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The shift in significance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes during the Covid-19 pandemic in respect of changes made in the hotel industry.

Tourism, Hotel Management and Operations

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

31.05.2021
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Date

Abstract

The importance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes is undisputed in the lodging industry. However, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has decelerated and changed the hotel industry globally. Due to lockdowns and curfews, and a coherent hotel-closure wave, the industry had to implement new standards to satisfy the market.

This thesis aims to identify the possible shift in importance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes during the Covid-19 pandemic. To explore a shift of importance, a qualitative thematical analysis was chosen. Further, guest reviews were collected from two major OTAs (online travel agencies) which are booking.com and tripadvisor.com. Nine themes were coded through an inductive, data-driven, research approach.

The results of the qualitative thematical analysis show that the most common hotel choice attributes, for instance, price and location are still key choice attributes. Nonetheless, safety, which was not listed under the top hotel choice attributes in the literature, appears to be a vital attribute for guests now. Personal protective equipment (PPE), for example, face masks and hand sanitizers, is now mentioned more often than before the global Covid-19 pandemic.

For many guests, it is the first time, they travel after the hotel industry almost stopped globally, with lockdowns and curfews. To conclude, nowadays, safety is more relevant than ever regarding the still ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Hotel guests need to have a safe feeling when traveling. Limitations arise from the uncertainty of how long the virus will be present in the future and if a vaccine will stop the pandemic. Further, it is unclear, if the newly implemented safety measures will remain after the pandemic and to what extend the hotel industry got affected by the virus.

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background information

The last years have shown that the hotel industry market is getting more competitive and increasingly dense. One example of this competitiveness is the NH hotel group. NH hotel group took over former Boscolo sites in Europe including hotel properties like Palazzo Naiadi in Rome or the Plaza Hotel in Nice which will then be rebranded (Doggrell, 2020). Another example of the increasing compression of the European hotel market would be Switzerland. The centrally located country in Europe had a growth of 14.7 percent regarding chain hotels. In 2016 they reported 218 chain hotels and two years later Switzerland had gained almost 100 chain hotels. Further, also the total number of hotel brands raised from 58 in 2016 to 73 in 2018 (Wehrle et al., 2019). In Austria, the pattern continues similar to other European countries. Referring to Hahn (2020) there were 29 different hotels planned to open in 2020, increasing the total hotel rooms in Austria by over 4000. The fastest-growing hotel brands are B&B Hotels, Best Western and Harry´s Home. Beginning of 2021, a new DoubleTree by Hilton opened in Nesslegg, Vorarlberg (Hahn, 2020). Hilton Worldwide Holding planned not only to open one property in Austria in the year 2020. Referring to "Why Hilton´s Collection brands are a 2020 development focus" (2020) more than 150 hotels worldwide will open their doors for guests in the next years. This trend leads a competitive market to an even more competitive one.

At the beginning of 2020, the global economy dropped dramatically as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Between the first and second quarters in the previous year, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated important information about the already spreading pandemic. At the very beginning of 2020 on the third January, WHO (2020) stated that Chinese officials provided information about a viral pneumonia that originated in Wuhan, China. From that moment onwards, almost every day new information was published by the WHO. At the beginning of March, 2020, the World Health Organization proclaimed Covid-19 as a possible pandemic due to increasing numbers of infections (WHO, 2020). Two days after their announcement, Europe got declared as the epicenter of the pandemic with more reported cases than in the rest

of the world except the Republic of China. In April 2020, more than one million reported cases were recorded, updated information on how to use a mask even for healthy people in communities, and the first advice considering large-scale movement restrictions, also known as lockdowns were published (WHO, 2020). Due to the constantly changing and adding restrictions people got insecure in all situations in daily life. Such travel restrictions had an enormous impact on the tourism industry. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) stated that 2020 was the worst year in tourism history. In comparison to 2019, one billion fewer arrivals worldwide were counted (UNTWO, 2021). This means in other figures, the international arrivals dropped by 74 percent compared to 2019. In order to demonstrate how all-encompassing Covid-19 is, UNTWO (2021) stated that in 2009, during the great recession, the international arrivals dropped only by four percent which is a fraction of the current pandemic.

This dramatic drop led also hotel managers to rethink their strategies. There are many ways to highlight a hotel. One way to stand out in the highly competitive hotel industry is through its attributes. Dolnicar and Otter (2003) stated that the awareness of pointing out the right attributes a hotel can offer will lead to higher customer loyalty and easier hotel development decisions. Little research has been done regarding safety as a hotel choice attribute. The Covid-19 pandemic increased the awareness of health security or safety in all situations. No research has been done so far on the shift in importance of safety as a hotel choice attribute during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hotel choice and satisfaction attributes influence guests to choose one hotel over another. The importance of those attributes is not constant and may change due to different circumstances depending on their influence (Kraus, 2000). In the current case, the Covid-19 pandemic changed people´s perception about safety and therefore a deeper investigation is needed.

1.2   Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to examine a possible shift in importance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes during the global Covid-19 pandemic based on existing academic literature and a conducted qualitative thematical analysis:

In order to support the aim of this study, following research objectives were defined:

- Defining the difference between choice and satisfaction attributes
- Showing the effect of Covid-19 on the hotel industry regarding economic issues and implemented measures
- Identifying present guests´ perception of choice and satisfaction attributes

1.3   Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five main parts: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and conclusion.

In the introduction part, the author provides an overview of the topic and will indicate necessary background information. Further, the aims and research objectives will be stated there. The second part is the literature review of this thesis and is divided into two main parts. The first part consists out of the definition of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes and the importance for the hotel industry. The second part of the literature review is a definition of a pandemic in general and going deeper into the still spreading Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the extent and impact of the named pandemic will be presented. The methodology, which is the third part of this thesis contains a thematical analysis of two chain hotels located in Dubai. Between July and August 2020 reviews from booking.com and tripadvisor.com were collected. After collecting the reviews, codes were generated. These codes were then put together into themes. Afterwards, findings will be presented in the fourth section of this thesis. In the end, the author will summarize the information gained in the previous parts.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Choice and satisfaction attributes and their importance

2.1.1 Definition choice attributes

Some attributes affect the choice of customers or guests prior to their stay and some attributes affect the satisfaction during their stay. Therefore, the five-stage model of consumer buying process is displayed below to show which attributes affect he actual stay.

Figure 2. 1. Five-stage model of consumer buying process
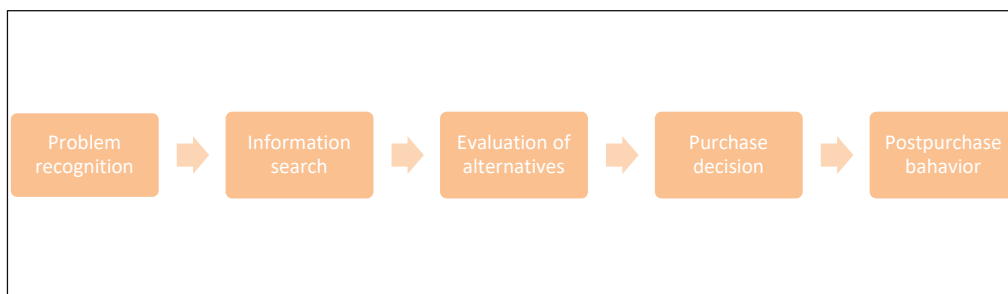
Source: Kotler and Keller (2016) p. 195.

Kotler and Keller (2016) described the five-stage model of the consumer buying process as following: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior.

As visually presented in Figure 2.1, it starts with the recognition of a problem a consumer has. This problem can have internal or external factors. Internal factors which drive a problem can be seen as hunger or thirst. External factors could be triggered for example, by a neighbor´s new wristwatch or an advertisement for a holiday. Kotler and Keller (2016) stated that around 50 percent of consumers only search for that one specific item they want. Less than a third will have a deeper look and search for more information about that item. The information gathering is mostly influenced by personal, commercial, public and experiential factors. After all the information needed about the product or item is gathered, a consumer will evaluate

for alternatives. By this, different attributes of the product are the key. This can be attributes like price, location, brand equity or safety. If the set of attributes for a consumer are met, the purchase decision will be made. There, the consumer decides the brand, retailer, quantity, timing and payment method. After buying a product or service, the post-purchase behavior results from consuming the product or service. If the product or service fulfills the expectation, the customer is pleased. If a product or service outpaces the expectations, the consumer is delighted but if the product or service does not meet the expectations, the customer is dissatisfied and might not return (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.1.2   Definition satisfaction attributes

There is no uniform definition of consumer satisfaction (Giese & Cote, 2000).

One definition of consumer satisfaction used by researchers is:

> Conceptually, an outcome of purchase and use resulting from the buyer's comparison of the rewards and costs of the purchase relative to anticipated consequences. Operationally, similar to attitude in that it can be assessed as a summation of satisfactions with various attributes of the product or service. (Churchill & Surprenant, 1986 p. 493)

Gise and Cote (2000) further stated that there are three key elements, all different definitions of consumer satisfaction have in common which are customer satisfaction is a response, which has a certain focus, that arises after the consumption of a product or service. Furthermore, they stated that response is described in the literature as either cognitive or emotional. Gise and Cote (2000) mentioned that more recent studies concluded that response is more emotional-driven rather than cognitive. Moreover, satisfaction focuses on the performance of a product or service, consumption or purchase decision. Timing of a response on satisfaction is a post-purchase circumstance. After a customer has consumed a service or good, he or she might be satisfied or dissatisfied.

2.1.3 Difference of choice and satisfaction attributes

Figure 2. 2 Different choice and satisfaction attributes
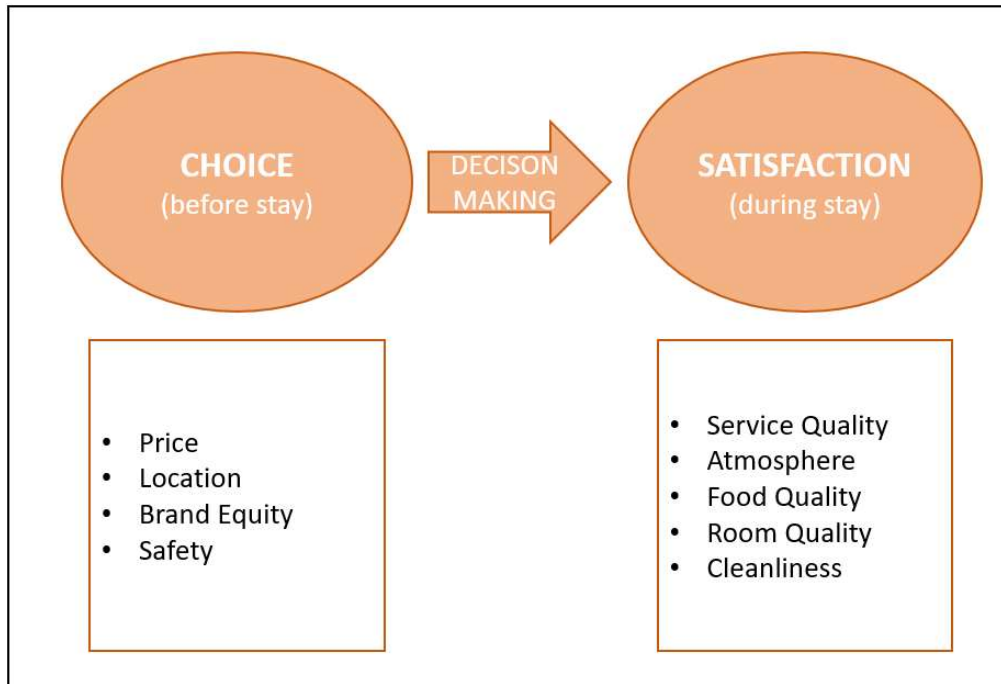
As previously mentioned, there are attributes that affect the choice and that others affect the satisfaction of guests. This can be seen in Figure 2.2. Nowadays, in the case of the hotel industry, price, location, brand equity and safety are choice attributes and affect the guest prior to their stay. The decision-making process helps to evaluate which hotel to choose. First, the problem recognition is a need for a vacation. Then, guests gather information about one specific hotel and discover the price, location, brand equity and safety measures. After this, alternatives are being evaluated. Then, the buying decision comes in place. While being at the hotel, satisfaction attributes are getting vital such as service quality, atmosphere, food quality, room quality and cleanliness. These choice and satisfaction attributes can be separated into those groups but might become indistinct.

Table 2. 1 Literature review of different choice and satisfaction attributes

Choice Attributes	Satisfaction Attributes	Authors
Price	-	Chang and Shin (2008); Goi (2011)
Location	-	Bull (1994); Yang et al. (2017)
Brand Equity	-	Knutson (1988); Lockyer (2003)
Safety	-	Enz and Taylor (2002); Hillard and Balloglu (2008)
-	Service Quality	Grönross (1984) and Lethinen and Lethinen (1991)
-	Atmosphere	Donovan and Rossiter (1982); Heide and Gronhaug (2008)
-	Food Quality	Kivela (1999); Alonso et al. (2005)
-	Room Quality	Attkinson (1988); Dolnicar and Otter (2003)
-	Cleanliness	Kim et al. (2008); Kottler and Keller (2016)

The following table shows the different choice and satisfaction attributes, which have been mentioned in the literature so far. There are more hotel choice and satisfaction attributes but it depends on the focus research that has been done in the past. For example, taking literature from researchers, safety was not even mentioned or was listed as one of the least important attributes in their studies because it used to be less important as hotel choice attribute (Dubé & Ranaghan, 2000; Baruca & Civre, 2012; Caber & Albayrak, 2014).

2.1.4   Different choice attributes

- **Price**

Referring to Goi (2011) price it the sum charged for a certain good or benefit. When it comes to the customer´s decision, price is one of the most important attributes. Price is the only attribute that generates revenue for a company or organization. If the price is too high or too low, the company or organization might receive a loss in revenue. The price should cover fixed and variable costs, position strategies of the company or organization and the willingness to pay, of the target group (Khan, 2014). The willingness to pay is the highest amount a customer or guest is willing to pay for a good or benefit (Homburg et al., 2004). Therefore, if a price is too high, a guest might

choose another hotel over the other. Chang and Shin (2008) stated that more than 50 percent switched to poor pricing. There are many pricing strategies to ensure a cost-covering or even profitable price. For example, cost-based pricing, break-even pricing, competition-based pricing and customer-value-based pricing (Khan, 2014). When it comes to the lodging industry a price can be measured as the amount charged per night.

- **Location**

Yang et al. (2017) expressed location as the physical appearance of a property at a certain place that cannot be changed. This mirrors the literature from Bull (1994) where it is stated that the location of a property is the only attribute of a hotel that cannot be altered and adapted to market changes. Further, it is stated that the location of a property is a vital attribute when it comes to hotel choice. To point out the importance of location as a hotel choice attribute, Xiang and Krawczyk (2016) went one step further and studied the field of online consumers and location. They came to the result that almost every online travel agency (OTA) has its map where a consumer can see important external factors like train stations or airports next to the hotels´ location. Furthermore, a business guest prefers a hotel next to the business area of a city and a leisure guest aims for a hotel next to the city center to visit sights or next to the beach if the vacation takes place at the sea.

- **Brand Equity**

The journey of selling a product or service is long. If the awareness of a certain product or service is high, a regular purchase can be achieved. Brand equity is the umbrella term of different aspects which all contribute to brand equity. Aaker (1992) named the different aspects as following: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and other proprietary brand aspects. Similar to Aaker (1992), Kim et al. (2008) described also five aspects that contribute to brand equity which are: trust, customer satisfaction, relationship commitment, brand loyalty and brand awareness. The higher the brand equity of a company is, the higher the chances are of choosing it again. Further, this can also raise the brand loyalty of a guest. In the context of hospitality, a guest who is aware of a certain brand and has positive

experiences with it, might not book the same hotel, depending on the occasion, but book the same hotel chain again. This statement is reinforced by Dick and Basu (1994) where they described brand loyalty as repeated non-random purchases. This means that a customer has the chance to decide between different brands but picking the one with a more positive relationship.

- **Safety**

According to Hilliard and Baloglu (2008) safety and security as hotel attributes can be divided into three different dimensions. The first dimension is visible safety measures which would represent security cameras for example. The second dimension is documentation and staff training. This refers to how the staff gets instructed to document suspicious or unusual occurrences. The last dimension is general security features which refer to electronic door locks for example. However, the hotel industry is a very sensitive industry regarding safety and security. Referring to Enz and Taylor (2002) managers need to find a way to give the guest a safe feeling while staying on the hotel´s property without giving them the feeling of too much monitoring. Further, hotels that changed their safety and security policies after 9/11, got the highest scores This can be converted in today's situation. Hotels which reacted quicker than others will probably receive higher scores in the review section than others. The already mentioned visible safety measures which are more relevant today refer to hand sanitizers throughout the hotel and face masks for guests and employees.

2.1.5   Different satisfaction attributes

- **Service Quality**

Grönroos (1984) stated that service products are produced and consumed simultaneously and have a higher consumer interaction. He separated service quality into three dimensions which are technical, functional and image quality. Other literature also defined service quality, not as a single attribute. Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) divided service quality into physical, interactive and corporate quality. Grönroos (1984) described his first dimension as technical quality. This refers to a bed in a hotel room as previously already stated. In other words, this is what the consumer

gets. This dimension is more objective. However, the functional quality is more subjective. Here, the importance is how a consumer gets a certain service. By this, the process of the delivered service is the key point. Grönross (1984) added also image quality to the existing two dimensions. Consumers have different expectations towards certain brands. Image quality raises from technical and functional quality. Regarding those three mentioned dimensions, Grönross (1984) further stated that there are external components that can impact image quality for example, word-of-mouth but described them as less important. To summarize service quality, the technical image quality would represent the tangible goods in a hotel and functional service quality addresses in what way the tangible goods are conveyed or served. Image quality is built on technical and functional service quality.

- **Atmosphere**

Atmosphere is a key component to satisfy guests in the hotel industry. There are different definitions of atmosphere. One of the definitions is that atmospheres are "packaged environments" which generate a tendency to buy a product or service (Kotler & Keller, 2016, p. 627). This means that the atmosphere positively influences the purchase or consumption of a specific service or good. As stated in Heide and Gronhaug (2008) distinctiveness was the main factor for creating atmosphere. Further, they pointed out that simple amenities presented in a warm and welcoming appearance tend to increase the satisfaction level of a guest. Also, the interaction between employees and guests was essential. Heide and Gronhaug (2008) introduced after an exploratory study four factors of atmosphere: distinctiveness, hospitality, relaxation and refinement. Distinctiveness, the most relevant factor, refers to a unique establishment that differentiates from others. The second factor, hospitality, stands for the interaction between employees and guests. They pointed out that managers need to pay attention to employee training. Thirdly, relaxation affects the recreation of guests in a hotel. The last factor, refinement, stands for classical, traditional, or upper class for example. With that knowledge, it can be assumed that atmosphere is one key attribute in the hotel industry but does not guarantee guest satisfaction solely.

- **Food Quality**

Kivela (1999) portrayed food quality as an important part regarding the restaurant experience. Further, high food quality does not only satisfy customers. It can also be used as a component for competitiveness. Higher food quality will increase the rate of returning customers and hence, it can maximize the restaurants´ business (Namkung & Jang, 2007). This can be seen in a study from Sulek and Hensley (2004) where food quality made almost 20 percent of the customers´ intention to return to a restaurant. According to Alonso et al. (2005) two dimensions of food quality were crucial. The first dimension is the tangible dimension of perceived food quality. This consists out of touch, color, taste, smell, size, vitamin content, knowledge and experience of the product, freshness, texture and shape. The second dimension was stated as the image dimension of perceived food quality which consists out of packaging and looseness, advertising and brand, origin, promotion and place and the type of store. This means in conclusion that food quality is not straightforward. It has different attributes which need to be met to attract guests. The most important attributes referring to Alonso et al. (2005) were tangible attributes like taste and smell.

- **Room Quality**

The importance of room quality in regard to the lodging industry cannot be denied. This reflects many studies which have been conducted over the last decades (Barsky & Labagh, 1992; Dolnicar & Otter, 2003; Lewis & Pizam, 1981). Room quality is a mixture between furniture, fixture and equipment and how it is maintained. For example, Dolnicar and Otter (2003) defined a list of attributes that contribute to the perceived room quality. The most important satisfaction attributes when it comes to room quality were sheets changed upon request only, occupancy sensors, key cards which are responsible for the power control in the room and energy-saving bulbs. In general, people connect with the term room quality the cleanliness of the guest room. Further, the comfortability of beds and value for money were mentioned as well (Atkinson, 1988). Therefore, cleanliness in the room was mentioned in almost every

literature regarding room quality, it can be assumed that during Covid-19 the demand will increase.

- **Cleanliness**

Cleanliness in the hotel industry is often described as essential attributes for guests when it comes to selecting an accommodation (Knutson, 1988; Dolnicar, 2002; Lockyer, 2003). Due to the fact that cleanliness is a crucial part of the hotel selection, managers must be aware of it. Referring to Knutson (1988) the key to success for a business in the lodging industry is to convince the guests to return. In the literature, the most important factor why guests will not return is the cleanliness of the room (Knutson, 1988; Dolnicar, 2002). In most cases of the literature, cleanliness as a whole was addressed but Lockyer (2003) went one step further. This specific hotel satisfaction attribute can be divided into different smaller areas. Through surveys, he came to the result that the cleanliness in the bathroom and especially the toilet are the most important areas followed by kitchen, bedroom, staff, reception area and exterior. For this thesis cleanliness as a hotel satisfaction attribute will not be separated.

2.1.6 Comparison leisure and business segment

The hotel industry serves two major segments which are business and leisure travelers. Over the last years, an increasing dense market has challenged hoteliers to attract those major segments. The success of a company will be determined by the understanding of a guest´s needs. A guest´s decision-making process is complex and goes through several stages. The key to success is to understand the choice and satisfaction attributes of why a guest chooses one hotel over another (Yavas & Babakus, 2005).

Due to the fact that business and leisure travelers are the two major segments, extensive literature has been conducted about choice and satisfaction attributes and how to attract those groups (Weaver & Oh, 1993; Dolnicar, 2002; Kim, 2014; Dubé & Renaghan, 2000; Ahmad et al. 2008). Lewis (1984) collected empirical data and came to the result that out of his sample, the most important hotel attribute for leisure

guests was service. However, Kim and Park (2017) found that leisure travelers are more focused on the general atmosphere while business travelers appreciate a higher room quality because a night of good sleep can raise productivity on the next working day. Business travelers tend to be less price-sensitive because the stays are often supported by a company whereas, leisure travelers tend to be more price-sensitive because they usually have to pay for their holiday by themselves (Kim & Park, 2017).

With different travel reasons, different hotel choice and satisfaction attributes are more decisive than others. There has been made a lot of research regarding the two big segments in the hotel industry. As an example, Weaver and Oh (1993) investigated American business travelers in regards to hotel service requirements which can be translated to hotel choice attributes. They found that there is also a difference between regular business travelers and infrequent travelers. To demonstrate the statement above, the convenience to the city center, which belongs to the location from the above-mentioned hotel choice attributes, is more important to infrequent travelers. Whereas, a hotel frequent traveler program, also associated with brand equity, has a higher importance to frequent travelers (Weaver & Oh, 1993). Other researchers, for instance, Dubé and Renaghan (2000) concluded the top four attributes concerning business travelers as location, brand name, reputation and physical property. Reputation can be considered as brand equity in this study because every brand has a certain reputation. Physical property is connected with atmosphere.

In contrast to business travelers, leisure travelers have dissimilar favorable hotel choice and satisfaction attributes which matter while choosing a hotel. Kim (2014) studied the importance and satisfaction criteria for leisure travelers. The results differ from business-related hotel guests. Important hotel choice and satisfaction attributes are value for money, room cleanliness, and hotel amenities. Nevertheless, the choice and satisfaction criteria are quite different. Here, the hotel location, friendliness of the staff and value for money got the highest marks. For the thematical analysis in chapter 4, friendliness of staff can be replaced with service quality and value for money with price. This covers also the study from Ahmad et al. (2008) where they studied the leisure guests´ perspective in the Malaysian hotel market. The cleanliness of the room, politeness and friendliness of the hotel staff and comfortability of beds

were the top hotel satisfaction attributes. Again, service quality covers the friendliness of the staff and the comfortability of the bed and cleanliness of the room count as room quality.

To sum things up, leisure travelers are more sensitive regarding hotel attributes related to price, location, room quality and quality of service. This means when a guest stays in a hotel for vacation, they want to recover from the daily business but want a certain service standard for their money spent. This reflects also the study from Dolnicar (2002) where the top three hotel attributes which disappointed the guests were cleanliness, room quality and staff. The attributes which can delight guests the most are the same that can dissatisfy them. In contrast to leisure travelers, business travelers have on the one hand similar but on the other hand opposite hotel choice criteria. As mentioned, business guests appreciate a higher room quality, location and the reputation of a brand. Further, a frequent stayer program was also indicated. This is because, they need a comfortable room to prepare for the next working day, a hotel located close to the business area of the city and get benefits if they have a frequent stayer program.

2.2 Importance of choice and satisfaction attributes for the hotel industry

Managers must communicate hotel choice and satisfaction attributes to possible guests appealingly. Many consider John Wanamaker as a marketing pioneer. Once, he said, "I know that half of my advertising is wasted, but I don't know which half." (John Wanamaker, n.d., as cited in Kotler & Keller, 2016, p. 595). This is the reason why lodging companies communicate their attributes also direct on their website. Hotel choice and satisfaction attributes can be used for marketing purposes. This can be seen on various hotel websites.

Figure 2. 3 Screenshot of NH Vienna Airport Conference Centre hotel attributes. Retrieved from: https://www.nh-hotels.de/hotel/nh-vienna-airport-conference-center (Accessed 5th March, 2021)

Hotel Information

Parking	Pet policy	Check-in and Check-out times	Smoking policy
On-site parking: Indoor	Dogs and cats allowed	Check-in: 3:00 pm	100% non-smoking hotel
Price: €4 for the fist hour. €3 every additional hour €34 / day Parking cannot be reserved in advance. EV charging station available	Max. weight: 25kg Price: 25€ (limited availability) Guide Dogs: No charge.	Check-out: 12:00 pm (Lazy Sundays: 5:00 pm)	

The **NH Vienna Airport Conference Center** hotel, formerly known as NH Wien Airport, enjoys a convenient location just across from the arrivals hall at Vienna Airport. That means we have unbeatable transport links – if you want to head into the city, it's just a 16-minute train ride to central Vienna.

- 16 minutes from Vienna's city center
- located within Vienna Airport
- fantastic transport links: Train Station, Bus, and City Airport Train stations are directly opposite.

We have 499 elegant and tastefully furnished rooms, which are spread over 8 floors. You can choose between a Classic Standard, Standard, Classic Premium or Premium room. All of them come equipped with a minibar, satellite TV and free Wi-Fi, as well as access to the spa and fitness area . To ensure you're never bothered by aircraft noise, all our rooms come with soundproofed windows.

- extra-thick mattresses
- rooms are stylishly furnished
- coffee and tea facilities in all Premium rooms

Our à la carte restaurant serves local and international dishes, and is ideal for romantic meals and business dinners alike. For late-night drinks, meanwhile, there's our bar. We also have a large fitness area, which has a sauna and steam room. We also have Sky TV, allowing you to catch up on the day's sporting events.

- massages available
- contemporary bar and restaurant
- large gym
- parking behind the hotel equipped with an EV charging station
- business center
- meeting and conference facilities
- Awarded the ISO 14001 environmental certificate, thanks to its environmental commitment
- If you're planning on staying with us over the weekend, book directly on nh-hotels.com, sign up to NH Rewards and take advantage of our "Lazy Sundays", which include a late checkout (before 5pm) free of charge.

Figure 2. 4 Screenshot of Roomz Hotel Wien Gasometer hotel attributes. Retrieved from: https://www.roomz-hotels.com/en/roomz-vienna#eat-tasty (Accessed 5th March, 2021)
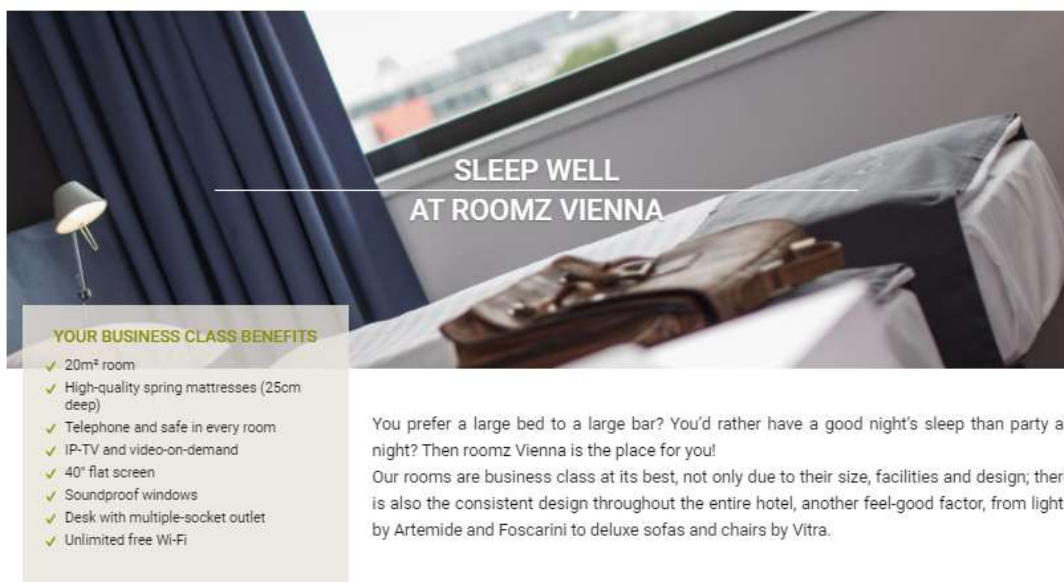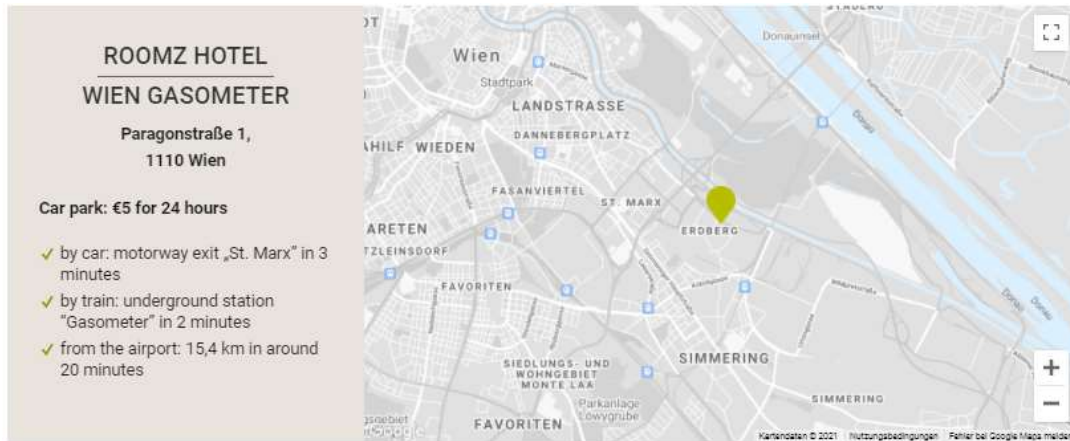
As visually represented, those two hotels communicate their hotel choice and satisfaction attributes clearly on their website. The pictures show a snapshot of what they advertise. The attributes which were discussed previously can now be seen. The first picture is from the NH Vienna Conference Centre. There, the location, room quality, service quality and atmosphere are described. The second picture shows a cutout from the Roomz Hotel Wien Gasometer. Here, the location, room quality and service quality are advertised. In general, hotels communicate almost every attribute

on their website from Table 2.1. This mirrors the importance of attributes for managers and guests in the hotel industry.

As already stated in the thesis, hotel choice and satisfaction attributes differ concerning the occasion. It can therefore be assumed that the importance of various attributes is consequently dynamic. This statement is reinforced by Kotler and Keller (2016) where they described the five-stage model of the buying decision process: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. The stages are usually the same but the outcome may vary depending on the influence.

To demonstrate the shift between the importance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes Dolnicar and Otter (2003) conducted a summary of 21 studies published between 1984 and 2000. The field, research that has been made the most in those 16 years was about service in general followed by the hotel itself and location. Furthermore, hotel rooms and their amenities and price for value have been studied. The outcome of these studies was that a convenient location, the level of service and the reputation were the top attributes that mattered for hotel guests during that period of time.

Whereas, more recent studies between 2000 to 2015 show a shift in the importance of hotel attributes. According to Rhee and Yang (2015) room quality got the highest rank. Moreover, value for money and cleanliness were also of high importance for guests. This almost mirrors the result from Caber and Albayrak (2014). They examined the influence of hotel attributes on senior guests. Here, cleanliness, quality of the room and politeness of the staff received the highest marks. With that knowledge gained above, a repeatedly shift regarding the importance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes can be assumed because none of the research in the literature declared safety as the most important choice criteria although the world is in the middle of a global pandemic with more than 150 million reported cases as of May 2021 (WHO, 2021).

2.3 Definition pandemic and its impact

2.3.1 Definition pandemic

Referring to Last (2001) a pandemic is "an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries, and usually affecting a large number of people" (p. 154). Pandemics are usually not spread in the same way but share some core features: wide geographic extension, disease movement, novelty, severity, attack rates and explosiveness, minimal population immunity and infectiousness and contagiousness (Qui et al., 2017). There have been various pandemics over the last centuries which brought the world and the coherent economy to a standstill. In the 20th century, three severe pandemics plagued the world. According to Barro, Ursúla and Weng (2020) the "Spanish Flu" caused around 40 million deaths in the years 1918-1920. Further, two milder pandemics, called "Asian Flu" and "Hong Kong Flu", caused 1-3 million deaths each in the middle of the last century (Wildoner, 2016). The last pandemic before Covid-19 was the first influenza pandemic recorded in this century. Between 2009-2010 a new pandemic called "Swine Flu" plagued the world again. It is also known as A/H1N1 pandemic. There, the first pandemic vaccine was developed and produced to stop the global spread. Important to mention is that the A/H1N1 mortality rate was much lower than the other two pandemics mentioned. Regarding the case fatality rate, which was at that time 68 percent, the "Avian Flu" or A/H5N1 would be considered in this study but was never declared as pandemic (Keil et al., 2011). The WHO was on high alert and the Avian Flu fulfilled some of the requirements of a pandemic but was never declared as one (WHO, 2005).

As already mentioned, pandemics are epidemics that occur worldwide. Therefore, its impact is global and negatively influence the world. Pandemics can have a tremendous impact on health and economy but can also have social and security impacts (Qui et al., 2017). Hiscott et al., (2020) extended those impacts and added psychological impacts which are related to lockdowns and social distancing. They described lockdowns and social distancing as the last resort to stem the spread of the virus. Further, those safety measures brought some countries to collapse due to a lack

of personal protective equipment (PPE). Moreover, it was pointed out that in Europe, the lack of PPE got more and more complicated for medics and other staff responsible for the daily operation.

The current pandemic has also an enormous impact on the hotel industry. For example, China has reported a drop in average room occupancy from around 68 percent in November 2019 to around twelve percent in February 2021. In May 2020 China reported an average room occupancy of more than 45 percent (Hao et al., 2020). This example is not an extreme. It is predominant around the globe. In less than one month, in February 2020, the European hotel industry came to an almost standstill. Rome reported a drop of an average occupancy rate of over 60 percent to a devastating six percent. Vienna fell from almost 70 percent to 24 percent. London was the most stable one in this example. They reported a decline of around 30 percent in average occupancy in the hotel industry (Coronavirus Hits German Hotel Industry Hard: More than Every-3-Guests Stay Away, 2020). In the U.S., the corona pandemic has more negative impact than September 11, 2001, and the recession in 2008 referring to the American Hotel and Lodging Association. Further, they reported a loss of 150 billion U.S. Dollars (Durbin, 2020).

2.3.2   The scope of Covid-19

The world population has seen different negative events like wars, natural disasters, financial crises and pandemics. Further, pandemics in the last 100 years strangled the population in almost every living condition. Currently, Covid-19 keeps the world busy. To demonstrate the omnipresence of Covid-19, three different major pandemics from the last century were chosen. The reason, why those three pandemics were chosen is to present one pandemic which is more than 100 years over, with little medical progress, one more recent pandemic with advanced medical progress and the most recent one.

Figure 2. 5 Reported infections and death during various pandemics as of May 1st, 2021
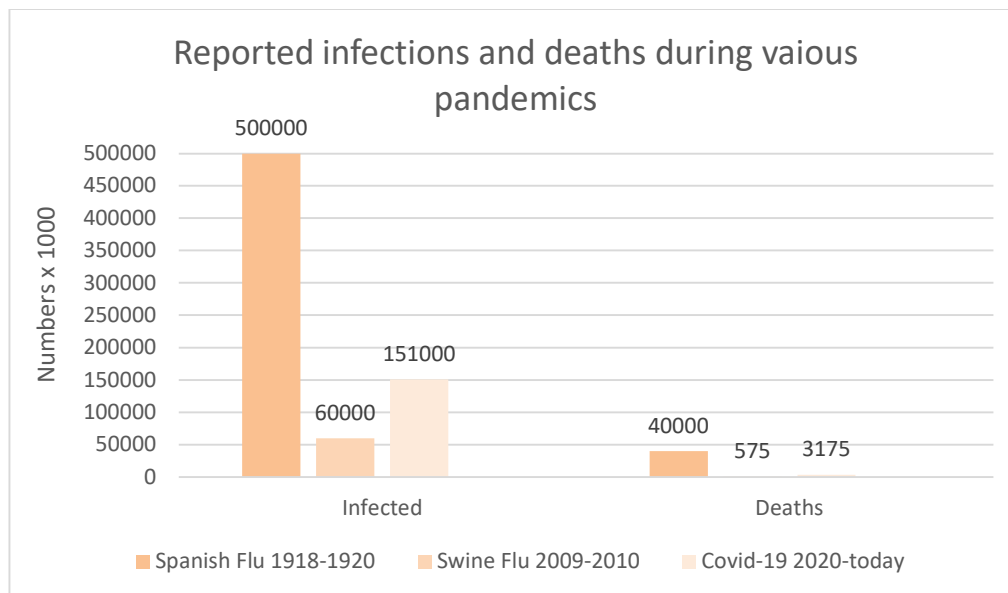
As visually presented, the Spanish flu between 1918-1920 was the worst pandemic so far regarding reported infections and deaths. Sayed and Peng (2021) pointed out that the number of infections and deaths was significantly higher due to less medical advancement and safety measurements being taken at that time. According to Barro et al. (2020) the Spanish Flu also known as the Great Influenza Pandemic caused over 40 million death which was 2,1 percent of the global population at that time. Today, this would count for almost 150 million deaths worldwide. Further, the Great Influenza Pandemic caused millions of deaths in three separate waves in 48 countries. The highest death rate was reported in Kenya with almost six percent of their population. Further, more than 30 percent of the world´s population were infected by the Spanish Flu. Whereas, the Swine Flu also known as A/H1N1 caused about 60 million infections. The fatality rate, as already mentioned, is much lower compared with the Spanish Flu and Covid-19. According to Keil et al. (2011) the Swine Flu has a mortality rate of 0,1 percent. The number of deaths is not exactly stated in the literature. It is estimated that the Swine Flu caused between 151000 and 575000 deaths globally (Bean, 2020). The present pandemic has the world under control. Currently, in May 2021, there are almost 151 million reported cases with more than three million deaths as of May 2021 (WHO, 2021). Important to mention is that the current Covid-19 pandemic is not over. Even though there are already vaccines on the

market and people getting vaccinated, the numbers are still increasing. Referring to McKibbin and Fernando (2020) they explored seven scenarios including the lowest and highest death outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even in the lowest scenario, they expect 15 million deaths. The highest outcome was a shocking 70 million death scenario.

2.4   Relevance for the hotel industry

Through the knowledge gained in the previous chapters, the relevance of Covid-19 for the hotel industry must be presented. On March 17th, 2020, for the first time in history, the European Union closed its borders to non-resident travelers, only six weeks after the first reported case in France. During that period of time, travel restrictions and even lockdowns were implemented worldwide from different nations to stem the transmission of the novel coronavirus. Further, during the spring season of 2020, air and sea travel bans were introduced. With those travel restrictions and lockdowns, the world has been slowed down (Kantis et al., 2021).

Travel restrictions and lockdowns are the inevitable solutions if a negative event like Covid-19 happens. Epstein et al. (2007) used a model to demonstrate the significance between countries with and without travel restrictions. In the first six months, the city with travel restrictions had half or even less than half reported cases than in the same city without travel restrictions. Moreover, Costantino et al. (2020) tested a comparable scenario. They analyzed the rate of cases reported in Australia imported from China. The results were similar to the previous one. Without travel bans, the number of cases imported from China was much higher than with travel bans. After one month of the first case reported, the numbers in their example went from 43 cases without to zero cases with mentioned travel bans (Costantino et al., 2020).

In context for the hotel industry, travel restrictions and bans lead to, in reverse, fewer guests and a dramatic drop in sales and therefore, in revenue. According to Simon (2020) and the use of HotStats data, the hotel industry has had the worst month in March 2020, since the Great Recession in 2009. The gross operating profit per available room (GOPPAR), fell by almost 116 percent and turned negatively for the first time since 1996. This devasting drop mirrors also in Asia Pacific, where the

GOPPAR dropped by 117,8 percent, Middle East fell by more than 98 percent and the United States´ GOPPAR dropped by 110,6 percent. This is an average YOY, meaning year-over-year, a decrease of around 65 percent worldwide (Simon, 2020).

As the GOPPAR fell into negative triple-digit, the hotel industry had to accept the consequences. Fernandes (2020) stated that airlines, cruise companies and hotels were facing a decrease of 90 percent regarding general activities. This led to hotel closings around the world. To demonstrate how devastating the hotel industry was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, Christopher Nassetta, the CEO of Hilton International, stated that they have never closed a hotel besides rebuilding or demolishing a building. Further, it was stated that many Hilton hotels in influential cities were closed and Christopher Nassetta expected an occupancy rate of ten to 15 percent (Jelski, 2020).

Due to the worldwide pandemic, guests are more concerned to travel than ever before. Deloitte (2020) wrote about the change in consumer behavior pre, during and post-pandemic. Almost 40 percent of the asked participants answered that they will continue to order take-away or delivery meals due to safety reasons. This result shows that a big proportion of people no longer want to eat inside restaurants which affects the hotel industry directly. Moreover, a significant decrease in traveling abroad was measurable in the study (Deloitte, 2002). With the change in travel behavior, different attributes will be more vital than others when it comes to hotel selection.

Recent studies have shown that the already concerned population demands more acceptance regarding cancellation policies and wants a higher level of safety. Guillet and Chu (2021) explored the essence of revenue management during the current pandemic where it also was pointed out that the confidence of guests will raise with higher hygiene standards and a focus on cancellation policies. Further, social responsibility was mentioned, while other researchers went even one step further. To minimize person-to-person contact, Jiang and Wen (2020) discussed the use of artificial intelligence and robotics. While stating the use of AI could be a possible solution in the future, they also mentioned that the hotel industry will remain a labor-driven industry with possible adaptations. The importance of hygiene and cleanliness

was a major point in their study and emphasized that the hotel industry has to adapt quickly to satisfy the guests´ needs to overcome the current crisis in a reasonable time (Jiang & Wen, 2020). To sum things up, Gupta et al. (2020) stated that it is easier to shut down the hotel industry than reopening. The opening phase should include several implementations like better safety measures because this pandemic will have a permanent impact on the hotel industry.

3   Methodology

3.1   Research Methods

Studies show that there are different types of research designs to collect the required information to answer a certain research question or statement. The different research designs to collect primary data are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Creswell, 2014). Further, it is stated that qualitative and quantitative research designs are not the opposite of each other. The direction research is conducted tends to be more qualitative or quantitative. By this, for example, interviews tend to be more qualitative and surveys tend to be more qualitative. The mixed method combines these two research designs´ advantages and uses both, quantitative and qualitative approaches. In the literature, it is stated that the qualitative research approach uses words and open-ended questions. Whereas, quantitative research approach uses numbers and closed-ended questions also described as hypotheses (Creswell, 2014).

Moreover, qualitative research can be conducted in five different ways. According to Creswell (2014) these ways are ethnographies, grounded theory studies, case studies, phenomenology and narrative research. Data collection with an emerging method usually arises from interview data, observational data, document data and audio-visional data. Regarding quantitative research, however, two strategies were mentioned: non-experimental designs like surveys and experimental designs. Usually, data can be gained with the help of performance data, observational data, census data and statistical analysis and interpretation. Mixed method can be conducted in three different ways: sequential, concurrent and transformative. There, it is either a pre-determined method comparably to a quantitative research design or can be an emerging method that is related to a qualitative research design. The mixed method can use both, open- and closed-ended questions. The data gained can arise from multiple sources, statistical and textual analysis and interpretation of various databases (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Introduction to thematical analysis

Thematical analysis (TA) was a poorly defined analysis method of qualitative data that gives the researcher freedom of flexibility and has gained more popularity over the last decades (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012; Joffe, 2012; Guest et al., 2011; Krieger & Varpio, 2020). Nowadays, the definition of thematical analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) is commonly used, where they stated "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). Contrary to other scholars, they stated that thematical analysis is not only a tool within other analytic approaches, it shall be considered as its own method with its own rights. Guest et al. (2011) summarized strengths and weaknesses in regards to thematical analysis. The suitability of large data sets, team capability, data-supported interpretation and the variety of study fields without experience was mentioned positively. The only limitation mentioned was that thematical analysis might miss data.

To understand the idea of thematical analysis, the understanding of a theme or pattern is essential. A theme is a capture of a vital detail related to the research question or statement and hence, has a meaning according to the set of data. A theme or pattern is ideally a reoccurring event throughout the data set. There is no specific length or prevalence given in qualitative research to count as a theme or pattern. The importance of such a theme is not valued by the frequency or space in a data set. This means, if a possible theme is mentioned more frequently it cannot be automatically included as a theme. In reverse, a possible theme that occurs less frequently than others is not automatically excluded as a theme. It is in the hand of the researcher, whether to include certain themes or not because there are no specific rules of importance (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, Joffe, 2012).

There are two ways in thematical analysis mentioned in the literature. The first, the inductive way, is also described as the bottom-up way. By this, researchers code themes based on the outcome of the data collected. Consequently, this form is data-driven but it is also mentioned that a researcher has a certain relation to the field of study and therefore, the questions asked to participants might be influenced from the

early stage on. The other way refers to theoretical deductive, also described as top-down analysis which is more analyst-driven. There are two ways to code themes. While coding for a specific research question refers to theoretical analysis, deductive coding refers to where the research question arises from the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012, Joffe, 2012).

Braun and Clarke (2006) mentioned a simple example either the thematical analysis is at a sematic or latent level with the support of a blob of jelly. It is mentioned that a researcher who uses thematical analysis with a semantic or explicit approach, scratches the surface of the meaning of the data collected. There, the data is organized, compiled, interpreted and represented to draw attention to find patterns. Although, thematical analysis with a latent approach goes one step further and focuses on the meaning beyond the collected data. The researcher draws assumptions and ideas about what the data might also be. In the context of the mentioned jelly blob, the semantic approach would focus on the surface and its meaning. While a researcher using a latent approach would go beyond the surface and want to interpret the meaning of the form and why the jelly blob is formed in a certain way (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3   Thematical analysis development

There is clear guidance on how to perform a thematical analysis from Clarke and Braun (2006) which is often cited in other studies (Clarke & Braun, 2012; Terry et al., 2017; Joffe, 2012; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The step-by-step guide, how to execute a thematical analysis is, as it is often, in qualitative literature, not a linear progress. Moreover, moving back and forth through the data set is important to reevaluate patterns of themes. Some steps of the guide are familiar with other qualitative-related methods. Clarke and Brown (2006) listed the six phases of a step-to-step guide as following:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing the report

3.3.1   Familiarization with the data

As the first step, as the name already tells, the researcher needs to engage with the data. It is not important whether the researcher collected the data by himself or the data was provided. Consistent re-reading is vital to familiarize with the data and it does not matter into which level of depth the researcher wants to go. Further, it is stated that re-reading might be time-consuming but is the key to the analysis. If the data is a verbal interview, speech or something else, a transcription of the recorded data is required. At this point, the researcher can use the time spent transcribing the data to familiarize even more with the topic.

3.3.2   Generating initial codes

Codes are mentioned to be broader than themes. In the coding phase, data that is interesting to the analyst is coded into shorter segments. This is the first and most vital phase to organize the data in purposefully. Essential to mention is that the content of the data can be coded as a whole or only specific detail can be coded from the content provided. The coding process can be designed in different ways. Some researchers might use pens with different colors and some use computer-based programs. There are many more ways to execute the coding phase. Lastly, the same extract of data can fit into more than one theme.

3.3.3   Searching for themes

At this stage, codes are generated from the data and these codes, at a wider level, need to be narrowed down to either themes or sub-themes. This can be done by using mind-maps, theme-piles or other organizing tools. Initial codes might overlap and result in themes or codes develop themselves as themes. Codes that do not fit anywhere at this stage are called miscellaneous and should not be excluded, deleted or being left out. These codes might fit at a later stage, after redefining, into other themes.

3.3.4 Reviewing themes

Reviewing themes means that there is already a fairly good understanding of what the possible themes are. If there is too little evidence for a theme, this theme needs to be reworked or refined. Other themes, which are overloaded, need also a potential re-coding or a separation into more themes. After refining themes, as earlier mentioned, codes from the miscellaneous theme probably fit into newly created themes. The next phase consists of the evaluation if the themes reflect the data in a meaningful manner. If the theme map is at a satisfactory level, it is stated to stop there to avoid endless re-coding of themes.

3.3.5 Defining and naming themes

This is the last part before conducting the report. At this point, the essence and meaning of each theme are clear. It was emphasized that the content of the data should not be just paraphrased, rather than presenting the important attributes of that exact theme. It is also possible that themes contain sub-themes. The names of the different themes should be precise and give the reader an immediate understanding. Each of these themes needs to be described in a comprehensive analysis.

3.3.6 Producing the report

The last stage represents the final report and it needs to present the former unstructured data which was transformed into a report to persuade the reader of its validity. Data extractions serve as a tool for it. As mentioned in part five, themes need to be comprehensively analyzed. There, data extractions are a helpful tool to ensure the reader of its relevance regarding the theme itself and the research question or statement (Clarke & Braun, 2006).

3.4 Data collection process and analysis

The data was collected in the period between June and August 2020, while the pandemic forced a lot of countries over the world to shut down. Dubai however, managed to remain open for business and leisure travelers. The reason why data was analyzed from Dubai is that during that time, business and leisure travelers were

allowed, while in most other countries all over the world hotels were just allowed to accommodate business guests. The aim was to gain more knowledge about the importance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes and a possible shift in importance for guests regarding safety and the current Covid-19 pandemic. To cover guest reviews from both, business and leisure travelers, data from two different hotels in Dubai was collected. These hotels accommodate both, business and leisure travelers, but with their facilities they tend to attract one group more. The first hotel, Atlantis The Palm, is a leisure-oriented hotel, located at the Palm Jumeirah. With its location directly next to the beach and many leisure activities, for example, a water park and aquarium, Atlantis The Palm tends to attract more leisure guests. This can also be seen in the review section, where the majority of guests stated, that their stay was leisure-related. The second hotel, Conrad Dubai, a business-oriented hotel, belongs to the Hilton Worldwide Holdings and is located next to the finance center. Due to its 18 meeting rooms and almost 4500 square meters of total event space, the Conrad Dubai tends to attract more business guests. This can be seen again in the review section, where guests stated that the location and relaxation facilities were to their liking because they were close to the business areas and could relax after a working day. Two main guest review platforms were taken into account which were booking.com and tripadvisor.com. 343 reviews from Atlantis the Palm and 156 reviews from Conrad Dubai were collected. A lot of reviews could not be used for this study because they were too short and did not have enough meaning. For example, if a review consisted just out of one word like "nice" or "beautiful", the review was not taken into account. A great number of reviews were anonymous and no other information about the guests was stated. Therefore, no other assumption on guests could be made. Searching for information through analyzing guest reviews got more important over the last decades. For example, De Pelsmacker et al. (2018) studied guest reviews of 132 hotels in Belgium and found out that guest reviews indirectly influence the hotels´ performance, for instance, occupancy and RevPar which stands for revenue per available room. Cong et al. (2014) used guest reviews from tripadvisor.com and did a thematic analysis to explore the experiences in wildlife tourism in china. Xiaoxiao (2015) also did a thematic analysis. They used 119 guest

reviews from retreat centers in Thailand and explored the recreation level before and after a retreat vacation.

The data collection process and the coherent analysis turned out to be more difficult than expected because the huge data set of guest reviews were in different languages. Therefore, a translation of several guest reviews was required. As earlier stated, there are different approaches how to organize qualitative data. A computer-based program called Nvivo was used. Nvivo is a program to organize unstructured qualitative data where a coding tool is implemented. With this, data from guest review pages was extracted into a file and inserted into the program. Further, the data was coded into initial codes and got converted into themes. A data-driven inductive research approach was used which means that the data obtained was not forced into an already existing coding frame.

4 Findings

The once unstructured qualitative data was formed into themes using an inductive research approach. After coding different data files from booking.com and tripadvisor.com during the period between June and August 2020, themes were developed. Through an inductive which means a data-driven approach, nine different themes crystallized out. It turned out, that the themes were extremely similar to hotel choice and satisfaction attributes which were mentioned in the literature review.

The themes, which resulted from guest reviews are listed below in alphabetical order.

- Atmosphere
- Brand Equity
- Cleanliness
- F&B Quality
- Location
- Price
- Room Quality
- Safety
- Service Quality

A deeper look at each theme will be provided. Further, examples of the coding and theme developing process will be displayed to demonstrate the validity of each theme. Moreover, frequency tables and word clouds have been created to show on the one side the most frequently used words regarding the theme and on the other side to visually represent the linked words how they described a theme.

Figure 4. 1 Word cloud atmosphere

Guests mostly described atmosphere as a general package coming with the level of service, attitude of staff and level of hospitality. This can also be seen in the word cloud above. To show, how guests of these hotels expressed atmosphere, data extractions are shown below. The researcher will keep the names anonymous.
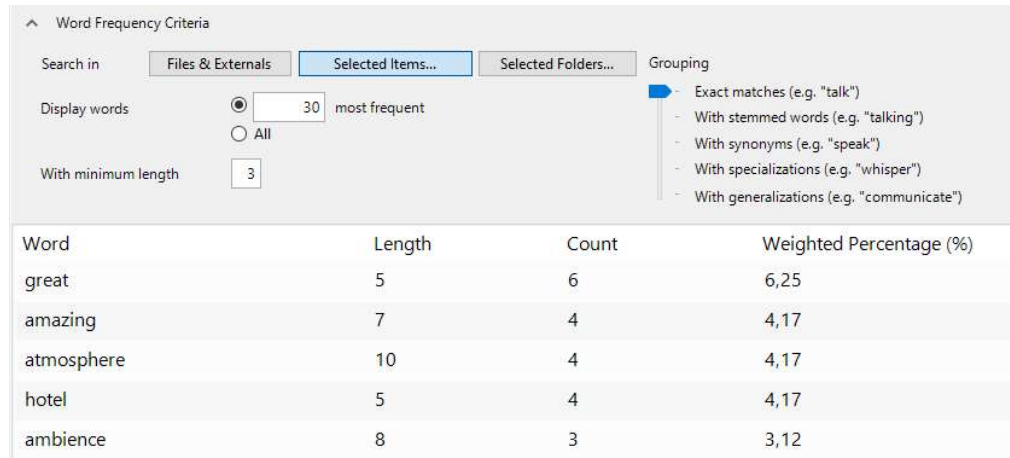
Guest 1 stated that it "Was a great experience overall, great hospitality and friendly staff. Food was great and wonderful atmosphere."

Whereas Guest 2 described it as "The hotel was great, the ambiance and atmosphere inside the hotel were very nice and positive."

Atmosphere was most commonly used when guests expressed the overall impression of the hotel. From staff created atmosphere which would be for example the warm welcome at the door up to the check-in process and other staff-related impressions, to the inside of the hotel where the lights, furnishing and the overall hotel environment were the focus. What stood out was that atmosphere was mainly mentioned at the beginning of reviews. This leads other guests to the general direction of what to expect and it creates the first piece of a puzzle.

The frequency table shows the top five ranked words which were mentioned in regards to atmosphere.

**Table 4. 1** Frequency table atmosphere

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
great	5	6	6,25
amazing	7	4	4,17
atmosphere	10	4	4,17
hotel	5	4	4,17
ambience	8	3	3,12

Important to mention is that the frequency table displayed above shows just exact matches which excludes even the plural when a word was stated in singular. The grouping options can be seen on the top right side. This was chosen because synonyms or generalizations weakened the results. Atmosphere was mostly described as great or amazing and was naturally connected with the hotel itself. Atmosphere barely was described without adjectives. The word cloud displays the top 30 words connected with atmosphere. As stated before, staff interactions, attitude and the hotel itself create a package that results in atmosphere.

Figure 4. 2 Word cloud brand equity
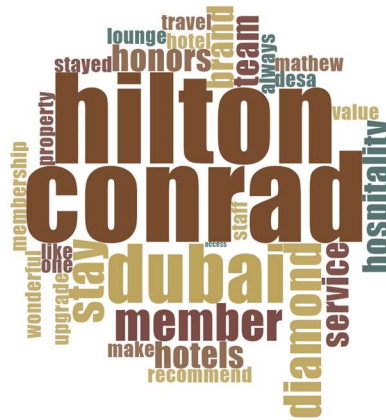
Brand equity is a combination of several factors for instance trust, relationship and brand loyalty. The higher these factors are, the more likely a guest will choose the same, already trusted brand over another. This also reflects in the data obtained for brand equity in the guest reviews. Therefore, Conrad belongs to Hilton Worldwide Holding, which is a major hotel brand, guest reviews regarding brand equity were mostly collected from this hotel. The outcome can be mirrored to every brand. For example, how guests perceive brand equity, two guest reviews are listed.
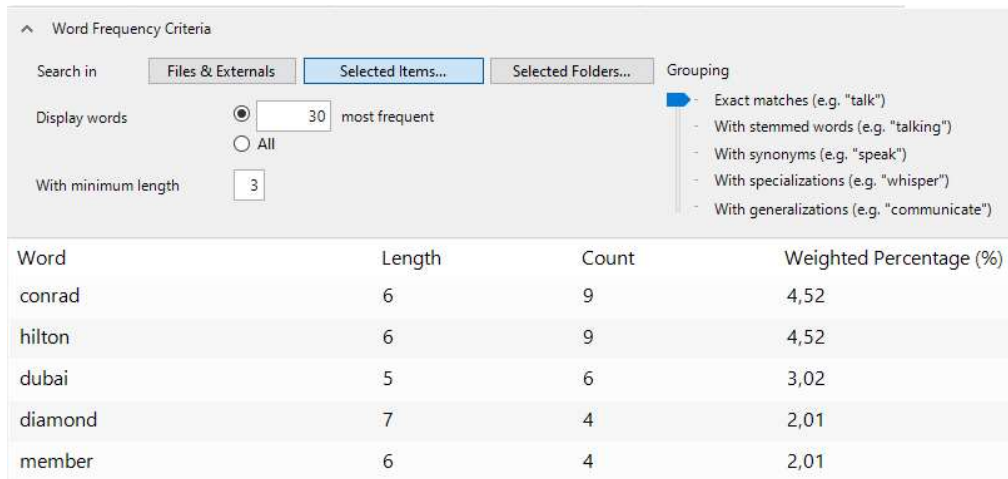
Guest 3 stated that *"We are Gold Hilton Honors members so we were treated to free breakfast at the property as well as executive lounge access. The selection at both was wonderful and boasted everything you would expect from the Conrad brand."*

The next example is a relatively short one but fulfills every attribute of the tick box of brand equity. There, it was stated that *"If you are a Hilton guy, you will love Conrad Dubai."*

These two reviews are completely different in the sense of expression but in the sense of meaning, both describe the brand similarly. The first review started with the level of status, which can be related to the relationship commitment, they have at a certain brand. With the status, they received benefits and continued with the linking of it. Finally, they expressed the level of service which a guest receives as a member of the benefit program. The other guest just wrote one short sentence with a lot of meaning behind it. Guest 4 described the trust in a brand. If someone is familiar with the brand´s attributes, the liking to the sub-brand is guaranteed.

The frequency table shows the following results:

Table 4. 2 Frequency table brand equity

Word Frequency Criteria				
Search in	Files & Externals	Selected Items...	Selected Folders...	Grouping
Display words	● 30 most frequent			▶ Exact matches (e.g. "talk")
	○ All			With stemmed words (e.g. "talking")
With minimum length	3			With synonyms (e.g. "speak")
				With specializations (e.g. "whisper")
				With generalizations (e.g. "communicate")

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
conrad	6	9	4,52
hilton	6	9	4,52
dubai	5	6	3,02
diamond	7	4	2,01
member	6	4	2,01

Again, exact matches were selected. As already stated, the results of the data can be mirrored with every brand. There, the sub-brand, which reflects the name of the hotel, was mentioned the most followed by the brand itself. Interesting is, that the level of status plays a key role in the reviews. The higher the status, the more benefits. This can also be seen in the frequency table. The diamond status reflects the highest one. Guests express their status within the brand as a touch of achievement.
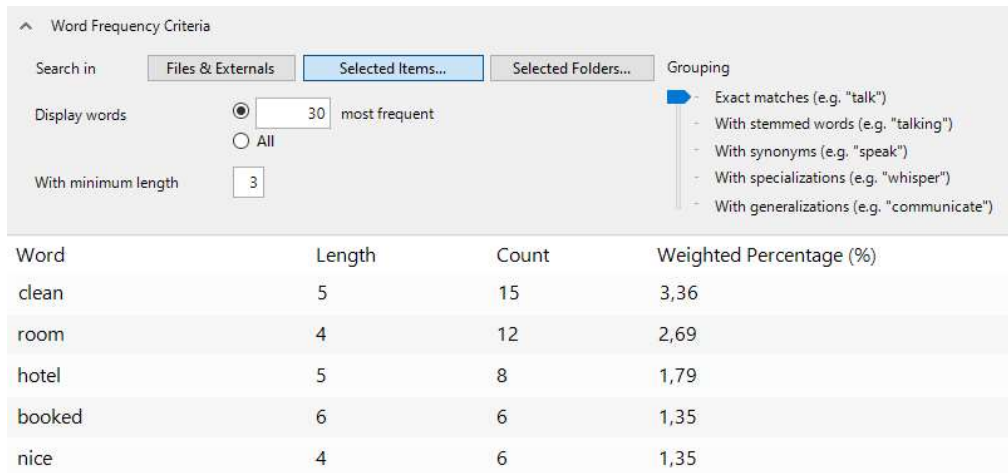
Figure 4. 3 Word cloud cleanliness

Cleanliness was perceived as an important factor for guests which can be seen in the word cloud. Especially, the room had a big influence on whether guests wrote about cleanliness or not. Further, the leisure facilities were rated regarding cleanliness. Guests often expressed cleanliness in the bathroom either as not sufficient, dirty, or as sufficient namely, high level of cleanliness or well-cleaned. To demonstrate this visually, examples are listed below.

Guest 5 mentioned that *"Cleanliness of the room and hotel grounds and a really nice range of toiletries. The shower was very effective and air-conditioning easy to regulate."*

Another guest wrote that the *"Room was very clean and they are always ready to serve and support especially for cleaning."*

Here, the importance of cleanliness and the area where guests presuppose cleanliness is clearly shown. The cleanliness in the room made the majority of reviews. Guest 5 mentioned also the hotel itself as clean and therefore, it can be assumed that this is an indicator for a recommendation. The other guest wrote about the level of cleanliness as well. Further, the level of service regarding cleanliness was mentioned positively which resulted in a positive review.

Table 4. 3 Frequency table cleanliness

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
clean	5	15	3,36
room	4	12	2,69
hotel	5	8	1,79
booked	6	6	1,35
nice	4	6	1,35

The frequency table echoes the selected guest reviews. The exact matches of the top 5 words concerning cleanliness were clean, room, hotel, booked and nice. As stated, the room cleanliness made the majority of the reviews. Moreover, the condition of the hotel and its facilities was of high importance.
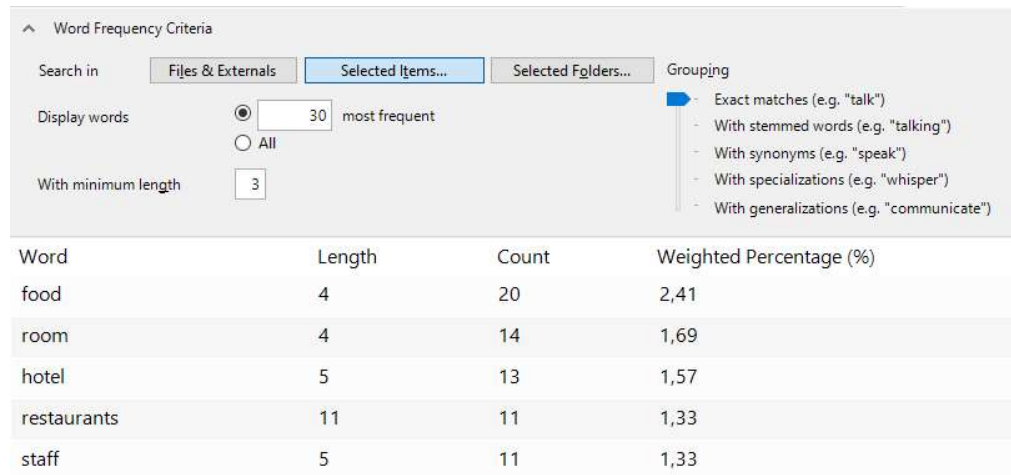
Figure 4. 4 Word cloud F&B quality

Despite hotel satisfaction attributes, where just food quality was described, it turned out that food and beverage quality, F&B quality, coherent with the way how it was served and presented, were important for guests. In the word cloud, food has an outstanding size. Further, the level of service, different restaurant options and breakfast play an important role.

Guest 7 stated *"Breakfast options need a bit more thinking but overall, the food was great, dinner was fantastic at the kaleidoscope restaurant, I even recommend their buffet as a dining out option."*

Guest 8 mentioned food in general and how he received it *"The food was as good as the service from all the staff who were all very friendly."*

With those reviews, the importance of F&B quality is shown. Guests tend to give recommendations when coming to food-related outlets. Often, they give hints about what they would like to see on the menu for their next visit or claim that the prices are too high for the quality which they received. Guest 7 represents an example of that statement. Breakfast is commonly served as a buffet style and here, the guest was not satisfied with the variety and recommended to change the buffet slightly. The other example represents the statement mentioned above, where the essence was the way of serving F&B quality. Staff in restaurants, bars and even room service is also mentioned as a key asset for the company. They give the guest the feeling of hospitality and care.

Table 4. 4 Frequency table F&B quality
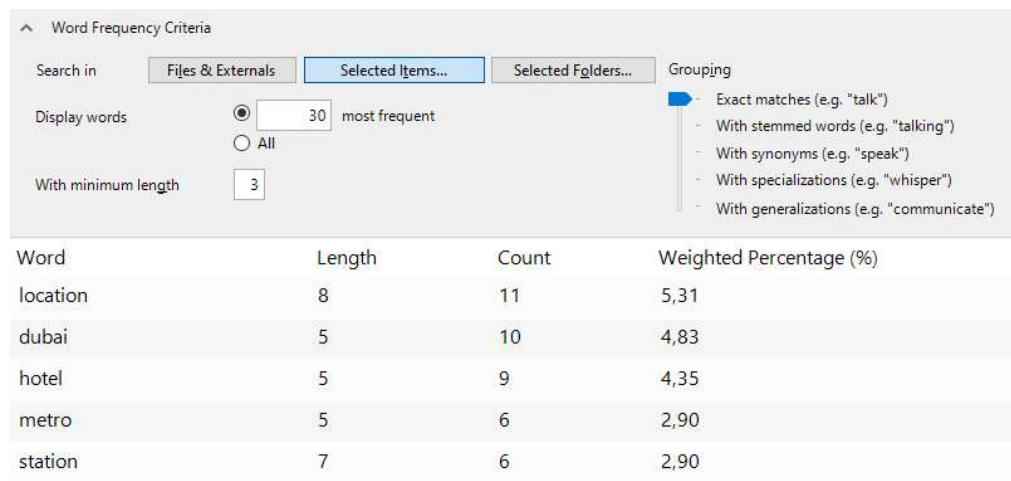
Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
food	4	20	2,41
room	4	14	1,69
hotel	5	13	1,57
restaurants	11	11	1,33
staff	5	11	1,33

This can also be seen in the frequency table, where staff is in the top 5 of the most commonly used words when it comes to F&B quality. Due to the current pandemic, the room is also mentioned repeatedly because some guests tend to consume their meals in the room. As stated before, different restaurant options are of high importance for guests. Some guests prefer buffet-style dining whereas other guests like to order à la carte.

Figure 4. 5 World cloud location

A difference could be determined regarding location. In the guest reviews, leisure guests were influenced by hotels located next to the beach. Business guests, however, tended to select a hotel, located next to a metro station, convenient to the airport or located near a business area. Also, the proximity to shops and malls was mentioned. This can be seen in the word cloud above.

Guest 9, a leisure guest, rated the location of the leisure hotel as following *"Location - 3/5 if you want to explore Dubai this is not the place for you, especially as the metro is not running up the Palm and the Taxis are limited to 2 persons so can be costly."*

Guest 10, a business guest, appreciated the location of the business hotel and stated *"It has an excellent location on the Sheik Zayed road, surrounded by restaurants, coffee shops, small supermarkets/stores and salons. The metro station is practically attached to the hotel entrance. Dubai Mall and Burj Khalifa are three stops and about a 4/5-minute journey. This was a great location to base myself to get out and about."*

These two guests, one leisure one business, referred the location of the property to sights, various bard and restaurants and shopping possibilities. The reason for the stay is here more dominant than in any other theme which was developed. Both business and leisure guests appreciate a convenient location next to the city center. Leisure guests prefer a location either directly in the city center or located at the beach. Business guests appreciate a location connected to convenient transportation possibilities and to business areas.

Table 4. 5 Frequency table location

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
location	8	11	5,31
dubai	5	10	4,83
hotel	5	9	4,35
metro	5	6	2,90
station	7	6	2,90

This can also be seen in the figure above. To give location a meaning in a sense of guest reviews is more challenging than with other themes because location stands for itself. Here, the type of stay makes the difference as already stated. The top five most important words mentioned were location, Dubai, hotel, metro, station.
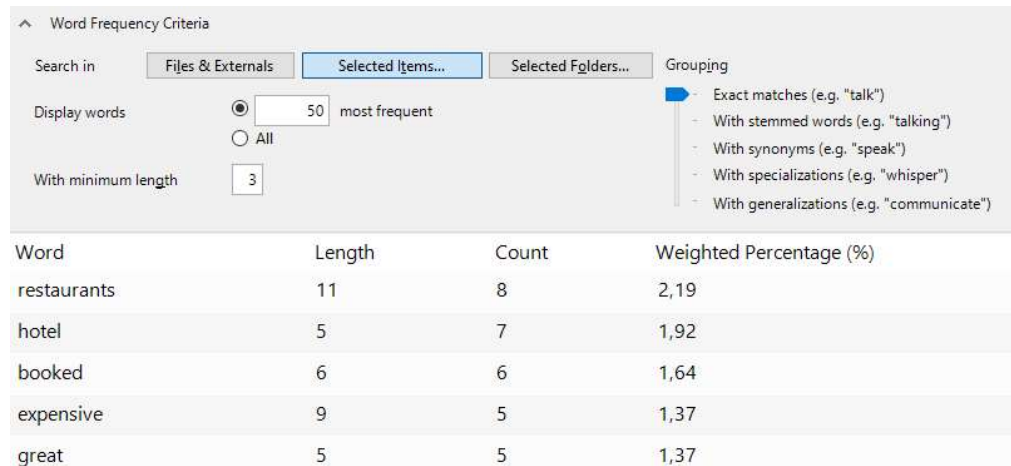
Figure 4. 6 Word cloud price
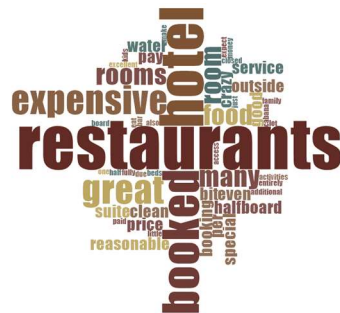
Price can be perceived in different ways. Guests often perceive price as either too expensive for what they received or as reasonable regarding the quality of the product. While coding the data from booking.com and tripadvisor.com, price was mentioned regarding the price for the room per night, for F&B-related items and other facilities, the hotels offered, which was not included in the initial price. The majority of guest reviews were about the prices of F&B-related items such as breakfast, dinner and drinks. This can be seen in Figure 10. above. An extraction shows the perceived prices.

Guest 11 was satisfied with the price and stated that *"The price was extremely reasonable and all I can say is wow."*

While Guest 12 did not agree with the price and mentioned *"It's that only one thing that will mess you up and that is food and beverage. Although Atlantis includes an impressive variety of quality restaurants, the bill you have to pay at any of them is just crazy crazy crazy expensive. How expensive? Well expect to pay at least 40-50$ per person per MEAL, that's a whopping 120-150$ a day per person!!!"*

The difference between those guests is the impression of the price when returning home. The hotel industry is extremely price-sensitive since the market is very dense. If a guest identifies a price as too high, switching the hotel might be a consideration. Further, a guest review that states a price is too high might prevent another guest from booking that hotel. The other way around, if a price is described as reasonable, another guest might book this hotel because of that review. As presented in the review extraction, price can also be seen as an attribute regarding satisfaction.

Table 4. 6 Frequency table price

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
restaurants	11	8	2,19
hotel	5	7	1,92
booked	6	6	1,64
expensive	9	5	1,37
great	5	5	1,37

As displayed in the frequency table, the most considered word when it comes to price is restaurants. This is because that the price per night is already known while doing the reservation for the hotel. If a guest is not satisfied with the price per night, he might look for a cheaper solution. While staying in the hotel, the guest declares the price as too high or reasonable for a specific item or meal. The last two words in the frequency table stand for exactly these two options.
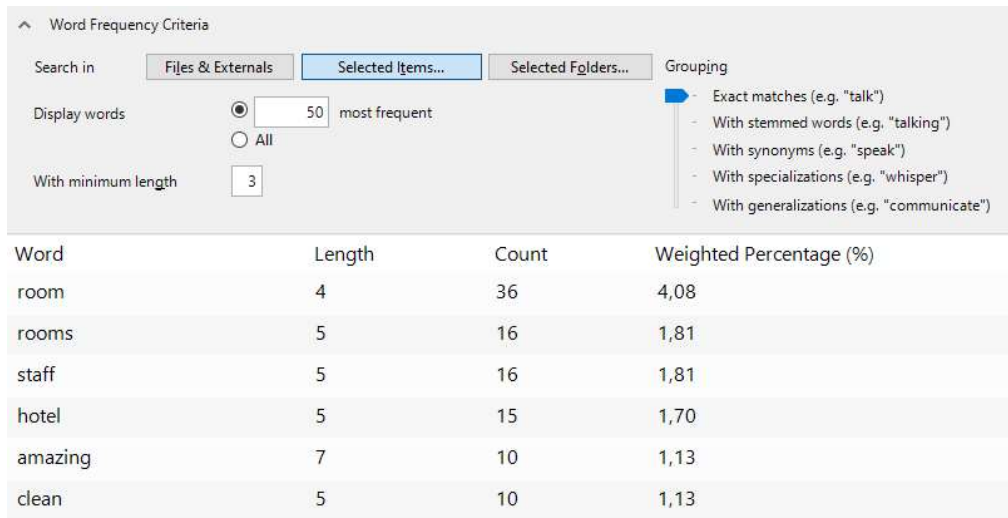
Figure 4. 7 Word cloud room quality
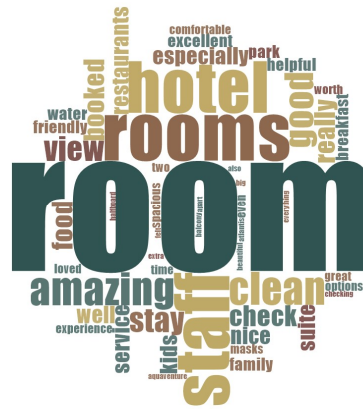
The room quality theme was developed with codes regarding the cleanliness of the room, which was also already mentioned in the cleanliness theme, different views from the room including balconies and a huge part was concerning the state of the bathroom. The figure illustrates the connection with room quality. The staff, especially the cleaning and concierge staff, also plays an important role. Guests often describe the size, state and cleanliness of the room to demonstrate whether it is worth the money or not.

Guest 13 stated regarding room quality *"Our room was a beautiful ocean view room with a small balcony, and I was very happy to find that the bathroom and bedroom were really modern and actually to a very high standard."*

Guest 14 stated similar results *"We had a family room, basically two interconnecting rooms, 1 x king and 2xqueen, ideal for my wife and I and two teenage kids. Rooms were extremely clean, well air-conditioned and comfortable."*

As stated in the excerpt from the guest reviews, the guests measured room quality with the modernity and comfortability of the room, view, features like balcony and air conditioning, bathroom and overall cleanliness. By this, a guest is more satisfied, if all the requirements in the mindset are fulfilled and are more likely to write a positive review than, if the room does not meet the expectations.

Table 4. 7 Frequency table room quality

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
room	4	36	4,08
rooms	5	16	1,81
staff	5	16	1,81
hotel	5	15	1,70
amazing	7	10	1,13
clean	5	10	1,13

As visually represented, the frequency table above mirrors the words used to describe room quality. In this table, the first six components were chosen due to the results for the exact matching. The first two places are the same word just in different use. The staff, as already mentioned contribute a lot concerning room quality. Further, cleanliness was mentioned as well. Therefore, the table shows exact matches, the bathroom or view was not in the top used words because many guests use different terms to describe it.

Figure 4. 8 Word cloud service quality

Service quality in the hotel industry is a mixture of staff interaction with a guest and how they deliver a certain service. This can also be seen in the figure above, where the most frequent words related to service quality are displayed. The most dominant word is staff linked with attributes like excellent, friendly, helpful or great. This contributes undoubtedly to the experience. Service quality can also be taken to the next step and is a deciding factor for guests whether to revisit the hotel or not. If the service quality is not as expected, guests might not consider staying in that property again. Service quality is staff depending. Therefore, not sufficient or dissatisfied service quality cannot be transferred to another property of a chain for example, although there are certain service standards. Two examples, how guests perceive service quality are listed below.
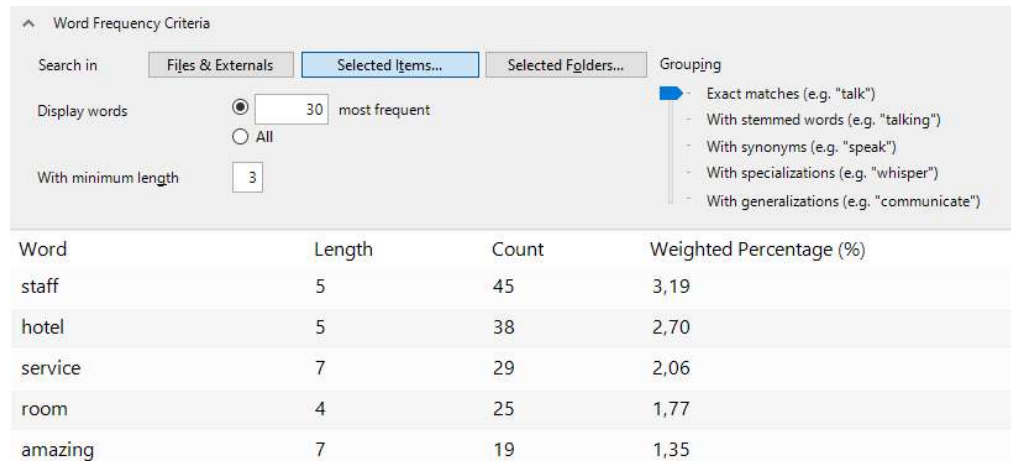
Guest 15 expressed service quality as following *"Service overall from all the staff was very good. Professional and very helpful. Loved the service."*

While Guest 16 stated *"There is so much to do and see at the Atlantis and the service is out of this world, the hotel staff literally cannot do enough for you."*

These two extractions show more the functional service quality, which was also mentioned in the literature review. The focus is, how the guest receives a certain service. In the review section, guests tend to rate functional service quality over technical service quality, which focuses on what a guest receives. Functional service quality is more subjective and therefore, the product is produced and consumed

simultaneously, guests might receive the same level of service but will perceive it differently

Table 4. 8 Frequency table service quality

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
staff	5	45	3,19
hotel	5	38	2,70
service	7	29	2,06
room	4	25	1,77
amazing	7	19	1,35

The frequency table above also reflects the literature review and guest reviews. The theme service quality was developed with codes from guest reviews and the top five words are listed. Staff and hotel, functional and technical service, were mentioned the most. Followed by the words service, room and amazing. Room is omnipresent for guests. Either it is the price, single attributes or service quality that drives a guest.

Figure 4. 9 Word cloud safety

Coming to the last theme, which was developed after the coding process, safety is more important for guests than ever. In the literature so far, safety and security were most often linked because safety was not present enough to stay as own attribute. There is also enough literature, which did not even include safety because the evidence of importance was too little. Also, if safety was mentioned in the literature, it was either of moderate importance but only linked with safety regarding cameras or security guards for example or it was of almost no importance. The current pandemic has changed the view regarding safety tremendously. Now, the guest reviews are loaded with comments referring to sanitizers, social distancing and face masks. To give a deeper look at what and to which extent it has changed, more guest reviews are shown than within other themes.

Guest 17 stated about safety in the hotel following *"Everything at the hotel was so well organized. COVID measures were really first class. Sunbeds, tables, etc. sanitized before you use them, everything was socially distanced and hand gel everywhere. I really felt completely safe."*

Guest 18 mentioned that *"Many sanitizing Stations all over the Hotel, Masks are distributed for free in the hotel, avoiding gathering and social distancing is maintained. Valet parking is well organized to avoid any contamination of the cars."*
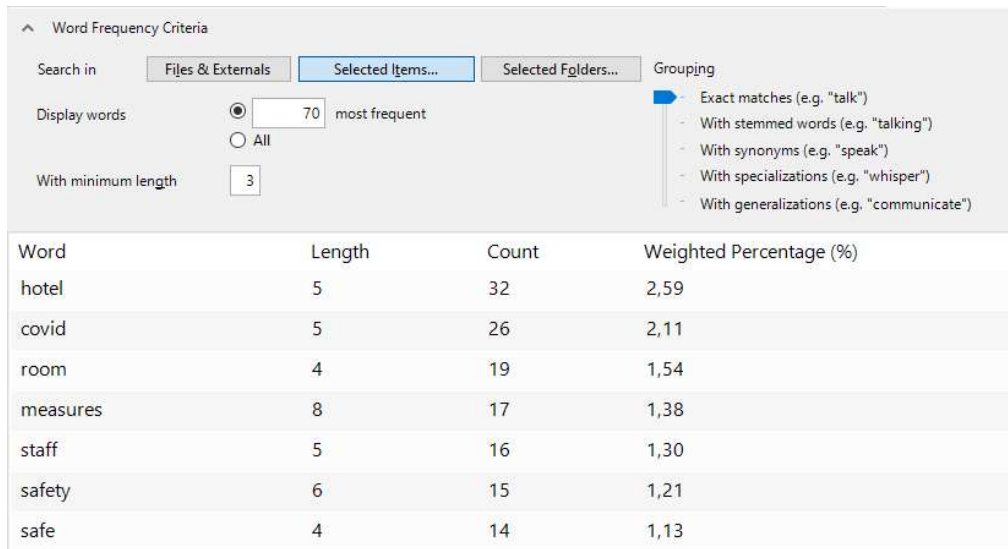
While Guest 19 said *"The hygiene standards of the hotel were spectacular, to say the least. Each guest has a sanitization pack in the room equipped with sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, masks and gloves. I was very happy because a lot of businesses aren't very COVID-19 aware and have been dropping the ball as people have become too relaxed about this global pandemic."*

Finally, Guest 20 expressed that *"This is my first hotel booking during the pandemic. It's important that guests feel safe and the hotel follows guidelines to ensure they operate safely during the coronavirus pandemic. Everything was OK, hand sanitizing stations are placed all over the place and elevators but just a few things that need improvement."*

Hotels nowadays have to adopt new standards to be able to remain successful. As in extracts from the reviews displayed, the intention of the travel still is the same but they want to have a safe feeling. With that, sanitizers, face masks, disinfection sprays or wipes, gloves and many more PPE are meant. Without the feeling of safety, guests might consider another hotel. Further, more emphasis is placed on other guests and staff, how they follow the rules on the newly implemented safety measures. The difficult part is that hotels need those safety measures to compete in the market but without losing their atmosphere and hospitality. Some hotels take it even one step further and offer PCR-tests for their guests and provide them with a safety kit with face masks, hand sanitizers and much more.

Table 4. 9 Frequency table safety

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
hotel	5	32	2,59
covid	5	26	2,11
room	4	19	1,54
measures	8	17	1,38
staff	5	16	1,30
safety	6	15	1,21
safe	4	14	1,13

The most frequent words regarding the safety theme are hotel, covid, room, measures and staff. This means that the room is one of the top criteria when it comes to safety. Also important for guests is the staff and how they communicate the safety measures without losing hospitality. With social distancing and face masks, the staff in hotels need to find another way to show their passion to care. The most commonly used word is hotel. Guests presuppose that safety measures are well organized when they first enter the hotel until they leave it.

5 Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the current Covid-19 pandemic has changed not only the travel behavior of guests but also influenced the hotel industry to an extent almost no other pandemic did so far. The only pandemic comparable to the current one is the Great Influenza Pandemic in the late twenties of the last century. If not considering the improvements over the last decades, assumingly, the Covid-19 pandemic would have cost more than 150 million lives which represent 2,1 percent of the global population (Barro et al., 2020).

The primary goal of this study was to identify the shift in significance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes during the Covid-19 pandemic in respect of changes made in the hotel industry. This means, whether safety took its place in considerable hotel choice attributes or not because as already mentioned in the literature review safety was often not even included as a hotel choice attribute. Other researchers included safety but with regards to security, or in other terms, physical security. Little research has been done on safety in regards to health security in the hotel industry and what influence it has for guests when choosing a hotel over another. As seen in chapter 4, safety has a greater impact on a guest´s decision, which hotel to choose than before and they consider it before actually booking a hotel. Further, while guests are in a hotel, safety is now an inherent part.

The outcome of the study was that the typical hotel choice and satisfaction attributes before the pandemic for example atmosphere, brand equity, cleanliness, F&B quality, location, price, room quality and service quality remain important. It can be determined that during the pandemic, one hotel choice attribute got significantly more important, which is safety. It is vital for guests nowadays to have a safe feeling when traveling, whether the trip has a business or leisure nature. Further, safety is more dominant than ever in the hotel industry in terms of face masks, sanitizers around the hotel or even wearing gloves while serving guests. Social distancing has become vital for hotels which is a balancing act as well as the previously mentioned newly implemented safety measures. A hotel is a place of hospitality and care. Today, this is a big challenge for hotels because wearing face masks makes it difficult to see

the smile of a server. This is just one example out of many that got lost during the pandemic. On the other hand, hospitality and care can be interpreted by exactly those safety measures.

Safety can be seen as a single hotel choice attribute but influences other hotel choice and satisfaction attributes as well. Starting at the check-in process, bell staff might wear gloves while talking the luggage upstairs to the room. The reception has different lines for check-in and check-out to prevent crowded areas. Further, in a lot of hotels, the reception has a shield on the desk to prevent spreading the virus. After arrival, on the next morning, the breakfast as a whole has changed a lot. What was a buffet before the pandemic, is now serving different items directly to the table or staff will hand out the food from the buffet. This requires more staff and is even more costly than before in the anyway labor-driven hotel industry. In leisure hotels, different facilities like sun beds need to be disinfected after every guest. This can be converted to business hotels as well. There, business facilities like computers and mice need disinfection after a single-use. Rooms have a different level of hygiene than before and are sometimes even sealed to show the guest that it has been cleaned and no other person was inside after cleaning. These examples are almost endless to demonstrate how omnipresent safety got during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

To conclude the study and the coherent change in the significance of hotel choice and satisfaction attributes during the Covid-19 pandemic in the hotel industry is that safety clearly got more important and is now a vital part. Hotels have to adapt safety measures not only to compete in the market, which is mandatory in most countries by states over the world but also to give guests a safe feeling while traveling. For the hotel industry as a whole, they need to communicate these newly implemented safety measures to guests prior to their booking in order to gain trust. Further, different hotels and hotel chains developed a hygiene program to give guests a safe feeling. Important is that the hotel industry does not stop here. With the rising vaccination rate, hotel companies might lose their drive regarding implementing new safety measures which last for the long term. It is important to remain the hospitality but still avoid too much person-to-person contact. Digital check-in and check-out, cleaning robots or even automatic doors would help to sustain safety measures.

There are limitations in this study. One, the pandemic is still going on and the numbers in most parts of the world are rising due to the fact that the vaccines on the market have not been vaccinated to the majority of the global population. Another limitation is that for this study only secondary data was used. Therefore, no direct and suitable questions could be asked and answered. This made it more difficult to interpret what a guest stated in his review. The reason that a lot of reviews were anonymous, made it impossible to categorize. Further, the size of the sample could be larger in two ways. Either choosing more hotels or a larger sample size of reviews. Moreover, this study focused especially on Dubai. This could be for example, expand to the whole United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Future research in the field of safety in the hotel industry should focus on primary data like interviews or questionnaires. Further, it would be interesting to see the change in significance of safety before, during and after the pandemic. Future research could also use a larger sample. This makes it easier to generalize.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Sample of guest reviews

Guest 1: Was a great experience overall, great hospitality and friendly staff. Food was great and wonderful atmosphere.

Guest 2: The hotel was great, the ambiance and atmosphere inside the hotel were very nice and positive.

Guest 3: We are Gold Hilton Honors members so we were treated to free breakfast at the property as well as executive lounge access. The selection at both was wonderful and boasted everything you would expect from the Conrad brand.

Guest 4: If you are a Hilton guy, you will love Conrad Dubai.

Guest 5: Cleanliness of the room and hotel grounds and a really nice range of toiletries. The shower was very effective and air-conditioning easy to regulate.

Guest 6: Room was very clean and they are always ready to serve and support especially for cleaning.

Guest 7: Breakfast options need a bit more thinking but overall, the food was great, dinner was fantastic at the kaleidoscope restaurant, I even recommend their buffet as a dining out option.

Guest 8: The food was as good as the service from all the staff who were all very friendly.

Guest 9: Location - 3/5 if you want to explore Dubai this is not the place for you, especially as the metro is not running up the Palm and the Taxis are limited to 2 persons so can be costly.

Guest 10: It has an excellent location on the Sheik Zayed road, surrounded by restaurants, coffee shops, small supermarkets/stores and salons. The metro station is practically attached to the hotel entrance. Dubai Mall and Burj Khalifa are three stops

and about a 4/5-minute journey. This was a great location to base myself to get out and about.

Guest 11: The price was extremely reasonable and all I can say is wow.

Guest 12: It's that only one thing that will mess you up and that is food and beverage. Although Atlantis includes an impressive variety of quality restaurants, the bill you have to pay at any of them is just crazy crazy crazy expensive. How expensive? Well expect to pay at least 40-50$ per person per MEAL, that's a whopping 120-150$ a day per person!!!

Guest 13: Our room was a beautiful ocean view room with a small balcony, and I was very happy to find that the bathroom and bedroom were really modern and actually to a very high standard.

Guest 14: We had a family room, basically two interconnecting rooms, 1 x king and 2xqueen, ideal for my wife and I and two teenage kids. Rooms were extremely clean, well air-conditioned and comfortable.

Guest 15: Service overall from all the staff was very good. Professional and very helpful. Loved the service.

Guest 16: There is so much to do and see at the Atlantis and the service is out of this world, the hotel staff literally cannot do enough for you.

Guest 17: Everything at the hotel was so well organized. COVID measures were really first class. Sunbeds, tables, etc. sanitized before you use them, everything was socially distanced and hand gel everywhere. I really felt completely safe.

Guest 18: Many sanitizing Stations all over the Hotel, Masks are distributed for free in the hotel, avoiding gathering and social distancing is maintained. Valet parking is well organized to avoid any contamination of the cars.

Guest 19: The hygiene standards of the hotel were spectacular, to say the least. Each guest has a sanitization pack in the room equipped with sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer, masks and gloves. I was very happy because a lot of businesses aren't very

COVID-19 aware and have been dropping the ball as people have become too relaxed about this global pandemic.

Guest 20: This is my first hotel booking during the pandemic. It's important that guests feel safe and the hotel follows guidelines to ensure they operate safely during the coronavirus pandemic. Everything was OK, hand sanitizing stations are placed all over the place and elevators but just a few things that need improvement.