



# Will the Youth Clear the Path for Extended Implementation of Robots in Luxury Hotels?

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## Abstract

Service robots have profoundly changed the hospitality industry. However, this is limited to the luxury sector due to concerns from the company side of rejection by the guests. Meanwhile, the demographic of luxury hotel customers is shifting to a younger generation who have emerged with robots and technology throughout their lives, which has given them the ability to easily interact with service robots and even prefer them in hotels. This research will try to understand if the drawbacks of implementing service robots in the luxury sector no longer exist to the young generation by monitoring the cultural factor, or level of uncertainty if more specifically, and the level of desire of human touch, factors which influence the acceptance of the technology, and to discover the influence of that feature upon service quality and luxury branding.

**Key Words:** *Cultural Differences; Uncertainty Avoidance; Desire of Human Touch; Service Robot; Service Quality; Luxury Branding*

**Track:** **Technological Human-Centered Innovations**

**Focus of Paper:** **Theoretical/Academic**

## Introduction

Nowadays, various types of service robots are implemented in the hospitality industry. The implementation of service robots helps reduce labor costs and human error, increases the efficiency of service (Ivanov & Webster, 2021), and creates an image of hotels that are dedicated to innovation (Wirtz et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the introduction of service robots has drawbacks to the hospitality industry as they can't offer the warmth and interaction of human staff, which are valuable for traditional customers (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). That is also the reason why luxury hotels are still using service robots cautiously. The managers believe that the implementation of service robots will make luxury hotels lose their "soul" (Milohnic, 2024).

However, the perspective of luxury hotel executives might be outdated. The demographic of luxury hotel customers has shifted throughout the decade, moving from Gen X and Baby Boomers to younger generations such as Millennials and Gen Z. Millennials and Gen Z, compared to the older generation, grew up in the era of digital life (Choi et al., 2021). This background naturally makes the younger generation familiar with the robot system and understand the use of logic.

Culture is a key factor influencing customers' acceptance of service robots (Papadopoulos, 2022). Different countries have various levels of implementation of service robots in the hospitality industry, not only

attributing to the different levels of economic and technological development but also to cultural differences. In detail, according to Hofstede, six dimensions shape the culture into different forms, which influence the acceptance either positively or negatively. The desire for the human touch is another factor influencing acceptance, and it is even more critical in a luxury environment, where customers pay more attention to personal interactions and exclusivity. (Ivanov & Webster, 2021)

Hence, the aims of the research are: (1) to explore the cultural differences and the desire of human touch between Gen Z and Millennials influencing the perception of service robots, (2) to discover the attitude of young luxury hotel guests towards implementation of service robots in the luxury section, and (3) to understand if the perspective of service robots will have impacts on the service quality and luxury branding. To achieve these goals, a holistic, scenario-based quantitative design is offered to the participants through online surveys.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Service Robot***

According to the International Federation of Robotics, the service robot is defined as “a robot which operates semi- or fully autonomously to perform services useful to the well-being of humans and equipment, excluding manufacturing operations” (IFR). In the hospitality industry, the concept of service robots is narrowed down to “a semi- or fully autonomous machine that interacts, communicates, and performs tasks traditionally handled by human staff, aiming to enhance operational efficiency and guest experiences in hotels and restaurants (Wirtz et al., 2018).

Different forms of service robots have already been implemented in the industry, such as room delivery robots and housekeeping aides, which are designed to deliver personalized and efficient service (Tung & Au, 2018). From the customers’ point of view, Service Robots would be the most appropriate if implemented in information provision, housekeeping and processing bookings, payments and documents (Ivanov et al., 2019). In luxury sections, the implementation of service robots has remained limited. The hotel prefers a less invasive implementation and aims to complement human jobs instead of replacing them (Blanche et al., 2020). Losing the personal touch may cause an erosion of customer satisfaction (Milohnic, 2024).

Technology has significantly impacted the hospitality industry, primarily through automation and robotic services, offering a range of benefits and conveniences for both companies and customers. For businesses, the most evident advantages are financial, such as reduced labor costs, increased sales, and improved operational efficiency, as well as non-financial gains like enhanced service quality and improved communication in multilingual settings (Ivanov, 2017). From the customer perspective, service robots provide personalized experiences (Wirtz et al., 2018) and contribute to improving hygiene and safety standards (Gössling et al., 2021).

However, the adoption of service robots also presents several challenges. The concept remains relatively new, and a general lack of awareness and foundational knowledge among decision-makers can hinder implementation (Milohnic, 2024). Similar hesitations exist among customers, particularly Generation X and Baby Boomers, who often lack exposure to or comfort with robotic services and may exhibit resistance (Ayyildiz, 2022). Additionally, concerns about robots being perceived as “cold-blooded machines” pose a significant barrier in an industry built on warmth, empathy, and personal interaction. Service robots often struggle with emotional intelligence and nuanced communication, potentially diminishing guest satisfaction (Ivanov & Webster, 2021). These concerns are especially pronounced in luxury hospitality, where the loss of human touch and personalized engagement is viewed as a major drawback (Milohnic, 2024).

### ***The Demographic Features***

Traditionally, the Baby Boomers and Gen X are considered the cornerstone of the entire luxury hotel clientele, attributing to their preference for exclusivity, traditional service, and brand prestige (Kapferer & Bastien 2012). However, when coming to the new era, the statistic indicates a new trend. From McKinsey & Co., data shows a trend in the composition of luxury hotel customers shifting to younger generations (Constatin, 2024). The emergence of Millennials (1981-1996) and Generation Z (1997-2012) as key consumers had led to a shift in expectations and preferences.

The younger generations, besides age, have plenty of differences compared to older ones. On average, Gen Z and Millennials have higher educational attainment compared to Gen X and Baby Boomers. Another key difference between Millennials, Gen Z, and older generations is the awareness of technology. They are significantly more familiar and comfortable with technology (Pew Research Center, 2020), and Gen Z is the first generation to be raised with smart cell phones from an early age, which shapes their social lives, learning methods, and consumer behaviors (Twenge, J. M, 2017). In the hospitality industry, the younger generations are more accepting of service Robots and AI in hotels due to their high level of digital awareness and comfort with automation (Tussyadiah, 2020).

The perception of service robots varies depending on the demographic features of customers. In general, the acceptance of service robots is negatively correlated with age and positively correlated with the level of education and income (Reich & Eyssel, 2013). Older generations, however, tend to be cautious of robot service and require greater assurance regarding usability and support. In other words, they certainly prefer traditional human service (Lu et al., 2020).

### ***Perspective of Service Robots***

According to Hofstede, the definition of culture is the “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede, 1980). Within Hofstede's theory, there are mainly four main dimensions for distinguishing different cultures, which are the power of distance dimension, uncertainty avoidance dimension, individualism-collectivism dimension, and masculine-feminine dimension. Later on, another two dimensions were added which are long-term orientation and level of indulgence (Hofstede et al., 2010). The most distinctive difference between the cultures of Asians and Europeans, according to Hofstede, is the level of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). Asians, in general, have a high tolerance for uncertainty while Europeans have a low tolerance. There is a long history of researching the influences of cultural factors on technology acceptance (Straub, 1997), as well as on the attitudes and preferences toward robots (Papadopoulos & Koulouglioti, 2018). The level of uncertainty avoidance, “the degree to which members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity” (Hofstede, 1980), draws more attention to the researcher (Papadopoulos et al., 2022). The level of uncertainty avoidance, “the degree to which members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity” (Hofstede, 1980), draws more attention to the researcher (Papadopoulos et al., 2022). Even though the original study hypothesizes that technology renovation will decrease uncertainty, which will be more easily adopted by countries with high levels of UA, another research indicates the opposite result (Bagchi et al., 2004), since adopting technological innovations always comes with high risk. Thus, we have proposed the following hypothesis:

#### ***H.1. The level of uncertainty avoidance will have a negative effect on the attitude toward service robots in luxury hotels***

Furthermore, human touch, or personal factors, refers to the interaction of services that are customized,

emotionally engaging, and human-centered (Pizam & Shani, 2009). They are often characterized by empathy, warmth, attentiveness, and customization. The human touch is a key factor influencing guests' satisfaction, loyalty, and overall service quality (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015). The impact becomes more evident upon the guests of luxury hospitality who usually expect high levels of interpersonal service (Ivanov & Webster, 2021) where warmth, empathy, and personal attention are part of the service promise. The rise of the service robot makes the maintenance of the personal touch becomes more challenging (Ivanov & Webster, 2021). Lack of human touch may lead to lower emotional satisfaction, even if the functional service is delivered well by robots or digital systems (Wirtz et al., 2018). Therefore, we have proposed the following hypothesis:

***H.2. The desire of the human touch, will have a negative impact on the attitude toward service robots in luxury hotels.***

Moreover, the service quality, or the aspects of evaluating the service quality in the hospitality industry, is one of the most crucial benchmarks for judging the performance of the business. One of the well-known models would be SERVQUAL, which defines quality as the differences between the expectation of the service from the guests and the perception of the service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1988). Besides, the SERVQUAL model divides service quality into five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. If the scope is narrowed down to the luxury section, how well a hotel handles complaints or service failures becomes another major factor in service quality (Maxham, Netemeyer, 2002). The service robots, in the condition of service quality, contribute to functional quality through consistent task execution, efficiency and accuracy, availability, and reduction of human error (Wirtz et al., 2018). Hence, we have proposed the following hypotheses:

***H.3. Attitude toward service robots will positively affect the perception efficiency of service in luxury hotels***

***H.4. Attitude toward service robots will positively affect the perception reliability of service in luxury hotels***

The branding of the hospitality industry, especially for hotels, refers to the strategic development of hotels' identity, values, image, and guest promise, communicated consistently across all touchpoints to create differentiation, recognition, and emotional connection with the target market (Keller, K. L., 2023). The function of branding mainly includes, other than differentiation and customer recognition, the trust and credibility of the customers, guest loyalty, and value communication (Dev, C. S., 2007). Ivanov and Webster (2021), believe that service robots can reinforce a hotel's brand image by showcasing its commitment to innovation and operational excellence. However, there is another research emphasizing that while robots improve functional service delivery, their use must align with the brand's experiential values to avoid a disconnect between service experience and brand promise (Wirtz et al., 2018). In the field of luxury hotel branding, the technology must not compromise the emotional and personalized service central to the brand identity (Ivanov & Webster, 2021), which means that luxury hotels must use robots selectively, ensuring they support the brand's emphasis on exclusivity, empathy, and personalized service. Therefore, we have proposed the following hypothesis:

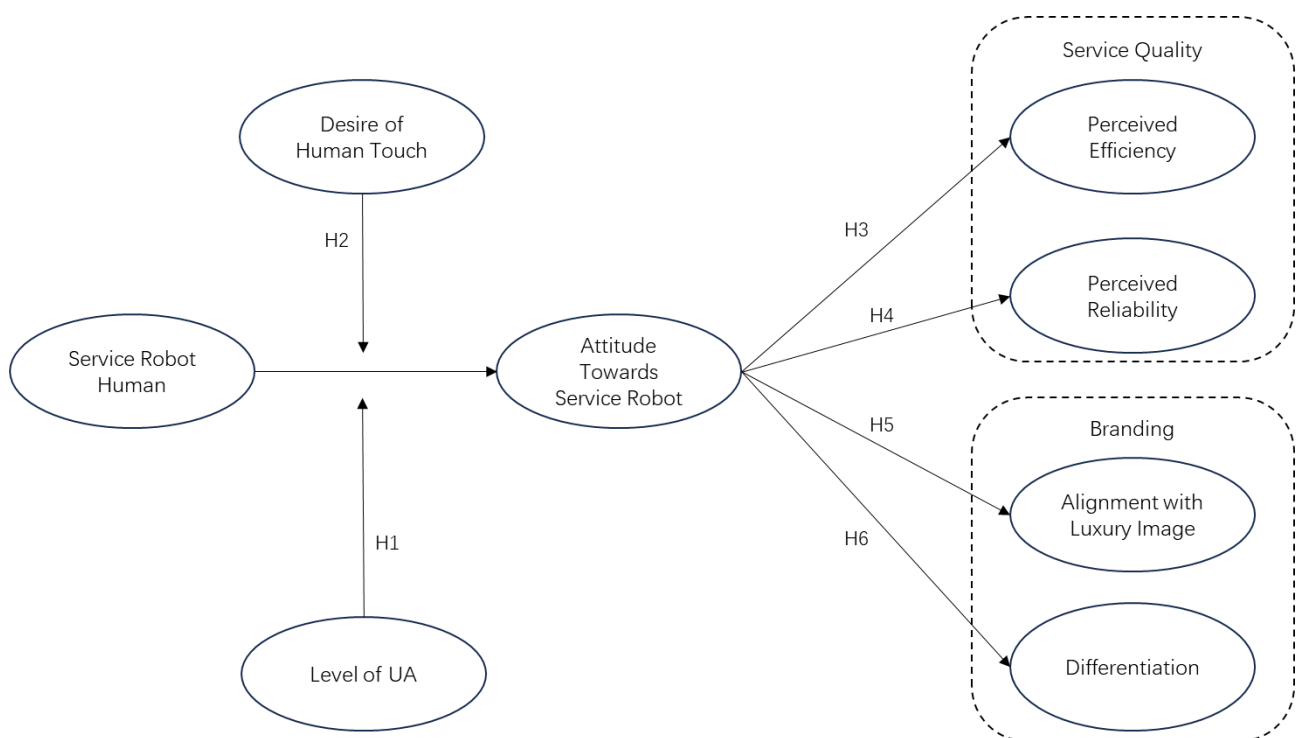
***H. 5. Attitude toward service robots will affect the perception of the brand image of luxury hotels.***

***H. 6. Attitude toward service robots will have an impact on luxury hotels' brand differentiation***

## Theoretical Background

The Technology Acceptance Model is a fundamental theory when discussing the interaction between humans and robots. Fred Davis (1986; 1989) stated that the user's acceptance of new technology is by their intention to use it, which is influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Beyond that, Belanche introduced more factors like perceived humanity and emotional connection to create the Service Robot Acceptance Model (Belanche, D., 2021). Other than usefulness and ease of use, perceived enjoyment, the extent to which the robot is fun, interesting, or entertaining to use, or perceived reliability, the extent to which the robots have a consistent and accurate performance, would also influence the acceptance of service robots.

Figure1. The Research Model



## Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach by using experimental design to explore how Gen-Z and Millennials' attitudes towards service robots under the influence of level of uncertainty avoidance and desire of human touch, affect service quality and brand image. Experimental design is a structured approach to research in which the researcher manipulates variables under controlled conditions to examine cause-and-effect relationships (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). This method is selected here specifically for its ability to manipulate the independent variable, namely, customers' attitude towards service robots under the influencing factors, and to measure its effect on the dependent variables, including attitudes toward service robots, perceptions of the service efficiency, service reliability, brand image, and hotel differentiation.

## Scenario Development

Two scenarios are created to simulate real-life interactions within a luxury hotel environment. Participants

will be randomly assigned to the two groups to facilitate the data credibility to avoid potential bias. In the experiment group, the participants will be offered a picture prompt where a service robot delivers an order to a guest's room. For the control group's participants, the prompt will be a human staff member who provides the same service.

Scenario Description: After 8 hours of a long flight, you finally checked in to your hotel. It's late at night, and you still haven't had dinner yet. You browsed through the menu and placed your order through the phone. 20 minutes later, a delivery robot showed up at your door. You opened up the cabinet and found your dinner sitting on the tray and it looked really good. You took out the dishes and placed them on your table. You then return to the robot and hit the "delivery confirmed" button on the screen. The robot said gently: Thanks for staying with us, please enjoy your meal. And then the robot left.

**Figure 2. Scenario Picture with Human (OpenAI, 2025)**



**Figure 3. Scenario Picture with Robot (OpenAI, 2025)**



## ***Measurement***

Following exposure to one of the scenarios, participants will be offered a detailed questionnaire. The measurement scales will be adapted from validated existing research, including the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM; Davis, 1989), SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988), and so on. This ensures the reliability and validity of the measurements, the questionnaire will begin with measuring two influence factors, which are the level of UA and the desire of human touch. Then, the manipulation questions will be asked to test if the participants correctly understand the scenario by explicitly asking about recognizing the two different types of service. Subsequently, participants will respond to items designed to gauge their attitudes towards their perceptions of service robots, overall service quality, and the hotel's brand image. Besides, a realistic check is also included in the questionnaire in order to validate the scenarios. The survey will be delivered to both Europe and Asia, more specifically, France and China, where they have distinctive differences in culture and living style which might lead to different results.

## ***Participants and Procedure***

The study takes on convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods. The researchers will distribute the questionnaires via social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and WeChat. The researchers will identify “Key Participants” known for abundant traveling experience and well-around understanding of luxury hotels. The “Key Participants” will be asked to complete the survey and refer it to their friend groups, leveraging their social impact. At the end of the survey, the questionnaire would kindly ask the participants to refer this survey to their acquaintances. The survey is preliminary and estimated to have 300 answers.

## ***Ethical considerations***

All participants will be informed of the nature of this research. The questionnaire will ask for consent to use the data they provide. To ensure their privacy, the survey will convey that all answers will be anonymous. All participants' data will be kept confidential.

## **Discussion**

### ***Expectation***

Due to the region where the sample is going to be selected, a high level of UA from European participants and a low level from Asian participants is expected. However, the correlation between the level of UA and attitude towards service robots is difficult to speculate due to the ambiguous relations, (Papadopoulos, 2018) which is also the core relation that this research focuses on. Controversial opinions are shown from both sides.

### ***Contribution***

Besides the ease of use and usefulness, this research adds the level of UA and the desire of human touch as two factors influencing the acceptance of service robots within the model of TAM and SRAM, extending the implementation of models into the luxury sector. From a practical aspect, confirming the youth with a certain level of desire of human touch and uncertainty avoidance have a preference of service robots in the luxury hotel would open plenty of opportunities for the company. With the expansion of the implementation of the service robots, the luxury hotel will surely cut down the labor costs and hiring pressure. (Ivanov, 2017). That money would not only become extra income for the hotel but also extra resources for them which they can invest to continue improving their service quality.

### ***Limitation***

The limitation of this research comes from both sides of service robots and customers. The service robots, which keep developing and are nowadays enhanced by AI have not been discussed (Chandraseker, 2024). Cutting-edge service robots can execute more complicated tasks. For the customer side, especially for Gen Z, who lives in luxury hotels but the decision was made by others, so as the purchase, might contaminate the result (Bettman, 1998).

### ***Research Plan***

With the process of research that has been done, the next step would be to create a valid questionnaire and collect data from the channels that are mentioned in the methodology section. After that, a thorough data analysis will be done followed by the verification of the result. The conclusion, discussion, and contribution will be enriched after the result is shown.

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