Metaverse in Hospitality and Tourism in International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management: Guest Editorial

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Introduction

The metaverse represents a transformative evolution of the internet, integrating virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), and blockchain technologies to seamlessly merge physical and digital realms. This convergence fosters highly interactive and immersive experiences, particularly within the hospitality and tourism industries (Buhalis et al., 2023; Chen, 2024). Leading hotel brands, such as Accor Hotels, are leveraging the metaverse to redefine the guest journey by enhancing the pre-trip dreaming and discovery phases through captivating digital experiences. Additionally, virtual avatars in the metaverse are being employed to enrich in-stay interactions, creating novel touchpoints for customer engagement. The integration of metaverse technologies into sustainable tourism practices is reshaping urban living, tourism, and hospitality. A prominent example is Dubai's ambitious vision for a smart city, which illustrates the potential of the metaverse in crafting seamless and engaging environments that elevate the experiences of both residents and visitors. With the hospitality and tourism sector poised to tap into an estimated \$20 billion market opportunity (McKinsey, 2023), the industry is uniquely positioned to harness these innovations, delivering redefined engagement and digitally enriched, unforgettable experiences.

Despite significant advancements in defining and conceptualizing the metaverse (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Koohang et al., 2023; Buhalis et al., 2023), its application within the hospitality and tourism domain remains in its infancy. Current research is marked by a limited number of publications and a predominantly conceptual focus, with commercial adoption yet to reach scale in this sector (Buhalis et al., 2023). Although there have been several publications on metaverse literature (e.g., Gursoy et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2023), a significant gap remains in examining and integrating foundational knowledge specific to the metaverse within the hospitality literature. While existing studies highlight general topics and key contributors, they fail to provide actionable managerial frameworks, limiting both theoretical advancements and practical applications. This special issue addresses these gaps, grounded in diverse theoretical foundations, offering a more comprehensive approach to understanding the potential of the metaverse. While the sustainability benefits of metaverse-enabled tourism development—such as VR adoption for training and other initiatives—are evident, both academic and practitioner circles exhibit a limited understanding of these critical aspects (Foroudi et al., 2024). This special issue addresses these gaps by drawing on diverse theoretical foundations, offering a more comprehensive approach to understanding the metaverse's potential. While the sustainability benefits of metaverse-enabled tourism

development—such as VR adoption for training and other initiatives—are evident, there remains a limited understanding of these critical aspects within both academic and practitioner circles. To fill this gap, our special issue aims to inspire researchers to develop insightful models that help practitioners integrate these technologies into their strategies. This special issue advances current knowledge on the metaverse and its applications in the hospitality and tourism industry by focusing on three critical areas: the theoretical structuring of the metaverse literature, the identification of key research streams and their interrelationships, and the exploration of future research directions for both scholars and practitioners. Then, it explores key questions related to the metaverse and its applications within the hospitality and tourism sector.

The papers in this special issue

This special issue features 14 articles, organized into three main research streams based on their core focus. The aim is to explore the metaverse and its applications in the hospitality and tourism industry. Collectively, the papers published in the special issue make significant contributions to the existing literature and offer practical insights to support managerial decision-making in the following research streams:

- Traveler Behavior and Immersive Experiences in the Metaverse
- Organizational Strategies and Technology Adoption in Hospitality
- Technological Innovation and Societal Implications

Each of these research streams highlights a distinct aspect of the evolving scholarship in metaverse applications within hospitality and tourism. They offer meaningful perspectives for both researchers and industry professionals—ranging from understanding consumer behavior and immersive experiences, to exploring organizational strategies for technology adoption, and addressing the societal, cultural, and ethical implications of technological innovation in sustainable and ethical tourism practices. The first research stream, **Traveler Behavior and Immersive Experiences in the Metaverse**, encompasses four articles that explore the intersection of tourism, hospitality, and key psychological and behavioral dynamics. This stream critically examines two core areas: the first, Prosocial Behavior, Psychological Impact, and Usage Motivation in the Metaverse, explores how metaverse experiences influence tourist behavior by fostering emotional connections and promoting prosocial actions. It examines factors like self-determination, psychological ownership, and technology mindfulness, highlighting how virtual environments drive both user engagement and socially responsible behaviors. Meanwhile, the second, User Engagement and Immersive Experiences, delves into how virtual experiences influence satisfaction, decision-making, and long-

term user involvement. Together, these studies offer valuable insights into how virtual environments are transforming traveler experiences and redefining engagement within the hospitality and tourism industries.

The first area, "*Prosocial Behavior, Psychological Impact, and Usage Motivation in the Metaverse*"*,* focuses on the factors that drive individuals to engage with metaverse environments. For instance, the study by Wu and Wang (2024) investigates the factors influencing tourists' behavioral intentions within metaverse environments. Using self-determination theory, the authors examine how usage motivation impacts behavioral intentions, with tourist satisfaction acting as a key mediator, and authenticity and flow serving as moderating factors. The study shifts the focus from qualitative, technology-centric research to a quantitative approach, providing new insights into the psychological mechanisms driving tourist engagement in virtual settings. Key findings highlight the role of external motivators—such as uniqueness, social interaction, cultural appeal, and safety— in shaping user satisfaction and intent to engage with metaverse tourism. Managerial implications suggest leveraging these insights to design personalized virtual experiences, enhance cultural engagement, and bridge the gap between virtual and physical tourism. Future research is encouraged to explore diverse demographics, sustainability factors, and data privacy concerns to deepen the understanding of metaverse tourism dynamics.

The article by Cai et al. (2024) examines how metaverse experiences can encourage prosocial behavior in tourism and hospitality. Using psychological ownership, it finds that technology mindfulness enhances ownership, aesthetic appreciation, and value, influencing tourists' intentions to volunteer or donate. Biospheric values moderate this willingness. The study suggests using interactive virtual heritage experiences, immersive narratives, and collaborations with influencers to boost engagement. Future research should explore diverse contexts, refine ownership measures, and assess the long-term impact of technology mindfulness.

The second area "*User Engagement and Immersive Experiences*", delves into how virtual experiences influence satisfaction, decision-making, and long-term user involvement. For example, Manthiou et al. (2024) explore the challenges of implementing metaverse service experiences in hospitality, introducing the Meta Service Experience framework with four dimensions: immersion, metascape, immediacy, and hedonism. The study finds that while the metaverse offers immersive experiences, managing customer expectations is challenging. It suggests adopting a holistic design approach and calls for future research on comparing virtual and real-world experiences, users' emotional responses, and data privacy concerns. Future research should also focus on comparing metaverse and real-world experiences, exploring users' physiological and emotional responses, and examining data privacy concerns in virtual environments. Shamim et al. (2024) explore how

immersive metaverse experiences can boost user engagement on travel and tourism websites. The study finds that both hedonic and utilitarian values mediate the relationship between immersion and engagement, with factors like headset comfort and prior knowledge moderating metaverse adoption. The research extends the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), linking immersive experiences to behaviors like word-of-mouth and reviews. It recommends focusing on ergonomic design, accessibility, and personalized content to sustain user engagement. Future research should explore longitudinal trends in user engagement, the impact of user-generated content, and demographic variations in metaverse adoption, while also considering the provider's role in shaping engaging virtual environments.

The next paper, by Balaji et al. (2024), compares the effectiveness of 360-degree VR videos and traditional previews in influencing customer perceptions and behavior in hospitality. The study finds that VR previews are more effective for individuals with independent self-construal, while those with interdependent self-construal prefer traditional previews. The research suggests that VR can enhance customer engagement and advises hospitality businesses to tailor marketing strategies based on psychological profiles. Future research directions include examining advanced VR technologies, exploring their effects across different customer journey stages, and analyzing the cognitive and emotional mechanisms driving user behavior. Additionally, studies could investigate the impact of cultural norms, choice overload, and evolving technology acceptance on customer satisfaction.

The second stream, **Organizational Strategies and Technology Adoption in Hospitality**, examines how hospitality businesses are adopting metaverse technologies, focusing on strategic decision-making and innovation management. It is divided into two main areas (i) Managerial Perspectives on Metaverse Adoption and Integration and (ii) Value Co-Creation and Business Model Innovation, these areas analyze how the metaverse enables new forms of value co-creation, revenue models, and customer relationship strategies within the hospitality industry. The first area, "*Managerial Perspectives on Metaverse Adoption and Integration",* explores the practical implications of implementing metaverse technologies in hospitality, focusing on adoption drivers and barriers. It examines factors such as CEO temporal focus, industry readiness, perceived risks, and regulatory challenges, while addressing the skills gaps managers face in effectively integrating these technologies. For example, Agnihotri et al. (2024) explore how CEOs' temporal focus (past vs. future) affects their intention to invest in metaverse technologies in the hospitality sector. The study finds that a future focus enhances technology adoption, while a past focus decreases it. Perceived competitive pressure moderates this effect. The research highlights the importance of leadership traits in driving innovation, suggesting that hotels prioritize future-oriented leadership

and competitive environments to foster technology adoption. Future research is recommended to explore additional strategic orientations, such as market orientation, and to examine the relationship between metaverse investments and hotel performance outcomes.

Another paper related to this area is that developed by Ashton et al. (2024); the paper, which examines metaverse adoption in the hospitality industry, finds that large, risk-taking, or chain-affiliated businesses are most likely to embrace it, enhancing traditional services, especially in events and experiences. Innovations like digital twins and immersive environments for younger consumers are key, but challenges include technological gaps, market immaturity, and regulatory issues. The study highlights the need for collaboration between hospitality firms, tech providers, and policymakers, with governments and educational institutions playing a crucial role in supporting adoption. Future research should focus on comparing adoption trends across different hospitality markets, exploring metaverse applications in non-traditional sectors, and investigating the impact of the metaverse on customer journeys, revenue models, and sustainability practices. The second area is related to *Value Co-Creation and Business Model Innovation*, which examines how the metaverse facilitates innovative approaches to value co-creation, revenue generation, and customer engagement strategies in the hospitality industry. A paper developed by Chen (2024) explores the role of the metaverse in tourism, highlighting its potential to overcome time and space limitations and expand market reach. It finds that personalized digital experiences, immersive interactions, and social connectivity can enhance virtual tourism, though challenges like technological development, data privacy, and user participation remain. The research proposes a framework integrating engagement, immersion, and personalization, recommending collaboration with tech companies and policymakers to promote sustainable digital tourism. Future research should empirically validate the framework, explore the ethical and economic implications of metaverse adoption, and investigate its applications across different sectors.

Chakraborty et al.'s (2024) study investigates consumer attitudes and trust factors influencing metaverse adoption in hospitality, using the theory of consumption values (TCV). It finds that functional, social, and emotional values shape initial adoption, while epistemic values and trust in data security become more influential over time. Trust and positive attitudes significantly impact usage intentions. The study recommends creating immersive virtual tours, promoting social engagement, and emphasizing data security to build consumer trust. Future research should replicate the study across different countries, explore longitudinal trends in consumer behavior, and conduct cross-cultural analyses to understand how demographic factors influence metaverse adoption in hospitality. Zaman et al. (2024) explore metaverse adoption in luxury hospitality from a cost–benefit perspective, weighing benefits like personalized services and enhanced brand image against

challenges like the lack of a human touch and security concerns. It emphasizes the role of guest interaction and emotional connection, highlighting the importance of guest feedback in value co-creation. The research recommends using VR tools, creating immersive experiences, and focusing on guest satisfaction to manage adoption costs and create new revenue streams. Future research should explore customer perceptions of virtual vs. physical experiences, the effectiveness of virtual events, business model development, and ethical concerns like data privacy. Cross-country and longitudinal studies are suggested to understand regional and temporal variations in metaverse adoption.

The third stream developed in this special issue, **Technological Innovation and Societal Implications**, focuses on the broader societal, cultural, and ethical impacts of metaverse technologies in hospitality and tourism. It is divided into two key areas: (i) Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism, which investigates the role of the metaverse in cultural preservation, sustainability, and heritage tourism, with a particular focus on its applications in emerging economies, (ii) Ethical, Privacy, and Regulatory Considerations, which explores critical issues related to data privacy, security, accessibility, and the ethical dimensions of virtual tourism, addressing the challenges and risks associated with metaverse adoption in the industry, (iii) Impact of AI and Emerging Technologies. The first area, *Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism,* focuses on the key concerns surrounding data privacy, security, and accessibility in virtual tourism, alongside the wider ethical considerations of digital engagement within immersive environments. For example, Nagirikandalage et al. (2024) explore the key factors influencing metaverse adoption for cultural heritage experiences in emerging economies. The research highlights how organizations are driven by isomorphic pressures—normative (industry expectations), coercive (regulatory and financial), and mimetic (emulating successful models)—in their decision to adopt metaverse technologies.

Hospitality businesses view the metaverse as a powerful tool for innovation, marketing, and customer engagement, while cultural institutions see its potential for heritage preservation and revenue generation. However, challenges such as funding limitations, regulatory barriers, and digital accessibility hinder widespread adoption. The study emphasizes the need for collaboration among technology developers, policymakers, and tourism operators to enhance metaverse accessibility, address the digital divide, and ensure secure data management. Future research is recommended to examine the role of government regulations, explore cross-cultural influences on metaverse adoption, and assess the financial implications for hospitality businesses in diverse contexts. Beheshti et al. (2024) explore how the metaverse and sharing economy principles can transform space tourism, using UTAUT2 to identify adoption drivers like performance expectancy, social

influence, and hedonic motivation. The study highlights the potential to democratize space tourism, promote sustainability, and foster community engagement, emphasizing consumer education and decentralized platforms for sustainable behaviors. Future research should address UTAUT2's limitations and cultural adoption factors in virtual space tourism.

Mahmoud et al. (2024) examines public perceptions of metaverse tourism through TAM and DIT, revealing both excitement for immersive experiences and concerns about authenticity, societal impacts, and mental health. Emotion analysis shows mixed sentiments, from excitement to loneliness. The study advances TAM and DIT in metaverse tourism, offering insights for creating inclusive and ethical virtual experiences. Future studies should adopt cross-cultural approaches, collect primary data, and explore cognitive and emotional factors shaping user perceptions. The third area, *Impact of AI and Emerging Technologies*, is examined by examining the role of AI technologies, such as ChatGPT and virtual reality, in improving customer experiences, influencing decision-making processes, and driving the adoption of new technologies in the tourism industry. Li and Lee (2024) explore how ChatGPT influences traveler behavior in hospitality and tourism. The study finds that personalization and human-like traits enhance cognitive trust, while timely information is more important than accuracy for building user confidence. It highlights the need for quality assurance in AI recommendations and suggests improving ChatGPT's personalization, emotional intelligence, and response times to foster loyalty. Future research should examine ChatGPT's impact across various travel stages and user experiences.

Impacts of the metaverse on hospitality and tourism

The metaverse is gaining significant attention in hospitality and tourism research, particularly in understanding traveler behavior and enhancing immersive experiences (Manthiou et al., 2024). Studies examine how users interact with virtual content and engage with digital environments, and how psychological and behavioral factors influence decision-making in these spaces (Cai et al., 2024). The metaverse's immersive capabilities are expected to improve with the adoption of advanced extended reality technologies, leading to higher levels of user presence (Wu and Wang, 2024) and fostering more sociable, real-time interactions (Zaman et al., 2024). However, challenges remain, including organizational resistance and limited resources, which hinder adoption (Ashton et al., 2024). There is also a conceptual underdevelopment of the metaverse, which impedes its integration into the hospitality sector (Chakraborty et al., 2024). In addition, the societal impacts of the metaverse are explored, emphasizing the need for improvements in communication quality, accuracy, and clarity, while addressing social concerns such as privacy and mental health (Nagirikandalage et al., 2025; Mahmoud et al., 2024; Beheshti et al., 2024).

This special issue introduces a series of interconnected themes that explore the dynamic and multifaceted effects of metaverse technologies on the hospitality industry. These themes are accompanied by critical and forward-thinking research questions designed to deepen our understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented by the growing adoption of metaverse platforms. The aim is to uncover new insights into the evolving landscape of hospitality, highlighting areas that require further investigation to develop effective strategies, mitigate risks, and maximize the potential of immersive technologies. The identified themes serve as focal points, capturing key areas where the metaverse is reshaping hospitality practices—from operational processes to customer engagement strategies. They encompass various aspects of the industry, including service delivery, marketing, revenue management, and guest experience, all of which are undergoing transformation due to metaverse integration. To foster innovative thinking, this special issue encourages thought-provoking inquiries that challenge existing assumptions and stimulate fresh research perspectives. These questions seek to identify gaps in current knowledge, driving new theoretical and empirical investigations that can better explain the complexities introduced by metaverse technologies.

The special issue also examines the impact of the metaverse on hospitality and tourism, offering practical insights for business managers to enhance digital transformation efforts, optimize customer experiences through immersive technologies, and identify new revenue streams. Additionally, it highlights important considerations for policymakers, emphasizing the need for regulatory frameworks, data privacy protection, and digital governance policies to ensure ethical and secure metaverse applications within the hospitality sector. A key focus is on understanding the psychological and experiential shifts that occur in virtual environments and their real-world implications for hospitality experiences. Furthermore, the issue provides actionable recommendations for hospitality stakeholders, supporting businesses in effectively implementing and leveraging metaverse technologies. These insights aim to foster innovation, strengthen organizational resilience, and enhance competitive advantage in an increasingly digital marketplace. By bridging theoretical exploration with real-world applications, this special issue offers valuable guidance for both academic researchers and industry practitioners, helping to drive business innovation and create immersive, value-driven consumer experiences in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Concluding remarks

This special issue enhances existing knowledge on the metaverse and its applications within the hospitality and tourism industry by concentrating on three key areas: the development of a theoretical

framework for metaverse-related literature, the identification of major research streams and their connections, and the investigation of future research opportunities for both academics and industry professionals. We critically examine the evolution and structure of metaverse research within hospitality and tourism, analyzing how emerging technologies, virtual environments, and digital consumer behaviors are shaping industry practices. In doing so, we have delineated key thematic areas, established conceptual linkages, and discussed the managerial implications of metaverse applications in hospitality. Additionally, we propose a series of research themes, along with pertinent questions and responses, to stimulate further intellectual discourse on topics such as metaverse adoption, technological integration, travelers' experiences, and strategic brand management in hospitality. Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to the reviewers for their constructive feedback and rigorous evaluations throughout the review process. We hope that the articles featured in this special issue will serve as a solid foundation for future research on the metaverse in hospitality, encouraging scholars to explore emerging challenges, industry disruptions, and evolving technological landscapes that will shape the future of digital hospitality experiences.

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