

From Frameworks to Foundations: A Critical Look at the 4Ps-to-4Es Transition in Hotel Marketing

Varga Szemes*

Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA

***Corresponding author:**Varga Szemes, Maastricht University
Medical Centre, Maastricht, the
Netherlands. szemes_varg@gmail.com

Introduction

The conceptual review "Reconceptualizing the Hotel Marketing Mix: Balancing the Transition from the Traditional 4Ps to the Customer-Centric 4Es" makes a timely and welcome contribution to hospitality marketing scholarship. Its central claim—that hotels need not abandon the classical 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) in favor of the customer-centric 4Es (Experience, Exchange, Everyplace, Evangelism), but should instead integrate the two—is intuitively appealing and reflects a broader trend in marketing theory toward hybrid, rather than replacement, models. As a post-publication commentary, this piece aims to critically examine the paper's conceptual architecture, evaluate the strength of its theoretical claims, and identify areas where the argument would benefit from sharper definition, empirical grounding, and engagement with adjacent literatures.

Summarising the Core Argument

The reviewed paper positions the 4Es—a framework most closely associated with Brian Solis's work on experiential and social marketing—as a natural evolution of the marketing mix in response to digital disruption and shifting guest expectations. Rather than treating Experience, Exchange, Everyplace, and Evangelism as a wholesale replacement for the 4Ps, the authors argue for a "balanced" integration: hotels should retain operational disciplines around product design, pricing, distribution, and promotion, while layering in experiential design, value-based exchange, omnichannel presence, and guest-driven advocacy. The paper supports this argument with illustrative examples of "innovative hospitality initiatives," and concludes that this integrated approach reduces strategic risk while enhancing guest satisfaction, loyalty, and competitiveness.

This is a reasonable and defensible thesis. However, several aspects of the argument merit closer scrutiny.

Where the Framework Integration Is Underspecified

The paper's greatest strength—its call for balance rather than replacement—is also its greatest analytical weakness, because "balance" is asserted rather than operationalized. Marketing mix frameworks are valuable to practitioners largely because they specify *decision variables*: a hotel manager can act on price, adjust distribution channels, or redesign a loyalty program. The 4Es, by

contrast, describe *outcomes and orientations*—experience is something a guest has, evangelism is something a guest does, exchange is a value proposition rather than a lever. Mapping the 4Ps onto the 4Es without clarifying which is causally upstream (does Product design produce Experience, or does Experience redefine what counts as Product?) leaves the "integration" more rhetorical than structural.

A more useful reconceptualization would specify the mechanism of integration explicitly—for instance, treating each E as a *lens* through which each P is redesigned (e.g., "Product filtered through Experience becomes guest journey design"; "Price filtered through Exchange becomes perceived value equity"). Without this kind of mapping, hotel managers are left with two parallel vocabularies rather than one decision-making framework.

The Evidentiary Basis Is Thin

As a conceptual review, the paper is not obligated to present primary empirical data, but its claims about guest satisfaction, loyalty, and competitiveness are outcome claims that invite empirical scrutiny. The reliance on "illustrative examples of innovative hospitality initiatives" is common in conceptual marketing papers, but illustrative cases function as existence proofs, not as evidence of generalizable causal effects. It remains unclear from the abstract whether the initiatives cited were evaluated against a comparison condition (e.g., hotels that did not adopt experiential or omnichannel strategies), whether the guest satisfaction and loyalty outcomes were measured with validated instruments, or whether effects were sustained over

time rather than reflecting short-term novelty.

Given that hospitality marketing already has a reasonably mature empirical literature on experience co-creation, servicescape design, and guest engagement (e.g., work building on Pine and Gilmore's experience economy and on service-dominant logic), the paper would be considerably strengthened by situating its integrated 4Ps–4Es model against this existing empirical base, and by proposing testable propositions rather than resting on descriptive plausibility.

Conceptual Overlap with Existing Marketing Theory

A further concern is that several of the 4Es dimensions substantially overlap with frameworks already well established in services and relationship marketing, raising the question of what unique theoretical leverage the 4Es add. "Exchange," for instance, closely tracks value-based pricing and perceived value constructs already embedded in services marketing. "Everyplace" largely restates omnichannel and multichannel distribution research, which itself already sits comfortably under an expanded notion of "Place." "Evangelism" overlaps considerably with word-of-mouth, advocacy, and net promoter constructs long studied under loyalty and relationship marketing. Only "Experience" arguably introduces genuinely new theoretical content relative to the 4Ps, and even there, the experience economy literature predates the 4Es framework by roughly a decade.

This is not a fatal flaw—frameworks can have value as organizing heuristics even without introducing wholly novel constructs—but the paper would benefit from explicitly acknowledging this overlap and clarifying whether the 4Es' contribution is primarily *terminological* (repackaging known constructs for practitioner accessibility) or *structural* (offering a genuinely new decision architecture). The abstract, as presented, implies the latter but substantiates closer to the former.

An Alternative Reading: Complementary Layers, Not a New Mix

Building on the paper's own instinct toward balance rather than replacement, a stronger theoretical move might be to abandon the "4Ps vs. 4Es" framing altogether and instead treat the 4Es as a *guest-experience overlay* that sits on top of, rather than parallel to, the operational marketing mix. Under this reframing, hotels would not be asked to manage eight variables in tension, but rather to ask, for each of the four operational decisions (Product, Price, Place, Promotion), how that decision is perceived, co-created, and shared by the guest. This preserves the practical clarity of the 4Ps for internal resource allocation while incorporating the paper's legitimate insight that modern guests evaluate hotels experientially and relationally rather than transactionally.

This reframing also resolves a subtler issue in the original paper: by presenting 4Ps and 4Es as separate frameworks to

be "balanced," the paper implicitly suggests hotels might over-invest in one at the expense of the other, creating a zero-sum framing the authors do not intend. An overlay model removes that implication entirely.

Practical and Managerial Implications

For practitioners, the reviewed paper's core message—do not discard operational marketing fundamentals in the pursuit of experiential trends—is sound advice, particularly for small and mid-sized hotel operators who may lack the resources to fully digitize guest engagement while neglecting pricing discipline or distribution efficiency. However, managers seeking to apply the framework would benefit from clearer guidance on sequencing and prioritization: should experiential investment precede or follow optimization of the traditional 4Ps? The paper's abstract does not address resource-constrained decision-making, which is arguably the most pressing question independent hoteliers face when evaluating this kind of framework.

Conclusion

The reviewed paper offers a conceptually sound and practically motivated argument for integrating experiential and digital marketing perspectives into hotel marketing strategy without discarding established fundamentals. Its central instinct—balance over replacement—is well justified given the operational realities of the hospitality sector. The paper's contribution would be considerably strengthened, however, by (1) specifying the causal or structural mechanism by which the 4Ps and 4Es integrate rather than simply coexist, (2) engaging more directly with the empirical literature on guest experience and service-dominant logic to ground its claims, (3) acknowledging conceptual overlap between the 4Es and existing relationship-marketing constructs, and (4) offering practitioners clearer guidance on sequencing and resource allocation. Reframing the 4Es as an experiential overlay on the 4Ps, rather than a parallel or competing framework, may offer a more parsimonious and actionable path forward for both researchers and hotel marketing practitioners.