattention, as well as enhancing service quality.

Murphy et al. (2017) discuss the evolving landscape of robotics in hospitality, noting that as familiarity with robots grows, reluctance diminishes, and evaluations become based on real experiences rather than biases. Despite concerns about job displacement, the trend is not expected to lead to a massive employment problem, with the potential for positive impacts on unit earnings and job enhancement through employee training for new skills. Historically, mechanisation has led to job creation and improvements in existing roles, suggesting a potential positive trajectory for robot integration in the hotel industry.

#### **2.4. Gaps in Existing Research**

While the literature extensively explores the integration of human touch and emotional intelligence in hospitality, there are notable gaps that warrant further investigation. One significant gap pertains to the nuanced understanding of how the introduction of AI and robotics impacts the traditional dynamics of human interaction in the hospitality sector. Given that AI adoption in hospitality is a relatively recent phenomenon, there is limited direct observation and empirical data available, particularly in Europe. Although studies acknowledge the potential benefits and drawbacks of AI technologies, such as increased efficiency and concerns about job displacement, there remains a lack of comprehensive research on the long-term implications for guest satisfaction and employee well-being.

Additionally, while existing literature provides insights into customer perceptions and attitudes towards robotic services, there is limited exploration of the perspectives of frontline hospitality staff who interact directly with AI systems. Understanding how employees navigate the integration of technology into their work routines and the challenges they encounter is essential for designing effective training programs and support mechanisms.

Furthermore, the literature predominantly focuses on high-income countries and luxury hotel settings, leaving a gap in our understanding of how AI adoption varies across different cultural contexts and hospitality segments.

Future research could address these gaps by adopting a multi-dimensional approach that considers the perspectives of both guests and employees, examines cross-cultural differences in AI acceptance, and explores the implications for service quality and job satisfaction in diverse hospitality settings. Such research initiatives will contribute valuable insights to inform industry practices and policies as the hospitality sector continues to embrace technological innovations.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative component includes statistical analysis of ratings and survey data collected from hotel guests, while the qualitative component involves content analysis of open-ended survey responses, interviews and panel discussion.

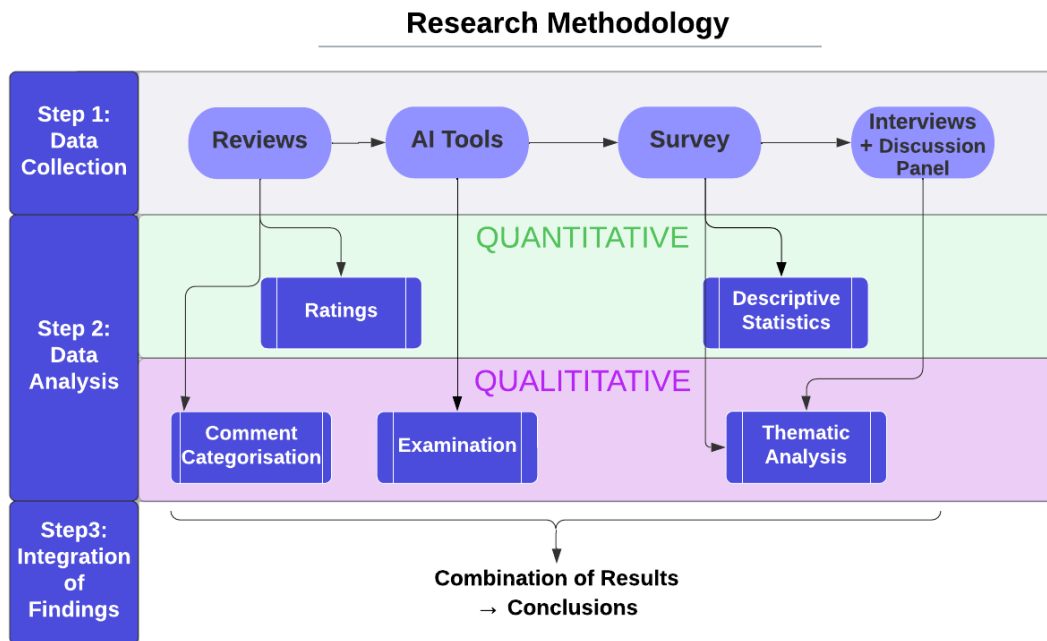


Figure 1: Flow diagram of research methodology, elaborated by the author (June 2024).

#### 3.1. Analysis of customer reviews

Customer reviews were analysed to understand guest sentiments about personal interactions with staff at Blaumar Hotel. This analysis involved examining data from three major online review platforms, Booking.com, TripAdvisor and Trivago, since June 2021, as well as the 2023 customer satisfaction report by Grupo Blaumar of Booking.com, Google.com, and TripAdvisor.

Statistical analysis examined ratings from the internal reports and review platforms to quantify customer satisfaction levels regarding the service and staff interactions, in order to determine to which extent these aspects contribute to the overall rating of the hotel. In the case of Trivago, the service was chosen as the element that most relates to Human Touch and in the form of Booking, the staff rating was used. In the case of Trivago, positive comments related to staff interactions were quantified, to determine the proportion of positive comments related to this aspect.

In addition, content analysis of customer feedback was conducted to sift out comments related to human touch using filters for keywords, such as “staff” and “service” in the various languages of the reviews. This analysis helped identify recurring themes and sentiments.

### **3.2. Examination of AI tools Implemented at Blaumar Hotel**

A comprehensive examination of AI tools implemented at Blaumar Hotel was conducted, which involved analysing the functionality, integration, and user experience of various AI-driven systems utilised within the company.

### **3.3. Survey on Guest Perceptions and Preferences**

A survey was administered to hotel guests staying at the hotel during May 2024, to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on their perceptions and preferences regarding human touch and AI. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions, including a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions in the five main languages of Blaumar's clientele and was available both online and on paper. A total of 98 responses were collected on different occasions.

Data from the closed-ended questions was analysed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of guest perceptions and preferences.

The open-ended survey responses were analysed using content analysis techniques. Responses were coded for recurring themes and patterns, allowing for a deeper understanding of guests' qualitative insights and experiences. This qualitative data complemented the quantitative findings, providing a more comprehensive view of guest perceptions.

### **3.4. Interviews and discussion panel**

To gain comprehensive insights into the use of AI and the importance of human touch at Hotel Blaumar, a multifaceted approach to interviews was undertaken. Firstly, a formal interview was conducted with the General Manager, during which the discussion was recorded with the participant's consent. Detailed notes were meticulously taken to capture the key points discussed.

Furthermore, an informal interview, along with emails and other forms of communication, were initiated with the Operations Manager. While these interactions were not recorded, thorough notes were diligently recorded to capture spontaneous insights and observations regarding the day-to-day utilisation of AI and the nuanced role of human touch in guest interactions.

Further perspectives were collected during a discussion panel, held at Blaumar and centred around the role of AI applications in sustainable tourism.

The recordings and notes from the interviews and discussion panel, were analysed using thematic analysis. This process involved identifying key themes and patterns in the responses related to the implementation and impact of AI, as well as the perceived importance of human touch.

### **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Interview participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to confidentiality. Survey respondents were assured of their anonymity, and data were securely stored and used solely for research purposes.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The Impact of Human Touch on Guest Satisfaction at Blaumar Hotel

According to Blaumar's 2023 customer satisfaction report, the service was rated as the fourth most valued aspect out of thirteen. The most valued sub-dimension within the service category was the amiability of the service, which scored 94%.

The author's analysis of guest reviews produced the following findings:

Platform	Total Reviews	Overall Rating / 10	Service Rating / 10
BOOKING	3.532	8,7	9
TRIVAGO	771	8,4	8,5
TRIPADVISOR	216	7	N/A

Figure 2: Based on reviews and ratings from [Booking](#), [Trivago](#) and [Tripadvisor](#), elaborated by the author (May 2024).

On Booking.com, the staff attribute received the highest rating, with a score of 9 out of 10, contributing to the hotel's overall rating of 8.7, based on 3,532 reviews.

Similarly, on Trivago, the service component garnered a commendable rating of 8.5, based on 771 opinions, further bolstering the hotel's total score of 8.4.

Of the 216 comments analysed on Tripadvisor, 69 conveyed positive sentiments using the term "friendly", constituting 32% of the total reviews. There was no individual rating of the service.

The content analysis of comments on these platforms, focusing on the perception of the service and personal interactions with staff, received notable findings:

On Tripadvisor, guests frequently lauded specific staff members, such as receptionists, restaurant waitresses, and entertainment staff, with whom they formed meaningful connections and eagerly anticipated reconnecting upon their return to Blaumar. Notably, one comment commended the longevity of many employees at the hotel, interpreting it as a positive indicator.

The combined findings indicate that positive reviews consistently highlight the staff's treatment as a key factor influencing customers' perception of the service. Numerous comments emphasise the importance of mentioning specific staff members by name, underscoring the significant connection established when interacting with individuals who possess distinctive and recognizable characteristics. This personal connection is especially meaningful for repeat customers, who value seeing familiar faces or having a specific point of reference.

## **4.2. Current Level of Integration of AI at Blaumar Hotel**

The examination of current AI tools used at Blaumar yielded the following discoveries:

### **4.2.1. BeonX - Revenue Management**

Primarily utilised by the sales and marketing department, this AI-driven revenue management platform benefits Hotel Blaumar in several key ways:

Firstly, this software uses AI to assess price elasticity and competitive positioning, allowing the sales and marketing team to set prices intelligently. By understanding how pricing changes impact demand, the team can adjust prices in real-time to maximise revenue without sacrificing market share.

With insights from the platform's automated segmentation by channel and market, the marketing department can craft more effective, targeted campaigns. This segmentation helps in identifying the most profitable customer segments and tailoring marketing efforts to appeal specifically to those groups.

BeonX's forecasting capabilities enable the sales and marketing team to anticipate market trends, customer behaviours, and potential revenue streams. This predictive power allows for proactive adjustments in marketing and sales strategies, aligning them with expected changes in the market.

By modelling the effects of different decisions across the company, this software helps in understanding how various promotional activities (like discounts or special offers) can affect overall sales and marketing outcomes. This leads to more strategically planned promotions that are likely to yield higher returns.

The continuous market analysis provided by this application ensures that the sales and marketing department stays informed about the latest market forces and competitor actions. This immediate knowledge enables quick reactions to external changes, keeping the company's offerings competitive.

In conclusion, by leveraging these AI-driven aspects of the BeonX platform, the sales and marketing department can not only enhance operational efficiency but also drive more strategic, data-backed decisions that lead to increased revenue and market share.

#### 4.2.2. HiJiffy - Chatbot for Guest Communication

HiJiffy is a platform that specialises in providing chat-based solutions for businesses, particularly in the hospitality industry. It offers AI-driven tools for managing guest communication, bookings, and various other aspects of customer service through messaging channels like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Instagram. Essentially, it enables businesses to streamline their interactions with customers and enhance their overall guest experience.

In the case of Blaumar Hotel, the chatbot was deployed as a virtual assistant, to enhance the function of the human receptionists, by automating routine tasks and handling numerous customer interactions. The chatbot offers instant assistance to customers at any time of the day or night, responding to common customer questions regarding room availability, booking procedures, rates and amenities and providing support outside of normal business hours. It is available as a website widget, whatsapp chat, Facebook messenger or through Instagram. This ensures that guests receive help whenever they need it and reduces the workload on human staff which consequently improves service efficiency and optimises resource allocation within the hotel. More complex issues are referred to human representatives, ensuring that customers feel heard and supported. In addition, the chatbot is equipped to communicate in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, French, German, and Catalan breaking down barriers and enhancing accessibility for non-native speakers. Blaumar also uses this platform to send messages as a virtual concierge, with reminders about check-in and check-out times, as well as prompting for requests and feedback before, during and after the stay.

According to the HiJiffy Global Reports on the 29th of May, 2024, since its installation in September, 2021, there has been an automation ratio of 88.3%, indicating the proportion of conversations conducted without the intervention of human staff, with a total of 42.923 conversations and 1.540 bookings.

The customer satisfaction score shows that 73% of customers perceive this service as "Excellent," 15% as "Okay," and 12% as "Bad, with an overall score of 84,68%.

#### 4.2.3. TrustYou - Reputation Management

TrustYou is a platform specialising in online reputation management for companies in the hospitality sector. It uses AI to collect, analyse and manage guest reviews, comments and mentions on the internet, providing valuable insights that can help improve the guest experience and the hotel's reputation.

TrustYou's AI conducts sentiment analysis on guest reviews, identifying whether comments are positive, negative, or neutral, and understanding the emotions behind each. It also aggregates data from various online sources, offering a comprehensive view of the hotel's online reputation. The platform generates automatic summaries of guest opinions, highlighting key topics like cleanliness, service, and location. TrustYou suggests personalised responses to reviews, aiding hoteliers in prompt and appropriate engagement with guests. AI algorithms identify trends in guest comments, enabling hotels to proactively enhance guest experiences.

For Blaumar Hotel, TrustYou offers several important benefits. By efficiently managing reviews and appropriately responding to comments, Blaumar can improve its online reputation, which is crucial for attracting new customers. With detailed analysis of guest opinions, Blaumar can identify specific areas for improvement and take steps to enhance guest satisfaction. A good online reputation and positive reviews are decisive factors for many travellers when making a booking, so improving these aspects can result in a significant increase in bookings. The data provided by TrustYou enables Blaumar to better understand which aspects of its service are most valued by guests and which need improvement, allowing for constant optimisation of its services. Additionally, using advanced AI tools for reputation management gives Blaumar a competitive advantage over other hotels not utilising similar technology. Finally, the detailed information and analyses provided by TrustYou enable Blaumar's management to make more informed and strategic decisions, based on concrete data and trends identified by AI.

#### 4.2.4. BQuAIT - Maintenance Management

BQuAIT (Business Quality Artificial Intelligence Technology) is a comprehensive AI-driven tool employed by Blaumar Hotel to optimise maintenance management processes. Targeting key areas such as predictive maintenance, scheduling, and fault diagnosis, BQuAIT enhances operational efficiency and ensures uninterrupted guest services.

Utilising advanced machine learning algorithms, this tool analyses historical maintenance data and equipment conditions to predict potential failures. By forecasting maintenance needs, the hotel can schedule proactive maintenance activities, minimising downtime and optimising equipment reliability.

BQuAIT also optimises maintenance scheduling by considering factors like occupancy levels, seasonal demands, and guest preferences. This intelligent scheduling ensures

that maintenance tasks are performed with minimal disruption to guest experiences, aligning maintenance activities with periods of low occupancy or during off-peak hours. Additionally, with sophisticated diagnostic capabilities, BQuAIT swiftly identifies equipment faults and recommends appropriate corrective actions. By diagnosing issues accurately, maintenance staff can address problems efficiently, reducing repair times and enhancing guest satisfaction.

In summary, BQuAIT empowers Blaumar Hotel to proactively manage maintenance operations, leveraging AI-driven insights to optimise resource allocation, minimise downtime, and deliver seamless guest experiences

#### 4.2.5. Virtual Reality (VR) Glasses

Hotel Blaumar offers a Virtual Eco-tour which utilises 3D virtual reality glasses to immerse guests in a detailed explanation of the daily measures undertaken at Blaumar Hotel to control and minimise our environmental footprint.

"We understand sustainable management through raising awareness among the tourists who stay with us", stated Nuria Varela, Quality and Environment Manager at Blaumar Group, during a discussion panel (see section 4.4.), highlighting the company's great interest in integrating AI into the hotel, especially to be more sustainable and have a more positive impact on the environment.

Although primarily a VR application, the Virtual Eco-tour exemplifies Blaumar's commitment to leveraging advanced technologies to enhance guest experiences. This innovative tour immerses guests in detailed explanations of our environmental measures, much like how AI applications aim to provide personalised and interactive experiences. By showcasing its sustainability efforts through VR, Blaumar sets the stage for potential future integrations with AI technologies, such as interactive guides and personalised content, aligning with its strategic vision of technological leadership and environmental responsibility.

It should be noted that no data has been provided by Grupo Blaumar to demonstrate the financial impact of these applications, in terms of the initial investment required, ongoing operational expenses, potential cost savings, or the anticipated return on investment.

### 4.3. Guest Perceptions and Preferences regarding Human Touch and AI

#### Survey Results:

There were 98 participants, with an average age of 47 years. The main nationalities were Spanish (53%), followed by British (14%), German (11%), Irish and French (8% each):

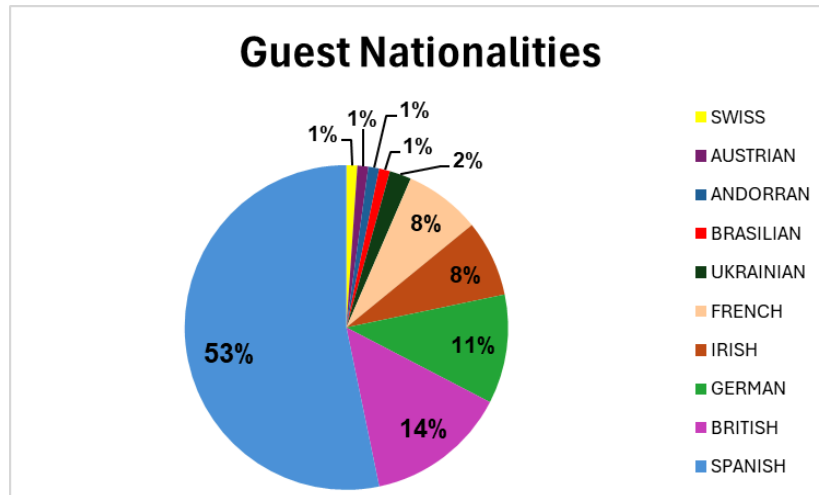


Figure 3: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

The purpose of the visit for 99% of respondents was leisure, with the remaining 1% visiting for business.

#### Question 1: How important is the interaction with hotel staff during your stay?

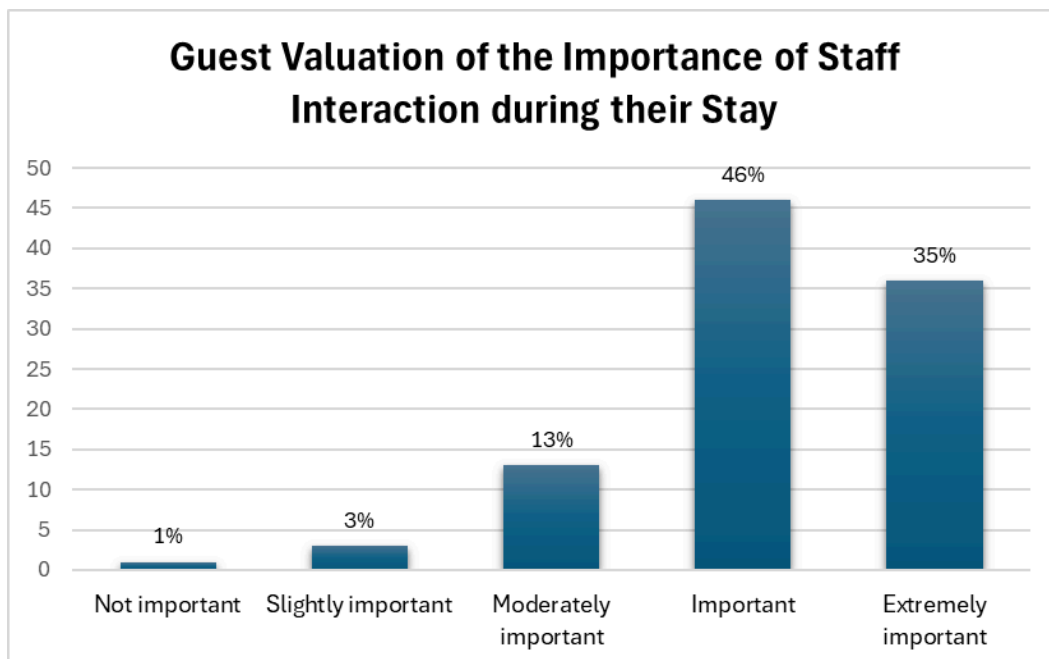


Figure 4: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

The vast majority of participants value the interactions with staff as either important or extremely important, jointly accounting for 81% of all responses, underscoring the significant role that human interaction plays in enhancing the overall guest experience at Blaumar Hotel.

**Question 2: How much do you value the following aspects in the human interactions at the hotel?**

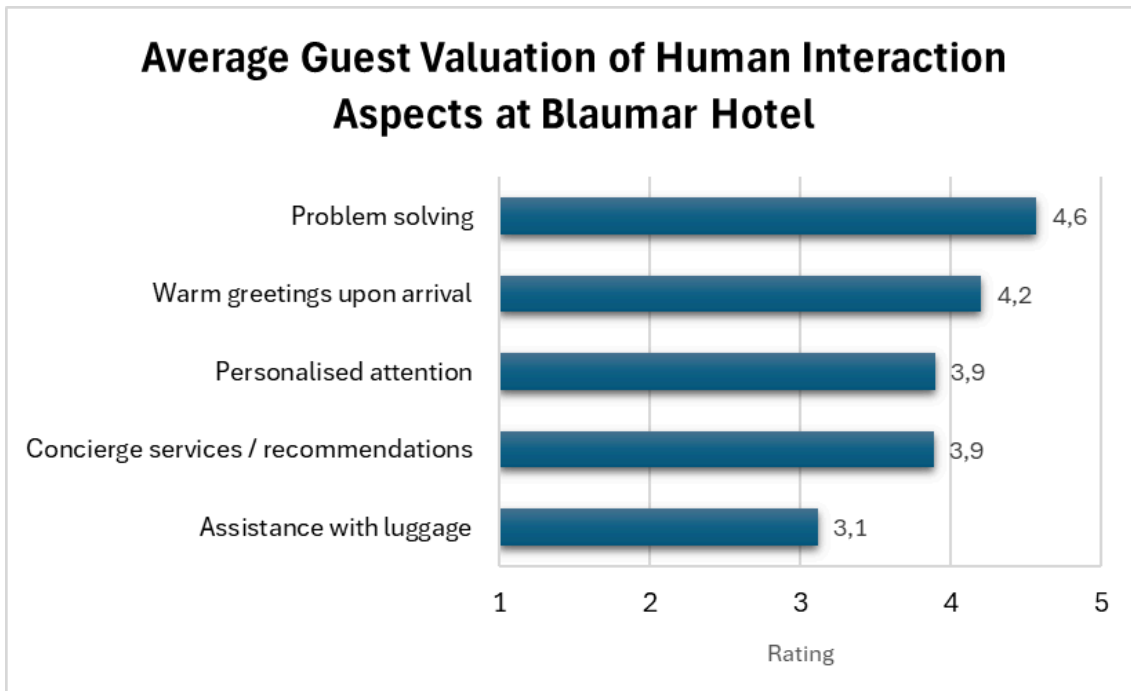


Figure 5: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

Participants rated each of the given aspects individually on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being “Not important” and 5 being “Extremely important”.

With regards to assistance with luggage, respondents generally rated this aspect as moderately important.

Concierge services, Personalised attention and Warm greetings were viewed as important elements, with a significant portion of respondents considering it as important or extremely important.

Problem solving was rated as the most important aspect overall, with the majority rating it extremely important and an average score of 4,6 out of 5.

**Question 3: Have you ever had a notable experience with a Blaumar hotel staff member that improved your stay? If so, could you describe it?**

In analysing the responses to this question, several key themes emerged, demonstrating the high level of service and positive impact of staff interactions on guests' experiences. Out of 98 total participants, 22 provided detailed feedback highlighting their notable experiences. The responses can be categorised into various aspects of service, each contributing to an enhanced stay.

General Helpfulness and Friendliness:

A recurring theme across multiple responses is the general helpfulness and friendliness of the staff. Guests frequently mention that the staff's positive demeanour contributed significantly to their overall satisfaction. Many highlighted the consistent support and amicable nature of the staff, describing interactions where staff members were quick to resolve questions and concerns. For instance, guests mentioned instances such as receiving clear explanations about bus transfers and other information, being helped with luggage upon arrival, and receiving friendly, attentive service in the dining room. These positive interactions contributed to a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere throughout their stay.

Personalised and Attentive Service:

Personalised service, such as engaging interactions and special adjustments, was highly appreciated by guests. These experiences often involved staff going above and beyond standard service expectations, highlighting the staff's attentiveness to individual guest needs and turning routine interactions into memorable experiences. Examples included the poolside barman who was noted for his professional and friendly manner, engaging conversations with staff at check-in, and room upgrades provided for special occasions such as anniversaries. Guests particularly appreciated the staff's efforts to make their stay unique, such as remembering specific preferences, such as seating requests in the restaurant and accommodating room changes for better sunlight or views. This level of personalised service highlighted the staff's dedication to meeting individual needs and creating special moments for guests.

Family-friendly details:

Engaging and caring for young guests through activities and personalised attention significantly enhances family stays, ensuring that both children and their parents have memorable experiences. The warm welcome and thoughtful gifts and gestures, especially for children, underline the hotel's commitment to making families feel special. The positive experiences extended to the Kids Club, where staff were praised for their excellent interaction with children. Specific instances, such as a staff member assisting a lost child and another providing a toy fish while explaining hotel details, showcased the staff's commitment to ensuring a delightful stay for families.

**Question 4. On a scale of 1 to 5, what is your level of satisfaction with the human interaction you experienced during your stay?**

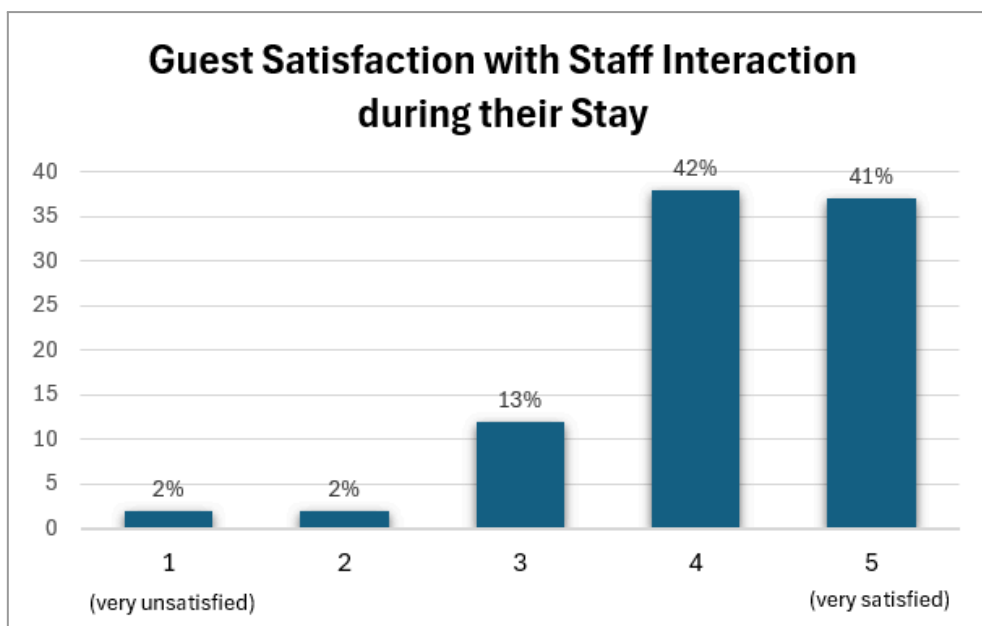


Figure 6: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

The majority of guests were satisfied with their interactions with the staff, with a significant percentage rating their satisfaction at levels 4 and 5, resulting in an overall average score of 4.16.

**Question 5. Which aspects do you think could be improved in interactions with the Blaumar Hotel staff?**

Out of the 98 participants surveyed, 61 provided responses to this question, which allowed for selecting multiple answers from the given options, shown in the pie chart below.

The remaining 37 participants indicated that they saw no need for improvement of any of the aspects in the interactions with staff, or provided no response at all.

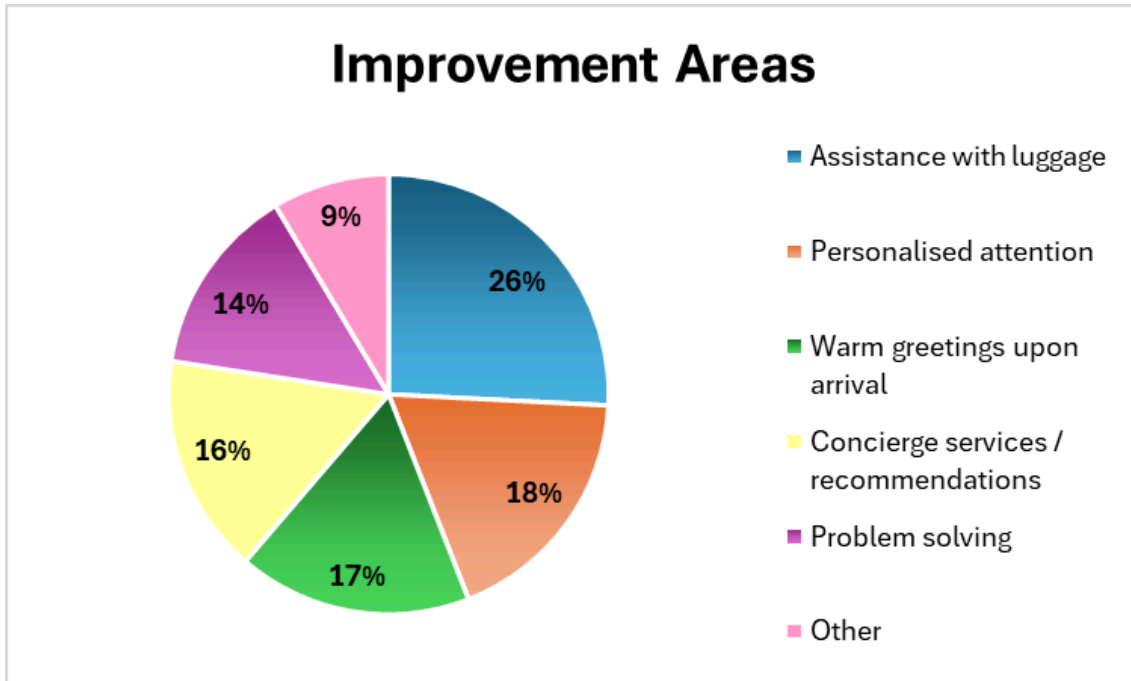


Figure 7: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

The aspect guests perceived to have the most room for improvement was Assistance with luggage, accounting for 26% of responses. Personalised attention constitutes 18%, followed closely by Warm greetings, with 17%, Concierge services, with 16% and Problem-solving with 14% of responses.

In addition, 10 participants added their own suggestions under the "Other" category: One participant highlighted a prolonged check-in process, suggesting that this aspect needs improvement for a smoother guest experience.

A few participants recommended increasing the number of staff members proficient in both English and German languages to facilitate better communication with international guests.

Another guest expressed appreciation for the hotel's use of wooden door cards as part of sustainability efforts and encouraged further initiatives in this direction.

Criticisms regarding transparency on services were raised by three participants. They indicated a need for clearer information about the half board package, specifically regarding the inclusion of drinks, as well as details about late check-out options and associated charges.

Additionally, one of the guests mentioned feeling uninformed about hotel activities upon arrival. This lack of information underscored the importance of providing comprehensive details about available amenities during the check-in process.

Reception-related issues, particularly concerning waiting times for resolving guest requests, were highlighted as areas needing improvement to enhance overall guest satisfaction.

**Question 6. Have you used the virtual assistant (chatbot) available on the Hotel Blaumar website?**

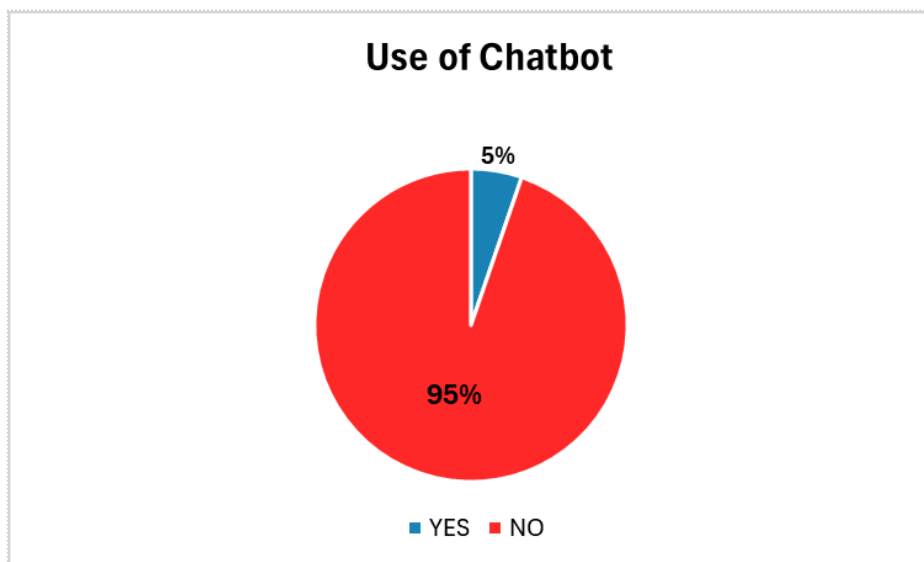


Figure 8: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

The vast majority of guests had not used the chatbot. Among the few participants who had used it, the average rating was 3 out of 5 points.

While the overall guest satisfaction with staff interactions is high, the virtual assistant's performance appears to be less satisfactory, suggesting that there may be room for improvement in the chatbot's functionality and user experience to better meet guest expectations.

**Question 7. Imagine if Hotel Blaumar offered automated check-in machines for a faster check-in process, in addition to a human receptionist. Would you consider using them?**

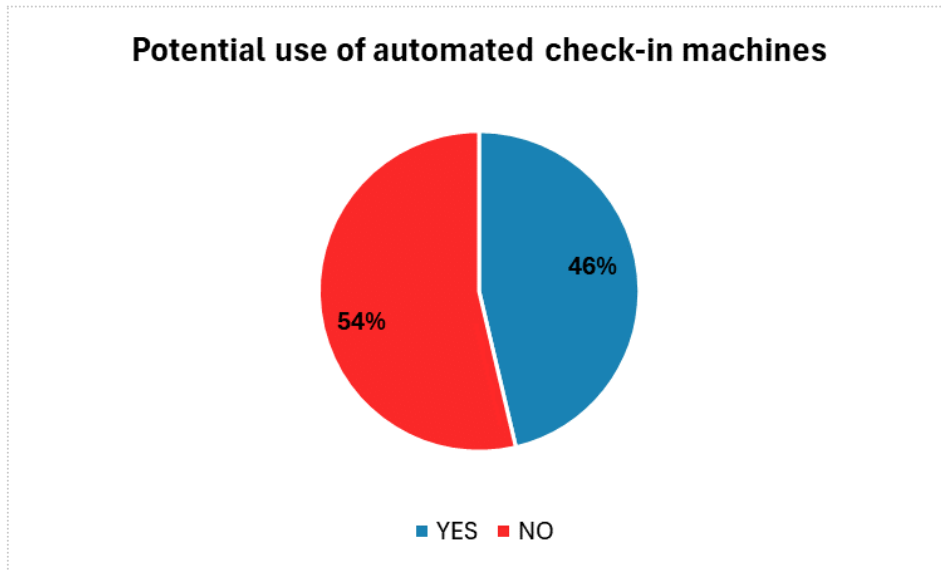


Figure 9: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

While 54% of guests would use check-in machines if available, the other 46% would not.

Those in favour mentioned the potential for faster check-ins, especially in busy situations.

Two participants expressed an additional need for the provision of alternative options such as room upgrades to further enhance this check-in option.

Others prefer human interaction for a more comfortable experience, valuing the warmth and attention provided by staff over machine interactions. They argue that machines lack the ability to provide human affection and empathy, which are crucial for a positive guest experience. Additionally, guests appreciate face-to-face interactions for clarifying doubts and asking questions about the area. There are also concerns about staff reductions and the potential loss of human contact if automated check-in systems are widely implemented. While machines may assist in speeding up processes, many guests prefer having a human available for problem-solving.

**Question 8. If Blaumar Hotel had robots for tasks such as room service, restaurant service or information assistance, would you consider their presence useful during your stay?**

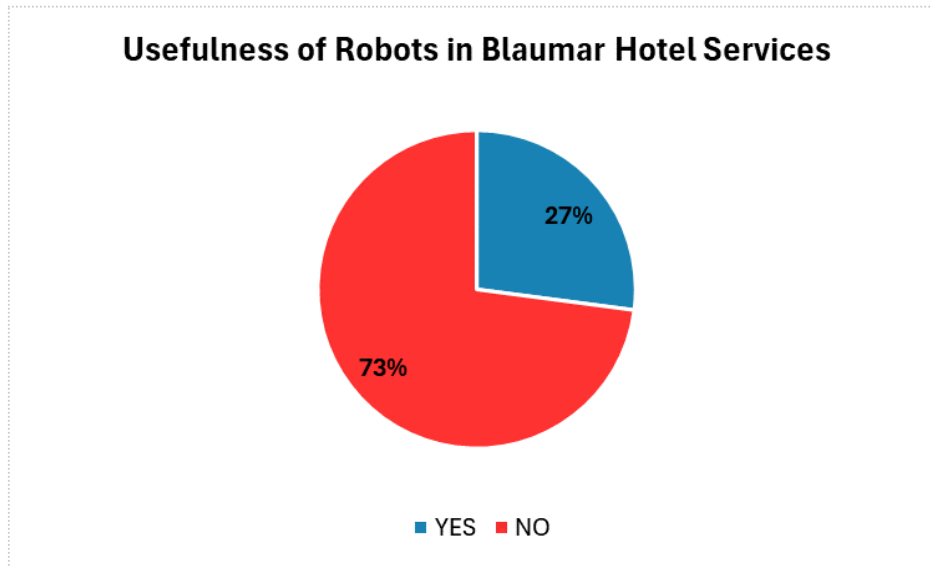


Figure 10: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

73% of respondents would not consider robots useful in tasks such as room and restaurant service or information assistance at Blaumar Hotel, while 27% would.

Among the reasons for using robots, guests mentioned that robots could be useful in certain areas of the hotel, particularly for reducing waiting times. Many guests acknowledged that these services are essential, whether performed by a robot or a human, recognizing that adapting to future technologies is necessary. They believe that moving towards the future and incorporating automation can bring efficiencies.

However, much like the responses to question 7, there were significant concerns about the replacement of employees, as well as doubts that robots could satisfactorily handle tasks such as cleaning rooms, citing experiences where automated services did not meet cleanliness standards. Human interaction is highly valued by guests, as it provides a level of warmth and personal attention that machines cannot replicate.

Some guests describe themselves as old-fashioned, preferring the traditional approach of human service. They believe robots cannot cater to all individual needs and enjoy the personal touch provided by human cleaners.

Despite recognising the novelty of automation, many guests would still prefer human interaction, especially when asking questions or resolving queries.

They emphasise the importance of face-to-face interactions for better clarification and overall experience. The personal service provided by staff is seen as irreplaceable, with many expressing a strong preference for people over machines. Warm and pleasant human attention is deemed more important than the efficiency of interacting with a machine.

Additionally, some guests are unfamiliar with automated services and are sceptical about their advantages. They argue that the speed of being attended to by a machine does not outweigh the benefits of personal interaction and oppose using technology at the expense of staff reduction. The human aspect is considered more valuable than speed and direct interaction, and guests believe that for the price paid, personalised attention from staff should be guaranteed. If machines were used, they feel that the loss of human contact would necessitate a lower price. Interaction during check-in is particularly important, and guests believe that this cannot be effectively managed by a machine. They prefer human receptionists and emphasise the importance of human contact and staff presence. Some guests are staunchly against automation, valuing the empathy and personal touch that human interaction provides. They believe that using robots would dehumanise hotel services and diminish the importance of interpersonal relationships, which are crucial for a positive experience. The absence of interpersonal exchange would be a significant loss, as it is highly valued by guests.

**Question 9. Would you appreciate receiving personalised recommendations for activities, restaurants or services during your stay?**

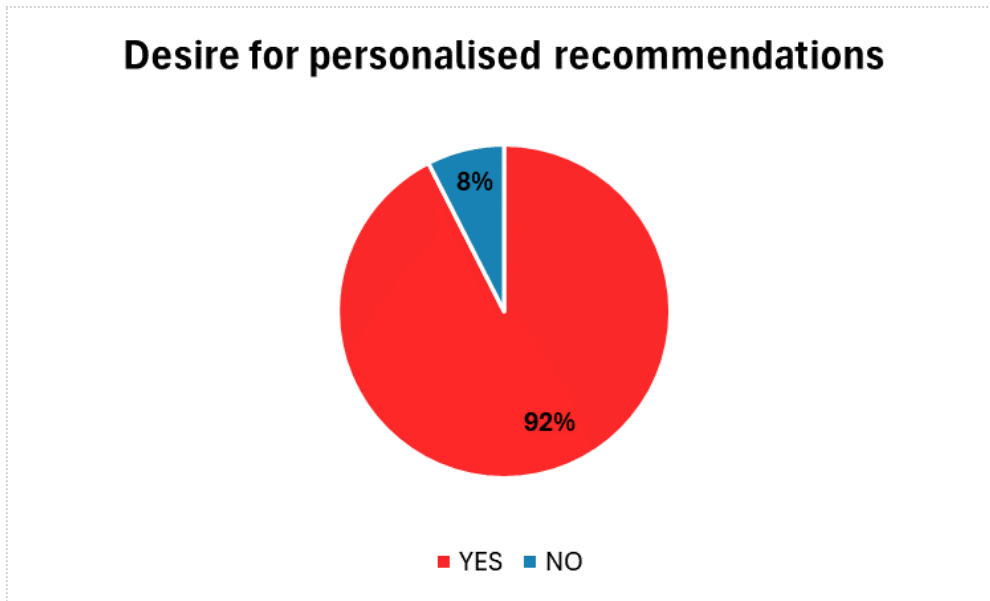


Figure 11: Based on Google Forms survey results, elaborated by the author (May 2024).

The vast majority of participants (92%) expressed a desire for personalised recommendations, indicating a strong preference for tailored suggestions to enhance their stay.

### Survey Conclusions

The survey results indicate that guests at Blaumar Hotel highly value human interaction, particularly for its friendliness, personal touch, and problem-solving capabilities. While there is openness to certain technological advancements like automated check-in, the majority prefer human services for their warmth and attentiveness. Family-friendly features and personalised recommendations are also highly appreciated.

Guests' responses highlighted the importance of improving areas such as luggage assistance, increasing staff proficiency in multiple languages, and providing clearer information about services and amenities. Enhancing the chatbot's functionality could also help meet guest expectations for digital interactions.

The full survey questionnaire is available in Appendix 1.

#### **4.4. Challenges and Opportunities of integrating AI - Insights from Blaumar's Leadership**

##### 4.4.1. Discussion Panel on Sustainability and AI

Blaumar's discussion panel on April 22, 2024 centred around the role AI applications can have in the sustainability of tourism. This discussion board was joined by Varela, Quality and Environment Manager at Blaumar Group, alongside Berta Cabré, President of the Tarragona Hotel and Tourism Business Federation (FEHT); Assumpció Huertas, Professor at University Rovira I Virgili and researcher for the ADAPTOUR project, created to analyse destinations' adaptability to climate change; Adrián Garcés, Projects Manager at the ICT Cluster Catalonia South; and Andreu Tobella, CDO & Head of Ventures at PortAventura.

Huertas highlighted the functioning of chatbots applied to tourism as a case study, in which it has been determined that what users value most about chatbots is the quality of information and then their empathy and understanding. She concluded by stating that "technology contributes to sustainability by saving resources, for example, and chatbots will also do so if the people behind them continue along this line" (Curt Iborra, 2024)

Varela raised concerns about the fear of replacement that exists among employees. However, in Tobella's view, AI will not replace anything specific; rather, it will help reach places that were not reachable before. "Artificial intelligence works with information that already exists from the past. Humans are the only ones capable of creating in the future."

Tobella concluded the discussion with a serious clarification about the potential threats of this technology: "AI is a tool for us and it is our responsibility to make it work as we want."

On this note, Adrian Garcés, also wanted to emphasise that for AI to be intelligent, human value and data interpretation are key. In terms of sustainability, he said that AI can be used to interpret and cross-reference data in ways that were previously unthinkable. "AI will be our next step as a society, it will allow us to optimise many processes, adding this layer of sustainability," he concluded.

In a similar vein to the other speakers, Berta Cabré highlighted the importance of human value in the tourism sector, making it clear that AI will change the roles of workers but will not replace them.

#### 4.4.2. Interview with the General Manager

During an interview with Albert Canadell, General Manager at Grupo Blaumar, we gained valuable insights into the strategic implementation of AI technologies.

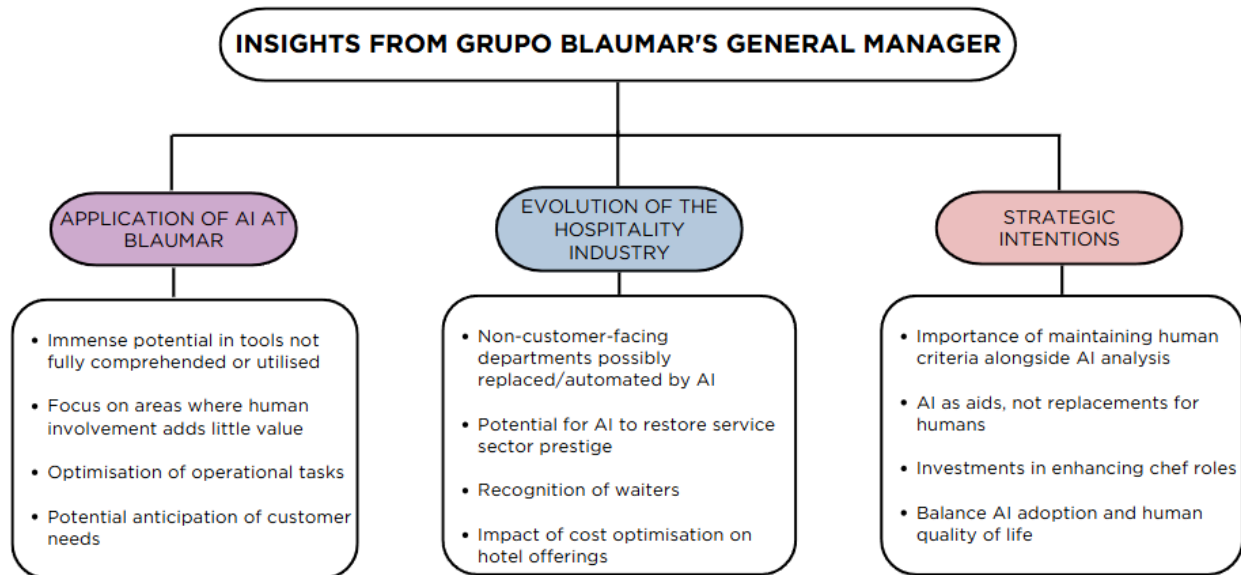


Figure 12: Insights from the General Manager. Elaborated by the author (June 2024).

Canadell emphasises that technology has surpassed our current level of advancement. There is immense untapped potential in tools that we have yet to fully comprehend or utilise correctly. He also highlights the importance of maintaining our own criteria and not solely relying on machine predictions. Certain unforeseen factors still exist, making it crucial to employ human analytics to truly grasp the capabilities of these tools. They should be viewed as aids rather than replacements for human execution.

When it comes to Blaumar Hotel, Canadell explains their approach to understanding the potential of various AI tools and identifying those applicable to their company's size. This allows them to focus on budgeting issues, reporting templates, and other areas where human involvement adds no significant value.

Looking ahead, Canadell predicts that in the near future, many non-customer-facing operational departments will be easily replaced by AI or robotics. However, customer-facing roles will remain essential. For instance, the warm welcome guests receive upon arrival at their destination plays a pivotal role in their overall experience.

One of the primary difficulties, according to Canadell, is discovering the equilibrium point that ought to enable us to enhance the quality of life for human beings. In other words, if AI eventually has to substitute a portion of the workforce, it is crucial to ensure that the replaced workforce can sustain an acceptable standard of living, to prevent any threat posed by AI. If individuals perceive in the long run that AI will not benefit society, they will not accept its presence. Therefore, it is essential to address this challenge. "I believe the key lies in finding a balance that allows people to continue progressing, living well, and maintaining their quality of life". The introduction of intelligence should be seen as assistance rather than replacement. This challenge is significant because people are currently filled with fear.

Canadell asserts that AI has not yet made significant improvements to the customer experience at Blaumar. However, it has the potential to do so. By having the ability to anticipate and understand the needs and habits of customers, AI can enable a more personalised service. Additionally, it can optimise the purchasing process by accurately predicting and managing inventory, thereby avoiding stock shortages.

Canadell also believes that AI will help restore the prestige that the service sector has lost in recent years due to mass production. He states that jobs that do not require face-to-face interaction can easily be replaced. Today, waiters are not highly valued. However, jobs that involve human contact, such as waiters, will take much longer to be fully automated by robotization and AI. The substitution of these jobs will not happen as quickly as it does with positions that lack human interaction.

"There may come a time in the future when the role of a maid is automated, eliminating the need for human workers. The client's only concern is that the room is cleaned, regardless of how it is done. This same concept applies to the kitchen. Customers primarily care about sitting down and enjoying a delicious meal. Whether it is prepared by a machine or a chef, as long as it tastes amazing, it meets their expectations. However, the question remains: who is serving the food? Who is providing a warm welcome? These often undervalued roles may soon gain more recognition, as they are much harder to replace. I hold onto the hope that the human element in the service industry will always prevail because it is incredibly challenging to substitute".

Grupo Blaumar has made significant investments in show cooking to both save and elevate the role of chefs, positioning themselves in a more prestigious market segment. "The role of a cook is no longer just about preparing food; it has become an art form. We aim to showcase our expertise and offer a heightened dining experience."

In the world of hospitality, Canadell believes we can expect to see a range of accommodation options, from budget hotels to more luxurious establishments. However, the middle ground, the average-priced hotels, may eventually disappear. The industry is evolving, and this shift is reflected in the varying levels of service and amenities offered by different hotels.

While low-cost chains have optimised their services to cater to budget-conscious travellers, there are hotels that provide a more luxurious experience, with additional human touchpoints and extravagant offerings. These different types of hotels will coexist, each catering to a specific clientele. The key factor driving these variations in hotel offerings is cost optimization. Hotels strive to find the right balance between providing quality services and managing expenses, which ultimately affects the price of a room. As technology continues to advance, AI may play a role in streamlining certain tasks within the hospitality industry. However, it is unlikely to completely replace human employees.

AI can assist with cleaning common areas, attending to customer needs, and performing maintenance tasks, but there will always be a need for human interaction and oversight in the service sector.

While AI may eventually replace many jobs across various industries, Canadell insists that the service sector is likely to be one of the last areas where human employees are replaced. This is because the personal touch and individualised attention provided by human staff are valued by customers and cannot be easily replicated by machines. “While technology may play a role in enhancing efficiency, the human touch and personalised service will continue to be integral to the hospitality industry.”

The full interview transcript can be found in Appendix 2.

#### 4.4.3. Interview with the Operations Manager

When asked about Grupo Blaumar's intentions with respect to the integration of AI, Operations Manager, Ketty Ruiz stated that they will consider anything that could be useful. “Artificial Intelligence is the future,” she affirmed (K. Ruiz Domínguez, personal communication, April 6, 2024).

In Port Plaza apartments, another establishment run by Grupo Blaumar, self-check-in machines by Roommatik are used during hours when no human receptionist is present. Although these machines currently operate without AI, they exemplify the initial phase of automation in hospitality services. The use of such technology in low-traffic locations like apartments makes operational sense.

Ruiz emphasises the importance of maintaining a human touch, planning to connect a camera to these machines, enabling a live transmission of a human receptionist from Magnolia Hotel (another establishment run by Grupo Blaumar). “It helps to know there’s a person behind it all,” she explained.

For Blaumar Hotel, self-check-in machines also present a future possibility. However, Ruiz insists that there will always be one or more human receptionists present to provide a sense of tranquillity to customers. “Although the automatic check-in can be useful, it will never replace our human staff.”

This approach reflects a balanced strategy where initial automation paves the way for more sophisticated AI integrations. While the current self-check-in machines may not utilise AI, they are foundational technologies that can evolve to include AI capabilities such as facial recognition, personalised guest interactions, and advanced problem-solving in the future.

#### 4.4.4. Digitalisation Projects and Adoption of Emerging Technologies

In pursuit of both technological advancement and sustainable practices Blaumar is applying for grants from the Ministry of Industry and Tourism for projects in digitalisation, focusing on sustainability in the tourism sector. The objective is to develop a digital platform that integrates key indicators of environmental, social, and economic sustainability, tailored specifically to the needs of Hotel Blaumar but with the potential for extension to other establishments in the tourism sector, ultimately aiming to reduce carbon footprint. To achieve these objectives, in cooperation with the technological providers Black2Blu and Eurocat, the project is based on an agile and adaptive methodology, incorporating mature technologies such as advanced monitoring, predictive analysis, and gamification. The project will also explore the adoption of emerging technologies such as AI, big data analysis, Internet of Things (IoT), and augmented/virtual reality (AR/VR) to enhance operational efficiency, offer personalised services, and create unique guest experiences.

## **5. Conclusions**

Based on the analysis of AI transformation within the hospitality industry and the aspect of human touch, particularly focusing on Blaumar Hotel, several key conclusions can be drawn. These conclusions are structured around the primary research objectives, outlined in section 1.

### **5.1. The Impact of Human Touch on Guest Satisfaction at Blaumar Hotel**

The analysis of customer reviews reveals that the treatment by staff significantly influences customers' perceptions of service, with positive reviews often highlighting specific staff members by name. This emphasis underscores the meaningful connection formed during interactions, particularly valued by repeat customers seeking familiarity and personalised experiences. Ultimately, beyond mere transactions, the authentic relationships forged contribute to making each stay at Blaumar Hotel distinct and memorable for guests.

### **5.2. Current Level of Integration of AI at Blaumar Hotel**

In the evolving landscape of hospitality, Blaumar Hotel, under the leadership of General Manager, Albert Canadell, is navigating the integration of AI technologies with strategic foresight. Canadell acknowledges the vast potential of AI tools but highlights the existing gap between their availability and practical implementation in the hotel's operations. Despite this, Blaumar is progressively exploring AI applications, especially in non-customer-facing roles.

The comprehensive integration of AI technologies within Blaumar Hotel's operations showcases a commitment to innovation and efficiency. Leveraging platforms like BeonX, for revenue management and TrustYou, for reputation management, underscores the hotel's commitment to enhancing operational efficiency and guest satisfaction. Additionally, tools like HiJiffy, for guest communication, and BQuAIT, for maintenance management, highlight the hotel's proactive approach to embracing emerging technologies to streamline processes and improve service quality.

The discussion panel on sustainability and AI underscores the potential of AI applications to contribute to sustainability efforts in the tourism sector. The hotel's pursuit of digitalisation projects exemplifies its commitment to leveraging emerging technologies for environmental and operational sustainability and reflects Blaumar's strategic vision of technological leadership and environmental responsibility.

However, amidst these advancements, areas for improvement emerge. Survey results referencing the HiJiffy Chatbot suggest a need to refine guest communication strategies to better align with guest expectations and preferences. This underscores the importance of continuous adaptation and refinement in response to guest feedback and evolving industry standards.

### **5.3. Guest Perceptions and Preferences**

The survey conducted among Blaumar's guests reveals a strong preference for human interaction over AI in various service aspects. While there is some openness to automated check-ins and other technological conveniences, the majority of guests prefer human services for their warmth and attentiveness. Family-friendly services and personalised recommendations were particularly appreciated, indicating areas where human touch significantly enhances guest satisfaction.

Guests highlighted specific areas for improvement, such as assistance with luggage, proficiency in multiple languages among staff, and clearer information about services and amenities. Enhancing the functionality of digital tools like the chatbot, could also meet guest expectations for efficient digital interactions while maintaining the personalised touch that guests value.

### **5.4. Balancing AI and Human Touch**

Both the General Manager, Canadell, and the Operations Manager, Ruiz stress the irreplaceable value of human interaction in the hospitality industry. While AI and automation can optimise various operational tasks, customer-facing roles such as receptionists, waiters, and concierges remain essential due to the personalised and empathetic service they provide. This sentiment is echoed in the guest survey, as well as the analysis of guest reviews, where human interactions are valued highly.

AI has not yet significantly improved the customer experience at Blaumar, although it holds potential for personalising services and optimising operations. However, tasks involving human contact, emotional intelligence, and personalised service are challenging to replace with AI, as highlighted by the guests' preferences for human warmth and attentiveness.

Canadell's emphasis on maintaining human analytics alongside AI tools reflects a balanced approach to technology integration, ensuring that AI serves as an aid rather than a replacement for human execution.

## 5.5. Recommendations for Blaumar Hotel

The integration of Artificial Intelligence in Blaumar Hotel presents a unique opportunity to elevate service quality by alleviating staff workload and redirecting efforts towards customer-facing activities. Moreover, AI can enhance the customer experience in ways that human staff may not be able to. The findings from the research consistently highlight the potential benefits and concerns associated with AI. Staff reduction due to automation is a prevalent worry, but Blaumar can mitigate this by focusing on the strategic redeployment of its human resources.

### 5.5.1 Adopt AI for Operational Efficiency

Blaumar Hotel could implement further AI tools to manage routine and back-office tasks, improving overall operational efficiency. For instance, AI-powered software like Robotic Process Automation (RPA) can handle repetitive data entry, freeing up staff for more complex or guest-facing tasks. Additionally, AI can be employed for inventory management, allowing the hotel to forecast demand accurately and optimise stock levels, ensuring that the hotel always has the necessary supplies without overstocking or understocking.

In addition, the lack of concrete evidence of effectiveness of some of the current AI tools highlights the need for measurable outcomes. It would be beneficial to assess the return on investment to make informed decisions regarding the use of these tools and future expenditures.

As mentioned by Canadell in the interview, Blaumar could leverage AI for report writing, by analysing large datasets and extracting relevant insights to provide management with up-to-date information for informed decision-making. By automating the report writing process, the hotel can save significant time and resources that would otherwise be spent on manual data analysis and report creation.

Introducing robot butlers for tasks, such as carrying luggage and escorting guests to their rooms, could be a valuable addition to Blaumar Hotel's service. This suggestion aligns with findings from the literature review, which highlighted the potential benefits of automation in streamlining tasks that are time-consuming and do not necessarily require human intervention. Moreover, the survey results indicate that guests highly value additional details and assistance, suggesting that robot butlers could cater to the needs of guests seeking extra support during their stay. Taking into account that the majority of guests expressed they would not find robotic services helpful, this service would be an optional addition, ensuring that the robots would not be utilised unless requested by guests who require it. With regards to the concern of staff replacement, a

topic that emerged several times during the investigations, similar to the luggage-carrying “Cobot” by Piaggio, the butler deployed at Blaumar would be designed with the aim of assisting staff, not replacing them.

#### 5.5.2. Invest in Staff Training

The resources saved through automating routine tasks could be allocated to staff development, thereby enhancing their skills and service quality. One of the areas identified for improvement is language skills. Regular language courses could be provided to staff, improving their ability to serve international guests and communicate effectively.

Furthermore, Blaumar could continue and expand training programs focused on upselling and cross-selling techniques. These skills not only drive additional revenue but also enable staff to better anticipate and fulfil guest needs, contributing to an enhanced overall guest experience.

#### 5.5.3. Leverage AI for Concierge Services

Blaumar could offer personalised recommendations generated through AI analysis of guest data, to tailor suggestions for local attractions, dining options and activities, enhancing the virtual concierge service, currently provided by the platform Hijiffy. By offering a proactive service, sending timely messages about special offers, event reminders and personalised greetings, as well as allowing for feedback and requests, Blaumar can provide a more personalised and engaging experience for its guests.

#### 5.5.4. Promote the Human Element in Service Delivery

Despite automation, it is crucial to maintain a strong human presence in guest interactions. AI systems should be designed to support, rather than replace, staff in customer-facing roles. Staff should be trained to use AI tools effectively, allowing them to enhance their service delivery and focus on personalised guest interactions.

By ensuring that the human touch remains central to its service, Blaumar can differentiate itself in the hospitality industry, offering a unique blend of technology and personalised service.

## **Final Thoughts**

The integration of AI at Blaumar Hotel presents a promising path forward which should be proactively but cautiously followed. AI is developing at a fast pace, making it crucial to stay up to date with current and future developments. Eventually, achieving the desired level of service could be impossible without the help of AI tools. However, while AI and automation can streamline many aspects of hotel operations, the irreplaceable value of human interaction remains a cornerstone of exceptional guest experiences.

By strategically balancing technological advancements with a commitment to personalised service, Blaumar Hotel can achieve a balanced approach to AI integration, where technology augments human capabilities rather than replacing them. This ensures that the quality of service remains high or is improved and staff members are equipped with the necessary skills to deliver exceptional guest experiences.

Consequently, Blaumar Hotel can navigate the evolving landscape of hospitality while meeting the needs and preferences of its guests.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged.

Firstly, the survey sample size, while sufficient for preliminary analysis, may not fully represent the diverse range of hotel guests. As Oppong (2013) notes, most qualitative research faces constraints in studying all cases of a phenomenon, leading to the selection of a certain proportion as the sample for the study. Anderson (2020) refers to this phenomenon as “convenience sampling”, described as “samples that involve the researcher choosing those who are either most accessible or most willing to take part. This form of sampling may be biased and unrepresentative of the population in question”. Additionally, self-reported data from surveys may be subject to social desirability bias, as highlighted by Crowne and Marlowe (1960), where respondents may provide answers they believe are socially acceptable rather than truthful.

While potential cultural bias among the survey responses cannot be excluded due to the influence of seasonality on hotel occupancy, the proportions of nationalities represented in the survey reflect the usual composition of guest nationalities at Blaumar Hotel.

For future research, an important consideration is the lack of detailed examination of the costs and financial benefits associated with implementing AI technologies. While the current study focused on AI's effects on guest satisfaction and operational efficiency, it didn't address critical financial aspects like initial investment, ongoing maintenance, and potential returns. Gaining insight into these financial implications would offer a more holistic view of the viability and sustainability of AI adoption in hospitality contexts.

It would also be beneficial to explore applications related to cooking and cleaning within the hospitality industry, particularly at Blaumar Hotel. Despite the growing interest in AI and automation, there remains limited direct observation and empirical data available, especially in Europe, regarding the implementation of such technologies in culinary and housekeeping tasks. Comprehensive research on the long-term implications of integrating AI in these areas for guest satisfaction and employee well-being would provide valuable insights for the industry.

Moreover, there's a gap in understanding the perspectives of frontline hospitality staff who directly interact with AI systems. Investigating their experiences, challenges, and perceptions could deepen our understanding of how AI tools impact their roles and interactions with guests.

This exploration could inform strategies for training, support, and integration to ensure a seamless transition and positive outcomes for both staff and guests.

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## Image sources

Image 1: Robot receptionist at Henn-na Hotel. Source: [uni-hotels.com](https://www.uni-hotels.com)

## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Survey with guests at Blaumar Hotel (printed version)

## Thank you for participating in this survey !

This questionnaire is part of a study at Rovira i Virgili University. Your comments are essential to understand the perceptions and preferences of guests at Hotel Blaumar, regarding human interaction and the use of Artificial Intelligence.

All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Please take a minute to share your thoughts with us.

1. How important is the interaction with hotel staff during your stay?

	1	2	3	4	5	
NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	EXTREMELY IMPORTANT

2. How much do you value the following aspects in the human interactions at the hotel?

	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Extremely important
Warm Greetings upon arrival	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assistance with luggage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concierge services and recommendations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personalised attention	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Problem solving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>





9. Would you appreciate receiving personalised recommendations for activities, restaurants or services during your stay?

Yes

No

**Demographic information** (optional)

**Age:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Nationality:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Purpose of visit:**

Leisure

Business

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you greatly for your contribution!**

## **Appendix 2: Interview with Albert Canadell, General Manager at Grupo Blaumar (in Spanish)**

**Entrevistadora (E):** Vale, pues para empezar, muchas gracias por participar. Esta entrevista forma parte de mi trabajo de fin de grado de la URV y trata de conocer tu perspectiva, como Director General del Hotel Blaumar, sobre la implementación de las herramientas de inteligencia artificial, desde un punto de vista estratégico. Entonces, con respecto a las herramientas ya implementadas en el hotel, como por ejemplo Beonx, la plataforma de gestión de ingresos, que usa principalmente comercial. El asistente virtual, o chatbot de la página web del Hotel Blaumar y también TrustYou, que usa inteligencia artificial para monitorizar las opiniones de los clientes. ¿Cómo dirías que ha sido la experiencia con estas herramientas? ¿Cómo crees que han impactado en la eficiencia operativa del hotel?

**Director General (D):** Digamos que la tecnología va más avanzada que nosotros. Las herramientas tienen mucho potencial que todavía nosotros no somos capaces de ver o de utilizar de manera correcta.

También yo creo que es importante que, sobre todo, tengamos un criterio creado propio. No podemos limitarnos a hacer lo que la máquina te dice que va a pasar porque las herramientas son herpes. Todavía hay ciertos factores que no están previstos.

Por ejemplo, el factor meteorológico no tiene todavía... Beonprice No sabe que resulta que en la segunda semana de mayo va a haber una tormenta y hará que te caigan las reservas. Hay unos factores que todavía hoy que le van a llegar a... Digamos que la máquina de alguna manera, igual como tampoco saben, por ejemplo, en el caso de hoteles, aquí Beonprice se basa en aquellos precios en los cuales los hoteles tienen cargados online.

Busca precios, los compara y te dice oye, estás muy barato, estás más caro y yo vendía a este precio. ¿Qué pasa? Que no controla los cupos de los hoteles. Por ejemplo, hay un hotel, aquí en Salou, que trabaja con tour operación, que tiene muchísima tour operación y el world booking o los portales online le representan muy poco porcentaje.

¿Y qué hacen muchas veces? Tienen un precio muy elevado. Ese precio elevado no significa que todas sus habitaciones las vendan a este precio elevado. Significa que probablemente,

como ya tienen hotel con un porcentaje de ocupación muy alto, venden el poco cupo que les queda a un buen precio online.

Dicen, ostras, ¿cómo puede ser que ese hotel, que supuestamente es peor que este, venda tan caro el booking? Sencillamente porque no lo necesita. Porque la venta al booking le representa un muy poco peso, por lo cual no trabaja en el revenue, carga

unas tarifas y si entra a la reserva bien, si entra bien. La inteligencia artificial todavía no tiene el acceso a otras tiendas de ese hotel para saber el cupo.

Entonces, lo que quiero decirte es que todavía hoy son herramientas que requieren también, en mi opinión, de una analítica humana para acabar de entenderlas. En este caso, en el caso de hacer de previsión, de proyectar futuro. Hay muchas variables que por eso nosotros tenemos que saber.

Las herramientas son herramientas de ayuda. No son herramientas para ejecutar. En este caso, hablo ya, por ejemplo, del Beonx.

Y esto lo he hablado con la gente de Beonx. Por ejemplo, es un factor muy importante porque si yo ahora cojo y mañana acabo con las tarifas, un sobrecoste del 500% por exagerar, a otro que esté utilizando la inteligencia artificial le dirán, oye, vende más caro porque en la marea está a 3.000 euros la habitación. Eso significa que llegan a unas conclusiones que no son reales.

Todavía es fácil, de alguna manera, desvirtuar el resultado.

**E:** ¿Y qué funciones o áreas del hotel dirías que se han beneficiado más de estas herramientas?

**D:** Ahora mismo todo lo que es parte de administración.

Ahora mismo todo lo que es comercial, administración en cuanto al departamento de reservas, el tema del chatbot. En este caso simplifica o ayuda o minimiza la carga de trabajo de recepción y reservas en cuanto a contestar muchas dudas que tienen los clientes. Pero esto es el inicio.

Es el inicio. Es más, mi obsesión a día de hoy es intentar entender bien todo el potencial que tienen las distintas herramientas de inteligencia artificial y ver cuáles de ellas hoy ya son de aplicación para una empresa de nuestro tamaño. Para que podamos analizar para trabajar temas de presupuestos, para trabajar plantillas de reporting, cosas así que digamos que no hay un valor añadido en coger unos datos de un sitio y ponerlos a otro y pasarlos a limpio, sino que esto es un proceso que podría hacer perfectamente un programa de inteligencia artificial.

Un Canva, por ejemplo, en tu caso, que hicimos el reporting, pues vamos a hacer un reporting. Digo, oye, me siento ahí, me interesa hacer un reporting con estos KPI's y ching, pum, y no hay un valor añadido. No me importa nada que haya alguien.

Yo creo que hay herramientas que nos podrían ayudar mucho todavía ahora a nivel de administración y comercial, como te decía. Administración, comercial y reservas. Hoy ya podríamos, si quisiéramos, ir más allá.

Ya dependerá un poco de lo que uno quiera y todo el servicio que quieras dar al cliente. Pero a la larga, no sé si me adelanto alguna pregunta, a la larga, habrán muchos

departamentos operativos no de cada cliente, o sea, aquellos que no están de cada cliente, que en muy poco tiempo serán fácilmente sustituidos por inteligencia artificial o por inteligencia artificial y artificial robotizada.

**E:** ¿Dirías que ha mejorado la experiencia general del cliente y su satisfacción?

**D:** No, todavía no.

**E:** ¿Y crees que mejorará con la ayuda de la inteligencia artificial?

**D:** Debería mejorar, sí. No creo todavía yo hoy en la inteligencia artificial para gestionar, para el trato directo con el cliente. Pero para las tiendas, el backstage, todos aquellos trabajos que no interactúan con el cliente, al final es un hospital, un hotel, un albergue, un camping, la gente, el factor humano es muy importante.

Yo creo que ayudará mucho la inteligencia artificial en simplificar todo aquello que es secundario para nuestro tablet. En nuestra industria lo principal es dar servicio y cuando ese servicio se da de manera directa al cliente requiere, en mi opinión, un standard de servicio que ya existen hoy. Pero digamos que cuando uno va de vacaciones hay ciertos servicios que puede asumir que estén robotizados pero tú la bienvenida tienes que tener de una persona.

El viaje de tus sueños de luna de miel llegas a Polinesia y resulta que te encuentras un robot y te dice “Welcome...” tu quieres una persona con rasgos característicos de la zona donde estás viajando y eso es lo que yo creo que tardará más a llegar. Pero todos los otros servicios por supuesto, es cuestión de tiempo que se vayan implementando cuestiones de check-ins toda esta parte más documentada administrativa..

**E:** ¿Qué desafíos ves en cuanto a la implementación o qué desafíos ya han surgido o ves que podrían causar problemas con esto?

**D:** Yo creo que ya de lo que estamos hablando de crear a veces imágenes falsas o enviar eso es un poco y ha pasado con la publicidad la publicidad subliminal hay ciertos tipos de publicidades que ya están prohibidas porque no hay ética pero esto es un poco lo mismo te das que ir a buscar muchos programas o ir a buscar y a veces sacar tus propias conclusiones o no te puedes creer lo que veas solo en un sitio ¿Por qué? Porque cada vez es mucho más fácil de manipular y de crear e incluso falsificar completamente entonces eso yo creo que es uno de los principales retos también buscar el punto de equilibrio eso debería convertirse debería permitir mejorar la calidad de vida del resto de personas o sea, si la inteligencia artificial a medio o largo plazo tiene que sustituir parte de la mano de obra esa mano de obra que se va a ir sustituyendo deberíamos ser capaces de asegurar unos niveles de vida lo suficientemente correctos como para que no haya una amenaza en la inteligencia

artificial si la gente a largo plazo ve que la inteligencia artificial no va a ayudar la sociedad no va a aceptar eso entonces eso debe ir es un reto que yo creo que es buscar el punto de equilibrio que permita que la gente tenga perciba de que sigue evolucionando sigue viviendo bien no pierde en calidad de vida y interprete que la inteligencia ha venido a ayudar no a sustituir eso creo que es un reto importante porque la gente tiene mucho miedo a día de hoy de la inteligencia artificial que seguro que la gente se va a recolocar en otras industrias en el sector de servicios pero es un reto es un reto.

**E:** Entiendo. Y ahora mirando hacia el futuro ¿cuáles son las intenciones del Blaumar en cuanto a la implementación de la inteligencia artificial?

**D:** Están atentos a todo aquello que vaya saliendo al mercado de una clara digamos implementación teniendo en cuenta también que nosotros somos una empresa pequeña con lo cual no todas las herramientas ya existentes nos pueden ser necesarias pero nosotros también tenemos la ambición de ser un poco no diría pioneros porque es muy difícil ser pionero en un mundo tan globalizado pero sí de atrevirnos y a implementar tecnologías nuevas para ver un poco digamos no podemos ser conservadores en esto sino que debemos ser como muchas otras cosas un poco más atrevidos vamos a implementar probamos, prueba error, hay un programa que permite hacer pues vamos a ver, vamos a probarlo que vemos que le encontramos beneficio pues lo consolidamos que no, pues no pasa nada hay muchos programas muchas cosas todas gustan pero no todas son necesarias entonces nosotros estamos siempre constantemente hemos oído vamos a ponerlo el gemelo digital que tenemos en la página web el tema este de Bionprice que es un muy buen programa de revenue hay cosas que ya existen en el mercado que ya tienen aplicación directa y otras que al igual a medio plazo pues hay cosas a día de hoy que ya existen y que probablemente puede ser interesante contratarlas para mejorar la optimización también de procesos

**E:** ¿Y qué factores influyen en estas decisiones de implementar herramientas o no?

**D:** Primero es que los factores económicos lógicamente tienen un impacto pero lo importante es no cuánto cuesta porque si inviertes esto ¿Qué retorno tengo? ¿Retorno de esa inversión? Muy bien, un programa vale, vale 25.000 euros, muy bien es poco dependiendo del uso que le queramos dar y qué es lo que nos permitirá si nos va a permitir posicionarnos y incrementar las ventas en un 20% bien pagados están si te va a permitir no tenga ese sentido ¿Qué es lo que quiero decir con ello? A tu pregunta Dependerá del retorno que puedas conseguir de esa inversión Hay algunos de estos programas que te sirven para un poco posicionarte como referente en temas tecnológicos en temas sostenibles o sea que es un retorno más indirecto pero que te

da te refuerza la marca te da un poco la personalidad en este caso optimizar ingresos o incrementar ingresos como sería un programa de revenue

**E:** Y por último ¿Cómo crees que la implementación y el uso de la inteligencia artificial podría afectar a la experiencia del cliente como conjunto?

**D:** Bueno, a ver de manera indirecta ya está afectando muchas cosas que el cliente compra y es gracias a la inteligencia artificial o sea lo que te permite la inteligencia artificial también es un poco adelantarte a lo que el cliente pueda necesitar o sea tú puedes conocer los hábitos del cliente adelantarte saber que el cliente en esta franja horaria le va a apetecer comer un helado con lo cual además puedes adaptar tu oferta a la demanda del cliente te permitirá personalizar más el servicio te permitirá ser mucho más mucho más gustando esta experiencia personalizar mucho más el servicio por supuesto vuelvo a decir lo que te comentaba antes dependiendo un poco de por ejemplo es una cosa absurda pero por ejemplo con la robotización pero ya está pasando ahora hay cosas de la robotización que como son novedades la gente le gusta nosotros conocemos los restaurantes de estos chinoses o japoneses que tienen un pequeño robot que te trae la comida entonces eso hace gracia yo creo que hace gracia a corto plazo a medio plazo la gente la verdad que no tienen pero donde voy con eso es que también pueden tener un impacto en la experiencia del cliente hay clientes que les gusta ir a un hotel robotizado ¿por qué? porque es la novedad es la novedad pero veremos de eso lo que te permite es prever lo que el cliente va a demandar y con lo cual te permite optimizar el tema de las compras tú sabes qué necesidades de compras vas a gastar con lo cual no tienes roturas de stock te permite adaptar la oferta al cliente saber qué es lo que el cliente va a demandar en qué momento y con qué frecuencia te permite ser mucho más eficaz y mejorar y todo eso lleva a mejorar la experiencia del cliente.

[Interrupción de la grabación]

**D:** .....mucho prestigio social, cuando la gente empezaba a viajar, aquellos que trabajaban en turismo, está que bien, ¿no?, pero todavía... Se ha masificado tanto que ha perdido mucho prestigio. Y el sector servicios, yo creo que la inteligencia artificial va a reubicar otra vez todos los oficios, y aquellos oficios los cuales no tienen el face-to-face, un customer-to-customer, te darás cuenta, un B2C, es que es muy fácil sustituir. ¿Dónde voy? Un camarero hoy nadie lo valora. El cuidado de la gente mayor hoy no se valora, lo hacen los inmigrantes en muchos países, porque no son trabajos que no están valorados. Pero a la vez, son trabajos que la robotización, la inteligencia artificial, van a tardar mucho más a sustituir. Porque el humano va a permitir, o sea, no va a permitir la sustitución de manera tan rápida como aquellos trabajos donde no hay un trato humano. ¿Me explico? O sea, el día que tú tengas un familiar directo muy

enfermo y puedas contratar una máquina, o puedas contratar a una persona preparada que le coja la mano, la acaricie y le abre y le escuche, si puedes permitirte económicamente, vas a contratar siempre a la persona. La cosa es que haya una gran parte de la población que no pueda permitirse contratar a esa persona porque económicamente será más caro y tiene con la máquina.

Es lo mismo que los hoteles. Tú, el que no se pueda permitir el llegar a un hotel y que haya una persona que le dé la bienvenida y que cuando baje al bar y haya una persona que está ahí haciéndole el cóctel y mientras le escuche o interactúe con él, que son los hoteles de lujo, de amaleo, hoteles personalizados, va a ir a un B&B o a algo que llegará, tendrá una codificación en el nombre de la puerta, no tendrá absolutamente ningún tipo de contacto humano, dormirá, se levantará, se irá y se ha acabado. Entonces, estos dos mundos van a convivir.

Pero ese mundo donde la parte humana va a tener mayor presencia, eso lo que va a hacer es permitir dignificar estos oficios que hoy no están dignificados. Por ejemplo, hacer una habitación, con toda la dificultad que requiere, es un tema mecánico. Probablemente llegará un momento que habrá una manera de estar robotizado de tal manera que no necesitarás una persona física o una persona humana para hacerlo, pero puede hacer la máquina.

Porque el cliente le da igual. El cliente se va, deja la habitación sucia, vuelve y la quiere limpia. Como se ha limpiado, le da igual. En una cocina, igual. En gran parte, el cliente quiere sentarse, comer y comer bien. Si ese plato que se está comiendo se lo ha preparado una máquina o se lo ha preparado un cocinero, lo he comido y está espectacular, punto, es lo que quiero.

Ahora, ¿quién me está trayendo el plato? ¿Quién me está dando la bienvenida? ¿Quién está cuidando de mis familiares mayores? ¿Quién está...? Esos trabajos que hoy no se valoran, en poco tiempo, creo yo, van a empezar a valorarse más. ¿Por qué? Porque es mucho más difícil que se puedan llegar a sustituir. Entonces, es un poco la esperanza que yo siempre mantengo dentro de nuestro oficio de que el factor humano en el sector servicios siempre va a acabarse dominando, por lo que te digo, porque es de mucha más difícil sustitución.

Y el cliente que pueda, económicamente, va a valorar más. Voy a decir, tener una persona que te da la bienvenida, una persona con quien hablar, que no llegar a un sitio y tener dos brazos robotizados que te están haciendo un cóctel, que esto ya pasa hoy. ¿No? Incluso hay un montón de casos de los pasos robotizados.

También vas ahí y apretas un botón y le dices, hazme un Daiquiri y te hace el robot. Está bien hoy porque es novedad. Mañana, lo que harás es, no me los enseñes los pasos, dame un Daiquiri y lo quiero ver en el vaso. Si no me vas a poner un Barman simpático y que sepa escuchar, no me enseñes nada. Y eso es lo que yo digo, que de cada ciertos trabajos que no están bien vistos, no están remunerados, ¿no? Es el

camarero, se cuida a gente mayor, estas cosas hoy. Pues yo creo que cuanto más evolucione la inteligencia artificial, en gran volumen va a sustituir muchas manos de obra, pero de la última que se van a llegar a sustituir será el sector servicios. Y eso es lo mínimo.

**E:** ¿Y entonces te podrías imaginar que dentro del Grupo Blaumar, puestos como camarero de pisos o incluso cocinero, podrían ser sustituidos mientras los camareros...?

**D:** Si. Probablemente ya no lo veré. No a ese nivel.

Pero progresivamente ya está pasando. O sea, tú progresivamente... Hay hoteles donde, por ejemplo, trabaja quinta gama. Quinta gama significa, parece una evidencia, pero que antes hubo una cuarta, una tercera, una segunda y una tercera.

O sea, una quinta gama significa que tú abres el envase, lo metes en el horno, calientas y lo sirves. O sea, que ya está cocinado. Con lo cual, si yo ya compro algo que ya está hecho, no necesito a quien lo haga. Lo que necesito es a quien lo presente, a quien lo vuelva en un plato. Pero el conocimiento que requerirá es o ya no es de un jefe de cocina. Claro, eso es una realidad que pasa hoy.

Lo que pasa es que luego cada hotel decidirá el grado de calidad que quiere ofrecer. Por ejemplo, nosotros hemos apostado mucho por el tema del soul cooking, que significa precisamente cocinar delante del cliente, que vea al cliente que le da bola... Eso nos tiene que permitir posicionarnos en un futuro, en un segmento de mercado más alto. Es lo que te decía.

Habrán hoteles económicos y hoteles más caros. El punto medio a la larga va a ir desapareciendo en todo. En sobre todo en la hostelería.

Habrán hoteles que lo que va a fluctuar será probablemente por la ubicación del hotel. Pero habrá hoteles que ya existen hoy, como cadenas de low cost, que tienen hoteles que están muy optimizados en cuanto a servicios. Y habrá hoteles que tienen unos servicios, que tienen ese factor humano adicional, que son más lujosos, que van a convivir.

A día de hoy, por ejemplo, un hotel como podría ser la cadena Ibis, o los Campanile, o los Holiday Inn, o Double Tree by Hilton, son cadenas de hoteles que están muy optimizados.

Son hoteles de una o dos estrellas, de categoría, pero tienen unos servicios de mayor categoría, que los tienen muy optimizados. Suelta el caballo ahí.

Una buena cama, un muy buen internet, prescindan de aquellos servicios adicionales que no aportan un valor añadido y que sus clientes no exigen. No tienen room service 24 horas. Alguien tiene un acuerdo con una pizzería de al lado y tiene una cartada de pizzería en el hotel.

De eso lo has visto en muchos sitios. Tienen ahí un telepizza, o ya lo tienen en un gimnasio. ¿Por qué? Si se hace un gimnasio, es espacio. Ese espacio lo tengo que pagar, entonces no tengo que repetir el precio. En algunos casos, incluso la recepción 24 horas no es necesaria, porque por la noche va a tener alguien de seguridad o un sistema de videovigilancia y ya me quito. Van a optimizar los costes y eso lo revierten en el precio de la habitación.

Más o menos, fíjate que siempre esos hoteles no tienen grandes fluctuaciones de precio. Más o menos siempre van de los 85 a los 130 euros por desfilado. Más o menos, ¿por qué? Porque los costes los tienen muy bien optimizados.

Y luego, por otro lado, tienes los hoteles que están en el centro de la ciudad, que tienen un bar, un rooftop, jajaja, que quieres, pero eso no tienes que pagar. Lo que va a quedar, en mi opinión, obsoleto, es el entremedio. Que no es ni esto, ni un buen hotel, ni un buen ubicado con buenos servicios. Que han habido muchos, pero todos estos que están en el entremedio, fíjate que el que tiene posibilidad se posiciona o en un lado o en otro. Todavía no se queda en el entremedio. ¿Por qué? Porque no es igual que la comida.

Te vas a ir a un restaurante de cadena o te vas a un restaurante de outdoor. Un restaurante de chichinago que no está bien de un lado o de otro, es más difícil de que al tiempo se acabe consolidando. Porque, por desgracia, para estar aquí siendo muy filosófico, con la clase media, se está diluyendo.

También es verdad que la calidad de los servicios de lo que es ahora un hotel, tú vas a un hostel, hoy, un hostel, y tienes hostels que parecen hoteles de 5 estrellas. ¿Qué pasa? Están con unas ubicaciones, en París, a tocar de la Torre Eiffel, en el centro norte, a tocar de Big Ben, o de Hyde Park, o en Barcelona, a tocar de la Rambla. O sea, tienen muy buenas ubicaciones, pero ¿cómo lo consiguen? Porque se dan cuenta que una habitación, por ejemplo, a tocar de las Ramblas en Barcelona, tendrías que vender a 300 euros para recuperar la inversión que supone. Y es más difícil vender, si tienes 100 habitaciones, es más difícil vender, en este caso 100 habitaciones, a 300 euros, que decir, oye, y si en vez de esta habitación me caben 6 personas, en vez de 300 puedo pedir 50 euros. 6 por 5, 30. ¿No? 6 personas.

Porque en habitaciones son 60 personas. Se dan cuenta de que es más fácil vender a 50 euros, que hay alguien que quiere la habitación entera, que no paga 300. Tú fíjate que en los hostels, tú puedes coger una habitación doble, con un baño propio.

No pasa nada, también la tengas. O sea, digamos un poco, es adaptarse a la mayoría. Y lo que estamos llevando a los dos extremos, lo intermedio está desapareciendo.

Y en el caso de los servicios, el tema de la integridad te permitirá que este de aquí, que este esté más optimizado, pero que solo tengas esa gente. Por ejemplo, ¿a qué te tiene que llevar la Inteligencia Artificial? No a sustituir por completo las camareras de

pisos. Porque tú necesitarás también limpiar zonas comunes, atender a ciertas atenciones de los clientes, porque les ha faltado alguna cosa, o el mantenimiento.

Pero sí que va a tener que reducir mucho ese número de personas. Y la reducción en un gran alto grado de ese número de personas, igual que en cocineros, no vas a desaparecer los cocineros. Ahora, vas a necesitar muchos menos cocineros.

Y puede ser que con un señor cocinero puedas dar servicio a toda una cadena hotelera. Con uno, un chef de cocina. Y los demás sean menos ejecutores.

¿Que tendrán qué? Primero, el calentador. Segundo, abrir el bote. Tercero, poner bandeja.

Y cada dos, un tres cuartos, y quinto, poner una hoja de perejil. Eso es lo que van a hacer muchos, que ya está pasando hoy eso. Pero eso no iba a pasar.

Aquellos que queden, van a dar menos, pero tendrán que estar mejor pagados. Por lo cual, cuando hablo de la dignificación del oficio, probablemente trabajaremos menos gente en la hostelería, pero aquellos que trabajemos en la hostelería estarán más buscados. Porque como hay menos puestos a que cubrir, podrás escoger.

Y aquellos que escogerás, serán los mejor publicitados. Llámalo recepcionista, llámalo barman, llámalo sommelier, llámalo maître. Eso es.

**E:** ¿Y entonces crees que los clientes de Blaumar valoran, o en un futuro, valorarán menos la elaboración de los platos, por ejemplo, como mencionaste, que, por ejemplo, la atención al al cliente?

**D:** Por supuesto. Es lo mejor, absolutamente lo que quieras. Todo.

Porque la lógica ya pasa ahora. Fíjate, la reflexión, ahora hemos llegado a un punto en que los cocineros son como los sommeliosos. Yo estudié en la escuela hostelería.

Todo el mundo quería cocinero o sala. La sala todavía tenía un sentido. En muy pocos años, ya nadie quería trabajar en la sala.

Nadie. Todos querían ser cocineros, con una pinza y unas pinzas, como si fueran médicos, para poner una florecita encima de un platito. No tiene sentido.

La reflexión mía es, si tú vas a un restaurante donde se come muy bien, pero el personal es un gilipollas, ¿tú ahí no vuelves? ¿No vuelves? Ahora, un sitio donde la comida está bien, pero el ambiente es espectacular, las personas súper simpáticas, agradables, y has estado bien, pero no has comido todo bien, ahí probablemente volverás. Con lo cual, bueno, ¿cómo puede ser si la cocina es tan importante? Sí, pero la cocina no lo es todo. La cocina es muy importante con un entorno. Y a veces el entorno es más importante que la propia cocina. Por eso hay cadenas de restaurantes que han conseguido el personal, el flow, la historia, la gente va a estar más. ¿Por qué van a estar más? Porque los que el café sea espectacular, pero siempre es un perfil de trabajador de la misma edad, potencialmente el mismo cliente, pues esto es lo mismo.

El cocinero, en el momento, por eso lo que va a salvar al cocinero es haber abierto las cocinas. En el momento en que cocinabas, si tú tienes que cocinar detrás de una pared, a mí que cocines tú, o cocino en la máquina, o lo compre hecho, me da igual. Porque yo lo haré lo que me presentes en el plato. Ahora, cuando tú hayas abierto una cocina, una cocina vista, un show cooking, claro, yo valoro por qué hacer un show cooking. El cocinero ya no es sólo un cocinero, es tú cocinero. Cuidado.

Y eso que está haciendo en ese momento lo está haciendo para ti. Y eres tú que dices, hazme un poco más, hazme un poco menos, ponme un poco más de salsa, y esto es una manera de salvar el oficio, dignificar el oficio. Pero eso ya no es el cocinero que está detrás de la pared.

El que está detrás de la pared, ese desaparecerá mañana, ya podría desaparecerlo. En muchos hoteles ya ha desaparecido. O sea, en muchos hoteles de estos que te decía de clase media, que están ahí, que tienen una carta de room service y tal, pero claro, no tienen nadie.

Normalmente es un cocinero, y si alguien pide que tiene una carta de quinta gama, el mismo camarero va, regenera la comida y se la sube. La cocinería no está. Ya... Caput.

Ahora, voy a decirte, en los hoteles, cuando pases de categoría, ¿qué vas a tener? Un cocinero, tendrás ahí su cooking, ¿y cómo lo quieres, caballero? ¿Quieres que le ponga un poquito más, un poquito menos? Pues menos, está bien, si no le pongo eso, te lo van a poder hacer aquí. Aquí no te lo harán, esto. Aquí te dirás, tendrás un sushi box, tendrás un sándwich de no sé qué, tendrás una sopita de no sé cuántos, y será buenísima, ¿eh? Cuidado, será un sushi espectacular. Pero ya no tendrás un chino, un japonés haciendo todo el sushi. Esto lo tendrás aquí, pero de medio, que te quieres cobrar, no te quieres cobrar a 100, te quieres cobrar a 200, porque haces no sé qué, para qué me voy a pagar aquí 200, si me estás dando lo mismo que este, me voy a este. Y eso es lo que yo, vamos, convencidísimo, es por eso.

En cambio, un camarero que esté atento, que te reconozca, me habías venido algunas veces, y dices, ay, qué tal, me alegro de volver a verla. Oye, eso hace, bueno, esa parte humana, hace que tú vuelvas a los sitios. Por eso esos camareros, que hoy no los quiere nadie, van a estar buscados, y ya lo están, ¿eh? Ya están empezando a gobernar, no van a haber nadie sobrado, de gente profesional en la sala.

Pero en breve, eso es lo último que se sustituirá. El cocinero, pues bueno, está bien. En los estudios de la gastronomía, McDonald's. McDonald's, nadie es imprescindible en McDonald's. Nadie. McDonald's te llega y te dice, pon, aquí, mételo, y eso es lo que tienes que hacer. No, porque yo he pensado. Tú no estás para pensar, tú estás para hacer.

Pues lo mismo que hizo en su día McDonald's. Es lo que estamos haciendo ahora. Con las quintas gamas y las cocinas y todo...

**E:** Vale, perfecto. Pues muchas gracias por tu tiempo, Albert.

¿Podría tener tu consentimiento para citar el contenido de esta entrevista en mi trabajo?

**D:** Si, claro. Si he dicho algo fuera de lugar, ya me dirás.