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Customer experiences and revisit intentions: implications of redesigning hospitality services through technological innovations and servicescape reorganisation

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1. Introduction

Past studies acknowledge the importance of customer engagement and customer experiences (Rather *et al.*, 2021; Rather & Hollebeek, 2021). On the one hand, customer engagement is strategic in enhancing sales, competitiveness and cost-savings (Rather *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, customer experience is also mentioned as important in literature due to its positive effect on driving organisational profits, growth (Witell *et al.*, 2020), source of competitive advantage (Rather *et al.*, 2021a; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Due to this, there is a proliferation of research investigating customer experience and engagement (Rather *et al.*, 2021a; Rather & Hollebeek, 2021). This growth could be motivated by the need to respond to commoditisation, especially when competitors offer similar goods and services (Witell *et al.*, 2020) to price-sensitive customers with relatively lower switching costs (Woyo, 2022). Furthermore, proliferation is also expected, given that customer engagement and customer experience enhance customer lifetime value and competitiveness (Rather *et al.*, 2021a; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2018). Thus, firms need to actively seek to design (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and redesign customer experiences (Awan *et al.*, 2021). This is more crucial now that we are in an ongoing global pandemic that is altering the way we conduct doing business.

These motivations have resulted in intimacy being more critical in enhancing customer satisfaction and competitiveness (Reimann *et al.*, 2010).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism is one of the economic sectors that have been negatively impacted (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Rivera, 2020), especially in developing economies that rely on it for revenue (Woyo, 2021; Woyo & Nyamandi, 2021). With economies gradually opening up for international travel, service provision in the hospitality industry is being delivered under the “new normal”. Given the continued uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19, especially with the emergence of several variants and the insistence on lockdown by national governments, redesigning customer experiences could be a crucial aspect of tourism recovery efforts. Hotel managers need to redesign the customer experience based on the disruptive nature and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021). Redesigning the customer experience is critical in tourism and hospitality as it forms the core operational aspect of the industry (Kim & Ritchie, 2014) and could help managers firms to maintain relevance in these unprecedented times. Sigala (2020) argues that redesigning customer experiences in the wake of a global pandemic is a critical topic worth investigating.

Customer experience, especially in the broader marketing sciences, has generally been approached using the demand perspective (Homburg *et al.*, 2017, Pine & Gilmore, 1998) compared to hospitality studies. There has been a shift in demand perspectives incorporated in studies focusing on customer engagement and customer experience (Rather, 2021a; Rather *et al.*, 2021; Rather & Hollebeek, 2021). Furthermore, this chapter acknowledges the comprehensive investigation on the importance of customer experiences in a hospitality context (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Rather *et al.*, 2021; Rather & Hollebeek, 2021; Rather, 2021a; Tussyadiah, 2014; Lahouel & Montargot, 2020), and the creation of positive customer experience (Pencarelli *et al.*, 2017; Sthapit, 2018; Bergs *et al.*, 2020). Very limited research has investigated customer experience in the COVID-19 pandemic in tourism from a demand (Rather, 2021a. 2021b) and supply perspective (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021). Research focusing on

redesigning customer experience to cater for the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic is largely lacking. Only a few studies investigated the construct of customer experience during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Rather, 2021a, 2021b). Bonfanti *et al.* (2021) used supply data, while Rather (2021) used demand data. In their paper, Woyo and Slabbert (2021) argued for the need to shift from supply views as tourists' perceptions could differ, especially where experiences are concerned. This chapter argues that understanding tourists' perceptions in redesigning customer experience is critical in informing supply views for enhanced service.

With the ongoing pandemic, hospitality managers are concerned with creating satisfying customer experiences while promoting their public health safety (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Woyo & Nyamandi, 2021). The major objective of the chapter is to examine the implications of redesigning hotel aspects on customer experiences and revisit intentions during the pandemic using demand-side data. The chapter's findings have theoretical and practical implications. First, the study identifies some of the service touch-points that can be re-designed to enhance the co-creation of satisfying customer experiences. Given that the impacts of COVID-19, especially the interventions, are beyond the control of the industry, redesigning the service aspects that enhance safety may show better customer experiences and increase firm performance. Thirdly, the findings add to the literature on customer experience, which has largely been dominated by information from the supply side.

2. Literature review

2.1 Customer experience and tourism

Customer experience is defined as "a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings and actions" (Lenon & Verhoef, 2016, p.16). Furthermore, the aspect of emotions is also stressed in the definition of Homburg *et al.* (2017), who defines customer experience as the customer's

"sensorial, affective, cognitive, relational, and behavioural responses to a brand" (p.384). Sørensen and Jensen (2015) introduce a different angle to approach customer experience by emphasising it as an encounter between customers and tourism service providers occurring along the customer journey. This journey consists of several "touchpoints" that includes the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase aspects. However, customer experience is also defined as a "subjective, internal consumer responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of the brand design, identity, packaging, communications and environments" (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). These definitions suggest that customer experience is an elusive concept (Rather *et al.*, 2021) with several meanings and conceptualisations (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Customers view it from an internal perspective, often subjective and not fully controlled by the supplier (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009).

In a tourism context, customer experience remains elusive because it is conceptualised (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Rather *et al.*, 2021). This is even the case in the linkages between customer engagement and customer experience (Rather *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the conceptualisation needs to be improved to fully understand the customer experience (Godovykh, & Tasci, 2020; Rather *et al.*, 2021; Rather, 2021a). Improved conceptualisation is critical for the hospitality industry, given the intensity of encounters between customers and service providers (Sørensen & Jensen, 2015). This is particularly so with the changing nature of tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Empirical studies on customer experience have remained limited, despite several conceptual studies on the construct (Lemon & Vergoef, 2016; Rather, 2020). Studies empirically investigating the impact of redesigned services on customer experience in response to the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in hospitality are also limited (Awan *et al.*, 2021; Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Rather *et al.*, 2021). The current chapter seeks to add and respond to the need for empirical studies on customer experience (Rather, 2020) during COVID-19 (Awan *et al.*, 2021; Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021) and customers' overall satisfaction with the redesigned aspects of services on their experience.

2.1 Redesigning customer experiences in a hospitality context

2.2.1 Hygiene, protection measures and COVID-19

COVID-19 has been disruptive, and hospitality managers must redesign the customer journey to improve the customer experience (Bonfant *et al.*, 2021). While extensive literature on customer experience exists (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021), the focus has been on planning customer experiences (Tussyadiah, 2014), loyalty and word-of-mouth recommendations (Cetin & Dincer, 2014). Positive customer experiences are critical for enhancing competitiveness through the co-creation aspects (Ahn & Back, 2018). Due to COVID-19, competing through differentiation is a challenge, and there is a need to innovate and transform the customer experience (Awan *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, COVID-19 presented hospitality establishments with relatively new types of customers who are afraid of the coronavirus and financially impacted (Awan *et al.*, 2021; Woyo, 2021) due to job losses as several industries were forced to shut down and retrench workers for survival (Musavengane *et al.*, 2021; Woyo, 2021; Woyo & Nyamandi, 2021). Thus, redesigning customer experience is critical to project a safe hospitality environment to travellers who perceive leisure travel as highly risk (Alwan *et al.*, 2021).

New normal customers expect service industries to be rolling interventions, including smart digital solutions and more contact-less service encounters to enhance public health (Awan *et al.*, 2021; Woyo & Nyamandi, 2021). This suggests that contact along the customer journey is currently being frowned upon, despite touch being the essence of the hospitality industry. Innovative ways for producing memorable customers experiences is required for physical encounters in hotels (Awan *et al.*, 2021). However, regardless of the importance of redesigning service provisions to deal with a new type of customers, research on these aspects is relatively limited (Awan *et al.*, 2021; Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Rather, 2021a).

2.2.1.1 Cleanliness and technology

Cleanliness, comfort, interactions with employees, membership programmes and how they affect customer experiences in hotel settings have previously been investigated (Awan *et al.*, 2021; Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021). Past research has considered the lack of cleanliness a major source of servicescape failure (Sann & Lai, 2020). However, this chapter responds to the call to test the effect of the hotel's redesigned service aspects on customer experience during the COVID-19 (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021). Several aspects that could affect customer experience have been identified in recent research, including hygiene, protection measures, internal work reorganisation, servicescape reorganisation, investments in technology, digital innovations, customer wait time reorganisation, staff training and updated communication (Awan *et al.*, 2021; Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021). However, these aspects of customer service redesign during COVID-19 are not sufficiently explored. Understanding the effect of these elements on customer experience using demand data is critical, given the growing interest to enhance public health among customers and service providers' (Awan *et al.*, 2021; Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Woyo & Nyamandi, 2021).

Cleanliness is considered one factor that affects the selection of accommodation services (Alwan *et al.*, 2021; Sann & Lai, 2020). The risk of contamination by viruses and bacteria stays even if the hotel is clean (Zemke *et al.*, 2015). This becomes complex during the COVID-19 pandemic, and if not addressed, could be a cause of servicescape failure and negative customer experience (Sann & Lai, 2020). Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between cleanliness and customer satisfaction (Park *et al.*, 2019). However, caution has been thrown that guests due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are likely to be conscious of their hygiene and social distancing (Pillai *et al.*, 2021), forcing hotels to reconsider customer experiences. Thus, to attract guests during COVID-19, hotels need to improve their perceptions of safety (Shin & Kang, 2020). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H₁: Redesigning aspects of cleanliness in a hotel significantly predicts customer experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technological innovations that reduce contact between customers and employees are critical in ensuring hotel cleanliness (Woyo & Nyamandi, 2021). Though several technologies were being advocated pre-COVID-19 (Shin & Perdue, 2019), COVID-19 accelerated the implementation of innovative technological solutions. While there were other outbreaks such as SARs, Ebola, and N1H1 before (Chien & Law, 2003; Kim et al., 2005), the conversation of technology usage as an intervention was not as pronounced as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital technologies in hotels are important for improved public health (Pillai *et al.*, 2021). Research is yet to sufficiently investigate the effect of technological innovations on the customer experience journey during COVID-19 (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Therefore, this study hypothesised that:

H₂: Redesigning technological innovations to improve hotel cleanliness significantly predicts customer experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2.2 Reorganising servicescape

Hotels are businesses where their customers are mostly influenced through their servicescape (Xu & Li, 2016). Servicescapes signals the cues and evidence concerning the quality of the hotel's intangible aspects. Often, customers rely on these cues in making first impressions or evaluating the organisation before engagement (Zeithmal *et al.*, 2018). Such cues and evidence is more important in a COVID-19 operating environment (Woyo, 2021). This implies the urgent need for hospitality managers to redesign their servicescape (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020) to effectively meet customers' expectations of safety assurance (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). In a COVID-19 operating environment, the research identified some of the servicescape aspects that could be reconfigured for enhanced service experience. These aspects include introducing qualified teams of health experts to design cleaning measures, the customer wait time to preserve social distancing, and servicescape reorganisation (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, reorganising the kitchen and the buffet

system is also encouraged (Hameed *et al.*, 2020). Doing so is critical in influencing customers' cognitive, emotional, and psychological elements in evaluating service.

Social distancing is one of the COVID-19 protocols that has greatly altered the hospitality servicescape. The implementation of this intervention reduced interactions between service employees and guests, contrary to what has been a hallmark encouraged practice (Butcher, 2005). It has effectively been achieved by using contactless technologies (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). It is thus, hypothesised that:

H₃: Reorganisation of the hospitality servicescape significantly predicts customer experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 Revisit intention

The intention to revisit measures the customer's intent to re-experience the same tourist destination or product (Dewnarain *et al.*, 2021; Gohary *et al.*, 2020; Rather, 2021a, 2021b; Woyo, 2018). Due to its importance, especially reducing marketing expenditure and increasing firm survival and long-term success, revisit intention has attracted much academic attention (Dewanarian *et al.*, 2021; Rather, 2021; Woyo, 2018). Customer retention is crucial for the hospitality industry (Han & Hyun, 2017), especially when faced with exceptionally low occupancies, as is the case during COVID-19 (Musavengane *et al.*, 2021). While revisit intention has been widely investigated, studies investigating revisit intention and customer experiences during COVID-19 are limited (Rather, 2021a, 2021b.). Enhancing the hotel's hygiene practice features perceived by guests can induce them to revisit (Yu *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, socially responsible behaviours positively influence tourists' intention to revisit hotels (Hassan & Soliman). Lastly, this study hypothesised that:

H₄: Enhanced customer experiences significantly predict customers' revisit intention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Methods of research

3.1 Sampling and procedures

A quantitative survey was used to collect data on guests' perceptions of the impacts of redesigned hotel services on their customer experiences and revisit intentions during COVID-19. Data were collected between May and June 2021 from 434 domestic tourists that have been to Namibia's coastal cities of Swakopmund and Walvis Bay at least twice during the COVID-19 pandemic. A screening question was employed to ensure the right participants were selected for the survey. Only the tourists who confirmed their previous COVID-19 hotel experience could complete the remainder of the survey. A non-probability sampling approach to data collection was applied because the target population could not be specified (Buelens *et al.*, 2018). Due to the restrictions in travel at the time, data were collected through an online survey (in English) using survey monkey. The survey was distributed to possible participants using several multiple sampling techniques. Initially, a convenience sampling technique was followed when the WhatsApp link was shared with self-selected samples. Secondly, snowball sampling was employed by asking personal contacts to share the link with respondents who would have travelled to the coastal cities during 2020 and 2021. This helped in getting many respondents and limiting non-response bias. The respondents' demographic characteristics are summarised in Table 1.

3.2 Questionnaire design

Data were collected using a structured question. Demographic information (sex, age, income, and education) was collected in the first section. The second section focused on redesigned service aspects of the hotel. The items used in measuring the redesigned service aspects were derived from previous studies and modified to suit the chapter's context (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Rather *et al.*, 2021; Rather, 2021a, 2021b; Tussyadiah, 2014; Witell *et al.*, 2020) using

a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 strongly agree). Revisit intentions were also measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree) based on items suggested in past studies (Gohary *et al.*, 2020; Rather, 2021a, 2021b; Yu *et al.*, 2021).

3.3 Data analysis

Data were first analysed using descriptive statistics. Reliability analysis was performed to measure the quality of items used in the study. Using WarpPLS 7.0 program, PLS-SEM was conducted to assess the research model (Figure 1).

(Figure 1 near here)

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Most of the travellers (53.7%) were female with an average age of 30 years (Table 1). Descriptive data show that most could afford to travel based on their monthly after-tax income. (34.5% earning between N\$31 000 and N\$40 000, approx. US\$2160 – 2700 at the time of writing). 23.7% indicated that they hold a university degree/diploma, suggesting an educated group of guests.

Table 1: Sample description.

Variable	Number	Percentage
Sex		
Male	233	53.70%
Female	201	46.30%
Age (years)		
<20 years	47	10.80%
21 -25 years	109	25.10%

26 -30 years	145	33.40%
31 -35 years	55	12.70%
36 -40 years	29	6.70%
>41 years	49	11.30%
Monthly income (NAD\$)		
<10 000	25	5.75%
10 000 -20 000	140	32.18%
21 000-30 000	104	23.91%
31 000 - 40 000	150	34.48%
41 000 - 50 000	10	2.30%
> 50 000	5	1.38%
Level of education		
Grade 12	70	16.13%
Certificate	65	14.98%
Diploma/degree	103	23.73%
Honours	100	23.04%
Postgraduate	96	22.12%

4.2 Measurement model

The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed using factor loadings, Cronbach Alpha and AVEs (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Factor loadings surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.7, ranging between 0.702 and 0.933 (Hair *et al.*, 2017), suggesting that indicator reliability was established. Construct reliability was established as the Cronbach alpha values surpassed the threshold of 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, composite reliability was higher than the threshold of 0.7 as it ranged from 0.885 to 0.933 (Hair *et al.*, 2017), suggesting that internal consistency was established.

Table 2: Construct's reliability and collinearity

Code	Construct(item)	Factor Loadings	Composite Reliability	Cronbach Alpha	Variance Inflation Factor
Cleanliness (CL)			0.887	0.899	3.725
CL1	New cleaning and sanitation procedures at the hotel made me feel safe	0.813			
CL2	Hotels are doing all they can to develop new cleanliness standards and behaviours	0.789			
CL3	Hotels are implementing high standards of hygiene and cleanliness	0.768			
CL4	All surfaces at the hotel, including high touch areas, were frequently sanitised during my stay	0.745			
CL5	Most of the places around the hotel have alcohol-based hand sanitisers for guests	0.712			
CL6	The hotel provides guests with disinfecting wipes as amenities to enhance the hotel experience during COVID-19	0.709			
CL7	Keys were disinfected before check-in.	0.702			
Technological innovations (TECH)			0.885	0.902	2.947

TECH1	Hotels are encouraging the use of electronic devices for bookings and check-ins	0.839			
TECH2	Hotels are using QR codes which guests can view places to visit around the coast on their phones	0.832			
TECH3	Hotels are using QR codes which guests can view digital menus on their mobile phones	0.826			
TECH4	Hotels are using sensors for lighting up the room to reduce human touch	0.811			
TECH5	Hotels are redesigning customer waiting time to reduce waiting times using touchless services	0.775			
	Work reorganisation (WRO)		0.933	0.879	4.105
WRO1	During my stay, the wait time was reorganised to reduce waiting lines and maintain social distancing	0.867			
WRO2	Hotels have reorganised the front office to provide an extra level of precaution for hotel employees and guests	0.839			
WRO3	Restaurant tables were reorganised to allow for social distancing among guests	0.821			

WRO4	Hotels redesigned new approaches to buffets to enhance the safety of guests and hotel staff	0.789			
Customer experience (CX)			0.918	0.863	3.955
CX1	I had a positive experience because the facilities of the hotel are smart	0.858			
CX2	The check-in and out were seamless and in synch with the social distancing guidelines	0.853			
CX3	Overall, I had a good experience at the hotel	0.845			
CX4	Hotel services, especially for taking preventive measures and control during the pandemic, were superb	0.839			
CX5	The hotel offered me an opportunity to check out late, which was good	0.817			
CX6	The hotel encouraged guests to takeaway meals, suggesting its perceived quality				
Revisit Intention (RI)			0.933	0.913	3.185
RI1	I intend to revisit the destination again	0.911			
RI2	I will recommend the destination to my friends and family	0.923			
RI3	I would love to come to this destination again	0.933			

Discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell and Lacker's (1981) criterion and average variance extracted (AVE). AVEs (Table 3) exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The AVE data suggested that the convergent validity of the constructs was proved. Furthermore, the square roots of the AVE of each latent variable are higher than the corresponding values of the correlations among other constructs, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 3: Discriminant validity

Construct	AVE	CL	TECH	WRO	CX	RI
CL	0.624	0.79				
TECH	0.672	0.68	0.82			
WRO	0.695	0.70	0.59	0.83		
CX	0.671	0.68	0.63	0.53	0.82	
RI	0.829	0.65	0.57	0.50	0.57	0.91

4.3 Structural model assessment

The inner model of Figure 1 was assessed using beta (β), p-value, and R^2 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). All the hypothesised paths have significant relationships with CX (Table 4). CL($\beta = 0.248$; $t = 2.34$; $p < 0.011$), TECH($\beta = 0.443$; $t = 6.59$; $p < 0.004$), and WRO ($\beta = 0.516$; $t = 8.53$; $p < 0.001$) all have a positive and significant effect on CX. CX also has a positive and significant effect on revisit intentions ($\beta = 0.564$; $t = 9.56$; $p < 0.001$). Overall, the results indicate a significant positive effect between cleanliness, technological innovations and work reorganisation on customer experiences and revisit intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesised path	β	t-value	p-value	Remarks
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CL>>CX	0.248	2.34	0.011	Supported
TECH>>CX	0.443	6.59	0.004	Supported
WRO>>CX	0.516	8.53	0.001	Supported
CX>>RI	0.564	9.56	0.001	Supported

5. Discussion and implications

The chapter examined the effect of redesigning hotel service aspects on customer experiences and revisit intentions during the pandemic using demand-side data. The findings of this study add to the literature on guest revisit intentions during COVID-19, which is generally lacking (Yu *et al.*, 2021). The quantitative relationship of cleanliness, technological innovations, work re-organisation on customer experience was established. Furthermore, the relationship between CX and RI was also assessed. Cleanliness has a positive and significant relationship with customer experience, suggesting that efforts to enhance public health safety along the customer journey are crucial (Yu *et al.*, 2021). This finding is consistent with previous studies that demonstrated the importance of perceived hygiene on the overall customer experience (Moon *et al.*, 2017; Wen *et al.*, 2020; Jiang & Wen, 2020; Yu *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the health of guests and service providers will be a critical aspect of post-COVID-19 recovery (Wen *et al.*,2020).

Technological innovations were found to be significant in explaining positive customer experiences. Therefore, this finding is consistent with previous research that argued that travel experiences during COVID-19 are made safe through technologies (Rahimizhian & Irani, 2020). The study also showed that work reorganisation significantly predicts guests' customer experiences during the pandemic. This confirms the supply side views that formed the conclusion of Bonfanti *et al.* (2021). Previous research argued that re-organisation of work is critical in ensuring positive customer experiences (Pullman & Gross, 2004; Voss *et al.*, 2008).

Lastly, the study showed that cleanliness, technological innovations and work reorganisation significantly influence overall customer experiences. With positive experiences, it was established that revisitation would be higher. The findings are consistent with past studies (Hasan *et al.*, 2019; Tran *et al.*, 2020).

5.1 Theoretical implications

Several studies have emphasised hygiene, but very few have integrated hygiene, technological innovations, customer experience and revisit intentions. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature on customer experience and hospitality service redesign during the COVID-19 pandemic by demonstrating the relationship between cleanliness, technological innovation, work reorganisation and customer experience and revisit intentions. The current chapter responds to a call for further unpacking revisit intentions during COVID-19 (Rather, 2021a, 2021b; Yun *et al.*, 2021). This is a critical contribution especially given the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, from a developing country perspective, the current study extends the theorisation of customer experience during COVID-19. Secondly, this chapter adds insights on context-specific strategies that hotels can use to rebuild consumer confidence for post-COVID-19 recovery (Rivera, 2020; Gursoy & Chi, 2020). These results provide significant implications for research on consumer and travel behaviour.

5.2 Practical implications

To enjoy repeat business from guests, the findings show the need for maintaining a higher level of public health and safety for guests. Therefore, hospitality managers need to continue redesigning services aspects that promote the public health of guests. Cleanliness, especially in high traffic areas of the hotel such as hallways, corridors and elevators, can be done using robots (Jiang & Wen, 2020; Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). Investing in robotic technologies in hotels is also encouraged. This can be used to alert staff in real-time regarding locations that need cleaning attention (Jiang & Wen, 2020), thus enhancing guest safety and increasing

repeat business during the pandemic. Protecting guests and employees' health could further enhance the customer's experience. Thus, regular hygiene surveillance will be critical in enhancing customer experiences and revisit intentions. Apart from using technologies, simple adherence to COVID-19 guidelines, including wearing masks and sanitising, could enhance perceptions.

Tourists in this study perceived their visit as safe because the hotel redesigned their servicescape using technologies. Investing in technological innovations will go a long way in creating a servicescape that guests consider safe during COVID-19, thus enhancing customer experience and willingness to revisit (Rahimzhan & Irani, 2020). Besides investing in innovative technologies, hospitality managers may also need to use visitor data to profile innovative customers for a post-pandemic world. Regarding work reorganisation, there is a need for hospitality managers to significantly reduce waiting times through the use of virtual queueing and other innovative interventions. Guests will perceive this effort by the hotel as a critical assurance that their public health is a priority. Tangible and intangible elements of the customer journey must be frequently monitored (Pullman & Gross, 2004). The hotel may communicate using hotel websites and social media pages, thus enhancing the guest's safety assurance and generating positive customer experiences.

5.3 Limitations of the study

Impacts of COVID-19 on customer experiences will be an evolving research area (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2021; Yu *et al.*, 2021), and future research must be done to understand the implications of the changing COVID-19 landscape on guests' experiences, especially first-time travellers. Furthermore, data for this study were collected from domestic tourists, and care should be exercised when applying the framework to international tourists. Further research, probably with a wider range of service redesign aspects, is needed to fully understand travel behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, since the study was done in a developing country, future studies could also compare these aspects of service redesign using data from

developed and developing countries for a broader understanding of consumer behaviour. These studies are critical in bringing out deeper insights that would generally enrich the literature on customer experience and customer engagement.

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