

QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING LUXURY MARKETING DURING TIMES  
OF CHANGE: CASE OF HOSPITALITY IN MOROCCO

**QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING LUXURY MARKETING IN  
TIMES OF CHANGE: CASE OF HOSPITALITY IN MOROCCO**

**ETUDE QUALITATIVE SUR UN MARKETING DE LUXE EN  
MUTATION : LE CAS DE L'HOTELLERIE AU MAROC**

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**QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING LUXURY MARKETING DURING TIMES  
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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the hospitality industry in Morocco, with hotels, restaurants, and affiliated businesses experiencing the restrictions of government lockdowns and border closures. As a result, many hotels were unable to accommodate guests due to national containment measures, leading to the cancellation of numerous reservations. The aim of this study is to analyze the practices and strategies of luxury marketing used by luxury hotels in Morocco to maintain their brand positioning and attract customers during times of economic crises, pandemics, and sociocultural changes. The research uses a qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews with industry professionals, such as marketing managers, general managers, department heads, and marketing consultants. The data collected will be analyzed to identify emerging trends and themes in the practices and strategies of luxury marketing in the hospitality industry in Morocco. The results of this research provide insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by the industry, the practices and strategies that they use to adapt and maintain their position on the luxury segment, but also the impact on the consumer experience. This research contributes to the literature on luxury marketing and provides practical implications for luxury hotel managers in Morocco and other similar contexts, by giving element of answers to the main research question: Adapting to evolving economic, social, and cultural contexts, how did luxury hotels adapt their marketing strategies to maintain their brand image and positioning while responding to changing customer expectations and the impact of the health crisis?

**KEYWORDS: LUXURY MARKETING, HOSPITALITY, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, CRISIS, COVID19, MOROCCO**

**RESUME**

La pandémie de la COVID-19 a eu un impact significatif sur l'industrie hôtelière au Maroc. En effet, les hôtels, les restaurants et les entreprises affiliées à ces derniers ont subi des restrictions liées aux mesures de confinement gouvernementales, entraînant ainsi la fermeture des frontières. En conséquence, de nombreux hôtels n'ont pas pu accueillir leurs clients, ce qui a entraîné l'annulation de nombreuses réservations. L'objectif de cette étude est d'analyser les nouvelles pratiques et stratégies marketing de luxe, de redéfinir l'expérience client pour ainsi maintenir le positionnement de leur marque et d'attirer des clients en période de crise

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économique, de pandémie ou de changements socioculturels.

Cette recherche utilise une approche qualitative, comprenant des entretiens approfondis avec des professionnels du secteur tels que des responsables marketing, des directeurs généraux et des chefs de département. Les données recueillies sont ensuite analysées afin d'identifier les tendances et les thèmes émergents dans les pratiques et stratégies marketing de luxe dans l'industrie hôtelière au Maroc. Les résultats de cette recherche mettent en exergue les défis et opportunités rencontrés par l'industrie, l'impact sur l'expérience du consommateur, ainsi que des nouvelles stratégies utilisées pour s'adapter et maintenir leur position sur le segment du luxe. Cette recherche contribue à l'enrichissement de la littérature en marketing de luxe et fournit des implications managériales pour les gestionnaires d'hôtels de luxe et d'apporter ainsi des éléments de réponse à la question principale de la recherche : Comment les hôtels de luxe ont-ils adapté leurs stratégies marketing afin de maintenir leur image de marque et leur positionnement tout en faisant face aux exigences croissantes des clients et aux effets de la crise sanitaire ?

**MOTS-CLÉS : MARKETING DE LUXE, HOTELLERIE, EXPERIENCE CLIENT, CRISES, COVID-19, MAROC**

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### INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last fifty years, the industry of hospitality has experienced unique and unmissable growth, which was at the origin of significant challenges for hospitality marketing, it is true that many models and different approaches have been used to expand our knowledge of luxury consumers choices and decisions, including econometric models (Dellaert et al., 1997; Kim & Fesenmaier, 1990).

On January 8, 2020, the World Health Organization reported the emergence of a new form virus: the Coronavirus, or COVID 19, in the capital of China-Wuhan. Very quickly, COVID-19 spread around the world to become, on March 11, 2020, a pandemic (Le Temps 2020). Morocco, like all the countries around the world has entered an unexpected health, economic and political crisis, to cope with, the government have been forced to take drastic measures, including forcing the closure of borders, schools and businesses and banning meetings of more than 50 people. On March 20, 2020, Morocco declared state health emergency and lockdown imposed on the Moroccan population which lasted nearly two months. The tourism, eventually the hospitality industry has been directly damaged by the health crisis.

In this context of economic and social disruption, it seemed interesting to us to examine COVID 19 aftermath on the luxury hotel marketing strategy, by studying the managers reaction to the measures imposed by the authorities in the part of the health crisis to shift. As a preliminary point, it should be noted that this work was carried out during the health crisis, with the consequence that we had very little hindsight and data on the subject. To makeup this lack, we have in addition to exploratory research, carried out a field study using the qualitative method in order to give element of answers to the main question: Adapting to evolving economic, social, and cultural contexts: **How did luxury hotels adapt their marketing strategies to maintain their brand image and positioning while responding to changing customer expectations and the impact of the health crisis?**

#### 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Only few studies that are recent have looked into the Covid-19 epidemic effects.

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Quantitative research was conducted amid senior hotel managers to determine if the health crisis was affecting commanding involvement by Filimonau (2020). A case study analysis presented by Jiang and Wen (2020), literature review based on hotel marketing, hotel visitor behavior, and hospitality service trends. Meanwhile, Seyitoglu and Ivanov (2020) proposed a conceptual framework for designing hospitality delivery systems during the health pandemic period. Other research focuses on the case of one country. In this context, Hao et al. (2020) focus was China hotels, identifying different post-Covid-19 strategies: market upheaval, product design, investment preference, multi-business and multi-channels, intelligent digital transformation. An investigation by Hu et al. (2021) on how businesses might facilitate employees' compliance with safety protocols using qualitative method and in-depth interview, medium-sized hotel in China case.

### **1.1. The pandemic and government measures**

Coronavirus 2019, also known by its acronym "COVID-19", meaning "Corona Virus Disease", is believed to have appeared in China in December 2019 (RMC 2020).

This virus has grown and spread at lightning speed. Three months after its appearance, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization already qualified this health crisis as a "pandemic", that is to say an epidemic which extends to the population of a continent, even to the whole world, marking the extent of the scourge. (Larousse).

The Moroccan authorities announced on Monday March 16, 2020, drastic measures to contain the spread of the new coronavirus, with the closure "until further notice" of cafes, restaurants, theaters and cinemas, also concern sports halls, hammams, games room and local grounds, specifies the Ministry of the Interior in a press release "The measures do not concern the souks, shops and premises for the sale of basic products and materials as well as the restaurants which deliver at home".

The government has banned all public or private gatherings and ordered the closure of all public institutions. This includes in particular shops, bars, nightclubs, and any other entertainment and leisure establishment, as well as any provider offering

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services involving physical contact, such as hairdressing, massage or beauty salons. In addition, gatherings of more than 50 people were prohibited. Only basic needs are still allowed to remain open, such as pharmacies and food stores. One week later, full lockdown.

However, the Federal Council has authorized take-out and meal delivery services, leaving the possibility for restaurants to organize this service. One month after entering containment, on April 16, 2020, once the peak of the epidemic has passed, the Moroccan government announced the reopening of certain businesses from April 27, 2020. Hotels and restaurants have as for they were only authorized to reopen by May 11, 2020, with however the obligation to respect a strict protection plan.

### **1.2. Conceptualization of luxury hospitality**

The hospitality industry is an activity necessarily correlated with travel. All the tourist activity, at the same time that it has an important potential is under the yoke since Antiquity of strong constraints related to the means of transport, to the infrastructures and to the insecurity linked to multiple factors.

It is approximately around 1050 that the word hotel finds its roots. The current spelling of the word hotel dates from the 17th century its meaning, which remains the same today is that of a room for guests and in the 17th century this term hotel distinguishes two elements: a furnished house where you stay but also where you find all the amenities and services.

For luxury hotel, if we understand the primary need for reception accommodation during antiquity and long after, we also understand nowadays that this primary need has evolved responding both to a need for occasional accommodation but also to a desire for great comfort when traveling away from home. The hotel industry responds to a basic demand which is to be able to sleep somewhere in a city that is not the one from which one comes but also to a demand to be able to have the choice to be accommodated according to one's wallet and one's desires.

It was from the 1880s that mesmerizing luxury hotels opened their doors in splendor and elegance. By analogy to royal residences, these Palaces are located in Paris,

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Cannes, Monte Carlo, Nice, Le Touquet, Deauville or even in Biarritz and their founding fathers are French people whose names will forever remain engraved in French heritage. It was at this time that César Ritz and Auguste Escoffier made French table hospitality a legendary luxury according to Jean CASTAREDE. The term Palace comes from English and finds its place in the French dictionary in 1905. It designates a "luxury hotel, of international renown, often located in a capital, in a seaside resort or in a spa town. "

Luxury hotels, even if they are not exempt from the repercussions of the economic crisis, find their strength in a strong tradition and an always loyal customers according to a study carried out by the firms Deloitte and In Extenso on "Trends Hospitality: 2014 Performances & 2015 projections, in complex environments (France)" February 13, 2015, the 5-star luxury hotel market and Palaces has held up fairly well without necessarily registering significant growth. In a difficult context, the occupancy rates of these establishments even stabilized. According to this study, the luxury hotel industry recorded a growth of 1% to 3% of the general turnover of hotel accommodation.

### **1.3. Covid-19 impact on customer experience and marketing strategy**

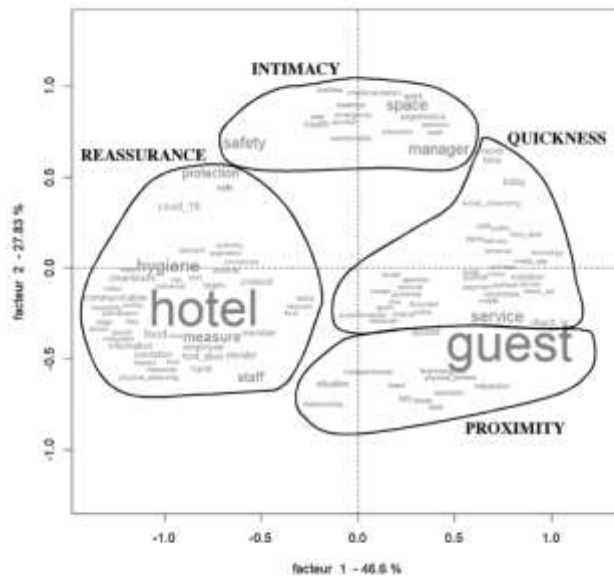
Hotels are reworking by implementing new health and safety measures to ensure the safety of their guests. According to Bonfanti (2021), hoteliers are being proactive and prioritizing the safety of their customers by taking a strategic approach. Specifically, they are focusing on measures such as enhancing hygiene and protection, reorganizing internal work processes, improving the service scape, investing in technology and digital innovations, managing customer wait times, providing staff



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training, and updating communication protocols.

**Figure 1 : Effects of hotel safety measures on expected customer experience**



Source : A. Bonfanti et al. (2021)

A study by A. Bonfanti (2021) revealed that hotel managers are investing in various aspects of the physical and social environment that guests interact with during their stay, with a focus on customer touchpoints such as the reception area, in-room and shared spaces, dining restaurants, gaming cabins, banquet spaces, and leisure spaces (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). According to the Customer Journey concept (e.g., Voss et al., 2008), some managers are prioritizing communication during pre-arrival and post-arrival stages, such as updating their website and official Instagram page to ensure that customers feel comfortable during their stay. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, hotels are taking a multifaceted approach to safety that includes cognitive and subjective responses to the service environment (Tasci and Pizam, 2020). They are working with medical professionals to adapt existing health and safety practices to meet new safety standards, and are implementing seven key measures, including hygiene and protection measures, internal work restructuring, service landscape restructuring, technology and digital innovation investments, customer latency rebuild, employee training, and up-to-date communication.

A. Bonfanti et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of examining physical and digital



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touchpoints from the customer's perspective in the Customer Journey Survey. Hoteliers are taking a strategic approach to create a secure customer experience that meets pandemic-related safety standards and makes guests feel comfortable before, during, and after their stay (Rivera, 2020). Enterprise-driven touchpoints are crucial for building a safe customer experience, and technology can introduce new touchpoints. The study also found that the context in which touchpoints are embedded (De Keyser et al., 2020) has changed, as have the relationships between customers, service providers, and service landscapes. Finally, customer participation in behavior needs to be increased during self-check-in procedures or when ordering meals at a restaurant (A. Bonfanti et al., 2021).

**Figure 2: A model of Covid 19 impact on the intended customer experience from the hotel managers' perspective**



Source : A. Bonfanti et al. (2021)

Companies had to rethink their marketing approach, shifting their focus from growth to survival (P. Koserowski, 2021). The marketing team turned to Agile, a method of working that had proven to be effective, Agile provided a structure for the global and regional marketing teams to come together, redefine how they collaborated, and respond to the pandemic's various problems. "It all started with each Agile team member's dedication. The individuals demonstrated a sense of personal responsibility to their colleagues, exhibiting adaptability, flexibility, and a mindset of growth. The

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employment of the Agile methodology provided a structure for the team's collaborative efforts." The ability to establish and manage new relationships across the

**Figure 3: methodological process**



(Source: Foster 1998, p.81)

organization the team was divided and had less brief interactions while the physical offices were temporarily shuttered, however, team members were able to interact more thanks to Agile.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

The study aims to contribute to the understanding of how hospitality industry in Morocco can adapt and succeed in a context of rapid and continuous change, taking advantage of market opportunities while preserving their positioning in the luxury market. We have carried out in addition to the exploratory research, qualitative research with different players in the luxury hotel sector.

The main research question that this paper aims to answer in particular is the following: How did the hospitality industry in Morocco adapt their luxury marketing strategy in response to recent economic, social and cultural changes, such as the health crisis, changing customer experience, while preserving their brand image and positioning?

This problematic raises several research questions, such as: What are the factors of change in the marketing environment of luxury hotels in Morocco? What are the new needs and expectations of the hospitality consumer in Morocco mostly how are hotels meeting them, redesign the customer experience? What are the luxury marketing challenges and opportunities for hotels in Morocco in times of change?

This chapter will therefore present how we found answers and the origin of the data. The figure is the schematic presentation of the methodology.

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The qualitative approach allows to better explain a given subject. In this approach, we are interested in a very small sample. We are going to conduct individual interviews. The latter helps to create an environment of trust between the investigator and the consumer. A close relationship is created between the two, and the barriers are erased. Interviews have the advantage of being in-depth interviews.

In order to answer our problematic, we carried out qualitative research with the top management of Sofitel Rabat Jardin des Roses, The Oberoi Marrakesh Hotel Manager, the F&B manager and the sales director of Story Hotel Rabat.

Also, we made the choice to develop a qualitative study, to focus on the quality and freedom of answers, guided by an in-depth interview guide. Once the field survey has been carried out, we will collect the information in order to interpret it, and analyze it, to answer our problematic.

The type of interview we chose for our qualitative research is an in-depth qualitative interview. We opted for this interview to be able to orient and direct the dialogue with the people interviewed. In our study, we want to have very precise and pointed information, and this type of interview allows us that, it is perfectly in line with what we want to obtain as information from this study.

The qualitative analysis including categorization, visualization, and data modeling was done using ATLAS.ti software which facilitated the process and allowed us to explore the relationship between the data and the group dynamics analysis.

### **2.1. Sampling**

In the context of our qualitative study, it seemed necessary for us to sculpt the point of view of the hotel managers'. Thus, we will better understand the framework in how this pandemic redefined the luxury hospitality marketing strategy. It was then that we found it necessary to interview through in-depth interviews. This type of interview, as we mentioned above, allows us to redirect the interviewees in the direction we want. The general subject of this interview is COVID19: what's the impact of this health crisis on luxury marketing strategy?

**QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING LUXURY MARKETING DURING TIMES  
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We decided to interview the Marketing manager of Sofitel Rabat Jardin des Roses: Ms. K. Nejoua and the F&B Director: Mr. Debagh Y., The Oberoi Marrakesh Hotel Manager Mr. Rohan O., the F&B manager Mr. Mahubi O. and the sales director of Story Hotel Rabat. Interviews were carried out individually. To the effect of, collect the opinions of each of them on this current situation. In addition, it will allow us to have different answers, to define the subject. Mr. Ogale, R Oberoi hotel manager met at the Rabat Sale Airport on September 10, 2021, Mr. Mahubi at the Story Rabat – Le Safran Restaurant on January 3, 2022. Finally, on February 12, 2022, we made an appointment with the interviewees at 10 a.m. in the Galica meeting room at the Sofitel Rabat Jardin des Roses.

We started first, by writing, and developing the outline of the interview (appendix). We can distinguish three stages: the introduction and presentation phase, the questions phase, and the interview conclusion phase. Regarding the first phase, it allows us to predefine our expectations regarding the interview, by ensuring that this interview remains abundant, and equivocal. This phase allows the investigator to assert himself, and to speak freely without being influenced by the investigator, he can interpret the subject in his own way, taking into account his own referencing framework.

For Phase Two, we developed the various questions to be addressed during the interviews. We have presented it in the form of open-ended questions in order to give the interviewees, the opportunity to express themselves on the subject freely. In addition, if the interviewee skipped a question, or when we needed to know more details, or to address the question in depth, we would interrupt by asking questions related to the information wanted. Obviously, we can say that we followed the funnel principle for our questions, it consists of asking general questions and ending with more specific questions.

At first, we started with the apparition of COVID19 in Morocco, the first lockdown, the government decisions for restrictions, the consumers behavior and so on, but on

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the other hand when we needed more details, we asked the interviewer to respond deeper. Then, if the interviewee has failed to answer questions, we direct them to get the answers.

The last phase is dedicated to the conclusion and thanking the interviewees for their participation in the research. A pre-test seemed necessary, in order to get an idea of the relevance and understanding of our questions, so we carried out this on a number of our friends. Neutrality was the watchword during the interviews. We were careful not to influence or guide the interviewees, using professional terms without any negative or positive connotations. In addition, to facilitate the transcription of the interviews, we asked permission for the interviewees to record the interview, some accepted others not.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Hotel Managers' and their marketing team employed the Agile technique since they had seen some of the achievements and thought it was a good time to try it out on a wider scale, by promoting cross-functional collaboration, the team fostered an environment that encouraged the generation of fresh and creative ideas, leading to an improvement in productivity and employee contentment. Despite being geographically dispersed, the team developed a stronger bond, further contributing to their success.

The customer base for luxury hotels is predominantly foreign, the arrival of the Coronavirus and the restrictions on international travel require a change of strategy. The guarantee of the safety of customers before, during and after the visit to the hotel, becomes a fundamental step and this safety is the same that must be transferred, from today and forever, even when booking. Moroccan tourists are once again the first reference target. It is precisely for this reason that hotels in the luxury sector are developing initiatives likely to create trust, reassure and better meet the needs of local customers, the new era is forcing players in the hotel world to have a different approach to customers.

Hotel directors and managers find themselves with significant fixed costs, such as salaries, possible loans, credits and sharply declining revenues, which do not budge,

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they wonder what will happen on the side of consumers when the time comes. It's extremely uncertain, nobody's world really knows what tourism consumption practices will take hold. Constrained by the opening of borders and the equally uncertain resumption of air lines for the choice of destinations and hotel segments. It is pointed out that the price of Accor has lost over 35% since the start of the year. But they have good cash flow and have largely focused their development through franchising for years to lower their use of equity capital. And as such, it is not the franchisor who pays the waste.

In order to encourage customers to start frequenting hotels again, while also encouraging greater frequentation of bars and restaurants by external customers, in the post-pandemic world a variety of deals must be considered, such as free nights, complementary stay insurance temporary, additional stays for the "third night", vouchers or gift cards that include services such as late check-out, welcome cake, free services such as SPA tickets, sessions with personal trainers, messages and forms of communication must be addressed in a direct and personalized way to customers, increasing the feeling of personal closeness and the constant attention paid to them. This approach would make it possible to show increasing attention to the benefits of a more psycho-social and emotional nature for clients, enriching the value of the reception offer. Having adopted a corporate social responsibility program aimed at the various targets most in need is also important, but it is not only momentary during this pandemic, but of an ongoing and strategic nature, to show continued commitment.

The positive impact of COVID19 is to have changed the direction of the industry, luxury hotels before the crisis, relied on loyal customers to add up to 60% of their turnover through accommodation, while 40% would cover it through direct channels and travel agencies. We're going to start to see more innovation because of all of this, despite the negative impacts of the cuts on service providers. The hotel industry realizes that it must do more with less to optimize its resources. After the shock of this health crisis, it could be the end of income management with the agitation needed to adapt. So, it's not just about raising or lowering prices on weekends, but understanding



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the prospect of demand, developing a strategy to deal with it and being agile enough to adapt the strategy, automation will be a necessity, companies will embark on technologies that automate routine tasks so hotel managers can focus on more complex decision-making strategies. Given the potential for downsizing as organizational structures change, we're going to start to see more technology in the back office, out of necessity. It will transform many professions, which in practice were data manipulators, into real management strategies, which will have a positive impact for luxury hotels.

As for the managerial implications of the research, understand the customer needs, preferences and expectations, in order to tailor the offerings based on these findings. The results of the study can help companies better target their marketing and develop strategies that meet customer needs but also analyze market trends, opportunities and threats to adjust their strategy accordingly, develop training programs for employees of luxury hospitality sector to improve their skills and provide upper quality service. The study will also help to better understand competitors' marketing strategies and find ways to innovate to stand out. The results of this study will help managers develop effective marketing and communication strategies to attract and retain customers.



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### CONCLUSIONS

The combination of the two-research exploratory and qualitative carried out allowed us to highlight the redefinition of luxury hospitality marketing strategy after the pandemic. Through the literature review, we noted the various measures that the Moroccan authorities were forced to take to face the pandemic, in order to highlight the framework in which the hospitality establishments have evolved. These measures could be classified into three distinct periods, from mid-February 2020 to March 16, 2020, a period during which gatherings of people were limited, from March 16, 2020 to March 11, 2020, corresponding to the period of imposed closure of establishments, then from May 11, 2020 to the end of June. During this last period, they were able to reopen their doors while respecting a protection plan.

The qualitative research, carried out through interviews with the top management of the well-known luxury hotel in Rabat, allowed us to observe the strong economic impact of the health crisis, which resulted in a drop-in demand. before March 16, by closing catering facilities during pre-lockdown, but also when reopening establishments due to the protection plan put in place. In general, we underline that the COVID19 pandemic strongly impacted all the sectors but mainly hospitality sector, the arrival of the Coronavirus and the restrictions on international travel require a change of strategy, Moroccan tourists are again the first reference target.

Developed in response to the Covid19 health epidemic, hotel solutions include sanitation and protection measures, internal work restructuring, technology and digital innovation investments, and customer latency reorganization. Includes staff training and up-to-date communication. Reassurance, speed, intimacy, and intimacy are the most important predictable repercussion of Covid19's safety-awareness hotel measures on the intended customer experience. The digital revolution improves the entire luxury experience by providing effective and secured services to customers. (A. Bonfanti et al., 2021)

The foremost contributions of this research are a better understanding of the new trends and challenges of the luxury hotel industry in Morocco during times of change,

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exploring the behaviors and expectations of the customer in terms of services, amenities, and the overall experience of stay, in order to attract new guests, retain existing guests, and differentiate themselves from other luxury hotels. But also, to identify growth opportunities for the luxury hotel industry, such as expanding into new market segments or investing in new marketing channels. This study provides valuable information to hotel industry professionals, policy makers, investors, and researchers interested in the development of the luxury hotel industry in the region.

Some limitations of this study may facilitate future studies. First, because this research used ethnographic method, the results lacked hypothesis testing and cannot be generalized statistically. Therefore, from a management perspective, quantitative method is a must when testing the impact of measures on customer experience. Moreover, interviewing just one person from each hotel, may lead to a biased assessment. Future research may be able to work around this limitation by investigating more hotel managers. Second, this research was mainly on the customer experience: an interesting area of the study is to expand the analysis from customers view. Further research will reveal customer's behavior of luxury hospitality during and after Covid-19.

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### Appendix: In-depth interview

*"The world of tourism is resilient and people will always have a need to travel. I think that the day it resumes it will start again in a very strong way."* – The Oberoi Hotel Manager.

The interview took place in the Galica meeting room of the Sofitel Rabat Jardin des Roses with Ms. K. and Mr. D., a meeting which was very enriching. During our field survey, we were given the following answers:

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1- Were you prepared for the risk of one day going through a pandemic?

We did not expect this to have a full impact on us and for everything to stop overnight, we recognize that we probably did not anticipate the strength of the second wave of the health crisis.

2- Have you taken any action after realizing the extent of this situation?

We deeply respect the national hygiene strategy. Despite all our considerable efforts, our hotel is facing one of its worst years in Morocco's most attractive tourist destinations. We lost our business customer base, weddings, and club parties.

3- Before the closure of the hotel imposed by the authorities, did you feel a change in the attitude of your customers?

In fact, the only circular received by the hospitality sector concerned the obligation to close the coffee house, bar and restaurants of our establishments but not our accommodation units. At the Sofitel Rabat Jardin des Roses which kept part of its customers throughout the lockdown, bars and restaurants are still closed to external customers but our residents can if they wish to eat while respecting social distancing measures

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4- Full lockdown since mid-March, what measures have you taken in this phase?

We have a very strict sanitary protocol: hotel employees must change sanitary masks every 4 hours and use hand sanitizers gels frequently and correctly. In addition, the rooms, which must remain empty for 24 hours before welcoming a new guest, are fully disinfected. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to reassure visitors who have doubts about hygiene in the midst of this crisis. We expect the situation to improve as quickly as possible. Personally, protecting yourself is important, but also protecting your teams.

5- After the lockdown, what were the sanitary measures required by the supervisory ministry that had the most impact on your establishments?

After three months of lockdown and six months far from normal activity (variable closing times depending on the city, social distancing), we are subject to a curfew which forces us to close at 8 p.m., we fear that this measure, which reduced the number of our customers and which deprives us of many hours of activity, is not renewed for an indefinite period. However, the protection plan was a burden on the hotel. In addition to the purchase of equipment, such as plexiglass walls or hand sanitizers, the workload increased for employees, as they were forced to clean surfaces and objects handled more regularly.

6- Regarding the list of the main health and safety measures implemented, do you plan to keep some in the hotel for the future?

Indeed, apart from safeguarding our production machine, the priority has been to establish common rules to control the health risk throughout the hotel's value chain, we have taken the quintessence of all the points of vigilance on which operators should be vigilant and vigilant. Although it will be improved over time, it will not however replace the protocols of the health authorities because it was designed for start-up, to ensure a gradual and gradual resumption of activity. It is a quality approach that will bring in more customers and be able to get off on the right foot for the future.

7- Since the pandemic, with a serious absence of customers, it's almost impossible for hotels to function well, what are the difficulties facing the profession?

It is not an easy period, we have few European customers, but we remain positive. We have decided to stay open and we are also working with Moroccan customers. And we believe that this allows the employees to keep the motivation and to continue to keep the hotel alive, despite the fact that we have no visibility on the opening of borders and the arrival of foreign tourists, the majority of hotels will be open at the end of June to welcome nationals. In particular, subsidies are expected to cope with losses and the declaration of the health crisis.



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8- During this alarming crisis, has activity fully recovered? Are you experiencing an increase or decrease in your turnover?

The global hotel group Accor saw its turnover fall to 1.61 billion euros, and lost 1.98 billion euros. The revenue per available room (RevPAR), a flagship indicator of the hotel industry, plunged 62% last year - and even 88.2% in the second quarter alone, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As for the company Risma, whose capital is held by the insurer RMA (36.7%) and by the hotel group Accor (33.4%). The tourist operator which manages thirty hotels of the Accor brand, saw its rating drop by more than 50%, from 165 dirhams (15.3 euros) at the beginning of March 2020. The investors sanctioned Risma, sole representative of companies in the tourism sector on the Moroccan market, which is currently very strongly affected. The establishment had recorded a loss of turnover, not because of a drop-in customer demand, but because of the measures imposed by the protection plan. Indeed, despite the loss of a small part of our "business" clientele, the private clientele very quickly returned when the establishment reopened, although the health crisis was not over. The clientele was happy to be able to come out after semi-confinement, they were staying in the facility longer than before the onset of this crisis and they were consuming more. Despite the negative impact of the protection plan measures on turnover, we understood and wanted to respect these measures. However, the challenge for the staff was to enforce these measures on the customers, without putting on the "police hat".

9- Have you benefited from state or private aid? In what forms?

The postponement or elimination of social charges (CNSS and CIMR), but also tax reductions (IR, IS and VAT), for the entire period of the crisis. In particular, subsidies are expected to cope with losses and the declaration of the health crisis as a case of force majeure in order to allow establishments to reduce staff and / or salaries. "For the moment, we have maintained permanent and fixed-term contracts, and we are paying them. Casual workers have been put on sick leave in order to benefit from state employment loss compensation.

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10- Since the reopening of the establishments of the hotel, have you noticed a change of customer base? Or more, a change in the consumption of your customers?

This is a time when we have to adapt. We are obviously dependent on Moroccan customers. It has been noticed that customers take their time consuming more, which has a double impact: the average ticket for a table has increased and the table turnover rate has decreased. The manager also noticed that the staff spent more time with customers, allowing them to pay more attention and get to know them better. Particular attention was paid to caring for customers and to strictly enforcing hygiene measures in order to gain customer confidence and reassure them.

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