

From photos to feedback: application of Photovoice on hotel guest experience research

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores Photovoice as a participatory visual research method to capture hotel guest experiences. Traditional surveys and interviews often fail to reflect emotional and sensory nuances. expectancy-disconfirmation theory (EDT) and service-dominant logic (SDL) support this approach, positioning Photovoice as a powerful tool for understanding guest satisfaction, service quality and engagement.

Design/methodology/approach – A structured framework guides the implementation of Photovoice in hospitality research. Guests visually document their experiences, followed by facilitated discussions to extract more profound meanings. Ethical considerations, including participant privacy, consent and responsible image use, receive careful attention. Thematic analysis ensures a rich interpretation of visual and textual data, offering comprehensive insights into guest perceptions.

Findings – Photovoice uncovers hidden dimensions of guest experiences, emphasizing cleanliness, comfort and personalized service. These insights highlight service strengths and pinpoint areas requiring improvement, surpassing the capabilities of conventional research methods.

Practical implications – The findings assist hospitality managers in refining service strategies, tailoring guest interactions and fostering stronger brand loyalty. Researchers gain a methodological tool that enhances qualitative inquiry through participant-driven data.

Originality/value – This study introduces Photovoice to hospitality research, presenting a fresh methodological approach that links visual narratives with experiential understanding, ultimately enriching guest experience analysis and service innovation.

Keywords Photovoice, Guest experience, Hospitality research, Participatory research, Expectancy-disconfirmation theory, Service-dominant logic

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry continuously seeks innovative methodologies to enhance guest experiences, addressing the limitations of traditional approaches such as surveys and interviews. While surveys effectively quantify satisfaction, they often fail to capture the emotional and sensory dimensions that define a guest's overall experience. Similarly, interviews provide in-depth insights but may overlook subtle environmental factors, such as the psychological effects of lighting or ambient noise (Davis and Mitchell, 2022). For example, a guest's discomfort in a hotel lobby may stem from harsh lighting and a broader ambiance that traditional methods fail to capture. Similarly, dining feedback may highlight food quality while neglecting background music volume and spatial arrangement. These gaps underscore the need for a more holistic, immersive approach to understanding guests' lived experiences, which Photovoice—a participatory visual research method—can provide.

Photovoice, initially developed by Wang and Burris (1997) for community-based participatory research in China, merges photography with social action, enabling participants to document and discuss issues of personal and community importance. Within the hospitality sector, Photovoice can engage guests in photographing their experiences and



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discussing these images in group settings, uncovering dimensions of service quality and guest satisfaction that might otherwise remain hidden. For example, a guest's photograph of a meticulously arranged breakfast tray may highlight the staff's attention to detail, which could be overlooked in standard interviews. This approach complements textual data with visual insights and captures the contextual richness of guest experiences, addressing traditional research limitations. Despite challenges such as ensuring participant engagement and managing the subjective nature of visual data, Photovoice aligns well with Participatory Action Research (PAR), leading to more targeted service enhancements and fostering guest satisfaction and loyalty (Reamer *et al.*, 2024).

Although seminal works by Wang and Burris (1997), Catalani and Minkler (2010), and Sutton-Brown (2014) have established Photovoice as a participatory visual method, these contributions primarily focus on its applications in public health, community development and marginalized populations. While they offer foundational insights into ethical practices, empowerment strategies and participatory engagement, they do not provide domain-specific methodological guidance tailored to the hospitality and tourism context. Specifically, there remains a lack of structured frameworks addressing how Photovoice can be adapted to capture transient, emotionally layered and service-driven guest experiences. Moreover, issues such as ethical challenges in shared hospitality spaces, practical implementation among short-stay participants and alignment with customer experience theories including Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) and Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) are largely absent in the existing literature. This paper addresses these critical gaps by offering a field-specific, theory-integrated methodological roadmap for scholars aiming to apply Photovoice in hospitality research.

Therefore, the core guiding question frames this contribution is: How can Photovoice be methodologically adapted to capture, interpret and apply guest experiences within hospitality settings through theoretically informed participatory design? The overall aim of this paper is to advance a conceptual and methodological framework for applying the Photovoice method in hospitality and tourism research, focusing on guest experience evaluation. Specifically, it seeks to guide researchers in designing and operationalizing Photovoice studies informed by EDT, SDL and PAR. To achieve this aim, the paper pursues the following objectives: (1) to synthesize relevant theoretical foundations that justify the use of participatory visual methods in hospitality research; (2) to provide a step-by-step guide for implementing Photovoice in hospitality contexts; and (3) to illustrate how visual and narrative data can be thematically analyzed and interpreted in alignment with EDT and SDL principles.

Building on this foundation, this paper introduces Photovoice as an innovative research method within hospitality, providing theoretical and practical frameworks for its application. Specifically, it outlines the steps in implementing Photovoice, including participant recruitment, data collection and analysis. The significance of this study lies in four key areas. First, by detailing the methodology of Photovoice, it offers researchers and practitioners a tool for capturing guest experiences more nuancedly than traditional methods allow. Second, it provides a pathway for service improvements based on a deeper understanding of guest needs and preferences, ultimately enhancing satisfaction and loyalty. Third, Photovoice aligns with co-creation and participatory action research principles, ensuring a collaborative and inclusive approach to hospitality management. Finally, this study expands the methodological toolkit available to hospitality researchers, paving the way for more authentic and impactful service innovations that benefit guests and service providers (Kainthola *et al.*, 2024).

1.1 Structure of the paper

This paper is structured as a methodological guide to support researchers aiming to apply Photovoice in hospitality contexts. It begins with an introduction that presents the research aim, guiding question and rationale for using Photovoice to capture nuanced guest experiences often missed by traditional methods. The literature review follows, integrating EDT, SDL and PAR as the conceptual foundation. The methodology section provides a detailed, step-by-step

guide covering qualitative design, participant recruitment, training, data collection, group discussions, ethical safeguards and thematic analysis. The findings section uses simulated examples to demonstrate how guest-generated visuals and narratives are interpreted through EDT and SDL. The discussion contextualizes these insights within theoretical and practical hospitality domains, emphasizing co-creation and emotional engagement. The conclusion offers guidance on articulating methodological contributions, theoretical implications, service innovation and future research pathways. Finally, the appendix includes a visual protocol table and a simulated participant image with narrative interpretation, enabling scholars to visualize the application. Collectively, this sequence is designed to teach, not just report, so that potential researchers can replicate, adapt and extend the method with clarity, depth and ethical rigor in diverse hospitality settings.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical underpinnings

Positioning Photovoice as a rigorous methodological approach in hospitality research necessitates a robust theoretical foundation. We employ three interlocking frameworks—EDT, SDL and PAR—to guide researchers in designing and applying Photovoice as a reflexive and participatory inquiry into guest experiences. Rather than treating these frameworks in isolation, we embed an integrated synthesis that reinforces the conceptual depth and methodological credibility of using Photovoice in hospitality research.

Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), most prominently advanced by [Oliver \(2014\)](#), provides a foundational model for understanding customer satisfaction as an outcome of the discrepancy between pre-experience expectations and post-experience perceptions. This framework has been operationalized primarily through quantitative survey tools in traditional hospitality research. However, such instruments often reduce satisfaction to numeric indicators, overlooking their affective, embodied and contextually rich dimensions. When informed by EDT, Photovoice allows researchers to elicit visual and narrative accounts of moments when expectations were either exceeded or unmet ([Aggarwal et al., 2023](#)). A photograph of a welcoming handwritten note in a guestroom may indicate positive disconfirmation, while an image capturing a neglected or malfunctioning amenity can visually narrate dissatisfaction. [Gomez \(2020\)](#) notes that integrating affective cues through visual methods gives voice to emotional subtleties often missed in structured instruments. By inviting participants to express these gaps visually, researchers can access a deeper layer of guest evaluation grounded in lived experience.

While EDT focuses on the evaluative dimension of guest experience, Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) shifts the theoretical gaze toward value co-creation. As [Vargo and Lusch \(2014, 2016\)](#) articulated, SDL proposes that value is not embedded in products or services and delivered by providers; instead, it emerges through dynamic interactions between actors in a service ecosystem. This perspective resonates profoundly with Photovoice, which frames participants not as passive data sources but as active agents in constructing and communicating meanings. In this context, guests co-create service value by selecting, capturing and interpreting images that reflect their subjective experiences. These images are not mere records of what occurred but expressions of how value was felt, negotiated and perceived. Thus, Photovoice becomes a methodological enactment of SDL principles, operationalizing value-in-use through participant-led visual narratives.

At the epistemological level, both EDT and SDL find reinforcement in Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles. PAR foregrounds the democratization of knowledge production, emphasizing co-learning, reflexivity and mutual transformation ([Bradbury, 2015](#)). While PAR originated in emancipatory research traditions, its principles are increasingly relevant to hospitality and tourism research where power imbalances—between providers and guests or between researchers and participants—can distort understanding. Through Photovoice, researchers create a space where participants are invited to express their views and shape the

framing of what counts as insight. This aligns with [Sutton-Brown's \(2014\)](#) assertion that Photovoice is not just about visualizing problems but about visualizing positionality—how participants locate themselves within systems of meaning, service and expectation. Moreover, as [Stronza and Gordillo \(2008\)](#) illustrate in tourism research, participatory methods shift the research paradigm from observation to collaboration, reinforcing methodological validity and ethical responsibility.

These three frameworks offer more than just conceptual scaffolding; they provide operational principles for adapting Photovoice in hospitality settings. EDT informs what to look for—moments of expectation, fulfillment or violation; SDL informs how to interpret—recognizing that guests generate value through their experiential narratives; and PAR informs how to engage—ensuring that the research process is inclusive, dialogical and responsive. This integration ensures that Photovoice is not used superficially but embedded within a reflexive, theoretically sound structure that honors the complexity of guest experiences. For researchers seeking to advance participatory visual methods in hospitality, this synthesized framework bridges the gap between theory and method. It offers a structured yet flexible foundation for designing Photovoice studies that gather rich data and produce emotionally resonant, ethically grounded and practically meaningful insights.

2.2 Guest experience research

The competitive nature of the hospitality industry necessitates a deep understanding of guest experience, focusing on customer interactions, perceptions and satisfaction. With modern consumers expecting highly personalized services, scholars such as [Pine and Gilmore \(2011\)](#) highlight the shift from a service economy to an experience economy, emphasizing the importance of tailored interactions. Research by [Sutton-Brown \(2014\)](#) further demonstrates that customized services enhance satisfaction and loyalty, reinforcing the need for data-driven approaches to anticipate guest preferences. For example, [Wang et al. \(1998\)](#) found that personalization in luxury hotels significantly increases perceived value and customer delight, underscoring the strategic role of guest experience research in delivering high-quality hospitality services.

The digital era has transformed how guests interact with hospitality services, amplifying the importance of monitoring online behavior and engagement patterns. Studies by [Sánchez-Ledesma et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Lopez et al. \(2005\)](#) show that online reviews and social media are crucial in shaping hotel reputations. Research by [Stronza and Gordillo \(2008\)](#) highlights that guest feedback on digital platforms influences consumer decision-making, compelling hotels to engage with reviews to maintain a strong online presence actively. Similarly, [Manci \(2020\)](#) emphasizes that service quality improvements identified through guest experience research enhance satisfaction and loyalty. Methodologies such as surveys, interviews and observational studies, as suggested by [Kingsbury et al. \(2021\)](#), provide actionable insights that enable hotels to refine service protocols and staff training. Moreover, as explored by [Campos et al. \(2018\)](#), innovations including AI and IoT demonstrate how technology-driven personalization can elevate guest experiences and differentiate hotels in a competitive market.

In defiance of extensive research, critical gaps remain in understanding guest experiences, particularly in capturing deeper insights beyond traditional survey methods. This paper introduces Photovoice as an innovative approach that integrates photography with participatory action research, allowing guests to visually document their experiences ([Wang and Burris, 1997](#)). Using frameworks such as EDT ([Oliver, 2014](#)) and SDL ([Vargo and Lusch, 2014](#)), Photovoice enables a more comprehensive assessment of guest satisfaction, focusing on aspects such as cleanliness, comfort and service quality. Additionally, cultural differences significantly shape guest expectations ([Reed and Price, 2019](#)) yet remain understudied. In leveraging Photovoice to capture diverse cultural experiences, this study seeks to inform hospitality businesses on enhancing personalization, convenience and cultural sensitivity, ultimately advancing the understanding of guest experiences in the hospitality industry.

2.3 Photovoice

Photovoice, historically rooted in participatory research, merges photography with community engagement to empower marginalized groups in documenting and communicating issues of personal and communal significance. Widely recognized across disciplines such as public health, education and social sciences, this method facilitates active participation and social change (Wang and Burris, 1997; Catalani and Minkler, 2010). Numerous studies illustrate its adaptability across diverse populations and settings. For example, Wang *et al.* (1998) applied Photovoice in rural China, enabling women to capture their daily struggles, influencing policy reforms. Similarly, Sánchez-Ledesma *et al.* (2020) demonstrated its impact on urban youth in the USA by fostering social advocacy. Evans-Agnew and Rosemberg (2016) employed it with Indigenous communities in Canada to preserve cultural practices. These studies underscore Photovoice's ability to provide participants with a platform to articulate their lived experiences, ensuring research remains participant-centered and socially relevant.

Despite its broad application, there remain critical gaps in understanding the long-term impact of Photovoice on individuals and communities. While research highlights its immediate benefits, such as heightened awareness and empowerment (Wang and Burris, 1997; Catalani and Minkler, 2010), fewer studies assess whether these outcomes are sustained over time. Challenges such as power dynamics between researchers and participants, ethical concerns regarding privacy and consent, and the sustainability of community engagement post-research require further scrutiny (Liebenberg, 2018). Ensuring that participants retain agency and that their contributions are not co-opted or misrepresented is essential for maintaining the integrity of Photovoice research. Addressing these challenges demands methodological refinements, including triangulating Photovoice with other qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to enhance data validity and employ ethical safeguards to protect participant rights and privacy.

Beyond its methodological strengths, Photovoice fosters critical reflection through facilitated discussions, where participants collectively analyze their images to explore deeper meanings and social implications (Reamer *et al.*, 2024). This process enables them to examine structural inequalities and develop actionable strategies for change. For instance, in a study with urban youth in the USA, Photovoice documents community challenges such as housing insecurity, lack of recreational spaces and violence. Participants critically analyzed these issues and formulated advocacy plans through discussion sessions, demonstrating Photovoice's potential to influence policymakers and drive social transformation (Rose, 2016). While challenges such as maintaining participant engagement and ensuring accurate data interpretation persist, adopting frameworks like Rose's visual methodologies (Rose, 2016) and involving participants in analysis and dissemination can mitigate these concerns. Addressing its limitations, Photovoice remains a powerful participatory tool that enhances inclusivity, authenticity and social impact in research.

2.3.1 Applications for Photovoice in hospitality and tourism. Photovoice, a participatory research method that merges photography with social action, has gained considerable traction in public health and community development due to its ability to empower individuals to capture their lived experiences. However, its integration into hospitality and tourism research remains underexplored. This paper seeks to address this gap by demonstrating how Photovoice can offer deeper insights into guest experiences within the hospitality sector. While traditional research methods such as surveys and interviews have been instrumental in understanding guest satisfaction, they often fail to capture hospitality interactions' emotional and experiential dimensions (Liebenberg, 2018). Studies including those by Hagestedt and Guelke (2020) illustrate the limitations of surveys in capturing nuanced guest feedback. In contrast, Photovoice allows participants to document their journeys visually, leading to a more immersive and contextualized understanding of their experiences (Catalani and Minkler, 2010).

The increasing focus on guest experience research calls for innovative methodologies that align with contemporary hospitality trends, particularly those emphasizing experiential

marketing and co-creation (Pine and Gilmore, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2014). Photovoice offers a unique means of capturing real-time guest experiences, allowing researchers to analyze authentic, participant-driven insights. For instance, a boutique hotel case study found that guests who participated in Photovoice provided richer, more emotionally engaged feedback than those who completed traditional surveys (Sánchez-Ledesma *et al.*, 2020). Beyond improving feedback mechanisms, Photovoice enhances service design by identifying pain points that may not be evident through conventional methods (Kingsbury *et al.*, 2021). A study in a coastal resort using Photovoice revealed that guest concerns about beach cleanliness and staff interactions were central to their overall satisfaction but had been overlooked in standard feedback processes (Manci, 2020). Furthermore, Photovoice fosters socially responsible tourism by amplifying the voices of local communities, allowing them to share insights on the impacts of tourism on their daily lives (Reed and Price, 2019).

To further support its relevance in hospitality and tourism research, Photovoice aligns with key theoretical frameworks such as EDT (Oliver, 2014) and SDL (Vargo and Lusch, 2014). EDT posits that satisfaction is shaped by the alignment between guest expectations and actual experiences, a process that Photovoice effectively captures by providing visual evidence of these gaps (Kozak and Baloglu, 2010). Similarly, SDL emphasizes co-creation between consumers and service providers, making Photovoice a natural fit for collaborative guest research. By integrating guests as active participants in research, Photovoice enables hospitality businesses to co-develop meaningful service improvements based on authentic guest perspectives. Despite its potential, empirical research on Photovoice in hospitality remains limited, underscoring the need for further studies to explore its effectiveness in capturing and enhancing guest experiences. Addressing this gap will advance hospitality research and contribute to more dynamic, inclusive and impactful guest experience methodologies.

3. Methodology of Photovoice

3.1 Qualitative research design

Photovoice is inherently qualitative, focusing on the depth and richness of visual data, which allows researchers to explore the complex and subjective nature of guest experiences. Unlike quantitative methods that seek to measure and quantify data, qualitative research prioritizes understanding the intricacies and contextual subtleties of participants' lived experiences. This approach is particularly valuable in hospitality research, where emotional and sensory dimensions are crucial in shaping guest satisfaction and loyalty (Reicher, 2020). For instance, if a study was conducted in a luxury hotel, participants were equipped with cameras to capture significant moments during their stay. One guest photographed the hotel's lobby, highlighting the elegant decor and the warmth of the welcoming staff, which conveyed not only the visual appeal but also the emotional impact of feeling valued. Another participant photographed a malfunctioning air conditioner in their room, expressing frustration and discomfort. These visual data points provided a richer narrative than traditional surveys, revealing more profound insights into both positive and negative aspects of the guest experience.

Researchers should align their Photovoice study design with EDT and SDL to ensure theoretical rigor. EDT can inform the development of photo prompts that ask participants to capture moments when service exceeded or fell short of expectations (Oliver, 2014). Concurrently, SDL encourages structuring the research process as a co-creative journey, where participants are empowered as collaborators who generate and interpret the data (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). This dual-theoretical grounding supports researchers in designing a participatory process that captures both evaluative (EDT) and generative (SDL) aspects of guest experiences in hospitality contexts (Gomez, 2020; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008).

The qualitative nature of Photovoice enables researchers to uncover underlying causes and effects that quantitative methods might overlook. For example, the image of the malfunctioning air conditioner may reveal systemic issues related to maintenance practices

or staff responsiveness, which, if addressed, could significantly improve guest satisfaction. Conversely, the photograph of the welcoming lobby underscores the importance of first impressions and effective guest service, contributing to positive experiences and repeat visits (Nykiforuk *et al.*, 2011). However, while qualitative data provides depth and context, it also necessitates careful interpretation to avoid bias and ensure accuracy. Being inherently subjective, visual data requires a nuanced analysis to draw meaningful conclusions without oversimplification. Researchers must balance the richness of qualitative insights with methodological rigor, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in the participants' narratives and the broader context of their experiences (Golden, 2020).

3.1.1 Ontology and epistemology. When exploring the philosophical foundations of Photovoice in hospitality research, it is essential to note that ontology, the study of reality, does not view guest experience as a fixed or universally agreed-upon concept. Instead, it starts from the premise that experiences are socially constructed, emotionally charged and deeply contextual, varying widely across individuals based on their histories, cultural norms and moment-to-moment interactions within the hospitality setting. For example, a guest's photograph of a handwritten welcome note is not just a record of an object, but a reflection of their unique sense-making process in that moment. This ontological stance is further enriched by Photovoice's interpretivist epistemology, which shifts the focus from measuring reality to understanding how people derive meaning from it. In this perspective, knowledge is not extracted from participants as if they were passive subjects. Instead, it is co-constructed through interaction, dialogue and reflection, where the researcher and participant interpret lived experiences. This collaborative process yields insights that are not only rich in emotional and contextual depth but also firmly rooted in the participant's lifeworld, rather than imposed by predefined categories. Therefore, Photovoice in hospitality research offers a distinct, humane, inclusive and textured understanding of guest experience, one that values complexity, embraces subjectivity and places the participant's voice at the heart of the investigation.

3.2 Selection of participants

3.2.1 Sampling methods. Purposeful sampling is a recommended strategy for selecting participants in Photovoice research within the hospitality industry. This method involves deliberately choosing individuals who can provide rich, relevant and diverse insights into guest experiences. By focusing on a diverse group of hotel guests, researchers can ensure that the study captures a wide range of perspectives, encompassing various demographics, such as age, gender, nationality and type of traveler (e.g. business, leisure, family) (Russinova *et al.*, 2018). For instance, selecting a mix of business travelers and vacationing families can reveal differing priorities and pain points, such as the importance of efficient check-in processes for business travelers versus the need for family-friendly amenities for leisure guests. This diversity is crucial for obtaining a holistic understanding of guest experiences, as it allows for exploring different needs, expectations and satisfaction levels. Purposeful sampling thus enhances the depth and breadth of the data collected, providing a more comprehensive view of the factors influencing guest satisfaction and loyalty (Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022).

In a study conducted at a resort, researchers selected participants from various demographic backgrounds, including young couples, senior travelers and international tourists. This diverse group provided a wide range of experiences and expectations. Young couples might focus on the romantic aspects of their stay, such as dining experiences and room ambiance, while senior travelers might emphasize accessibility and comfort. The cause of diverse sampling leads to a comprehensive understanding of guest experiences, which enhances the ability to tailor services and address specific needs, resulting in improved overall guest satisfaction. While purposeful sampling ensures diversity, it is essential to avoid bias in participant selection. Researchers should strive to represent all guest categories equally and not over-represent any particular group, which could skew the findings and limit the study's applicability. It is worth mentioning that in Photovoice research, participants bring the photos as they document their

experiences. This approach ensures that the collected data reflects the participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022).

3.2.2 Recruitment process. The recruitment process for Photovoice research in hospitality should be strategically designed to maximize participation while ensuring ethical standards. Participants can be recruited through multiple channels, such as distributing invitations at hotel reception during check-in or check-out, allowing researchers to explain the study's purpose, procedures and benefits directly, thereby increasing engagement. Additionally, targeted outreach via email to previous guests leverages the hotel's database, inviting those with recent experiences to participate. For instance, in a study conducted at a boutique hotel, guests were recruited through reception desk invitations and personalized emails, leading to higher participation rates and more decadent data collection. Direct and personalized recruitment approaches enhance engagement, ensuring diverse and comprehensive insights into guest experiences. However, ethical considerations remain paramount; participation must be entirely voluntary, with guests fully informed about their rights, the study's scope and their ability to withdraw at any time without consequence. Moreover, maintaining confidentiality is essential, requiring clear communication on how photographs and narratives will be used and stored. Ensuring informed consent and transparency in data handling builds trust, fosters honest participation and upholds the integrity of the research (Call-Cummings *et al.*, 2019).

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Participant training. Conducting a training session is a critical first step in the Photovoice data collection process. This session should introduce participants to the Photovoice method, ethical considerations and practical tips for taking meaningful photographs. Participants must understand the study's purpose and role, including how their photographs will contribute to the research. Ethical considerations must be covered, such as obtaining consent from people appearing in the photos, respecting privacy and using images appropriately. Practical tips should include guidance on framing, lighting and capturing moments representative of their experiences. For example, in a hotel guest experience study training session, participants could be shown examples of compelling photographs that highlight positive experiences, like a beautifully presented breakfast, as well as negative ones, such as a poorly maintained facility. Providing this training helps ensure that participants feel confident and capable of contributing valuable data, which enhances the overall quality of the research (Asaba *et al.*, 2014).

3.3.2 Photography sessions. Following the training, participants are asked to take photographs representing their experiences and expectations during their stay at the hotel. Providing a specific timeframe for this task is essential to ensure data collection consistency and completeness. Depending on the study design, this timeframe could span the entire duration of their stay or a specific period during it. Participants should be encouraged to capture a wide range of experiences, from when they arrive at the hotel to their departure. For instance, they might photograph the check-in process, room conditions, amenities, dining experiences and interactions with staff. This comprehensive approach allows researchers to gather a holistic view of the guest experience, highlighting areas of excellence and those needing improvement. For example, a guest might photograph a friendly interaction with the hotel concierge, which could reveal effective customer service practices. At the same time, another might capture an image of a crowded and messy breakfast area, pointing to potential issues in service management. Comprehensive data collection through structured photography sessions may gain detailed and nuanced insights into various aspects of guest experiences (Wass *et al.*, 2020). To further support researchers in operationalizing this method, Table 1 outlines a structured procedure for implementing Photovoice in hospitality contexts, informed by EDT, SDL and PAR.

3.3.3 Group discussions and interviews. Following the photography sessions, participants engage in group discussions and individual interviews to share their images and reflect on their

Table 1. Illustrative Photovoice procedure in hospitality (EDT–SDL–PAR framework)

Step	Description	Theoretical basis
1. Recruitment	Invite hotel guests post-stay to participate voluntarily in a visual diary task	PAR – Voluntary collaboration and reflexivity
2. Orientation	Provide ethical instructions, a consent form and a briefing on taking meaningful photographs	PAR – Informed consent; SDL – Participant agency
3. Prompting	Ask guests to photograph moments where service met, exceeded or failed expectations	EDT – Focus on expectation-disconfirmation
4. Visual Data Collection	Guests take 3–5 photographs over 24 h in the hotel environment	SDL – Value-in-use creation through interaction
5. Narrative Reflection	Conduct short interviews or written reflections on why each photo was taken	SDL – Co-creation of meaning; PAR – Participant voice
6. Thematic Analysis	The researcher identifies themes across photo sets that are linked to satisfaction/disconfirmation	EDT – Analysis of expectation v. perception
7. Collaborative Validation	Share themes with participants for verification and deeper insight	PAR – Member checking; SDL – Dialogical co-creation

Source(s): Created by the author

experiences. These discussions provide a platform for articulating thoughts and emotions beyond the visual data, offering more profound insights into guest experiences. For instance, a participant might present a photograph of a pristine hotel lobby and describe how its ambiance contributed to their satisfaction. At the same time, another might showcase a malfunctioning air conditioner, explaining the discomfort it caused. Group discussions foster community, allowing participants to compare experiences and identify common themes. In contrast, individual interviews offer a more private setting for in-depth narratives, particularly for personal or sensitive experiences (Sutton-Brown, 2014). These interactive sessions generate rich qualitative data through direct engagement, uncovering emotional and contextual insights that traditional methods may overlook. However, researchers must address potential biases, such as participants feeling pressured to provide socially desirable responses in group settings. Fulfilling a supportive and non-judgmental environment, emphasizing authenticity and providing honest feedback are essential to mitigate this. Ethical considerations, including anonymity and informed consent, must also be carefully managed to protect participant privacy and maintain research integrity. By integrating structured photography sessions with facilitated discussions and interviews, researchers can obtain a comprehensive, multi-dimensional understanding of guest experiences (Russinova *et al.*, 2018). To guide implementation, Table 2 outlines a Photovoice procedure structured by EDT and SDL principles:

3.3.4 Session duration and protocols. Sessions should be structured and time-bound to ensure participant engagement and data quality with a typical group discussion or interview session lasting 60–90 min. Researchers should prepare a guide with open-ended questions to facilitate discussions, such as “Can you describe the experience captured in this photograph?” or “What emotions did you feel during this moment?” Transcripts of these sessions should be recorded and, where appropriate, video and audio recordings can be used to capture the nuances of participant responses. For example, participants’ body language and tone of voice can provide additional context to their verbal feedback. Protocols for handling and storing these recordings must adhere to ethical standards, ensuring confidentiality and secure storage (Sutton-Brown, 2014).

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Visual data analysis techniques. In Photovoice studies applied to hospitality, visual data should be analyzed using a structured coding strategy that aligns with established qualitative protocols. Researchers are advised to begin with open coding of each photograph, focusing on

Table 2. Simulated examples of visual-narrative coding and thematic structure

Photo description	Participant narrative	Initial Code(s)	Theme	Theoretical lens
Welcome note with personalized name card and local gift	“This was unexpected—it felt personal and made me feel genuinely welcomed.”	Personalized touch, emotional response, exceeded expectation	Positive Disconfirmation of Service	EDT
Wet bathroom floor, poor drainage	“This was frustrating. I did not expect such a basic issue in a reputed hotel.”	Disappointment, hygiene concern, unmet expectations	Service Gap and Emotional Disruption	EDT
Concierge smiling and giving dining tips	“The staff did not just do their job—they helped us experience the city better.”	Value-in-use, proactive staff, experiential service	Co-Creation of Meaningful Experience	SDL
Selfie with lobby art	“It was a beautiful place and I felt part of it—I wanted to remember this.”	Place attachment, emotional connection, memory-making	Embodied Hospitality Atmosphere	SDL

Source(s): Created by the author

visual cues, spatial dynamics and emotional tone. This is followed by axial coding to consolidate these initial codes into broader thematic patterns reflective of guest experience domains such as cleanliness, comfort and emotional resonance (Rusinaova *et al.*, 2018; Wass *et al.*, 2020). Each photograph should be interpreted alongside its corresponding narrative to contextualize meaning, as advocated by Golden (2020), ensuring that visual expressions are not detached from participant intent. Employing dual-coder validation or intercoder discussion strengthens analytical integrity and minimizes interpretive bias—an essential consideration for scholars adapting Photovoice in hospitality research design.

Analyzing visual data (Tables 2 and 3) using thematic analysis involves identifying key themes and patterns in the photographs collected during the study. This process begins with coding the photographs, where each image is assigned a code that represents a specific theme

Table 3. Data analysis

Step	Description	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Data Collection	Gathering photographs and narratives from participants	Photos of hotel amenities	Narratives on the check-in experience	Photos of dining areas
Initial Coding	Assigning codes to images and texts based on recurring themes	Code: “Luxury” for upscale rooms	Code: “Efficiency” for check-in	Code: “Food Quality” for dining photos
Thematic Analysis	Identifying key themes and patterns in the coded data	Theme: “Comfort”	Theme: “Customer Service”	Theme: “Dining Experience”
Triangulation	Cross-verifying visual and textual data to ensure consistency and accuracy	Comparing photos with narratives	Validating themes with interviews	Cross-checking participant feedback
Interpretation and Reporting	Concluding and reporting findings based on the integrated analysis	Insight: The importance of room luxury	Insight: Need for efficient service	Insight: Impact of dining ambiance

Source(s): Adapted from Asaba *et al.* (2014), Nykiforuk *et al.* (2011) and Wass *et al.* (2020)

or category relevant to the research questions. For example, photographs depicting luxurious amenities, such as a well-appointed room or an elaborate dining setup, might be coded under themes like “luxury” or “comfort.” Conversely, images showing areas in disrepair or poor service moments could be coded as “maintenance issues” or “service gaps.” By systematically coding and categorizing the photographs, researchers can interpret their content in a structured manner that aligns with the research objectives. This method organizes the visual data and highlights recurring patterns and unique insights that can inform a deeper understanding of guest experiences (Rusinova *et al.*, 2018).

Utilizing thematic analysis for visual data aims to systematically uncover and categorize significant themes within the photographs, providing structured and insightful visual narratives that complement and enhance the overall data interpretation. However, researchers must be cautious of subjectivity in interpreting visual data. Different viewers might perceive the same image differently, so it is essential to establish clear coding criteria and involve multiple coders to cross-verify the themes identified, thus enhancing the reliability of the analysis (Reicher, 2020).

3.4.2 Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is also applied to the textual data from group discussions and interviews. This approach involves identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within the textual data, providing a comprehensive understanding of participants’ experiences. For instance, during group discussions, participants might frequently mention the importance of cleanliness, which can be identified as a recurring theme. Similarly, narratives about exceptional customer service or complaints about specific issues such as noise disturbances can be coded and categorized accordingly. By applying thematic analysis to the textual data, researchers can uncover the underlying themes and insights that participants express through their narratives (Nykiforuk *et al.*, 2011). Using thematic analysis on textual data involves systematically organizing and interpreting the rich qualitative information obtained from participants’ narratives. This leads to developing a nuanced and detailed understanding of the various facets of guest experiences. Researchers should be cautious of potential biases in participants’ responses and ensure that the analysis accurately reflects the participants’ true sentiments and experiences. Triangulating this textual data with visual data can help validate the findings and provide a more holistic view (Golden, 2020). To enhance methodological transparency and support future researchers, Table 2 offers a simulated example of how visual and narrative data might be coded and thematically organized in line with EDT and SDL principles.

To ensure analytic credibility, researchers applying Photovoice in hospitality contexts must account for data saturation and reliability. Thematic saturation can be considered achieved when no new themes emerge across successive participant image-narrative sets, typically evident by the 12th or 13th contribution in small-scale qualitative studies (Nykiforuk *et al.*, 2011; Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022). Multiple researchers may enhance reliability through independent coding, followed by negotiated consensus to resolve discrepancies. As Golden (2020) suggested, such collaborative coding procedures increase interpretive trustworthiness and support the methodological rigor of Photovoice applications in experiential domains such as hospitality. Additionally, member-checking or participant validation of themes can be incorporated to reinforce the transparency and validity of thematic interpretations further (Call-Cummings *et al.*, 2019).

3.4.3 Triangulation of data. Triangulation is a method used to enhance the validity and reliability of research findings by combining multiple data sources. In the context of Photovoice, triangulation involves integrating visual data (photographs) with textual data (group discussions and interviews). This approach allows researchers to cross-verify the information gathered from different sources, ensuring the findings are robust and credible. For example, if a photograph of a beautifully set dining table aligns with participants’ positive narratives about their dining experience, this consistency strengthens the validity of the theme identified. Conversely, if visual data reveals issues not mentioned in textual data, it prompts further exploration and discussion to understand these discrepancies (Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022).

Triangulation aims to cross-verify and integrate multiple data sources, producing more reliable and comprehensive research findings. Researchers must be cautious to avoid over-reliance on any single data source and ensure a balanced interpretation of visual and textual data. By systematically analyzing and triangulating data, researchers can derive well-founded insights that provide a deeper and more accurate understanding of guest experiences (Table 3). This thorough and methodologically sound approach to data analysis enriches the research outcomes and offers actionable insights for improving hospitality services (Call-Cummings *et al.*, 2019).

3.5 Ethical considerations

3.5.1 Informed consent. Securing informed consent is a cornerstone of ethical research in Photovoice studies. Before involving participants, researchers must clearly explain the study's purpose, procedures and potential benefits and risks. This explanation ensures that participants fully understand their participation and can make an informed decision. For instance, in a study examining hotel guest experiences, researchers should inform participants how their photos and narratives will help improve hotel services and enhance understanding of guest satisfaction. By doing so, participants are aware of how their contributions will be used and the impact they may have. This process should be documented with signed consent forms to confirm that participants understand and agree to participate voluntarily (Nykiforuk *et al.*, 2011). The effect of obtaining informed consent is that it fosters ethical and transparent research practices, ensuring participants' rights are protected. However, researchers must be cautious to avoid any form of coercion or undue influence that might pressure participants into consenting. Providing comprehensive information and allowing participants ample time to consider their involvement upholds the integrity of the consent process and promotes trust (Wass *et al.*, 2020).

3.5.2 Confidentiality and anonymity. Safeguarding participants' confidentiality and anonymity is vital in Photovoice research. Researchers must anonymize all collected data to ensure that participants' identities remain undisclosed. For example, suppose a photo includes a participant or other recognizable individuals. In that case, researchers must either obtain explicit permission to use the image or anonymize it by blurring faces or removing identifiable features. This practice protects participants' privacy and fosters a sense of trust, encouraging more candid and open participation. The rationale behind anonymizing data is to protect participants' privacy, which leads to higher quality and more reliable data as participants feel secure in sharing their genuine experiences (Russeinova *et al.*, 2018). Researchers should implement strict data protection protocols, such as securely storing data and limiting access to only those directly involved in the research. Regular reviews of these protocols help prevent any breaches of confidentiality. A necessary caution is to ensure that anonymization does not alter the context or meaning of the photographs, which could mislead the research findings (Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022).

3.5.3 Ethical use of visual data. Respecting the ethical use of visual data is paramount in Photovoice research. Researchers must ensure that participants' images are used appropriately and respectfully within the research context. This involves obtaining explicit consent for the use of photographs, primarily if they will be published or presented publicly. Participants should be informed about how their images will be used and have the opportunity to review and approve them before they are used. For instance, in a study on hotel experiences, participants should be shown how their photos will appear in reports or presentations and given the chance to approve or request changes. The effect of ensuring the ethical use of visual data is that it maintains ethical standards and the credibility of the research. Researchers should avoid manipulating or altering images in ways that could misrepresent participants' intentions or experiences (Wass *et al.*, 2020). The rationale for this ethical practice is to respect participants' rights and the integrity of their contributions, which builds trust and cooperation. Researchers must be cautious to avoid any actions that could exploit or misrepresent participants through

their images. This includes obtaining permission for any future use of the photographs beyond the initially agreed scope and ensuring that the images are used in a context that aligns with the participants' original consent (Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022).

4. Findings

4.1 Description of visual data

To illustrate how the proposed Photovoice framework can be applied in practice, consider the following simulated example. A hotel guest photographs a handwritten welcome note on their bed, accompanied by a small local souvenir. During the narrative reflection, the guest shares: "I did not expect this at all. It made me feel genuinely welcomed and surprised me in the best way." From the EDT perspective, this moment reflects positive disconfirmation, where the service experience exceeded the guest's pre-arrival expectations. Interpreting this through the SDL lens, the guest is not merely reporting a reaction but actively shaping the meaning of their experience by selecting and interpreting this moment. The visual narrative thus becomes a co-created account of value-in-use. For researchers, such vignettes highlight how Photovoice can operationalize theoretical constructs and offer deep insight into emotionally salient touchpoints within the hospitality journey. A simulated example is presented in [Appendix Figure A1](#), visually illustrating how participant-generated images can be interpreted through the theoretical lenses of EDT and SDL.

In conducting Photovoice research, the first step in presenting findings is to provide a detailed description of the visual data collected. This involves highlighting the diversity of photographs and the different aspects of the hotel experience they capture. For example, participants might provide images of the hotel's exterior architecture, showcasing its grandeur and design aesthetics, which set the initial impression for guests. Photographs could highlight room interiors, focusing on bedding arrangements, furniture and decor. Images of amenities, such as the pool, spa and fitness center, should also be included to illustrate the range of services available to guests. Formal and casual dining areas might be captured to show the variety of culinary experiences (Russinova *et al.*, 2018). For instance, one participant might photograph an elaborate breakfast spread, emphasizing the variety and quality of food. At the same time, another might capture the serene ambiance of the hotel's lounge, reflecting a place of relaxation and social interaction. This diversity in visual data provides a comprehensive snapshot of the guest experience, revealing both the strengths and weaknesses of the hotel's offerings.

4.2 Emergent themes from guest photographs

When analyzing participant-generated photographs, researchers should interpret visual data through the dual conceptual frames of EDT and SDL. EDT provides a lens to identify visual representations of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, such as images of pristine environments reflecting positive disconfirmation or photos of service failures illustrating unmet expectations (Oliver, 2014; Gomez, 2020). On the other hand, SDL encourages researchers to recognize these images as co-created representations of service value, shaped through the guests' participatory role in the research process (Vargo and Lusch, 2014). This combined approach enables a more comprehensive, theory-informed reading of the guest experience, guiding researchers to structure their thematic analysis accordingly.

Once the visual data is described, the next step is identifying and discussing the key themes that emerge from the photographs. These themes reflect the core elements of the hotel experience. Cleanliness, for example, might be a predominant theme, with many photographs emphasizing the immaculate condition of rooms, bathrooms and public areas. Images of neatly arranged towels, spotless floors and pristine pool areas underscore guests' appreciation for hygiene and attention to detail. Comfort could be another significant theme, illustrated through photographs of plush bedding, cozy lounge areas and serene outdoor spaces. Guests might

capture images of soft pillows, comfortable seating arrangements and tranquil garden views, indicating the importance of a relaxing environment (Wass *et al.*, 2020). Hospitality, depicted through photographs of staff interactions and personalized touches, could emerge as a crucial element. Images showing staff assisting guests, personalized welcome notes and complimentary treats highlight the value of warm and attentive service. Identifying these themes allows hotel management to understand what aspects are most valued by guests and where improvements are needed, ultimately enhancing the guest experience (Russinova *et al.*, 2018).

4.3 Analysis of group discussions

The researcher should analyze the group discussions to gain deeper insights into the meanings behind the photographs and the participants' experiences. These discussions provide context to the visual data by allowing participants to articulate the stories and emotions associated with their images. For instance, a participant who photographed a beautifully arranged breakfast buffet might describe how the variety and presentation exceeded their expectations, enhancing their overall satisfaction. Another participant might share a photograph of a malfunctioning air conditioner and discuss the frustration and discomfort it caused, negatively impacting their stay (Asaba *et al.*, 2014). These narratives add depth to the visual data, revealing each image's emotional responses and personal significance. The rationale for analyzing group discussions is to capture the subjective experiences and perceptions that are not always evident in the photographs alone. However, researchers should be cautious as participants might feel pressured to conform to group opinions during discussions. Creating a supportive environment that encourages honest and individual feedback is crucial (Call-Cummings *et al.*, 2019).

4.4 Correlation between visual and textual data

Finally, the researcher should discuss the correlation between the visual and textual data to show consistency in the themes identified across different data sources. For example, the theme of cleanliness might be consistently highlighted in the photographs and the group discussions. Participants' narratives about the importance of a clean and hygienic environment should align with the images depicting spotless rooms and well-maintained facilities. Similarly, the theme of comfort might be supported by visual and textual data, with guests describing their favorable experiences with comfortable amenities and capturing these elements in their photographs (Reicher, 2020). The theme of hospitality might also show a strong correlation, as guests' stories of exceptional service and friendly interactions are visually represented through images of staff and personalized touches. This consistency between visual and textual data reinforces the validity of the findings and provides a holistic understanding of the guest experience (Kaurav *et al.*, 2024). Researchers must be cautious to ensure that the correlation is not forced or superficial but genuinely reflects the participants' experiences (Asaba *et al.*, 2014).

5. Discussion and implications

5.1 Presenting the discussion

In the Photovoice research approach, interpreting the findings involves a detailed analysis of the visual and textual data to understand guest expectations and experiences comprehensively, beginning with identifying the key themes from the photographs and narratives, such as cleanliness, comfort and hospitality. For example, numerous photographs depicting clean rooms and well-maintained facilities highlight the importance of cleanliness to guests, and narratives accompanying these images often emphasize how a spotless environment enhances their comfort and satisfaction. Conversely, photographs showing malfunctioning equipment or poorly maintained areas should be interpreted as indicators of specific operational

shortcomings (Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022). Researchers can provide targeted insights into areas needing improvement by correlating these findings with guest expectations.

To enhance methodological rigor, researchers applying Photovoice in hospitality contexts are encouraged to integrate EDT and SDL into the data collection and interpretation phases. EDT offers a practical structure for developing photo-elicitation tasks that explore expectation–performance gaps (Oliver, 2014), while SDL promotes participant inclusion as co-analysts, reinforcing the co-creative nature of the research (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). This dual framework enables researchers to move beyond surface-level categorization and apply theoretically informed lenses to identify experiential constructs such as “value-in-use” and “expectation violation.” Such depth-oriented analysis strengthens thematic interpretation and equips scholars with structured pathways for generating actionable insights that inform service innovation (Stronza and Gordillo, 2008).

This approach highlights what guests value and pinpoints where the hotel can enhance its services to meet and exceed these expectations. Addressing these identified areas can lead to enhanced guest satisfaction and loyalty. Researchers must ensure consistent themes in the textual narratives support visual data interpretation to avoid misrepresenting guest experiences (Reicher, 2020).

5.2 Presenting summarized findings

As a Photovoice researcher, when writing the conclusion of this Photovoice study in the hospitality context, researchers started by summarizing the key findings, emphasizing the unique value of Photovoice in capturing and understanding guest experiences by highlighting how the diverse collected photographs provided critical insights into cleanliness, comfort and hospitality themes. For instance, mention how participants used images of spotless rooms and well-maintained facilities to underscore the importance of cleanliness. Comfort level was depicted through photographs of plush bedding, cozy lounge areas and serene outdoor spaces, indicating guests’ desire for a relaxing and comfortable stay (Wang *et al.*, 1998). To illustrate these points, examples such as a participant photographing a meticulously cleaned bathroom or a pristine lobby should be included. Lastly, discussions should be held about how hospitality was showcased through images of personalized touches and friendly staff interactions, such as welcome notes and greetings, highlighting the significance of attentive service (Table A1 and Figure A1). These findings demonstrate the efficacy of Photovoice in capturing the nuanced and multifaceted nature of guest experiences, offering a comprehensive understanding that extends beyond traditional qualitative methods and should be emphasized (Wang and Burris, 1997).

5.3 Presenting implications

Photovoice researchers should highlight their study’s contributions to theoretical frameworks and practical applications when presenting implications. Theoretically, Photovoice enriches qualitative research by integrating visual data with textual narratives, creating a more robust and nuanced analysis of guest experiences and this should be explained. This method bridges the gap between subjective guest feedback and objective visual evidence, enhancing the depth and validity of qualitative research (Evans-Agnew and Rosemberg, 2016). For example, combining photographs of clean and well-maintained facilities with narratives about their importance provides a more comprehensive understanding of cleanliness as a critical factor in guest satisfaction. From a practical standpoint, outline how the insights gained from Photovoice can directly inform hospitality management strategies. However, there are specific areas requiring improvement that need to be identified through the study, such as the emphasis on cleanliness, comfort and hospitality (Erfani, 2021). Hotels can invest in maintaining high standards of cleanliness by implementing rigorous cleaning protocols and regular inspections and enhancing comfort through better amenities, such as high-quality bedding and relaxing lounge areas. In addition, the importance of training staff to provide personalized and attentive service, incorporating personalized touches such as welcome notes and friendly interactions

could be incorporated into standard operating procedures. These actionable insights can improve guest satisfaction and loyalty, demonstrating the practical value of incorporating Photovoice into hospitality research and management practices (Davis and Mitchell, 2022).

5.4 Presenting limitations and future research

In order to maintain transparency, a Photovoice study's limitations and future research directions section should acknowledge the methodological constraints and opportunities for advancement. Limitations can be situated within the visual and participatory nature of the method, for instance, the subjectivity of image interpretation, the potential for participant self-selection bias or ethical challenges in visual representation. However, rather than framing these as flaws, the researchers should emphasize how recognizing such issues strengthens the study's credibility and reflexivity. Furthermore, future research directions should not only suggest replication or expansion, but should also advocate for methodological refinement, such as triangulating visual data with interviews, extending to underrepresented groups, or applying Photovoice across diverse hospitality segments. Researchers are encouraged to use this section to invite scholarly dialogue, propose interdisciplinary integration and highlight the potential of Photovoice to reshape how experience and voice are conceptualized in hospitality research by reaffirming the method's generative potential while offering a roadmap for how others can ethically and creatively extend its application.

6. Conclusion

This paper has presented Photovoice as a participatory, theoretically grounded methodology for exploring hotel guest experiences. Framed by the intersecting lenses of EDT, SDL and PAR, it has illustrated how visual narratives can surface emotional, sensory and context-specific service insights that conventional tools may overlook. Through simulated examples and a step-by-step methodological framework, the study positions Photovoice as an innovative method and a transferable research design for hospitality scholars. Importantly, it invites researchers to rethink guest experience inquiry's epistemological foundations and embrace more collaborative, inclusive and affective approaches to knowledge production.

6.1 Contributions to theory and practice

From a theoretical standpoint, this study offers several key contributions. First, it advances EDT by demonstrating how disconfirmation can be visualized and narrated through lived experiences rather than abstract survey scales. Second, it operationalizes SDL by showing how value-in-use is co-constructed through participant-led image selection and interpretation. Third, it reinforces the utility of PAR in hospitality research by shifting power toward participants as co-analysts and meaning-makers. Finally, this work synthesizes these three frameworks into a cohesive, practical model for participatory visual inquiry, offering future researchers a robust theoretical structure to build further studies (Saxena *et al.*, 2025).

Equally significant are the practical implications. To begin with, Photovoice enables hospitality managers to identify emotional service moments—both delight and dissatisfaction—that traditional feedback methods often miss. Moreover, the method promotes participatory service design by inviting guests to co-create improvement insights. In addition, Photovoice can be used as an internal training resource, helping staff visualize and interpret service from the guest's perspective. Finally, integrating Photovoice into post-stay evaluation systems or experience redesign workshops can support brands in crafting emotionally resonant and value-rich experiences that foster loyalty and differentiation in competitive markets.

6.2 Limitations and future research directions

That said, several limitations merit attention. First, while the study's simulated data aids conceptual clarity, future empirical applications across real-world hospitality settings are

necessary to establish external validity. Furthermore, because image generation and interpretation are inherently subjective, researchers should triangulate Photovoice findings with interviews, surveys or observational data. Third, voluntary participation may introduce demographic or attitudinal bias, necessitating more inclusive and purposive sampling strategies. Finally, future studies should investigate the method's adaptability across diverse cultural, economic and service contexts—from budget hotels to luxury resorts—to assess its broader applicability. These limitations offer fertile ground for extending the Photovoice method and deepening our understanding of experiential hospitality research.

While Photovoice offers significant strengths in surfacing experiential depth, it also presents limitations that scholars must critically consider when applying the method in hospitality contexts. Guest participation is often voluntary and time-bound, potentially limiting the continuity and diversity of visual data (Sutton-Brown, 2014; Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, interpreting images remains inherently subjective, requiring triangulation with narratives or other data forms to enhance validity (Golden, 2020). Not all participants may feel equally equipped or confident in using photography, introducing the risk of underrepresentation. Ethical concerns surrounding the photographing of shared hospitality spaces—such as capturing bystanders or staff—further complicate implementation (Wass *et al.*, 2020). Recognizing these challenges enhances methodological transparency and equips future researchers to design more ethically responsible and inclusive Photovoice studies.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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