

COVID-19 Safety Measures' Commitment in the Egyptian Hotel Industry: An Exploratory Mixed-Method Study

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to examine guests' perceptions of COVID-19 safety measures in the Egyptian hotel industry and determine their assessment of such measures implemented in different hotel areas. In addition, it explores the management decisions and preparations for the future to support that safety commitment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, an exploratory mixed-method approach was used as the methodology to achieve the study's objectives. Based on an official checklist for hotel safety procedures released by Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, a structured questionnaire was distributed with 446 valid responses being received from hotel guests. The management strategies to support safety commitment were then investigated in a qualitative study based on 35 semi-structured interviews. According to the study findings, guests place great importance on the implementation of safety measures in hotel clinics, guest rooms, and restaurants. However, their evaluation of the optimum safety measures in hotel areas found that restaurants and guest rooms require more severe and active safety measures. It was also emphasized that during times of crisis, hotel managers highlight the role of managerial practices as well as collaboration with governmental stakeholders. Finally, this study concludes with important theoretical contributions and implications for the hotel industry during the pandemic time.

Keywords: Safety measures, COVID-19 pandemic, hotel areas, guest rooms, swimming pool.

Introduction

The impact of Covid-19 has been comprehensive and devastating for all sectors and establishments in all countries of the world, considering it to be a crisis the world has never seen before (Gossling et al., 2020). Indeed, the hospitality sector is still struggling to survive the collapse caused by the global COVID-19 crisis (Guevara, 2020). Where, the pandemic has weakened tourism and travel movements and significantly decline global economic activity (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Moreover, Hao et al. (2020) recommended deep thinking about the contributions that this pandemic can add to the hospitality sector and how to work on the sector's recovery during this period. The hospitality industry is a sector described as a labor-intensive industry and depends on many daily interactions between employees and customers, employees together, and customers together (Gallen, 2020). In addition, the nature of service in the hospitality sector has unique and sensitive characteristics and is, therefore the first to be affected by natural disasters, and epidemics (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Therefore, the hotel sector is the largest and fastest receiver of the pandemic because of the previous characterization unless the situation is carefully controlled through considered procedures and strategies (Gallen, 2020).

The success and performance of hotels depend heavily on hygiene and cleanliness (Kim et al., 2005), mainly when it comes to a worldwide health crisis. As well as research had shown that the consumer's decision to purchase is greatly influenced by both hygiene and cleanliness in the service place (Choi, 2019). However, despite many preventive or increased steps to decrease and prevent the transmission of COVID-19 at lodging facilities, more than half of tourists declared that

they were not willing to stay at a hotel in the near term (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Consequently, to revitalize and restore the hospitality sector, the focus must be on the extent to which hygiene and cleanliness are achieved (Jiang & Wen, 2020).

Hotel customers are exposed to perceived health risks because of natural disasters and viruses (Shin & Kang, 2020). Risks can be overcome significantly when relying on previous experiences and solutions (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). However, measures adopted in the COVID-19 crisis have a very narrow horizon and have not succeeded in eliminating the epidemic because of the virus mutation more than once (Sigala, 2020). Also, Hung et al. (2018) emphasized the urgent need to follow specific safety procedures and high-quality standards to ensure the hygiene that all hotel units must adhere to. Similarly, despite interviews with hospitality industry leaders on how to minimize the risks of this virus and the procedures that follow within all hotel units to reduce its spread within the customer environment, no proposal has been made to fully include defensive measures for this pandemic (Elshaer et al., 2022; Bonfanti et al., 2021). More importantly, there is currently a dearth of empirical data that can clearly show which COVID-19 preventive activities and measures are valued by hotel guests. Furthermore, little is known regarding hotel guest satisfaction in light of recently implemented COVID-19 safety measures and activities across the hotel business (Ko, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to investigate guests' perceptions of COVID-19 safety measures in the Egyptian hotel industry, as well as their appraisal of such measures implemented in various hotel areas. Furthermore, it investigates management plans and recommendations to support that safety commitment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

World Health Organization (WHO) reported 14,000,000 cases worldwide (World Health Organization, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is considered a global health crisis the world has never seen before (Fong et al., 2020). Therefore, the hospitality industry must adopt effective policies and strategies that help them overcome crises with the lowest costs and losses. It is therefore important to develop and strengthen responses and evaluate them periodically, where ineffective action is replaced and effective response is enhanced (Hao et al., 2020). Jiang & Wen (2020) found that the impact of infectious diseases can be reduced by promoting and monitoring safety measures. According to Oxford Dictionary (2022), safety is the condition of being protected from or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury. Hotel safety refers to preventing possible harm or fatalities from occurring to guests and staff while they are on hotel property (Enz, 2009).

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten the service sector globally, especially hotel enterprises. In Egypt, the unanticipated effects of Covid-19 on tourism and hospitality have produced several challenges that have led to a decline in hotel occupancy all around the country. *Figure 1* depicts the occupancy rate curve of hotels in South Sinai and the Red Sea (the community of the study's sample) from 2017 to 2021, demonstrating a large fall in occupancy rate during the peak period of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 and 2021.

Therefore, consideration must be given to the places that are difficult to see or reach, which can also cause infection. Therefore, hotel health care requires the imposition of simple but effective procedures and policies to reduce the spread of infection and thus reassure customers to do the experience amid this epidemic (Zhang et al., 2020), and update well-thought-out standards (Chan & Gao, 2021). Although, it is worth noting that the life cycle of previous diseases was short (Gössling et al., 2020). The COVID-19 cycle is expected to be prolonged, leaving huge consequences due to the virus's ongoing mutation and the lack of any recovery indicator yet (Ying et al., 2021).

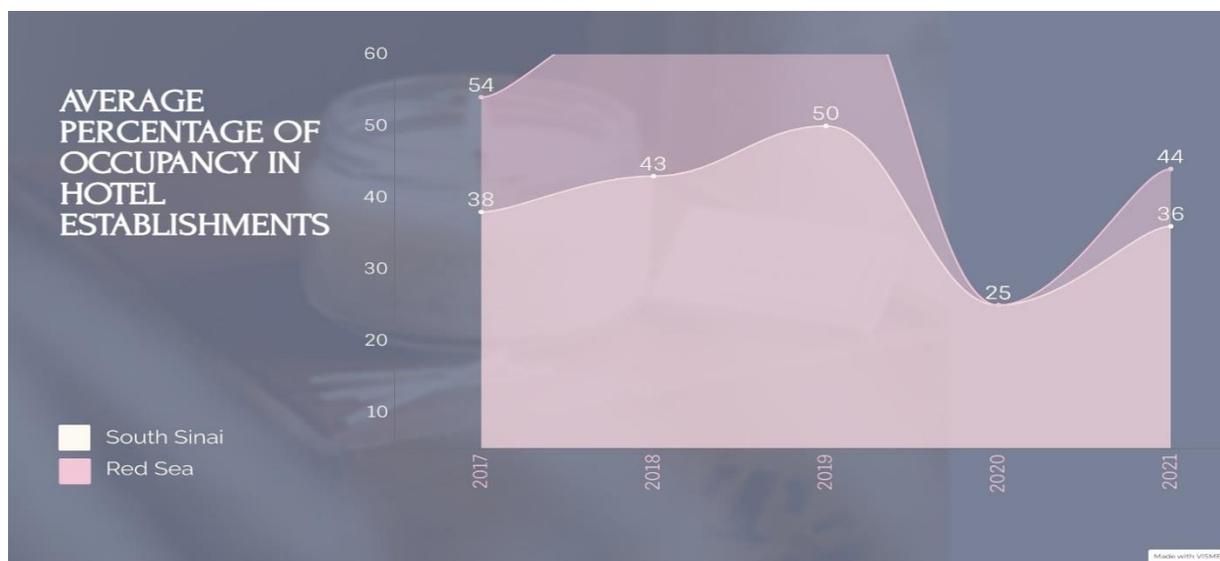


Figure (1): The average hotel occupancy rate in South Sinai and the Red Sea from 2017 to 2019

Source: Information and Digital Transformation Unit – Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities

The hospitality industry has strived to develop and strengthen hygiene and safety protocols because of the horror that has dominated all people globally. For this purpose, hospitality companies have provided a statement of their change in hygiene regulations and procedures and following new policies for handling food and beverages (Abdelaal & Elshaer, 2020) while reducing the interaction between the customer and the employee (Baum & Hai, 2020). Furthermore, the hotel's safety is critical and must be emphasized regularly, as well as pushing sanitizing programs and requiring all personnel to adhere to them (Elshaer & Marzouk, 2019). Those procedures greatly help prevent the spread of the virus and constitute a dependable vision for the future in similar circumstances to this pandemic (Yu et al., 2021). Increased public health attention was a result of the devastating effects of COVID-19. A healthy lifestyle is likely to become a critical trend in the hospitality industry. So, hotel industries must move to provide customized products to enhance the customer experience such as designing healthy fitness programs and healthy food systems (Sigala, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). In addition, the extent to which effective service standards are adopted to deal with this virus generates safety and reassurance for the customer and encourages him to choose his hotel (Williams & Balaz, 2013). As a result, attracting a new segment of customers amid these conditions is the effective management of these catastrophic health risks (Shin & Kang, 2020).

Leading hotels in the field such as Marriott, Hilton and Hyatt have relied on technological systems to reduce or prevent employee-customer interaction such as mobile check-in systems, kiosk check-in machines, and robot cleaning systems, in addition to enhancing hygiene technologies for cleansing and intelligent sterilization through (e.g., electrostatic sprayers, ultraviolet-light technology) (Garcia, 2020). Those procedures are necessary for the hotel environment to reduce the health risks that have taken hold in customers' minds (Shin & Kang, 2020). Lockyer (2005) has supported that choosing hotels depends mainly on hygiene and cleanliness. It is worth noting that the hotel's reputation is greatly affected by the system and cleanliness of rooms (Gu & Ryan, 2008). However, there is less interest in hotel units independently in actually applying the issue of hygiene and cleanliness (Park et al., 2019). Hygiene is concerned with maintaining an individual's well-being from any challenge. Similarly, it can be pointed out that the extent to which a person has a healthy life where widespread attention to hygiene makes the individual safe from various

diseases, especially in the case of infectious diseases causes a global pandemic (Delea et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, the positive effects of proper hygiene eliminate any future health risk, therefore, most studies support the importance and the urgent need for periodic hygiene to avoid the terrible consequences of Covid-19 (Delea et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2021). Although the duration of the service or product experience in the service sector may be short in some cases, the response to this experience is very rapid. Therefore, the cleanliness of the environment, product, and service are unacceptable in the debate about its low quality (Pizam & Tasci, 2019). Also, it should be noted that the front departments need to understand their customers closely as they need to understand and analyze customer behavior and consumption history from the time they deal with the facility (Mariani, 2019), and to know what customers hope in these crises (Jiang & Wen, 2020).

The customer can assess the hygiene of the place from several factors, including spaces used by customers (e.g., reception, washrooms, rooms, and restaurants), personal hygiene of staff (e.g., uniform and hands), and spaces used by staff (e.g., computers, desks, and chairs). Thus, reducing the spread of infection requires considering the places to which individuals are exposed more than once a day, such as restrooms, halls, reception rooms, corridors, elevators, stairs, elevator buttons, railings, keys, door handles, and dispensers, as well as gathering places using sterilization and certain proportions of disinfectants (WHO, 2020a).

The receptionist must be fully aware of all standards, procedures, policies, and all documented information the customer may need. Thus, they must be qualified to be able to discover the infected person or suspect and must be highly informative to provide advice and guidance. In addition, the receptionist must be aware of all recent developments. Moreover, they must also be fully aware of periodic follow-ups to rooms involving suspected. Therefore, all the following must be available at the front desk: 1) Disinfectant and cloths or disinfectant wipes for surface cleaning 2) Medical mask and eye protection, separate or combined, face shield, goggles (disposable) 3) Gloves (disposable) 4) Plastic apron (disposable) 5) Isolation gown (disposable) 6) Biohazard disposable waste bag. Moreover, the reception desk should have telephone numbers for health authorities, medical centers, public and private hospitals, and safe transportation services easily available for use whenever there is the possibility that a customer may be sick with COVID-19 (WHO, 2020b). According to Vandenhaute et al. (2022), safety measures in the reception area and restaurants reduce the possibility of infection and consumers' perceived risk. By thus ensuring customers' health, customers are motivated to interact with hotel staff through the registration process or by indicating the importance of safety measures.

Jiang & Wen (2020) endorsed the need to focus on customer expectations for room hygiene, especially surfaces that are the first to be touched by the customer inside the room rather than focusing on the antecedents and consequences of cleanliness and hygiene. (WHO, 2020c). Rooms should be disinfected and sanitized periodically and more than once a day, and the waste of each room such as hand towels, medical masks, gloves, and garbage should be disposed of quickly and disposed of according to each hotel's business plan. Emphasis should also be placed on the employee's and customers' wearing of protective equipment. In addition, rooftops, toilets, and sinks should be sanitized with a disinfectant solution containing 0.1% sodium hypochlorite as cleaning should always be done first, followed by disinfection. Staff must be well trained in how to use, store and handle these chemicals. Most important is the use of a custom laundry bag to collect the contents of the inmate that he wishes to wash and must be cleaned and sterilized at temperature (60-90 ° C). Accuracy is required when dealing with the contents of each room to prevent infection from one inmate to another. Furthermore, the need to open windows to change the air of the room (WHO, 2020d).

One of the most sensitive areas in the hotel is the restaurant section which helps spread the infection due to its reception of many guests at the same time, as well as the proximity of customers and the use of tools that everyone exchanges. Thus, all must follow WHO's safety measures. According to Lakshmi and Shareena (2020), After COVID-19, health and safety will be the top priority, which interprets into hygiene and sanitation issues of the restaurant. The World Health Organization has therefore encouraged mask-wearing in such places where there are large numbers of people and at very close distances (WHO, 2020e). Moreover, tables should be arranged such that the distance from the back of one chair to the back of another chair shall be more than 1 meter and that guests face each other. In addition, it is necessary to follow precautionary measures for the tools used by guests where the dishwasher must be used to clean all the tools used with cleansers, and authorized disinfectants, and at the appropriate temperature. It is necessary to ensure that all the tools are dried after disinfection, whether manual or antenna. In addition, make sure to wash the table linen and wipes at a temperature (60-90 ° C) with the right detergent (WHO, 2020f). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic led to discussions on safety issues regarding pool operation and management during the pandemic, and many countries issued new COVID-19-related safety regulations for pool environments. Regulations regarding standard cleaning and disinfecting procedures, microbiological and chemical testing, and other requirements were subjected to changes aiming to further reduce the risk of infectious diseases (Romano-Bertrand et al., 2020). Based on WHO guidelines when using the swimming pool, spa, sauna, and steam bathrooms, the following must be followed: 1) a maximum number of people who will use these facilities to ensure their distancing and declare this number, 2) Detergents and disinfectants must be provided in visible places in changing rooms and toilets, 3) Provision of single-use towels, 4) Provision of precautionary containers with closed lids, 5) Provision of single-use drinking containers, 6) Cleaning officer should ensure the cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting for the most commonly used places in these places such as door handles, toilet handles, tap handles, toilet surfaces and waste container surfaces (WHO, 2020g).

Methodology

An exploratory mixed-method approach was used as the methodology for the study to produce an impactful and comprehensive analysis of the data. According to Creswell (2014), the mixed-methods approach provides actual knowledge, which is a value in the process of making decisions and managing situations. The study began with a quantitative method via a survey that focused on accomplishing the first and second study objectives by investigating guests' perceptions of the hotel industry's safety measures as well as assessing the optimal safety measures' commitment in the hotel front areas. This was followed by a qualitative research semi-structured interview, addressing hotel managers' experiences with safety measures, covering the measures/practices and continuity strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results of The Quantitative Study

Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

The survey respondents were restricted to guests of five-star hotels in Sharm El Sheikh. A screening question was included in the survey that asked respondents if they had ever stayed in a five-star hotel during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 or 2021. During the 2-years survey period, a total of 446 samples were collected. A structured questionnaire was developed based on an official check-list for hotel safety measures issued by Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and

Antiquities in 2021. In addition to the demographic characteristics section, the questionnaire was divided into five components, investigating guests' perceptions of safety measures in the hotel (Hotel clinic, Guest rooms, Hotel restaurants, Reception area, and Swimming pool).

Guests' perceptions of the safety measures

This section primarily seeks to investigate hotel guests' perceptions of safety measures established in the hotel industry during the COVID-19 era. Five underlying standards in different hotel areas (Reception area, guest rooms, restaurants, hotel clinic, and swimming pool) were examined. For reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha (A) was used. The overall A value was 0.815, while the minimum acceptable value is .7 (Nunnally, 1978), all components had A values more than .7. Also, according to the descriptive data in Table 1, each measure's mean score of guests' perceptions showed that all measures were placed in the high score range, showing that respondents perceived all measures in various hotel areas were significant. Nevertheless, the relative value of each measure varies from one to another. The five areas with the highest mean values for implementing safety measures were respectively as follows: Hotel clinic (Mean value = 4.10), Guest rooms (4.03), Hotel restaurants (3.99), Reception area (3.98), and Swimming pool (3.95).

Table (1): Guests' perceptions of the hotel industry's commitment to safety measures

Safety Measures Standards	Mean	Std. Dev.
Reception area [Mean, 3.98]; [Cronbach's A., 0.849]		
1) There is a compulsory machine for guest bags sterilization before the security gate of the reception area.	4.28	.845
2) Guests' shoes are chlorinated before passing through the security gate.	4.11	.900
3) Guest temperature is measured after passing through the security gate.	4.26	.711
4) A guest's hand is sanitized with a disinfectant (concentration 70% at least) after passing through the security gate.	4.07	.661
5) A mask (If you don't have one) is delivered to guests before moving to the reception area.	4.00	.697
6) There are signs on the ground to show guest spots for social distancing and to maintain safe distances.	3.96	.875
7) There is a box on the front desk with sterile pens for guests to be sanitized immediately after use or disposal.	4.00	1.119
8) The surface used for completing reservation form templates is sterilized after each use individually.	3.94	1.019
9) There is an alcohol dispenser next to the elevators with guide posts that declares the importance of sanitation.	3.21	.649
10) The maximum load of the elevator is 50% of its capacity.	3.85	.735
11) There are many guide posts to prevent the spread of infection in the reception area.	3.91	1.213
12) There are many dispensers for continuous sterilization of guests within the hotel reception area.	4.00	.747
13) The sterilization process is repeated on the sofa and fauteuil within the hour through using the evaporator machine.	3.87	.970
14) Commitment to continuous disinfection and sterilization of public bathrooms.	4.32	.831
Guest Rooms [Mean, 4.03]; [Cronbach's A., 0.855]		
1) The room capacity should not exceed a maximum of two adults and two children.	4.02	.725
2) Sanitizer dispensers are available in the corridors.	4.13	.861

3) The rooms are cleared with special tools to prevent the spread of infection.	4.25	.972
4) Room and bathroom wastes are gathered in a bag, knotted, and placed in another bag, with no touch with the guest.	3.89	.862
5) Sterile room furnishings are placed in bags, to be changed without contact with guests.	3.85	.795
6) All surfaces and tables are wiped with sterilizers.	3.91	.985
7) Doorknobs, power switches, and remotes are sterilized.	4.07	.981
8) Sterilize all bathroom accessories with alcohol (70%) concentration.	4.05	.875
9) Each room has personal protective tools (muzzles, gloves, and hand sanitizers).	4.17	.711
Hotel Dining Areas - Restaurants [Mean, 3.99]; [Cronbach's A., 0.825]		
1) There is a fixed dispenser at the restaurant's entrance (70% concentration).	4.16	.655
2) There are guide signs (on the floors) in front of the restaurant door to regulate entry and maintain safe distances.	3.38	1.000
3) The guest's temperature is measured before entering the restaurant.	3.98	.897
4) One table has a maximum of 4 chairs considering the social distance.	3.76	.817
5) The family table has a maximum of 6 chairs considering the social distance.	3.88	.815
6) Two meters of space between each table and another.	3.77	1.125
7) Chairs at distances of 1.5 meters between each chair and another.	3.90	1.011
8) Covered forks, knives, and spoons to indicate sterilization, using disposable utensils is recommended.	4.30	.855
9) A paper tablecloth is placed, which is disposed of immediately upon completion of the service.	4.00	.735
10) There is an alcohol napkin on the table to sterilize the hands again.	4.22	.790
11) Using menus with plastic wrap.	4.25	.902
12) Sterilize menus after each use with alcoholic sanitizers.	4.19	.944
13) Tablet menus or online menus are available.	4.08	.953
Hotel Clinic [Mean, 4.10]; [Cronbach's A., 0.845]		
1) There is an equipped clinic in the hotel.	4.31	.811
2) A dispenser is provided at the clinic entrance and inside it.	4.10	.799
3) A doctor stays continuously at the hotel.	4.28	.774
4) Oxygen cylinders for artificial respiration are provided.	3.92	.723
5) The instruments are sterilized and disinfected after each examination using alcohol swabs.	4.05	.784
6) A single-use mattress is provided on the bed.	3.99	.890
Swimming Pool [Mean, 3.95]; [Cronbach's A., 0.702]		
1) The area surrounding the beach and the swimming pool is disinfected from tables, surfaces, and chairs after each guest.	3.83	.863
2) A distance of two meters for the sunbeds is considered.	3.78	.810
3) Beach and swimming pool towels are provided in the guest room by placing them in a sterile bag.	4.21	.855
4) The bar area is continuously disinfected and sterilized.	3.99	.826

When the COVID-19 epidemic broke out, researchers recommended investigating the characteristics of medical preparedness that can be incorporated into the hotel property (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Prior research by Ghaqzi (2016) revealed that, among all the hotel safety and security

measures, guests ranked medical preparedness as the second most crucial factor, after only guestroom security. In the same line, this study's findings show that hotel guests place high importance on having a hotel clinic available and being medically prepared, particularly in the era of the pandemic. When evaluating the measures of hotel clinics, guests focused on the need for an equipped clinic in the hotel (4.31) where a doctor resides permanently (4.28). Also, it was discovered that the guests' perceptions of safety in the hotel room were highly significant. Similar to this, Wen et al. (2021) indicated that after the COVID-19 pandemic, potential guests may prioritize safety and cleanliness while making hotel booking decisions. The study's findings on guest rooms showed that it was important for guests to have a room cleaned using particular instruments to stop the spread of infection (4.25) as well as to have personal protective equipment (muzzles, gloves, and hand sanitizers) within the room (4.17). Furthermore, the safety measures implemented in the hotel restaurants were deemed important by guests. In dining rooms, more stringent and systematic hygiene practices and techniques should be utilized. They placed a high value on various virus-prevention techniques within the hotel dining rooms, such as wrapping menus in plastic wrap (4.25), using an alcohol napkin to sterilize hands (4.22), and sterilizing menus with alcoholic sanitizers after each usage (4.19). In this context, Kim et al.'s (2005) case study discovered that during the SARS pandemic, upscale hotels in Korea installed new hygienic equipment and taught employees about health awareness. Moreover, the study investigated the safety measures in the reception area from the perception of the guests. Guests attached the highest levels of importance to some points in the reception area (e.g., commitment to continuous disinfection and sterilization of public bathrooms (4.32), a compulsory machine for guest bags sterilization before the security gate of the reception area (4.28), and measuring guest temperature after passing through the security gate (4.26).

Finally, among the areas of the hospitality industry that has received little research, the findings also investigated how guests perceived the safety measures at the swimming pool. According to Spica et al. (2020), swimming pools were shut down during lockdowns as part of health measures against the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mellou et al. (2022) added that since there was no information on the risk of viral transmission at indoor swimming pools, it was not permissible for hotels to open their indoor pools during the pandemic. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic sparked debates over safety concerns relating to the reopening of pools and their management during the pandemic, and numerous nations enacted new COVID-19-related safety measures for pool environments (Mellou et al., 2022). The findings of this study, which described how guests perceived the safety measures at the hotel pool, showed that guests believed it was important to provide beach and pool towels in the guest room by putting them in sterile bags (4.21) as well as the importance of regularly disinfecting and sanitizing the pool's bar area (3.99).

Assessing the Optimal Safety Measures

The assessment of the key safety measures implemented in the hotel's areas revealed that, in response to COVID-19, the hotel has shown adequate levels of dedication to safety measures as indicated in Table 2. To represent better accuracy in ranking, the value point was established using the percentage of "yes" responses rather than the scale's median value.

Table (2): The assessment of the key safety measures of the hotel areas (N= 446)

Safety measures	Yes		No		Mean
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Safety measures at the reception area	389	87.21	57	12.79	1.744
Safety measures in guest rooms	375	84	71	16	1.680
Safety measures at hotel restaurants	340	76.23	106	23.77	1.524
Safety measures at hotel clinic	418	93.72	28	6.28	1.874
Safety measures on swimming pool	392	87.89	54	12.11	1.757

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, safety measures in certain areas of the hotel (hotel clinic, swimming pool, and reception area) were found to be more resilient and efficient in general. Hotel safety measures should be strengthened not only in response to the pandemic outbreak but also as a routine practice to prevent or mitigate any potential health-related crises and need to be established to continue as future practices. On the other hand, to effectively manage the COVID-19 crisis, two major places in the hotel require more stringent and aggressive implementation of safety measures (restaurants and guest rooms). In this regard, Elshaer (2021) claimed in his study about restaurants' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic that there was a common understanding among restaurant managers on the significance of implementing food Safety and Hygiene in restaurant operations. Compliance with such measures and practices, in particular, is consistent with the safety protocols established by the Ministries of Health and Tourism and Antiquities. In addition, such compliance could be interpreted to suggest additional concerns need to be taken into consideration in terms of resource allocation (e.g., electrostatic sprayers, ultraviolet-light technology) and managerial concerns (regulations and procedures).

Results of the Qualitative Study

Analysis

This section aims to explore hotel managers' perceptions and practices/procedures in terms of their establishment's commitment to safety measures, which has been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak to help researchers in understanding how hotel managers address handling such crises. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), the use of interviews in a research study enables researchers to get distinctive and novel viewpoints on the subject under study. The data for this study were gathered using semi-structured interviews to thoroughly explore the topic. The semi-structured interview method allows participants to expound on their responses and provide comprehensive perspectives (Creswell, 2014). In this study, open-ended questions were used to encourage managers to express their opinions and ideas regarding how to best comply with safety regulations (Merriam, 2002).

The knowledge and experiences of the interviewed managers, who come from a variety of hotels and cities (e.g., Sharm El Sheikh and Hurghada are recognized as leisure destinations), offer different managerial and operational priorities. In compliance with this view, Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) stated that it's crucial to choose interviewees who have the necessary knowledge and experience for the context of interest. As a result, to achieve the study's third objective, purposeful sampling was utilized to select the most appropriate respondents (Ames et al., 2019).

The interview questions focused on hotel managers' experiences with safety measures, including the measures/practices, problems, and continuity strategies used during the COVID-19 outbreak. The questions included "How to best exploit the period of the Corona crisis?" and "What is the Ministry of Tourism's responsibility in supporting hotels' safety measures during the growing Coronavirus crisis?"

The questions included "How to best exploit the period of the Corona crisis?" and "What is the Ministry of Tourism's responsibility in supporting hotels' safety measures during the growing Coronavirus crisis?" The follow-up probes included questions on their responses to the role of the Tourism Ministry, such as "How did you rate this role?" and "How did you arrive at such decisions?" This section follows an interpretive paradigm that enables researchers to collect fresh insights and experiences from hotel managers in Egypt regarding the phenomenon (in this case, Safety Measures' Commitment) (Creswell, 2014).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Hotel managers in a popular tourist destinations in Egypt - Sharm El Sheikh and Hurghada - were consulted for their insights. Since a member of the research team is a current employee of the Ministry of Tourism, the participants were reachable and friendly to the invitations. A total of 35 participants accepted the invitation. Throughout the study, participant profiles were kept anonymous. It was intended to include managers from various levels of the organization's hierarchy (Japutra & Situmorang, 2021). According to complexity theory, selecting the correct mix of managers from various levels of the hierarchy might allow producing better results (Gear et al., 2018). Therefore, varied participants' job duties were internationally considered when arranging interviews (e.g., F.O managers, HR managers, Service managers, etc.). The initial data coding was done by the way the text was understood to give meaning to the interpretation of the data. The themes were determined, classified (as main concepts) and sub-concepts (as sub-segment) into descriptions, and participant quotations were added.

Management Decisions and Preparations

The hospitality industry has been most severely impacted. The pandemic has had major consequences, including health concerns, a struggling economy, and management disorders (Elshaer, 2021). According to Japutra and Situmorang (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the hospitality industry to a new low point in despondency. Subsequently, managers have used up all of their alternatives for surviving.

Some have considered temporarily suspending business or closing hotels. However, the cost incurred due to ruining image, losing reputation, and reopening could be higher, thus this was not the best solution. As a result, this challenge has spurred hotels to seek out new prospects (Sharma et al., 2021). The majority of them (respondents, N= 33) opted to keep working as long as they could, depending on four main streams/strategies, as follows:

- The commitment to safety measures,
- Development and quality of service/product to reduce costs,
- Reducing property operations and maintenance, and
- Training and development of employees.

Developing your service/product is the most effective strategy to stay in business through difficult times. It was discovered that approximately (48%) of the participants choose to develop their products and services during the slowing period induced by the COVID-19 pandemic (see *Figure*

2). In this regard, Coombs and Bierly (2006) argued that product/service innovations raise the added value, which raises consumer satisfaction and ultimately aids in an organization's survival by increasing sales revenues. Similarly, Elshaer and Marzouk (2022) have shown that service/product innovation has a major favorable effect on the guest's experience, which leads to them remaining loyal to your organization. Also, Gursoy and Chi (2020) make it abundantly evident that technology integration and application into hospitality operations would likely be essential shortly.

Furthermore, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to supply fresh information that may inform staff on how to adapt their operations in response to newly growing client desires and demands (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). In this context, 25% of managers underlined the importance of training personnel to adjust to the new work environment and changing consumer requirements and expectations imposed by the pandemic. In the same line, 77% of the participants reduced property operations and maintenance throughout slack periods of operations.

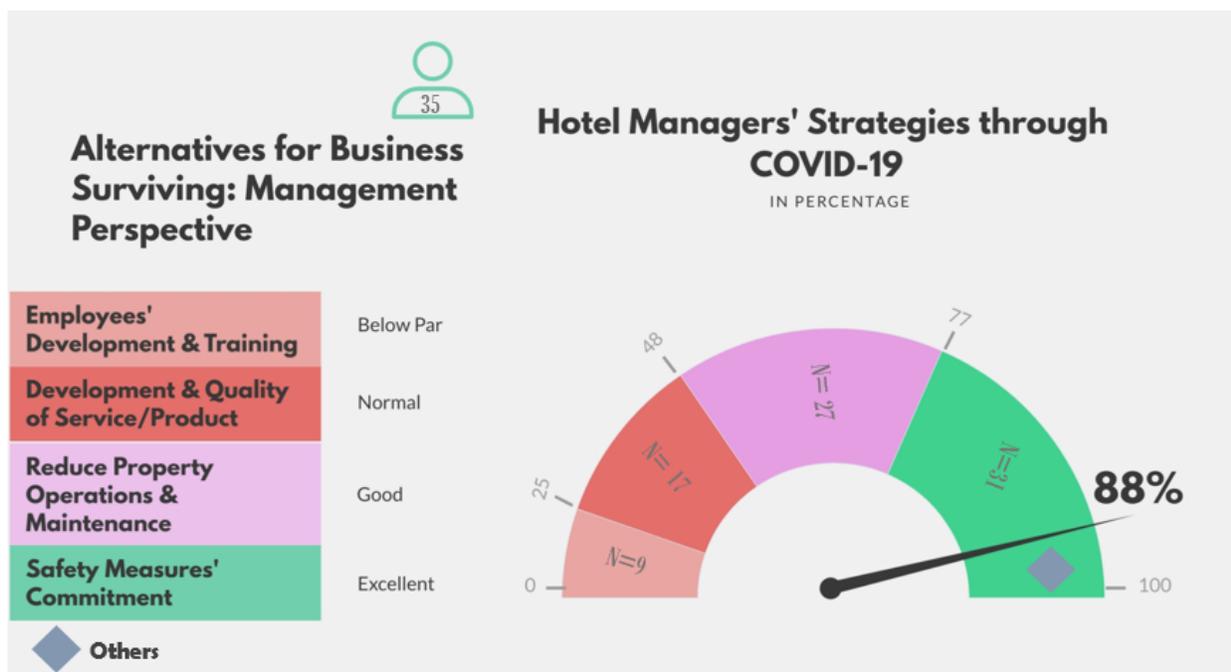


Figure (2): Hotel managers' survival strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic

Moreover, hospitality organizations are expected to make significant adjustments to their processes in the COVID-19 business environment to ensure employees' and customers' health and safety, as well as increase customers' propensity to patronize their business, according to Gössling et al. (2020). According to Gursoy and Chi (2020), about one-third of restaurant consumers and approximately 40% of hotel guests are willing to pay more for enhanced safety measures. Gursoy and Chi added that while customers anticipate hospitality organizations to adopt stricter cleanliness and safety practices, some of them are prepared to pay for those extra security precautions. The majority of study participants (88%) indicated a strict dedication to safety procedures, which is consistent with these arguments.

Management Recommendations to Support Safety Measures

There is evidence that the tourist and hospitality industries are particularly vulnerable to global crises like COVID-19, making the need for open communication and government support for the industry's existence even more critical (Yeh, 2020). Fong et al. (2020) added that government support for tourism and hotel businesses is crucial, and additional policy implementations are required (OECD, 2020). In this context, the study's participants recommended many government actions to revive the hotel sector, mainly greater health-care oversight, increased contact with the sector, and the provision of subsidies. Using the semi-structured interview form, the hotel managers' recommendations were examined, and the common recommendations are summarized in Table 3.

Table (3): Participants' recommendations

Participants	Recommendations
P.3 (Service Manager)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coordination between the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Ministry of Health and Population about hotel contracts with highly skilled and trained medical professionals. ○ Coordination between the Ministry and the Chamber of Hotel Establishments regarding hiring professional companies with expertise in health and safety to train personnel in hotel establishments on how to apply disinfection and sterilizing processes and practices.
P.11 (HR Manager)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Ministry, in coordination with government organizations, puts off paying all hotel debts incurred during the crisis. ○ For example, in collaboration with the Ministry of Manpower, the Ministry offers financial assistance to hotels so that staff members are retained rather than cutting labor.
P.22 (F.O Manager)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developing a strategy that focuses on enhancing the abilities of current tourist industry employees, limiting labor leakage, and lowering turnover.
P.27 (Room Manager)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encouraging employee participation in health and safety initiatives by rewarding or penalizing them. ○ Build trust and confidence by developing a preparedness plan that includes an agreement between hotels and hospitals to provide tourists with 24-hour medical care and insurance services.
P. 28 (F&B Manager)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fostering management commitment to COVID-19 safety measures by three management practices: protecting, promoting, and participating.
P. 30 (Service Manager)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promoting and implementing a safety-first policy that prioritizes keeping workplace health and safety during the pandemic. ○ Update the team on the virus's evolution in the tourist attraction and involve the employees in the initiatives being taken to stop it.
P. 31 (HK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The government should provide frequent trainings and seminars for businesses on safety standards and sanitary regulations, and these should be advertised in the media. ○ To combat the transmission of the virus, the government should ensure increasing hospital capacity, testing vaccination capacity, and security measures.

The hotel managers' recommendations showed that the management role is recommended to promote employee Covid-19 safety measures' commitment, which was consistent with the findings of Elshaer (2021) and Xue et al. (2020). Our findings identify three managerial strategies

that can be used to strengthen the commitment to safety, particularly in times of pandemic: improving employee abilities, encouraging managers to adopt safety practices that promote safety measures (protecting, promoting, and participating), and prioritizing a safety-first policy. In this context, many academics have claimed that management commitment to safety is the most influential predictor of employee safety commitment (Alsetoohy et al., 2022; Clarke, 2013; Gracia et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2020; Zohar & Polachek, 2014). In summary, the management function closely monitors employee performance, which has a higher impact on safety measures compliance (p22, 28, & 30).

Concerning working with stakeholders, our findings provided proof of how managers express a desire for coordination with governmental agencies during a crisis. The recommendations made by the participants regarding working with the various stakeholders, particularly the government, were in line with the results of Fong et al. (2020). In the interviews, statements such as "coordination between the Ministries of Tourism and Antiquities and Health and Population" were asserted (p3, 11, & 31).

The safety measures in the core five hotel areas are summarized in *Figure 3*, along with management preparations and recommendations. These recommendations demonstrate that there are numerous potentials for stakeholders to work together to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and safeguard these businesses, and hence the entire industry.

Conclusion and Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on almost all sectors, including the lodging industry. During the pandemic, hotel businesses were required to implement comprehensive safety measures. It is necessary to guarantee that the safety measures in hotel services are in place to reduce the spread of the virus with new infections. This study used an exploratory mixed method technique to examine guests' perceptions of the hotel industry's commitment to safety measures and to assess the ideal safety measures. In addition, to investigate management decision-making processes and future preparations to meet safety commitments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a mixed methodology, theoretical and empirical conclusions are drawn from the results. Based on quantitative data analysis, this study demonstrates that guests prioritize safety measures in five hotel areas (Hotel clinic, Guest rooms, Hotel restaurants, Reception area, and Swimming pool, respectively). The assessment of the essential safety measures of the hotel areas, on the other hand, demonstrated insufficient implementation of the COVID-19 safety measures in the restaurants and guest rooms. Findings of the qualitative study found four underlying streams/strategies of maintaining businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely: "commitment of safety measures", "development and quality of service/product", "reduce property operations and maintenance", and "training and development of employees". Also, the semi-structured interviews largely confirmed the role of managerial practices and government support for COVID-19 safety measures as identified by existing literature (e.g., Fong et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2020), implying that additional managerial practices and collaboration among different stakeholders should be considered.



Figure (3): COVID-19 safety measures in the Egyptian hotel industry

Source: The Researchers

In terms of the managerial implications, the management team should develop an action plan that is specific to the situation and integrate it following local government recommendations after consulting with local health authorities and industry associations. Also, the management should develop a training plan in some specific areas like service, cleanliness, and disinfection in guest rooms and dining spaces. The housekeeping and food and beverage personnel must have procedures they follow rigorously. Therefore, the management team should allot enough funds to guarantee the ongoing, efficient implementation of appropriate safety measures. Furthermore, specific techniques, such as the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to be used in the case of isolating a suspected case, disinfection, cleaning, and any other measures, may require particular managerial attention.

Even though this study added to the body of knowledge, it is crucial to point out some shortcomings that require discussion in further research. First, this research provides substantial data that is exclusively from Egypt in terms of handling the COVID-19 epidemic. So, other countries should ascertain the opinions and practical actions of their hotels. Second, the study was distributed and gathered during the COVID-19 period, which suggests it's likely that the unusual timing of the study period may have had an impact on hotel guests' behavior and accordingly reflected their perceptions and assessment. Third, the study explored guests' perceptions of safety measures implemented in certain hotel areas; thus, in addition to the areas covered in this study, safety measures are an important subject that requires additional research in all hotel areas.

Future studies are required to assess the various strategies that hotels might use to collaborate with governmental organizations to create coordination structures and complete crisis management plans. Also, it is important to consider how hotels should set up contingency plans for infectious disease control because they are a common victim of pandemics. Finally, the ministry of tourism work with Egyptian hotel academic institutions and must exchange information and ideas on how to use more entrepreneurial strategies and techniques to deal with such crises. Therefore, respect, it is advised to provide details on the present endeavors by the hotel industry to address challenges when dealing with COVID-19. This information raises the possibility to increase effective community engagement during such a pandemic.

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الالتزام بتدابير السلامة الخاصة بفيروس كورونا في صناعة الفنادق المصرية:
دراسة استكشافية متعددة الطرق

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الملخص العربي

تهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف تصورات النزلاء حول تدابير السلامة المتعلقة بفيروس كورونا COVID-19 في صناعة الفنادق المصرية، وتحديد تقييمهم لمثل هذه الإجراءات التي يتم تنفيذها في مختلف أرجاء الفندق. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تستكشف قرارات الإدارة والاستعدادات للمستقبل لدعم الالتزام بإجراءات السلامة أثناء هذه الجائحة. وقد تم استخدام المنهج الكمي والكيفي لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة من خلال الاعتماد على قائمة التحقق الرسمية لإجراءات سلامة الفنادق الصادرة عن وزارة السياحة والآثار المصرية، حيث تم تجميع عدد 446 استبانة صالحة تم تلقيها من نزلاء الفندق، كما تم بعد ذلك البحث في استراتيجيات الإدارة لدعم الالتزام بإجراءات السلامة في دراسة نوعية تستند إلى 35 مقابلة شبه منظمة. ووفقاً لنتائج الدراسة، يولي النزلاء أهمية كبيرة لتنفيذ إجراءات السلامة في العيادات الفندقية والغرف والمطاعم. وقد أكدت النتائج أن الغرف والمطاعم تتطلب تدابير أمان أكثر صرامة ونشاطاً. كما تم التأكيد على أنه في أوقات الأزمات، يُسلط مديرو الفنادق الضوء على دور الممارسات الإدارية وكذلك التعاون مع أصحاب المصلحة الحكوميين. فقد وجدت نتائج الدراسة النوعية أربعة مسارات أساسية للحفاظ على الأعمال التجارية خلال جائحة COVID-19 وهي: الالتزام بتدابير السلامة، وتطوير جودة الخدمة، وتقليل عمليات التشغيل وصيانتها، وتدريب وتطوير الموظفين. أيضاً، أكدت المقابلات شبه المنظمة إلى حد كبير دور الممارسات الإدارية والدعم الحكومي لتدابير السلامة الخاصة بـ COVID-19 على النحو المحدد في الأدبيات الحالية. أخيراً، تلخص هذه الدراسة إلى مساهمات نظرية مهمة وآثارها على صناعة الفنادق خلال فترة الوباء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إجراءات السلامة، جائحة كورونا، صناعة الفنادق، غرف النزلاء، حمام السباحة.