

Reflections: How technological developments can help the hospitality and tourism industries cope with increasing staff shortages

Theme Editors Kemal Birdir and Sevda Birdir reflect on the significance and outcomes of this theme issue alongside Managing Editors Hale Ozgit and Ali Ozturen.

Overview

The hospitality and tourism industries are battling with a critical shortage of skilled workforce. Despite forecasts predicting robust growth and demand for these sectors, the lack of a competent workforce remains a significant challenge. This issue underscores the need for innovative solutions to maintain high service standards and operational efficiency.

Our theme issue addresses this urgent topic by exploring how technological advancements can help alleviate staffing shortages and enhance service quality globally. We believe this timely issue serves as a crucial resource for industry stakeholders, providing insights into leveraging technology to address workforce challenges. Continued research and academic dialog are essential for understanding how these advancements can be effectively implemented while maintaining high service standards.

Why is this theme issue strategic?

The strategic question of this theme issue focuses on exploring how technological developments can assist the hospitality and tourism industries in managing pervasive staff shortages. As this problem intensifies globally, the relevance and timeliness of this issue are evident. The contributions within this issue aim to offer actionable insights and strategies for tackling these workforce challenges through technological innovation.

What worked well in the theme issue plan and approach?

Our choice to address a highly relevant topic in hospitality academia attracted a dedicated and knowledgeable group of scholars. Their enthusiasm and expertise greatly contributed to the quality of the thematic issue. We facilitated effective communication with contributors, encouraging the submission of high-quality papers. The support from journal editors was instrumental in maintaining a smooth review process, ensuring that abstracts and final papers were submitted and processed efficiently.

How did you engage with different stakeholder groups?

We employed two main strategies to engage stakeholders in this thematic issue. First, we reached out to prominent academics known for their work in this field, resulting in valuable contributions from leading experts. We are grateful for their willingness to participate and share their insights. Second, we issued an open call through social media and research networks, which successfully attracted additional researchers who provided valuable perspectives and research.

Highlights from stakeholder group interactions

Engaging with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds provided us with a rich array of perspectives, enhancing our understanding of the labor market challenges in the hospitality



industry. This diversity allowed us to approach the issue from multiple angles and develop a more comprehensive view of potential solutions.

Peer review process: what went well and why?

The peer review process was a rewarding aspect of academic publishing. Both authors and reviewers displayed enthusiasm and commitment, contributing to a constructive review process. The editorial team's continuous support ensured that the review was thorough and efficient. This process not only strengthened the quality of the submissions but also enriched the thematic issue as a whole.

Significant outcomes of the theme issue

The theme issue addresses the pressing labor shortage in the hospitality industry and explores how technological advancements – such as AI and automation – can provide solutions. The issue contributes to knowledge by highlighting how these technologies can improve operational efficiency and workforce management. It also offers practical guidelines for businesses on selecting and implementing technologies to address staffing challenges, emphasizing the importance of staff training and adaptation.

Additionally, the issue promotes collaboration between technology developers and industry practitioners, fostering innovation and encouraging sustainable practices. The insights provided aim to support strategic workforce planning and enhance customer experience, even with limited staff.

Implications for management action and applied research

The findings of this theme issue have several implications for applied research and management. Key areas for further exploration include:

- (1) *Technological solutions*: Identifying best practices for integrating technologies like mobile apps, VR/AR and IoT to boost efficiency and customer engagement.
- (2) *Impact assessment*: Evaluating the effectiveness of different technologies in mitigating staff shortages to inform management strategies.
- (3) *Longitudinal studies*: Investigating how technological advancements influence workforce dynamics over time to guide policy and management practices.
- (4) *Quantitative analysis*: Analyzing the financial impacts of technology implementation, focusing on ROI and labor savings.
- (5) *Customer behavior research*: Studying how technology affects customer preferences to tailor services effectively.
- (6) *Ethical considerations*: Addressing the ethics of automation, job displacement and balancing efficiency with maintaining a quality workforce.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this theme issue provide valuable insights for both management practices and applied research. By highlighting the synergy between technological solutions and human elements, the issue aims to contribute to a more resilient and adaptable hospitality and tourism industry. This focus on technology and human integration is crucial for addressing the challenges posed by staff shortages and ensuring continued success in the industry.

Reflections on the editorial experience

Serving as theme editors for this issue has been a deeply rewarding experience. We appreciated the interdisciplinary collaboration, which enriched the research quality. Engaging with

cutting-edge solutions and connecting with experts in the field has been fulfilling. The process also offered significant learning opportunities and professional growth. Overall, the editorial role has been both professionally satisfying and instrumental in advancing critical discussions within the hospitality and tourism industries.

About the Theme Editors:

Kemal Birdir (Prof. Dr) Born in 1967 in Adana, Turkey. He earned his undergraduate degree in Tourism Management from Cukurova University's Mersin School of Tourism and Hotel Management in 1989. He was appointed as a research assistant in the same school and received a scholarship to pursue his graduate studies abroad. In 1994, he earned his master's degree in Tourism Management from Hawaii Pacific University, and in 1998, he completed his Ph.D. in the Restaurant, Hotel, Institutional and Tourism (RHIT) program at Purdue University. Since 1998, he has been a full-time Professor of Hotel Management at Mersin University's Tourism Faculty, where he is currently based. His major research interest includes hotel management, tourism management and human resources management.

Sevda Birdir (Assoc. Prof. Dr) Born in 1969 in Antakya, Turkey. She completed her elementary and high school education in Antakya. She earned her bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hotel Management from Mersin University's School of Tourism and Hotel Management in 1998 and her master's degree in 2001 from the same institution. Between 2001 and 2006, she worked as a lecturer at Nevsehir Vocational School of Erciyes University. She earned her Ph.D. degree in Production Management and Marketing from Erciyes University's Department of Production Management and Marketing in 2009. Between 2006 and 2012, she was a lecturer at Social Science Vocational School of Mersin University. She was awarded the title of Associate Professor of Tourism Science in 2017 and is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Tourism Guidance in Mersin University's Tourism Faculty. Her areas of expertise include tourism marketing, tourism guidance and tourism management.