The Disruption of the Pandemic in the use of Hospitality Establishments and Services in South Africa

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Abstract: The tourism and hospitality sectors were among the most negatively impacted industries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many studies have reflected on the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism and hospitality industry; however, more needs to be written about the effect on the customers.

Therefore, this paper aims to report if COVID-19 has affected the use of hospitality establishments and service customers during and after the lockdown in South Africa.

This was a cross-sectional quantitative study. Google Forms were used for data collection using snowball and convenience sampling techniques. Seven hospitality establishment categories (Bed and breakfast, guesthouses, hotels, Airbnb, sit-down restaurants, fast food outlets, and wine farms) and two hospitality services (Catering services and delivery services) participated in the study. Data were analysed using SPSS version 26 and presented using descriptive statistics. Demographic data was introduced to give an overview of all the respondents. Most respondents were female (64%) and Africans (69%). Most respondents were employees (49%), earning salaries ranging between R5000 and R50 000. Most customers indicated that they continued to use these establishments and services during the lockdown and were willing to continue doing so post-lockdown. In terms of salaries versus the categories of establishments, customers who earned less visited establishments the most. However, it was observed that customers who visited restaurants were from all salary ranges (brackets). This indicates that customers always continue visiting hospitality establishments and utilising hospitality services. This affirms the importance of the hospitality industry in the social and economic space.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown, Hospitality Establishment, Customer Perception

1. Introduction

The dawn of the global pandemic, COVID-19, brought about universal challenges. The terrifying pandemic's economic and social implications have been distressing and are yet to be fully measured and grasped (Dube, 2021). With the spread of coronavirus, the global hospitality sector has been highly impacted and devastatingly affected the hospitality sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the worldwide hospitality industry, reshaping how people use hospitality establishments and services. The sector, encompassing hotels, restaurants, travel, and tourism, has faced unprecedented challenges due to the stringent public health measures implemented to curb the spread of the virus. When the WHO announced COVID-19 to be a pandemic, countries had to adopt strict measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (Sucheran, 2022).

The consequences of lockdown have the potential to be vast, and the global economy will experience an overall economic shock as it affects all business sectors, including supply chains, personal protective equipment available for health workers, food supply, and job security. South Africa is one of the countries that has been affected because of lockdown restrictions (Naidu, 2020). The hospitality industry serves as a catalyst for economic growth and employment, which are influenced by customers' use (Bhoola, 2022). Hence, it is important to establish the effect of COVID-19 on the use of hospitality establishments. Therefore, this paper focuses on determining the COVID-19 disruption in the use of hospitality services in South Africa.

2. Literature Review

COVID-19 has disturbed every facet of human life, economically and socially, across the biosphere. These ranged from delaying and rescheduling many social and cultural events, meetings, games and sporting events to closing down institutions and centers of learning and shutting down internal and international borders (Biwota, 2020). The global economy was instantaneously impacted, with many industries suffering the effects of the coronavirus

outbreak. Strategies such as lockdowns, restricted travel and social distancing were implemented to manage and reduce the rate of infections, which impacted the hospitality and tourism industry significantly (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Sucheran, 2021). According to Dube (2021), the tourism and hospitality sector was among the most negatively impacted industries, even receiving blame and backlash for spreading the disease. Approximately 60-80% of total tourism activity was reduced in 2020 (Crespí-Cladera et al., 2021), impacting the entire hospitality and tourism value chain (Ntounis et al., 2022).

The coronavirus outbreak affected not only the tourism and hospitality industry but also the way its consumers spend their time, and this shift could be lasting (Rahimizhian & Irani, 2020). The hesitancy of hospitality consumers to travel during and after COVID-19 is because of the elevated health risks it presents (Shin & Kang, 2020). Natural disasters affect the behavioural change of consumers, resulting in disrupted consumption. This was observed during COVID-19 as buying evolved from improvising, low demand for non-essentials, digital technologies adoption, hybrid shopping, unusual shopping times, virtual social gatherings, and the discovery of new talents, such as cooking (Sheth, 2020). Economic growth globally is driven by consumer spending, and a drop in income reduces overall spending. COVID-19 has not just resulted in a household income decrease but has also changed consumers' spending patterns. As a result, a decline in spending on tourism and hospitality services was observed. (Sucheran, 2021) Shifts in consumer behaviour are impacted by stressful life events such as the COVID-19 pandemic; notable changes such as changes in spending patterns occur to manage this stress. This also affected the change in consumption patterns (Zwanka & Buff, 2021). Additionally, Lee and Deale (2021), various types and levels of stress and anxiety have been observed in consumers in relation to the risks associated with the coronavirus, which affects consumers' risk sensitivity about shared accommodation. Due to the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic along with increased consumer risk perception, the pandemic could influence "cocooning" behaviour in consumers, which refers to individuals protecting themselves by staying indoors in their homes to reduce the threat (Hu et al., 2021).

In addition to risk sensitivity, further changes observed in consumer behaviour include shopping patterns. Consumers are more cautious regarding environmental effects and, therefore, have been observed to shop more "cost-conscious" during the coronavirus pandemic (Kim et al., 2022). The spending patterns of hospitality consumers shifted towards consuming more meals prepared at home instead of meals bought from restaurants due to safety and the recession (Mendez-Carbajo, 2021). The state of the economy due to the pandemic decreased the demand for both goods and services, which consequently led to a decrease in travel and the need for hospitality establishments. Further changes observed in shopping patterns include an increased interest in shopping for goods locally; these changes suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic has shifted consumer buying patterns towards a more socially responsible culture, which has not been observed in pandemics which occurred in the past (Kim et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

The study followed a quantitative approach using a descriptive cross-sectional design. Customers using accommodation and food and beverage establishments participated in the study in 2020-2021 and were selected using convenience and snowball. Data collection was conducted online using Google Forms. The questionnaires were structured to respond to the objectives of the study. Section A consisted of information about the customers to determine the background of the participants, and section B assessed the impact of COVID-19. The questionnaire was sent using various online platforms such as email, WhatsApp, and Facebook.

Data were analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 and summarised employing tables using frequency and percentiles. Data was rechecked for duplication and errors to ensure validity and reliability. Ethical clearance was obtained from a university, and informed consent was obtained from the respondents. The consent information explaining the purpose of the study and the ethical aspects to be considered to ensure the protection of the respondents was included in the questionnaires.

4. Results

The result of this study covers the demographic information, which presents gender, population group, employment status and income. Furthermore, the study focuses on the effect of COVID-19 on the use of hospitality services in South Africa.

4.1 Demographic Information

Inclusive gender representation was observed in this study whereby female, male, non-binary and prefer not to say were reported in Table 4.1.1 below. Of these categories, females (64.21%) were mostly represented, followed by males (34.67%). Da Costa et al., (2021) also observed female dominance at 60,7% compared to 39,3 % and Genov et al (2022) at 61.5% compared to 38.5%, respectively. Contrary to this finding, in Istanbul, men were the most participants (50.2 %), whereas 49.8 % were women (Dedeoğlu and Boğan. 2021). Further supported by Foroudi et al., (2021), with 57.1% males compared to 42.9% females. The findings about 2.3% who preferred not to state their gender are congruent with the National Department of Tourism (2022) study, which reported that 2.3% of the respondents preferred not to disclose. Byrd et al., (2021) further confirmed this, whereby 0.6% of the respondents preferred not to say. In terms of a population group, the Department of Tourism (2022) study showed that all South African ethnic groups participated. Furthermore, the respondents were predominantly Africans (33.8%). These findings concur with this study, with 69.89% of Africans being the most respondents. Various ethnic group representation is not unique to these two South African studies, as a study conducted in the United States reported the same, with Caucasians (77.1%) being the majority (Byrd et al., 2021) (Table 4.1.1).

Table 4.1.1: Gender and Population Group

Gender and Population		
Gender	**Count**	**Percentage**
Female	400	64.21%
Male	216	34.67%
Non-binary	1	0.16%
Prefer not to say	6	0.96%
Grand Total	623	100.00%
Population Group		
African	434	69.89%
Coloured	90	14.49%
Indian	27	4.35%
Mixed	6	0.97%
White	64	10.31%
Total	621	100.00%

Most of the respondents were employed (58.87%) at the time the data was collected, and of those employed, most (39.52%) were full-time, and the rest were either on contract or self-employed. On the other hand, 41.13% of the respondents were not employed. The National Department of Tourism (2022) shared similar results, with 74.5% of the respondents being employed. Of the employed, most (51.5%) were full-time, followed by self-employed (11.8%) and then contract (11.2%). These findings were further supported by Byrd et al., (2021), stating that 76.2% of the respondents were employed, with 64.4% being employed full-time and 11.8% part-time (Table 4.1.2).

These dynamics of employment versus non-employment were observed in the income reporting for both studies, whereby for this study, 50.97% reported the income they earned and 27.35% no income. For the National Department of Tourism (2022), 59.9% said the income they earn and 6.2% no income. Of those employed and willing to disclose their income, the income earned ranged from < R5000 to > R50 000. Most of the respondents (24,11%) earned < R10 000 and> R40 000. Different findings were reported by the National Department of Tourism (2022), whereby more than 10% of the respondents' salaries ranged between R5000 and R30 000. However, it also reported that the minority of the respondents earned a higher income of R40 000 and above. Dedeoğlu and Boğan (2021) reported the varying income categories, stating that 38.5 % of the participants earned between 5001 and 7500 TL, followed by 36.4% with an income of over 7500 TL, which relates to this study's findings. These findings were further observed in the US, whereby 41.8% earned $50,000-$99,999, followed by 22.0% earning $25,000-$49,999. And that the minority earned a higher income (Byrd et al., 2021).

Table 4.1.2: Employment Status and Income

Employment Status and Income		
Employment Status	**Count**	**Percentage**
Employed	365	58.87%
Employed – full-time (fixed salary per month)	245	39.52%
Employed – part-time (non-fixed salary per month)	55	8.87%
Contracted	1	0.16%
Self-employed	64	10.32%
Not employed	255	41.13%
Retired	5	0.81%
Retrenched	1	0.16%
Home Executive	2	0.32%
Part-time student	1	0.16%
Full-time students	138	22.26%
Stay-at-home mother	1	0.16%
Unemployed	106	17.10%
Volunteer	1	0.16%
Total	620	100.00%
Income		
R50 000 or more	15	2.43%
R40 000 to less than R50 000	16	2.59%
R30 000 to less than R40 000	35	5.66%
R20 000 to less than R30 000	48	7.77%
R10 000 to less than R20 000	52	8.41%
R5000 to less than R10 000	65	10.52%
Less than R5000	84	13.59%
Can't recall	13	2.10%
Declined to answer/confidential	121	19.58%
None	169	27.35%
Total	618	100.00%

4.2 Hospitality Establishments use Prior, During and After COVID-19

The pandemic affected the tourism market in South Africa, resulting in reduced demand. The consumer confidence index moved during 2020, negatively affecting tourism product purchases (Dube, 2021). Hence, tables 3, 4 and 5 below present the results to establish the use of hospitality establishments prior to the COVID-19 era, During lockdown and after lockdown. The hospitality establishments were categorised into accommodation and food and beverage establishments. Each category had sub-categories; for accommodation establishments, it was Bed and Breakfasts, Guesthouses, Hotels, and Air BnB.

4.2.1 Hospitality Establishments Use Prior to COVID-19

Positive responses were observed as respondents indicated they had used the establishments prior to COVID-19. Furthermore, food and beverage establishments were predominantly used, ranging between 80% and 90%. These results were congruent with da Costa et al., (2021), whereby 87,8% of the respondents indicated that they visited restaurants at least once a month prior to COVID-19 and confirmed by Dedeoğlu and Boğan (2021) who reported that most (49.6 %) of the participants visited the restaurant weekly and then biweekly (31.7 %). Furthermore, Foroudi et al., (2021) reported that respondents frequently visited restaurants monthly. Sucheran's (2022) study reported that all the respondents agreed that COVID-19 disrupted hotel operations. This supports the findings of this study as accommodation establishments were minimally used, and these findings are not unique as Biwota (2020) reported a decline in hotel bookings, which led to low occupancy (43%) (Table 4.2.1).

Table 4.2.1: Hospitality establishments used prior to COVID-19

	Last 5 years (2014-2018)		Once in the last year (2019)		Did not use		Total	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Accommodation								
BnB	77	15.78%	212	43.44%	199	40.78%	488	100.00%
Guesthouses	88	19.43%	160	35.32%	205	45.25%	453	100.00%
Hotels	102	20.40%	245	49.00%	153	30.60%	500	100.00%
Air BnB	53	11.88%	152	34.08%	241	54.04%	446	100.00%

	Last 5 years (2014-2018)		Once in the last year (2019)		Did not use		Total	
Food and Beverage								
Sit-down restaurant	44	7.86%	485	86.61%	31	5.54%	560	100.00%
Fast-food outlets	34	6.34%	478	89.18%	24	4.48%	536	100.00%
Wine farms	60	13.73%	141	32.27%	236	54.00%	437	100.00%
Catering services	84	19.13%	161	36.67%	194	44.19%	439	100.00%
Delivery Services	40	7.63%	421	80.34%	63	12.02%	524	100.00%

4.2.2 Hospitality Establishments use During and After Lockdown

Minimal (Ranging between 35% to 44%) use of accommodation establishments prior to COVID-19 were observed in Table 3 above, and in Table 4.2.2 below; during lockdown, a further decrease in the use of these establishments was observed after easing of levels ranging between 33% to 39%. These findings were in line with the status quo whereby COVID-19 caused the government and the industry to impose various measures, such as restrictions and closures to curb the spread of the virus (Hoang et al., 2021). Sucheran (2022) reported a decrease (48.1%) in income on accommodation during the lockdown, which supports the findings of this study regarding the minimal use mentioned above, no guests, and no revenue.

Also, as the easing of levels happened, consumers were still anxious and sensitive and mostly preferred staying at home than visiting accommodation establishments (Lee and Deale, 2021; Hu et al., 2021). The measures affected the operations negatively (Hoang et al., 2021), hence the findings mentioned above. However, it is important to note that the accommodation establishments were still in use during the lockdown and that the decrease observed was minimal when compared to prior COVID-19. Sucheran (2021) supports these findings, indicating that 9.2% of the hotels were partially operating during lockdown. Apart from the minimal use observed, it is great to see that most (ranging from 40-50%) of the respondents indicated that they would visit establishments after the lockdown, which aligns with the predictions by Krishnan et al., (2020) indicating that hotels will experience fast return after COVID-19.

Table 4.2.2: The use of accommodation establishments during and after lockdown

Accommodation Establishment							
`		During lockdown (Easing of levels)		Use after lockdown		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
BnB							
	Strongly Agree	77	19.15%	153	31.94%	230	26.11%
	Agree	60	14.93%	113	23.59%	173	19.64%
	Neutral	77	19.15%	145	30.27%	222	25.20%
	Disagree	111	27.61%	34	7.10%	145	16.46%
	Strongly Disagree	77	19.15%	34	7.10%	111	12.60%
	Total	402	100.00%	479	100.00%	881	100.00%
Guesthouses							
	Strongly Agree	77	19.25%	137	30.18%	214	25.06%
	Agree	59	14.75%	111	24.45%	170	19.91%
	Neutral	73	18.25%	137	30.18%	210	24.59%
	Disagree	119	29.75%	35	7.71%	154	18.03%
	Strongly Disagree	72	18.00%	34	7.49%	106	12.41%
	Total	400	100.00%	454	100.00%	854	100.00%
Hotels							
	Strongly Agree	96	23.36%	182	37.45%	278	30.99%
	Agree	67	16.30%	130	26.75%	197	21.96%
	Neutral	78	18.98%	114	23.46%	192	21.40%
	Disagree	94	22.87%	31	6.38%	125	13.94%
	Strongly Disagree	76	18.49%	29	5.97%	105	11.71%
	Total	411	100.00%	486	100.00%	897	100.00%
Air BnB							
	Strongly Agree	75	18.75%	122	27.73%	197	23.45%
	Agree	59	14.75%	111	25.23%	170	20.24%

Accommodation Establishment							
	Neutral	80	20.00%	131	29.77%	211	25.12%
	Disagree	106	26.50%	38	8.64%	144	17.14%
	Strongly Disagree	80	20.00%	38	8.64%	118	14.05%
	Total	400	100.00%	440	100.00%	840	100.00%

A decrease in the use of food and beverage establishments was also observed when comparing before COVID-19 and the lockdown period. These findings concurred with da Costa et al., (2021), indicating that customers either stopped or reduced visiting the restaurants during the lockdown and this affected restaurant sales (Panzone et al, 2021) and dining habits (Genov et al,, 2022).

Bhoola (2022), Genov et al (2022), and Dedeoğlu and Boğan (2021) mentioned that restaurants offer customers more than just a good meal but an opportunity to explore convenience and socialise to enjoy the environment, the ambience, and the service. Furthermore, unique experiences and a catalyst for consumers' well-being (Jaeger et al., 2017). Hence, more than 70% of the respondents of this study indicated that they visited these establishments during the lockdown, namely, sit-down restaurants (74.84%), fast-food outlets (85.82) and delivery services (82.50%), except for catering services and wine farms which were minimally visited. The continued use of restaurant services concurred with Cohen et al (2022) reporting that participants consumed at restaurants weekly during COVID-19. Furthermore, according to Genov et al., (2022), 61.5% of consumers reported an increase in the use of delivery services and preferred fast-food outlets, which resonates with the findings of this study.

These findings regarding catering services and wine farms corroborate government-implemented measures such as restrictions on alcohol sales, social gatherings and the curfew (Adebiyi & Mukumbang, 2022; Smith, 2021)- from total shutdown to easing lockdown levels from 4-1 (Nyathela-Sunday et al., 2022) which affected the business operation and then the use. The overall decrease in the use of other food and beverage services led to low demand, resulting in food wastage during COVID-19 (Njomane & Telukdarie, 2022).

Table 4.2.3: The use of food and beverage establishments

Food and beverage establishments							
		During lockdown (Easing of levels)		Comfortable to use after lockdown		Grand Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Sit-down restaurant							
	Strongly Agree	230	48.22%	265	49.44%	495	48.86%
	Agree	127	26.62%	168	31.34%	295	29.12%
	Neutral	54	11.32%	67	12.50%	121	11.94%
	Disagree	34	7.13%	20	3.73%	54	5.33%
	Strongly Disagree	32	6.71%	16	2.99%	48	4.74%
	Total	477	100.00%	536	100.00%	1013	100.00%
Fast-food outlets							
	Strongly Agree	313	59.96%	253	49.13%	566	54.58%
	Agree	135	25.86%	171	33.20%	306	29.51%
	Neutral	42	8.05%	60	11.65%	102	9.84%
	Disagree	19	3.64%	17	3.30%	36	3.47%
	Strongly Disagree	13	2.49%	14	2.72%	27	2.60%
	Total	522	100.00%	515	100.00%	1037	100.00%
Delivery Services							
	Strongly Agree	328	63.08%	281	56.54%	609	59.88%
	Agree	101	19.42%	123	24.75%	224	22.03%
	Neutral	35	6.73%	69	13.88%	104	10.23%
	Disagree	31	5.96%	9	1.81%	40	3.93%
	Strongly Disagree	25	4.81%	15	3.02%	40	3.93%
	Total	520	100.00%	497	100.00%	1017	100.00%
Catering services							
	Strongly Agree	78	20.31%	145	33.56%	223	27.33%

Food and beverage establishments							
	Agree	66	17.19%	106	24.54%	172	21.08%
	Neutral	84	21.88%	122	28.24%	206	25.25%
	Disagree	85	22.14%	31	7.18%	116	14.22%
	Strongly Disagree	71	18.49%	28	6.48%	99	12.13%
	Total	384	100.00%	432	100.00%	816	100.00%
Wine farms							
	Strongly Agree	49	13.21%	130	30.30%	179	22.38%
	Agree	51	13.75%	97	22.61%	148	18.50%
	Neutral	83	22.37%	119	27.74%	202	25.25%
	Disagree	107	28.84%	41	9.56%	148	18.50%
	Strongly Disagree	81	21.83%	42	9.79%	123	15.38%
	Total	371	100.00%	429	100.00%	800	100.00%

4.2.3 Hospitality Establishments use Compared to Income During COVID-19

Income is a key influencing factor in the decision-making process when choosing to visit a tourism outlet (Djeri et al., 2014). In addition, consumers' income determines their spending power (Zhang, 2020). COVID-19 resulted in salary cuts and many consumers losing their jobs, which affected spending power. So, it's essential to determine the income versus the type of establishment being visited. Therefore, this section established the respondents' salaries against the use of the establishments. Most of the respondents who supported the accommodation establishments during the lockdown were willing to state their income and that they earned less as they belonged to the low-income and middle-income categories (World Health Organisation, 2023). Among these low-income earners, it is to be noted that most (52.3%) visited Air BnB establishments, which support the moral economy, promoting fairness and justice, as Air BnB is known for its affordable price (Ndaguba & van Zyl, 2023; Visser et al., 2017). Apart from this, respondents earning higher incomes (> 50,000) visited guest houses (61.5%) and hotels (60.0%). Overall, a higher percentage of the respondents of all income categories indicated that they would support the accommodation establishments after the lockdown.

In terms of food and beverage establishments, customers from all salary ranges, from low to middle-income levels (World Health Organisation, 2023) visited all the categories, and they indicated that they would continue to support after the lockdown. Contradicting findings were reported by Banerjee et al., (2023), who stated that low-income customers visited restaurants more than high-income customers during lockdown.

5. Conclusion

This empirical study determined the effect of COVID-19 on the use of hospitality establishments in South Africa, focusing on accommodation and food and beverage establishments. The findings show that there was continuous use of these establishments, which indicates that customers never stopped visiting the hospitality establishments and utilising hospitality services. This affirms the importance of the hospitality industry in the social and economic space and, therefore, adds value to the Sustainable Development Goals. Although positive findings were reported, a decrease in the use of this establishment and its services was observed, especially for accommodation establishments. Consumers from all salary ranges visited the establishments.

This paper showcases the importance of the hospitality industry, as COVID-19 did not really affect customer perceptions of using hospitality establishment services. Furthermore, it contributes scholarly to the limited literature, especially in African content. On the other hand, it gives the industry confidence for potential growth and sustainability and an opportunity to invest more in domestic tourism.

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