The effects of the pandemic on the hotel sector: a case study

Os efeitos da pandemia no setor hoteleiro: um estudo de caso

DOI: 10.55905/ijsmtv9n5-004

Recebimento dos originais: 04/08/2023
Aceitação para publicação: 04/09/2023

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ABSTRACT
This research aimed to evaluate guests' perceptions in the hospitality sector regarding adopting protective measures related to the COVID pandemic and to identify the main differences related to protective measures between men and women guests. A survey was conducted with a convenience sample of 250 respondents in the check-in flow at a hotel in the State of São Paulo. In the data processing stage, the percentage statistical probability was initially adopted to identify the percentage occurrences regarding the profile of the sample surveyed and the measurement of the research constructs. Then, using a statistical package (SPSS), the discriminant analysis was applied to investigate differences between genres related to the adopted measures related to the pandemic.
Keywords: hospitality, tourism, satisfaction, protective measures, pandemic.

RESUMO
Esta pesquisa teve como objetivo avaliar as percepções dos hóspedes do setor hoteleiro quanto à adoção de medidas de proteção relacionadas à pandemia da COVID-19 e identificar as principais diferenças relacionadas às medidas de proteção entre hóspedes homens e mulheres. Foi realizada uma pesquisa com uma amostra de conveniência de 250 respondentes no fluxo de check-in de um hotel no Estado de São Paulo. Na etapa de processamento dos dados, inicialmente foi adotada a probabilidade estatística percentual para identificar as ocorrências percentuais relativas ao perfil da amostra pesquisada e à mensuração dos construtos da pesquisa. Em seguida, por meio de um pacote estatístico (SPSS), aplicou-se a análise discriminante para investigar as diferenças entre os gêneros referentes às medidas adotadas relacionadas à pandemia.

Palavras-chave: hospitalidade, turismo, satisfação, medidas de proteção, pandemia.

1 INTRODUCTION
Tourism constitutes a sector that contributes to transforming the economy and society, promoting employment generation, and contributes on average 4.4% of GDP and 21.5% of services exports in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020). The activity encompasses the act of traveling, eating, lodging, leisure time, vacation time, business trips, and various motivations (Netto & Nechar, 2016). Gonçalves and Campos (1998) describe tourist services as buildings and facilities that offer accommodation and services essential to developing tourist activity, such as food, entertainment, agency, and information.

Iglesias (2016) indicates that Tourism is nowadays a critical economic sector that has grown almost uninterruptedly since 1950. Based on the data's Comerio & Strozzi (2019), Aguinis et al. (2023), the tourism and hospitality industry creates both local and foreign income and employment opportunities, prompting infrastructure development and positive economic growth. To these authors, in terms of social development, the industry also alleviates socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, inequality, and poverty by providing opportunities and social value locally.

According to Sharma et al. (2022), tourism differs from other activities because it involves multiple socio-cultural, political, economic, and ecological interconnections, being very sensitive to environmental changes that affect any of these dimensions. Uğur
and Akbiyik (2020) claim that the tourism industry was one of the biggest markets in the world until the world experienced a pandemic in the 21st century, Covid-19, which created an unprecedented and devastating impact on the travel and tourism industry worldwide. Behsudi (2020) reports that, before Covid-19, travel and tourism had become a relevant sector of the world economy, accounting for 10% of the global GDP and more than 320 million jobs worldwide.

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (Economic Impact Reports, 2020), the tourism sector before the pandemic, including its direct and indirect impacts, represented 1 in 4 of all new jobs created worldwide, 10.6% of all jobs (334 million), and 10.4% of global GDP (US$9.2 trillion). According to the Economic Impact Reports (2020), international visitor spending amounted to $1.7 trillion in 2019 (6.8% of total exports and 27.4% of global services exports).


In addition, this report indicates that France, the USA, Spain, and China were the top destinations in the rankings of international arrivals and receipts, and China became the primary outbound tourism source. A growth of 3% to 4% in international overnight visitors was expected in 2015, and by 2030 the total number could be 1.8 billion. As for the reasons why people traveled in 2014, 53% of the total number of international tourist arrivals were motivated by holidays, recreation, and other forms of leisure, while 14% were due to business and professional reasons, 27% to other purposes such as visiting friends and relatives, religious or health-related issues, and the travel motivations for the rest (6%) were unknown (Iglesias, 2016).

Research by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (2017) shows that the hotel sector comprises more than 31 thousand accommodation means, with 84.6% of accommodation establishments in Brazil having up to 49 housing units. Larger accommodation establishments, with 50 or more units, represented 15.4% of the total.
To Aguinis et al. (2023), although the positive impact of tourism generally outweighs the negative, some tourism practices may lead to adverse outcomes, for instance, the Covid-19 context. Accordingly, policy formulation is highly relevant and meaningful, particularly in tourism and hospitality. Focusing on policies is particularly relevant because the tourism and hospitality industry is complex, with numerous interlinked networks.

Between January 2020 and the same period in 2021, the number of service providers to hotels suffered a drop of 10,200 jobs (Matteis, 2020). Among all areas that suffered layoffs, governance (organization and cleaning staff at hotels) was the most affected, with -43%. The bar and restaurant area was the second most affected, with a 23% reduction. Also, according to the study above, the reduction in working hours/salary was adopted by 63% of respondents (Matteis, 2020).

According to the Economic Impact Reports (2020), the Covid pandemic caused more than 500,000 jobs to be closed in Brazil by June 2021, making it the sector that most suffered the economic consequences of the pandemic. Also, according to that source, until June 2021, tourist activities accumulated a loss of almost US$ 79 Bi. The tourism sector before the pandemic (including its direct and indirect impacts) represented 1 in 4 of all new jobs created worldwide, 10.6% of all jobs, and 10.4% of global GDP ($9.2 trillion).

Meanwhile, international visitor spending amounted to US$1.7 trillion in 2019, almost 27.4% of global service exports (Economic Impact Reports, 2020). Affected by Covid-19, the tourism industry has suffered a considerable impact, and some theme parks have had to close. And when they re-open, there is the potential for a surge of visitors. Consequently, focusing on the theme park is significant to tourism development in the post-epidemic era (Bai, et al., 2023). According to the OECD (2020), the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic can be considered a humanitarian crisis that affected people’s lives and triggered a global economic crisis. The pandemic has profoundly impacted the tourism sector, particularly in countries, cities, and regions where tourism is essential to the economy.

Tourists seek new experiences when visiting tourist attractions like theme parks, zoos, and museums (Li, Shang & Su, 2023). In this case, hospitality, according to Lashley (2000), reconciles different domains: the private (responsibilities and hospitality), the
social (adapting to the social rules of the moment, and the commercial (managing the hospitality experience). Therefore, employees serving their managers must provide hospitality but balance that with the requirement to be efficient and profitable.

For this reason, it is possible to observe that tourist satisfaction is one of the primary purposes of tourism marketing activities. Shi et al. (2022) explain that tourist satisfaction directly affects their revisit intention of destination. In this case, these authors point out that tourist satisfaction is a crucial predictor of tourists' behavioral intentions. Thus, tourism marketing professionals must observe tourist satisfaction's impacts on their behavioral intentions.

Higher satisfaction and service quality may produce exceptional behavioral results, such as greater loyalty (Oliver, Rust & Varki, 1997; Fornell, 1992; Paravani; Masoudi & Cudney, 2010; Pizam & Ellis, 1999). To Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1993), consensus exists that expectations serve as standards with which subsequent experiences are compared, resulting in evaluations of satisfaction or quality. Oliver, Rust, and Varki (1997) argue that the last years have seen a dramatic upsurge of interest in services as academics and practitioners alike have realized the profound structural shift toward services and Customer satisfaction in every advanced economy.

According to Tinoco and Ribeiro (2007), the main determinants of customer satisfaction are desires, expectations, emotions, quality perceived, price, perceived value, disconfirmation expectations, and corporate image. We will adopt this model because it was developed for the services sector and could be suitable for the hotel as a service.

It is observed that offering a quality service in hospitality is not a trivial task, considering that there is an impact of the intangible aspects associated with the provision of the service that influences the perception of the quality of the service by the consumer (Lovelock, 1983). Lovelock (1995, 2001) states that supplementary services that add value can be classified into eight main clusters: information, security, consultation, exceptions, billing, hospitality, and payment. When analyzing these aspects, the elements of food, cleanliness, and safety will be highlighted in terms of hospitality. Satisfaction is the result obtained by consumers through comparing the perceived performance of a product or service with their expectations (Oliver, Rust & Varki (1997)).
Being an essential factor in mitigating the negative consequences of the global crisis in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the development of the economy, which has suffered the most, requires focusing on such pressing issues as improving the competitiveness of the tourism sector (Abduazizovich et al., 2023). Additionally, Kim, Seo, and Choi (2022) defend that to sustain tourism organizations in the post-pandemic period, it is crucial to understand the factors that maintain, boost, or reduce the potential demands of international travel.

Considering this context, this research aimed to evaluate guests' perceptions in the hospitality sector regarding adopting protective measures related to the COVID pandemic and to identify the main differences related to protective measures between men and women guests. Understanding customer needs is essential to enhance service quality and competitive advantage (Zhou & Yao, 2023). Despite that, the publications on factors that generated satisfaction in the hotel sector stated that there are many articles but few with applied management applications (Gundersen; Heide & Olsson, 1996).

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was exploratory and quantitative, and the research population was the guests at check-in time. The sampling process could be characterized as non-probabilistic and using convenience since the respondent base was constituted of contacts established within the study environment selected by the authors considering their disposition to answer the questionnaire (Hair Jr. et al., 2014).

Although non-probabilistic surveys do not permit generalization for the population, our main objective was to identify interdependence relationships between variables (Hair Jr. et al., 2005). The research instrument was a structured questionnaire with a Likert scale to measure the respondents' degree of agreement regarding the variables included in the data collection.

The questionnaire was developed with the hotel owner based on his experience and then was pre-tested with ten hotel guests. Data collection was carried out in the second half of 2021, obtaining a sample of 250 responses from guests. Respondents were informed that their anonymity would be preserved when applying the questionnaires.
The collected data were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The discriminant analysis technique was used to assess whether the perceptions of the acceptance of adopted measures varied significantly between men and women.

The research was carried out in a medium-sized hotel located in the inland region of the São Paulo state (Paranapanema region) in a city with 30,000 inhabitants and which has investments in the commercial and tourist sphere for the development of the economy and job creation (Piraju Tourist Resort, 2021). The following section brings the results.

3 RESULTS

3.1 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SURVEYED SAMPLE PROFILE

The sample composition in terms of gender was 61 women (24% of the total) and 189 men (76% of respondents). Concerning the age group of the interviewees, we found a certain balance, with a greater emphasis on those between 25 and 30 years old, comprising 79 respondents. Soon after, we have the age group between 31 and 40 years old, with 59 responses, corresponding to 23.6%. Most respondents have a high school, 37%, and 49% are single. The best-rated Covid protective items are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that in this pandemic period, the payment of 50% of the accommodation value in the reservation should be suspended.</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I research previous guest reviews of the hotel before finalizing the booking</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The individual and personalized breakfast is a positive factor in the hotel service and must be followed after the pandemic.</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would stop staying in a hotel if the necessary importance were not given to the risks of contamination</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When choosing a hotel to stay, the price of the accommodation is an essential factor in your decision.</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field research data.

It is interesting to notice that economic aspects appear, but measures related to pandemic prevention appear highlighted. After this, data normality was analyzed, and two variables were excluded (Everitt & Dunn, 2021). Then was performed a discriminant analysis (using SPSS). The genre was adopted as the variable to be analyzed, as shown in Table 2.
Table 2: Test results

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box M</td>
<td>293,196</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Approx. .901</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df1</td>
<td>276</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df2</td>
<td>37507.332</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>.880</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field research data.

The evaluation of the generated function is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Evaluation of the generated function

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilks Lambda</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function test</td>
<td>Lambda de Wilks</td>
<td>Chi-squared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.903</td>
<td>24,016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field research data.

Next, we highlight the most important differences between the two genres’ evaluations, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Function coefficients classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When choosing a hotel to stay, the price of the accommodation is an essential factor in your decision</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>4,066</td>
<td>3,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe limiting the number of guests per room is essential?</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>5,026</td>
<td>4,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a differential to provide meals individually in the rooms</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>6,628</td>
<td>6,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You feel free to present a vaccination card and a negative report at check-in to be able to stay.</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1,658</td>
<td>1,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is essential to wear a mask on the hotel premises, even in isolation</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2,708</td>
<td>2,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The individual and personalized breakfast is a positive factor in the hotel service and must be followed after the pandemic.</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guests who make up the risk group must inform their condition in the reservation and obtain differentiated and preferential service at check-in and check-out.</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I research previous guest reviews of the hotel before finalizing the booking</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>1,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe it is essential to know if hotel employees are vaccinated</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2,222</td>
<td>2,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you research the cases of coronavirus in the destination city before making the trip</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1,606</td>
<td>1,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sanitary Seal for hotels that meet the recommendations of good practices in the pandemic is a differential in your choice of accommodation</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2,177</td>
<td>2,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of social networks to demonstrate the importance of preventive measures is vital for your choice of accommodation compared to competing hotels</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1,243</td>
<td>.977</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field research data.

Interesting differences were generated when comparing men and women and their evaluations. Based on these results, we can notice that men tend to value prices, the limitation on guest numbers, and hotel employees’ vaccination. Otherwise, women tend
to value more pre-information about local conditions, meals being served individually, and wearing masks during pandemics.

4 DISCUSSION

From the 20th century onwards, the hospitality industry has developed with globalization (Iglesias, 2016). Thus, this research aimed to evaluate guests' perceptions in the hospitality sector regarding adopting protective measures related to the COVID pandemic and to identify the main differences related to protective measures between men and women guests.

According to Aguinis et al. (2023), tourism and hospitality create local and foreign income and employment opportunities, prompting infrastructure development and positive economic growth. Lodging is linked to the need for people to get a place to stay and eat on trips, whether for work, religious or leisure purposes. It is not known when the activity emerged, but we can consider it a natural movement of travelers, from the beginning, to seek shelter, comfort, and food outside their homes.

The Brazilian government began to encourage the sector in the mid-1960s, but in 1970, with the entry of international hotel chains, it found a vast diversification of services offered. The hotel sector comprises more than 31 thousand accommodation means, with 84.6% of accommodation establishments in Brazil having up to 49 housing units. Larger accommodation establishments, with 50 or more units, represented 15.4% of the total, according to IBGE (2017).

The explanation for the low international inbound tourism is due, on the one hand, to the strength of the Brazilian domestic market and, on the other, to its location far from the leading world emitters: Europe, Asia, and North America, which account for more than 80% of the world issuer. In this context, Brazil has the potential and special conditions to base tourism growth on the strength of its domestic market, which generates externalities to support the development of international tourism and its benefits. The internal and external demands are not mutually exclusive; conversely, they can result in beneficial interactions (Ministério do Turismo, 2021).

The tourism sector before the pandemic (including its direct and indirect impacts) represented 1 in 4 of all new jobs created worldwide, 10.6% of all jobs, and 10.4% of
global GDP ($9.2 trillion) (WTTC, 2020). Meanwhile, international visitor spending amounted to US$1.7 trillion in 2019, almost 27.4% of global service exports) (Economic Impact Reports, 2020). With more than 5 million deaths worldwide, the Covid-19 pandemic has delimited an unprecedented health and economic crisis. In the tourism sector, global emergencies, such as disease outbreaks, pandemics, and natural disasters, call attention to the need for planning by organizations linked to global and regional tourism. They should reflect on the importance of structuring strategies for crisis management and recovery, not only economical but social and environmental, which involves issues related to sustainability (Pantuffi & Perussi, 2021).

During the pandemic, the average occupancy rate in the Brazilian hotel sector fell by 49% from January to May 2021, considering the occupancy rate by hotel category. The segment that suffered the most was upscale (55%), followed by the economic (49%) and midscale, down 47%, according to the Fórum de Operadores Hoteleiros no Brasil (2021).

Between January 2020 and the same period in 2021, the number of service providers to hotels suffered a drop of 10,200 jobs (Matteis, 2020). Among all areas that suffered layoffs, governance (organization and cleaning staff at hotels) was the most affected, with -43%. The bar and restaurant area was the second most affected, with a 23% reduction. Also, according to the study above, the reduction in working hours/salary was adopted by 63% of respondents (Matteis, 2020).

Hospitality, according to Lashley (2000), reconciles different domains: the private (responsibilities and hospitality), the social (adapting to the social rules of the moment, and the commercial (managing the hospitality experience). Therefore, employees serving their managers must provide hospitality but balance that with the requirement to be efficient and profitable. It is observed that offering a quality service in hospitality is not a trivial task, considering that there is an impact of the intangible aspects associated with the provision of the service that influences the perception of the quality of the service by the consumer (Lovelock, 1983).

Lovelock (1995, 2001) states that supplementary services that add value can be classified into eight main clusters: information, security, consultation, exceptions, billing, hospitality, and payment. When analyzing these aspects, the elements of food,
cleanliness, knowledge, and safety were used to develop the applied questionnaire of this research jointly with the hotel's owner.

Bergamini (1998) states that satisfaction is associated with fulfilling the consumer's internal needs. Human action would act toward these needs, thus being a cognitive and emotional state.

Pizam and Ellis (1999) contextualize customer satisfaction as a psychological concept that involves a sense of well-being and pleasure. This feeling is generated when the customer's expectations match their experience after contracting the product or service. This study explored the guests' perception of the measures adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic and indicated management recommendations.

With increasing competition, the hotel industry seeks outstanding service quality and customer satisfaction (Parayani et al., 2010). Hospitality organizations, therefore, need to understand what guests want from the service experience, catering to the diversity of customers. According to Tinoco and Ribeiro (2007), the main determinants of customer satisfaction are desires, expectations, emotions, quality perceived, price, perceived value, disconfirmation expectations, and corporate image. We will adopt this model because it was developed for the services sector and could be suitable for the hotel as a service.

The contribution of this paper has some aspects. The gift of this paper has three parts. First, this paper contributes to the research of product/service tourists. This research focuses on the customers' experience of service in online reviews. The objective of this study was to understand the perception of the determinants of guest satisfaction regarding the measures adopted during the Covid pandemic and the main differences related to protective measures between men and women guests.

This study contributes to the literature in the field of tourism, offering a practical methodological framework for analyzing tourist satisfaction from the consumer demand perspective once customer satisfaction is evaluated by conducting market surveys or experiments to collect and analyze customer preference data.

One significant practical contribution of this research is that it brings some enlightenment to the tourism management industry. The managers can, for instance, evaluate the performance of tourism services based on customers' views or sentiments on
the service and notice that men and women could have different evaluations of adopted measures. They can further understand the advantages and disadvantages of tourism services in their company.
REFERENCES


