The Great Reset: Hospitality Redefined

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Abstract COVID-19 has been a transformational stressor and accelerator for hospitality. The crisis has also magnified the existence and impact of pre-existing challenges and issues (e.g., technology evolution and climate change) and intensified the need for urgent industry action. This chapter identifies and discusses the major changes taking place in hospitality by clustering them into the following categories: the hospitality offerings; the safety, cleanliness and hygiene protocols; the services-cape design; employees management; and brand communication and marketing. The chapter also analyses both the immediate and long-term implications of these changes for the industry, with the purpose to start a debate and inspire research directed to the re-imagination and the re-setting of the hospitality industry. Overall, COVID-19 imposed changes affect the core DNA of hospitality by resetting our understandings and practices of the essence of hospitality. The chapter concludes by discussing how the crisis directs all hospitality stakeholders to rethink and re-imagine their business and social practices, which in turn reform hospitality in the next normal.

Keywords Hospitality · Health · Safety · Risk management · COVID-19

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has already resulted in an acute human and economic toll to the global hospitality industry and its stakeholders, namely employees, guests, students, educators, company shareholders and communities (American Hotel and Lodging Association [AHLA], 2020; Dube et al., 2021; Lock, 2020; Sigala, 2021a). As Arne Sorenson, Marriott CEO, claimed, "COVID-19 is having a more severe and sudden economic impact on our business than 9/11 and the 2009 financial crisis

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combined" (Marriott International, 2020a). From an immediate and unforeseen global halt of operations, hospitality was forced to substantial changes in order to allow a safe industry reopening. Hence, apart from the unprecedented damage, the pandemic has also resulted in an accelerated change in both hospitality demand and supply that will have long-term implications in the industry. The slow-down of the economy, the forced changes and the necessity to urgently innovate to ensure business continuity and survival, have given the opportunity to hospitality stakeholders to reflect, rethink and reimagine their practices. These transformations, some of which had pre-started before the pandemic, are claimed to be resetting (Sigala, 2020) or innovating the business models (Breier et al., 2021) of hospitality, hopefully helping the industry to also build back better.

This chapter aims to identify and discuss the major ways in which COVID-19 is impacting and changing the hospitality industry by (re)-setting its marketplace, business models and operations. To achieve that, the chapter begins by debating the implications of COVID-19 on the hospitality services, which in turn have caused several alterations on consumer behaviour and industry operations. The chapter continues by analysing the major changes introduced in hospitality to restart the industry. These changes are discussed by clustering them into the following categories: hospitality offering; safety, cleanliness, and hygiene protocols; technology and digital innovation; servicescape design; employees management; and brand communication and marketing (including price, promotion and distribution). The chapter concludes by debating the long-term implications of these changes on resetting the hospitality industry by redefining the nature of the hospitality experience or even purpose and essence of hospitality. The practical and research implications of these changes are also discussed.

COVID-19 and Hospitality Services

COVID-19 is a highly contagious and transmittable virus through direct and indirect people's contact. The most known transmission paths include: coughing and sneezing; through the air in confined spaces; and through virus-containing surfaces of objects. Consequently, direct contact with others (e.g., shaking hands, touching) and indirect contact (being or using public spaces and facilities) create high anxiety and strong desires to avoid them. In addition, social distancing rules have been imposed by governments to eliminate and/or regulate personal and/or social interactions and activities.

By definition and nature, hospitality is based and entails people's interactions. By being a high touch and highly labour intensive industry, COVID-19 has placed hospitality in an extremely challenging situation whereby employees' and guests' health become a top priority (Kim et al., 2021a). A few studies have already emerged discussing the enhanced occupational stress that COVID-19 has generated to hospitality employees, severely affecting their mental health and long-term wellbeing (Wong et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021a). Similarly on the demand side, industry reports

(Haas et al., 2020) document that returned guests experience increased anxiety not only at touchpoints featuring active employee-customer encounters (e.g., ordering, receiving and/or paying for hospitality services) and distance/back-of-the-house interaction with employees (e.g., meal preparation, housekeeping), but also at touchpoints whereby guests are found in close proximity to other guests and/or objects that the latter may have touched (e.g., hotel rooms and facilities such as lobbies, waiting areas, toilets). Hence, it appears that guests' safety anxiety is generated and heightened by even distant and passive interaction with others (e.g., leaving or arriving at hospitality venues).

Numerous studies advocate that more than any other crisis, the people's safety, health and risk perceptions and attitudes are driving their decision-making and behaviour during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Cleanliness and safety have become decisive and top factors shaping hospitality demand requirements, expectations and behaviours (Kim et al., 2021c; Shin & Kang, 2020). Workplace safety and corporate's commitment to staff wellbeing and personal/career development are also claimed to highly determine the hospitality's ability to attract, maintain and accelerate the performance of talent in the industry (Sigala, 2021a). As the world adjusts to COVID-19 and hospitality reopens, the hospitality managers' priorities are focused on creating reassurance and taking measures to restore the people's confidence in the industry (Rivera, 2020). To achieve this, we also need to re-comprehend people's beliefs and the main factors driving their behaviours.

Recently, Hazée and Van Vaerenbergh (2021) adopted a contamination approach in order to understand how customers' contamination concerns will transform the service industry in the post-COVID-19 period. Two major changes are found: preference to more introverted and socially distance services; and positive attitudes, purchase intentions and choices towards brand/services emphasising safety. From a contamination approach, four major cues are also found to generate customers' safety risks and concerns (Hazée & Van Vaerenbergh, 2021):

- Product-related contamination cues including product location, product-body proximity, product scarcity and product packaging
- Social-related contamination cues mainly relating to the number of sources believed to have come into contact with the target and the characteristics and/or nature of the contact source
- Environmental cues including the organisation/design, cleanliness and sanitary of the contact location and servicescape
- Brand-related cues such as brand communications (e.g., advertising, promotions)

Hence, to respond to customer contamination concerns and government imposed COVID-19 safety regulations, the hospitality industry has fast introduced and continuously develops numerous interventions in the following four major areas: hospitality offering; safety, cleanliness and hygiene protocols; service interactions through the whole customer journey affecting the reorganisation of the servicescape, the employee and customer experience; brand communications and marketing practices (including distribution, pricing and promotion). Many of these changes are here to stay and continue to transform the industry in the long term (Skift &

Oracle Hospitality, 2020), while cleanliness, health and technology are considered as the three major issues in post-COVID-19 hospitality marketing and management (Jiang & Wen, 2020; Sigala, 2020).

The following sections identify and discuss the COVID-19 induced changes taking place in hospitality within the abovementioned areas. The sections also analyse both the immediate and the long-term industry implications of these changes.

Hospitality Offering

The sudden halt of the global hospitality industry has led the industry to alter and/or re-purpose its service offerings in various ways in order to maintain business continuity and/or contribute to the public good. The restaurant and catering sector has limited food and beverage options to prepackaged meals and redesigned menus to include locally sourced supplies and migrate property dining services to home delivery services; some providers have virtualised dining and drinking experiences (e.g., online cooking classes, online social drinks, virtual wine tastings and disco/DJ parties). Many caterers penetrated the convenience store market by delivering daily food items (Becker et al., 2020). Hoteliers have responded similarly: hotel rooms were converted into home offices to cater for the increased demand of remote working; hotel restaurants and leisure facilities (e.g., gyms, spas) were shut and equipment redirected to provide more in-room or outdoor services (e.g., socially distanced picnic basket dinner at Hyatt Regency, California); guestrooms were redesigned to match home-centred lifestyles (e.g., access to personal online fitness classes and Netflix/Spotify services through the guestroom TV). In response to the increasing consumers' demand for wellbeing, Batat (2021) claimed that COVID-19 has also accelerated the hospitality's re-direction towards more healthy eating and lifestyles.

In response to COVID-19 challenges, some hospitality players have totally transformed their offerings and business models. For example, restaurants have developed *dark* or *ghost* kitchens to specifically cater for the food delivery market. Shared accommodation providers renting out their "accommodations" for people to host "private" small-scale functions and parties, use them as self-quarantine places, or home offices.

Hospitality offerings have also been adapted to match the "new" emerging customers' lifestyles, for example, blur of leisure and work life, that is, staycations and workcations (World of Hyatt, 2021); and small events such as micro-weddings (Deane, 2021). In the long-term, the questionable return and future expectations of the corporate and events market have made the hospitality industry to rethink the nature and purpose of hospitality facilities and services. Function and business spaces are being equipped to support hybrid meetings and events (e.g., hybrid weddings at Hyatt) (Oliver, 2020), as well as redesigned to accommodate the needs of the booming digital nomad market.

During the lockdown, the industry has repurposed and donated many unused resources (staff, equipment, facilities and supplies) for public good. For example,

more than 16,000 hotels have signed up for the American Hotel and Lodging Association's *Hospitality for Hope* program, which connects hoteliers to the public sector to provide facilities to medical staff (Sperance, 2020a); hotels donating cleaning and food supplies to people in need, while underutilised hospitality staff volunteered to support essential services (Price, 2020). Some hotels have introduced (online) social campaigns (#INTHISTOGETHER campaign by Choice hotels) to communicate their social causes and boost their brand image and responsibility (Choice Hotels, 2021). It is unknown whether COVID-19 accelerated philanthropy within the sector is to be continued, but current pressures have intensified the need to boost the (corporate) social responsibility of the industry. Indeed, because of its nature and by refocusing on its core essence, the hospitality industry can make a significant contribution to progress from the (commercialised) experience economy of our capitalistic world to what is called the purpose and/or compassionate economy. It is thus imperative for both hospitality scholars and professionals to seriously re-imagine and reset the purpose and delivery of the hospitality offering in the post-pandemic. It is also their responsibility to help shaping and (re)-forming a "new" and true meaning of hospitality that is away from any woke-marketing practices aiming to simply please cultural and political changes and/or regulatory imperatives.

Safety, Cleanliness and Hygiene Protocols

Cleanliness and hygiene are emphasised as major attributes of hospitality service quality (Sifuentes et al., 2014; Vos et al., 2019). Guests can recognise hygiene in hospitality experiences through various factors including: the spaces used by customers (i.e., lobby, washrooms, rooms, and restaurants); personal hygiene of staff (e.g., uniform, hands, and head); and spaces used by staff (e.g., computers, desks, and chairs). Guests also wish to experience hygiene and feel safe at every stage and touchpoint of their whole customer journey (i.e., before, during and after their stay).

Because of the highly contagious nature of COVID-19 and its transmissions through direct and/or indirect contact, hospitality operators have adopted heightened cleaning and safety measures. The latter were not only a response to guests' concerns but also a requirement to comply with government imposed COVID-19 safety regulations. Because of different government policies and public-health approaches, various regulations were introduced in different countries, which made it difficult for multinational hospitality players to standardise their practices across the globe (Krishnan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the industry has adopted the following major safety and cleanliness measures:

- Limited capacity (distance tables, chairs, number of guests, time lags between guests, for example, 24-h empty guestrooms between their occupancy)
- Rigorous sanitation: cleaning cycles and enhanced procedures, sanitisers, communication, frequent sanitisation and/or scrubbing of high-touch areas (such as counters, self-checkout screens, and door handles)

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for employees and for customers (masks, gloves, temperature checks)
- Employee training regarding enhanced cleaning standards and strict protocols for providing personal service while keeping social distancing and minimising human contact.

Temperature screening (at check-in and/or property entry points), hand sanitisers, social distance markers and guests' lists and tracking (e.g., "check-in" through COVID-19 mobility tracing applications) have become the most commonly visible hygiene and safety items in hospitality venues. Due to the nature of the COVID-19 virus, the industry is forced to adopt new cleaning equipment and/or products, e.g., High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters (removing more than 99.9% of particles including airborne viruses and bacteria), laser beams and electromagnetic sprayers (e.g., used by Marriott staffers for cleaning). The new cleaning protocols, products and higher frequency cleanings could cost the entire hotel industry as much as $9 billion annually (Sperance, 2020b). Hospitality operators might pass the increased operating costs to customers, but the question arising is whether cleaning procedures will ever go back to the old "standards"? Based on marketing theory, once customers are "upgraded" and got used to new services, product standards are also elevated to new "standards" and it is very difficult to go back to old "standards" as this will be seen as a product (quality) downgrade. In other words, how can hotels start providing again "less" cleaning without guests perceiving that their rooms are less clean? Would guests in the future trade off less cleaning for even lower prices? As customers' perceived hygiene attributes critically affect not only their quality perceptions and visit intentions but also their perceived hotel/offering image (Yu et al., 2021b), the prolonged provision of COVID-19 enforced hospitality operations are very likely to contribute to the establishment of "new" industry standards.

Almost all major hospitality operators (spanning from budget to luxury hotels, resorts, vacation ownership and even Airbnb representing the shared accommodation) developed, branded and adopted their own COVID-19 hygiene protocol (Skift & Oracle Hospitality, 2020). Some (Sperance, 2020c) have also criticised hotels for engaging in a show-off "hygiene theatre", that is, use of expensive gadgets and practices to make guests feel good rather than effectively clean their properties. Such hygiene theatrics may include guests' temperature checks in the entrance to build confidence and extensive use of communication paraphernalia such as sanitary bags covering the remote controls and guest room doors sealed with a CleanStay label to show that they have been cleaned and not used since housekeeping serviced them. Nevertheless, the industry has undertaken several efforts to establish credibility and accountability of its hygiene standards.

Some branded hotel chains have partnered with medical and cleaning experts. For example, Hilton's CleanStay deep cleaning program is co-created with Lysol and Mayo Clinic (Sperance, 2020d) and Marriott launched a Global Cleanliness Council including many research and professional experts (Marriott International, 2020b). Industry associations have also developed hygiene standards to help independent and small hospitality operators to learn about and implement new cleaning

standards, as well as benefit by communicating and linking their hotels with a well-recognised body accrediting their hygiene practices. For example, the American Hotel and Lodging Association has launched its *Safe Stay* cleaning protocol, which has been used by many small but also big players (e.g., Wyndham uses it as a foundation for their own practices). In addition, several third-party accreditors have emerged that provide training and accreditation services to hospitality operators (e.g., Blue Canary (2020); International WELL Building Institute (2020) offering its own branded WELL Health-Safety Rating). Such third parties are of course garnering more interest from independent hotel owners than major brands (Sperance, 2020e).

Apart from third-party auditing, major hotel operators also include the following practices for ensuring adherence to their new health, safety, and cleaning guidelines (Sperance, 2020e):

- Regular staff training and monitoring
- Internal monitoring and auditing including: daily colleagues surveys to get staff feedback, guest satisfaction surveys on cleanliness, hotel owner self-evaluations, and on-site COVID-19 *marshals* and/or "Cleanliness Champions" who are responsible and accountable for the standards' implementation
- In the era of social media and customer empowerment, many hotel brands are also using user-generated content (reviews, social media posts) for continuously monitoring their cleanliness performance and brand's associations with COVID-19 issues.

Table 1 provides an overview of initiatives and guidelines developed by major hospitality operators.

Technology and Digital Innovation

COVID-19 has accelerated technology adoption and use in hospitality from both a consumer and supply perspective (Sigala, 2020). Technologies have been instrumental and vital for hospitality operators to maintain their business continuity and safeguard the safety of their staff and customers, as well as plan for the next normal. Indeed, the role of technology in supporting the recovery but also the redefinition of hospitality in the post-COVID-19 industry is widely argued (Gilliland, 2020; Pillai et al., 2021; Shin & Kang, 2020). This is also confirmed by studies (Kim et al., 2021c) showing a clear change in guests' preferences from human-based to technology-based services because of COVID-19 perceived risks.

Technologies that have been slowly adopted and transforming hospitality before COVID-19 are now being rapidly introduced and innovate every type of hospitality operation. Technology induced innovation in hospitality is categorised in the following areas:

Table 1 Safety, cleanliness, and hygiene protocols and initiatives in hospitality

Hospitality operator	Initiatives/protocol	Guidelines
Marriott	Marriott global cleanliness council	Commitment to clean
Hilton	Hilton clean stay	New standard of cleanliness
Accor	ALLSAFE	The ALLSAFE label framework
IHG	IHC clean promise	IHC way of clean enhancement
Omni	Omni safe & clean	Stay A part of safety
Four Seasons	Lead with care	Global program guidance
Wyndham	Count on us	Health & safety protocols
Choice Hotels	Commitment to clean	Protocols and products
Best Western	We care clean	Five key areas
Loews Hotels	Safety & wellbeing protocols	Service promise and protocols
Airbnb	Enhanced cleaning initiative	ECI teaser
VRBO	Enhanced cleaning & disinfection of vacation rentals	New vacation rental standards
Red Roof Inn	Red roof RediClean	Protocols for employees and cleanings
Extended Stay America	STAY confident	Stay safe, stay healthy, stay comfortable
American Hotel & Lodging Association	Safe stay	Safe stay guidelines
OYO Hotels & Homes	Sanitised stays	Corona concierge
Margaritaville	Health & sanitation commitment	Guidelines & reopening schedule
AMResorts	CleanComplete verification	Quality safety, & hygiene protocols
Montage International	Peace of mind commitment	Peace of mind commitment traveler guidance and protocols
G6 Hospitality	Clean@6	Initiative overview
Club Med	Safe together	Protocols & standards

Source: Adapted from Skift and Oracle Hospitality (2020, pp. 8–9)

- New distribution channels: digital channels for supporting food/beverage delivery. Apart from the booming adoption of food tech companies (e.g., UberEats, Deliveroo), hospitality operators worldwide have also "pushed" to innovate and develop their own controlled digital food delivery services, for example, Barossa Eats (Kelly, 2020) and Apocalypse (Wilson, 2020).
- Digital customer service and communication making them contactless and/or touch-free: technologies are introduced to streamline, personalise as well as increase the effectiveness and safety of customer experiences along their whole journey (e.g., Mystay, 2021; Portier Technologies, 2021). For example:
  - before the stay: digital (website, mobile app, kiosks-based) bookings, ordering and payments
  - during the stay: mobile check-in and check-out, digital key technology, robots and drones to deliver food and beverage, robot concierges/receptionists, robot cleaning systems, digital self-service touchless service for coffee (Rovins, 2020) or beer (Smithers, 2016)

- – after the stay: digital customer communication for complaints/feedback management

- Digital customer engagement. Hospitality operators have increased use of technologies to deepen and maintain their engagement with current (loyal) and potential customers. From using technologies to update and inform customers about COVID-19 news, booking refunds/cancellations and so on to "entertaining" customers during lockdown and boosting their psychological state and emotions.
- Digitalisation/virtualisation of experiences and offerings: hospitality operators offering online cooking classes (Le Méridien Angkor, 2021) and/or virtual drinks, to online parties (Ewe, 2020) with virtual gigs and DJs, virtual or hybrid conferences/events
- Employee management including remote working, e-training and e-learning
- Market intelligence referring to the use of big data and AI/machine learning to make better forecasting to forecast and manage risks, develop scenarios for strategic planning, marketing and pricing (Hollander, 2020), for example, traxo. com, trooptravel.com. For example, technology using big (geo)-data about COVID-19 cases, contact tracing to predict future virus out-breaks, lockdowns and cancellations and re-organisation of events
- Technologies for health and safety. For example:

  - – contact tracing and self-reports
  - – crowd management technologies for managing social density, contactless temperature controls and face recognition for tracing usage of masks, e.g., crowdvision technology (Airport Technology, 2021)
  - – new technologies (e.g., UV cleaning equipment, electrostatic sprayers, cleaning robots, etc.) for enhanced disinfection (Garcia, 2020); robots for automating cleaning and sanitise and disinfect guest rooms without employee contact (Hotel Business, 2020).

It is envisaged that the use of these technologies will also continue in the post-COVID-19 era, because of a demand pull and supply push. Customers have tried, become familiar, and become experts in using the new technologies. These new customers' e-routines and e-habits are expected to continue, as people have realised the benefits of such technologies and have managed to effectively integrate them into their lives without disturbing their wellbeing. Equally, hospitality firms have accelerated their take-up of technologies and have benefited from the new "business" opportunities and cost savings. Consequently, professionals and guests see technology-based services as a complimentary rather than a substitute to traditional hospitality offerings. In the future, customers would expect digital (mixing digital and physical) customer service and offerings. For example, a dining customer may use technologies to reduce contact with service staff (e.g., e-payment, e-ordering), but would still like to dine in a restaurant and interact with others, but simultaneously also use a mobile app to find out information about the calories and nutritious value of a restaurant menu, and/or watch and interact with a chef in the back office

preparing his/her meal. Virtual and hybrid hospitality offerings and services are also a way to internationalise and expand the reach of hospitality services giving operators a new revenue stream and market to penetrate. COVID-19 has accelerated technology uptake by both hospitality demand and supply, and this is transforming the hospitality experience, operations and offerings forever.

Servicescape Design

Being a multi-sensorial experience, servicescape significantly influences employees and guests' behaviour, mind, body and emotions (Sigala, 2021b). Servicescape atmospherics are an integral part of hospitality experiences affecting customers' satisfaction, behaviour and intentions, quality and brand image perceptions. However, the re-opening of the hospitality industry after the pandemic requires various interventions in servicescape design that have changed the hospitality experience and are challenging its future nature.

Due to COVID-19 safety and hygiene rules, hospitality operators were forced to make interventions, as well as innovate all aspects of their servicescape design:

- Ambient conditions (including temperature, music, odour/scent, colours) once used to create the hospitality experience are now changed. Operators make increased use of disposable single-use cups, utensils and menus. Scents being part of hotels' brand identity/personality (e.g., Hyatt, Westin) and experience are now being covered by disinfectant odours. Voices can generate a moist breath zone and increase viral spread. Consequently, various hospitality experiences have been adjusted: karaoke, and hospitality event spectators are required to sit down and avoid singing and co-creating the event experience; wineries are only allowed to offer sitting down wine tastings.
- Spatial layout and functionality have also been affected by COVID-19. For example, greater space between tables and chairs, dedicated exit and entrance points, installing glass or plastic separators of tables, private rooms for meal experiences. There has also been some innovation in servicescape design and experience with operators using "space bubbles" or greenhouses to separate guests amongst each other
- Signs, symbols and artefacts (e.g., COVID-19 signage and guidance, social distance markers, sanitiser points, queue management signals) have been increasingly used for informing guests about cleanliness and safety measures and generating comfort but also for educating and enforcing COVID-19 safe behaviour amongst employees and customers. This servicescape element is important as it does not only matter what operators do, but also how they communicate and enforce hygiene protocols to their patrons and employees.
- Social servicescape, referring to the social presence and interactions of people within hospitality venues, including the provision of emotional labour. COVID-19 imposed measures (such as social distancing, wearing of masks, face shields and

gloves by staff and guests) inhibits the provision of personal service and traditional aesthetic/emotional labour. Superior customer value is traditionally related to close interactions, while emotional labour refers to both *static appearance* (e.g., dress code, appearance, personal grooming and bodily characteristics) and *performative mannerisms* (verbal and non-verbal mannerisms) (Wu et al., 2020) such as, body language and service with a smile. Emotional labour is found to be an essential factor contributing to rapport-building, which eventually leads to customer satisfaction and perceptions of service quality (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). COVID-19 imposed measures on social servicescape and customer service seems to inhibit the provision of this traditionally perceived high touch human-based hospitality service, while it is also altering people's perceptions of the characteristics and standards of good customer service. In fact, it might be that the COVID-19 paraphernalia and social distancing may become part of a *new normal* of hospitality staff appearance and uniform that symbolises and communicates the new frontier and perceptions of hygiene face-to-face personal service. Crowding in servicescapes once reflecting popular choice and evidence of good quality (e.g., crowded beaches, bars, restaurants) are now perceived as risky and low-quality hospitality experiences. Under COVID-19 capacity restrictions, customers have also discovered the benefits of "private" hospitality experience without the delays and noises of other guests around them.

The adjustment of the servicescape theatre to the COVID-19 cleaning and hygiene requirements is creating a new "hospitality" experience, a new psychological conform and expectations of the hospitality consumer. Future research is required to examine how the new servicescape is shifting the customers' perceptions, behaviours and feelings about the quality of aesthetics, comfort, safety and cleanliness. Preliminary results provide conflicting and diverging results. For example, Kim and Lee (2020) provided evidence of increased demand of private rooms in restaurants, but consumers have also reported to miss the social interactions in hospitality places operating with reduced capacity. Restaurants have used mannequins or dolls to fill up seats at unused tables in dining rooms (Associated Press, 2020), so that they can replicate the feeling of others' social presence. However, Taylor (2020) found that in relation to dining rooms with mannequins, customers found and preferred dining rooms with partitions between tables as more visually attractive, cleaner looking, more welcoming, safer looking, more entertaining, more sanitary and more comfortable.

Employees Management

Hospitality employees have not escaped from the COVID-19 health and economic crisis. For some (Baum et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2021), the pandemic is one more crisis that has loudly amplified the pre-existing conditions, concerns and problems of hospitality staff during their pre-COVID-19 precarious "normal" lives. Being a

highly labour-intensive industry the halt of the global hospitality industry resulted in millions of job losses worldwide, negatively affecting lives, livelihoods and communities. To keep hospitality operators and jobs alive, numerous governments launched programs (e.g., subsidies, salaries support); executives of hospitality multi-nationals such as Hilton (Tyko, 2020) and Hyatt (Kostuch Media, 2020) have forgone salaries; and hospitality staff accepted salary cuts and compulsory unpaid leave. But despite these sacrifices, the hospitality workforce has suffered a lot, while it is experiencing a new reality whose long-term effects and rules are still unknown.

At an individual level, studies already report the severe economic, psychological, and physical wellbeing impacts on hospitality staff (Wong et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021a) including salary cuts, enhanced stress and anxiety from job insecurity and health risks undertaking, even mental health problems and suicides (Taylor & Siradapuvadol, 2021). Hospitality staff find themselves in a new work environment featuring the use of masks, temperature checks, mobility tracing, COVID-19 tests or vaccine passports required for entering the workplace and/or for getting/maintaining a job. To safeguard the wellbeing of staff and guests, hospitality operators have intensified their workforce care, training and professional development services. Numerous industry training programs are provided by governments (e.g., Queensland Government, 2021), hospitality operators and associations (AHLA, , 2021) alike aiming to (up)-skill employees to the new COVID-19 imposed health, safety and hygiene standards. Development of new skills refers to both technical and soft competencies including professional specialised abilities in identifying and communicating with people being affected by COVID-19, such as risk communication, cultural sensitivity, disease transmission, isolation, quarantine and other measures, for example courses to become a certified contact tracer (Purdue University Global, 2021). Hence, it is not surprising the increased research attention on employees' safety performance and behaviours. However, employees' compliance with the new procedures does not solely depend on their knowledge and skills. Research (Guzzo et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021b) reveals that employees' participation and motivation to implement safety/hygiene protocols is also heavily influenced by the organisation's crisis communication and management practices, the organisational trust and commitment shown towards Corporate Social Responsibility values and actions. The latter significantly highlights the magnified and urgent need of the hospitality industry to heighten its efforts to become a more responsible and sustainable industry to address the overdue demands and issues pertaining not only consumers and the society overall but also its major asset, namely its employees.

At a macro-level, the (global) hospitality industry and labour market have experienced several impacts due to COVID-19 with serious knock over effects and long-term implications. Good talent exited the hospitality industry to seek employment. This huge brain drain is envisioned to crucially affect hospitality in the long term, as professionals are not expected to return to hospitality (especially when they experience better remuneration and career options in other industries). The hospitality industry is still also unable to absorb the emerging graduating talent (Sigala, 2021a). Current hospitality graduates are demoralised due to frozen internships, placements

and recruitment programs and often re-directed to other industries, as hospitality skills are highly transferable and widely sought. Hospitality education providers have also experienced significantly reduced student registrations for the last 2 years.

Efforts continue to recover tourist numbers and at the same time industry jobs to the pre-COVID-19 period, however little is done to retain, develop and attract talent in the industry. Scholars and industry members alike need to address not only the future labour shortages, but also the various issues challenging the quality of hospitality work. COVID-19 has intensified the impact and the need to respond to many of these challenges, and research is still required to better understand and guide policy makers and industry alike about:

- the new skills and competencies required from hospitality employees due to the *new normal*, the changing consumer sentiment and demand, the accelerated adoption and use of technologies (e.g., AI, machine learning, robots) in hospitality automating all job tasks from low level (mechanical) to high level (cognitive/analytical and emotional) skills
- the best ways to develop the new skills/abilities to the existing and the new hospitality workforce (e.g., revised/new pedagogies, curricula, professional training)
- the talent management practices that can satisfy the needs of the new generation entering the hospitality labour market.

Brand Communication and Marketing: Price, Promotion and Distribution

Despite the halt of the industry, hospitality operators have intensified their customer communications and use of digital channels to address urgent customer service issues, maintain customer engagement, and win future loyalty. The core focus of customer communications has been shifting during the crisis:

- At the beginning of lockdowns: communications aimed to help affected customers and employees, e.g., dealing with stranded guests, cancellations, refunds and/or credits for re-bookings, expiring loyalty points and status in a period when loyal guests cannot collect and/or redeem points, revision of policies/rules and/or the whole design of loyalty programs
- During the lockdowns: communication gave emphasis on boosting the morale of depressed consumers being in lockdown not being able to travel. Purpose or cause marketing on social media skyrocketed with operators launching campaigns to sell "hope" and seek people's solidarity to stand by each other and address the current crisis, "entertain" but also to keep people tourism-inspired and interested while being locked down and not able to travel. The hashtags of many such campaigns became known worldwide and received a lot of support (i.e., "likes" and "shares"), for example: #inthistogether #stayinspired #DreamNowVisitLater #travellater #TogetherInTravel #donotcancelrebook #OneTravelIndustry #togetherathome (Collins, 2020).

- The re-opening of the industry: communications focused on generating customer confidence to return by creating awareness and trust on two aspects: the hygiene/safety protocols; and the "flexible" booking/pricing policies (e.g., no penalties for rebookings, cancellations, refunds)

The focus of these communications does not only reflect the industry's challenges and responses to the crisis. These communications also epitomise the introduction of industry "innovations" whose prolonged use has a great potential to alter the operations and nature of hospitality. A good example is the effectiveness of hospitality loyalty programs and their ability to address contemporary industry developments. Loyalty programs in hospitality have resulted in "pointification" systems measuring and trading customer loyalty as an exchange relationship of purchases and points. These loyalty programs have offered little room for differentiation within the hospitality industry and converted guests to "point hunters" being loyal to the program and not the hospitality brand. Hospitality operators are overdue to re-think about what is guest loyalty and how to build it by understanding that customers can co-create (but also co-destroy) value at all touchpoints of the value chain and not just at the purchase/consumption stage. Technologies enable customers to engage with brands and co-create value at the design, production, marketing and after-sales stage. Hence, the industry should re-think the way it measures customer value and reward customer engagement and loyalty that goes beyond the traditional customer lifetime value metrics of loyalty programs focusing solely on frequency and value of customer purchases. Several other contemporary trends demand the industry to change: customers are loyal to everyone but no one (customer polygamy in several loyalty programs), do not like being locked-in but prefer instant rewards of their co-creation activities, and are accustomed to subscription services (i.e., unlimited use for the paid period such as, Netflix, Spotify). The industry is overdue to re-think customer loyalty and engagement and the ways to build and win it in a hyper-competitive and flux world, where there are no distinction walls between industries and the role of producer and consumers.

In response to the COVID-19 situation, numerous hospitality operators have relaxed their booking and pricing policies (e.g., flexible cancellations/refund policies, frequent price discounts, removal/reduction of min/max lengths of stays and deposit/pre-payment requirements). Customers have experienced these changes for a rather long period and re-adjusted their expectations as well as understanding of hospitality pricing or "profiteering" tactics. This questions whether the industry can go back to the old normal or it is time to revisit and reform its revenue management policies and practices. For example, the introduction of subscription programs (Munoz, 2021) have been debated as an effective way to restart the industry and make it competitive in the post-COVID-19 era.

The (over)-use of cause marketing by hospitality operators during the crisis is not surprising. The industry has always used cause marketing to respond to society's challenges such as climate change, sustainability, equality, racism/discrimination. However, to what extent this (over)-use of cause marketing is not another one woke-marketing or COVID-19 washing marketing, but it rather reflects an authentic and

honest re-direction of the industry to build back better. Have hospitality operators really begun to re-think their practices, re-imagined and become ready to restart the industry with responsible and sustainable practices, or is this a cultural/political marketing practice and they will soon go back to the old normal? Many things have been written about the transformational opportunity that COVID-19 has provided to the industry, but very little has been debated on how hospitality can become a true and authentic contributor to the purpose economy. More research is still needed to provide a roadmap on how hospitality as an industry and social practice can generate a meaningful value and purpose to the society. Probably a "refreshed" return to the roots and values of hospitality can be one way to achieve this. Nevertheless, more time is needed to conclude whether COVID-19 can and has been a milestone for a new 'better' beginning of the industry.

Finally, the aggressive and immediate response of the industry to (co-)develop (with medical experts), accredit and implement/police measures to protect the safety and hygiene of its major stakeholders (i.e., customers/employees) signifies another critical issue for discussion and future investigation. It implies the emerging role and importance of brands (and not institutions) to protect citizens and take civil action by setting, establishing mechanisms and brand credibility to build trust and assurance to what traditionally been considered the role of state governance. This is for example confirmed by research findings (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2021) showing how hospitality operators have used and developed their brand personality to communicate health and safety and create consumer confidence by institutionalising brand "qualities". The ability and the role of industries and markets to be self-regulated with limited and/or no governments' interventions has been a topic of discussion for centuries. Is COVID-19 again a milestone whereby the role of governance will be once again re-thought and/or start to be diminished? Do (hospitality) brands have the credibility and responsibility to assume the role of governance and are markets sufficiently capable enough to regulate and re-build a better normal?

Conclusions and Implications: Hospitality Redefined

COVID-19 has been a transformational stressor and accelerator for hospitality. The health crisis has subsequently generated economic, socio-cultural, psychological and political crises, and has introduced and fostered changes, interventions and innovations in hospitality. The crisis has also magnified the existence and impact of pre-existing challenges and issues (e.g., technology evolution and climate change) and intensified the urgent need that the hospitality industry should take action. The continuous changes affect all aspects of the industry: the hospitality offerings and business operations; the physical and social environment of the hospitality experience; the hospitality experience itself; the business and social practices as well as the mindsets of all hospitality stakeholders (namely companies, shareholders, brands, employees and guests).

Overall, by affecting the core DNA of hospitality, COVID-19 imposed and nurtured changes that make us re-think how the crisis might redefine and reset the nature and provision of the concept of hospitality itself. Under the fear of contamination and the realistic scenario that we will have to live with the continuous existence of "a" virus, people have become and may see as *normal* to be socially avoidant, more introverted and less tolerant to "strangers". These new mindsets can critically redefine and reform our concept of hospitality, customer service and quality in the next normal. Preliminary findings (Bonfanti et al., 2021) show that there are new expectations of intended hospitality experiences in terms of how vital concepts are being understood and interpreted in practice, for example:

- re-assurance viewed as reduced perceived risk, communication practices, trust on employees' capabilities
- quickness and promptness seen as provision of fast convenient service
- intimacy interpreted as the capacity limits in the use of hospitality spaces
- proximity defined by emotional and social closeness rather than by physical closeness

This chapter aimed to identify and discuss the major changes taking place in hospitality because of the pandemic. The chapter also analyses both the immediate and long-term implications of these changes for the industry, with the purpose to start a debate and inspire research directing to the re-imagination and the re-setting of the hospitality industry. To achieve these, the chapter discuss changes related to: the hospitality offering; the safety, cleanliness and hygiene protocols; the servicescape design; employees management; and brand communication and marketing. The chapter discussions examine how these interventions change the physical structure and relational/social aspects by which hospitality spaces are re-constructed and re-designed and as a result redefine the hospitality experience and the essence of hospitality itself. It becomes evident that COVID-19 has "forced" hospitality operators to rethink the redesign of all aspects of the customer experience in hospitality including, the (digital) touchpoints, the stages and sequence of the customer journey, the design and expanded frontiers of the customer journey. Overall, COVID-19 is affecting the way hospitality is defined and experienced, the way hospitality spaces are conceived, constructed and consumed, the way hospitality stakeholders can re-imagine their business and social practices to co-create (meaningful) value to a new and hopefully better economy.

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