

## **The raging polemics of defining the phenomenon of hospitality: Towards silencing the storm**

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### **Abstract**

*The term hospitality became widely used in the 20th century to refer to an industry that covered hotels, restaurants and tourism. Etymologically, the concept was derived from the terms 'hospitalite' and 'hospitalis' as French and Latin derivatives, respectively. However, noteworthy is that the current discourse on the concept of hospitality remains a slaughter house of ideas and perspectives without any foreseeable consensus on the horizon. The debate largely features scholars who challenge a management-oriented perspective or the hegemony of the 'managerial' paradigm, which conceptualizes hospitality as a series of organisational functions or service transactions that provides ambience to the social and commercial manifestations of hospitality. In essence, the management-oriented perspective is too linear to embrace the multi-faceted nature of the hospitality phenomenon. The latter view also fails to bring closure to the conceptual disharmony in that its emphasis on 'commercial manifestations' is also too obscure and general to offer practical guidance to the hospitality industry. This scenario leaves the industry practitioners stuck in a cul-de-sac with hardly any clear pointers on what the phenomenon is about. This paper seeks to address the ongoing conceptual fragmentation that develops a more integrative approach to defining hospitality. Specifically, it aims to identify and synthesize the critical elements of hospitality from existing literature in order to propose a composite index of hospitality. The paper originates not to align with either pros or cons of the debate but to demonstrate with reviewed literature on the futility of such a disposition. Using a qualitative literature review, the paper tracked the polemical debate on hospitality. The analysis revealed that both managerial and socio-cultural interpretations of hospitality remained incomplete abstracts when considered in isolation. The literature highlighted the multiple dimensions that ranged from the quality of service, organizational efficiency to ethical, social, and experiential factors that together shaped the phenomenon of hospitality. The conclusion led to a rewarding discourse in the hospitality industry. The findings showed that the hospitality concept through informed extracts in the literature review comprised elements of critical importance*

*that defined the discipline. Scaffolding on the literature review this manuscript attempts to discuss on a 'composite index of hospitality' with the aid of a battery of critical hospitality indicators which serves as a distinct score card for any hospitality establishment that envisages to assess and evaluate itself in terms of how hospitality services are offered.*

**Keywords:** Composite Index, Cul-de-sac, Hospitality, Linear and Tourism.

## **Introduction**

Traditionally, the hospitality industry was celebrated as an open and benevolent act of welcoming a stranger. That description has become a deeply contested concept in contemporary academic, political, and social discourse. The term now occupies a paradoxical space idealized in theory and yet compromised in practice. From the commodification of care in the service industry to the ethical dilemmas surrounding migration, tourism, and cultural appropriation, hospitality has evolved into a site of intense polemics. Philosophers such as Jacques Derrida have highlighted the inherent contradictions between conditional and unconditional hospitality, while industry practitioners grapple with reconciling profitability and genuine human connection. Despite the growing scholarly interest in these debates, there remains a lack of consensus on what constitutes ethical and sustainable hospitality in an increasingly globalized and crisis-prone world.

This disconnection calls for a critical examination of the political, economic, and moral threads embedded in the concept, practice, and institutionalization of hospitality today. Hospitality often regarded as the simple act of welcoming others, has historically held deep cultural, ethical, and commercial significance. However, in recent decades, scholars have increasingly problematized its meaning that have revealed a set of competing interpretations among ideological tensions. These polemics challenge the idealized notion of hospitality as altruistic and universal which reveals the contradictions between ethical responsibility and commercial interests in the wake of some conditional power dynamics.

## **The History of the Concept of Hospitality**

The concept of hospitality was rooted in the act of welcoming strangers which has played a pivotal role in human societies for millennia. While it began as a cultural and ethical practice among ancient civilizations, hospitality has transformed over time into a global, commercialized industry that encompasses tourism, overnight lodging, food services, and event management.

### **Ancient and Medieval Origins**

Hospitality, in its earliest form, was a sacred social obligation. Ancient civilizations such as the Greeks and Romans viewed hospitality as both a moral duty and a religious obligation. In Greece, the concept of *xenia* described the mutual respect and generosity between hosts and guests, often tied to divine favour from the gods like Zeus Xenios (Derrida, 2021). Similarly, in ancient Rome, hospitality (*hospitium*) involved structured agreements between households and traveling dignitaries or soldiers.

During the medieval period, hospitality took on a more institutional role through religious and feudal structures. Monasteries and churches provided shelter to pilgrims, while noble households were expected to host travelers as a symbolic demonstration of status and benevolence (Brotherton & Wood, 2023).

With reference to ancient primitive societies, hospitality in its broad sense was viewed essentially as an organic integral part of such societies that revealed the host's cultural values and beliefs. Lugosi (2022) and Chen and Mattila (2022), noted that the principles which governed the peoples' attitudes towards hospitality among these societies were religious practices and beliefs, the contemporary evolution in trade and commerce, transactional networks, social status and the potential unforeseen strangers' xenophobic norms. Whilst these concepts are still practiced nowadays, the fear of strangers that views the customer as the king in the provision of quality service is slowly replaced by the respect of strangers.

In everyday life, hospitality is mainly represented as a host's disposition toward their guest who provides security, generosity and an extended warm, welcoming atmosphere through the provision of the "holy trinity" food, beverages and shelter (Brotherton, 1999, p. 168), (Golubovskaya *et al.*,

2024). Whilst this definition provides nuggets of essential components of hospitality, it is however narrow and constrained as hospitality does not only cater for food, beverages and shelter but rather other services like entertainment among many. More so, such a definition cannot be operationalized as it becomes unclear on the satisfactory threshold of a generosity niche that qualified as adequate what components of caring for the guest are referred to and what could be defined as a yardstick in the welcoming of guests. One would go further to probe whether offering any kind of accommodation or beverage would be considered hospitality though such activities culture specific. Golubovskaya *et al.* (2024) further notes that this holy trinity can be conceptualized as the “artefacts” of hospitality namely accommodation, food and beverages though there are a lot of other offerings in hospitality such as entertainment.

A more familiar definition is provided by Ogbeide (2025), who stated that hospitality is the generous and friendly treatment of guests and visitors. This also is a vague definition as it leaves a lot to the imagination. Lugosi (2021) on the other hand stated that, “hospitality is the relationship, process, presentation, formality and procedure experienced between a visitor/customer/guest and a host. It specifically includes the reception and entertainment of those who require or are invited to experience an organization's service (Lugosi 2021). However, this definition just discusses about the welcome and welfare of guests. How these guests are received and treated is not clear in terms of regulatory processes and procedures. Another view from Ogbeide (2021) defined hospitality a social science (psychology) that refers to the friendly, empathetic, and kind manners when attending to people. Hospitality has often been viewed as a fundamental, albeit supporting component of the tourism ‘product’ (*see* Page, 2021; Smith, 2023; Lugosi 2021).

### **The Endless Discourse**

'Hospitality' became a standard term in academia and business circles though now it is ironic that, after more than three decades of its use the industry desires to replace earlier referent terms such as hotel, catering, and restaurant operations or alternatively lodging and food service in the United States semantics. This opens contemporary debate over what the same phenomenon is and how it should be defined. Observers from both within and outside the industry continue to align to such arguments which underlines a persistent conceptual uncertainty (*see* Chen 2026, Stephens 2025, Tartem 2025). Chen (2026) engaged the various viewpoints and shifted the focus of hospitality

research from a narrow set of managerial concerns about service quality and operational efficiency to the social and emotional dimensions of the consumer experience.

Despite the existence of a variety of literature defining hospitality, the scope has really been profoundly disappointing. Middleton (2024) noted that there was a definitional problem arising from the term ‘hospitality industry’ which was not in common use in the United Kingdom. Middleton (1983) observed that it was surprising that, in the 1980’s, one would contemplate educational programmes for the hospitality industry without agreement on what the industry comprised. In the same period, literature argues that a thorough understanding of hospitality as a phenomenon lacked, because hardly any research had been done on this subject (see Jiang & Chen, 2023; Xu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). More than a decade later, the situation was much the same. Jones (1996) pointed out that the reality is that there is certainly no commonly shared paradigm of what is meant by hospitality. A review of literature also indicated that there was not much discussion of what the term ‘hospitality’ meant” (see Pizam *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, in the editorial launching a new journal, Lynch (2023), Lugosi and Lashley (2021:5) admitted that considerable literature had been generated across a range of disciplines that regards definitions and approaches to hospitality. However, there is still neither a single definition of hospitality nor is there a unified theoretical framework within which hospitality studies are situated.

Hospitality is not a simple concept but rather it is a ‘mystifying concept’, its contextual manifestations can be, and indeed usually are, idiosyncratic and highly dissimilar if not unique (Chen 2026). In its current thrust, it seeks to identify and describe dissimilarity and diversity in relation to alternative forms and types of hospitality rather than working from the universality of the concept and the consequent variety generated when this concept is operationalized in the real world.

### **Problem Statement**

The failure to define hospitality as a commercial phenomenon created a fragmented academic discourse. The limitation of an acceptable universal nomenclature among global industry players has made it difficult to operationalize and standardize the phenomenon (see Chen 2026, Lynch *et al.*, 2021, Stephens 2025, Kully 2025). Despite the existence of a spirited debate, to date, there seems to be no consensus on what could pass for a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon ‘hospitality’.

Hence, this review paper on one hand seeks to demonstrate the lack of scholarly consensus on what should pass for a comprehensive definition of the concept 'hospitality'. On the other hand, the paper therefore again serves to argue that the prevailing lack of consensus points to the need for the search for a more unifying platform that has potential to shift scholarly attention from a more individualistic and polarized pursuit of the meaning of hospitality. The envisaged meaning ought to be characterized by a robust and operational-friendly enterprise of a 'composite hospitality index'. If efforts are not made to develop a composite hospitality index, the industry should continue to operate under the delusionary view that provides the clients with the purported best service. A reliable 'hospitality index' enables hosts to align their services that benchmark along satisfactory customer expectations.

### **Main Research Question**

How can the diverse and often conflicting perspectives on hospitality be synthesized into a coherent framework that identifies critical elements of the concept and develops a composite index of hospitality that guides both scholarly discourse and industry practice?

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the prevailing perspectives on hospitality in academic and industry literature, and how does the managerial paradigm dominate this discourse?
2. What are the conceptual and practical limitations of the managerial and alternative perspectives on hospitality?
3. Which elements recur across scholarly and industry literature as critical to defining hospitality?
4. What indicators can be derived from the literature to construct a composite hospitality index?

### **Main Research Objective**

To synthesize the diverse and conflicting perspectives on hospitality into a coherent framework by identifying critical elements of the concept and developing a composite index of hospitality that can guide both scholarly discourse and practice in the industry.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To examine the competing perspectives on hospitality, particularly the dominance of the managerial paradigm and alternative conceptualizations.
2. To analyze the limitations of current perspectives in providing a coherent and practical definition of hospitality.
3. To synthesize elements of critical importance to defining hospitality by conducting an extensive literature review.
4. To propose the composite index as a practical score card for the hospitality establishments which assist in the assessment and evaluation their performance.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative research design grounded in an extensive review of literature. A critical interpretive synthesis was employed to trace the etymological, historical, and scholarly evolution of the concept of hospitality. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers drawn from hospitality, tourism, sociology, and service management fields. Databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Hospitality & Tourism Complete were searched using keywords that included hospitality definition, managerial paradigm, social manifestations of hospitality, and hospitality philosophy. Considering the overwhelming number of publications in hospitality and tourism the publications were limited to the area of hospitality only. The primary reason for this restriction was to concentrate on hospitality area since hospitality theories research had different theoretical quests and approaches. Research Gate and Mendeley offered an informative coverage of hospitality journals which provided a historical perspective on topics, primarily on hospitality business operations, management techniques, business trends and definition of hospitality. Through diligent searches, it became evident that not all of the hospitality publications were included in these massive databases. The review process followed a structured approach that first, identified and screened literature relevant to the competing perspectives of hospitality. Secondly, some categorization of the dominant themes, namely the managerial, social, and commercial orientations were done. Thirdly, some synthesizing of recurring elements that emerged

across perspectives were recorded. These thematic segregates were applied to code and extract critical indicators that were deemed pertinent to the conceptualization of the discipline ‘hospitality’.

In order for the researcher to locate author profile missing, another database, Hospitality and Tourism Complete mounted on EBSCO host, which provides indices, citations, abstracts, and full text of articles since 1931, was used. Only peer-reviewed articles were selected from both databases to segregate definitions used in different segments and functional areas. Effort was made to capture as many publications as possible however, it is possible that some articles may have escaped detection. Each selected article was sifted to isolate the definitions used (*see* Oluwatosin 2023, Cheong *et al.*, 2025). A preliminary scan of the peer-reviewed published research in hospitality clearly indicated that much of the serious research work started after the year 2000, which Pizam *et al* (2022) classified as the “Innovator” phase. Therefore, a period of twenty years that started from the year 2005 through to 2025 was selected in order to review all published peer-reviewed research literature in hospitality management. Another focus was on the latest publications since 2022 to 2025 due to the rapid expansion of empirical studies and theoretical refinement in the field (Jiang & Chen, 2023). The primary collection of data was restricted to the Mendeley database, Research gate and Bookfi, with index citations, abstracts, and full-text articles. Keywords used included, hospitality, and defining hospitality. These databases provided hundreds of articles from various disciplines under the heading of hospitality and hospitality theories. This required a painstaking effort that applied the Boolean logic operators AND, OR, NOT in order to locate publications that pertained to hospitality under each reviewed year.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Approaches to Defining Hospitality**

Amongst the evolving and growing literature on hospitality there are, on the one hand, a number of authors who have focused on the etymology, language and, linguistics of ‘hospitality’(see Bernard *et al.*, 2023; Wan & Forey, 2024; Purnomo, 2025; Syarifah *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, there are those who favour to define hospitality in terms of its multiple manifestations that differs in contexts (Oleson, 2022; King, 2023; Lashley, 2024, 2022, Conti & McAlpine, 2023; Chen and Mattila 2022). Many consciously or unconsciously, seek to define hospitality with reference to the

existence of certain motives and behavioral characteristics. (Ritzer, 2023, 2021; Lashley, 2017). Some have chosen to explore the issues through a spiritual moral/ethical, and/or religious prism (see Gowreesunkar et al 2024; Derrida, 2022; Dikec, 2022; Chen and Mattila 2022, 2025, 2022a; Lashley, 2024b).

However, much, if not most, of this work reveals an almost total absence of any attempt to develop a hospitality index through empirical enquiry. Only Brotherton (2022) and Brotherton and Wood (2023) present results, derived from empirical enquiry that concerned how hospitality is perceived, and may be defined, by those most closely associated with providers and receivers. Using a small-scale survey (Brotherton, 1989) (Brotherton, 2023a, 2025; Brotherton & Wood, 2022, Brotherton 2021) techniques, these studies revealed that the overwhelming response of hospitality managers, hotel guests, and fast-food customers defined hospitality in behavioral terms. Although product and place were emphasized only a minority of respondents in each study were not asked to comment on the locations or the specific products they associated with hospitality. Similarly, this focus upon the behavioral aspect of hospitality did not detract from the recognition that other dimensions of the hospitality concept could be identified, which will be addressed later.

Recently, there are those, for example Hemmington (2023) and Melissen (2022), who seemed to have been seduced by Pine and Gilmores (2023, 2022) experienced economy work that focused attention on hospitality as an experience that is designed, manipulated and managed by human activity. However, Brotherton (2022) argued that this is a false dawn because anything may be described as an experience to a human being and, he demonstrated that the only way to differentiate a 'hospitality experience' from any other human's perspective within the context of a hospitality site. In addition, and perhaps the greatest culprit in terms of clouding further the mists of this activity, is the ubiquitous tendency for commentators to use the adjective hospitable and the nouns of hospitableness and hospitality as entirely synonymous and perfectly interchangeable. It is, or indeed should be, argued that they are not. This really begs the question of why these two distinct and dominant themes of diversity and difference that consider hospitableness and hospitality as synonymous and interchangeable have been acceptable among the industry players. It is clear that the former has essentially arisen due to a period of '*prometheus unbound*' within which the old boundaries and certainties of hotel and catering or industrial hospitality management became challenged by wider and more critical thinking in relation to the nature and relevance of the

phenomenon of hospitality in a more generalized context. The narrative no longer is constrained by ‘the tyranny of applied relevance according to Taylor and Edgar (2024). This, in a manner of speaking led opportunist academics exploit their freedom through broad views on the hospitality debate (Brotherton, 2025).

In turn, this has spawned, as Wood (2025) correctly identified, a series of perspectives and approaches to these central questions that are loosely connected under the umbrella term ‘hospitality studies. The broad movement essentially was characterized by a central concern that envisaged to identify and comment on different classifications of hospitality, within commercial and non-commercial contexts. He further explored and adopted a range of social science perspectives, methodologies and techniques in investigating the previous hegemony of the ‘managerial’ paradigm that was evident in the narrower field of hospitality management. Although these are endemic to this new world of hospitality, they are perhaps typified in the views expressed by Lashley (2022). For example, the so-called ‘three domain approach’ to hospitality produced by Lashley (2022a, 2023b) has been quite influential for one to appreciate the approach taken in his published work.

Though there is nothing inherently wrong to focus on the difference when you intend to identify and explore the diversity of the hospitality phenomenon, their morphologies have largely been ignored. The result was a universally accepted definition of hospitality which helped to circumscribe the field in a more logical and defensible manner.

### **Mobility and hospitality**

Kunwar (2023) offered a comprehensive discussion of two themes that regarded hospitality. The first theme suggested that mobility brought about hospitality and social control and the second being reciprocity. Different management revolved around social issues such as welcome versus non-welcome, inclusion versus exclusion, and acceptance or tolerance versus conflict. Giving and receiving hospitality are effective ways to avoid a latently harmful host-guest relationship. Ethics also play a role in the control and management of Otherness and differences as the two sides to hospitality include the host’s duty to ensure the well-being of the guest and the guest’s obligation to respect the culture of the host and to reciprocate.

## Host–Guest Interaction

Regarding the second theme, Kunwar (2023) discussed the two features of the host-guest interaction, namely, reciprocity and transaction. According to Kunwar (2023), hospitality becomes a transaction when hospitality behavior is mainly concerned with economic exchange for a profit. Reciprocity comes in when the guest pays for the hospitality service. These approaches are similar in the sense that they imply two key actors, the host and the guest in relation to their social and commercial contract (Golubovskaya *et al.*, 2022). The research does explore the meaning of the concept during the service encounter with attention focused on hospitality from the viewpoint of the host, who non-verbally interprets the appearance and behavior of employees (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2022; Blain & Lashley, 2024; Derrida, 2023; King, 2025; Nailon, 2022; O’Sullivan, 2024; Pfeifer, 2023; Reynolds, 2020; Tasci & Semrad, 2022; Pijls *et al.*, 2024).

Considering the above definitions, it suffices to say that there is no clear and comprehensive operational definition of hospitality. Hospitality focused enquiries have therefore dominantly been conceived in relatively narrow, utilitarian terms that help to improve productivity, satisfaction and profitability. However, multidisciplinary scholarship shifted the scope of hospitality studies by exploring the interests and experiences of all stakeholders but in cognizance of the hospitality implications (Lugosi, 2021). The illustration below simply illustrates the interaction between the guest, technology and the operator such as the hoteliers.



Figure 1: Defining Hospitality through guest, operator and technology (Source: Chen 2026)

## Defining hospitality through technology

Restaurant reservation systems empower operators by helping them overcome hospitality challenges. With technology, operators can create guest profiles to better recognize new and repeat guests. Since its faster in-service, technology consistently deliver experiences satisfy real time expectations. Technology is tenfold the knowledge of the best maître 'ds, hosts and servers. It stores records beyond employee institutional memory nor turnover that is retrieval in real time for reference. So, how does this relate directly to the definition of hospitality? Hospitality technology focuses on optimizing the service component of this equation (Chen 2026)



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Figure 2: Cultural context and variations in hospitality (Source: Chen 2026)

## Cultural and Contextual Variations

The definition of hospitality varies significantly across cultures and contexts. What constitutes a hospitable act in one culture may be perceived as invasive or inappropriate in another. For instance, in the Shona culture they cannot greet each other through a hug or kiss but in the Moslem culture they kiss when greeting each other.

Cultural distinctions make universal definitions of hospitality problematic. As Higgins-Desbiolles et al., (2022) asserts, attempts to globalize hospitality practices often erase local traditions and values, leading to cultural homogenization, particularly in the tourism and hotel sectors.

There is a plethora of definitions, but it can be understood that culture governs our view in life. It comprises the shared values, understandings, assumptions, and goals we have learnt from earlier generations that passed on to posterity. Your culture is informed with a range of environmental factors, such as climate, legal systems, religion and languages. This forms general values, norms and beliefs, which again influence to attitudes and individual behavior.

### **Understanding cultural differences**

In hospitality industry, cultural sensitivity is about openness, tolerance and empathy to other cultures. However, gaining some general cultural knowledge may be a welcome initiative. One useful framework for understanding how basic values underlie organizational behavior is Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Hofstede (1926) identified four cultural dimensions with other studies weighing two more Power distance, Uncertainty avoidance, Individualism and collectivism, Masculinity and femininity, long versus Short-term orientation, Indulgence versus. Restraint. As an example, uncertainty avoidance has nothing to do with risk avoidance, nor with following rules. It has to do with anxiety and distrust in light of uncertainties that should have fixed truthful habits and rituals. The implication to individuals with such cultural background may view hospitality in the context of what they originally know but not enthusiastic to experiment and experience new services (*see* Shkurko, 2023, Piotrowska & Piotrowski 2023, Osiobe, 2024)

The newest trends and topics surrounding hospitality research and development is the management of multicultural talent and the political landscape affecting the hospitality industry. With the development of globalization, multicultural issues are facing and disturbing the industry operators. Bringing the far corners of the world together is part and parcel of what the hospitality sector does. Blending amenities to cater for the needs of the world's different cultures is central to the success for large, international hospitality chains. Cultural issues have never before been such a crucial determinant of how hospitality should operate. In some Asian cultures, for example, eye contact is

not sought, as it can make guests feel uncomfortable, while in Western tradition it is equated with openness and honesty (*see* Osiobe 2024, Shkurko 2023).

In addition, for example, cultures in very cold climates tend to be more egalitarian than hierarchical. It is because in the past if you did not work together, regardless of age, gender or social status, you would not be able to survive the cold in the winter months. Therefore, if you do not fully understand certain attitudes and behaviors of customers or employees from other countries, it may help to conduct some research to improve your knowledge about the history and current affairs of the country. By learning about other cultures, you are more likely to be tolerant. cultural sensitivity, or an ability to understand different perspectives and care about another person's culture in the end offering the best hospitality. (Zhang et al 2025)

### **Hospitality and space**

In relation to defining hospitality, it should also be clear that hospitality can only occur within the context of a place and that the spatial dimensions of such places are necessarily constrained in the vast majority of cases (Brotherton, 2023). Of late these spaces even extend to one's home with the advent of virtual hospitality that has been necessitated by staying in door due to COVID-19. Examples of such places are restaurants, theatres, hotels, and hospitals. Hence, according to Brotherton (2023), the starting point to construct a sensible, and universally applicable, definition of hospitality must be the type of spatial entity, or place, and the temporal dimensions relating to its occupancy and use. Meaning the occupation of any hospitality space should be temporary. The essence of this, which has remained temporarily constant and is spatially consistent, is that entry to this space is voluntary, temporarily constrained, and does not embody any transfer of ownership of any kind of resource or asset for future use or consumption. Whilst this might be true when referring to accommodation, when it comes to food there actually is transfer of ownership of the product. It is therefore a type of 'access and usage' or temporary rental transaction within which the obligations of the provider and user are known to each other. In the hospitality industry, embracing diversity has become a strategic necessity rather than a choice. Companies and leaders that prioritize inclusivity not only enhance employee satisfaction and retention but also create a richer guest experience by fostering environments where diverse perspectives thrive.

## **Commercialization and the Hospitality Industry**

One of the most intense debates arises from the commodification of hospitality within the service sector. As hospitality became institutionalized through hotels, restaurants, and tourism enterprises, its meaning shifted from an ethical obligation to a transactional relationship. Lashley (2022) argued that in the contemporary hospitality industry, the guest-host relationship is often reduced to a buyer-seller exchange, hollowing out the moral dimensions that once defined it. The industry's reliance on performance, emotional labour, and scripted interactions further blurred the line between genuine care and economic necessity (Brotherton & Wood, 2023).

This commercial framework raises ethical concerns: Can paid hospitality truly be considered "hospitable"? Or does the introduction of financial motive inherently alter the nature of the exchange? These questions fuel ongoing tensions between scholars who advocate for a return to the ethical roots of hospitality against those who emphasized the operational realities of modern business models (Olson, 2024).

## **Hospitality and Power Relations**

Hospitality is not a neutral or benign practice. Critics have pointed out its embedded power relations, especially in colonial, postcolonial, and gendered contexts. Lynch *et al.* (2021) noted that the host's authority to grant or deny hospitality positions them as a gatekeeper of belonging, often reinforced social hierarchies. This dynamic is evident in immigration systems where asylum seekers and migrants are "welcomed" only under strict conditions and scrutiny.

Moreover, hospitality often masks dominance, where the host sets the terms and the guest is expected to show gratitude, compliance, and respect (see Zhang et al 2023, Wang 2026). This power asymmetry complicates the idea of hospitality as generous or benevolent, revealing it instead as a strategic or performative act in many contexts.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The raging polemics around the concept of hospitality are not a case of semantic discord but reflect deeper ethical professional and economic disquiet about the hospitality industry. From Derrida's

philosophical paradox to the capitalist restructuring of human care, hospitality is revealed as a contested, dynamic concept that resists a singular definition. It is quite true that hospitality differs from a culture, gender, disposable income, space technology perspective therefore requires some semblance of a unifying scale. As scholars and practitioners continue to fuel these debates, a more nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of hospitality becomes essential for acknowledging its contradictions that attempt to generate a composite hospitality index. The index can be operationalized and used as a standard measure to assess hospitality, despite the differences in culture, race, and level of education or income. Indeed, the most rewarding route to take for the hospitality industry in this discourse is to investigate and come up with a hospitality index which accommodates all nuanced views and helps the industry to operationalize the concept in offering hospitality and also serves as a scorecard for hospitality practice.

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