

**The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on workers and managers of
accommodation facilities in Maseru urban**

By

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Declaration

I Mothala Matjelo declare that this dissertation hereby submitted to the National University of Lesotho, for the degree of Master of Arts in Development Studies has not been previously submitted for publication of academic credit to any institution. I affirm that the work of other people contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Supervisor.....

Supervisee.....

Date.....

Date.....

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus
NACOSEC	National COVID-19 Secretariat
NECC	National Emergency Command Centre
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
NDVH	National Domestic Violence Helpline
UIF	Unemployed Insurance Fund
MDT	Malealea Development Trust
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
F	Female
M	Male

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak remains a significant issue for the world's economies and societies. Since its inception, its dire consequences were seen in various sectors, particularly in the tourism accommodation facilities. As such, this study's findings are premised on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, and the strategies that were deployed both during and post that era. The data collected from the accommodation facilities in Maseru urban was analysed using the qualitative thematic approach. The findings therefore revealed that COVID-19 widened the societal strata gap, which became visible in employability, thus leading to the aggravated stress levels. The study concluded that this health crisis paved way to hospitality industry's economic meltdown, which manifested in drop of sales and low room occupancy. The study further established that socially, retrenchments caused the workers and managers a lot of stress, thus increasing the workloads for those that continued serving in those businesses. The study further recommends that financial and taxation policies should be amended to resuscitate the economy of the hospitality sector.

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Chapter 1: Overview of the Study

1.1 Introduction and background

Coronavirus (COVID-19) was discovered in late December 2019 in Wuhan, China, which rapidly increased globally (Morens, 2020; Wu, 2020). This being the case, approximately 66% of the workforce within the vicinity of Seafood Wholesale Market fell victims to this contagious disease (Wu, 2020). As a result, the prospect of the same pandemic's upsurge remained high (Morens, 2020).

In Turkey for instance, the initial case was documented on 11 March 2020, albeit the first death was reported on 17 March in the same year (Bostotan, 2020). Afterwards, the number of infected people proliferated with the cases exceeding 10 000 and more than 150 lives in that country being claimed by this newly emergent pandemic (Bostotan, 2020). In Italy, two months since the emergence of this health crisis, approximately 23,000 deaths were documented in Lombardy, the most hit region in that country (Bosa, 2021).

Since its emergence, COVID-19 had a rampant and life threatening impact as countries in various continents were forecast to experience an economic plunge by 20% (Sachs, 2020). This included African countries such as Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria; El Salvador and Guatemala in the Americas; as well as Philippines in Asia (Sachs, 2020). Prospects were that at least 83 to 132 million mankind were at a risk of experiencing acute hunger in the year 2020, thus propelling about 71 million into destitution (Sachs, 2020).

Therefore, as the infection cases escalated, countries' authorities put in place some strict measures to contain this monstrous disease. They imposed mobility restrictions, and closure of non-essential businesses together with pestilent events such as sports, festivals and hospitality industries for they cluster people from various locations (Rogerson, 2021). The Chinese government halted the exit movement to Macau (Zhang, 2021). Aside from that, in March 2020, India too attempted to mitigate the challenges that were posed by COVID-19 hence effectuated a 21 days lockdown, as well as a total restriction of movement (Kumar, 2020).

Though governments tried to curb the rapid spread of COVID-19 through movement restrictions, hospitality industry was thus exposed to the drastic hurdles. Asia experienced a serious decline in finances and room occupancy: \$2.7 billion in Malaysia and \$9.44 billion in

China respectively Ray (2021). Furthermore, there were approximately 80% booking cancellations in hotels (Kaur, 2021) and eminent losses for the casino industry, thus leading to a tremendous loss of up to US\$1.041 million (Augustina & Yosintha, 2021). Also, a huge loss for the industry was encountered as some of the tourism products are liable to rot (Filimonau, 2021). As a result, millions of workers associated with the hospitality industry lost their jobs (Kumar, 2020; Augustina & Yosintha, 2021).

COVID-19 therefore, continued to put development in grave jeopardy as it prolonged closure of some sectors and industries such as tourism accommodation facilities. This is paired with intersecting crises such as skyrocketing prices on food and fuel (Vos, 2022). (Hosseini, 2021), denotes that during inescapable quarantine in the course of COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a distortion of the usual social and economic life. Subsequently, multitudes of people became trapped and isolated, which intensified levels of stress (Teng, 2020). Suicidal attempts too, were heightened in the COVID-19 era, and were resultants of both health and economic effects of this treacherous disease (Teng, 2020). (Sher, 2020), in the similar manner, indicates that in the wake of COVID 19, multitudes suffered psychiatric complications, loneliness and uncertainties.

Parallel to other continents whose hotels' economy was brought to the knees amid COVID-19 was Europe. Spain in particular was hit hard for it witnessed a dramatic decline of about 72.43% in foreign tourist arrivals, which translated to a number exceeding 34. 8 million guests. Matters got even worse for a period of two months, April and May as entry movement came to a standstill, signalling zero arrivals of international visitors (Rodriguez-Anton, 2020).

These repercussions extended to the United States of America, where hotels lost room revenue as 60% of the rooms remained unoccupied. Joblessness of almost half of the hotels' employees, and hotels' economic regression were thus resultant (Davahli, 2020). In the same vein, the hospitality sector in the African continent experienced negative effects borne by COVID-19. Zimbabwe for instance, was faced with a significant decline in hotel occupancy and income (Ncube, 2021).

As the COVID-19 virus increased rapidly, it got to Lesotho. The initial confirmed case in Lesotho was documented on 13 May 2020 (Su, 2022). That was followed by four verified positive cases as of 15 June 2020, and by 5 July 2020, cases had accelerated to 91. Besides that, it was discovered that in the period of three weeks, the positivity rate of samples had been compounded and remained higher. Records ranged from 9% on the week ending 12 December

to 17% on the week ending 26 December (National COVID-19 Secretariat - (NACOSEC, 2021). The situation worsened, and people's lives were threatened to the core. From the number of cases per 100 000 population in December 2021, the risk of getting the disease in a month's time had risen to 46.6% compared to October and November with 9.2% and 15.3% respectively (NACOSEC, 2021).

In an attempt to curb the spread of COVID-19, the Lesotho government instigated a number of prevention measures including the closure of its borders with South Africa. There was also collaboration with the local comedian who used Sesotho proverbs and figures of speech to inform people that COVID-19 is existent. The comedian also encouraged the nation to adhere to the stipulated prevention measures by the authorities (Mokala, 2023).

The government further put in place mobility restrictions to lessen the spread of this pandemic (Shale, 2020; Tlali & Musi, 2022). Apart from that, (Shale, 2020) makes reference to the declaration of the state of emergencies that were announced by the prime minister during the first days after the registered case. Lockdowns too were exacted; banning of public gatherings and shutting down of all business except the crucial services (Shale, 2020). (Mokala, 2023), denotes that the Lesotho nationals received vaccination for free from the designated areas. The government again set forth an interim relief by offering food parcels to the members of the society that were in peril. However, that did not last on the account that much of the finances that were geared at ameliorating the piercing effects of COVID-19 were engulfed by corruption (Malephane, 2022).

Although there is so much scholarship on COVID-19 in Lesotho, much attention has been directed to education (Makiba, 2020; Sengai, 2022). Besides that, (Malinga, 2022) have discussed the impact of this pandemic at large ranging from food scarcity; decline in agricultural activities, and economic stagnation; to exacerbated poverty levels in this country. From there, scholars like Tlali and Musi (2022) have documented the effects of this dangerous disease on ecotourism in Lesotho while (Chitsamatanga, 2021), has delved into the health risks that were imbedded in COVID-19.

Other scholars such as Malephane (2022) and Mokala (2023) have explored the mitigating measures that were effectuated by the government. Additionally, (Shale, 2020) made inquiries into the implications of Lesotho's COVID-19 response framework for the rule of law. As such, the fact that literature on the impact of COVID-19 on Lesotho hospitality industries is not found does not nullify the fact that the hospitality sector, like other departments, was impacted by this

health crisis. Though there is some literature on COVID-19 in Lesotho, there is limited one on the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector. It is therefore on these grounds that this study is significant and worth to be carried out.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although the government of Lesotho has put in place the control measures for COVID-19 outbreak, its negative impacts are still visible in the tourism industry.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the managers and workers of tourism accommodation facilities in Maseru urban.

1.4 Research Questions

What were the social impacts of COVID-19 on the managers and the workers of tourism accommodation facilities in the areas of the study?

What were the economic impacts of COVID-19 on the managers and workers of the tourism accommodation facilities?

What were the management strategies during and post COVID-19 pandemic?

1.5 Study objectives

To examine how COVID-19 has socially affected the managers and workers of tourism accommodation facilities.

To assess the extent to which COVID-19 has affected the economic livelihoods of the workers and managers of tourism accommodation facilities.

To investigate management strategies used in accommodation facilities during and post COVID-19.

1.6 Significance of the study

The findings of this study may contribute to the tourism sector through all its stakeholders to adopt recommended strategies that can be used in future as coping mechanisms if the country experiences any viral outbreak.

This study may assist hoteliers and policy-makers to be proactive when dealing with emergencies like COVID-19, so that employees in this sector cannot face job uncertainties, loss of revenue and food scarcity. Apart from that, recommendations that may be given in this study may be of paramount importance to the management and workers as they may get an insight of any adjustments they need to do on marketing pathways in order to maintain the guests' turn up, even in the midst of pandemics.

1.7 Justification of the study

COVID-19 has affected various sectors in all spheres, thus this study seeks to investigate its socio-economic impacts on the managers and workers of accommodation facilities. The study further furnishes the concerned personnel with the strategies to be used during the outbreaks so that the economy of the accommodation facilities is kept thriving.

1.8 Chapter summary

This chapter entails the introduction and background of the study, which covered the origin of COVID-19, its spread coupled with the impacts, as well as the mitigating measures that were deployed in trying to stop its rapid spread by countries respectively. The problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions and the objectives are also included in this chapter. It lastly presents the significance of the study together with its justification.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on accommodation facilities, as well as the strategies that were used to survive that era. Also, this chapter explores how COVID-19 influenced the strategies to be considered and implemented within the hospitality industries during and post this health crisis. The chapter again presents the theoretical framework which underlies this study.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Chaos theory is a mathematical theory which can be applied in Physics, and was founded by Newton. It is also used in biological rhythms like heart rate and brain functionality. However, with time, it gained popularity in the field of social sciences (Oestreicher, 2007). This study therefore, adopts chaos theory. This theory contravenes linearity (Hayles, 1990), certainty and predictability that were deemed as indispensable elements of a Newtonian universe (Elliott, 1997). Rather, it advocates for unanticipated, dynamic consequences, and endorses differing behaviour which can breed a new form of equilibrium (Heiby, 1995) as well as self-organisation (Levy, 1994). Elliott (1997), emphasises that this theory disregards generalisation on the way systems operate, but advocates for divergence on outcomes from systems. It therefore provides a means for understanding that initial circumstances have an impact on the outcome of events, and if those conditions are sensitive, instability and uncertainty are inherent (Campbell, 2020).

Several scholars used chaos theory as a basis to investigate its impact on diverse issues (Abhari, 2021; Kozak, 2021; Iirmdu, 2022). To cite an example, (Abhari, 2021) have applied chaos theory to successfully investigate the economic impacts of the coronavirus on small business in tourism and hospitality. Again, (Kozak, 2021) used the chaos theory to explore the impacts of COVID-19 on various parts of the travel and tourism industry across the world whilst (Iirmdu, 2022) utilized it to examine the impact of this deadly disease on tourism businesses in Plateau state, Nigeria.

Chaos theory is, as thus, applicable in this study as it provides an explanation on how COVID-19 pandemic influenced the scenarios that happened during that period. It further relates to the changes that sprang within the hospitality industry. Predominantly, the world experienced a

chaotic state as the virus escalated, and the death rate increased. This therefore called for divergent ways in trying to deal with its bitter consequences that bore countless social impacts within accommodation facilities. As a result, governments instigated stringent lockdowns, and sectors respectively put their employees on layoffs or retrenchments. On the basis of the prevailing sensitive situations, mankind experienced hurdles like mental strain. That as a result, manifested in the exhibition of unusual behaviour such as alcohol abuse and bitter relationships between family members and or societal strata.

In the peak of COVID-19 pandemic, stability was distorted, and uncertainties were encountered as some hospitality industries faced total shut down (Hao, 2020). From there, others came across low to no room occupancy rate as well as a decline in sales and economic shrinks, which led to retrenchments or layoffs of the workforce (Begum, 2020). Furthermore, additional expenditures on daily running of their businesses; disruption in logistics and distribution channels were the aftermath of the outbreak of COVID-19 (Nicola, 2020). As such, chaos theory will help in investigating how COVID-19 affected accommodation facilities in Lesotho.

Consequently, different governments and sectors abandoned the old, traditional ways of operating, and adopted the 'new normal'. It is in this regard where this theory will furnish this study with an elucidation of the influence this health crisis had on sales programmes, together with strategies suitable for boosting business performance amid and post COVID-19 era.

2.3 Social impact of COVID-19 on tourism

Numerous researchers have discussed the social impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector (Farre, 2020; Rubbery, 2020, Doorley, 2020; Chipumuro, 2021). With the spiking infections of COVID-19, Spain documented large numbers of job losses during the instigated lockdowns particularly in non-essential sectors like hospitality (Hao, 2020). This included the erosion of potential clients, which left the hospitality industries devastated (Hao, 2020). Additional aftermath was schools' closure, which became a catalyst in burdening women with increased childcare and household chores (Farre, 2020; Su, 2022). Scholars like (Doorley, 2020) share sentiments with others as they postulate that job losses imposed by mitigating factors for COVID-19 affected mainly women than men.

Gender disparities in employability were visible within the tourism sector in the middle of this health crisis (Farre, 2020; Chipumuro, 2021). To cite an example, this pandemic widened the inequalities in both paid and unpaid work, and the lower educated were hit harder than the

elites (Farre, 2020). Chipumuro (2021), states that in South-Africa, females were predominantly more uncertain about their jobs. As a result, there was perpetual fear that they had a good chance of not securing jobs in future, even in the tourism sector where female employment is higher (Chipumuro, 2021).

On the equal footing, the gender revenue gap seemed significant in Ireland, chiefly driven by disparities in working patterns between males and females, but also by salary variations (Doorley, 2020). By and large, occupations associated with women are primarily faced with closure, hospitality inclusive. However, those that consist mainly of men remained operational: mining, engineering and information technology (Rubbery, 2020). This therefore, implies that the notion of basic needs satisfaction would be a persistent challenge for women than their counterparts.

COVID-19 has crucially increased gender based violence (Mantler, 2021; Moffitt, 2022). In Ontario, Canada, Domestic Violence Shelters that looked after women in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic had to accommodate women that suffered domestic violence in order to adhere to the government directives. They also made sure that such women, together with their children, had shelter (Mantler, 2021). To substantiate the notion of family conflict, (Moffitt, 2022) documented that in the same country, Canada, rural Nova Scotia registered both physical and psychological violence during COVID-19. Sanction containment efforts requiring people, hospitality employees included, to self- isolate and practise social distancing leverage men's coercive behaviours that control, humiliate and dominate their victims (Moffitt, 2022).

Based on social distancing initiatives, curtailment of movement together with lockdowns, hospitality industries experienced severe loss of revenue, which led to loss of employment (Dube K. N., 2020; Davahli, 2020; Bufquin, 2021; Rasul, 2021), and loss of shelter and property (Abbas, 2021; Chang, 2021). In the case of Brazil, COVID-19 posed spill over impacts on the tourism accommodation facilities (Abbas, 2021; Hakim, 2021). For the fact that tourists had to call off their intended travel plans, small merchandising hoteliers were susceptible to losing their property, as they could no longer afford to pay their mortgages (Abbas, 2021).

On a separate note, Western and Southern countries in Europe encountered a spike of alcohol consumption in order to escape boredom and perpetual stress from layoffs and retrenchments (Brink, 2021). Following that, the workers of the tourism sector encountered Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) (Brink, 2021). More so, females who dwelled in places that are beset with

abuse, be it sexual or physical, are constricted to their homes (Usher, 2020). Owing to that, they cannot escape their misery, either by sneaking out or calling law enforcers (Campbell, 2021). Moreover, social distancing exposes women to their perpetrators, who expedite their tactics of isolating and controlling them. Unfortunately, because of economic uncertainties and anxiety, women who largely depend on males financially, are less likely to leave their abusers (Brink, 2021).

Authorities, in their efforts to slow the tide of infection, compromised women's peace and wellbeing as violence against women skyrocketed exponentially, particularly with a 5% increase in Australia (Su, 2022). The United State of America was no exception to women abuse during the pandemic. Evidence shows that the National Domestic Violence Helpline (NDVH) received calls exceeding 2000, from survivors of abuse (Jung, 2020).

Furthermore, COVID-19 revealed some inequality structures of vulnerability. In Australia for instance, impoverished people who had inhabited the shelters heightened the morbidity and mortality rates. That was based on the ground that they were overpopulated, hence the environment was not conducive for respiratory health (Team, 2020). Similarly, (Agarwal, 2021) ponders the issue of inequality by explaining that the workforce from the lower strata were exposed to the already existing inequality and societal exclusion. Moreover, in the province of Yunnan, the hospitality sector turned away pre-booked visitors from Wuhan and Hubei, irrespective of their health conditions (Xu, 2021).

COVID-19 destroyed the hospitality stakeholders' social identity, and denied them their statuses as moral people. This translates to defying symbolic acts such as ceremonial activities that could be done as a token of appreciation to the workers (Romania, 2022). Other than that, this destruction resulted in minimising face-to-face interaction, and eroding norms of politeness, which further handicapped social cooperation and exchange (Bonotti, 2021). This consequently led to cultural homogenization paired with the re-ritualization of feasts, and reduction of customers for the hospitality industry (Romania, 2022). Besides that, professional civility is highly compromised in hotels due to the imposed social distancing, particularly for front desk workers such as receptionists and hotel porters (Hunt, 2020).

2.3.1 Psychological impact of COVID-19 on tourism sector

COVID-19 has had an impact on many sectors, which manifested itself psychologically. Henceforth, it affected workers and owners in the tourism sector, and other sectors (Baum,

2020; Biwota, 2020; Dube, 2020; Rasul, 2021). Countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia instigated strict measures such as lockdowns and social distancing to contain this novel virus (Baum, 2020; Begum, 2020; Mughari, 2021). Nonetheless, those mitigating measures ripped off tourism workers their right to work due to the substantial revenue loss that created employment cuts in hotel industries (Baum, 2020; Davahli, 2020; Biwota, 2020). In the like manner, there was a decrease in tourist market and room occupancy, all being ingredients of zero revenue, piling up to the hoteliers' stress (Khan, 2022). After making a desk review of secondary materials, online blogs as well as interviews through social media chat, (Biwota, 2020) discovers that COVID-19 resulted in numerous effects. Those included among others: booking cancellations; postponements of plans; disruptions in supply chains and the government's indefinite suspension of tourism travel. For instance, major events such as the Comrade Marathon in South Africa; Olympics in Japan and ICC Men's T20 world cup got postponed by a full year. Apart from that, the 2020 Summer Olympic Games, where nearly 206 countries had a probability of being hosted in Tokyo, Japan were cancelled, which left multitudes with great concerns (Matikiti-Manyevere & Rambe, 2022). Equivalently, Oman witnessed a rise to reduction of logistics and distribution channels, resulting in friction among suppliers, customers as well as employees, hence aggravated stress for hoteliers (Mughari, 2021).

The emergence of COVID-19 triggered perpetual fear among hospitality stakeholders (Mao, 2020; Yacoub, 2021; Kaushal, 2021; Gursoy, 2022). Individuals in Turkey feared to be infected by this virus (Karatepe, 2021; Hao, 2020). Aside from that, (Mao, 2020) indicates that hotels' workforce got threatened that they might lose their jobs; as such, they lost hope, self-efficacy as well as optimism during this health crisis. Apart from that, job losses are a causal factor of financial strain, thereafter contributing to the decline in human's mental health (Deb, 2020; Rogerson, 2020; Dube, 2021). Moreover, owners of hotels came across some challenges in trying to secure lines of credit, which further escalated their mental strain (Hakim, 2021).

South African hotels endorsed a furlough programme; lessened business days and brought some companies' operation to halt. This resulted in staff's layoffs and extreme poverty, thus causing distress (Dube, 2021). For instance, Mount Nelson Hotel released 154 of its 251 workers, which left them devastated, and with no hope. Again, the City Lodge was short of 1.2 billion capital injection which came as a result of financial distress it was experiencing (Dube, 2021). Moreover, owners of the Sun International were confronted with the

psychological trauma as they were compelled to sell the company's assets. They even had to downsize the wage bill (Amani & Ismail, 2022) by retrenching a total of 2300 workers (Dube, 2021).

In the period when COVID-19 was at its peak, approximately 80% of hotel sector employees in Ghana experienced a salary cut hence workers were exposed to job uncertainties and emotional trauma (Hervie, 2022). On the same grounds, Botswana faced economic recession like other countries as it registered steep dwindled sales volumes as a result of closed accommodation and food services. Furthermore, the country faced zero income for both the owners and workers, which makes them prone to rampant poverty and distress (Nyakudya, 2020). Also, since the hospitality industry in Tanzania relied much on the external market, it approximately reached liquidation level, hence exacerbated levels of stress for the owners (Baraka, 2023).

COVID-19 stressed the hospitality stakeholders a lot (Gursoy, 2022; Mao, 2020), which reflected in various reactive behaviours such as suicidal attempts (Rasul, 2021); a feeling of loneliness and alcohol abuse among employees (Newby, 2020) and frustrations breeding fights (Agarwal, 2021). Separately, immigrant workers in the hospitality industry were concerned about the spread of the virus since they knew that, as non-citizens, they would not have access to adequate medical care. Also, these immigrants feared to be separated from their families, thus developing persistent mental distress (Sonmez, 2020).

Equivalently, the worst financial crunch in Lebanon compelled Le Bristol to put its operations to halt while Marriott International planned to retrench thousands of its labourers (Yacoub, 2021). Following the closure of Le Bristol Hotel, foreign workers departed to their home lands, which escalated poverty to those who lost their jobs, hence suffering the heightened stress levels (Yacoub, 2021). Workers in the hospitality sector were devastated because they ought to cope with numerous threats instituted by this lethal pandemic: ranging from job insecurities to low turnover for hotel labourers (Dube, 2021).

China's hotels, as it happened in other countries, were exposed to the fragility of the hospitality industries as the hotel leaders were nudged to effectuate the harsh decisions (Hao, 2020). To cite an example, suspension of investment on human resource development so as to navigate the strident economic times (Hao, 2020), thus increasing their stress levels. Additionally, more pressure was exerted on the hotel shareholders as they had to underscore their duty to restore confidence amongst their labourers, as well as alleviating fear in them (Kaushal, 2021). Apart

from that, China's hotel staff were faced by a major dilemma of making a decision of whether to carry on working while putting their lives in danger as hotel staff that offer quarantine services (Teng, 2020).

2.4 Economic impact of covid-19 on tourism

COVID-19 has directly affected the global economy of the hospitality industries with its brutal, massive job losses faced by the hotel employees (Bengu, 2021). In America for instance, about 4.8 million hospitality industry jobs were lost, breeding a loss of 1.7 billion US dollars, as a weekly revenue. To a greater extent, the human toll of COVID-19 was catastrophic as the United States' hotels' income losses had compounded to an amount exceeding \$30 billion in the period from March to May 2020 (Ozdemir, 2021). More so, this pandemic wreaked havoc to an extent that Western Cape province in South Africa registered hospitality workers exceeding 600 000, who had applied for the Unemployed Insurance Fund (UIF) to sustain their lives (Sucheran, 2021).

Another concern for hoteliers was a consistent drop of room occupancy (Sucheran, 2021; Ozdemir, 2021). In April 2020, South Africa had faced a nightmare as its gains from bed nights sold had sharply decreased from R1.99 billion to only R37.9 million (Sucheran, 2021). Amid COVID-19, South Africa's City Lodge had put to halt, operation of 65% of its hotels thus encountered a 50% decrease in hotel occupancy, which constituted a significant drop of up to 98% of hotel revenue in May 2020 (Sucheran, 2021).

A descriptive qualitative study indicated that the continent of Asia, like others, felt the pandemic's heavy blow for its hotel industry and experienced a dreadful loss of revenue (Augustina & Yosintha, 2021). On the one hand, a huge amount of \$1.041 million lost during the peak of COVID-19 in that continent is attributed to tremendous booking cancellations as travellers had fear of contagion. On the other hand, the hotel's workforce was crushed owing to the fact that they had no alternative means of generating income (Augustina & Yosintha, 2021).

Additionally, (Ncube, 2021) employed a mixed method approach, administering semi-structured questionnaires to collect data from 29 (3 to 5 star) hotel management throughout different prominent sites in Zimbabwe. In their contribution to this study, the scholars dissect that Zimbabwe's hotel industry, in the same manner as other countries, encountered a decline in hotel occupancy, resulting in income loss. Tanzania as well, suffered a drastic drop of

tenancy in hotels, reduced markets, and additional costs in the pursuit of combating the pandemic (Amani & Ismail, 2022).

The strategies used to eradicate the COVID-19 pandemic were the fundamental contributors of the detrimental effects on the tourism sector and hotel industry in particular (Rànasinghe, 2020). Once a COVID-19 patient was confirmed in Sri Lanka, on 10th March 2020, tourism activities came to a halt, and this impactful act of business closure hindered the hotels' income flow (Rànasinghe, 2020).

In the case of Brazil, COVID-19 posed ripple impacts on the tourism accommodation facilities (Abbas, 2021; Hakim, 2021). Companies exceeding 70% were turned down, therefore, 20% of the hoteliers were convinced that they would fail to continue operating as an aftermath of COVID-19 (Hakim, 2021).

2.5 Positive effects of COVID-19 on tourism

COVID-19 did not only bear bitter fruits, but it also highlighted the paramount significance of plausible government communications worldwide. That was therefore, merged with expounding and assimilating, as well as communicating scientific information (Mohring, 2020). Following the emergence of this deadly pandemic, concerned stakeholders sharpened their skills in decision making, regulation and management of both scientific and statistical knowledge. Stakeholders were also gathering and comprehending that information in order to formulate policies (Mohring, 2020). These scholars further denote that the advent of COVID-19 gave rise to Digital Healthcare and artificial intelligence.

COVID-19 remarkably enhanced leadership skills amongst the parties involved in the hospitality industry and navigated the crisis successfully. The concerned parties exhibited the following abilities: positive and divergent thinking as well as decision making and flexibility. Besides that, stakeholders had to build trust among the employees, come up with the contingency pathways and display good communication skills (Hahang, 2022). Also, shareholders allowed medical practitioners to use their hotels as emergency hospitals, and opened their hotels as quarantine sites. These were coupled with granting hotel owners a chance to look for new markets within their business network (Japutra, 2021).

Moreover, COVID-19 escalated digitalisation which was meant to improve the revenue gains, and minimise costs (Morrone, 2021). This pandemic propelled the stakeholders of the

hospitality sector to consider 'green' innovation to solve problems posed by plastic waste for sustainable development purposes (Filimonau, 2021). Again, due to the prevalence of COVID-19, the hotel sector was put at a chance of being integrated into alternative food networks, and short food supply chains (Gori & Castellini, 2023).

Some hotels were turned to accommodation facilities for returning nationals' quarantine facilities (Bengu, 2021). Also, managers and owners of accommodation facilities developed new strategies such as eco-marketing to run tourism industries (Cai, 2021). Apart from that, workers acquired new skills to deal with COVID-19 and maintain their livelihoods. To cite an example, (Tlali & Musi, 2022) discovered that Malealea Lodge devolved managerial duties and contravened the usual protocols of specialisation and division of work. In the pandemic era, every worker was responsible for the booking process. Furthermore, it is divulged that Malealea employees developed a number of skills including being a tour guide, and mobilising local tourists instead of relying solely on international tourists (Tlali & Musi, 2022).

2.6 Coping strategies with COVID-19

The worsening financial conditions of hotels across the globe called for mitigating measures from governments and hotels respectively (Rwigema, 2020; Filimonau, 2021; Ncube, 2021). Hotels in Spain for instance, introduced a new working opportunity for its hotel workforce to prepare food for take-away, as well as to deliver them to customers (Filimonau, 2021). In trying to boost the economic performance, accommodation facilities provided holiday vouchers so that they could retain their clients as soon as hotel operations became in full swing. In the same way, some hotels were changed into short-term emergency health care centres, and maintained the terms and conditions for the COVID-19 era (Filimonau, 2021). For (Rodriguez-Anton, 2020), other facilities became homes to workforce from the essential economic sector and the security forces depending on where they were deployed.

On the other hand, (Mao, 2020) anatomize the importance of hotels to invest in corporate social responsibility so as to care for their clients, workers and local communities. In an effort to stay afloat, Capital Hotels and Apartment Group provided isolation rooms at a reduced price, 40% less than the usual, for guests that entered South Africa (Sucheran, 2021). To anchor hotels from COVID-19 pandemic's grave economic impact in Zimbabwe, hoteliers opted for cost cutting measures. Consequently, they send their employees on layoffs, working in shifts as well as offering them indefinite leaves (Ncube, 2021).

Chinese hotels had to freeze all renovations that were scheduled to kick-start around that time when the pandemic was at its peak (Hao, 2020). Also, the pandemic nudged the hotel leaders to effectuate the harsh decisions such as suspending investment on human resource development so as to navigate the strident economic times (Hao, 2020).

In order to revive the sharp economic decline faced by the hospitality sector in China, hotels launched advanced cleaning processes such as bringing in touchless faucets to the customers' experience. That extended to using contactless checkouts through the app or email. Robots were also used for transportation of masks, foodstuffs and beverages (Dwivedi, 2022). Moreover, hotels kept within bounds, food and beverage choices to pre-packaged meals that can be eaten up by hotel guests from their rooms, instead of going to the common restaurants or bars (Dwivedi, 2022).

With an aim to restore trust from clients, some hotel chains redirected their marketing and sales programmes, as well as the promotional packages while others attached some slogans to their original names. To cite an example, Melia rebranded to 'Stay safe with Melia' (Rodriguez-Anton, 2020). Besides that, to attract more customers during the thick of the pandemic, five hotel chains in Spain found ways of working together with the certifying entities that dealt with countable departments: security in general, and health security specifically (Rodriguez-Anton, 2020). On this issue of partnering with other entities, there is again no literature documented in the African countries.

To respond to the repercussions brought by COVID-19 in Egypt, the cabinet drew a new financial policy, hence deferred pay ups for the entire tourism and hotel operations. Fines were suspended for a period of three months, and the government wrote off the real estate tax for six months in order to assist hotels financially (Salem, 2022). On the contrary, in Lesotho, mitigation in a form of tax measures was never effectuated to hospitality industries, thus hotels such as Mpilo shut down during that COVID-19 outbreak (Tlali & Musi, 2022).

Moreover, the central bank of Egypt created a 50 million funding which charged only 8% interest for the tourism industry to pay their workers. Also, the temporary workforce was given an assistance of 500 EGP for three months, whilst the hotel industries were fumigated periodically (Salem, 2022). The government's support in Egypt stretched to formulating very strict rules and regulations for hoteliers to protect their workers. Hospitality employees were even assured that if they experienced ill treatment from their employers, they ought to report it, for there would be strict penalties instigated against the perpetrators (Salem, 2022).

Again, as one of the worst stressors of the hotel workers, particularly those working in quarantine hotels was additional safety precautions (Ozdemir, 2021), the government of Egypt took it as its obligation to give training to hotel staff. That assisted them to acquire the relevant skills that were applicable during that health hazardous virus.

As much as other countries deployed various measures to cope with the impacts of COVID-19, be it national, regional or individual levels, Lesotho's literature is limited as two scholars (Tlali & Musi, 2022) made their documentation about eco-tourism. In their study, though they are not focused on hotels, they have illustrated that to overcome the effects of this pandemic, newly developed strategies have to be invoked. The country has to stop relying on international guests, and promote domestic tourism.

Tlali and Musi (2022), assert that Lesotho has insufficient social protection networks including food security for multiple members of the community. This therefore, goes without saying that in this country, the government is less prepared for hazards like pandemics and disasters.

All the hospitality stakeholders had to join hands in order to come up with plans that would assist them to manoeuvre through the phases of COVID-19 for the companies to get a rapid revival (Pathak & Joshi, 2021). In the case of Lesotho, literature points to the effort that was taken by the Malealea Development Trust, a privately owned organisation, to promote themselves and their goods. They did that through various media outlets including the internet, Facebook, and local radio stations (Tlali & Musi, 2022). Again, Malealea Development Trust (MDT) secured funds, and a company in Lesotho, which would give them a total of twenty computers; a shelter for such computers and training sessions with free data for five years (Tlali & Musi, 2022).

National governments as a way of putting impacts of COVID-19 to halt, put forth some measures: handing out relief packages in order for businesses to keep operating (Tlali & Musi, 2022). However, the government of Lesotho during the period of COVID-19 did little to come to the rescue of its nationals (Kali, 2021). For an example, the Lesotho government directed its focus to the textile industries and gave the affected workers M800 for a period of three months, as well as giving food supplies to Basotho who were in South Africa in the period of lockdown.

Aside from that, the government displayed inconsistencies and lack of accountability (Kali, 2021). To substantiate this argument, the National Covid-19 Secretariat (NACOSEC) was formed in June 2020, and National Emergency Command Centre (NECC), one after the other. They were notorious for being a *carte blanche* for deceitful politicians and officials to rob the nation off its funds. For instance, in April 2020, the leaked NECC document put to surface that NECC cared much about the interests of politicians and high ranking officials over those of the society. By June 2020, they had already gobbled M161 million of the M698 million budget aimed at combating the COVID-19 pandemic (Kali, 2021).

Similarly, the NECC utilised an amount exceeding M10 782 618 on its employees, and the buying of office equipment at exorbitant prices. Meanwhile, essential sectors like health were short of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and campaigns meant for the nation's education were never conducted. Also, the government was incriminated in a murky deal with its accomplice, Yan John Xie, whom they gave M53 000 on daily basis for rental fees. That amount accumulated to M2.9 million after the 77 days spent at 'Manthabiseng Convention Centre (Kali, 2021).

2.7 Post COVID-19 management strategies

As much as COVID-19 exposed hotel industries to harsh and complex impacts, research gained momentum on how to operate in the post COVID-19 era (Jiang, 2020; Yacoub, 2021). To begin with, there was an advent of the digital revolution. The hospitality sector resorted to the use of artificial intelligence and robotics for certain chores to be performed (Jiang, 2020).

Another way to foster the development and sustainability of the hotel sector, hoteliers had to create conditions and practices that are conducive to maintaining health and preventing diseases. One salient factor they implemented was instigation of intensive hygiene measures (Jiang, 2020). The hospitality industry businesses joined forces with public institutions and extra companies from different sectors that are involved in tourism (Robina-Ramirez, 2022) in order for hotels to follow hygiene and safety protocols for their customers.

On a separate note, Yacoub (2021) clarifies that hotel stakeholders considered pre-eminence on the significance of local tourists as opposed to full reliance on foreign nationals for generation of income in hotels. Yacoub (2021) further explains that hotel management enhances flexibility in making reservations and revocations in order to incentivize their customers. These scholars further zeroed in the factor that hoteliers effectuate operational shifts

so that operations in hotels may be more technologically oriented and engrossed. Yacoub, (2021), infers the inherent strategic approaches that hotels have to acquire in the near future, by interviewing hoteliers that managed 4 to 5 star hotels in the city of Beirut in Lebanon. Through in-depth interviews with hotel stakeholders, and a thematic analysis for data collected, (Liu, 2021) discovered that hoteliers should use self-service technology as suggested by (Yacoub, 2021).

(Cai, 2021), brings a completely different trajectory from the explored strategies that should be adopted by hotel management post COVID-19 phase. In their study, these scholars put forth the notion that hotel leadership should consider introducing the green hotel industry and ryokans, which can provide hot spring facilities and internet for the customers so that they can be independent, and not fear contamination from hotels' rooms. Hotels' management should also opt for eco-marketing strategies just like it happened in Taiwan, and Bed and Breakfast service in Canada (Cai, 2021). Cai (2021) further recommends for the hotel stakeholders to outspread awareness of green satisfaction as they view it vital for post- crisis recuperation. Owing to the fact that service directly involves people, customer satisfaction can therefore be influenced by quality service received, and proposed the green environment for green accommodation (Cai, 2021).

The study conducted by (Siagian, 2021) brings in a different perspective regarding the management strategies to help hotel industries' sustainability after COVID-19 and its pervasive impacts in this sector. They argued that in Labuan Banjo, the government employed a revised business strategy to improve the room occupancy rate by instituting certification in the hospitality industry to set up health protocols that are grounded on cleanliness, health, safety and environment (CHSE) sustainability. Siagian (2021), gives additional details that for hotels that managed to make developments regarding service of clients rooted on CHSE, the government then made provisions for financing their buying of tools linked with controlling COVID-19 in the vicinity of the hotel.

To lessen the impacts of the pandemic, (Dayour, 2020) through the use of qualitative lens paired with a thematic analysis, state that hotels in Kenya have to weigh up the benefits of insurance uptake to help manage the losses brought about by the pandemic, and expedite their recovery.

On the same account, it is apparent that introduction of environmental sustainability measures in the tourist companies is key for the future hotels (Robina-Ramirez, 2022). From the levelled

literature, the ascertained hypothesis is that future hotels should develop safe experiences for their guests, form public-private unions, and rethink the sustainable management strategies to accelerate the hospitality growth. This insinuates that hotels in various countries should try and work towards achieving sustainable development, and be prepared for pandemics.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the theory that has been adopted in this study, the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the hospitality sector together with the coping strategies that were deployed during that era to resuscitate their economy. Also, the chapter shed light on the strategies that could be used by accommodation facilities post COVID-19 era.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for this study, and discusses the research approach together with the research design. Moreover, other components such as the target population, sample and sampling, data collection methods as well as data collection tools are presented. From there, data analysis, validity and reliability, ethical considerations as well as the limitations of this study are incorporated herein.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative approach can be referred to as an approach that primarily focuses on linguistic words rather than numeric data (Maree, 2018). It is effective in determining the deeper meaning of the specific situation being investigated (Chandra, 2019). On this perspective, this approach was the most appropriate for this study because it was conducted to generate an in-depth information from the owners and workers of accommodation facilities regarding the socio economic impacts of COVID-19 as well as the strategies that were employed amid and post COVID-19.

This was attained by making inquiries that addressed the ‘how, why and what’. Profoundly, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to respect the fact that the research participants are conversant with the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, hence gave valuable understanding from their settings and situations so that ultimately, incidents could be depicted in their contexts. Also, the researcher was in a position to investigate this new, and unexplored pandemic, and its impacts socially, economically, and find out the strategies that were put in place to remedy its repercussions in accommodation facilities, as well as those can be opted for after this pandemic has subsided.

3.3 Research design

A case study is referred to as an approach that is employed to collect an in-depth understanding of a difficult issue in life situations (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021). For that reason, case study was used in this study and allowed the researcher to understand the participants’ different perceptions and ideas because the researcher’s aim was to investigate the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on the owners and workers of tourism accommodation facilities in Maseru urban.

To be specific, this used a multiple case study. According to Yin (2009), multiple case study allows the researcher see the sights of various life arrangements through the collection of detailed information from various sources. Therefore, multiple case study was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to do a broader investigation from numerous accommodation facilities in Maseru urban. With the information gathered from the participants, the researcher was able to answer the research questions.

3.4 Data collection

The methods and tools used to gather the data are described in this section. To tackle its goals and questions, this study relied on primary data. Therefore, the researcher gathered information through conducting interviews. A cell phone was used to record the data from one-on-one interviews, and it was saved in the computer.

3.4 Interviews

This study employed in depth interviews as a form of data collection tool. In the views of (Langley & Mezian, 2020), an in depth interview is a genuine discussion in which the two parties explore a particular topic of interest, if possible, in a relaxed, open and sincere manner. Basically, in an in depth interview, the researcher asks the questions and makes follow ups, based on the respondent's answers; and this is done with a chief objective of deriving as much information as possible from the participant who directly has the experience and knowledge of the topic under study (Deterding & Waters, 2021).

3.5 Target population

From the perspective of Shukla (2020), population is a collection of the entire components that the study intends to explore or test, and that very set of units is that which the findings of the research can be deduced from in order to have a general conception. Population consists of distinct humans, groups, companies or any entities that one peruses to understand in depth, and to whom or to which the study findings may be applied. This makes it the paramount group for the investigator's eagerness to obtain certain discoveries about it (Casteel, 2021). Therefore, workers and owners of accommodation facilities in Maseru urban, who experienced COVID-19 constituted the population for this study because they had an insight regarding the research questions. Table 1 presents a distribution of population size.

Table 1: Distribution of population size

Name of the facility	Number of respondents
Scenery Guest House	1
Green lake Guest House	1
City Stay Guest House	2
Ifo Guest House	1
San Antonio	1
Lancers Inn	2

3.6 Sample and Sampling technique

The researcher used purposive sampling in this study. According to Etikan (2016), purposive sampling involves choosing individuals or groups that meet a specific criteria suitable for the research questions, population based on the researcher's understanding of the population, its characteristics, and the nature of the research's objectives. Therefore, the researcher was able to choose eight participants from the population (owners and managers of accommodation facilities) so as to investigate the socio economic impacts of COVID-19 on accommodation facilities and the strategies that were employed during and post COVID-19, and drew conclusions.

3.7 Rigour of the study

This study, like any academic study, ensured some rigour by focusing on the validity and dependability that characterise qualitative research. The term "reliability" refers to the consistency, stability, and accuracy of a research tool, all of which are indicative of reliability (McDonald, 2019). If the results of the study can be verified using a comparable methodology, the research tool is regarded as dependable. In that perspective, Rose and Johnson (2020) posit that for delivery of accurate, consistent and sound evidence, the researcher must give reliable and valid data. Research validity is therefore defined as the degree in which the instrument measures what it is inherently deserving to measure (Ganesha & Aithal, 2020). It also looks

into how well founded the investigation is in terms of being: logical, robust, uncomplicated, realistic, significant and beneficial (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). As a result, pilot testing, of four participants was carried out to evaluate the study's viability as well as to evaluate the approach, tools, and procedures.

3.7.1 Dependability

The researcher considers giving consistent and reliable research findings, and follows the standard research procedures when collecting data (Campbell, 2020). The researcher therefore gave a detailed description of how data was gathered, analysed and interpreted for conclusions to be drawn.

3.7.2 Transferability

As Noble and Smith (2015) put it, transferability in a qualitative research could be linked to the provision of evidence that the research study's discoveries could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times and populations. Thus for this study, the researcher made transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers. The accommodation facilities were therefore the researcher's context and setting. The sample, sample size, sample strategy and socio-economic characteristics of the participants were also provided. Direct codes were also used to provide evidence regarding the study's findings.

3.8 Data analysis method

Data analysis refers to structured vetting and organisation of the interview text, field records and other material that can be collected to facilitate the comprehension, and to enable the investigator to present their discoveries from the field, in comparison with what others have uncovered, (Lester, 2020). Wickham (2016) purports that data analysis is informed by specific stages of transcript, and clarifications though they ought to correspond with the stated objectives of the study.

This study used thematic approach to dissect data that was gathered from the field. Therefore on this perspective, the researcher employed six steps of thematic analysis. To begin with, the researcher familiarised herself with the data collected, generated initial codes, searched for themes and organised them into sub-themes, reviewed the themes, defined and named themes. Lastly, the researcher presented and discussed the results.

The researcher therefore found thematic analysis suitable for this study because the study was a qualitative study in nature and it was used to understand a set of experiences and thoughts across the data set (Clarke & Braun, 2021).

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical measures refer to a series of steps that the researcher should follow when conducting the study, prior to establishment of data collection techniques to safeguard the informants from both physical and emotional harm (Rakotsoane, 2012). The researcher obtained initial consent to carry out the investigation from the National University of Lesotho (NUL). Afterwards, the researcher also sought informed authorisation from the participants before commencement of the study interviews. Informed consent, insinuates that informants were sufficiently made aware of the kind of information they would be sharing with the researcher.

It was explained clearly that the information provided during the interviews would surely be treated with sheer confidentiality, and that their identity would not be revealed. The other key item among the ethics of the study is voluntary participation. Respondents were notified that they were not forced to participate in this study against their will, and that if they felt like withdrawing from participation, they could freely do that. Plagiarism was also avoided through referencing the material used.

3.10 Limitations of the study

While conducting this study, participants were too busy to host or entertain the investigator, instead of attending to their clients. Besides that, in many accommodation facilities, there were new staff members who did not experience COVID-19, thus could not answer the questions. As such, findings might be biased, for there is possibility that the participants withheld some information on the account that their schedules were tied, thus could not spare much of their time to answer the questions. Besides that, time and budget constraints prevented the researcher from interviewing more participants for a broader study to be undertaken.

3.11 Chapter summary

This chapter sets forth the methodology that is endorsed for this study. Aside from that, this chapter gives an exploration on both the research approach and research design that were employed in this study. Furthermore, this chapter presents the targeted population, sample and sampling technique adopted for this study to be a success. The researcher also hashed out the

data collection and analysis methods. Besides that, the researcher unveiled the ethical considerations, as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the demographic information of the participants, then the summary of themes and categories generated during data analysis. That is followed by analysis of the qualitative data collected from the participants within the hospitality accommodation facilities in Maseru urban. Findings are therefore presented using themes that were constructed from the research questions. As such, both direct and paraphrased codes were used to signify that data was collected from various participants. A detailed presentation on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on management and workers of the accommodation facilities, as well as the strategies used during that era is presented herein. The themes were generated from the research questions, thus are related to the literature and theoretical framework underlying this study.

4.2 Participants

For this study, the informants held different positions within various accommodation facilities- managers and workers, all of whom would have adequate knowledge about how COVID-19 impacted those establishments. Participants comprised of mixed genders- males and females, and they had a wide age range, from youth to elderly people. The profile of the participants is summarised in table 2.

Table 2: a profile of participants of the study

Informant	Participant's label	Sex (Male=M Female=F)	Position (worker=W Manager=M)	Age
City Stay West Guest House	P1	F	W	20-30
Ifo Guest House	P2	F	M	50-60
City Stay Guest House	P3	F	W	20-30
Lancers Inn Hotel	P4	F	W	60-70
Lancers Inn Hotel	P5	M	M	40-50
San Antonio Guest House	P6	F	M	20-30
Greenlake Guest House	P7	F	M	40-50
Scenery Guest House (Maqalika and Stadium Area)	P8	M	W	20-30

Source: Data May, 2023

Table 2 shows that most of the participants were females, constituting a number of 6, while males were only 2. 4 participants were workers of the hospitality facilities, while other 4 were the managers. Their age ranged between 20 and 70, with 4 that were youth, and the rest were above the age of 35.

4.3 Themes and categories concerning COVID-19 impact on accommodation facilities in Maseru urban areas

Data analysis revealed many categories in relation to the impacts of COVID-19. Therefore, a summary of identified themes is presented in table 4.2. From there, a detailed analysis and discussion of such themes and their categories is given henceforth.

Table 3: Themes on Impacts of COVID-19 among hospitality industries

Social impacts	Economic impacts	Strategies used amid and post COVID-19	Opportunities brought by COVID-19 <i>(Emerging theme)</i>
Stress Poverty Sour relations	Drop of revenue	Improved hygiene levels Short-term emergency health care centres Lessened expenses Alteration of working hours Training the workforce Divergence on marketing strategies Screening and Vaccination	Authenticity in leadership Co-operation of hospitality facilities New business opportunities

4.3.1 The social impact of COVID-19 on Maseru Urban tourism accommodation facilities

Three major categories emerged during data analysis regarding the social impact of COVID-19 on accommodation facilities in Maseru urban. The first category was the effect of stress on the workers and employers which resulted from the retrenchment of employees hence exerting much pressure on the ones left and the management. The usual work schedules were altered, so those that were left became overloaded as P5 explained:

“Out of 40 workers, 20 were retrenched, while the other 20 continued working which overloaded the workers. For instance, as the manager, I performed the managerial duties plus reception which means I occupied two departments at the same time. I was really overwhelmed at times.”

Data revealed that some participants complained about workload which was not consummated with pay increase which was affirmed by P7 *“As a result of retrenchments, workload increased for those that were still working, but not their salaries, which magnified the stress levels for all of us, workers and management.”*

Additionally, some participants identified job losses as their stressor during COVID-19, which bred uncertainties and devastation as their co-workers got retrenched irrespective of their dedication and long-term service. The study further exposed that management teams in hospitality industries were burdened by many heavy responsibilities such as retrenching or cutting workers' salaries, and providing protective clothes to their staff. Some participants explained that COVID-19 itself put a lot of stress on them because some accommodation facilities were used to provide quarantine services thus they were afraid of contagion.

Another category that emerged during data analysis was the emergence of relative poverty which involved both societal disparities and exclusion that were caused by workers' retrenchments. Those that lost their jobs faced barriers that limited them from access to the basics such as water, good sanitation, food and shelter. That was because they could no longer afford bills as opposed to their counterparts who were still working. Loss of shelter was confirmed by P1, who stated: *"I lost my rented house and I even had to cohabit with my boyfriend, and I fell pregnant."* The situation was further affirmed by P8 who explained that: *"Before I forget, people who were retrenched lost their shelter because they no longer had any revenue to pay for rent."* These testimonies confirmed that COVID-19 had a negative impact on both workers and employers in accommodation facilities in Maseru urban shaming them among other workers and villagers at their rented houses.

Sour relations between online booking institutions like Booking.com and the lodging facilities emerged as a category resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as many participants including P7 expressed it:

We had a disagreement with Booking.com Company, which instead of paying us, gave that money to those complaining customers. I had to threaten the institution that I would expose them on their Facebook page that they do not follow COVID-19 protocols. It was only after that threat that they settled their debt with us. I did not like that friction between us because that is the booking company we are using to market our facility.

Thereafter, the working relationships were destroyed between the booking institution and hospitality companies, thus contributing to the already existing decline in sales. Also, due to such incidents, accommodation businesses' identities were tarnished, which affected the revenue collection.

The data further revealed that sour relations developed among the employees since the criteria used to pick workers who ought to be retrenched from those who continued with work was not clear. From there, frictions sprang amongst workers on the allocation of work for they were few in numbers and pressured by too much work.

Based on the foregoing, COVID-19 had rampant social impacts on the hospitality industry affecting social relations at the workplace and spilling them to the communities where the workers resided. Findings reveal that it widened the societal strata gap, which became visible in employability (Farre, 2020), thus leading to the aggravated stress levels (Ntacho, 2021). As chaos theory explains that certain situations cause a chaotic state (Elliott, 1997), the advent of COVID-19 led to chaotic situation both at work and at home (Malinga, 2022). Disarray is central to the evolution of difficulties (Campbell, 2021), and this is linked with significant job losses that were encountered by hospitality sector employees (Mao, 2020). In addition, the study revealed that the front desk workers were at a very high risk of contracting the virus. This connects with literature as Teng (2020) expressed that owing to the fact that other guest homes offered quarantine services, employees were at a great danger of infection.

4.3.2 The economic impact of COVID-19 on Maseru urban tourism accommodation facilities

The data showed that COVID-19 negatively impacted the employers and workers differently but leading to related effects. Several categories were identified on how it affected the economic lives of the employers. The first category was that it reduced and or eliminated the number of tourists visiting the facilities hence the decline in room occupancy. The participants illustrated that the decline had negative effects on sales leading to drop in revenue. That drop of revenue disrupted the running of the accommodation establishments. The owners of the hospitality businesses could not afford to pay their workers' salaries and to purchase the cleaning supplies for improved hygiene within the businesses.

The second category which was common among employers was the loss of human capital either through death or retrenchment. The participants explained that though many of them did not experience loss of life, some facilities indeed had workers who died as a result of the pandemic. The serious loss of human capital was through retrenchment in which some facilities had to retrench all the staff or more than half of it. The participants explained that the retrenchment and layoffs were serious economic effects of COVID-19 because the hospitality industry operates with mobile staff as one of the participants explained, "*We work with*

employees that are on the move for greener pastures.” P6. Another participant sharing the same sentiments added “When you have a well trained staff, business works well and you cannot wish to lose them for anything. So we had to retrench them making them to move to better places with no hope to return.” P3

The third category highlighted through the data was the loss of physical capital in the form of accommodation facilities which were either owned or rented. Some participants explained that they were using accommodation facilities that they had acquired through the bank and when businesses became poor, the facilities were repossessed as one participant explained *“I could not afford paying the bank anymore. When I was threatened with repossession, I had to sell my house. I am now living in this guesthouse without a home anymore” P5.*

Participants who used rented accommodation facilities narrated pathetic stories explaining that they were constantly under threats to be evicted. Some of them explained that they were eventually affected and had to come back post COVID-19: *“I failed to pay rent for the first month and because my rent was post-paid, the owner did not allow me to stay during the next month” P1.* The economic meltdown helped some of the participants to get back to their rented facilities *“I was evicted but because the economy was bad, I managed to come back to this facility when the economy opened” P8.*

Two salient categories in relation to employees emerged namely the loss of jobs which later resulted to loss of income and the loss of income generating activities. Many participants explained that COVID-19 badly affected them as they lost their jobs or saw their colleagues lose jobs. They explained that the loss of jobs was the most painful experience as articulated by P3 *“We were torn apart when we lost our jobs because we depended solely on that income for survival. We even had to use up our savings to sustain our lives during that period”.* This affirms that job losses resulted in the loss of income with dire consequences.

Throughout the data analysis, it was typical to hear workers complaining about how COVID-19 affected their income generating activities. Hence, income generating activities became the second category in relation to workers. They explained that to make more money, they contributed some money to give to each worker each month end.

In addition to contributions made at work, participants explained that they joined money-making societies at home. Many explained that such societies collapsed as the members could no longer afford to contribute.

Literature correlates with these results as Tu and Sucheran (2021) have pondered on the notion of retrenchments that befell the workers of the tourism accommodation facilities. Again, the discussed results are associated with what has been expounded by other researchers who documented that in the midst of the pandemic, accommodation facilities experienced a drop of room occupancy (Begum, 2020; Ncube, 2021; Ozdemir, 2021).

4.3.3 Management strategies during and post COVID-19 pandemic

There were several categories that emerged during data analysis relating to management strategies during and post COVID-19. Physical distance was the first category that emerged from data analysis. That concept was shown by P4 when stating that, *“In order to prevent patrons from assembling in the dining room, we ought to implement room service for them.”* Besides that, hotels introduced disposables to serve their guests. That way, there were limited chances for contagion among guests and workers. Additionally, essentials like towels, toiletries, and remote controls were wrapped and kept in the designated location so that upon arrival, visitors could obtain them without having to physically be in contact with the receptionists. That was one way to enforce the practice of leaving the space of at least one metre between the people to reduce chances of transmission. The concept was supported by P7 when articulating:

“The other thing we did was to package towels, toiletries and a remote in the plastic bag to try and curb transmission so that at the time the guest got to the reception, we could minimise chances of contact.”

From there, data showed that guests were prohibited from sharing rooms because that would allow clustering and possible transmission of COVID-19.

The second category that was revealed from data analysis was improved hygiene levels in the lodging establishments. Participants aired that among others, use of sanitisers was a common practice within the hospitality industries to kill the virus. Again, they asserted that fumigation too was done periodically to ensure cleanliness, and provide a safe space for visitors as expressed by P6 *“We also fumigated the building every week to ensure that the environment is conducive for.”*

Another important category that appeared from the data analysis was the reduction of expenditure by accommodation facilities, which manifested in various ways. It was mentioned

that employees' working hours were reduced, which forced them to go to work on shifts. As such, some employees had their pay reduced while others were retrenched.

Many participants claimed that businesses had to close down chalets and pools in order to minimise the number of the personnel to be paid. Therefore, the closure of the non-essential departments such as self-catering and dining rooms became the fourth category. That was substantiated by P7, who explicated, *"For the accommodation facilities to pay few employees, chalets and entertainment facilities such as pools had to shut."*

According to the analysed data, it became apparent that hospitality businesses had to put activities of maintenance on hold. Participants expressed that periodical renovations of the accommodation facilities were ceased on the account that the companies were no longer generating enough profits throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data again suggested that during the pandemic, some employees received some training to be equipped with the necessary skills so that they could not be exposed to catching the disease easily. That was authenticated by P2 when stating that: "The training encompassed the skills on how to take care of ourselves, and the customers. We were even sensitised to the symptoms of the virus, as well as how to handle patients if there was need." In that way, workers' fears were allayed, so they could work calmly with their customers without panicking.

Use of various marketing strategies throughout the pandemic proved to be another category regarding strategies amid and post COVID-19. Owners advertised their businesses through the likes of Facebook pages, websites, Instagram, as well as newspapers. Those marketing strategies helped the owners to retain their clientele and to reach more new customers as expressed by P8:

For marketing, we used a Facebook page, our wall was filled with positive comments given by our happy clients. We also sponsored some institutions like Donanballos to further make ourselves known. Moreover, we host an annual event 'Be My Moonlight' on Valentine's Day with an aim to catch as many people as possible.

As per the data, people were screened at the entry points of the hospitality industries, both the workers and the guests who entered the vicinity. In the views of the participants, screening process helped to curb the possible transmission of that lethal virus by tracking the guests' travel history for them to be isolated if there was need. Also, for those that had been exposed to contagion, they were quarantined and treated there. Additional to that was vaccination card

which was a requisite as proof that guests had been vaccinated for the pandemic as shown by P3 when noting that, “ *If the guests failed to produce the card, they were denied access to the hospitality industry so that other personnel could be protected from any contamination possibilities.*”

The results of the study cohere with the literature as Rasul (2021) discussed the significance of fumigation to ensure cleanliness for hotel guests while (Hussain, 2020) mentioned that hotels had to use sanitisers for hygienic purposes. Moreover, (Rodriguez-Anton, 2020) maintained that some hotels became temporary homes to the infected people. Furthermore, (Ncube, 2021), has put emphasis on working on shifts. Some scholars expressed that training for the staff was a requisite during COVID-19 (Ozdemir, 2021; Teng, 2020). From there, (Rodriguez-Anton, 2020) wrote that amidst COVID-19, there ought to be diversion on marketing strategies. Also, (Gursoy, 2022) mentioned that vaccination was mandatory during that time.

4.3.4 Opportunities brought by COVID-19 on accommodation facilities in Maseru urban

Though not covered by research questions, data analysis revealed that despite the negativities attributed to COVID-19, there were some opportunities brought to both employees and employers of the lodging businesses. The first category regarding employers was that COVID-19 helped them unleash their authenticity in leadership, which manifested in divergent ways. Firstly, it enhanced their communication skills. Participants pointed out that managers were able to give out precise, transparent and regular information throughout that period even if it bore sad news to the workers. In that regard, workers felt encouraged and cared for, which was seen in how they interacted with the guests.

Secondly, data uncovered that COVID-19 helped accommodation facilities employers to be able to make decisions that benefited all the parties involved in a short space of time. That included being able to come up with pathways that were implemented to run the businesses during that crisis as narrated by P1: “We reduced the companies’ expenditure by closing down the non-essential departments within the establishments.” The ability to strategize and implement suitable strategies benefitted the owners as they managed to save some funds for the continuity of their businesses.

On another level, data revealed that workers’ interpersonal skills were also improved during COVID-19 pandemic. They stated that since the inception of the pandemic, they asked guests how they felt, and did routine checks on them to ensure their happy stay in facilities. Similarly,

managers talked to their workers, assuring them that in the end, things would get to normal, and that crisis too would pass as explained by P3: “Our managers talked to us frequently, in a more transparent manner, updating us about any information. That increased our trust on them, and did away with discontentment we could have as workers. As such, we worked smoothly with our clients as we had no grudges against our management.” Therefore, possession of relational skills worked for the benefit of the business as there was never a time when there were frictions that hindered the service delivery. As such, customers were satisfied, hence revisited the facilities, thus increasing the turnover for the owners. Based on the foregoing, a suggestion can be made that, it was possible for owners to retain a certain number of employees, and make a positive impact in their lives.

A different category that was displayed was that because of the pandemic, lodging establishments co-operated, which was exhibited in the sharing of information. That was evidenced by participants when explaining that in situations where there was a guest overflow, they informed one another. Additional to that was sharing of information regarding the governments’ expectations about them as businesses during that pandemic, as well as the tactics on how to meet the customers’ needs.

On equal terms, data revealed that this health crisis brought up new opportunities for the hospitality industry workers as narrated by P8: “It brought along with it, new opportunities like selling masks.” That benefited the workers as they managed to generate extra cash for themselves, and supplemented the cut salaries that had created a visible economic plunge among hospitality workers.

The results of the study are linked to the literature as it is explained that COVID-19 opened new markets within their business network (Japutra, 2021). Hahang (2022) has asserted that the pandemic has helped the management to unleash their abilities in making decisions. Apart from that, throughout COVID-19, managers who exhibited transparent and consistent communication with their workers assisted them to accept the decisions made, even if they were bad news (Mohring, 2020). As such, positive relationships were maintained between workers and management, as well as between workers and guests (Agarwal, 2021).

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has displayed data analysis, presenting the responses that have been given by the informants who took part in the conducted interviews for this research study. Aside from that, the findings entailed herein emerged under the following: socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, and the strategies used by accommodation facilities both during and post COVID-19. However, though not covered by the research questions, the positive impact of COVID-19 emerged from the collected data, thus it is also included in this document.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the findings and objectives of the study as outlined in chapter one:

To examine how COVID-19 has socially affected the owners and workers of tourism accommodation facilities.

To assess the extent to which COVID-19 has affected the economic livelihoods of the workers and owners of tourism accommodation facilities.

To investigate management strategies used in accommodation facilities during and post COVID-19.

5.2 Summary of key findings

It has been established that COVID-19 has adversely affected the managers and workers of the accommodation facilities in Maseru urban. This was validated by social impacts as one of the eminent themes that have been investigated. This theme was therefore substantiated by categories such as stress which manifested in quite a number of ways, ranging from massive retrenchments, increased workloads to altered work schedules.

Apart from stress, the study found the second category to be relative poverty, which included social exclusion and disparities as resultants of loss of jobs that happened in the thick of the pandemic. The study has further found out that sour relationships between accommodation facilities and the booking institutions were the aftermaths of this lethal pandemic, which in the end caused dire consequences in relation to the performance of the hospitality businesses. These findings were backed up by the chaos theory which explains that instability breeds evolution of difficulties as COVID-19 did in the tourism sector.

The results of the study again revealed that COVID-19 had rampant effects on the economic livelihoods of both the workers and owners of the hospitality industries in Maseru urban. As such, it was confirmed that owners were hit hard by this health crisis for they encountered grave decline of guests, which manifested in low to no room tenancy. This concept was supported by a drop on sales which led to significant decrease in revenue collection. That drop bore dreadful results for the owners as they failed to pay the workers and buy the cleaning materials for their

businesses. Discoveries were again made that owners were faced with loss of both human and physical capital. For the former, employers lost their hard working workforce either through death or retrenchment, while for the latter, they lost their businesses as they could no longer afford to pay mortgages, thus the bank repossessed the buildings.

This study further revealed that the managers of accommodation facilities employed different strategies amid and post COVID-19. This theme was supported by multiple categories that emerged from data analysis: social distancing, lessening of expenditure, ceasing renovations, training, various marketing strategies and screening.

Even though the study's objectives did not cover the positive effects of COVID-19, findings were obtained that indicated that there were significant good impacts that were attributed to this pandemic. It was evidenced that managers displayed authentic leadership qualities by being able to communicate clearly and precisely with their workers. From there, they managed to come up with decisions that were best for business and employees within a very limited time frame. Through this study, it was established that interpersonal skills as well were improved for both the concerned tourism hospitality stakeholders.

This study revealed that hospitality businesses during COVID-19, as opposed to the period prior to the outbreak, were working together during that crisis. This was seen in sharing of information by the accommodation facilities. The findings showed that the workers got new business opportunities such as selling masks in that era.

5.3 Conclusions

In the light of the foregoing, the study concludes that COVID-19 has largely impacted the socio-economic lives of hospitality industry stakeholders. The findings suggested that the economy of these businesses melted because of this pandemic. Low to no room occupancy led to drop in sales, thus a decline in revenue.

On the social part, findings showed that the tremendous rate of retrenchments, and other changes that sprang during the pandemic stressed both the workers and the owners, causing awful consequences within the hospitality sector. That included pressure for the workers who continued working during that trying time. While workers got retrenched, they struggled to

access the basic needs, thus increasing the influx of the humankind living in destitution. As the unemployment piled up, individuals were faced with social exclusion and disparities.

In addition, it is realised that the lodging facilities employed divergent strategies in order to build resilience and continuity during that health crisis. That was supported by participants who noted that hospitality industries put in place strategies that were not limited to the following: the use of various marketing strategies to maintain and attract new customers; improved hygiene levels within the hospitality establishments; social distancing and reducing business expenditure.

It is concluded that COVID-19 has been a double edged sword as it also bore the positive effects. This notion was substantiated by participants who maintained that COVID-19 brought along with it some business opportunities for workers, and enhanced numerous skills of both the employers and the workforce. Enhanced skills therefore worked for the benefit of the hospitality businesses, hence boosted their economy.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered in turn for the government and the hospitality industry in Lesotho as they are the relevant stakeholders in the tourism accommodation facilities. During any outbreaks, the government should be careful to not enact mitigating measures that contribute to the detriment of the hospitality sector, and collapsing its economy. Rather, it should be mindful of the spill over effects of such measures and adjust financial and taxation policies to resuscitate the economy of the hospitality sector as illustrated in the literature review with countries such as Spain and China. If such policies are drawn and implemented, the hospitality facilities will pay their workers and make positive contributions to their livelihoods.

It is further recommended that the hospitality industries too should start thinking of green evolution for sustainability, and adoption of technology in order to respond to the ever changing demands of the patrons during any given time.

5.5 Areas of the future research

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher recommends that further research investigating the government's readiness to alleviate the repercussions brought by any pandemic within the hospitality industry should be undertaken. That will help both the

government and accommodation facilities to have what it takes to survive pandemics, be it skills, information or finances. Also, the same study can be conducted, but in the outskirts of Maseru, and in the rural areas to assess if all the effects were the same across different geographical settings. Apart from that, a further research on the recovery strategies of hospitality industry post the pandemic can be undertaken.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participants' Interview questions

1. What were the social impacts of COVID-19 on the owners and the workers of tourism accommodation facilities in the areas of the study?
2. What were the economic impacts of COVID-19 on the owners and workers of the tourism accommodation facilities?
3. What were the management strategies during and post COVID-19 pandemic?

