

## **Digital well-being in the hospitality industry: A PERMA conceptualization**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Over the years, the hospitality industry has become the embodiment of various evolving technologies; however, the field lacks major examination into digital well-being. Digital well-being is broadly defined as a state of personal, psychological well-being experienced through the healthy use of modern digital technology, representing a new trend in hospitality businesses. There are current research gaps on the topic. It is unclear which dimensions of psychological well-being represent different aspects of digital well-being. Previous research studies on this topic only focused on the tourism context. Therefore, this paper is the first attempt to better conceptualize digital well-being in the hospitality management field. The authors classify three enablers of digital well-being: digital devices, digital interfaces, and digital applications into a well-established model of psychological well-being: PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement). To accomplish this objective, an integrative literature review was conducted. Theoretical and implications of this integrative review are presented.

**Keywords:** Digital well-being, hospitality, digital enablers, PERMA, hedonic, eudaimonic

## **INTRODUCTION**

Digitization has become an inevitability in the daily management of hospitality businesses (Stankov and Gretzel, 2021). Essentially, the advancement of technology has elicited a growing desire of customers in demand a more accessible experience in researching, reviewing, booking hotel rooms, communicating their needs, and augmenting their stay, particularly in the era of Covid-19 (Buhalis and Leung, 2018; Chen *et al.*, 2021). Although technology can complement guests' experiences, excessive technological use has been proven to cause adverse effects such as technostress, technological malfunctions, noise pollution, and information overload (Monge Roffarello and Russis, 2019; Stankov and Gretzel, 2021) on the well-being of guests (Cecchinato *et al.*, 2019). The over-emphasis on advanced technology necessitates both researchers and practitioners to better examine the role of technology on people's psychological well-being.

Over the years, researchers have critically examined psychological well-being focusing on the hedonic approaches while neglecting eudaimonic experiences (Filep and Laing, 2019). These concerns were raised as a result of the well-being of people going beyond seeking pleasures in the short term. Today, psychological well-being is multidimensional, encompassing both hedonic and eudaimonic components. (Huta and Waterman, 2014; Butler and Kern, 2016). The past decades have witnessed a vast advancement of multidimensional hedonic and eudaimonic well-being models (Martela and Sheldon, 2019). For this paper, psychological well-being is defined by Seligman's (2011) PERMA (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement) model. The model has been widely applied in the tourism sector to conceptualise psychological well-being (Filep and Laing, 2019).

Digital well-being is considered a responsible use of digital technology to promote psychological well-being (Marsden, 2019), typically encompassing both hedonic (e.g., positive emotions) and eudaimonic well-being (e.g., a sense of meaning). Although there has been preliminary research on the application of digital well-being in the tourism sector (Stankov and Gretzel, 2021), there have not been any significant assessments of digital well-being in hospitality settings. It is further unclear what specific psychological dimensions constitute digital well-being. Hence, this paper aims to address this research gap by conceptualizing digital well-being in the hospitality management field through PERMA.

## **METHOD**

An integrative literature review was used to assess, scrutinize and organize the literature to more closely conceptualise digital well-being. Since digital well-being is a novel topic, an integrative literature review (Snyder, 2019) was used instead of a systematic literature review. Torraco's (2005) approach of the integrative literature review was adopted to scrutinize the literature in August 2021. Google Scholar was the chosen search engine. The preliminary search for "digital well-being" and "hospitality" resulted in only one related article (Stankov and Gretzel, 2021). To refine the search, specific search terms such as "hotel ICT and positive emotions" were used. This resulted in a total of 50 peer-reviewed articles. These articles were ultimately reduced to 27 papers by choosing articles specifically relevant to psychological well-being and the use of ICTs (information and communication technology) by hospitality customers (such as the use of mindfulness apps in hotels). Papers on unrelated topics (such as the use of ICTs for the well-being of workers in the hospitality sector) were excluded.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The integrative literature review identified three significant groups of enablers of psychological well-being in the hospitality industry. They are 1) digital devices, 2) digital interfaces, and 3) digital applications.

Digital devices are electronic digital enablers that use distinct guests' data to process customer information for various operations, such as smartphones and laptops, keyless door locks, digital concierge, etc. (Monge Roffarello and Russis, 2019). Digital interfaces are computer networks that connect guests to other digital devices, such as Google Home Assistant, QR codes, A.I. interface, wifi connection, etc. Digital interfaces depend on the personal data and search history of guests. Digital applications are software programmes developed by hospitality related-businesses to provide well-being support to guests, such as spa booking apps, wellness apps, social media, check-in, check-out apps, etc.

The levels of psychological well-being enhanced or hindered by these digital enablers are subjective to each individual (Stankov and Gretzel, 2021). However, the PERMA model serves as an overarching explanatory framework to better understand and appraise digital well-being. It has been established the use of digital devices triggers positive emotions (P), such as joy in customers (Kansakar et al., 2019). Digital applications such as mindfulness apps offer instant immersive hotel experiences, leading to a higher sense of engagement (E). At the same time, it has also been shown that non-functioning technology can cause a lack of engagement (Prentice and Nguyen, 2020). The role of relationships (R) in digital well-being can be studied through technologies linked to social customer relationship marketing. For understanding meaning (M) and achievement (A), the role of digital applications is particularly relevant. Hotels offer on-demand virtual fitness classes to enable guests to choose the most suitable workout programs during their stay (Little, 2019). It would be valuable to examine the role of these virtual fitness classes in facilitating guests' achievement levels. It would also be interesting to compare the virtual with non-virtual classes in this regard.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Overall it is clear that the concept of digital well-being in the hospitality industry is still in its infancy. However, the PERMA framework is useful to understand psychological well-being as part of digital well-being, and hence to conceptualise digital well-being better. This paper, therefore, extends Stankov and Gretzel's (2021) nascent mapping of digital well-being in tourism to the hospitality sector by integrating PERMA. It filled the gap in understanding how the aspects of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being relate to digital enablers. Future researchers can study various enablers, examine their effects on PERMA pillars, and present new research questions. For hospitality managers, this analysis allows them to decide which specific digital enabler can be used to generate specific well-being outcomes with their guests. This in turn ensures greater ability to enhance overall customer experience and generate a sense of well-being in their establishments (Vada et al., 2020). Given that digital well-being is a multi-faceted phenomenon, further research of its hedonic and eudaimonic components is clearly needed.

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