

The Hospitality Industry in Times of Covid: Changes in Management and Recovery Strategies: A Look from the Hotel Sector in Marrakech



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ABSTRACT: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector worldwide has undergone all kinds of changes, from operational to organizational. This study responds to requests for research on the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the hotel industry by analyzing the changes produced by this crisis as well as the management strategies implemented by hotels to counter its consequences in Marrakech. Information collected from in-depth interviews with hotel managers, the analysis of the content of information published by specialized entities and the descriptive bibliographic review from academic sources allowed a diagnosis of these establishments at the most critical moment, identify survival strategies and future prospects. As a result, tourism and hospitality are among the sectors most affected by the pandemic, and hotels continue to devise strategies to reduce costs, strengthen safety protocols and, above all, design new products that meet the new requirements of the guest. Based on these results, this research suggests practical implications for helping hotel managers formulate strategies to create a secure customer experience.

KEYWORDS: Hotel management, COVID-19, recovery strategies, Organizational impact, Marrakech.

I. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) is one of the most striking events of the 21st century. The first cases of this virus were reported from China in December 2019 and by March 2020 it was already around the world, it was at that time that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic. As a highly contagious virus among people and there is no cure, the WHO recommended a series of measures to stop infections such as cancelling all kinds of mass events, travel, restriction of mobility of persons and closure of different sectors worldwide.

Clearly, tourism is one of the most affected productive sectors by the impacts of COVID-19 and the situation has been appalling in the true sense of the word. Tourism activity dropped sharply to almost zero. More than a third of humanity is confined, air traffic has decreased by 90%, and tourist attractions are closed. A disaster for a sector that managed more than 1.5 billion tourists a year grew much faster than the global economy, accounted for more than 10% of global GDP and employed more than 300 million people (UNWTO, 2020).

The expansion of the coronavirus in the world has caused not only a global health crisis, but also a crisis of unfounded mobility and trust, that most affects the tourism sector in the short and medium term, by modifying our travel habits and driving tourism businesses and destinations to make significant changes to adapt to new needs and preferences of demand. All this creates a new paradigm for the Moroccan tourism sector, which will have to face this new reality.

In particular, the accommodation subsector presents a complex situation, since, due to the isolation, most of the clients' reservations were cancelled. Some of the big chains are still operating, but many of the smaller properties have closed their doors (Jain, 2020). What makes them more vulnerable is that hotels have high fixed costs; therefore, they are sensitive to economic conditions, since, in periods of crisis, they cannot reduce a significant part of their costs (El Azyzy, 2022). While some markets have faced similar pandemics, such as SARS and H1N1 (Gu and Wall, 2006; Henderson and Ng, 2004; Hung et al., 2018; McKercher and Chon, 2004; Pine and McKercher, 2004; Tew et al., 2008), this is the first global pandemic to hit hotels in this way (Jiang & Wen, 2020). As a result, lessons learned from previous pandemics have limited widespread application to COVID-19 (Garrido- Moreno et al, 2021). While research on hotel strategic responses to the pandemic is growing (Garrido-Moreno et al, 2021), the implications

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of these responses need to be considered. It is important to explore the potential long-term effects of these strategic responses so that when hotels attempt to 'return to normal' and cancel some of their responses, there are guidelines on what can be changed, at what pace and with what form of considerations (El Azyzy, 2022).

The objective of this article is to publicize the operational and management changes generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in the hotel industry, studying some of the theoretical approaches of the strategic management to the analysis of the measures implemented by the managers of establishments of the housing subsector of the city of Marrakech (tourist capital of Morocco) in dealing with this unprecedented crisis. To this end, portals of associations and specialized platforms and associated literature were reviewed. Finally, managers of several establishments dedicated to this activity were interviewed, which included hotels of large format chains, other medium sized hotels and the association of tourism SMEs, which, among other operators of the value chain in this sector, groups and represents small hosting service providers. The choice of Marrakech as the center of the study will then be justified due to the importance that Marrakech has for world tourism and the importance that tourism has for the Moroccan economy.

To achieve this objective, the article begins with a literature review in which approaches to strategic management in times of crisis and turbulence are presented, to then describe theoretical and empirical aspects of the tourism sector and the accommodation subsector in the current pandemic situation. In addition, the actions taken by different hotel firms throughout the world to face this new reality are introduced. Then, the methodology used in the study is explained, to give way to the results, where the actions taken by different hotels in Marrakech are presented, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and their strategies for the future of these establishments. The results of the study will allow the hotel industry to better understand the different strategies used to respond to COVID-19 and their perceived long-term impacts, as well as the consequences of changes in the hotel sector in a post- COVID-19.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Crisis Situation and Hospitality Industry

Tourism activity has suffered various crises due to natural phenomena (tsunamis, volcanoes, etc.), major fires or terrorist attacks (Faulkner, 2001; Mair, Ritchie and Walters, 2016); however, we never witnessed such a closure, such a sudden and global blockade. Tourism is one of the sectors most affected by the health crisis because it limits the bases of the tourist system: the movement of people and the agglomeration in the spaces most used by visitors. Various research and institutional studies (Exceltur, 2020c; Gössling, Scott Hall, 2020; OECD, 2020; UNWTO, 2020d; WTTC, 2020) had predicted a decisive setback in 2020 and the years to come.

World tourism registered its worst year in 2020, with a fall in international arrivals of 74%, according to the latest data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Destinations worldwide received one billion fewer international arrivals in 2020 than the previous year, due to an unprecedented collapse in demand and widespread travel restrictions (WTO, 2021a). According to the latest UNWTO Global Tourism Barometer, (2021), the collapse of international travel represents an estimated loss of \$1.3 trillion in export earnings, a figure that multiplies by more than eleven the losses recorded during the global economic crisis of 2009. The crisis has put between 100 and 120 million direct tourist jobs at risk, many of them in small and medium-sized enterprises.

This decrease in tourists has brought with it significant impacts in all sectors of the tourism value chain. From 9 March 2020, when countries such as China and South Korea began closing borders, until 25 April of the same year, the virus had spread to 196 countries and generated a massive closure of airports and the cancellation of flights (WTO, 2020a). Until the end of April 2020, it was estimated that only 5% of the aircraft would be in circulation and used mainly for cargo (IATA, 2020). This led to the cancellation of 3.5 million global trips until April 2020. Airlines represented by the International Air Transport Association estimated losses close to US\$258 million for 2020 alone. The crisis led different low-cost airlines mostly to resort to different state bailouts to deal with the financial crisis (IATA, 2020).

The impact on the hotel sector has also been negative. To the situation of closure of establishments must be added that the tourism sector in general and the hotel, in particular, it has been one of the last to enter normal after the de-escalation processes and after the reduction of air restrictions and the closure of borders (Tobar, 2020). Worldwide, the hotel industry was declining due to the pandemic, the REVPAR in the United States, Spain, Germany, Italy and China was falling at the beginning of the year, which represents a great loss of money for hotel companies, so several hotels had to suspend operations. In general, it means that international distortions for the industry were caused and the significant fall suffered by the European hotel market (Kumar, 2020).

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In China, three of the world's best-known brands reported suspension of operations. Hilton closed 150 hotels, IHG closed 160 properties and Marriott closed 90 of its hotels. In some cases, the hotels are kept on foot, but with reduced employees, which generates costs for the company despite not receiving profits. However, some hotels still have guests associated with emergency companies, hospitals and transportation (Marham & Stewart, 2020).

On the other hand, in the United States the unemployment rate rose for the first months of the year, as hotels had to dismiss chefs, waiters, managers, among others (Patel & Kulkarni, 2020).

In Spain, according to the Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourist Accommodation (CEHAT), 97% of hotel activity was suspended. This has brought with it a problem of large-scale unemployment; for example, only the four main Spanish hotel chains (Meliá, Barceló, NH and RIU) have generated more than 25,000 temporary contract terminations and asked the government for help in paying their salaries (Asociación de Empresarios Hoteleros de Costa del Sol [AEHCOS], 2020).

Another representative example of the impact of covid-19 in the hotel sector is the situation of this industry in France. Until March 17, 2020, when the border closure began, an occupation of 3.3% was registered throughout the country. According to STR (a company that collects information on hotel occupancy and trends worldwide), Paris reported the greatest impact, since only 1.8% occupancy was registered during that month, a decrease of 97.2% if compares with the same period of 2019 (STR, 2020).

In the case of India, loss of income in hotels due to border closures and travel restrictions, a sharp drop in revenues was projected in the financial year 2020-2021. The hotel sector was in decline since the beginning of the year, so the hotel associations decided to make proposals to stay in the market and guarantee work to their employees, Also, receive help from the Government with the payment of arrears and loans to reactivate the sector (Kumar, 2020).

Hotel companies in Morocco, under the consequences of the pandemic, had to stop their operations definitively, since they did not receive income due to the closure and prohibition of tourist activities by the State, It also generated the return of money to customers who had active reservations in the country's hotels, especially in Marrakech. (El Azyzy, 2020). According to the statistics of the Department of Financial Studies and Forecasts (DEPF) under the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Administration Reform, the losses of the tourism sector in the first half of 2020 approached 18.3 billion Dirhams, what means 44% of revenues, while tourist arrivals and overnight stays in classified accommodation establishments declined by 63.5% and 59.1% respectively during the same period. From the peak period of July onwards, the tourism sector continues to show significant revenue withdrawals that have fallen by more than 90% compared to the average of the same period.

Some of the most significant changes within the hospitality sector, from the perspective of the post-COVID tourist, will be related to reservations in small hotels and cruise ships, since there will be less concentration of people. In addition, buffet service and à la carte dishes would be restricted to avoid possible contamination; health protocols during the stay and transfer of the guest to generate confidence in services; and capacity reduction in hotel establishments (Castello, 2020).

In this context, despite the uncertainty, countries must be practical and quick in their diagnoses and strategies. Those proactive destinations that anticipate the response and coordinate the different public and private actors in crisis management can increase the positive impacts and decrease the negative ones (Faulkner, 2001; Evans & Elphick, 2005; De Sausmarez, 2007; Mair et al. , 2016); Chan, C.S., Nozu, K. & Cheung, T.O.L., 2020). Despite the devastating impact that the pandemic continues to have, hotel sales and marketing teams are doubling down on their efforts and doing everything they can to maximize their revenues now, with the knowledge that the end of the pandemic could potentially be in sight.

2) Recommended reactivation strategies for the management of hotel services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the face of the global crisis in the hotel sector caused by the corona virus, the most important thing is to remain calm and think rationally with a focus on long-term strategies that respond to different scenarios (Hu, Liu and Yu, 2020). A large number of empirical studies have been conducted to explain the strategies that managers design to deal with turbulence and chaos. Thus, for authors such as De Villa and Rajwani (2013), the strategic response to face the crisis in organizations is strongly influenced by the perception of their managers, which is formed by their cognitive scheme, personal beliefs and social interactions. According to the authors, these perceptions affect the choice of strategic responses that determine the way forward for the organization. Therefore, the recommendations and steps to take in different critical areas within the organization of a hotel are presented, which will serve as a push for the recovery of the establishment.

2.1. Strategies in the administrative areas of hotels

a) Finance and Revenue Management

After the pandemic, success will depend on the strategy used for revenue and the skills of managers to identify new trends and adapt to them. The first point is Revenue Management, from which attention should be focused on the budget of the hotel and the provision of income and if necessary the numbers should be adjusted (Hu, Lui & Yue, 2020). Data analytics tools will be vital

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to undermining the impact that the pandemic will have on the hotel's revenue stream. Likewise, support the development of a more flexible business strategy focused on earning income in the lower months, saving strategies, which help the recovery of the organization (Baynova, 2020).

Dynamic prices, even in times of low demand, help hotels attract bookings and generate revenue needed for recovery. With the current low demand, it is difficult to sell with high rates, so it is suggested to consider new price categories for all types of room and lodging, and evaluate how the market responds. More attractive discounts can also be considered for longer stays, which will help control sales costs.

On the other hand, the predictions of the speed of the establishment's recovery should not be too pessimistic, but should be kept realistic in the short, medium and long term, accompanied by an adjustment in sales strategies. As for the forecasting process, it is vital as not only a basis for price control, but as a tool to make decisions regarding the personnel, operation and liquidity of the company (Hu et al., 2020). An important aspect in times of crisis is to maintain cash flow and operations within the hotel. By making this point difficult, the finance area could take into account the management of energy costs, the negotiation with suppliers and the reduction of rental costs....

b) Human Resources

During disasters, the high performance of hotel employees should be considered valuable resources for the company. Therefore, every hotel should aim to retain their employees as much as possible during the pandemic. For hotels located within areas with a high rate of Covid-19 cases, it is vital to guarantee the physical, psychological and salary health of workers located in front of the house. On the other hand, hotels will need to reduce non-essential labor costs (McKercher, 2020). In terms of labor cost, efforts should be made to reduce employee overtime and encourage staff to take annual vacations during non-activity months. Another option to be used by this area would be to schedule mandatory training sessions during the hotel's low demand period (Hu et al., 2020).

During the outbreak of the virus, the human resources area must be in constant communication with the financial and revenue management area to be updated on the forecasts of daily occupancy of the hotel and provide adequate staffing (Hu et al., 2020).

c) Sales and advertising channels

Promotion and sales channels need to be maintained during the epidemic (Hu et al., 2020). As El Azyzy, (2020) comments, to keep in sight of potential guests it is necessary to update any changes or novelty in the establishment through newspapers and social networks.

Days after the proliferation of the SARS epidemic in February 2003, confidence in travel by the population is greatly diminished. So if we talk about post-COVID advertising, this should focus on assuring the guest or traveler that the environment to which it arrives is safe and healthy (Hu et al., 2020). The hotel industry should focus on its most remote locations; taking this into account, resorts, eco-friendly hotels, attractions away from large cities or locations focused on nature or culture will have great potential for promotion (Syahira et al., 2020).

Although the management of company's sales channels is becoming more and more relevant, these will not be the same again after the pandemic, there will be a decrease in the number of reservations in the different channels that the establishment has therefore, and a good management of these to establish the positioning of the hotel brand is a very important task. Likewise, sales teams must maintain communication with their corporate clients and associates, to be informed about their trips and reservation policies (Hu et al., 2020).

Regarding communication channels, the Covid-19 will force an innovation in the hotel's communication, where there is a fluid and receptive exchange of information and decision-making (Moorhouse, 2020). A tool to use at this point would be mobile communication applications that have gained popularity for office automation, remote conferences and online training, such as Zoom, Teams, WeLink, among others (Li et al., 2020). In this way, combining office technologies, tools and platforms, hotels can establish an effective remote command and management system to organize meetings.

There are several resources that can serve as advertising channels such as social networks, so they should be used by companies to send a message to the public and regain confidence in their establishment (Hu et al., 2020).

d) Marketing

The marketing area should have three main tasks. The first will be customer-based. Future market trends, market segmentation and changes in customer profile after the end of the crisis should be analyzed and forecast. Like, for example, the corporate customer market being one of the first and fastest to be reactivated. Due to this, more in-depth analysis of consumer insights should be carried out and their new needs and expectations should be investigated (Hu et al., 2020). Hoteliers should choose to

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invest in the search for new segments, as guest behavior will change after quarantine and life will slowly return to normal (Baynova, 2020). The panic caused by this kind of phenomenon tends to cause long-term variations in people, so it will be necessary to evaluate who will be the new demographic target audience (Hu et al., 2020).

Secondly, there is the product. From a financial perspective, hotels must diversify the products or services offered to the public, to increase the profitability of establishments through alternative resources. Such as food delivery, laundry services, among others. The alternative of offering long stays and offering hotel rooms as apartments that contribute to the organization's liquidity should be considered (Hu et al., 2020).

Finally, the market and its trends should be analyzed and adjustments made to the price estimate. During the time without activity, prices could become unbalanced, which is why price structures should be established that consider the value of the company and the cash flow that you have. Discounted rates should not be reduced or cancellation restrictions (Hu et al., 2020). In times of crisis, temporary changes must be made to the hotel's existing policies, such as flexible cancellation policies, flexible rates for services, and structuring health and hygiene policies (Syahira et al., 2020).

2.2. Strategies implemented in the operational areas of hotels

a) Housekeeping

This area should concentrate on the provision of sanitation and control of rooms. It must be in constant communication with the revenue management area to make reasonable arrangements for the use of rooms in terms of energy savings per floor (Hu et al., 2020).

It will have to keep updated with the new requirements of the guest in terms of hygiene in the environments, so they will focus in more detail on health services; among these handheld disinfectants in the rooms, fresh air systems, and high quality bedding to improve service quality and customer satisfaction (Hu et al., 2020).

b) Food and Beverages

The food and beverage area should reduce its supply of dishes to two or three for lunch and dinner, thus reducing not only the purchase of supplies but also waste from the area. In addition, a new form of income can be developed, refocusing hotel restaurants to provide "contactless" food delivery services to capture demand during the quarantine period (Hu et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the appearance of the Covid-19 virus will have an impact on eating habits and their preferences when choosing establishments to feed. People will give more importance to hygiene and healthy eating, so each brand of hotel should have this change of mind when devising offers in the menus of their restaurants (Hu et al., 2020).

Guests who choose to stay at the hotel during the pandemic time preferred to eat in their rooms and avoid sitting with anyone else in the restaurants. Considering this, if they want to attract customers to restaurants, they must redesign the flow and tables in these areas, to minimize contact between one guest and another and thus reduce the risk of contagion (Hu et al., 2020). Some hotels should consider expanding their market and explore new segments such as offices near their establishments that do not have cafeterias to provide delivery of not only prepared dishes, but also snacks. This could benefit the hotel's reputation, in addition to increasing the hotel's revenue and obtaining greater cash flow (Hu et al., 2020).

c) Events Area

Hotels characterized by offering conventions and large events are those that face the greatest difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. The loss of revenue in this area, not only in the hotel industry but also in the local economy of each of these hotels will have repercussions for the following years. This will be the sector with the longest recovery compared to other segments (Hu et al., 2020).

The recovery of the event area depends on the confidence that will be had in the security of the city in which the hotel and its establishment are located. Distancing standards will reduce the number of attendees allowed to events, resulting in a 50% decrease in event attendance by the end of 2020 (Rauch & Anderon, 2020). Taking this scenario into account, the following Table lists some points to implement to ensure the confidence and safety of those attending post-COVID events.

Actions to be implemented to ensure the confidence and security of attendees at post-COVID events

Actions to implement	Description
Temperature control	People with a temperature greater than 37 degrees are not allowed in.
Distribution of masks	Masks are offered for both event attendees and staff. As well as gloves, hand sanitizer and/or disinfecting wipes, along with standard event materials.
	Hand disinfectant stations without contact.

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Creative design of spaces	It should have larger corridors, marked circulation routes and avoid the grouping of attendees in certain areas. Mark 6 feet of space between attendees.
Contactless food and beverage delivery	Service personnel will wear gloves, masks and protective equipment.

Source: adapted from Rauch & Anderon, 2020.

3) Reactivation strategies used in hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In disaster situations, the first task on the agenda should be the formation of an efficient management team focused on disaster management (Faulkner, 2001). Various hotel chains, such as Dossen, BTG, IHG, Huazhu, Jinjiang, Wanda, Marriott, Helton, Acor and New Century, established disaster management teams in the pre-COVID stage and during the pandemic, thus taking over the leadership of the entire organization, command and action (Moorhouse, 2020). In this way, the impact of the pandemic on the tourist market and how hotels could respond to it were carefully analyzed. Despite the delicate position of the hotel sector during the Covid-19 pandemic, various organizations have found ways to reinvent themselves and seek opportunities in difficult times (DUNC, 2020).

a) Strategies in the area of Human Resources

Given the proliferation of COVID, hotels around the world had to reduce their non-essential labor costs through various strategies. The first of these was to share its staff with related service industry companies. Some of these hotels shared workers with industries that at the time had a shortage of workers or efficient labor that could fill the required jobs, such as delivery businesses or mask manufacturers. Subcontracted labour was also employed for complementary hotel services such as food delivery and laundry (Hao, Xiao, & Chon, 2020).

On the other hand, through the use of smart devices it was possible to replace some manual tasks and lay-off staff. The choice of employees to be fired was based on two criteria; poor work performance and a bad work attitude, both with their colleagues in the area and with hotel guests (McKercher, 2020).

Finally, in times of pandemic and social immobilization, hotels used this time without activity to retrain all their staff in a virtual way, so that it is possible for them to perform multiple tasks in order to improve the flexibility of work and optimize the allocation of human resources (McKercher, 2020).

b) Restore guest confidence

As mentioned before, a key point to combat the Covid-19 and post-COVID crisis is to restore guest confidence. At this point, numerous hotel chains have chosen to release their cancellation policies from any monetary charge, as well as policies for change in dates of stay. In addition, the benefits of hotel loyalty programs have been increased.

On the other hand, the hotels have adopted very strict cleaning and health protocols to ensure the safety of future guests in their facilities, emphasizing the disinfection of the different spaces of the establishment, guaranteeing the hygienic handling of food and beverages, and distributing masks and alcohol to guests. An example of this point would be Tujia Homestay, which promoted the standards that its establishment had created in terms of disinfection processes in 12 points where the guest had the most contact (Luo, 2020). Huazhu's Hanting, a Chinese hotel chain, published the post-COVID cleaning operations at 130 of its 2560 hotels, and invited any guest to supervise the deep cleaning process online to ensure the safety they would have while staying at their hotels (Meadin, 2020).

Different hotel groups such as Dossen, Huazhu, and New Century among others have implemented technological solutions that reduce contact in different activities where there is a direct contact with the customer to ensure the security of contagions. Among these activities were self-check-in, remote check-in (before arriving at the hotel), facial scanner and voice control in rooms, robotic room service. These services would aim to minimize the stay of guests in common areas of their establishments and reduce the risk of contagion (Guan, 2020; Yunji Technology, 2020).

c) Financial strategies

Hotel brands must collaborate with their parent companies to overcome any financial obstacles that may arise. This is how hotel chains decided to reduce their administration and franchise fees, eliminated marketing fees, and offered discounted supplies and pandemic prevention materials (Zhang et al., 2020).

Several hotel brands, including Dossen, Huazhu and Vienna, offered health insurance to their franchisees and a loan amount that was essential for these hotels to remain in the market and the opening of new hotels (Chang, 2020; Jin, 2020). On the other hand, OTA (Online Travel Agency) Ctrip recommends OTAs that collaborate in reducing commissions from hotel providers and advertising fees and evaluate the option of providing loan services to individual hotels (Travel Daily, 2020).

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d) Creation of new products and services: self-isolation spaces due to the pandemic

A large number of hotels have found in the panic of people to a contagion, a business opportunity to offer rooms to individuals who want to isolate themselves during pandemic time (Folinas & Metaxas, 2020). Thai hotel group "A-One Hotels" was one of the first to offer this kind of services worldwide. With fewer travelers, A-One Hotels began offering packages at its Bangkok and Pattaya hotels. This new service is aimed at residents who want to isolate themselves from people for an average period of 14 days, but who want to have an exclusive service and attention 24 hours (Chang et al., 2020; Lapointe, 2020).

Through a restructuring of prices, packages could be offered with a 20% discount, seeking more interested in this new proposal. In addition, for extra payments, individuals could access complementary services that the hotel has available (Skift, 2020). Taking into account the importance of biosecurity in the facilities, each process in which the customer was contacted had to be equally restructured.

As for the process of food delivery, these are taken to each room by trays and will be cleaned separately of objects that have greater contact with the guest such as dishes, towels and sheets. There is a housekeeping team that will focus exclusively on the care of these clients and will monitor their health. The first symptom or discomfort of the virus in the host will be sent to the nearest hospitals (Skift, 2020).

Various hotel companies around the world as a first action to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and quarantine on their businesses have followed this new strategy initiated by the A-One Hotels group. In Australia, the Novotel Sydney Brighton Beach (2020), a resort of the Accor Hotels group offers a 40% discount for stays longer than 13 nights. Among the services and benefits that the guest can access is an all-inclusive room service, Wi-Fi, parking, among others (The Points Guy News, 2020). According to the hotel, huserooms will feature amenities and the delivery of dishes will be at the door of each of these. In addition, common areas will be constantly decontaminated and available for guest use.

In Switzerland, the Bijou Hotel & Resort sought a new market for its luxurious apartments, returning the "quarantine apartments" and running an advertising campaign with this name on its social networks and official website. In addition, as a strategy linked to its corporate social responsibility, which undoubtedly helped the company's image was offering this new class of stays to workers in the health sector for free (Le Bijou, 2020).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is an evaluative bibliographic review, so the review of different academic sources was carried out that involve consulting and collecting relevant information that is useful for the objective of the study and important to situate the research problem (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2014). In addition, the research is evaluative because it systematically obtains information on the functioning, effects and consequences of a phenomenon in order to generate new information related to development and results that are obtained (Mejía-Castillo, 2017). Then, the impacts and changes that, at the organizational level, have originated a new phenomenon are described, from the managerial perspective of the lodging subsector, based on sources and techniques of diverse information collection. In the first place, a review of the portals of establishments specialized in tourism activity was carried out, such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the World Travels and Tourism Council (WTTC), the National Confederation of Tourism of Morocco (CNT) and the Moroccan Tourism Observatory. With the purpose of contextualizing the consequences and union perspectives due to the restrictions on tourism derived from the declaration of confinement and social isolation. This information was complemented by searching for news in economic media. Content analysis was used as a technique in both reviews.

With the aim of deepening the information obtained, the present study is complemented by an exploratory qualitative analysis based on in-depth interviews. The research was exploratory, providing a better overview and looking for information within a topic little explored (Vera, 2019). In-depth interviews were applied to hotel professionals with experience in hotel management, in order to validate and compare the theory previously analyzed and document aspects of strategies for the Moroccan case covering topics such as perceptions and opinions on the management of hotels and prevention measures during the crisis. Then to know the implemented strategies and future expectations of the entrepreneurs of the hotel sector in Marrakech, contacts were made with managers of selected hotels through a sampling for convenience.

A targeted sample of fifteen senior hotel executives was collected. Participants were selected based on their position and contacted via social networks, such as LinkedIn, and personal e-mail contacts to invite them to participate in the study. Theoretical saturation was observed after the tenth interview. The sample size was considered appropriate as it allowed for more in-depth analysis (Nam et al, 2020) using a constructivist approach (Boddy, 2016; Dimache et al, 2017). The interview protocol was designed based on the literature review on the strategic management of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was pre-tested before data collection to ensure that the meaning of the questions was clear and that their wording was unambiguous.

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The objective of this study was focused on the main question: What are the changes produced by the pandemic of the COVID-19 virus in the hotel industry and in relation to the management of the services offered by hotels in Morocco? From it, three secondary questions were generated: i) What are the changes produced by the COVID-19 virus in the hospitality and tourism industry worldwide? ii) What are the reactivation strategies used to manage the services offered by hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic in the world? iii) What strategies are hotels currently using to counter the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Morocco?

The study was carried out in Marrakech, the tourist capital of Morocco. Participants were interviewed via telematics due to the time and availability of participants. The interviewer played a primarily strategic interpretive role and focused on listening and avoiding potential sources of distraction. In some cases, asynchronous online interviews have been conducted (Hewson and Laurent, 2008) in order to prioritize the comfort of Managers (Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; Hight et al, 2019) and to meet their time constraints. Interviews were conducted during the month of January 2023, an average of 45 minutes was found between the 15 interviews, and interview times ranged from 30 minutes to one hour. In some cases, additional clarification or questions were required and respondents were contacted again. Interviews were conducted mainly in English, with few in French, which were then translated into English. The meaning and consistency of the translation of the English interview responses was then verified by other university researchers fluent in both languages to ensure that it retained the subtlety and meaning of the original responses (Hogg & al, 2014). The interviews were conducted and recorded, with the permission of the participants.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

The World Tourism Organization confirms that tourism and its entire value chain, such as the hotel industry, are the economic sector most affected by the pandemic. Therefore, it argues that the world's governments should not set it aside, since, according to the UNWTO, it produces 1.7 trillion foreign tourism revenues in all countries, which is equivalent to 5 billion dollars a day. Additionally, tourism generates one of every 10 jobs on the planet and is the third largest economic sector in the world (UNWTO, 2020a).

To this end, the WTO created a global crisis committee, in which key UN agencies such as the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), UNESCO and the International Labor Organization (ILO) participated. In turn, the committee includes executive councils and regional commissions from different countries and leaders from the private sector. The management of this committee has been the creation of different strategies and recommendations for the different governments of the world to implement and thus support in the recovery of the tourism sector (Bayonne, 2020).

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the entity that produces reports on the economic and labor impact of travel and tourism reveals that in 2020, 62 million jobs were lost globally, representing a fall of 18.5%, and leaving only 272 million employees across the sector, compared to 334 million in 2019. Covid-19 paralyzed the planet during 2020 and continues to devastate it in 2021, given the threat it poses to businesses, governments and communities. The agency highlights the importance of understanding and projecting the evolution of the phenomenon for strategic, effective and timely decisions, in order to reactivate the sector in a responsible manner. It highlights important aspects such as strategic alliances and confidence-building with stakeholders, the conception of health and hygiene as the new normal, sustainability as a collective responsibility, mental health as an aspect for a healthy life and large-scale digital irruption (WTTC, 2021a).

1- Changes produced by the COVID-19 pandemic in Morocco according to the opinion of hotel experts from national and international chains

Based on the analysis of in-depth interviews with hotel managers and experts in the sector, the main findings were : Changes in international travel are perceived to have occurred at the end of 2019 when the outbreak of the virus started in China. Asian customers, especially those traveling in groups, began to cancel reservations, followed by American and European customers. This led to the prioritization of biosecurity protocols that indicate how the hotel will work; on the other hand, another need that arose was to have an occupational doctor to monitor the health of the employees.

As for the customers, it should be noted that since the first months of 2020, the hotels were operating under an agreement with the Moroccan government offering humanitarian rates to people who could not return to their countries and to the returnees. Also during the pandemic, some hotels receive guests from crews from different airlines. It was identified that the new post-COVID-19 consumer will be millennials that is not a luxury market, so high-category hotels will have to adapt and regulate the rates they have been working with and vary the segmentation of guests, since this new tourist profile will be positioned for a long time. As well, the changes of the post-COVID-19 traveler will focus on social distancing and in the case of the corporate

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traveler; it could change in terms of business meetings by performing them virtual or face-to-face meetings, but hosting fewer people.

On the one hand, the objectives of the commercial area were mainly linked to protecting long-term relationships with customers, since, being an unprecedented situation, it was necessary to implement policies of flexibility regarding the cancellation or modification of reservations to that when the situation normalizes, the rapid rescheduling of trips can be promoted.

On the other hand, the objective of the operational area was to operate each site at the lowest possible cost and with established biosafety protocols. The hotels had to work hand in hand with the Finance area to assess the situation in which they found themselves and to be able to determine if it was convenient to continue operating or to close temporarily. In addition to this, changes were made in the payroll, some of the workers went on perfect suspension since March 2020, so that the different areas of the hotel are working with 25% of the workers.

Regarding sales, it is estimated in some departments that they would be greatly reduced to 65% less than in 2019, despite having the support of the government (Reactivation Plan) and the support received from suppliers, financial institutions and banks regarding the postponement of payments. Currently, hotels work with sales protocols and carry out what is established at the corporate level, having weekly meetings to see the constantly changing progress.

Finally, it is believed that the coronavirus pandemic will mark a before and after in the hospitality industry, as well as the attack on the twin towers to the aerospace industry, because during this period of crisis, international trade is limited and there was no one to house. Therefore, the traveler's profile will change, and he will look for safe locations, avoiding large crowds.

2- Reactivation strategies applied to COVID-19 in hotels in Marrakech

Following the recommendations of the UNWTO and those of the national government, the hotel sector also implemented measures to mitigate the negative effects caused by covid-19. All the measures taken by the Moroccan hotel sector will be analyzed below, in order to prepare for a recovery phase when the quarantine measures of the different countries are suspended.

2.1. Survival strategies

Internally, the strategies adopted were articulated on the possibility of reducing costs and protecting employment as much as possible. To do this, once the quarantine was decreed, the hotels took different actions that could mitigate the negative impact, among them, generate telework, suspend employment contracts for temporary staff, schedule vacations, grant compensatory days or agree on unpaid leave and temporary wage reductions. At the same time, these tactics were not only taken by the hotel sector, but by various tourism sectors, mainly aviation (Bayonne, 2020).

Some hotels consulted confirm that, for example, in order to continue positioning themselves in the minds of their consumers and in accordance with the campaign "Modify, do not cancel", they sent invitations for people to post photographs of their memories in one of the hotels. through their social networks. In addition, with the intention of generating bonds of trust and loyalty, they publicly reported on the relaxation of their reservation and cancellation policies.

The managers implemented biosecurity protocols with the constant disinfection of elevators, stairs, meeting rooms, furniture in common spaces, handles, telephones, switches, among others, the installation of sanitizing stations and mats with disinfectant solutions, and the delivery of prevention kits to guests and visitors. In addition, some hotels signed contracts with specialized companies to evaluate prevention protocols against Covid-19, with the aim of receiving the "Safe Guard" seal, which endorses the hotels in those protocols at international level. To this end, in addition to strict biosecurity controls, other measures were taken, such as the temporary suspension of the buffet service at breakfast time and, in its replacement, a "free service a la carte for guests in their rooms" was offered. Likewise, elevators with capacity for many people operate by a voice command system, preventing guests from having to press buttons.

Regarding the reception of customers in the hotels consulted. The seal initiative called "Clean promise" was carried out, which consists of promoting contactless transactions at reception, by reducing paperwork in the check-in and check-out processes, installing disinfection stations and sanitary access cards in this area. Introduction of new standards in banquet, buffet and room service services, and new washing protocols using electrostatic technology, the reduction of furniture and non-essential high-touch items inside the rooms.

With the aim of strengthening occupancy rates and multiplying their sources of revenue, managers designed a program called "Office Pastime", giving executives the possibility to work in a safe, comfortable space without distractions. The strategy prompted the client to move their home office to the hotel, in an exclusive room, with discounts on food and beverage, a coffee station and bottles of water, Wi-Fi internet, free parking, and few printed pages per day. Additionally, they were given a kit with facemasks, antibacterial gel, wet cloths, and a pen. Several hotels also launched online platforms for their restaurants, which have home delivery services. Where the collaborators worked until noon, as a strategy to avoid congestion in public transport and

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reduce the costs associated with staff feeding. Finally, we should highlight the mention by some interviewees of the creation of a minimarket in the hotels under their charge.

2.2. Alternatives

One measure that helped to mitigate the difficult situation of the accommodation sector is the "For those who care for us" campaign, which consists of making use of the hotel infrastructure located near the hospitals in which care associated with the Covid-19 for medical staff to rest while they are between shifts and enjoy services such as food and laundry.

According to some interviewees, there were no medical personnel staying in their establishments. However, they were informed that, as of April 2020, the Ministry of the Interior, through the Wilaya of Marrakech, advanced the formulation of a project so that the accommodation establishments could be linked to satisfy the housing needs of the demand of the health sector that attends the emergency derived from the Covid-19. This scenario would only come true when the city required it, depending on the evolution of the phenomenon. This program was extended to "solidarity beds", opening the possibility of housing elderly people in a situation of vulnerability or people arriving from abroad, who were required to comply with mandatory isolation and that occupational risk managers had to ensure quarantine. The managers-owners of the hotels were contacted by the Undersecretary of Tourism, who was informed about the available inventories.

The general manager of a hotel chain with a leading establishment in the city of Marrakech affirms that various public and private sector entities contacted them to collect information on hotel inventories. However, they gave up participating in this project, because the rate is too low and is unattractive for large-format establishments, so they suggested heading towards the accommodation offer of middle class hotels. Some hotels also served as quarantine sites for infected workers. On average, the stay of the workers in the hotel was ten days; however, for cases positive to Covid-19, the length of stay depends on the severity and recovery process of each worker.

2.3. Prospects for the medium and long term

The flows of guests in the hotel sector depend largely on the meetings, events and business tourism held in Marrakech. Currently, with the rise of technology and the development of activities such as telework and virtual education, trends like the execution of hybrid events are gaining strength, which can be seen as a strategy to deal with forced confinement and an opportunity to evolve the event industry in terms of scope and coverage, as physical or geographical limitations would not be a barrier. Authors such as Ranasinghe et al (2020), point out that virtual and hybrid events emerge as two disruptive options, formats that are probably the best alternative for MICE tourism in difficult times. These events include a combination of live and virtual components. In this model, several people may be present in a physical location while the general audience attends the encounter remotely. However, it is also seen as a threat, as the incorporation of digital technologies and tools improve connectivity and reduce people's travel, which means a decrease in travel costs and, therefore in transport and accommodation needs.

On the other hand, it is imperative to think that hotels should go beyond their rhetoric about providing an ultra-luxurious service to an ultra-hygienic service. Currently, marketing actions related to discounts, loyalty programs and complimentary nights are no longer enough to attract and retain customers, since strategies must be designed to make rooms free of Covid-19 and thus trust is transmitted to customers (Jain, 2020). Therefore, towards the near future, the most urgent thing for hotel establishments is to generate confidence to potential customers by implementing actions such as employee training to reinforce cleaning solutions and the use of personal protective equipment, sterilization of room keys, and prioritization of room service processes to avoid crowds in feeding areas and restriction of service schedules. Some occupational safety and health experts have also recommended the spraying of quaternary ammonium salts in public areas on inanimate surfaces in the absence of a crowd; and, for the purpose of disinfecting footwear, suggest the installation of abrasive and pediluvius mats at the entrance of hotels, restaurants and common areas, as well as the use of hypochlorite solutions for cleaning floors and surfaces that are not attacked by corrosion. This would make it easier to persuade customers to avoid cancellations and reschedule their accommodation and events (Bagnera & Stewart, 2020).

It should be noted that interviewees agree that there was much uncertainty. There was a positive scenario, which is that after leaving isolation and the possibility that such a situation could present itself again, people want to live more intensely, know and enjoy new landscapes, culture and gastronomy, this may initially be generated at regional and national level. The negative scenario is that economic possibilities and fear of contagion lead to a sharp decline in tourism, in relation to the good performance of the economic indicators enjoyed by the sector before the pandemic.

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V. DISCUSSION

Regarding the results obtained in the bibliographic analysis. The effects caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and its variants have transformed people's lifestyles and organizational routines in companies, especially services such as transportation, accommodation, food and beverages. As a method of prevention of spread, at the beginning of 2020, governments opted for preventive measures such as the closure of borders, suspending all types of tourism activities and in other cases, suspension of visas. As the tourism sector is one of the most important for its economic contribution, during the Covid-19 crisis, governments were making new measures for reactivation, in which they seek to support the different companies in the sector. In most countries, including Morocco, plans and initiatives were launched to promote domestic tourism and then focus on receptive tourism, all this by applying different health protocols that are created by the government in conjunction with ministries. On the other hand, in continents such as Europe, Asia and North America, they began with the promotion of countries and the reopening of tourist destinations under compliance with protocols to avoid contagion and some restrictions in terms of mobility and services such as capacity and limited hours.

As for the changes in the hotel industry, being a sector linked to tourism, it was greatly affected by the current pandemic. Several internationally recognized hotel chains had to close some of their properties and reduce staff to avoid generating higher cost (Marhan & Stewart, 2020). Likewise, hotel establishments of different categories were making money back from active reserves and suspending operations. However, in some establishments it was decided to provide accommodation to people related to health sectors in order to contribute with help and in other cases, make proposals to stay in the market (Kumar, 2020). Taking into account the perspective of the post-COVID tourist it is considered that the most visible changes will be the preference for small hotels where there is less concentration of people, in addition, implemented sanitation protocols and capacity reduction (Castello, 2020).

When talking about strategies recommended by different professionals in the hotel industry, emphasis is placed on taking action and looking for tools to counteract the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on hotels. It should develop a more flexible business strategy focused on earning income in the lowest months, saving strategies, which help the recovery of the organization (Baynova, 2020). Therefore, the best option for hotels would be to carry out an exhaustive analysis of each of the assets or resources that the establishment has, and how new ways of obtaining income could be created with these.

Regarding the reactivation strategies implemented by hotels in the world, it was mentioned to establish a disaster management team, strategies in the area of human resources, restoration of guest confidence, financial strategies, creation of new products and services and self-insulating spaces by the pandemic. At this point, the importance of restoring guest confidence to combat the COVID-19 and post-COVID crisis was highlighted (Sun, et al., 2020). For fear of contagion, guests will require that hotels guarantee their safety if they decide to stay or opt for any of their services. As a result, hotels remained active throughout 2020 and 2021, studying the market and its trends, shaping the new consumer and running promotional campaigns for their hotels focused on their new biosecurity measures.

The changes produced by the pandemic in Marrakech were of great impact especially in the tourism and hotel sector, so the Moroccan government decided to create the "Reactivation Plan" which details the measures to be implemented divided into phases. Likewise, the recovery of the tourism sector will be slowly developing, as it depends on the regulations that were made for the prevention of contagion, as well as the types of promotions to reactivate the internal tourism. However, recovery began gradually with the development of the vaccine and its distribution. On the other hand, hotels should take into account the post-covid consumer and adapt to the new requirements (New normal), In addition, it was necessary to regulate fares and maintain services for tourists as well as cabin workers on airlines with which some hotels worked. The managers of these hotel companies have been forced to design and implement emerging strategies, while trying to ensure the survival of the company and the preservation of employment, in a situation of drastic decline in income. A large part of the actions undertaken involves changes in their organizational processes, including adaptation to new government guidelines and policies regarding the adoption of safety protocols for employees and customers. And it is that regaining consumer confidence will be the main challenge that government, guilds and hotel managers will have to face, the possibility that the purchase will generate repurchase will be conditioned on the establishments transmitting a safety image and that the customers have a favorable perception on the quality and protection measures in all phases of service provision.

As for the strategies implemented in Marrakech, we can find some similarity with those observed in Europe and Asia. In this way, hotels in the tourist capital of Morocco designed new products and services to offer to the public, seeking to meet the new needs of the population. The publicly recognized hotels in the city, took the first months of pandemic as a moment to investigate external markets and as hotel chains of different nationalities respond to the phenomenon of the coronavirus. Special emphasis was given to strategies implemented in tourist countries such as Spain, Italy, France and China, which had a virus

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proliferation much earlier and so hard than any other country and it was studied how viable these actions would be in Marrakech. On the other hand, like hotels in Europe and Asia, most of the hotels in Marrakech, aimed at a receptive public, had to redesign their strategy and seek the attention of the national citizen, because the country's borders were closed during a long time.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research have shown that the hotel and tourism industry is one of the sectors most affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Due to the border closures implemented by various governments worldwide, companies in both sectors had to stop their operations due to lack of tourism activity and even make refunds of money for reserves, reduce staff and close hotel establishments. However, over the months, several countries from different continents generated and implemented reactivation plans. In the case of the tourism sector, promotions were carried out to encourage internal tourism and to enable different tourist destinations under the protocols of health and restrictions. In addition, in the case of the hotel sector, some establishments provided their services to health sector workers in order to continue operating and help, in addition, to make proposals to stay in the market. Although governments have devised reactivation plans for the sectors, the companies that provide hosting services must adapt to the new reality and generate strategies applied to their businesses to stay in the market.

To address the coronavirus, various specialists in the sector gave different recommendations to hotels on how to act against this unprecedented phenomenon, and what it causes in the tourism and hotel industry. Given the diversity of recommendations addressed to hotels, it was identified that these can be divided into administrative and operational areas. On the one hand, we find administrative strategies aimed at areas such as Finance and Revenue Management, Human Resources, Sales Channels and Advertising, Marketing. On the other hand, we find strategies within the operations such as Housekeeping, Food and Beverages and Events, as presented in the literature review and discussion section, these become especially important in the current context.

However, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and its variants have transformed people's lifestyles and organizational routines in companies, especially services such as accommodation and food. The managers of these have been forced to design and implement emerging strategies, while trying to ensure the survival of the company and the preservation of employment, in a situation of drastic decline in income. A large part of the actions undertaken involves changes in their organizational processes, including adaptation to new government guidelines and policies regarding the adoption of security protocols to regain consumer confidence.

In view of the global uncertainty caused by the proliferation of the COVID-19 virus, especially in the hospitality sector, hotels in Morocco began an investigation in order to collect information on the actions taken in international hotels to address the crisis, focusing on hotel management strategies based in Asia and Europe. Given that these countries saw the birth of the coronavirus and were the first to suffer its consequences, their hotels were the first to take action to mitigate the impact that quarantine and fear in the population caused in the occupation of hotels. Like hotels around the world, hotels located in Marrakech took on the task of researching the international sector and collecting data on changes in consumer needs once the virus spread. Thanks to the fast operation of the hotels and their constant search for new trends, new services or products were devised that could respond to post-covid customer needs.

Finally, the leaders and the main actors in the hotel industry must be aware that the tourism model is going to undergo a radical change. High importance will be given to care, health, hygiene, safety, digitization and sustainability. The Covid-free protocols and certificates will be necessary and convenient for the industry. The more the hotel, its managers and staff prepare to face this and future contingencies, the better their image will be with the client, who will reward and support them with the use of their services and the generation of new business.

The main limitations of the study are related to the dispersion of information and the speed with which different events occurred, which generated a changing information as the days went by. It was necessary to update the data on contagions, government measures, and new strategies for reactivation by the establishment, among others. However, covid-19 will remain a subject of ongoing attention in both the present and the near future. In addition, drawing on prior research, we chose general managers as key respondents because they have knowledge of the strategic variables analyzed and can reduce response bias. However, future studies could include data from employees or other organizational stakeholders to achieve better understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, it is recommended to collect information in other cities in Morocco, as well as in other countries, integrating evolution and trends in supply and demand behavior, in order to compare experiences that can offer practical solutions to hotel managers.

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