

Guests' Behavior and Emotions After COVID: Side-Effects Felt on Hospitality Revenue Management

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Abstract: The study delves into the profound ramifications of COVID-19 on the tourism and hospitality sector, centering its attention on the intricate facets of guest behavior and emotions. Through a meticulous direct approach, we unearthed that the pandemic instigated an unparalleled wave of fear and apprehension among individuals. Yet, intriguingly, our findings illuminate that these emotions were transient, giving way to an astonishing resurgence in 2022, which not only surpassed the preceding year but also eclipsed the benchmarks set in the pre-pandemic zenith of 2019. What sets this research apart is the resounding validation it received from a diverse spectrum of stakeholders, including both discerning guests and seasoned industry professionals. Their unanimous endorsement stands as a testament to the industry's resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. It speaks volumes about the collective resolve to not only weather the storm but to emerge stronger and more innovative than ever before. This study not only offers invaluable insights for industry leaders and policymakers but also instills a sense of optimism in a world recovering from the profound impacts of a global crisis. It serves as a beacon of hope, illuminating a path forward towards a revitalized and thriving tourism and hospitality landscape.

Keywords: Guests Emotions, Tourism Management, Guest Experience, Hotel Management, Online Travel Agents, Revenue Management

1. Introduction

1.1. Relevance

Since the beginning of human societies, we have all integrated natural environments, and so, following this theory, it is understood that social metabolism is changed according to the interactions had in social environments, which could explain the reasons behind the mass consumption on buffets and the perceived value added over personalized services provided by hotel units [10, 20].

The brand image is nowadays powerful over customer decision-making upon purchase period, and when is pointed to hospitality and tourism management, it is the destination image

that makes it considerable for customers to decide whether they go or not to travel to that destination [2, 5, 9, 39, 40].

It is also important to understand the potential crisis, how it is supposed to recover, and analyze relevant markets, to better compact hotel strategies to the side effects to be felt due to the pandemic, as for instance, the safety measure taken over time, hotels have been criticized about the impacts on climate change [1, 4, 17, 19].

1.2. Context

From a social exchange perspective, the destination's social responsibility is determinant for tourists to have intrinsic trust and greater intention to visit the destination, so, in the worst-case scenario, hotels should be afraid of overall

rules established by the government of the corresponding country and as well, bear in mind that the rules of each municipality, as it may influence the supply chain but specific constraints applied [6, 7, 8, 32].

By the sense of destination branding, it is implied that internally, hotels would be culturally independent [3, 12, 14], which behavior should, however, be adapted to consumers' behavior [20], although, the adaptation could suffer higher repercussions when government behavior is not according to consumers' needs and expectations, which could negatively impact operations in a way that guests would be willing to travel to a specific hotel but they do not move further because of destination restrictions.

1.3. Research Question

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many hotels were afraid about the possible mutations to be found in guests' behavior, therefore, the intention of this essay is to compare whether this is true or not by designing a survey that will provide inputs for it. The survey will be conducted for guests and potential hospitality guests to draw their current behavior upon making reservations. To short the research question, the intake is: Is the consumer different, or was it only a temporary feeling of "travel fear"?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hotel Guests' Behavior

The number of deaths registered between the beginning of the pandemic and the time of analysis of the corresponding paper has led to "unprecedented levels of anxiety, fear and panic" among guests, which also has increased the avoidance of human contact. In terms of guests' expressions [39], was very tough to identify and interpret guests' willingness to stay and enjoy the usual hotel services. Some authors went further and stated that hotel guests had a potential behavioral transformation [17, 30, 37]. Understanding the psychological distance developed by the pandemic and how this empowers potential risks for hoteliers is needed.

Guests are nowadays more digital and frequently seek other people who have been in the chosen location and review their experience and online reviews before choosing the provider [16, 36, 38].

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "*COVID-19 is a highly transmissible infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and has as its main symptoms fever, fatigue, and dry cough, and may have more serious consequences depending on the health status of each infected person.*" [34, 35].

The impact of the pandemic, rather than an immediate contraction in demand, proved to have a structural impact on travel consumer behavior as it led to accelerated migration to the online and remote environment. In fact, humans have started to live in an atypical way, where the concerns and priorities have shifted to safety, hygiene, health, and well-being, rather than enjoyment, travel, and sightseeing.

According to a study conducted by *TravelBi – Turismo de Portugal*, "*The impact of COVID-19 on the air travel behavior of European tourists and the consequences for tourist destinations*" (April 2022), the pandemic has shown that there is little or no knowledge about how consumers make decisions under conditions of risk, as was the case with the COVID-19 pandemic. This is one of the main reasons why it is so important to understand what impacts were felt by the hotel industry emerges.

2.2. Hotels Revenue Management Practices

Differentiation must is nowadays a KPI among hotels' Revenue Management (RM) and Hotels' Management (HM) itself, that managers should be aware [2, 13, 15], concerning the supply chain constraints existing and emphasized by the COVID-19 pandemic, the expectations, and needs from guests are now centered in other perspectives, as sanitation, proximity to other guests and even the staff [18, 29, 39], also, this might affect the potential mutations over consumers behavior upon reservations periods and decision-making over it, which would directly influence the contribution of RM to the supply chain sustainability [22, 24], and by following this same theory, there would be evidences to justify why does a twin room on the first floor has a different price from a twin room on the upper floors.

The digital transformation needed upon the emergence of COVID-19 [1, 23], brought evidence that hotels were not up-to-date ready to the mandatory requirements for the transformation to take place, stating that hoteliers need to understand the key customers in their clients segment, in order to then, underline their main needs and expectations which after would underline and justify the rates and rate fences per room and typology [21, 25].

3. Methodology

3.1. Investigation Procedure

This essay has relied on a systemic literature review with updates on the information published between the months of August and September of 2022, which has allowed us to retrieve the current state of the art about the patterns of consumers' behaviors, however, there were lacks of information about Portuguese hospitality guests, and so, there was the intention to design a survey in Portuguese and English language to retrieve the needed data and also to contrast the Portuguese guests' behavior with the literature found.

The article focuses on understanding and describing the sector's current status performance.

The study was focused on data analysis on mixed methods, whereas quantitative data from the sample was intended to provide significant insights to qualify whether there are comparative relations with written literature or if this public differs from others.

3.2. Literature Selection

The literature selection went according to the quality

standards seek for this essay, to achieve the best outcomes from the literature review and to design the survey, all data was retrieved from SCOPUS and Web of Science, focusing on Q1 and Q2 journals. Besides articles, the research was also based on statistical data published by the Portuguese tourism council and the Portuguese government. Also, proceeded to the inclusion of classical literature “on the books”.

3.3. Sample and Data Collection

Concerning the data extracted, we have achieved 240 answers, from 2 periods for contrasting mutations, developed in 2022, in which we have removed 20 that were considered invalid, plus we have conducted some interviews with top managers to collect hand-on data.

The survey was published on the author's social media and personal website and distributed among others. Also, besides the data collected, several professionals among Touristic Operators, Travel Agents, and Outsourced Revenue Managers (ORM's), provided inputs from their experience on the 2022 activity in the hospitality industry, between hotels and short-term rentals. In terms of adjacent businesses of Tourism and Hospitality, we have retrieved data from restaurants and bars concerning consumption in this period.

Besides the collected data, there was also placed to use data extracted by the Portuguese Travel center “Travel-BI”, a Business Intelligence tool developed by the Portuguese tourism council.

4. Results and Discussion

According to the information given by ORM's, the northern market was very interesting to evaluate in terms of national demand as the Portuguese people as increased their demand in the northern regions covering up to 51% of the total occupancy of hotels (in the specific case of Porto), which has stated by the 2 professionals inquired has “Portugal was discovered by the Portuguese”, which in fact was a theory developed by themselves as a phenomenon that has happened due to the lack of willingness to go abroad. “The concerns about sanitation, the fears about the war between Ukraine and Russia led people to seek safer places to enjoy the holidays which would allow escaping the worried mindset suffered during this period.” Said one of the ORMs.

In the same analysis, both ORMs stated that 2022 was the best year ever for Portuguese hospitality and even new hotel units were already “above revenue projections, in September 2022”, which was interesting to understand that new hotels with higher prices were able to accomplish the occupancy rate proposed.

A derivative question made to these ORMs was: “Do you find that this is a game changer for units that do not have Revenue Management implemented nor a Revenue Management System?” to this question ORM agreed on “The culture is changing, and we are now more active than reactive, so people are paying more attention to data available and taking actions over it, but there is still a huge gap between companies that understand and apply revenue

and those who do not.” They went further to say “Smaller units are still considered the «me too» companies, as they investigate the comp. set. and change their rates from a reactive perspective to copy strategy and usually incurred into poor performance on the advantage that was possible to take over the market growth”.

Related to the consumption on the F&B (Food & Beverage) businesses approached, it was possible to evaluate that the consumer behavior has returned to the same patterns prior to COVID, gatherings are happening again from Friday to Sunday, and the peak hours registered on the city bars are happening post-work on Fridays, has local owners have stated: “People leave their workplace and go directly to the bar to meet up with friends for relaxation moment, and a new reality that we are experiencing is that, these clients stay here for longer periods, they are here, some days until after 9pm, and this is something happening in a frequent perspective as after they go and have dinner for a longer period as well and return to the bar only after midnight, which sometimes causes us impacts on the cost structure to manage Human Resources as we incur into periods of few tasks to do”.

It was also possible to understand through the data extracted from Travel-BI, that the overall room nights in 2022 YtD (Year to Date = October 2022) has registered 47,1M room nights, a variation of 133,8% when comparing to the homologous period, however, this could correspond to the high impact of cancellations registered, as in 2021 the number of room nights was 37,3M for the all year with a positive variance of 44,7%, which however is not so much of a good number as in 2020 the overall room nights was 25,8M but with a negative variance of 63,2%, so, moving back to “prior to COVID” period, it was possible to understand that we are still behind the pace registered in 2019, where the number of room nights registered was of 70,2M [26].

Now, concerning the number of guests, provided by the same database, the average room nights per guest is 2,68, as the number of guests registered for this YtD period is of 17,6M, increasing the status of Portugal to be a City Break destination where guests do not overstay for longer periods, also, the variance is “only” of 128,7%, which means that there is an increase of room nights with less guests, which could represent an opportunity for hotel units to promote longer stays within the main markets (Spain, UK, France, Germany and USA), however since the “pre-COVID” period (2019) the number of guests decreased 9,5M, which is also important to evaluate because from 2019 to 2020 there was a loss of 16,7 and the recover since then was only 7,2, which again states that the hospitality sector is yet in need to recover the pace, also important to mention that from 2020 to 2021 there was a growth of 4,1M guests and from 2021 to this year (YtD), the increase is of “only” 3,1M [27].

The last KPI that we have evaluated was Revenue, which we have seen that Revenue has increased 155,7% in 2022 (YtD), being at 14,4bn €, KPI that is currently quite good for the overall performance as in 2022 the revenue generated by guest is 818€ and in 2019 the revenue per guest was 675€, which emphasizes the Revenue Management quality applied

through the services with a revenue per guest growth of 17,48% [28].

The results retrieved from the surveys, brought the understanding that nowadays, people tend to travel in Family/in groups (56,42%), and usually, the mode of stay is 3 nights, making the city breaks segment more relevant in-between the Portuguese consumers, which represent 93,5% of the respondents of this survey. Also, worth mentioning that the average salary of the respondents is 15.000€, the most repeated answer on the number of reservations per inquired is 2, and most respondents responded between 1 and 3 reservations, 1 reservation = 21,77% of the respondents, 2 reservations = 28,23% of the respondents (acc = 50%), and 3 reservations = 20,97%.

It is important to also mention that, according to the survey, there is the need to have 14 reservations in the hotel to have one made by a passive guest, as the results have shown that *"From all the hotel stays that you make during the year, all of them are booked by you?"* it was possible to see that 69,27% of the respondents book their stays and the remaining respondents are participants, also worth mention that from the 110 female respondents, the pattern is to travel with family 34,55% of the female answers pointing to that direction, followed by trips in couple 14,55% and then in groups 11,82%, placing the remaining respondents answering that it depends on the holidays, they might mix the people with whom they might travel; while contrasting with the male segment (n = 69), there is a tie between those who travel with the family and in couple = 21,74%, and in third place we can observe that 10,14% of the respondents travel alone.

Connecting the previous information, we can understand that the male segment n = 69, that manages the reservations = 69,57% usually do it when in group 25%, then for holidays with the family 18,75% and finally, then book to travel alone 12,5%; however, when they do not manage = 30,43% the reservation but participate, the pattern is to be in family holidays first 28,57%, then in couple 14,29% and then with a Business partner with 9,52%; while on the female segment n = 110, the reservations managed = 69,09% of the respondents saying that they manage their holidays and the pattern is to manage trips with family first 31,58%, then in couples with 17,11% and finally trips in groups 10,53%, as reservations where female segment participate but do not manage the reservation (30,91%), the pattern is to participate in holidays with family 41,18%, then in groups 14,71%, and finally in couple 8,82%.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Conclusion

According to the data extracted with this essay, it is possible to understand that major efforts have relied on Revenue Management rather than inventory management, which is a good strategy and maybe the only one to adopt in tough times like these, where with the high fixed costs and low variable costs [11], the focus should be to improve and

increase the Revenue itself.

Through the reports of some professionals in the hospitality industry, as well as hotelier consumers of tourist accommodations in continental Portugal, it was possible to understand the main changes felt both in emotional terms and in consumer behavior, and, on the other hand, what impacts can be registered regarding Revenue Management.

Speaking about consumer behavior, which figures itself as the main indicator to understand within the RM strategy, we can understand that the value proposition from Portuguese tourism is mainly centered on foreign clients, as the average revenue generated by guests is 115€ higher than the minimum salary in Portugal.

Concerning the research question, with the registered growth, we can only assume that the "travel fear" was a temporary feeling without major repercussions over what could be expected as a slowdown in the tourism and hospitality sector. Even though concerning the surveys, it was possible to understand that the major concern about traveling was not the person as an individual, but the respondents said that were the rules established by the destination and concerns about their relatives.

By focusing on the Portuguese culture, it is possible to state that concerning the length of stay of the respondents and considering that most answers were retrieved from Portuguese people, it is possible to say that it is preferable for this guests, to do more bookings that increase the length of stay of one booking, as 70,97% (n = 127), of the respondents, have answered that they make an average of 2 reservations a year with a mode of 3 nights per reservation.

Considering the booking behavior of the consumers, we may realize that the male segment has more interest in managing bookings for group trips, and participating in trips as a family or couple, so, if it is to travel in a family or group, it is preferable to men, if someone else books it while contrasting with the female pattern the interest relies on managing bookings for the family.

In couples and finally in groups, and to participate in trips with the family, then in groups and then in couples, where it is interesting to see that on both genders, family trips are the ones where there is higher participation but the biggest booking management interest is centered on group trips.

5.2. Study Limitations

The main limitations to emphasize in this essay rely on the information needed for data analysis, as the main publications of tourism data are published from INE (National Institute of Statistics) and the Portuguese Tourism Council which are not public instantaneity, which it was found as a major constraint to compare data provided by the interviewees and available databases accessed with the data from other units, markets, and regions. Also, in terms of data extracted from Travel-BI, this tool had data updated only until August in some cases, in others until September and this has made it hard to have a clear idea of how to forecast the potential of 2022 in terms of how it would end.

5.3. Further Studies

For further studies, we would aim to discover if this

perspective described on the Portuguese, and other realities could be applied to other countries as if the nationals would be interested in discovering their countries as well.

Appendix

Table 1. Survey design.

References	Question	Type	Goals	Inputs
	Género Gender	Single answer	To understand and differ the behavior characteristics between man and woman	a. Masculino Male b. Feminino Female c. Prefiro não dizer I prefer not to mention
	Idade Age	Single answer	To position potential differences identified on the first question by generation and to see if there is any mutation overtime.	a. [18 – 23] b. [24 – 29] c. [30 – 35] d. [36 – 41] e. [42 – 47] f. [48 – 53] g. [+54] a. Higiene dos hotéis Hotels' sanitation b. Higiene dos transportes públicos Public transports sanitation c. Regras impostas pelo país destino Rules established by destination d. Receio pelos meus familiares Afraid for my family e. Other: _____
(Gössling et al., 2020; He et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020; Newlands et al., 2020)	Enquanto consumidor, qual considera ter sido o maior impacto / diferença sentida durante a pandemia? As a consumer, what do you consider to have been the biggest impact /difference felt during the pandemic?	Single or multiple answer	To understand consumer perceived observations concerning actions taken by hoteliers.	
(P Bastos, 2022; Pan et al., 2021)	Considera que pelas razões anteriores, se tornou mais exigente nos hotéis? Do you consider that for the previous reasons, you have become more demanding in hotels?	Single answer	To understand if nowadays there is still the need of retain, improve, or remove any standards to improve consumers' experience.	a. Sim Yes b. Não No
(Eva et al., 2019; Goyal et al., 2019; Kamble et al., 2018; Kimes, 2011; Riasi et al., 2017; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2017)	Em que area passa mais tempo, nas suas estadias? During your stays, in which area do you spend the most time?	Single or Multiple answer	To understand which Point of Sale (POS) is more interesting on clients perspective	a. Alojamento Rooms b. Restaurante Restaurant c. Bar d. Spa e. Salas de conferência Conference rooms f. Piscina (interior ou exterior) Pool (indoor or outdoor)
(Költringer and Dickinger, 2015; Wen et al., 2020)	Considera que o vírus e o contágio do mesmo mudaram a sua perceção acerca da importância da higienização nos estabelecimentos hoteleiros? Do you think that the virus and its contagion have changed your perception about the importance of hygiene in hotel establishments?	Single answer	To understand consumer perceived observations which shall be considered by hoteliers.	a. Sim Yes b. Não No
(P Bastos, 2022; Ye et al., 2017)	Que canal/canais utiliza para comprar as suas experiências? Which channel(s) do you use to purchase your experiences?	Single or Multiple answer	To understand two things, if clients loyalty begin within the choice of OTA and to approach an overview of the OTA usage vs direct reservations	a. Booking.com b. Hotels.com c. Expedia d. Airbnb e. Travel agency f. Directly with the hotel g. Other: _____
(P Bastos, 2022; Ye et al., 2017)	Costuma consultar websites de simulação e comparação de preço antes de reservar? Do you usually consult simulation and price comparison websites before booking?	Single answer	To corroborate if the previous choice of OTA's relies on pricing or the OTA quality itself.	a. No b. Yes c. If yes, mention them: _____
(Dewandre, 2020; Zheng et al., 2021)	Hoje em dia, com que antecedência reserva as suas férias? Nowadays, how far in advance do you book your vacations?	Single answer	To understand if the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) is still on clients mindset when projecting their holidays.	a. 2 semanas de antecedência Two weeks before b. 1 month

References	Question	Type	Goals	Inputs
(Barnes et al., 2014; Hsu et al., 2010; Hussein et al., 2018; Ning, 2017; Prentice, 2020; Robinson and Clifford, 2012; Tsai and Wang, 2017; Tung and Ritchie, 2011)	Algum período das suas férias é passado fora do seu país de residência? Is any of your vacation time spent outside your country of residence?	Single answer	To understand if clients' expectations are to always travel abroad or to stay nearby their relatives and home.	c. 2 months d. 3 months e. + 4 months f. Reservo à última da hora Last minute bookings
(Hsu et al., 2010)	Como costuma passar as suas férias? How do you usually spend you holidays?	Single or multiple answers	Following the previous question, to understand the causes of traveling abroad or not.	a. With family b. With friends c. Alone d. Outra: _____ a. 500-1.000€ b. 1.000-1.500€ c. 1.500-2.000€ d. 2.000-2.500€ e. 2.500-3.000€ f. +3.000€
(Jang and Moutinho, 2019)	Quanto gasta em média no total das suas férias? How much do you spend on average for your holidays?	Single answer	To understand the average spend among the consumers who answer the survey.	

Source Authors

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