



# Hospitality in times of pandemic: Examining the guest experience in lodging facilities in the city of João Pessoa/PB.

Paula Dutra Leão de Menezes<sup>a</sup>  
Marcleide Maria Macêdo Pederneiras<sup>b</sup>  
Lidiana de Castro Lima Bandeira<sup>c</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** The day-to-day activities of lodging businesses are marked by hospitality, but this routine was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Gradually, the sector resumed its activities, implementing specific protocols and good hygiene practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19 while providing guests with hospitality and safety. Guests share their experiences on the Internet, providing information about their stay and evaluating establishments based on the quality of services provided. This information determines the performance of lodging facilities and generates an online reputation that can influence the decision-making of future potential guests. The goal of this research was to analyze the guest experience of twelve hotels categorized as 4- and 5-star, located in the city of João Pessoa in the Brazilian state of Paraíba (PB), during the period of the pandemic, using User-Generated Content (UGC) available on the website Booking.com. The guest experience reported on websites is considered a reliable database, hence our decision to use it as a data collection instrument. A descriptive netnographic survey was conducted, and it was found that in addition to issues related to hospitality, biosecurity, and infrastructure, the breakfast service was a predominant and decisive factor in the guests' evaluation.

## Keywords:

User-generated content (UGC);  
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<sup>a</sup> PhD in Humanities and Arts at Universidad Nacional de Rosario, UNR, Argentina.  
Professor at the Department of Tourism and Hospitality at Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB).  
leaopaula@ccta.ufpb.br

<sup>b</sup> PhD in Administration at Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, UFPE.

<sup>c</sup> Undergraduate in Hospitality at Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB).

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## INTRODUCTION

Lodging facilities are essential to tourist activity because, with a few exceptions, when traveling, the tourist needs a place to stay and rest. The Accommodation Unit (AU) is the main product of the lodging industry; this is the guest's place of rest and privacy and, in some ways, replaces their home. Therefore, aspects related to hygiene, safety, and hospitality are some of the requirements analyzed by the guest when choosing a lodging establishment.

Ribeiro (2011) explains that lodging facilities are companies that aim to provide safe, sanitary, and satisfying accommodation for the customers who seek these services. According to Cuillé (1992, cited by Castelli, 2005), one of the basic principles of hospitality is safety, because when a traveler is welcomed, he or she wants to find a safe place to rest.

The relationship between hospitality and safety is goes back to ancient times. Castelli (2005) describes how Greek civilization cultivated hospitality, and if a visitor was murdered during his stay, it was considered one of the most heinous crimes a host could be held guilty of, since his role was to protect his guest. Roman civilization, like the Greeks, provided every protection and care for their visitors.

Hospitality is present in the daily life of hotel companies, and cannot be dissociated from its principles, one of which is safety. According to Cavassa (2001), the term safety comprises several typologies: physical safety, biological safety, safety from fires, safety and security of the facility, external security, security of the services, safety against accidents, protection of users' belongings, tranquility and order, among others.

Hospitality is the act of welcoming, and its principles are essential for the quality of services provided in lodging facilities. In this context, all employees working in this sector must be prepared to provide quality services; therefore, it is important to improve services that meet the demands of increasingly competitive and demanding customers.

The emergence and rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the context of hospitality has provided tourists with a forum in which they can evaluate their lodgings on the internet, by reporting and evaluating establishments through User Generated Content (UGC), which generates an online reputation through electronic word-of-mouth. According to Parolin & Boeing (2019), online platforms are widely used to disseminate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in various areas of tourism and hospitality.

This UGC is an important aspect to be considered by managers, as managing users' comments enables them to identify failures in the service provision,

providing an opportunity to optimize the company's actions and improve its performance through online reputation and increased guest satisfaction.

In 2020, the world was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had an impact on the entire society, in all aspects of daily life, leading to changes in people's behavior. In this regard, the tourism sector was one of the most affected productive segments due, to its characteristics and the need for contact with other people. In this scenario, studies such as those of Zhong, Sun, Law, Li & Yang (2022); Sengel, Genç, Iskin, Çevrimkaya, Zengin & Sarıışık (2022), and Sigala (2020) have analyzed the impacts and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in the hospitality and tourism sector.

In view of the pandemic scenario, some relevant questions arise. Are hotels providing hospitality and safety for their guests? What are guests' perceptions of the adequacy and implementation of protocols and good hygiene practices for the prevention of COVID-19? What aspects of the guest evaluations stand out? Are there any aspects of safety and sanitation protocol that stand out? It is critical to examine and understand guests' experiences during times of pandemic.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the guest experience during the pandemic period in 12 hotels categorized as 4- and 5-star, in the city of João Pessoa, Paraíba, Brazil, using the User Generated Content (UGC) available on the website Booking.com.

Booking.com was chosen for this study as it is one of the leading online travel agents (OTA) in the national market. Booking.com allows its customers to evaluate establishments after their stay, as a way of helping potential future customers in their decision-making.

## Theoretical framework

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the world scenario, causing wide-sweeping changes, such as the temporary closure of companies and new attitudes among people. Due to the nature of the tourism industry, companies and professionals in this industry have been among the hardest hit as a result of the pandemic, due to the significant drop in the number of trips and demand for accommodation. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE (2021, cited by Neder, 2021), the pandemic resulted in a 36.7% decrease in the volume of services provided in 2020 as compared to 2019, and despite the gradual recovery, the segment needs to advance by 42.9% in order to return to the level of February 2020, before the pandemic.

A survey conducted by HotellInvest, in partnership with Omnibees, STR, and the Brazilian Hotel Operators' Forum (FOHB), found that in June 2020, 4% of hotel developments were closed in Brazil. Of these, 62% were



budget hotels, 58% midscale, 53% upscale, and 93% resorts. The country's recovery has been slow and gradual, and the hotel industry, according to the study, should follow a sequence of recovery according to the different groups. Hotels with primarily regional demand and low reliance on events will resume operations more quickly. Next will be the hotels with a predominance of national demand, with majority access by air and reliance on events. Finally, hotels with high international demand, primarily air access and reliance on events will be the slowest to recover (MONACO, 2021).

In Paraíba, data from PBTUR (2020, cited by Almeida, 2021) reveal that the number of tourists staying in João Pessoa fell by 8.6 percentage points in December 2020 compared to December 2019. In December 2020, hotel occupancy was 54.02%, compared to 62.92% in 2019. The overall estimated flow for the municipality was also lower. There were 93,880 guests in December, 16.9% less than in December 2019. This drop was even greater in the comparison at state level; there were an estimated 130,012 guests in December 2020, 17.2% less than the same period in 2019. However, the industry is preparing prepare for an upturn by adapting and implementing safety protocols.

Good practices and sanitary protocols were developed and implemented to protect employees and customers. The Ministry of Tourism - MTUr (2020) created the responsible tourism safety seal, which includes protocols for several tourism segments, including lodging facilities. The Brazilian Hotel Operators' Forum (2020) also developed the FOHB Protocol - safe operation and guest confidence, with procedures and recommendations for good practices during and after the pandemic. Hotel chains have also developed their own protocols. For example, according to the newspaper Folha de São Paulo (2020), the Accor chain announced a partnership with a certification company to develop a seal with new sanitary standards for its hotels.

Hilton hotels implemented changes such as mobile check-in, the elimination of pads and other paper gifts, and limiting the number of guests allowed in its gyms. Marriott, meanwhile, formed a cleaning council and announced several changes, such as the use of hospital disinfectant on heavily touched surfaces, and the installation of sanitizing stations near the elevators and at the entrance to its buildings.

According to Kalaoum, Sousa & Trigo (2020), that a new perspective on hospitality is emerging, emphasizing the importance of considering how new hospitality, which the authors refer to as sanitary, will be required not only in lodging establishments, but also on a wider scale, in urbanity itself. This new way of understanding hospitality is challenging the existing paradigms, and it is important to consider not only physical health matters but also the emotional state of all those involved in the lodging industry.

In this scenario, the guest's search for information becomes even more relevant. Today, information is disseminated on the Internet and guests are increasingly sharing their experiences on social networks and online travel agency sites through UGC, providing relevant information about their stay in lodging facilities and evaluating the establishments in terms of the quality of services provided.

In this understanding, there has been an increase in the number of studies that address issues related to ICT, expectations, habits, and consumption experiences of contemporary travelers. Examples are the studies by Barbosa & Medaglia (2019), Cortez & Mondo (2018), Gondim & Araújo (2020), Lamas, Mendes, Marques Júnior & Perinotto (2019), Mendes Filho & Carvalho (2014), Leung, Law, Hoof, and Buhalis (2013), Lima Junior (2016), Oliveira & Porto (2016), Temoteo, Brandão & Silva-Lacerda (2017), Standing, Taye & Boyer (2014), among others.

These studies are justified because advances in ICT enable customers to evaluate tourism ventures on the internet through social media and online travel agency websites, sharing information and experiences through UGU, resulting in significant changes in market dynamics and relationships between companies and customers. These comments are made spontaneously by tourists and reveal their experiences with the accommodation, while also creating expectations for future guests.

The websites of OTAs provide users with access to information that helps in their travel planning and allows them to share their experiences after their trips.

According to Tito & Ferreira (2019), OTAs emerged with the internet boom and have gathered strength over time. These companies invest heavily in technology because they rely on it for their product distribution and marketing. Guimarães & Menezes (2016) also point out that OTAs provide a wealth of information necessary for trip planning, such as weather, hotel availability, promotions, and available flights, among others. Expedia, Hurb, and Booking.com are examples of OTAs.

The sharing of information and perceptions on the internet is known as "electronic word-of-mouth" and has grown in recent years, as pointed out by Mendes Filho & Carvalho (2014). These reports are important because UGC forms an image of the company. Lopes (2015) explains the importance of monitoring information on consumer perception, which forms the "digital reputation". Thus, analyzing the user's comments is an efficient way to determine what can be changed or improved in the services provided, in order to improve the customer's experience.

Sharing personal opinions and comments has become more common and accessible as social net-



works have grown in popularity. Thus, traditional word-of-mouth has given way to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

According to Terra (2011), electronic word-of-mouth communication begins when personal opinions are posted on the Internet, which leads to their dissemination. Andrade (2014) shows that this communication started with the creation of blogs - web pages that allow people to express their ideas.

Mariano et. al. (2015) explain that on the internet, there are no time or space constraints because everything is immediate, integrated, and without loss of information; everything is recorded online, generating a greater range of coverage, and the physical barrier is eliminated, so more people can become involved in the process of transmitting and receiving information, allowing more people to read, discuss, and compare the products or services in question.

In a review of the literature, Ismagilova, Dwivedi & Slade (2019) identify eWOM as a rapidly expanding area of research. In general, these studies determine some antecedents of eWOM, its characteristics, the sources of information, and the receiver of the information. Some studies examine the impact of the emotions expressed in the comments on the perceived usefulness of online reviews. The authors also clarify that terms of eWOM characteristics and the applicability of online reviews can be influenced by rating, content, quality, and volume.

According to Loureiro (2014), experience can be a factor for the success, innovation, and competitiveness of companies in the hospitality sector. Facco (2016), clarifies that the image of a hotel enterprise, service quality, and experience are all important factors in maintaining high approval scores among guests.

Concerning the concept of experience, Walls et al (2011, cited by Coelho, 2017) explains it can be characterized as a constant flow of thoughts (cognitive) and feelings (emotional) that occur during moments of awareness in relation to the elements of the experience.

Sun Tung & Ritchie (2011) define the tourist experience as an individual and subjective evaluation – which may involve affectivity, cognition, and behavior – of events related to tourism activity. It begins with planning, develops during the trip, and ends after the trip is completed. Guests use their personal experiences to cognitively evaluate the services provided, in order to determine their level of satisfaction (Storbacka, Satndivik & Gronros, 1994). Temoteo, Brandão & Silva-Lacerda (2017) point out that the degree of customer satisfaction is built from the relationship between expectation and experience, with expectation being understood as a reference by the customer to evaluate the service.

Thus, experiences and perceptions are subjective and are formed individually, before being shared in evalua-

tive comments (positive or negative) that comprise an overall evaluation of the hotel. This information determines the performance of the hotel and creates an online reputation that can influence future guests' decision-making and serve as a source of information for the hotel. According to Urban et al (2009), consumers around the world are seeking information about destinations and tourism services in virtual communities that will enable them to better evaluate companies, destinations, and options before making a decision.

In this regard, the management of the CGU disseminated on the Internet can be used in the management of the lodging facilities; by analyzing guests' opinions, they can innovate their services, particularly in these times, when old habits are changing and new patterns of behavior are emerging.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive netnographic research with a qualitative approach was conducted. Corrêa & Rozados (2017) explain that netnography enables the study of objects, phenomena, and cultures that emerge in cyberspace as a result of the development and social appropriation of information and communication technologies.

According to Richardson (1999), qualitative research is defined as a study that can describe, assimilate and classify dynamic processes experienced by social groups. In other words, it allows us to understand how these processes present themselves in everyday life. Descriptive research, on the other hand, according to Andrade (2002) is concerned with observing facts, recording, analyzing, classifying, and interpreting them without interference from the researcher.

The study used data from the UGC posted on Booking.com i.e. the metadata provided by the User-generated content of Booking.com, since this OTA has an evaluation system that allows customers who have stayed through the site to post comments about their experiences of the hotel.

Booking.com has a self-classification system that allows lodging managers to classify lodging facilities into star levels. Based on a survey conducted on the website, 12 beachfront hotels were selected, 11 of which were rated 4-star and one 5-star.

UGCs totaling 4,672 comments were collected between March 2020 and December 2021. For the data analysis, we used IRAMUTEQ, a free software program developed with open source logic and under General Public License - GNU GPL (v2). The program is based on the R statistical environment (a dynamic, multi-paradigm programming language focused on data manipulation, analysis, and visualization) and Python (a high-level programming language). It allows for various types of textual data analysis, ranging from the most basic, such as basic lexicography, to multivariate analyses

(Camargo and Justo (2013)). Next, an initial text corpus was created using the total number of guest reviews. For this, the the evaluations were corrected by removing all special characters from the text (\*%&^\$), keeping only terms that could be analyzed by the software. In the same way, to prevent IRaMuTeQ from identifying different words, some words, such as breakfast and check-in, were linked. It is worth noting that emphasis was placed on nouns, adjectives, and verbs, in order to better analyze the guest evaluations.

Thus, 1 Initial Context Unit (ICU) was formed from the extracted comments, with each text segment (ST) separated in the ICU by a line, counting only one variable, described according to the number assigned to each of the hotels analyzed (\*Hotel\_01 \*Assessments).

After this first treatment, keywords were used to delimit the study environment to achieve the research objectives. The following forms/words were used: "covid", "coronavirus", "agglomeration", "mask" and "protocol". After this delimitation, a second corpus was constructed, containing only comments related to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to perform a lexicometric analysis on the proposed research theme. This second corpus contained a total of 379 evaluations via the OTA.

Guests' perception of their stay during the COVID-19 pandemic was analyzed using information from OTA Booking.com, taking into account how hospitality manifested itself and determining the performance of the 12 hotels during this period of greater sensitivity in the tourism and hotel sector.

## DATA ANALYSIS

To preserve the identity of the companies involved in the research, they are described as Hotel 1, Hotel 2, Hotel 3, Hotel 4, Hotel 5, Hotel 6, Hotel 7, Hotel 8, Hotel 9, Hotel 10, Hotel 11, and Hotel 12.

Table 1: Hotels, classification, and comments.

Hotels	Classification	Number of comments	UGC related to the COVID - 19 pandemic
Hotel 1	5	240	10
Hotel 2	4	682	32
Hotel 3	4	877	95
Hotel 4	4	600	34
Hotel 5	4	444	62
Hotel 6	4	521	51
Hotel 7	4	224	12
Hotel 8	4	205	18
Hotel 9	4	138	24

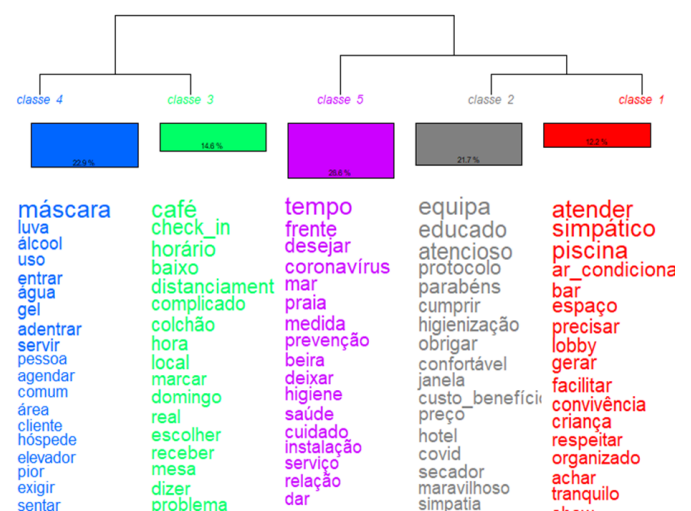
Hotel 10	4	391	24
Hotel 11	4	125	4
Hotel 12	4	225	13
<b>Total:</b>	-	<b>4.672</b>	<b>379</b>

Source: Elaborated by the authors with data from Booking.com, 2022.

Table 1 shows the hotels analyzed, their classification, the total amount of comments, and the number of comments related to the pandemic. A total of 4,672 comments were gathered, 379 of which were related to the pandemic and its impacts on guests' perceptions. The volume of UGC during the period corroborates what was discussed in the theoretical background, i.e., that guests share their experiences, experiences, and perceptions in evaluative comments (positive or negative) and this information determines the performance of the lodging facilities and generates an online reputation that can impact on the decision making of future guests and be a source of information for lodging facilities.

After processing the guest comments related to the COVID-19 pandemic, analyses of the Text Segments (STs) were performed, using the software program IRaMuTeQ, which performed a Descending Hierarchical Categorization (CHD), assigning, from on this text corpus, 5 lexical classes, which differentiate and resemble each other based on their vocabulary.

Figure 1: Descending Hierarchical Ranking Method (CHD) – Dendrogram.



Source: Research data elaborated by the authors, IRaMuTeQ, 2022.

Figure 1, represented by the Descending Hierarchical Classification Dendrogram (CHD), shows two major ax-

es and from these, 5 classes qualified by a vocabulary and by STs that share the same lexicon.

The first major axis was broken down into two subcorpora. The first subcorpus was represented by classes 3 and 4, where negative aspects are observed regarding the service offered by hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic, with emphasis on mask (máscara), glove (luva), alcohol (álcool) in class 3 and coffee (café), check-in, time (horário), and low distance (baixo distanciamento), in class 4. The second major axis corresponds to two sub-corpus, where class 5, which denotes positive aspects related to the service offered by the hotels during the pandemic of COVID-19, connects with classes 1 and 2, which correspond to the same evaluations of class 5. In the positive aspects, it was found that hospitality was a positive aspect of the guest experience through the words polite (educado), attentive (atencioso), friendly (simpático), convivial (convivência), to respect (respeitar), organized (organizado), calm (tranquilo).

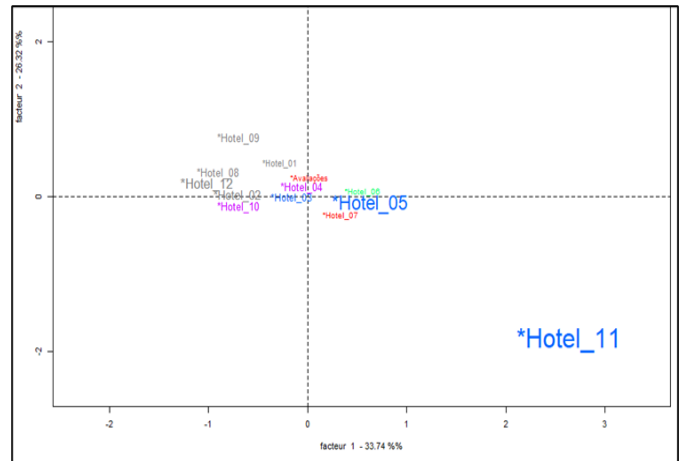
Figure 2 – Active form statistics

café_da_manhã	306	nr
pandemia	166	nom
hotel	160	nom
quarto	153	nom
localização	150	nom
covid	137	nr
funcionário	130	nom
bom	110	adj
limpeza	84	nom
máscara	73	nom
protocolo	72	nom
piscina	68	nom
excelente	67	adj
ótimo	65	adj
atendimento	58	nom
ficar	57	ver
aglomeração	55	nom
devido	54	adj
distanciamento	54	nom
restaurante	54	adj
hóspede	51	nom

Source: Research data elaborated by the authors, IRaMuTeQ, 2022.

In the textual statistics, represented by figure 2, we see the frequency with which the words appear in the evaluations. Thus, it is verified that the form "breakfast" (café-da-manhã) is the aspect that stands out the most in the guest evaluations, with 306 mentions, followed by the forms "pandemic" (pandemia) (166), "hotel" (hotel) (160), "room" (quarto) (153), "location" (localização) "covid" (137) and "employee" (funcionário) (130).

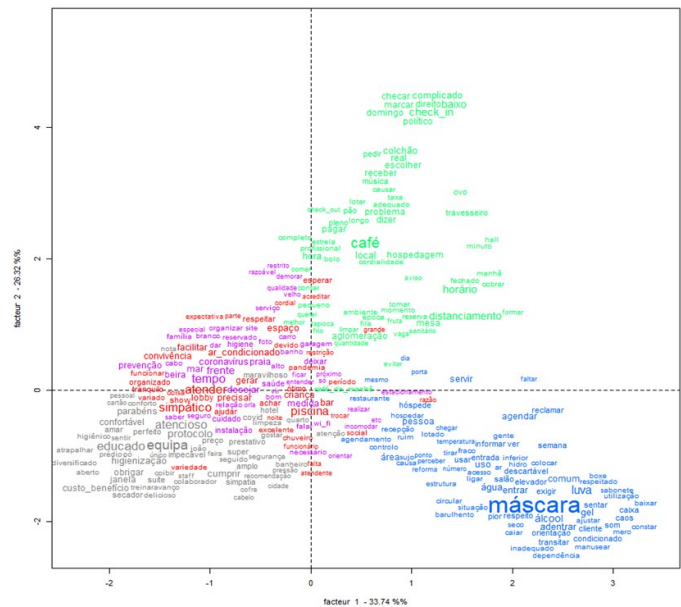
Figure 3: Result of the Classification by Reinart's Method: AFC



Source: Research data elaborated by the authors, IRaMuTeQ, 2022.

Figure 3, represents the Classification by Reinert's Method: AFC, the arrangement of the hotels in the Cartesian plane is presented. Classes 3 and 4, which are situated on the first major axis, are represented by hotel 05, hotel 06, hotel 09, and hotel 11, characterizing 37.5% of the total guest evaluations. The second major axis, class 5, 2, and 1, are represented by hotel 01, hotel 02, hotel 04, hotel 07, hotel 08, hotel 09, and hotel 12, corresponding to 62.5% of the evaluations.

Figure 4: Result of the Classification by Reinart's Method: AFC



Source: Research data elaborated by the authors, IRaMuTeQ, 2022.

In figure 4, it was found that classes 3 and 4 present forms that consider negative aspects related to the pandemic of COVID-19, mainly relating to the lack of social distancing, failure to wear masks, and failure to implement other safety protocols against COVID-19.



The guest evaluations that best describe these classes are:

"The breakfast area is very small, causing queues, as well as overcrowding at that time; I say that because during the pandemic, we had to schedule time for breakfast and even then we had queue because the area filled up quickly" (Hotel 06).

"I stayed at the hotel last year and I liked everything, so I came back, but this year it didn't have the same quality or infrastructure, I'm sorry to say. One hour standing in line for check-in and there was a line with overcrowding for breakfast" (Hotel 05).

"Health protocol rules against COVID-19 were totally disregarded in the common areas; breakfast was the worst situation, with scheduling being a mere formality. Several guests entered the hotel and walked around the premises without masks on, including inside the restaurant" (Hotel 03).

"There were no minimum security conditions for anyone to enter the hotel, which was full, despite the pandemic and without any restrictions on entering wearing a mask, and empty bottles of alcohol-based hand sanitizer" (Hotel 11).

It is worth noting that soon after the new coronavirus pandemic was declared in March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO), together with the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), issued safety protocols for businesses, to help them manage their services in times of pandemic.

According to the guidelines, the hospitality industry received specific safety protocols, such as Deep cleansing and hand washing by staff, guests, and invitees; Disinfecting room cards and keys and encouraging electronic payments; Providing alcohol-based hand sanitizers on all floors, and at entrances, and exits; Disinfecting TV controls, light switches, thermostats, and doorknobs; Cleaning and reducing the maximum capacity of elevators, as well as encouraging use of the stairs; Where possible, delivering breakfast to the apartment and, where there are buffets, ensuring that guests do not touch the food.

It was observed that most of the guests' complaints related to non-compliance with these measures, especially the sanitary protocols during breakfast, a period of greater vulnerability, as it is a time when face masks are removed so that that people can eat.

It is important to note that with the beginning of the pandemic, besides all these particularities presented, hotels had to deal with changes related to the daily work, organization, and management of the work. With the tourism sector becoming the first to suspend its activities and the last to resume them, hotel businesses were forced to reduce their workforces, causing excessive work burdens in various sectors, which generated dissatisfaction among guests over the quality of services provided, as observed in the comment: "I was in

the hotel last year and I liked everything so I came back, but this year it did not have the same quality or infrastructure, I'm sorry to say..." (Hotel 05).

Considering the scenario of the tourism/hotel sector before and after the beginning of the pandemic of COVID-19, it is possible to understand the negative impacts of this health, social and economic crisis on a global scale, and how it directly affected the quality of services provided in the hotel sector at the time of the pandemic.

In contrast to the hotels previously analyzed, the second major axis (class 5, 2, and 1), represented by hotel 01, hotel 02, hotel 04, hotel 07, hotel 08, hotel 09, and hotel 12 - corresponding to 62.5% of the evaluations - represents the positive comments posted by guests regarding issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These hotels even during the pandemic crisis, were able to meet the satisfaction of their guests. In this axis, the evaluations highlight compliance with biosecurity protocols, the cleanliness of the accommodations, and the organization at breakfast time.

The following ratings best represent the guest perception of the classes studied:

"Attentive, friendly and helpful. It's a pity they didn't have that wonderful cheese cake every day at breakfast. Lots of varieties, organized space and met all the sanitary protocols against Covid-19" (Hotel 02).

"The entire staff team complied strictly with the security protocols to prevent the spread of Covid-19, congratulations. A large room and very well located hotel, the building is a little dated, but this is not a problem" (Hotel 03)

"Attention from the staff. Good breakfast and with the necessary care to prevent the Coronavirus." (Hotel 04)

"I was impressed by the cleanliness and all the care taken due to the Coronavirus. Everything was cleaned all the time; there were lots of notices, putting us at ease to enjoy our stay at the hotel" (Hotel 06).

"Great accommodation, I love the outskirts of João Pessoa and the accommodation was very quiet and comfortable. Clean hotel, excellent location, and great breakfast, respecting the protocol of restrictions due to the pandemic. Wonderful bed and great shower"(Hotel08).

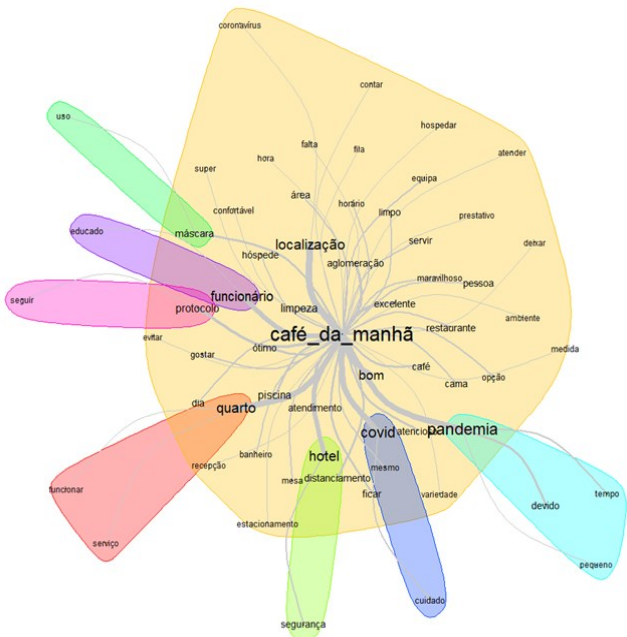
"Hotel always has attentive staff and huge rooms. I always stay here. I love everything, the huge rooms and the hotel respecting all the safety protocols due to the pandemic" (Hotel 12).

The above comments are in line with Moreira et al (2020), who clarify that in the challenging scenario of the COVID-19 pandemic, hotels had to act quickly, first to ensure their survival, and then to innovate and obtain competitive advantages when resuming their activities. Moreover, it is understood that before implementing any innovation to improve the management, processes and operation of hotels, it was necessary to

guarantee the quality of the services that were already offered before the pandemic, to ensure guest satisfaction.

Thus, the data analyzed here shows that 62.5% of the guests had a good perception about their stay, beyond the issues related to the pandemic of COVID-19, such as the good infrastructure offered by hotels, the quality of service and the hospitality of the employees. Within this understanding Alves et al. (2020) state that experiences in the scope of tourism and hospitality are the main product in the sector, and have a direct impact on the competitiveness of the enterprise, defining the service experience as the subjective and emotional personal reactions of customers. The relationship between the hotel and its guests, before, during, and after the stay, also affects future evaluations and behavioral intentions.

Figure 5: Similarity diagram of guest ratings.



Source: Research data elaborated by the authors, IRaMuTeQ, 2022.

In the similarity analysis (figure 5) groupings were created with the entries within the analyzed corpus that were most closely related. This analysis allows us to establish the context in which the most relevant words of the evaluations were used, contributing to the visualization of the content and the structure of the guests' perceptions during their stay, in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It can be seen that the geographical shapes are represented by colors, where words that are in the same context within the evaluations relate to each other. Some inference can be drawn from this. It is observed that the shape "Breakfast" (café-da-manhã) symbolizes

the main aspect analyzed by the guests, intersecting with the shapes: "mask" (máscara), "employee" (funcionário), "protocol" (protocolo), "room" (quarto), "hotel" (hotel), "Covid" and "pandemic" (pandemia). Thus, based on the general analysis of this conglomerate, it is inferred that the breakfast service was an essential feature that contributed positively or negatively to the guest's perception of hotels during the pandemic.

Figure 6: Word cloud



Source: Research data elaborated by the authors, IRaMuTeQ, 2022.

For a visual projection with the most relevant aspects of the user experiences of the 12 hotels analyzed, a word cloud analysis was used, which according to Salvati (2017) shows a set of words grouped, organized, and structured in the form of a cloud. The word cloud enabled the identification of the keywords of the analyzed content.

Corroborating with the other results presented previously, the forms "breakfast" (café-da-manhã), "pandemic" (pandemia), "room" (quarto), "location" (localização), "employee" (funcionário), and "Covid", qualify the perceptions of guests regarding their stay experience in times of pandemic, where the form "breakfast" (café-da-manhã) stands out from the others, expressing the point that the guests mention the most in the online evaluation.

Although the breakfast service is seen as common, and easily replicable in the hotel industry (WILKE, et. al. 2020), the result of the analysis shows that it is a moment of high value, and a decisive factor in the guests' evaluation.

As a result of this perception, it is seen the guests' behavior positively or negatively evaluated these hotels, where hotels in classes 3 and 4 received the most negative evaluations, and those in classes 1, 2, and 5 were positively perceived, breakfast being the decisive as-





pect for the evaluations.

Besides being a matter of convenience, quality of service, and customer experience, during the pandemic of COVID-19, breakfast was directly related to guest safety, as it was the time when infection was most likely to spread, as this is when guests came into contact with the hotel staff and other guests.

Besides ensuring a good night's sleep, good cleanliness, and service excellence, it is also necessary to ensure that the food served at the hotel is the best possible, since, according to this research, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this was one of the main factors of guest satisfaction.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Hotel staff must be aware, and prepared to provide quality services, to face the challenges and opportunities that the competitive market offers, and to cater for the most demanding customers. This study analyzes the experience of guests at 12 hotels categorized as 4- and 5- star in the city of João Pessoa, Paraíba, during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, through User Generated Content in the form of comments posted on the website Booking.com.

It was observed that of the 4,672 comments extracted and analyzed from the website Booking.com, only 379 reviews mentioned aspects related to the pandemic, which suggests that even during the pandemic crisis, this was not the topic of greatest relevance or concern to guests. However, it was noticed, from the comments related to the pandemic, that guests and hotels had to adapt to new patterns of behavior imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, giving new meaning to the stay experience, especially when it comes to new safety protocols proposed by the WHO and government agencies, which in general, formed the most relevant discussion regarding the resumption of tourism and the reopening of hotels.

According to the data, the aspects that stood out the most in the experiences of guests in the hotels of classes 3 and 4, represented by hotels 05, 06, 09, and 11, were negative, particularly in terms of safety, as the evaluations mentioned inadequate procedures at the hotels to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This could have resulted in a setback in the current global situation, in which very strict work rules were imposed to combat the spread of the disease. It was possible to observe in this major axis, reports of lack of social distancing, failure to wear masks among employees, and lack of compliance with other biosecurity protocols, especially during the breakfast service.

If the lodging facilities have these areas well worked out, adopting internal policies to implement the recommendations of the competent government agencies, they will certainly offer their services smoothly and

without many problems.

It was also found that the guests of hotels in classes 1, 2, and 5, represented by hotels 01, 02, 04, 07, 08, 09, and 12, posted positive comments about their guest experience during the pandemic, corroborating the need for compliance with safety protocols, cleanliness of the accommodations, and especially, better organization at breakfast time, as this is the aspect that was most mentioned in the reviews and, consequently, the in the perceptions of the guests at the hotels analyzed. The study concludes that aside from biosafety protocols and good hygiene practices, hospitality, and good infrastructure of the lodging facilities, breakfast, one of the most important symbols of hospitality, is a decisive aspect for a positive or negative evaluation/perception in the guest experience. Both positive and negative characteristics were seen in relation to the service offered by hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as some points for improvement, particularly regarding lack of social distancing and good hygiene practices, based on this guests' perception of breakfast.

If hotel managers use management tools and protocols to meet the needs of their guests, the ratings available on Booking.com will certainly reach a satisfactory level in terms of guest experiences.

To summarize, this research analyzes the guest experience during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, of 12 hotels categorized as 4- and 5- star, in the city of João Pessoa - PB, using User Generated Content available on the website Booking.com, thus identifying the guest perceptions.

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