

〈Research Article〉

System Implementation in Foreign-Branded and Traditional Japanese Hotels: Educational Implications Based on Student Internship Experiences

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Abstract

This research examines the current status of digital transformation (DX) in the hospitality sector experienced by undergraduate students during their hotel internship and its implications for education. After an introductory lecture by a faculty member, two students with hotel-related work experience were engaged in semi-structured interviews, which were descriptively analyzed for data analysis. The results of this study find that there were some forms of customer management systems and cleaning robots introduced at Hotel A, which contributed toward operational efficiency, but were limited by usability, scope, and compatibility issues. In Hotel B, there were little to no automated processes, and reliance on manual labor caused increased workloads and inconsistent service outcomes. Furthermore, the two students suggested a wide variety of improvements from self-check-in kiosks to translation options, and ultimately showed that DX could be a useful resource for Human Resource Development through hospitality education.

Keywords: Tourism DX, Accommodation Facilities, Internship, Workload and Service Quality, Interview Survey

1. Introduction

This study aims to gain insight into the current status of tourism digital transformation (DX)¹ as experienced by tourism-related students through internships at hotels and to make clear how the students' experiences were interpreted. Through interviews, authors first identify types, implementation status, and operationalization of types of DX-related tools at the students' workplace, and examined ways in which students perceived the tools as affecting workload, service quality, and job design. Finally, authors use the students' internship sites as examples to detail ways in which tourism DX areas remain underdeveloped and identify challenges and implications for education with respect to leveraging tourism DX.

In Japan, population decline has recently been a growing trend, and most evident in rural areas. Therefore, tourism is positioned as an important mechanism for enhancing regional revitalization through inter-regional exchange. The Japan Tourism Agency is promoting digitalization of the tourism sector (tourism DX) to address the dual challenges of increasing convenience for travelers and reducing labor shortages resulting from population decline. In developing travel convenience for travelers, the report recommends developing reservation and payment systems and implementing recommendation functions through websites and online travel agencies (OTAs).

Also, with the potential to increase operational efficiency, accommodation providers are recommended to adopt property management systems (PMS)² and standardized data, in order to enhance the accuracy of information management, efficiency of resource deployment, and overall operational efficiency. At the same time, regarding the feasibility of improving marketing for entire tourist destinations and increasing the likelihood of visits by enhancing customer relationship management (CRM)³ and data management platforms (DMP)⁴ based on customer behavior data. Additionally, one of the reasons for promoting tourism DX is human resource development. The report supports developing and placing specialized personnel through industry-academia-government alliances in conjunction with destination management/marketing organizations (DMOs)⁵.

Japan is pursuing these efforts to encourage the sharing of data between tourism businesses and destinations, maximize tourism revenue, and achieve sustainable regional economies. As a result, students and young talent will be exposed to the most current applications of DX that are emerging in practice, through onsite internships and/or other means, and this exposure can be seen as more than simply work experience, but also an authentic education experience in the tourism industry. This study will examine the status of tourism digital transformation uses, and practice, encountered by students from the Faculty of Tourism, Josai International University during their internships at hotels, and the gaps that can be observed in the government policy directions and students' experiences. The study will also seek to compile students' comments on technologies and systems they felt were lacking in platforming, clarify the challenges in implementing tourism DX, and look forward to the future considerations of digital transformation literacy in tourism education.

2. Previous Research on Tourism DX

Technological adoption in the hospitality sector is now a fundamental aspect that directly affects competitiveness and operational ways of doing business. For instance, a study that analyzed the characteristics of smart hotels demonstrated that innovative and advanced technology could enhance the relationship between guests and hotels as well as create an effect on emotional value that goes beyond the notion of convenience (Kim & Han, 2020). In a similar vein, a study examining the processes that impact

the acceptance and adoption of information technology (IT) in the US hotel industry found that strategically implemented IT could advance market positioning and transformational change (Siguaw, Enz, & Namasivayam, 2000). However, it also identified ongoing issues impacting guest experience, such as implementation costs, safety issues, and integration of technological systems already in use (Vitezić, Car, & Šimunić, 2015).

In the past few years, there have been more and more studies published studying the broad topic of DX as the context for technology adoption. Since the pandemic, the adoption of AI, as well as self-service terminals, has quickly accelerated. One area of concern has been maintaining the human value that comes from genuine human interaction (Zhu, Wang, & Cheng, 2021). A few empirical studies have supported the efficiency of DX around revenue management and performance management, however, studies also state that implementation and operation costs as well as incompatibility have an impact on large organizations adopting it (Alrawadieh, Alrawadieh, & Cetin, 2021; Anwar & Deliana, 2024). Domestic studies have focused more specifically on talent acquisition and on-site operations perspectives.

Ishitani (2023) investigated the value of internship programs within Japan's hospitality sector and found that medium- to long-term industry-academia collaborative internships are vital in meeting both the industry's skilled workforce needs and the learning needs of students. Moreover, Ishitani (2024) showed that long-term internship experiences improve professional confidence and interest in the tourism industry for students, which plays an important role in career decision-making. Additionally, Ishitani (2025) examined the case of THL (TAP Hospitality Lab) in Okinawa and argued that the DX of the hospitality sector enhances not only operational efficiency and customer satisfaction, but also regional development and human resource development. In addition, research in Japan's hotel sector, which takes into account labor shortage and institutional barriers to accepting foreign talent, has explored DX not merely as the means of enhancing automation, but as a strategic enabler of, not a replacement for, human service, which also leads to operational standardization and multilingual support (Iwamoto & Ishitani, 2025; Iwamoto & Ishitani, in press). While these records establish the potential of DX, such as helping reduce employee burden and manage service and operations more efficiently, they also indicate some real-world challenges, such as, the absence of operational personnel at the site or the absence of data infrastructure to utilize the existing data.

In conclusion, while efficiency and profitability are being scrutinized abroad, the notion of human resource strategy and harmony at the ground level is gaining attention in Japan. The research is mostly limited to large-scale facilities and branded hotels, and little research systematically examines the relationship between educational learning (student internship experiences) and digital transformation. This study seeks to address the gap in research, and is novel in that it aims to describe the state of DX, the experiences of tourism students in the context of internships and activities, and offer educational

considerations (human resource development and learning outcomes). Specifically, it collects qualitative data based on experiences in the field, examining how DX plays an important role in the development of practice skills, and how these experiences may provide implications for educational curriculum and industry-academia collaboration.

3. Research Method

This study aimed to clarify the real status of tourism digital transformation (DX) experienced by students from the Faculty of Tourism, Josai International University through hotel internships and analyze its educational significance. After an introductory lecture by a full-time faculty member, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students who interned in a foreign-branded hotel (Hotel A) and a well-established Japanese hotel (Hotel B). Hotel A's internship took place for one year in 2024, while Hotel B's internship took place for one year in 2022. Interviews were recorded verbatim, organized and analyzed descriptively.

Both students also took part in the "Hotel Scholarship Program" (a program distinctive to the Faculty of Tourism at Josai International University)⁶. This program permits students to receive scholarship support for their hotel-based work experience, in balancing their study with work experience (Josai International University, 2023). In this study, authors analyze the internship experiences of the students who received support through this framework, to more specifically analyze the educational significance of DX in tourism education. The scope of this research can be distilled into three main points of consideration.

RQ1: To clarify the types, scope of implementation, and operation methods of DX-related tools introduced in the workplace.

RQ2: To examine how these technologies were perceived to have impacted workload, service quality, and job design from the students' perspective.

RQ3: To organize systems that have not been introduced or are insufficient, and present challenges and educational suggestions regarding the use of tourism DX.

For RQ1 to RQ3, authors accurately capture experiences and perceptions of the students in the structured interview survey and then clarify issues and what improvements, if any, the students who participated in the above-mentioned internships identified related to DX. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to the interviews. Personal information was anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and the study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines. While acknowledging this was not a survey with a large sample size, authors took into

account the state of tourism DX in the field and the educational implications therein. The structured interview survey was based on the questions outlined below.

Q1: What DX tools were actually used at your workplace?

- What systems and machines were used at the hotel where you worked?
- How were they used at your workplace?
- What were the conveniences and inconveniences?

Q2: How did these affect your workload, service quality, and role design?

- How did the use of systems and machines affect the workload and burden of your work?
- Has there been a change in the quality of service provided?
- Has there been a change in your role or division of labor?

Q3: What are some suggestions for improvement from the workplace for functions that have not been implemented or are lacking?

- Was there anything at work that you thought would have been helpful if you had this system?
- In what situations did you feel that efficiency could be improved?
- How do you think the expanded adoption of DX will change the ease of working and customer service?

Through the above methods, authors will explore the relationship and discrepancies between tourism DX promoted by policy and the on-site experiences of student interns.

4. Research Results

4.1 DX Tools Implemented at Hotel A

This section organizes and presents the answers of two students based on the questions devised from the research questions and the survey results.

In response to “What tools (types, extent of use, implementation method) of DX were actually used in the workplace?”, the student employed at Hotel A reported that a customer information management system was adopted in their workplace as the primary DX tool. This system managed basic guest information, check-in, room cleaning status, etc. in a centralized manner and was accessible for all departments via terminals. In this way, sharing information and handing over tasks inter-departmentally was reported as uncomplicated. However, the operating interface was in English and felt complicated, requiring a lot of time to learn and felt weighty for the student, to learn. While robots were introduced to

clean some lobby areas, the window cleaning and other specialized work was still done by people. Additionally, the digital check in functionality of the official app was not being used because it was not compatible with existing work systems, and therefore a traditional front desk interaction was needed.

4.2 Limited Automation and Manual Operations at Hotel B

In contrast, the student intern at Hotel B reported a very low level of implementation of automation technology with all check-in and check-out completed by hand. Although reservations were completed online, all functions of front desk duties, room cleaning, and bell services were completed by staff. Of note, room cleaning had no added piece of auxiliary equipment or robots to use, making it virtually impossible to accommodate to help ease staff shortages. The intern also stated that the use of DX and operational efficiencies could help with lengthy work schedule periods and when the hotel was saturated with high levels of guests. The student stated that front desk and bell services, in particular have many duties that could be improved by simply introducing technological supports to lessen the burden of work.

4.3 Impact of DX on Workload and Service Quality

In response to “The Effect of DX Tool Introduction on Workload,” the student employed at Hotel A indicated that the introduction of a customer information management system assisted with handover tasks, resulting in a more efficient process than before. Nevertheless, the intern remarked that the complex operation of the system required significant time to master, resulting in increased workload during the period when the tool was introduced. Notably, the intern explained that although the cleaning robots limited some tasks, their use only extended to certain areas, and did not sufficiently mitigate the recruitment challenges. Conversely, the student working in Hotel B explained that not using any DX tools or systems resulted in a repetitive pattern of check-in/check-out management, and that their shifts obliged them to spend longer periods of time at the front office which substantially tired both physical and cognitive domains in their role.

Staffing deficiencies were particularly prominent during peak seasons and at shift transitions. It was noted that the workload could have been greatly alleviated with DX efficiency. With areas of service quality, the student intern at Hotel A said that the improved information sharing via system use increased the accuracy of its customer interaction processes, which enhanced the quality of the service. However, because the digital check-in function was not useful, guests did not enjoy this convenience, resulting in expanded service counter interactions requiring assistance. On the opposite end, Hotel B had almost no automation, thus the quality of service relied heavily on the ability of the staff, as well as the number scheduled. The intern mentioned issues such as language coordination with foreign cleaning staff and decreased service quality resulting from the front desk being open most hours of the day.

At Hotel A, the system’s visualization of cleaning status and customer information facilitated the staff

(including the student) understanding of their position, and therefore task assignment. The complexity of the system indicated that proficiency levels were directly related to completing the role, and at times, tasks became dependent on certain individuals. By contrast, in Hotel B, there was no DX implementation which placed a heavy burden on each employee. For the student, “it became common for them to manage multiple roles at the same time.” While attending to multiple roles, the student’s ability to focus on their job responsibilities suffered and the concentration to attend to guest servicing declined. At this point, there were large inefficiencies and ineffectiveness with role design.

4.4 Students’ Suggestions for Improving DX Implementation

Lastly, authors provide survey results related to “ideas for improvement from the field for non-implementation, or insufficient functionality.”

The student employed at Hotel A was aware of how the systems and the different equipment they used were lacking in some ways, identifying multiple avenues for improvement. First, regarding the customer management system, the student highlighted it was multifunctional but complex to operate and was only available in English, making it time-consuming to learn to use. They would like to see more of a user-friendly PMS introduced that anyone would be able to easily use. This would allow new staff and trainees to spend less time learning the operations of the software and more time focusing on customer service and hospitality.

Second, the intern requested the introduction of food delivery robots. They proposed that implementing support spanning both the restaurant and accommodation departments could alleviate labor shortages and improve interdepartmental coordination efficiency. Regarding communication with multinational staff and foreign guests, they noted that existing translation apps produced many errors and were unsuitable for operational use. They therefore stated that highly accurate translation tools and dedicated staff terminals are necessary. Furthermore, inefficient lost and found management was highlighted as a challenge. Processing 40-50 items daily using a combination of handwritten logs and Excel spreadsheets was time-consuming, prompting a call for centralized QR code management and automated retrieval systems. These proposals suggest that DX implementation directly contributes not only to operational efficiency but also to reducing staff burden and enhancing customer service.

At the same time, the student employed at Hotel B emphasized a lack of automation, especially in relation to the front desk and housekeeping functions. They reported that during busy check-in/check-out periods, front desks become immensely busy, and suggested that self-check-in kiosks could address this issue by reducing wait time and improving employee utilization. They also mentioned that because many employees were foreign workers, the introduction of cleaning robots would be beneficial to lessen the reliance on staff for housekeeping. They also stated that even utilizing robotics to carry out physical tasks such as room service or luggage handling would allow staff to focus more on interacting with guests.

They also pointed out that insufficient information flow was another major issue. They referred specifically to the lack of timely information regarding the arrival of airport buses so there would be situations when multiple staff were absent at the same time, and suggested that staff members needed to be in the same system to log the situation. In addition, they requested a direct ordering system from guest rooms and a multilingual translation app. These were anticipated to enhance service for international guests and alleviate the psychological burden on staff.

Moreover, as a result of the significant amount of time staff spend managing lost and broken room keys, recommendations were made to use new authentication technologies like facial recognition or vein authentication as effective remediation strategies. Improvement recommendations not only will improve the working conditions of the staff but will also positively impact customer satisfaction ratings.

5. Discussion

5.1 Gap between Policy-Level DX and On-Site Implementation

The results of this research did show the current state of the implementation of DX tools, the implications, and the obstacles that interns perceived when adopting DX. Firstly, with respect to the difference between the DX implementation and on-site perception, Hotel A had implemented DX to a certain extent with customer information management tools and some robotic cleaners, but in practice, there were issues of operability, and compatibility with existing equipment, and thus it was not necessarily highly convenient for employees. On the other hand, Hotel B showed very limited progress in implementing DX and staff were still working in a labor-intensive environment.

In comparing the two examples, it became clear that the expectations at a policy level for “efficiency gains” and “labor reduction” experience very insufficient implementation at the operational level. In other words, implementing DX goes beyond simply adding a piece of equipment or a system; ensuring operational usability and fit with the work system is essential for the effectiveness of a new technology or platform.

5.2 DX, Workload Reduction, and Service Quality

Next, with respect to operational and service quality, DX brought some efficiency and service-quality improvement to operations, but the impact was limited. Specifically, Hotel A indicated some improvement in service accuracy through fewer barriers to information sharing, but new operational complexities associated with applying and managing a system also created new burdens. Hotel B indicated that staff is constantly engaging in multitasking work processes concurrently, which resulted in long work hours. Taken together, this shows that although there has been some advancement in reducing labor burdens from the changes DX made with improved technology, this has not been realized to the

fullest extent of what DX can or should be.

Overall, students that worked at both hotels offered specific recommendations for on-site needs that could also serve as improvement initiatives for their DX models. The recommended technologies varied considerably; they included all types of automation equipment, including self-serve check-in kiosks and cleaning robots, multilingual support tools (e.g., translation apps and terminals for staff), centralized management systems for lost items and bus schedule management, and even biometric authentication technology for guest services. All of these recommendations targeted ways to improve guest convenience, operational efficiency, and service quality, which correspond directly to the struggles guests face on the frontlines of service delivery. This demonstrates that there is not a meaningful disconnect between the goal of tourism DX noted in policy and the on-the-ground ability to utilize those technologies to achieve tourism DX. The shortcomings highlighted by the work from the students were aligned with the means to achieve the policy's objectives.

5.3 Educational Value of Internship-Based DX Observation

The authors investigate both the experiential nature of tourism DX among students who engaged in internships and their identified aspects for improvements. In this regard, the difficulties encountered and the suggested improvements by students who experienced hotel internships are valuable learning materials for tourism human resource development. As such, it demonstrates the potential of field experiences to be more than just “technologizing” the experience; it provides for the experience of the potential benefits and difficulties of the experience in a more formalized way as well as suggesting improvements to address the challenges. In the context of education, there is potential to more systematically integrate such experiential learning so that the next generation of tourism industry professionals is gaining skills in DX literacy as well as on-the-ground problem solving.

6. Conclusion

This study explores students' understanding of tourism DX derived from their internship-based exposure to hotel operations and digital practices. Interviews with the student who had interned at Hotel A revealed that there were a couple of guest information management systems in place, and there were a few cleaning robots used on property that did help improve efficiency to an extent. However, there generally remained issues with the process of operating the management systems, and compatibility with older systems and existing equipment were still areas that required attention. In terms of Hotel B there also did not appear to be an innovative approach to the automation of general hotel operations. For basic front desk customer service and cleaning there was still a reliance on manual labor. Interviews further indicated a major difference in workload in staff in the hotels, as well as inconsistency in the delivery of

service processes. The comparison between Hotels A and B further framed that the definitions of “labor reduction” and “efficiency improvement” in tourism DX put forth by the Japan Tourism Agency may not be a direct reflection of what is happening in tourism and hospitality operations at the frontline.

In addition, the interview survey demonstrated concerns via the actual experiences of students completing the internship. They suggested ideas like expanding the use of self-check-in kiosks and cleaning robots, organizing lost and found and bus schedule information, improving multilingual support with translation tools and staff terminals, and adopting new authentication technologies such as facial recognition. These suggestions are not only components of operational efficiencies and increased guest convenience, but are also consistent with the Tourism Agency’s direction for Tourism DX. It is also noteworthy that students physically visit sites, document challenges, and provide solutions, which are educational opportunities that builds DX literacy and problem-solving abilities, and indicates the merits of this research to build a relationship between tourism DX and educational practice. It is clear that the students in the fashion of a hotel internship, left the experience, with a better comprehension of the field and were able to identify real challenges.

Nonetheless, the current study does not address several challenges. As a first caveat, the number of individuals interviewed in this study was small, suggesting that the outcomes cannot be generalized to a larger sample size. While a foreign-branded hotel and a traditional Japanese hotel were compared in this study, future studies should examine internship experiences based on scale, e.g., internship practices at lodging facilities of various types. Additionally, to increase the breadth of survey research into internship experiences, it is necessary to obtain input from those other than employees and managers, such as hotel guest opinions, if the goal is to further understand stakeholder experiences. Finally, to determine if internship experiences can inform career development or future professional competencies, continued studies on such matters would be useful.

From an educational perspective, the findings indicate that hotel internships should be designed not merely as opportunities for work experience, but as structured learning programs that enable students to observe, analyze, and critically reflect on operational systems and DX implementation. Internship programs should explicitly incorporate learning objectives related to DX literacy, such as understanding system usability, operational compatibility, and the relationship between technology, workload reduction, and service quality.

For students, this implies learning how digital tools influence job design, multitasking, and service consistency, rather than focusing solely on technical operation. From the perspective of industry–academia collaboration, meaningful internships are those in which hotels benefit from students’ observations and improvement proposals, while students gain opportunities to connect practical challenges with academic learning. Such reciprocal internship programs can contribute to sustainable human resource development in the hospitality industry.

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Notes:

- ¹ Digital transformation (DX) within the tourism industry encompasses all efforts to leverage digital technology for areas such as reservations, customer relationship management, marketing, and human resource development. The Japan Tourism Agency is advocating DX with two primary goals: increasing convenience (decrease time spent by the customer in person) and reducing human resources and labor while addressing issues such as marketing and human resource development.
- ² A primary system used by hotels and other lodging facilities. It is a centralized repository for room reservations and allocates various staff responsibilities for check-in/check-out, room cleaning status, accounting, and much more. The implementation of a PMS solution is meant to increase information sharing across departments, as well as improve accountability and reduce staff workloads or duplication of work. However, in some cases, usability and compatibility with existing equipment and devices can be of concern and detrimental to implementation scheme.
- ³ A means of analyzing customer attribute data and behavior data that results in improved customer satisfaction and improved customer visit-to-revisit ratios (higher customer retention through understanding customer behavior and preference). Within the tourism industry, this means using customer data to better recommend services and merchandise based on previous customer preferences and reservation histories.
- ⁴ A platform-based system for capturing, integrating, and analyzing online behavior data (e.g., web access history, location information, purchase history, social media posts, etc.) and employing or implementing a marketing and customer-based strategies.
- ⁵ An organization that will leverage local tourism resources and data in its marketing and tourism strategy development and implementation. As part of the tourism digital transformation promoted by the Japan Tourism Agency, it will fulfill an important function as a base for regional data analysis and human resource development.
- ⁶ A system unique to Josai International University's Faculty of Tourism that allows students to receive work experience at hotel affiliates while still being enrolled and receiving scholarship support. Students gain work experience in the tourism industry, and the educational feature is that it allows for students to work while also keeping up with their studies.

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外資系ホテルおよび日本の老舗ホテルにおけるシステム導入 —学生インターンシップ経験に基づく教育的示唆—

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【要旨】

本研究は、観光学部の学生がホテルでのインターンシップを通じて体験した観光DXの実態を把握し、その教育的意義を検討することを目的とする。専任教員による導入講義の後、ホテル勤務経験を持つ学生2名に半構造化インタビューを実施し、その逐語記録を基に記述的に整理・分析した。結果として、Aホテルでは顧客管理システムや清掃ロボットが部分的に導入され、業務効率化に一定の効果をもたらしていた一方で、操作の煩雑さやシステム間の互換性不足といった課題が見られた。Bホテルでは自動化がほとんど進んでおらず、人手依存による負担の大きさやサービス品質のばらつきが確認された。また、学生からはセルフチェックイン機や翻訳ツールの活用など多様な改善提案が示され、DXが人材育成における学習資源として有効であることが明らかとなった。

キーワード：観光DX、宿泊施設、インターンシップ、業務負荷・サービス品質、インタビュー調査