

TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

School of Business and Governance

Boris Roiz

**TRANSFORMATION OF SALES AND MARKETING
PROCESSES IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY DUE TO COVID-19**

Master's thesis

International Business Administration, Marketing and Sales Management

Supervisor: Ekaterina Demiankova, Lecturer

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors have been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

The document length is words from the introduction to the end of the conclusion.

Boris Roiz

(date)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the transformation of processes of sales and marketing within the hospitality industry due to COVID-19. Owing to the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and governmental response, all industries were affected, especially hospitality. With the inability to conduct their operations normally, the hospitality industry had to adapt their channels and processes to survive.

This thesis attempts to answer three questions: how did the process of marketing and selling change, what were their effectiveness and advantages, and why did businesses leave them after the pandemic ended? To provide in-depth understanding, qualitative method was chosen as the primary research method with semi-structured interview with open-ended questions being the research tool. The sampling method was chosen to be convenience sampling. Eight respondents from the hospitality industry, both businesses and customers, were chosen to answer the questions.

Conducted interviews and thematic analysis show that businesses adapted their processes through digitalization. Sales and purchasing were conducted through online food delivery platforms. Marketing was conducted through social media. COVID-19 forced businesses to change their marketing messages, focusing on product quality and hygiene. Customers with positive associations and experiences heavily supported businesses through the pandemic.

Digitalization was effective in its adaptability and allowed businesses to survive. Online food delivery platforms and social media provide great opportunities to businesses as additional channels with low maintenance. Therefore, all businesses must digitalize to access these channels and opportunities. Businesses must also focus on loyal customers and maintain relationships with them.

Keywords: hospitality, covid, sales, marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 was and continues to be a dark chapter in recent human history. With many complications coming from the rise of the pandemic, there were two most prominent – the toll on the health of many individuals and the effect it had on economies all around the world. Businesses from all sectors and industries have been overwhelmed by the sudden downslide of national economies, restrictions that were put in place by most governments in the world, as well as unpreparedness of the general population for it.

However, certain industries were affected less, while some were affected more. For example, the tourism and hospitality industries were affected the most, as many countries closed their borders to incoming passengers by air, sea, or land. With people having to stay at home, cafes and restaurants had no customers. This made apparent the need to adapt to survive, and often this survival depended on pre-existent factors, which shaped the business before the pandemic. Countless factors were involved in helping the business through the pandemic or making it even worse for them: business model, digitalization, product variety, and many others. However, it is impossible to say that any business was not touched by the pandemic at all – everyone had to adjust to survive through the pandemic. And so did the hospitality industry – hotels, restaurants, and cafes.

Marketing and sales during the pandemic have become difficult to perform, therefore changes needed to be administered to keep companies from closing. The processes themselves needed to be adapted to suit the pandemic and the world that was being ravaged by it. In this thesis, the author wishes to understand how businesses changed these processes, and how they were adapted to the pandemic, especially within the context hospitality industry

While many research papers include information about how businesses adapted during COVID-19, this thesis aims to cover the gap of knowledge that the academic community has in terms of sales and marketing processes and how they changed to perform better during the pandemic in the context of cafes, restaurants, and hotels, or hospitality industry. This paper also aims to connect

the processes of selling and buying and see how the changes affected the customers of these businesses.

The research objective for this paper is to establish how exactly businesses adapted their selling and marketing processes to the COVID-19 pandemic in the hospitality industry, which primarily consists of hotels, restaurants, and cafes. The need for fresh academic research rose heavily during and after the pandemic, because of the uniqueness of the situation, as well as the possibility of another pandemic at any given time. Therefore, it is important to provide academicians with an avenue of further research and information, as well as businesspeople with possible introductions and explanations of certain decisions that saved other people's companies and businesses.

The research questions that this thesis will try to answer are:

- 1) How did the processes of marketing and sales change for hospitality industry businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. How digital and physical marketing and sales processes were affected?
 - b. How were seller and buyer marketing and sales processes affected?
- 2) What was the performance of the changes created due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 3) Why did the changes made during COVID-19 stay after the pandemic ended?

Since the COVID-19 pandemic is still in effect, albeit not as dangerous as it once was, the effect that it had on the economies and businesses is still felt today. The insights from this study could be used to help currently struggling businesses, as well as document the important decisions and adaptations that were made by others in case another similar pandemic breaks out. The relevancy also comes from the information that the owners, sellers, and customers of the hospitality industry have. This information is fresh, which makes for more reliable results.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF STUDY

2.1. The impact of COVID-19 on the field of hospitality

The hospitality industry has been around for thousands of years, from the times of ancient Greeks and Romans, and it will continue to exist, as long as people require food and rest to maintain their livelihoods (Bender Stringam & Partlow, 2015, pp. 1-4). The hospitality industry is important not only to satisfy the urges of the people, but it is also as an important actor within any country's economy, both on domestic and international levels, bringing large amounts of revenue every year. According to Harwood et al. (2022), the hospitality industry is one of the most important factors of economic growth, which is also dependent on and sensitive to the state of the economy, because of its cyclicity.

COVID-19 affected the growth of the global economy, according to Mou (2020), with its high rates of infectivity and mortality, as well as preventive measures that were put in place to stop it. The severe negative impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry was described extensively in the media, as well as in scientific research, making everyone aware of the issues it presented for this field of work and business. However, to study the problem of changing processes of sales and marketing in the hospitality industry, it is important to look deeper into what kind of changes were produced from the pandemic.

Due to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the general unpreparedness of the public for it, certain preventive measures were put in place to contain the disease. Such preventive measures were home quarantine, "shielding" (avoiding contact with healthy, asymptomatic, or infected persons), avoiding non-essential travel, social distancing, and many others (Lotfi *et al.*, 2020). Before the development and testing of the vaccines, most countries included PCR testing as one of the prerequisites for appearing in public places, like cafes and restaurants. Even after vaccination, in Estonia, a person had to present a COVID certificate to be served (Kriis, 2022). These preventive measures, while placed to safeguard human lives, inadvertently lead to people not being able to visit cafes, restaurants, hotels, or even countries, which in turn had a negative

impact on the revenue streams. However, even with the vaccines developed, it still did not stop the spread of infection from vaccinated to unvaccinated (Franco-Paredes, 2022). With the constant loss of clients to preventive measures and disease, the hospitality industry had to adapt its operations to face both challenges.

With the loss of clients and due to the severe financial impact of COVID-19, many hospitality industry businesses decided to lay off a portion of their staff (International Labour Organization, 2020). This was primarily done to cut costs. Certain businesses, in their fight for survival, decided to change their offering. For example, hotels in New York, to attract domestic customers, decided to allow people to open offices in hotel rooms (Villano, 2020).

One of the solutions to many problems faced by the hospitality industry has become the digitalization of working processes. COVID-19 has become a driver in digitalization for many businesses and industries, helping them continue their work in the environment of the pandemic (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). Online food delivery services have become a staple during COVID-19, especially during the beginning of the pandemic, when many countries imposed strict virus spread prevention rules (Poon & Tung, 2022). Similarly, to prevent further contamination and increase hygiene, many businesses turned towards technology, especially touchless, akin to digital hotel check-ins (Pillai et al., 2021).

A big emphasis was placed on the hygiene of businesses, with many operations and processes adopting the advice of the World Health Organization and other leading health organizations. The recommendations often consisted of social distancing rules, wearing facemasks, avoiding touching your face, and sanitizing your hands. The perceived image of hygiene had a direct impact on customer retention and the image of hotels (Yu et al., 2021).

Therefore, the impact of preventive measures for COVID-19 has had a negative effect on the number of people able to visit cafes, restaurants, and hotels. This, in turn, forced businesses to adapt their selling strategies, using the Internet, their product choice, and their response to the preventive measures in the eyes of the customers, as well as the government.

Customer acquisition and retention are very important processes as they are the main drivers of revenue streams for any business. The hospitality industry, especially among restaurants, is a very competitive field. One of the most important factors when selecting a place to eat was determined by the price. (Chua et al., 2020) With COVID-19 negatively affecting the agricultural industry with mildly rising prices of food (Montanari et al., 2021), as well as additional costs associated with online food deliveries, the prices of meals rose.

Whenever considering the hospitality industry, it is important to remember that customers often pay not only for the food in a restaurant or for a room in a hotel, but they also pay for the service provided with it. The level of customer service has a direct impact on customer satisfaction (Bhuian, 2021). However, due to the closure of premises during the peak of COVID-19, an important part of the experience has been lost. With growing dependence on online food deliveries, restaurants are also affected by the quality of service provided by these platforms and vice versa (Suhartanto et al., 2019).

Hygiene has also taken place as an important part of customer satisfaction and perception of the businesses. In their work, Gursoy and Chi (2020) proceed to gather data on the safety and hygiene precautions that customers expect in restaurants and hotels. The gathered data also indicated that many would return in case these measures were provided, therefore having a direct impact on the image of the business. Many customers are willing to pay more for the associated safety.

Consumer behavior also changed due to COVID-19, with a preference put on carbohydrate-rich food, which produced more serotonin, as a particular way of fighting boredom and poor mood associated with the pandemic. That often meant that people preferred fast-food restaurants to high dining. (Aday & Aday, 2020)

As the result, the images of restaurants across all countries were heavily affected by the perceived hygienic safety of the establishment, as well as prices and delivery quality. The purchase behavior of the customers favored fast-food restaurants, due to their carbohydrate-rich food, which put many high-dining establishments in a difficult position.

COVID-19 had an extensive impact on the global economy and finances. All countries, big and small, were affected. For example, when it comes to the biggest economy in the world, the United States of America, millions of people have lost their jobs and were unable to pay for food and rent.

Jobs with lower wages were especially affected, like hotel cleaners, wait staff, and so on. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021)

While rents on residential property have increased, commercial property has followed suit. According to Allan et al. (2021), COVID-19 negatively impacted the prices of renting commercial property, making it harder for businessmen to pay for it during the pandemic. The trend depended on the country, with some having worse effects than others, or certain states having an opposite effect, but in general, all were affected.

Global financial institutions were also affected negatively, like the banking industry. While developed countries, with a strong backing of the policies and established practices, as well as risk-alleviating procedures, were not affected as harshly, many underdeveloped countries were hit severely by the pandemic. Loaning and paying were directly affected. Government supervision and policies prevented much of the fallout in developed countries. (Çolak & Öztekin, 2021)

However, certain aspects of COVID-19 positively affected the global economy and financial institutions. For example, Martins and Cró (2022) in their work discern that the United States national stock market was negatively affected by the declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic yet proceeded to react much more positively during lockdown and contagion waves. The positive shock reaction is the result of record-breaking amounts of digital sales, as well as certain aspects and characteristics of affected firms.

And even though certain businesses were able to turn this tragedy into opportunity, it does not necessarily mean that the general situation was any better. In her work, Roy (2020) states that the global stock market has seen a worse crash during the COVID-19 initial crisis than during the economic crisis of 2008-2009. Similarly, with the vast dependence of world economies on Chinese production, it was clear that now they had to find alternative routes of supplying themselves with what is now missing from the stock, which was easily accessible before. This has put many countries into an economic slowdown, with many markets and industries failing to meet supply and demand.

Summarily, the pandemic has negatively impacted workers all around the world, with many being laid off and losing their jobs, especially in the hospitality industry. Businesses' profits have dropped significantly, with many unable to make ends meet. Financial institutions, like the stock

market, have seen a large crash at the beginning of the pandemic, which was followed up with a soon recovery. The focus on digital sales has significantly improved the situation.

2.2. Exploring the concepts of marketing and selling

The processes of selling and sales management are undoubtedly important for any business venture, as well as the processes of marketing. These two concepts often go hand-in-hand, despite the differences that departments may have in an organizational environment (Kotler et al., 2006). Both concepts are closely connected due to their nature. Marketing often tries to reach people, who have certain problems or needs in their life, that require a solution. This solution often comes in the form of a product or a service, which the company would be happy to sell for the right amount of money. However, the processes that lie under such simple principles of supply and demand are often much more intricate and require a lot of hard work to establish correctly.

Before delving further into the variety of models of sales, which researchers have developed and presented over the years, it is important to understand where such models came from. Before modern models were developed, the most traditional way of looking at sales was through the prism of the “Seven Step Model” (see Figure 1). Described, for example, in the works of Hase and Busch (2017) or Moncrief and Marshall (2005), or Tompkins and Young (2021).

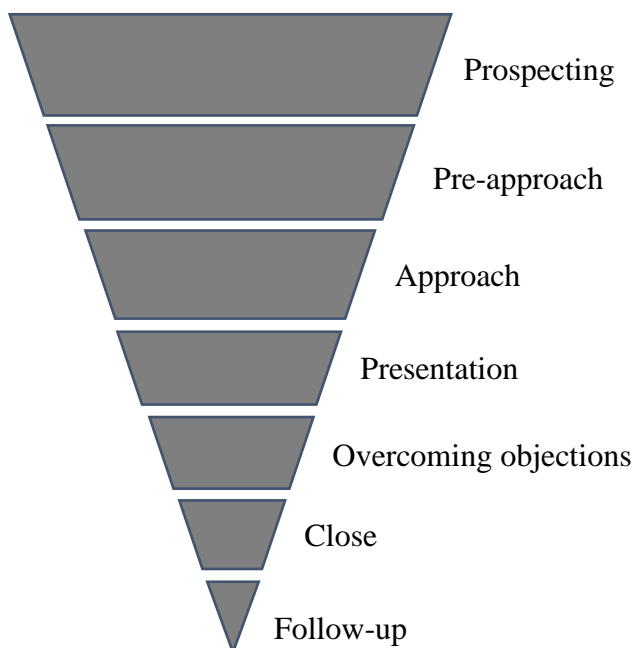


Figure 1. The process of selling
Source: Adapted from Moncrief & Marshall (2004)

The seven steps of selling can be described as a traditional process of sales. The steps are, in order:

- 1) Prospecting – process of searching for new customers and potential clients.
- 2) Pre-approach – process of familiarization with customer needs and obtaining the necessary information for a successful sale.
- 3) Approach – process of initiating sales process and creating rapport with possible customers and prospected individuals or companies.
- 4) Presentation – process of introducing product, service, brand, and business to the potential customer in efforts to convince them to make a purchase.
- 5) Overcoming objections – process of clearing up any objections and hesitations about the product, service, brand, or business that the customer may have.
- 6) Close – process of completion of the presentation, which culminates into a commitment to purchase the product or service.
- 7) Follow-up – process of managing and controlling the aftersale, to make sure that the customer is satisfied with the product or service.

This traditional model, while being the most basic form of understanding the sales process, primarily targets processes and actions, over conceptual results of said process. Similarly, the traditional model is aimed at a traditional understanding of sales, with actual salespeople attending meetings, presenting their product and/or service, and trying to negotiate and close the deal. This model, while easily adaptable and descriptive of the basic sales processes, does not suit retail or other types of selling in its original form. Modern sales often lack actual salespeople, moving their sales from physical to digital, where the customer themselves can decide whether to purchase the product and/or service, if they are provided with enough information and personal incentive to do so. However, due to the mentioned versatility of this model, many other models have been developed and adapted from the “Seven Steps”. These models, on the other hand, are aiming to include modern sales practices and processes, which the traditional model was lacking. These, therefore, could act as a better choice for the framework of this thesis.

In their article, Kotler et al. (2006) present to us a Buying Funnel model (see Figure 2), which separates the necessary tasks of marketing and sales departments. It allows us to see what processes and stages there are for the process of selling. The Buying Funnel is the sales funnel, which is aimed primarily to understand the customer and is used as a system of understanding how to attract potential clients and turn them into loyal customers of any business. The funnel is divided into relevant stages, beginning with the Awareness of the customer, and continuing further down

toward, Consideration, Purchase, and Loyalty stages. This funnel clearly shows us how related the processes of marketing and sales are, showing exactly where one department would allow the other to take over in their business. However, it does not mean that Sales does not work in Marketing stages and that Marketing does not work in Sales stages.

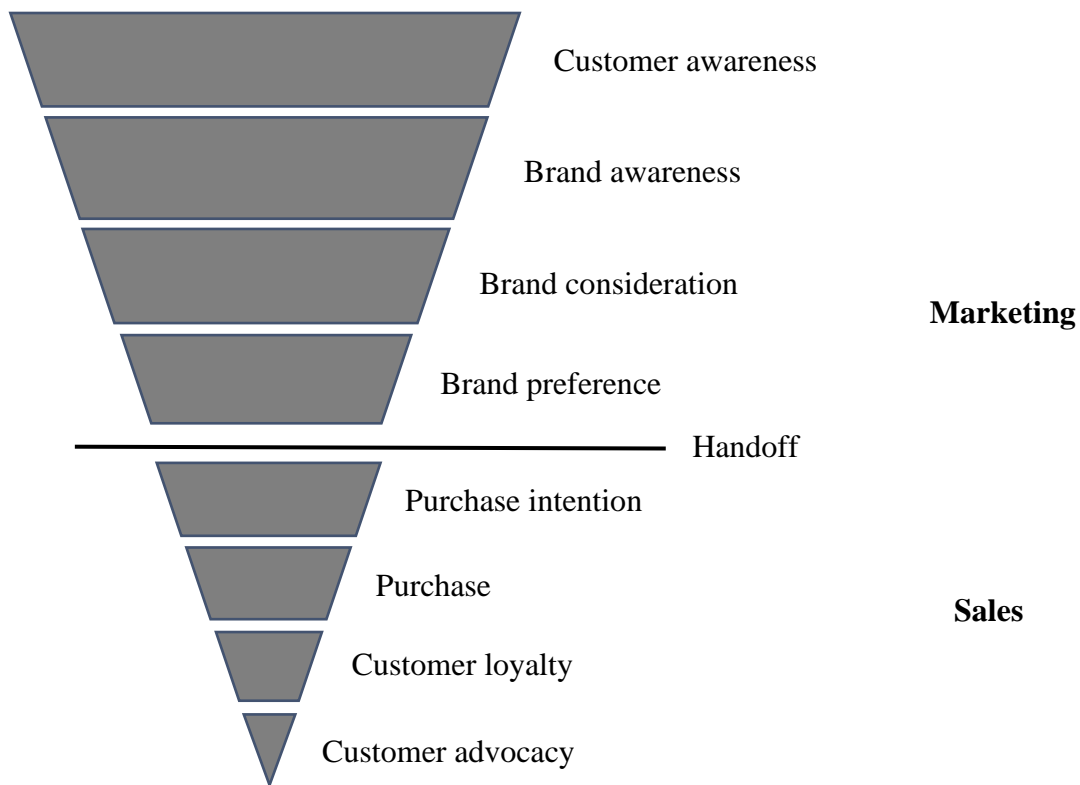


Figure 2. The Buying Funnel
Source: Kotler et al. (2006)

The stages of this model are, in order (Kotler et al., 2006):

- 1) Customer awareness – process which involves the customer understanding their own needs, as well as possible solutions to these needs.
- 2) Brand awareness – process of becoming more aware of the brands, which present the customer with possible solutions to their needs.
- 3) Brand consideration – process of filtering possible candidate brands for the solution of customer’s needs.
- 4) Brand preference – process of choosing the brand most suitable to solve customer’s needs.
- 5) Purchase intention – process of creation of motivation to purchase a product/service from a preferred brand to solve customer’s needs.
- 6) Purchase – the process of closing the deal with the customer.

- 7) Customer loyalty – process of creation of positive associations with the brand, which leads to more purchases made by the customer from the same brand.
- 8) Customer advocacy – process of mutually beneficial behavior between brand and customer.

The Buying Funnel model is important for the discussion of sales, as it presents the viewpoint of the customer, and what they are going through when selecting a brand, product, or service. It is also important because instead of focusing on the process's stages, it focuses on the concepts and the desired outcome of every stage. Since processes of sales have changed, were transformed, and even improved in number, there are many possibilities to work towards the concepts presented within the framework of this model, while the traditional model looks toward specific processes that are taking place. It is also an interesting model, because it connects the processes of marketing and sales, as they often depend on one another to make the business work.

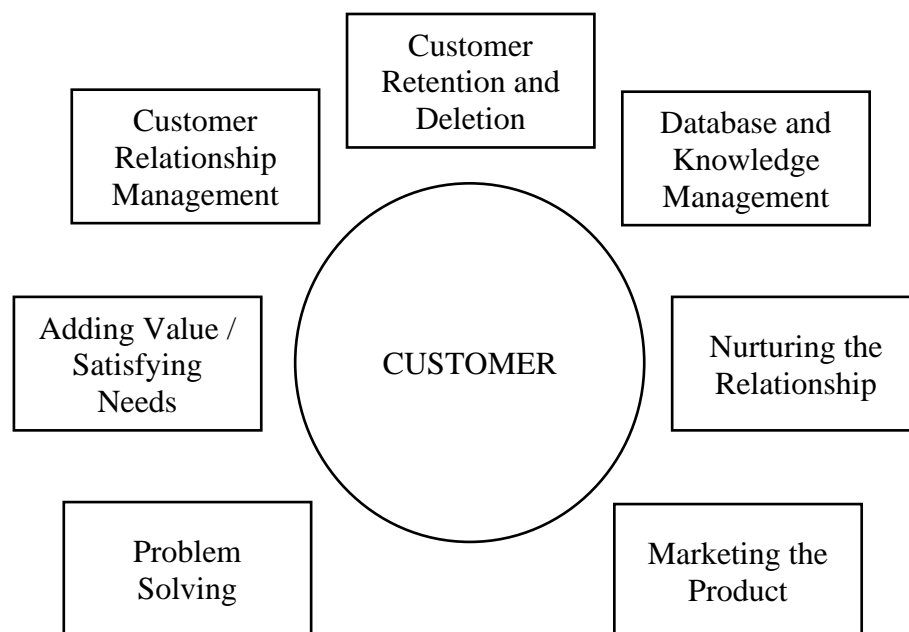


Figure 3. Evolved selling process
Source: Moncrief & Marshall (2005)

Another model of selling, which is presented in the work of Moncrief and Marshall (2005) is a modification of the original “Seven Steps” of the selling process, which were modified to fit better within the context of modern sales (see Figure 3). With the creation of a variety of different new ways of approaching sales, its activities, and processes that are included within sales, these “Seven Steps” had to be modified to incorporate these new transformations. The transformations, as

described in the work of Moncrief and Marshall, are primarily based on the modern means of communication, as well as advanced concepts of customer-salesperson communication and relationship building. This, in turn, creates modernized steps (see Table 1).

Table 1. Transformative factors of the evolved selling process

Traditional Seven Steps	Transformative factors	Evolved Selling Process
Prospecting	Telemarketing Digital sales	Customer retention and deletion
Pre-approach	Laptop account data Support staff	Database and knowledge management
Approach	Build a foundation	Nurturing the relationship
Presentation	Power-Point, Multiple calls Team selling	Marketing the product
Overcoming objections	Predetermining needs	Problem solving
Close	Identifying mutual goals	Adding value/ satisfying needs
Follow-up	Increased effectiveness of communication through technology	Customer relationship maintenance

Source: Moncrief & Marshall (2005)

While it is beneficial that the described steps are very closely related to the original, adapted version of the Seven Steps model, it fails to capture the importance of cooperation between marketing and sales, only putting it in the Presentation stage. However, the focus on creating relationships with your customers, which has become the paramount prerequisite for successful sales, is clearly stated in this model and is taken throughout the entire table, similar to the Buying Funnel. The customer-focused basis of this model is also apparent.

With the presentation of the relevant models, it is important to choose the one that could act as a framework and foundation for the rest of the thesis. After consideration, the Buying Funnel was determined to be the most suitable to continue with the thesis for several reasons. Firstly, the connection between marketing and sales, as well as the separation of the stages for which they are responsible, could benefit the thesis in connecting these two departments to understand how they

function. Secondly, the Buying Funnel is a customer-centric model, with the concepts at every stage aimed directly at the customer and their behavior, which could also be mirrored by the company. This makes it easier to perceive and explore the dichotomy of customer-salesperson relationships. And lastly, the Buying Funnel contains the concept of Customer Advocacy, which is unique and is not mentioned in any other model, which could be interesting to explore within the confines of the hospitality industry. To conclude, the Buying Funnel was chosen among other models to continue as the main framework for the thesis for its unique concepts and possibility for further exploration of the customer-salesperson dichotomy.

The Buying Funnel, while depicting primarily the process that customer undertakes to fulfil their need and create a relationship with a brand, can also be mirrored in a similar way to the brand, that is trying to sell their product, service, or themselves to the client. While the concepts which are covered through every stage are attached to both customer and business, the processes differ. To each stage, the author will attempt to attach the processes which might be going on from each side, not only to connect the brand and the customer but to also provide necessary information about the basic processes, which could have been used before COVID-19, as well as during.

2.2.1 Customer awareness

Customer awareness is presented in the funnel as the first stage. Customer awareness, as mentioned in the work of Goyal (2019) could be understood as a process of educating of customers about the company, its products, its value, its brand, and other important facts. It is the beginning of interaction between the company and the client, as it tries to assess what the client may know about the company, or what they may not. The client may be aware of the certain needs or challenges that have arisen, which require a solution that you as a business may possess. However, the client may also be unaware of any needs that he has right now, and, in this case, it is the responsibility of the business to guide them toward said awareness.

The importance of customer awareness comes from the establishment of their problem or need. This will further continue into understanding what kind of product or service they are looking for to solve their need. This will directly affect the awareness of the person about the different companies because only companies that can satisfy the need will be chosen to be the solution to the problem and considered for the brand consideration and brand preference processes.

Customer awareness is created through the efforts of the marketing department. It is often done through advertisements, especially those, which focus on the problem that the client may have, as well as the introduction of the solution through the brand. Explanatory blog posts, short videos, and infomercials are great at creating awareness in customers. Before any marketing effort, the companies often try to investigate groups of people, who may benefit the most from their product and/or service. These groups are called target groups, and they often represent the potential customers for the brand. However, as mentioned previously, customers may be on two different stages at this point: they know and understand their current problem or need and are actively looking for a solution to it, or they are not aware of the problem that they have and are not actively looking for a solution. This creates the dynamic between customers within target groups, as the attempts to reach either solidify the belief of the need or problem or attract necessary attention for the customer.

In conclusion, customer awareness could be described as an understanding by customers of their own needs and problems, as well as possible solutions to them. While the customer may not even realize the number of different brands and companies which may solve their problem, their exposure to marketing materials makes them aware of how it could be solved, rather than who can solve it. The customer needs to be aware of the problem so that they could start working on solving it, through means offered by businesses and brands.

2.2.2. Brand awareness

Awareness, which is an important part of the principles of marketing, described by Kotler and Keller (2016) as a very important component in persuasion for purchase, can be divided into two concepts: brand awareness and product knowledge. Brand awareness, in the work of Kotler and Keller, can be presented as “recognition of the brand in sufficient detail to make a purchase”. Aaker (1992) defines it as “the ability for a buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category”. Foroudi (2019) explains that brand awareness is used to create associations and certain brand beliefs, which may create preferences in decisions. Whenever a customer has an understanding of their needs and possible solutions, they start looking for the one that suits them the most. Macdonald and Sharp (2000) claim that brand awareness can have a positive impact on purchase decisions. Foroudi (2019) supports Macdonald and Sharp and claims that brand awareness has a positive effect on overall brand attitude.

When choosing a possible provider of a product or a service, consumers often look towards something or someone that they may recognize and associate with the nature of their necessity. Therefore, companies can create brand awareness in people through customer awareness, presenting them with information, like product line mix, value that product or service may offer, and others. This association is created during the stage of exploration of available choices in terms of solutions for clients' problems. And the more the client knows about the brand and the product or service it represents, the more likely they are to be persuaded to purchase said product or service. Brand awareness is an important part of the sale and is often underrepresented in many hospitality businesses (Šerić *et al.*, 2016).

The creation of brand awareness depends heavily on the marketing content that the client may see and interact with, as well as the experience of those who might be related to the customer, like family, friends, or co-workers. Advertisements in social media, and websites, as well as proper collection of statistics and monitoring of key performance indicators, will allow brands to create brand awareness and tweak it accordingly. However, brand awareness is also created by the client itself when they start researching their problem and ways to solve it. Brand awareness is also created unintentionally, as customers are often exposed to many brands and advertisements in their daily life. Marketing departments often utilize research engines in that regard, creating targeted advertisements for the clients through the usage of Cookie technology, which allows them to gather the search data and use it to put down relevant advertisements on banners on different websites, if the customer just went through a website or search query once.

2.2.3. Brand consideration

Brand consideration could be easily described as the consideration of the brand to solve a problem or a need that a client may possess. Brand consideration is primarily based on brand knowledge because during that stage the client gathers all the necessary information about the brand to continue towards the stage of consideration. In their work, Erdem and Swait (2004) directly link such elements of the brand as Trustworthiness and Expertise to brand consideration, both of which come from the previous stage of brand awareness or personal experience with the brand. Similarly, Baxendale *et al.* (2015) through their research found that touchpoints like brand advertising, in-store communications, word-of-mouth, and retailer advertising positively affect brand consideration and brand choice.

It is important to understand that during the process of brand consideration, the client often focuses only on the brands that he finds most suitable, or he had great experience with. This is a very important part of making sure that the client comes towards the preference of a certain brand, as well as closing the deal. Clients, according to Suh (2009), also proceed with creating something called “consideration sets”, which could be defined as “a set of brands that are brought to mind and scrutinized carefully at a particular choice occasion”, which are often created to economize on cognitive resources. The importance comes from the fact that the business and its brand have to be within the confines of these sets to be considered for the continuation of a purchase. Otherwise, they are separated and are not considered by the client. Desai and Raju (2007) in their study proceed to show that preferred brands have a bigger advantage in being chosen over those brands that offer better situational benefits to the client.

After generating brand awareness, the clients often sum up those brands, which offer the best product and/or service, that often act as a solution for their problem. As mentioned earlier, Trustworthiness and Expertise act as great mediators between brand and client, as they research more information about their possible solutions. That is why customer testimonials are so important for this stage, as they proceed to show real people, with real problems, that are solved by the product or service offered by the brand in question, as well as the size and variety of channels where this information can be presented. However, while we often look at the positive interpretation of brand consideration, we must also look at the negative implications that may arise during this stage from the position of the customer. Sometimes, customers will actively avoid certain brands due to either personal disagreements with the brand’s policy, products, services, or reputation or due to other factors that may arise during the search for the brand that can solve their problems. This problem may arise through intentional brand actions or unintentional brand actions. To prevent such actions, brands have to constantly monitor and assess what kind of results will come from their performed actions.

2.2.4. Brand preference

After considering all viable options for the solution to their problem, clients have to select the brand that will be able to provide them with the necessary products or services to satisfy their needs. As Alreck and Settle (1999) write in their work, customers often arrive with a set of preferences and tastes, which product or service has to satisfy. Therefore, they developed six distinct modes, through which a brand could be considered and become preferred to others (Alreck & Settle, 1999):

- 1) Need association – Product or brand is linked to a need through repeated association;
- 2) Mood association – Attachment of mood to product or brand through associations;
- 3) Subconscious association – Suggestive symbol to excite subconsciousness;
- 4) Behavior modification – Manipulation of cues and rewards;
- 5) Cognitive processing – Penetration of perceptual and cognitive barriers to create a favorable attitude;
- 6) Model emulation – Idealization and presentation of social lifestyle models;

Moreover, with the creation of these modes, Alreck and Settle (1999) also conveniently developed marketing mixes and processes, which are attached to the modes, and can be equipped by businesses to make their client preference achievement easier.

As mentioned previously, brand preference, which is often created through association and positive experience with the brand, leads not only to higher chances of closing a sale but often leads to clients choosing preferred brands over other brands, which may offer better benefits to the client. Similarly, brand equity, which can be defined as a set of assets and liabilities attached to the brand can also contribute towards brand preference. Brand associations are a part of this set of assets and liabilities, which can be presented both positively and negatively. (Aaker, 1992) This preference, as noted in the work of Chang and Liu (2009), is positively affected by brand equity, especially in the service industry akin to hotels and restaurants. This, in turn, fuels not only customer acquisition, who is more likely to use and prefer brands with positive brand equity, but also proceeds to keep them as loyal customers.

Associations often come through experiences, which the customer may have with the brand. Consistency, timeliness, and professionalism are created through communication with the customer, as well as customer support. If a brand continues to communicate with the customer, either through email, phone, or social media, it will eventually create associations in the customer's mind, due to heavy exposure to interaction. Interaction is improved by visuals that the brand offers through social media or websites. It is important to remember that associations are created throughout the entire journey that the customer takes while exploring their problem, finding solutions, and fulfilling their needs. Customers are willing to put themselves into the positions where they are looking for active communication, as they are looking for a brand that can help them solve their problems with efficiency.

2.2.5. Purchase intention

Purchase intention can be defined as personal action tendencies according to the brand (Shabbir et al., 2009). It may also be described as the feeling of perceived likelihood of purchasing the products that are advertised (Rezvani et al., 2012). Purchase intention is directly linked to brand equity, especially through associations. In their work, O’Cass and Lim (2002) proceed to claim through their findings that purchase intention and brand preference can be determined through price perceptions, image congruence, feelings, and personality. Spears and Singh (2004) believe that purchase intent is connected to attitude towards the brand, which is created through positive and negative emotions, as well as perception of advertisements of the brand. Biswas et al. (2006), in their work, support the idea that price directly affects the purchase intention, which proceeds to send better marketing signals to the clients than higher prices. However, Son and Jin (2019) in their work proceed to claim that higher prices do not necessarily lead to lower purchase intention. This means that price is dependent on the context of the product and the service in which it is presented, as well as the clientele that purchases it.

Self-image congruence could be understood as a match between consumers’ self-concept (the way they may perceive themselves) with the image of the brand or product or service (Sirgy et al., 1997). The congruence could be easily understood through the personal experience of what we, as customers, choose to buy. Depending on our personalities, characters, morality, likes, and dislikes, we choose brands, products, or services that would become a part of our ideal image of self. Hosany and Martin (2012) claim that the effect of self-image congruence may determine and improve tourists’ experience of cruises. Concepts of brand image and brand personality may also resonate heavily with the concept of self-image congruence. Govers and Schoormans (2005) determine in their study that brand personality positively influences self-image congruence, with positive effects on brand preference and purchase intention. This shows that brands that work towards personalizing their brands, as well as products and services, will often find them to be well-liked by the customers, whose personality is similar.

Purchase intention is initiated by both sides. By going through the process of preferring one brand over the other, the customer, who was actively looking for a solution to their problem is now ready to purchase one brand they trust the most. However, the hesitation of the brand to actively communicate with the customer can negatively impact the chance of securing the purchase. By allowing the salespeople to reach out to customers, who are actively seeking help with their

problems, the brand increases the chances of potential sales, as well as potential loyal customers. If there are no salespeople to reach out to, brands can actively reach out not only through automated messaging applications, like email newsletters and follow-up lists but also through advertisements and active, informative marketing. Another possibility for the business to secure the sale is to work towards better cohesion between the personalities of the brand and the customer. The resonance between the adopted self-image of the customer with the image with which the brand presents itself to the public will deliver not only better relationships but more confident purchases.

2.2.6. Purchase

While the concept and process of a purchase can be easily understood from the definition of selling given in the prior parts of this thesis, the concept of consumer purchase behavior, which translates from purchase intention, can be explored further. Consumer behavior, in general, can be defined as “the study of how individuals, groups, and organizations select, buy, use, and dispose of goods, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants”. (Kotler & Keller, 2016) Consumer purchase behavior aims to understand how the intention transforms into the actual purchase.

Kotler and Keller (2016) introduce a model, which allows us to see how the transformation from consideration of alternatives and intention leads towards the actual purchase (see Figure 4). In this model, the two factors that heavily influence the purchase decision of a client are the attitudes of others and unanticipated situational factors. The influence of the attitudes of others depends on two factors: the intensity of negative emotions of others and our motivation to comply with these emotions. Kotler and Keller introduce a model, which allows us to see how the transformation from consideration of alternatives and intention leads towards the actual purchase.

This is the reason why it is important to provide positive testimonials of those clients, who have already had experience with the brand, their products, and services. The additional factors that may be added to this are perceived risks associated with the purchase of a product or service. There are several risks, like (Kotler & Keller, 2016):

- 1) Functional risk – product/service does not perform well enough;
- 2) Physical risk – product/service poses a threat to well-being;
- 3) Financial risk – product/service is not worth the price paid;
- 4) Social risk – product/service causes embarrassment before others;
- 5) Psychological risk – product/service affects the mental health state of the user;
- 6) Time risk – failure of product/service forces to look for alternatives.

The degree of risks varies with the amount of money, uncertainty, and other factors (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

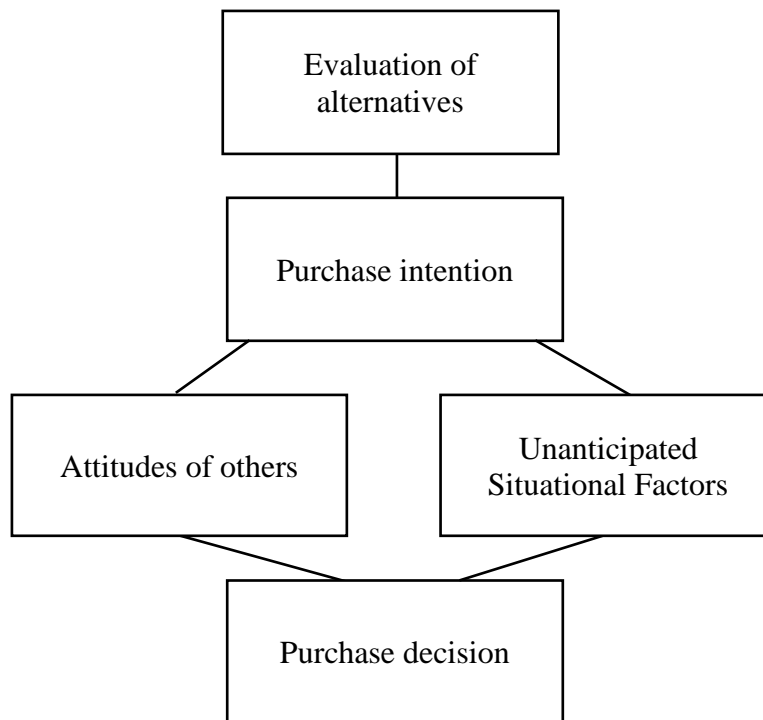


Figure 4. Steps between Evaluation of Alternatives and a Purchase Decision
Source: Kotler & Keller (2016)

While we have an understanding that certain factors apply to the purchase decision and behavior that the customer exhibits, there are times when they cannot apply. Madhavan and Kaliyaperumal (2015) describe the behavior in such a situation as “impulse purchasing”. It is usually done through impulses and emotions. Sojka and Giese (2003) describe several characteristics, which form a customer's self-control, which may prevent impulse purchasing: personal standards, self-monitoring, and capacity to change.

With the introduction of the internet, the purchase behavior of customers has been changing to include the convenience of online shopping. Online shopping has grown to become a big part of our lives, with purchases made online ranging from food to clothing, which customers traditionally had to try on, before buying. In their work, Park and Kim (2003) have proceeded to explore the factors that may determine the commitment of a customer to purchase in an online store. With little exposure to actual salespeople, the quality of the information provided by the online store has proved to be one of the biggest determinants of whether the purchase will happen. The quality of said information is dependent on the user interface, as well as security perception. Considering

the factors introduced by Kotler and Keller (2016), customer testimonies have become important in the context of online sales. Websites like Yelp and Trustpilot allow people to share their opinions on products, services, businesses, etc., as they allow others to warn others of the experiences of those that may have used this previously.

In conclusion, the process of purchase and the purchase intention has many different factors that may affect the choice of the customer to go through with it or not. Similarly, physical and online sales are very different, as there are no salespeople, so customers often have to rely on the information provided through different means, like the business' website, testimonials of others, and many others. Customers also often rely on their feelings and understandings about themselves, which constitute impulse purchasing.

2.2.7. Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty, as described by Khan (2013), can be defined as “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchasing”. Heskett (2002) describes loyalty as one of the most important things a business should possess, for their business strategy to function properly. Loyal customers are not only important for a business due to the customer acquisition resources they save the business, but also due to the marketing costs they save and marketing opportunities they are willing to provide with referrals and customer testimonies.

Brand loyalty is often created through the process of value co-creation. Value co-creation can be described as the engagement of customers and brands into processes that benefit them from the value they create. Bowman and Ambrosini (2000) describe two types of values: use value and exchange value. While both are perceived by the customer themselves, the use value is the benefits that arise from using said product or service, while exchange value can be described as the monetary valuation of a product or service and how fair it is. Haksever et al. (2004) propose a new model of value, which is divided not only by categories (financial, non-financial, and time) but also by stakeholders (employees, consumers, community, suppliers, shareholders). However, value co-creation begins with engagement.

Customer engagement is the creation and maintenance of a relationship between the brand and the consumer to create brand loyalty. Banyte and Dovaliene (2014) describe the process of creating customer loyalty and value from customer engagement, which turns into value creation.

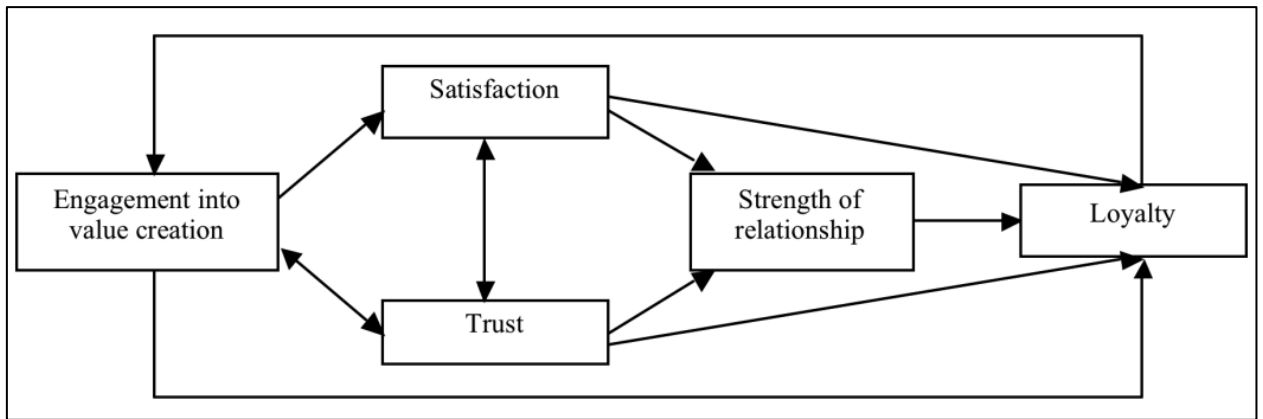


Figure 5. Conceptual model of customer engagement into value creation and customer loyalty
Source: Banyte & Dovaliene (2014)

Customer engagement and engagement in the value creation process are actualized through all the stages of the sales funnel (see Figure 5). Through communication, exchanges, and research, customers grow their trust in the brand, as well as satisfaction with the product and services provided by the brand. The better satisfaction and trust, the stronger the relationship created between customer and brand, which in turn creates brand loyalty. (Banyte & Dovaliene, 2014) Through the understanding of what value has been created and their satisfaction with that value, which fuels the trust in the brand, during the process of customer engagement, customers become more loyal to the brand.

However, with the focus put primarily on the benefits that arise for the brand, it is important to remember that businesses often implement strategies to reward loyal customers and retain their loyalty. Special deals and marketing campaigns aimed at loyal customers are a possible approach towards customer reward and retention, as they allow for those who are loyal to the brand to enjoy bigger discounts and limited offerings, which are not available to others. Loyalty programs have also proven their efficacy during the tenure, allowing customers to possess special deals at every moment they interact and purchase from the business.

In conclusion, brand loyalty is an important asset to a business, which is created through the process of co-creation of value between the customer and the business, as well as active relationship building. It allows for customer retention for the business, as well as adding value to the product or service for the customer.

2.2.8. Customer advocacy

Customer advocacy can be described as the creation of a mutual dialogue with customers, where the company acts as an advocate, which leads to reciprocation from the side of the customer with trust, loyalty, and wealth (Roy, 2015). Bhati and Verma (2017) describe customer advocacy as an extreme form of word-of-mouth, which is positive and proactive. In general, the concept of customer advocacy can be described as the customer performing the role of a spokesperson for the business. Customers help the business through advocacy by engaging other potential customers through content, testimonials, or other means on their own accord or at the brand's request.

In their work, Lawer and Knox (2006) introduce means for businesses to leverage customer advocacy. Customer advocacy, in general, is created through certain values, which empower the customer. They act as drivers within the relationship between brand and customer, striving for providing mutual benefit. They introduce three main drivers of empowered consumer value: value-for-choice, value-for-involvement, and value-for-knowledge. Value-for-choice is created through a brand's help to the customer in making their choice, like helping them navigate among the variety of solutions, as well as saving time for them, which also leads to a reduction in uncertainty and overall growth of convenience. Value-for-involvement involves managing the marketing materials, communications, media, and overall attention of the customer. (Lawer & Knox, 2006)

Value-for-knowledge is presented as a filter for knowledge, privacy, and security, as well as the provision of value for the personal information the customer provides to the brand. While these are presented as intrinsic values of advocacy, the business can leverage them with four factors: focus on customer success, enable choice transparency, improve marketing and customer involvement, and foster knowledge-creating relationships with customers. All of these create components of customer advocacy value (see Figure 6). For the business to create and maintain advocates of their brand, it is necessary to involve certain practices in the business managerial framework, like focusing on transparency and trust, aligning brand values with value drivers, building a network of partners and stakeholders as well as involve customers in the process of co-creation of the partner community. This will ensure the retainment of advocates, as well as invite new willing advocates. (Lawer & Knox, 2006)

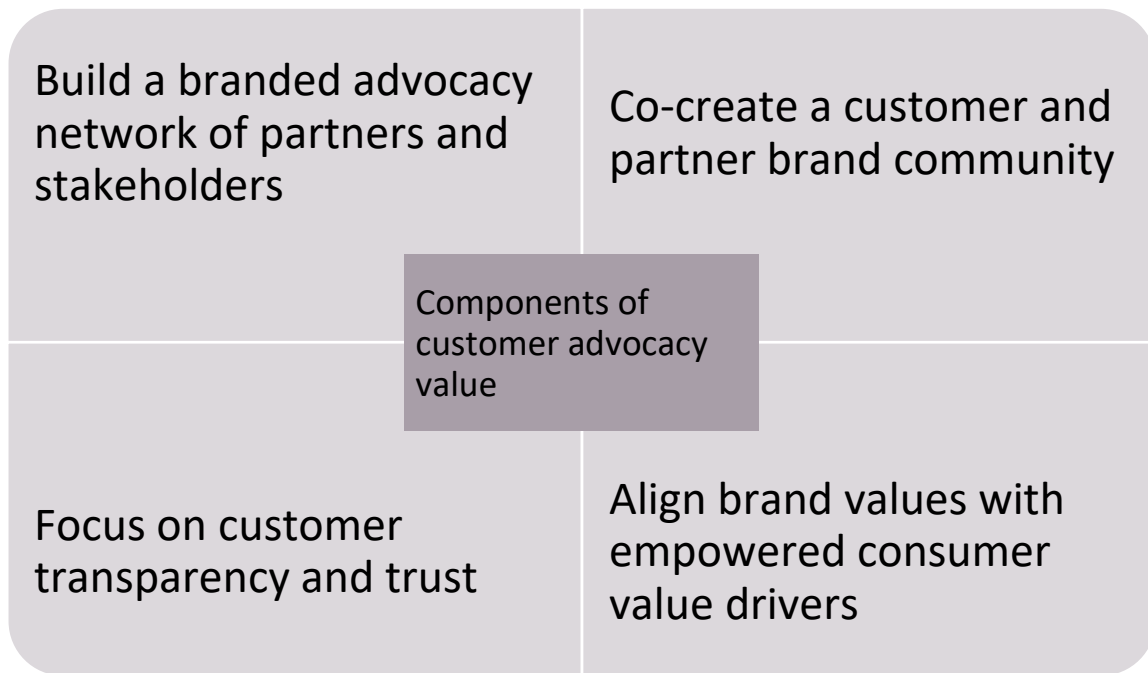


Figure 6. Corporate brand management framework and customer advocacy
Source: Lawer & Know (2006)

However, while the focus was primarily on the values that the customers receive from the business, as well as a description of necessarily implemented practices for the creation and retainment of customer advocates, it is important to understand what value the business will gain from creating and maintaining customer advocates. According to Sweeney et al. (2020), advocacy can be presented as a distinctive form of positive word-of-mouth, which is more strong, relational, and lasting. While it is understood that customer advocacy has a positive effect on customer loyalty and overall satisfaction with the brand, its products, and services, it is important to determine what actions are performed by such advocates, which benefit the business. Advocates, according to Rob Fuggetta (2012), often act as marketing departments, who are looking to promote your brand through various means. While there are a variety of different advocates, who promote businesses through different means, as well as possess different levels of allegiance to the brand, they often do so without the incentive of monetary gains. Rob Fuggetta also describes ten activities, that the advocates can perform for the brand or business (Fuggetta, 2012):

- 1) Provide referral leads and act as an independent salesforce;
- 2) Write positive reviews online;
- 3) Create glowing testimonials about their experiences;
- 4) Answer questions from possible customers;
- 5) Share brand's or business' content;

- 6) Help launch a new product;
- 7) Create better ads;
- 8) Defend company reputation against detractors;
- 9) Alert to threats and opportunities;
- 10) Give profitable ideas and feedback.

And while these are important for the brand and business, as they provide benefits to it, many advocates are unable to perform all these actions. Therefore, the advocates who perform more actions than others become more important for businesses and brands. The so-called “Power Advocate” heavily influences other people to become a part of the brand and purchase products or services. The more reach, frequency, and influence the advocate has, the more powerful they are. (Fuggetta, 2012)

One of the best examples for modern advocates comes from the video gaming industry, especially with creators that release their works in an unfinished stage. Often, customers will buy the game to experience what it has to offer and understand the vision that the creator is going for. After that, customers often create suggestions for the videogame, necessary additions that have to be made, as well as recommend the game to their friends and relatives. This, in turn, boosts sales and development processes. Advocates for such video games often use public forums or websites like YouTube to promote the game and discuss it with other people, who have bought the game like they did. This often forces the consumers to create communities of like-minded individuals, which creates easier and open space for the developers of the game to engage people in discussions and gather relevant suggestions. This phenomenon, therefore, makes the video gaming industry to be the best proponent of customer advocacy and sets out great examples of how businesses and brands could orient their customers to work for them.

In conclusion, customer advocacy can be understood as marketing through customers, who are infatuated and closely related to the brand that they represent. The representation and advocacy, however, also work for the customers, as they are not only presented with extremely positive and beneficial value but also with an attempt to seriously help the business and be a part of the community of like-minded individuals. Many businesses and brands, who may have not been popular through their marketing, owe their success to the loyal customers, who took it into their own hands to promote them.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Research can be understood as a detailed study of a subject to discover information or achieve a new understanding of it (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Research is usually conducted through a variety of means, which all follow a simple principle:

- 1) Propose a question;
- 2) Gather the data on the question;
- 3) Present the results.

While the questions of the research, as well as the problem, have been posited in the Introduction chapter of this thesis, in this chapter, the author presents the methodology behind the gathering process of the data. The data collection, as well as presentation, depends on the chosen research method. Three main research types could be implemented into academic research:

- 1) Quantitative – gathering and analyzing numerical values and data presented as numbers.
- 2) Qualitative – gathering and analyzing conversational communication, as well as questionnaires and surveys.
- 3) Mixed – gathering and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative types of data in one research.

It is important to choose the method that will be the most suitable for the research, as it determines not only the way the data is collected, but also analyzed and interpreted.

Saunders et al. (2015) also present several approaches toward philosophical understanding and structuring of the research, focusing on five major paths: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism. Of all the available research philosophies, the most suitable one for the research presented in this thesis is pragmatism. Pragmatism allows us to create “difference to organizational practice”, which this thesis set out to do, by bringing the spotlight onto the issue of transformation of sales and marketing practices and processes. The main reason behind this thesis is not only to bring more theoretical and practical information on this issue but also to offer solutions to those, who may not have any available to them or have not thought of them at this moment. And with relevancy and well-detailed interviews, pragmatism will

allow the author of this thesis to help those businesses, who may need it, and bring more information to the academic environment.

The type of research that was chosen for this thesis is a qualitative research method. Qualitative research allows the author of the thesis to gather detailed information on the experiences of both businesses, as well as customers, during the pandemic. The data collection has taken the form of an interview. According to Alshenqeti (2014), interviews allow for direct, detailed explanations of phenomena and actions that people experience on a variety of topics. Since the main questions in this research concern the transformation of the sales process in the hospitality industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviewing is the most logically acceptable and relevant method tool to use, as it helps to answer research questions to the fullest.

The interview took the form of a semi-structured interview with several open-ended questions, where the participants were allowed to answer in whatever manner they saw fit and talk about how long it took them to give the full answer. As mentioned in the work of Ruslin et al. (2022), the semi-structured interview is highly beneficial in terms of delivering in-depth and precise information, while focusing on the research questions, as well as having a general direction in which the interview may proceed. The chosen participants, or the sample, were among hospitality industry companies, like cafes, restaurants, and hotels. Similarly, one customer from each company was chosen to answer a set of questions dedicated toward them in the same manner. The interviewees were chosen among the acquaintances of the author, as well as by personally reaching out to businesses through email addresses placed on their websites or search engine, which would clarify the sampling method as a convenience sampling method. The interviews were conducted through direct phone calls or applications that allow for vocal, uninterrupted communication.

The chosen questions for the interview were developed according to the Buying Funnel model, presented through the theoretical background section of the thesis. While the conversations were not recorded, the author made several written notes on each question and respondent, which were most relevant to finding and answering the research questions, as well as interview questions. According to Rutakumwa et al. (2019), recording an interview may limit the comfort of the interviewee and affect their responses. Due to the sensitivity of the topic of COVID-19, the author decided it would be best to avoid recording the interviews to produce the best possible responses from the respondents. The data was collected and structured according to business-customer relations and the contents of the interviews were then analyzed to cross-reference certain patterns

in behavior among the dichotomy relationship of the business-customer, as well as among all chosen respondents. The questions were formed to reflect the presented Buying Funnel model, as well as actions and processes that may be performed by both sides during the model stages (see Table 2).

Table 2. Interview questions

	Questions for the businesses	Questions for the customers
Customer awareness	How did hospitality businesses make people aware of the possibility of availability of product/service during the pandemic?	How did you learn that hospitality businesses were offering products/services during the pandemic?
Brand awareness	How did you market your business? What methods/tools did you use? How has the process changed?	How did you learn about different hospitality companies? What kind of marketing material were you exposed to the most?
Brand consideration & Brand preference	What was offered to the customer to create additional value for considering using your products/services? Did you offer something new?	Why did you consider this business for purchasing the product/service? Why did you choose this particular business to satisfy your needs?
Purchase intention & Purchase	How did the process of sales change? How did you adapt to the restrictions? Did the changes stick around after the pandemic?	Were your purchase decisions done on a whim? How did the process of purchasing change? How did you adapt to the restrictions?
Customer loyalty	Did you offer any loyalty programme? How did COVID-19 transform your view of loyal customers?	Would you describe yourself as a loyal customer to the business? What made you so?
Customer advocacy	Did you advocate for your client? How?	Did you advocate for your chosen business? How?

Several stages have been unified into one, as the questions from one stage could easily be applied to the other stage. This creates an easier understanding of the connectedness of these stages, as

well as makes it easier for further interviewing processes with the respondent, as they will answer questions for both stages at the same time. This also helps to better answer the research questions.

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the sample group of businesses and customers was selected among hospitality industry companies and their respective clients. To fit better within the research environment, the chosen participants were deliberately diverse not only in their products and services but also gender and age, to provide more relevant results without any bias (see Tables 3 & 4).

Table 3. Business respondents information

Interviewee code	Interviewee gender	Interviewee age	Business concept	Location
1A	Male	27	Fast-food restaurant	Finland
2A	Female	24	Café	Estonia
3A	Female	34	Fine-dining restaurant	Finland
4A	Male	45	Hotel	Finland

Table 4. Customer respondents information

Interviewee code	Interviewee gender	Interviewee age	Respondents nationality
1B	Male	23	Finnish
2B	Male	30	Estonian
3B	Female	51	Russian
4B	Female	31	Finnish

From these tables, we establish that the respondents come from a variety of age groups, as well as a variety of business concepts, which can be understood as what kind of business they run or work at. The interviewee code (first column in each table) was established to easily describe the interviewee. The codes were established according to the business (the number) and according to the business or customers (the letter). Letter “A” describes business respondents, while letter “B” describes customer respondents. Therefore, if the author wanted to select interviewees from the business concept of a café, he would refer to 2A for business and 2B for customer.

After the data has been gathered, it must be analyzed by a properly chosen qualitative method, which would allow for the most concise and useful interpretations and recommendations. One of the most prominent qualitative analysis methods is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as described in the work of Braun and Clarke (2012) is a method of analysis that involves identifying, organizing, and providing insights into patterns of meaning, or themes, that emerge from the sets of data, akin to interview transcriptions or notes. The method consists of six separate phases, through which the data is taken, coded, and analyzed by patterns to create themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012):

- 1) Familiarizing the data;
- 2) Generating initial codes;
- 3) Searching for themes;
- 4) Reviewing potential themes;
- 5) Defining and naming themes;
- 6) Producing a report.

Thematic analysis is a very flexible and adaptable method, that could suit many different sets of data of different kinds with different questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similarly, thematic analysis is transparent and strives for accountability, focusing on documenting and justifying analysis through the set of data (Nowell et al., 2017). Moreover, thematic analysis strives for a systematic and rigorous approach to analyzing qualitative data, allowing for in-depth and rich analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Due to all the advantages that thematic analysis is offering, especially flexibility and adaptability, the author of the thesis decided to conduct it in this thesis. Since transcriptions of the interviews were unavailable, but general keywords and ideas were still intact, taken during the interview in the form of notes, the thematic analysis offers a pathway for constrained sets of data to be analyzed.

The analysis in this thesis will follow the six phases of Braun and Clarke (2012) to establish themes related to the hospitality industry within the environment of COVID-19. These themes will attempt to lead the author of the thesis toward the answers to the research questions, as well as provide links between the research itself and the theoretical framework established in the previous chapter. Since the interview structure is separated into different stages with different questions, the analysis will closely follow the Buying Funnel model, created by Kotler et al. (2006). These stages will provide a foundation within which the themes be created and further interpreted by the author. The hierarchy of this relationship is shown below (Figure 7). Themes will exist within every stage of the model, with the codes being taken from the interview notes.

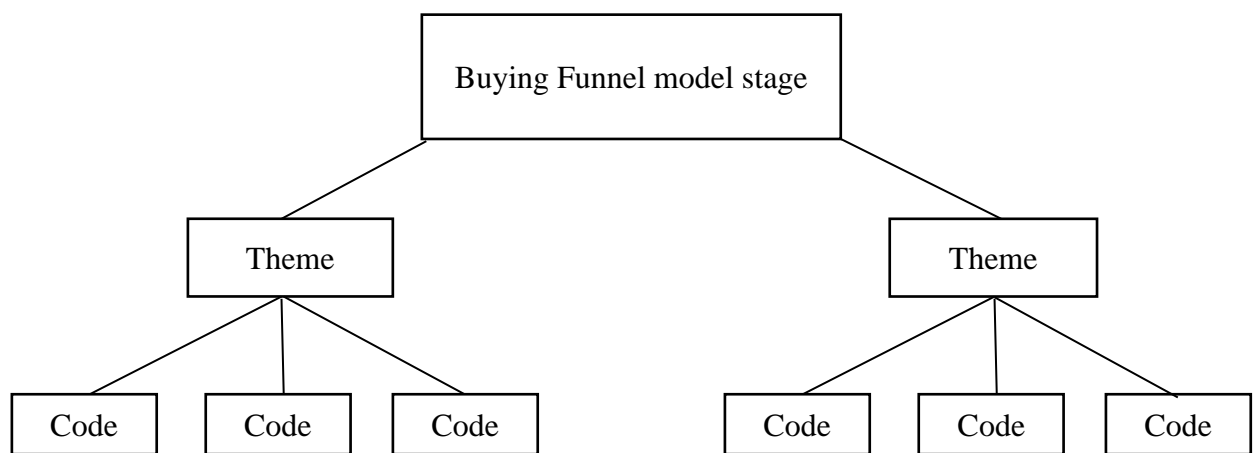


Figure 7. Thematic analysis hierarchy
 Source: Created by the author based on Appendices 5-10.

In conclusion to the methodology part, the selected approach towards understanding the research problem was chosen to be the qualitative approach. Since the author wishes to understand the experiences of customers and businesses alike, a semi-structured interview provides a great basis for getting the data necessary for analysis. The sampling method was chosen to be convenience sampling, with the author looking for closer contacts in the hospitality industry for assistance. The data is analyzed using thematic analysis, which is regarded as a highly flexible and adaptable method, which could help the author of the thesis overcome the unavailability of recordings and provide useful interpretations and suggestions of the results of the interviews.

4. PRESENTING THE RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS

In this chapter, the author of the thesis will provide the results of the interview, meaning the answers to the questions, which were mentioned in the previous chapter. This chapter will be structured according to the Buying Funnel model stages, with the answers being mixed to further connect claims by customers and businesses. The mentioned questions will also be present for easier understanding and referencing for the readers of this work. This chapter is based on the notes the author took during the interviews (see Appendix 4).

When talking about Customer awareness, as mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, we are talking about the understanding of the customers of their needs and the availability of solving these needs. Most of the customer respondents mentioned that they did not know whether the businesses were still active, when the restrictions, like the order of staying at home, were put in place, while the business respondents did not know whether they will be able to sustain the effect of preventive measures put in by the governments. After it was clear that the measures will continue to be active for an unknown amount of time, many businesses, according to business respondents, started to look for ways to show that they are active, still working and are still offering products and services.

When talking to both business and customer respondents, many were aware that the hospitality industry is very traditional in its marketing, relying primarily on word-of-mouth and online or other types of reviews, rather than actual marketing content in social media. Respondents 1A and 2A mentioned that their businesses had social media pages, but were primarily inactive, focusing mostly on promotions and special deals, with photos of the venues. Respondents 1B and 2B confirmed that information, as well as the author personally, and mentioned that they were introduced to the restaurants before the pandemic, through friends and family, and that they were not following the social media channels of the restaurants. Respondent 1A claims that they mostly got “new people coming in on a weekly basis, but you always have more faces than you remember”, referring to loyal customers of the establishment, who often tell about their experience at the restaurant to others.

After the initial restrictions and the uncertainty that came with it, from both customers and businesses, according to respondents 1A, 2A, and 1B, many restaurants switched to social media for the initial message of their survival and continuation of the provision of products and services. Similarly, businesses started using online delivery services for presenting and marketing themselves as available to the public. However, since respondents 1A and 2A already had the necessary equipment and accounts created for online delivery services like Bolt, Wolt, and Foodora, respondent 3A did not possess such. In her experience, respondent 3A primarily relied on word-of-mouth and the “impeccable reputation” of her restaurant. After the response to COVID-19 left the business without customers, the attempts to bring them back through word-of-mouth, which took the form of personal calls to the loyal customers failed, which also led to the business creating their own social media accounts, as well as online delivery services accounts.

As mentioned by the customer respondents, 1B and 2B, they initially found out that restaurants continued working through the means of online delivery services and through online news channels, which closely monitored how the hospitality industry suffered through the pandemic. Many bloggers, according to 1B, were encouraged to “go out and support the small businesses” in the areas where readers lived. Respondent 2A confirmed the positive effect of encouragement of both bloggers and news channels to go out and help local businesses, who also explained that they were still available through other platforms. Even respondent 3B, who described herself as “not so good with technology” started using the applications for ordering food, especially when her favorite restaurants became available on online delivery platforms.

However, respondent 4A described the effect of preventive measures on hotels to be “devastating”. As described by the respondent, hotels have been available online for years through Booking.com, which was described as the “bread and butter” for hotels, as it easily connected clients with hotels, providing all the necessary information. The problem was, however, that the majority of the clients in that hotel were foreign tourists, who came to visit from other countries, which meant that the primary target group for the hotel was out of reach and not available anymore. The message was hard to send out because the hotels had to change their direction to suit local customers in both offerings of products and services, as well as marketing activities. Social media channels have also become increasingly popular with hotels, but respondent 4A also mentioned a tactic of using a very traditional method of marketing – flyers. As explained by the respondent, he wanted to reach the customers directly and the best way to do so was to leave a flyer in their mailboxes or to slip

it through their doors. Since most people stayed at home, there was a higher chance that they would read that material, which was exactly what happened to respondent 4B.

Respondent 4A also mentions news as a source of information for the clients, as certain agencies started making articles, either advertising or informing the public of the unique ideas that the hotels come up with to keep inviting guests to their hotels and earning money. “Office spaces, away-from-home resorts... I have read people try everything they could to keep afloat from the news” said respondent 4A, in his comments. Respondent 4B confirmed that she has also seen the articles, which, combined with the flyer she received in her mail, prompted her to visit the hotel, as a measure of getting out of home environment, as it became “too dull”.

From this, we understand that hospitality businesses, before the pandemic, relied heavily on the traditional forms of marketing, like word-of-mouth and online reviews. However, with the pandemic-related preventive measures installed by the governments, they had to find platforms of communication with their clients elsewhere, which took the form of active social media, food delivery services, and even more basic forms of advertisement – flyers. With the supportive public, especially in the form of bloggers and news, restaurants, and hotels were able to bring a certain portion of the clients back. In the end, however, many businesses that were unable to adjust to the new reality during the pandemic have gone bankrupt and had to close.

Brand awareness, as mentioned earlier, could be described as a recognition of the brand by the customer and the efforts that are put in by the company to be recognized by potential clients. As mentioned by the respondents in general, the marketing messages and processes had to be adapted to the pandemic restrictions, meaning the platforms which were used before, as well as messages that were not relevant to the pandemic, had to be changed.

Respondents 1A and 2A proceeded to explain what changes their businesses underwent during the pandemic, especially in the process of marketing. With the unavailability of traditional means of marketing, which have been a staple in the rigid hospitality industry, much of the marketing activities had to be moved to the digital format, which was suitable for the customers, as well as businesses, who now have started working from home. While social media played an important role, the integral part, as described by the respondents, was played by the online delivery service applications. By becoming a mediator for the client and the business, these applications allowed businesses to become streamlined in their sales and marketing efforts by helping clients to view

and learn more about all restaurants and cafes that were present on the application. Respondents 1B and 2B also mentioned that the application has become the most important part of learning about new restaurants available around them, with information on prices, ingredients, how far away the location is, etc. There, the respondents were also aware of the ratings that the previous customers have left the restaurant, which was presented as a 1 to 5 Likert scale, 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest. This has also played into the marketing of restaurants, as customer testimonials are an important part of marketing.

Social media channels have also become important for hospitality companies, because of their value for effort. Most of the business respondents mentioned that due to the restrictions, many of the messages had to be adapted to include information on the hygiene of the place, which was a common topic during the pandemic. Respondent 1A mentioned “reviving” the social media presence improved the delivery of marketing messages to past, present and future customers about their restaurant. In her words, respondent 3A described the thought process behind creating messages for the social media for her restaurant. Respondent 3A described the experience of visiting a restaurant as consisting of two primary experiences, “experience of food” and “experience of service”. With the service aspect unavailable during the pandemic in its original sense, or put into the hands of online delivery services, a lot of marketing messaging effort had to be adapted to include information on the quality of food that remained on the same high level as before. Respondent 3B also included similar concerns over the so-called “experiences”, stating that she was afraid that it would not be “the same as in a restaurant,” but the messages have improved her outlook on the situation considerably.

The issue with the hotels, as described by respondent 4A was the fact that the experience of staying during the pandemic involved a lot of risk associated with it. Hygiene has taken precedence over quality, with messages being aimed at reassuring customers of their safety when staying at the accommodation. These messages were present in the digital format, as social media posts, as well as information on the flyers which were used to invite local customers to visit the hotel. According to the respondent, many hotels had to choose between quality and safety during the pandemic. While restrictions had to be abided by, extra effort could be put in to provide the best possible safety for the clients. That has upset certain customers, as they felt that the quality dropped majorly, with an outright ban on spa services. Respondent 4B was among the customers who have seen a drop in the quality of the services provided by the hotel in the effort to make it safer, but eventually

welcomed the position that the hotel took, as it helped the “nagging feeling of possibility of catching the virus”.

Consequently, the traditional methods of marketing in the hospitality industry had to change the platforms that they were using for delivering the messages to the customers, as well as the content of the messages sent. Much of the process of marketing and learning about new restaurants has become streamlined for the customers due to the online delivery service applications, which made much of the information available and collected all the businesses into one big database. The most marketing material that the customers were exposed to were messages of compliance with hygiene standards, as well as the remaining high quality of food. The hospitality industry has undergone heavy digitalization of marketing.

Brand consideration and brand preference, as mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis, can be understood as a process of selecting and filtering brands to select a specific one, which will then be used to satisfy the customer’s needs. In the Buying Funnel model, the two processes are separated and at the same time play a pivotal role for each other.

The customer respondents have outlined several factors that played into their selection of products and services from the companies that they associated with. First and foremost, one of the most important parts of the consideration of the brand was the price range of goods and services provided. With the pandemic raising food prices, many restaurants had to raise the prices on their selection, which prompted certain customers to reconsider buying it from that specific business and look for one that offers better value for money. The second factor that played into consideration was the available selection of services and goods. Many respondents mentioned that they looked for businesses that would satisfy their needs and craving for specific types of food, which also means that a broader selection may attract more customers. That is exactly what respondent 2A decided to do, by increasing the number of pastries and cakes available for selection during the pandemic, as many customers were looking for something new and sweet to go with their coffee lunch. Another fact that played majorly into the selection and preference processes was associations created with the business before the pandemic. Due to the positive experiences with the business, people were more prone to select it again, but as mentioned by respondent 3A, since the service aspect was not available or rather given into the hands of online food delivery companies, restaurants had to focus on the quality and taste of food. The created associations could also be connected to an important statistic within digital marketing – ratings and customer

testimonials. The restaurants on online delivery platforms have ratings that the customers leave for them after the delivery, and it plays a major part in portraying a good image for a restaurant and makes it more likely to be selected by potential customers. Respondent 1A mentioned that the ratings were “ambiguous” on these applications, as they did not explain the rating, but rather just a number, which then the customer may consider to be positive or negative. According to different respondents, that had a different effect on restaurants, some saying it to be “not clear enough without customer comments” and some saying that it was good for business as customers “can make their own decisions”. The last major factor that played into the consideration process was the marketing activities that were heavily reinforced during the pandemic. For respondent 4B marketing was especially important, as it encouraged her to visit the hotel during the pandemic to change the atmosphere around. “I kept looking at that flyer and thought that I should try going there,” said the respondent.

After considering the brand, the customer has to prefer the brand. The respondents have outlined several decisions that, in their opinion, played an important part in being chosen or choosing the particular business to satisfy their needs. For respondent 1A, the most important part in being chosen was the special deals that were offered to the customers in the online food delivery applications, which put their restaurant on the front page of the application. Respondent 1B confirms this, by saying that seeing it on the front page with special discounts was what prompted him to choose this particular restaurant, as it was also affecting the perception of value for money. Respondents 2A and 4A, in creating preference, relied on adding something new to the products and services they provide. As mentioned before, respondent 2A decided that it would be beneficial to broaden the selection of pastries and cakes available for ordering through online delivery services. Respondent 2B confirms that, by stating that before that change much of the food had “grown stale”, meaning it was no longer enjoyable to eat, but after it was “a breath of fresh air”. A similar situation happened with 4A, whose hotel services had to be changed and broadened to include local customers, which led to the marketing and sales campaign of attempting to play into people that were stuck at home in an attempt to bring them to the hotel to “change the atmosphere”. It worked for 4B, as it was a very unique proposition and the only one she has personally received the flyer of. For respondents 3A and 3B the story was different, as 3A relied heavily on the audience she already knew, the loyal customers, who had great associations with the restaurant and their service. Respondent 3A mentioned that despite the fact she lost a large chunk of her customer base, loyal customers still found ways to buy their products.

On that account, the processes of brand consideration and brand preference are very important to each other and to the process of purchase intention and purchase. Hospitality businesses, in their attempt to create preference, often used social media and other forms of marketing, as well as tried to improve the available selection of products and services. Other businesses had to rely on unique propositions or loyal customers, who have stayed with them even during the pandemic.

Purchase intention and purchase can be easily understood as a want to acquire and the process of acquiring products or services that help satisfy a customer's needs in exchange for money. Purchase intention and purchase are two separate phases, although, like brand consideration and brand preference, play a pivotal role in each other.

When asked about the changes in the processes of purchasing and sales, the respondents have indicated that the digitalization of the hospitality industry improved its chances of survival during the pandemic, as it not only made purchasing and selling more convenient, it made it completely streamlined. Both business and customer respondents have said that it has become very easy to purchase and sell food on online food delivery applications, with the entire process being visible to the customer and the seller, money being received directly by the company with certain fees paid to the mediating party and delivery is taken care of by the mediator. Respondents 1A and 2A both stated that having delivery services like that "put the burden off" their already struggling businesses during the period of the pandemic. Respondent 3A also had similar to say, however, her transition was much harder, as both respondents 1A and 2A had the delivery systems established before the pandemic. For restaurants, which already had such systems, the transition has become a matter of marketing, rather than restructuring their entire sales process. Similarly, with people who were familiar with the apps before, like respondents 1B and 2B, the transitioning to digital purchasing of food was easy, as they were already familiar with the applications and how they work. And even respondent 3B, who said that she was not familiar with the technology that well, said that ordering food through these applications and transitioning to them was easy, fast, and convenient. Since the hotel industry was already digitalized, respondent 4A mentioned that transforming the services has become the main priority, as well as letting customers know how they can access these services. Since Booking.com was mainly used for foreign customers and actual hotel purposes, it did not work for locals, therefore respondent 4A had to create a booking system through their website. In the words of the respondent, establishing their system was easy and the instructions for booking services were explained on social media and on the flyers. Respondent 4B confirmed it because she learned about it from the flyer itself.

Another major issue that arose in the purchasing and selling, was the shift in the purchasing behavior of the customers. Due to the pandemic's mentally and physically harmful nature, many customers switched to purchasing food, which was rich in carbohydrates, or, in the case of the hotels, that would get them out of their homes, in which they spent so much time already. Respondent 1B has noticed about himself, that throughout the pandemic, much of the food that he was ordering through these applications has been "junk foods" or foods, that are rich in carbohydrates and are generally unhealthy, yet possess ingredients that boost the release of serotonin in our brains. Respondent 2B also noticed that behind them, the "junk food" was replaced by pastry and confectionery products. Respondent 2B also mentions, that the entire situation with the pandemic has ruined the natural flow of their life, where they did not let themselves eat so much unhealthy food, but the mental toll that the pandemic had on them changed how they perceived such food and made them more prone to purchasing it. Respondent 4B, in their attempts to change the atmosphere around them by going to the hotel, also mentioned, that the decision was done "somewhat on a whim", going into detail about their mental health and that it was a desperate attempt to get out of the "slow and dull way of life" that the pandemic forced on them.

Many of the changes that occurred during the pandemic, from both customers and businesses continued to work after the pandemic, especially in terms of digitalization and the way of purchasing. Respondent 3A, who did not have a digital ordering system through online delivery applications, mentioned that she would leave this system after the pandemic, as it served as an additional source of income for the restaurant, as well to order for those, who did not want to visit the restaurant themselves. Respondent 2B has mentioned that the pandemic has been effective in testing various changes not only for businesses but also for customers, especially in terms of online ordering. Having been forced to order food online, this "trial", as described by the respondent, was very efficient for people to understand in what way they wish to be served and works for them. Respondent 4A, realized that the focus on foreign visitors as the main source of income for their hotel may not be the best, as a crisis, both natural and unnatural could limit the work of the company, yet the locals are almost always around to enjoy the service the hotel can provide.

That being the case, the processes of sales and purchasing have changed with digitalization and heavy streamlining. Many businesses tried to offer something unique or better value for money to attract customers to their establishments. The buying behavior of the customers also played a major role in keeping the industry alive. Many changes that were put into the restaurants and hotels, like

additional products, services, and digitalized environments for purchasing and selling were left after the pandemic, as they offered great opportunities for customers and businesses. Many customers were happier to order than to go to a restaurant after the pandemic ended.

Customer loyalty, as described in the theoretical chapter of the thesis, can be understood as the commitment to buy products or services of a specific brand. During the pandemic, many businesses have lost the core of their target groups due to the restrictions. However, for some businesses, loyal customers have been an important asset in keeping their business alive.

Customer loyalty is a concept, that many businesses are familiar with, but not many have made it their priority to uphold it. During the pandemic, several business respondents, as well as customer respondents, have made it clear that loyalty has played a major part in the survival of their businesses and the decision-making process. Respondent 3A has been exceptionally emotional during this part of the interview because many of the loyal customers stayed and helped the business survive the restrictions and the pandemic. “Without them, we wouldn’t have lasted even several months, before we would have to close down,” said the respondent. Respondent 3B was one of those loyal customers. “Pandemic has hit everyone, and we really wanted to help out and eat good food.” Respondent 3A, in her interview, noted the importance of loyal customers, as many of them will stay with you even through the pandemic, as many consider places where they constantly eat as a part of their life. Respondent 2B was of a similar opinion about respondent 2A’s café, as it was the place where he would often visit and work remotely. The pandemic has changed everything, but not love for the 2A’s establishment. “I really like their sweets, I couldn't live without them.” Respondent 1A, however, responded that his fast-food restaurant does not get a lot of loyal customers, as there is large traffic. “There may be a few names, but mostly we have new arrivals, and they ate at our place when it was convenient for them.” Digital selling and online delivery applications have changed it, however, as respondent 1A mentions that it was easier to find a loyal community there, especially with the many special deals they offered. A major problem, however, was the failure to implement any reasonable loyalty programme, as many online food delivery applications lacked this feature, which made it impossible to be implemented through the mediating party. Therefore, business respondents had to rely on their customers to continue enjoying their produce. Before the pandemic, however, respondents 2A, 3A, and 4A had loyalty programmes designed for their customers.

The loyalty programme for respondent 4A was different, as it was aimed at mostly foreign customers, which were now locked out. During that time, and without the reliance on the applications, respondent 4A understood the importance of incentivizing potential customers to visit the hotel and created several “loyalty opportunities” to bring people back. One such opportunity was presented to customers through personalized emails, which respondent 4B has seen, but decided not to respond to, as they were too busy, and their schedule did not allow them to visit. Respondent 4A also mentioned that when pandemic restrictions were lifted for traveling, he prepared several offers for loyal foreign customers, who would come to visit Finland again. However, they also realized that focusing on foreign customers only is not viable and were prepared to also focus on local customers with their loyalty system in place.

The respondents, when asked whether they considered themselves loyal customers, were unclear as to whether they can refer to themselves as loyal customers. While respondents 2B and 3B were loyal to the businesses they chose, as they often spent time in the establishments before the pandemic and continued to do so during the pandemic, respondents 1B and 4B said that they could not consider themselves loyal, as they did not have a sentiment to continue buying from these particular businesses or they have not purchased enough or regularly to be considered one. Respondent 1B also mentioned that within their group of friends, they were using multiple online food delivery applications, since different restaurants and cafes are listed on different applications. The applications themselves may become the target of loyalty, rather than the business, because of the prices of delivery they offer, as well as the professionalism of the couriers. Respondent 3A mentioned that they were afraid at first, that they did not select the proper application to install the system of, as they thought it had fewer clients than the competing application of similar purpose.

Thus, customer loyalty is very hard to achieve and maintain, as not many customers will continue to purchase goods and services from the business. However, during the pandemic, loyal customers had a significant impact on the survival of businesses, with many businesspeople praising their efforts to help during such hard times. Loyalty, however, may also lie not with business, but rather with the food delivery application, as they may offer better value and benefits for its frequent users.

Customer advocacy can be described as the ultimate form of customer loyalty, where clients go out of their way to support the business through many different means, like word-of-mouth, reviews, social media posts, and speaking with the public about great experiences they had in the business of their choosing.

Most of the respondents, after being presented with these questions, did not understand what customer advocacy and advocating meant. After a further explanation of the nature of customer advocacy, respondents 2B and 3B were the most resonant with these ideas. Respondent 2B mentioned in the interview that they advocated for the restaurant through the usage of social media and online review platforms, like Google Reviews. An interesting thing that was mentioned by respondent 2B is that, since they often spent their time in the café before the pandemic, they also brought friends during that time. The pandemic, however, did not allow them to go there, so instead, respondent 2B resorted to telling his friends that the establishment was still working and insisted they should order their product through online food delivery services. “This place was a huge part of my life before the pandemic and I couldn’t believe I wasn’t allowed to go there anymore,” mentioned the respondent. Respondent 2A has also seen these positive reviews that respondent 2B left them and, overall, was excited to have such “loyal friends of the café” still try to buy produce during the pandemic. Respondent 2A, in their attempt to reward respondent 2B for their effort, mentioned that when the pandemic ends, he would be welcome to the café again with special discounts on everything. They even mentioned in their social media, as to promote loyalty among other clients.

Respondent 3B also mentioned that they told the people around them that the restaurant was still active on online delivery applications. From the knowledge of the author of the thesis, respondent 3B was not reciprocated for their impact on the restaurant and it is unknown what impact it had. However, the fact that respondent 3B did mention the restaurant to many people in their immediate group of family and friends, without any gain in mind, other than to help other clients buy good food, respondent 3B’s actions could be classified as customer advocacy. Respondent 3A also mentioned that they were thankful to the people who did spread the word around, but that they did not have any particular reward system in place.

Respondent 1A also mentioned that his restaurant did not employ any benefits for those, who leave positive reviews about the restaurant. However, their ideas differed from those presented by academics from different fields. In the words of respondent 1A, customer advocacy, in their mind, did not constitute only positive feedback or feedback that offered suggestions and comments. Negative reviews with constructive feedback on what was wrong were more important for respondent 1A than positive reviews. “I’d rather listen to people who have something wrong with what I do, than those who agree with everything I do,” the respondent mentioned. The respondent

has also mentioned that reviews that are left on food delivery applications are also important and could be considered advocating for business.

The topic of customer advocacy was not very well represented among the respondents, except for respondents 2A and 2B. From what has been gathered from the interviews, many of the businesses were not aware of customer advocacy or did not have ample rewards to give to those who were advocating for them. The pandemic has also had a negative effect, as many were unable to be rewarded due to the digitalization of the services, which meant that no special discounts or coupons could be given to be used in the online delivery service applications.

In conclusion, the author provided a summarized, concise version of the interviews and the results that he received. Further interpretations of the results will be conducted in the next chapter. However, the author attempted, through this presentation, to create a narrative for further analysis, as well as to offer a better understanding to the reader of the context behind certain conclusions.

5. RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the author will not only summarize the results received from the respondents but also interpret them through the usage of thematic analysis and narrative creation. This chapter will also include a justification of the importance of received results, as well as limiting factors of the presented results and thesis conduction.

5.1 Summarizing the results

Customer awareness, which could be understood as knowledge of and awareness of people of problems and solutions, was performed by different hospitality businesses primarily through the usage of social media channels, as well as other types of online media. The messages contained within the materials were aimed at bringing awareness to the fact that many businesses were still active and willing to provide potential customers with products and services through mediating platforms, like online food delivery applications. Certain businesses even went as far as to use traditional means of marketing during the pandemic, as they saw it reach the audiences they desired. Many news channels, as well as bloggers, have also been a helpful influence on the state of the hospitality industry, as they often brought attention to businesses surviving the pandemic and the fact that local customers should help.

Brand awareness, which is understood as an awareness of the existence of different brands and of services/products they offer, was heavily affected by the pandemic, especially in the hospitality industry. Many cafes and restaurants have turned towards spreading awareness through online food delivery applications, which offered a digitalized “database” of all available restaurants, that were using that application. The information within this “database” ranged from available products and prices to ingredients and restaurant ratings. Social media, as mentioned earlier, has also become a staple in bringing awareness to the customers about the brand, but due to either change in the provided services or unavailability of certain aspects of the experience of visiting such an establishment, much of the marketing messages had to address quality of the experience as well as hygiene, which even took precedence in certain cases.

Brand consideration and brand preference could be described as processes of filtering through several brands and selecting the most appropriate for solving the problem or a need. Brand

consideration, according to the respondents, was affected by a variety of factors – prices, which increased due to the pandemic, variety of products and services, customer ratings, associations, which were created before or during the pandemic, and several others. Brand preference, however, was affected primarily by the special deals that the restaurants were offering, the hygiene of the places as well as the available selection of goods and services. The author notes that many factors that played into considering the brand have also played a major part in preferring the brand and vice versa.

Purchase intention and purchase processes were heavily affected by the digitalization of services provided by hospitality industry companies. The streamlining of the processes of purchasing and selling improved the efficiency of many restaurants and helped them survive the pandemic. The experimental way of existing within the digital environment for restaurants has given bigger opportunities for other hospitality industry companies to think about digitizing their businesses and diversifying their selection and value for money. This has also offered the opportunity for both businesses and customers to experience digital ways of selling and purchasing, which affected them overall. Many customers switched to digital purchasing after the pandemic due to its convenience.

Customer loyalty and customer associations related to their chosen businesses have definitely helped certain hospitality industry businesses survive the pandemic. Loyal customers have made up a relatively important part of the customer base, even when considering a total change to the experience. However, in the case of restaurants and cafes, the loyalty may lie not with the restaurants and cafes, but rather with online food delivery applications, as factors like pricing and professionalism of couriers and support staff play a major role in creating good associations related to these applications. Several customers were introduced to businesses during the pandemic and could not say whether they were loyal or not.

Customer advocacy was a relatively underrepresented topic in the respondents' answers, as many were not heavily exposed to advocating for businesses or customers. Some, however, thought that leaving reviews for restaurants, even negative, could be considered advocating, as they had criticism that could improve the restaurant if listened to. Many establishments were not aware of people advocating for them and did not present them with an ample reward for their deeds, but people have continued to advocate despite that fact. The pandemic also did not make it easier to

provide customers with rewards for their actions, because of the lack of ways such a reward could be provided.

5.2 Analyzing the results of interviews

The analysis of the interviews was conducted using thematic analysis, as described in the methodology of the thesis. The analysis involved these steps:

- 1) Division of interview into relevant stages of the Buying Funnel;
- 2) Combination of related answers from business and customer respondents;
- 3) Color coding of words, combinations of words or sentences by relativity to each other;
- 4) Creation of themes from related codes;
- 5) Creation of the narrative and answers to research questions from codes and themes;

Adapted to fit within the confines of notes, taken during the interview, the thematic analysis provides an adaptable and flexible basis for creating the narrative of transformation and changes, as well as the performance of these changes. The author of the thesis identified themes according to the Buying Funnel model stages. These themes are:

- 1) Customer awareness:
 - a. Social media;
 - b. Traditional marketing;
 - c. Marketing message;
 - d. Outside influence;
 - e. Awareness through application;
 - f. Prior experience and association;
- 2) Brand awareness:
 - a. Marketing tools;
 - b. Marketing message;
 - c. Traditional marketing;
 - d. Marketing through application;
 - e. Social media variety;
 - f. Social media exposure;
 - g. Important marketing quality;
- 3) Brand consideration and brand preference:
 - a. Prompted changes;

- b. Importance of association and experience;
 - c. Consideration qualities;
 - d. Loyalty importance;
 - e. Role of application;
- 4) Purchase intention and purchase:
- a. Sales changes;
 - b. Purchase changes;
 - c. Change advantages;
 - d. Role of impulsivity;
 - e. Reasons for leave;
 - f. Prior to changes;
- 5) Customer loyalty:
- a. Programme inability;
 - b. Loyalty appreciation;
 - c. Loyalty aftermath;
 - d. Loyalty creation;
- 6) Customer advocacy:
- a. Advocacy expression;
 - b. Advocacy intention;
 - c. Advocacy result;

Certain themes are repeated or closely related through several stages of the Buying Funnel model, as they are heavily related and help answer research questions. Appendices 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 can provide further clarification as to what themes consist of which codes, which are taken directly from the interview notes (see Appendix 4).

5.3 Interpreting the results

In this chapter, the author of the thesis will interpret the results that were received during the analysis of the conducted interviews with business and customer respondents, related to hospitality industry establishments. The interpretation will be based on the themes created from the thematic analysis, the narrative that the themes create, as well as the research questions of the thesis.

From the gathered results of the interviews, subsequent thematic analysis, and theoretical knowledge, it is clear that customer awareness and brand awareness are closely related to each other through a variety of means, like messages, message content, and channels used to relay the messages. Before the pandemic, many of these messages and channels have been related to traditional means of marketing, like word-of-mouth, physical marketing, and others. While COVID-19 acted as a catalyst for restaurants to change many aspects of their marketing, traditional marketing has acted as a basis for these changes and even assisted them. Respondents were clear that prior positive associations and experiences related to their chosen hospitality establishment were one of the reasons they recognized them among competitors and proceeded, in several cases, to go beyond consideration sets, creating preference.

COVID-19, however, forced hospitality companies to shift their focus in terms of customer and brand awareness. Messages created to spread awareness focused heavily on the most relevant concepts during the pandemic: survivability, hygiene, and quality. According to the respondents, initial messages consisted mostly of spreading awareness about the survival of restaurants during the pandemic, their availability through online food delivery platforms, and the overall continuation of their services. Further messages concerned hygiene and quality alike, but while hygiene was an important topic to spread awareness about, it was clear that quality was also an important aspect of messages. Because respondents already had good associations and experiences, they also expected to have the same quality of products and services available to them, therefore creating a need for business respondents to convince the customer respondents of high standards even during COVID-19.

Marketing and awareness-creating channels have also shifted to suit digital means of messaging. Social media has become the primary source of these messages, with social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Instagram has been the most popular choice for both customers and businesses. The tools for delivering the messages of hygiene and quality have become photos and videos of food preparation with important pandemic attributes worn by the staff of the businesses – face masks and gloves. Social media posts describing the situation the business was in, as well as talking about quality and hygiene, were also present. Online food delivery platforms were also used by business respondents for marketing purposes, taking pictures of food and showing them in the selection, attaching them to the related item in the menu. However, it is also important to note that online food delivery platforms, according to respondents, were heavily constrained and did not allow for spreading messages as creatively and fully as social media does.

Moreover, several respondents noticed a shift in the messages, and their content, of outside media, like news websites and channels, and bloggers. Respondents mention that these messages of encouragement to support smaller businesses and the creation of awareness around the hospitality industry struggle and ways of support have been crucial in regaining many customers and gaining more in the process. Outside media has talked about online food delivery platforms and that they have become the most important way of ordering food, creating awareness in those, who have not used applications before.

Brand consideration has seen a variety of changes, as shown by the respondents of the interviews. These changes can be summarized as a creation of a variety of products or services. With respondents attempting to change their offer to provide more variety in their products or give a completely new idea for their businesses, they attempted to go beyond their previous target audience or their target audience preferences to invite more possible customers to their business. Many loyal customers, which have been an integral part of the surviving customer base, met these changes positively. Similarly, these changes were also incorporated into already existing positive associations and experiences, further solidifying their consideration and preference for related hospitality businesses.

Online food delivery applications offered a great channel for launching certain changes for restaurants and cafes because they were able to go beyond social media and have a loyal customer base. Online food delivery applications offer to send a message about new products to a much bigger audience. Similarly, online food delivery applications were very useful in providing incentives to the customers to order through discount campaigns, which aimed to either decrease the price of the delivery or the price of the delivered product. In their consideration and preference, respondents often looked out for the price range that suited them best and offered the most value for money, as well as the restaurants or cafes offering.

An important aspect of consideration and preference is customer testimonials. COVID-19 is an unprecedented situation, and therefore customers look for the experiences of their peers to solidify their selection. It has been a major focus for certain respondents and loyal customers were often willing to provide them with necessary accounts of positive experiences. This often helped the respondents to make their choice.

The concept of purchase intention has positively benefited from positive associations and previous experience, as well as it did through previously mentioned concepts and ideas. Many aspects of brand consideration and preference also refer to the concept of purchase intention, like pricing. While prices grew, considering the prices of food and service provided by the online food delivery services, respondents continued to purchase foods and services. The author believes that impulsivity in purchase decisions played a major part in shifting the purchasing behavior of respondents. Considering the personal experience of respondents, COVID-19 had put a lot of strain on their mental health, which led to the failure of personal standards and image. It was actively reinforced by the stay-at-home lifestyle during the pandemic, which led to the shift of purchasing in an attempt to mend respondents' mental health and capacity.

The processes of sales and purchasing have seen drastic changes towards digitalization. The main channel for purchasing and selling, according to respondents, has become a variety of different online food delivery applications. These applications offered a variety of advantages to customers and businesses, as they note them for being responsible for the survival of their businesses or favorite places to visit. Simplification and streamlining of processes have been mentioned on several occasions throughout interviews. Certain customer respondents, however, mention that lack of service has disappointed them, relating heavily to their previous experiences of physical presence at the location. Moreover, business respondents credit the digital shift to improvement in customer marketing and management of social media. Many of these changes, according to business respondents, have been left after the COVID-19 pandemic due to their usefulness and productivity.

Customer loyalty was credited by some business respondents as another integral part of survival during COVID-19. Positive associations and experiences have been important in retaining a loyal customer base, as well as creating loyalty before the pandemic. However, many loyalty programmes and rewards have become unusable throughout COVID-19. Online food delivery applications have also formed loyal communities for restaurants, as well as made available the support of older communities. Customer advocacy, as mentioned previously, is severely underrepresented. Loyal customers have attempted to continue to support the businesses through a variety of means and with no intention of gaining anything in return.

In conclusion, the analysis has shown many changes that were either forced or done willingly during the pandemic of COVID-19. Selling and marketing processes were heavily affected, with changes towards digitalization of said processes. Prior experience and positive associations played

a major part in retaining loyalty and acceptance of changes. The effectiveness of the changes is reflected in the survival of respondents' businesses. Changes were left after the pandemic, because they offer great opportunities for the hospitality industry and overall, remain effective today.

5.4 Research implications

The importance of this research for theoretical and academic knowledge, as described by the author, lies in opening a new way of looking at the effect the pandemic and COVID-19 had on the hospitality industry, especially in acquired processes and made decisions. The notion of understanding the transformation through which the industry went as “overall digitalization” is incorrect, as it does not highlight the actual changes made and the adaptation of an entire industry to a completely digital format of selling and marketing. Similarly, the implication that digitalization was not only positive but also had certain negative effects on the industry, especially in terms of experiences and value for money is important to acknowledge and understand, which this thesis is trying to do.

Practically, the thesis attempts to establish necessary steps and changes that businesses must include in their daily marketing and sales processes to survive similar situations. Moreover, these changes enhance the daily lives of such businesses, as they open new venues and opportunities to further improve their businesses and find new ways of selling and marketing in the modern, ever-changing world. With the significant rise in digital sales and marketing in the traditional hospitality industry, businesses need to follow trends and seize opportunities that present themselves to further improve their business and employ competitive advantages against other businesses.

5.5 Research limitations

The main limitation of the study was the lack of audio recordings of the interviews and, therefore, the lack of transcribed material directly from the respondents. The author explains his choice in the methodology chapter of the thesis, however, it is still important to note their lack, as thesis results are heavily dependent on the notes taken by the interviewer and their interpretation of said notes, which can be flawed.

Another prominent limitation is the lack of respondents and recorded experiences from the hotel industry, which has also majorly changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This happened due to a lack of willing respondents, who wanted to tell more about their own experiences during the pandemic, as well as what they did to adapt their businesses. Not all companies have survived the pandemic and therefore it was important to only talk to those, who were successful in their attempts to preserve the business, as otherwise, the author would be asking questions from those, who might have had nothing to answer to the questions. However, asking those who have failed to preserve their business during the COVID-19 outbreak could be a fitting topic for another research. This research, however, focused on those, who succeeded and changed their business for the better.

Moreover, considering the 8 respondents who have been willing to give answers about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and half of them being customers, rather than business owners or workers, more detailed and broad responses could have been gathered if more respondents were found. However, such a limited number of respondents also allows for better focus on the subject of the study, as the author knew of the limits and therefore proceeded to conduct in-depth interviews with the respondents.

Another major limitation of the study is its narrowness in terms of the topic and information gathered. Since this thesis focuses primarily on the changes in processes of sales and marketing, it does not research any other changes that have occurred during the pandemic, in that industry, which might not be related to such kinds of processes. This, therefore, creates big opportunities for other researchers to focus on other aspects of the hospitality industry and the changes that COVID-19 brought into the daily lives of these businesses and industries related to hospitality.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude the thesis, the author will proceed with a short summation of the thesis, what it wanted to achieve, its findings, and subsequent interpretations of the results. In this thesis, the author attempted to understand what the hospitality industry and businesses associated with went through and how their process in marketing and sales were affected by the pandemic. The posited research questions were the following:

- 1) How did the processes of marketing and sales change for hospitality industry businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. How digital and physical marketing and sales processes were affected?
 - b. How were seller and buyer marketing and sales processes affected?
- 2) What was the performance of the changes created due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 3) Did the changes made during the COVID-19 stay after the pandemic ended?

From the information gathered, it was understandable that COVID-19 affected not only the hospitality industry but entire sections of our lives and economies all around the world. Many international institutions were under the influence of the pandemic until it finally subsided.

To answer the questions, the author decided to interview business owners or workers, as well as customers, associated with the hospitality industry. With the pragmatic outlook on the process of the data gathering and research, the interview took the form of a semi-structured interview with several open-ended questions related to the Buying Funnel model, as well as depending on whether the respondent was a business or a customer. The author of the thesis managed to gather data from eight respondents, four of which were related to the business side and the other four were customers of these businesses. Most respondents were related to the restaurant industry and only two were available for hotels, which has become a major limitation of the study.

The processes of sales and marketing in the hospitality industry changed significantly due to the influence of digitalization, which was growing due to the restrictions governments imposed on local businesses and populations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Processes of marketing and sales have followed suit, especially in the restaurant and café industries, which involved marketing

through the means of social media and online food delivery platforms, as well as sales through similar platforms. Due to the convenience of the applications, as well as being one of the only available ways of ordering food, many restaurants and customers have switched to it as their primary source of takeout food.

Due to the closure of physical premises and the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, the emphasis was put on food quality and hygiene of food preparation, products, and deliveries, which was an attempt by restaurants to stay relevant within the confines of the pandemic. As the results show, people were still willing to purchase food through digital means, even if it was not completely safe. Considering the impact that the pandemic had on the mental health of customers all around the world, such impulsive behavior was understood by the author as an attempt to cope with the situation and proceed to increase their own happiness through food.

An important aspect of survival during the pandemic was performance prior to the restrictions. Several respondents have mentioned that loyal communities of customers, as well as those, who generally had a good experience and associations with the hospitality establishment, would often order food after the pandemic, even during the unavailability of physical service. This creates a notion, that restaurants should really focus on delivering the best result and creating relationships with their customer through positive emotions and quality experiences.

The performance of the changes implemented during COVID-19 could easily be described by the results that the respondents have shown us during the research stage of the thesis. Since they have survived the pandemic and were able to return to their normal activities following it, it means that the performance of said changes was satisfactory. However, it is also unwise to compare results from before the pandemic and during the pandemic, as it was impossible to reach the same results. Therefore, the performance was based on overall survival.

However, it is also important to mention that several respondent companies had the changes already implemented before the pandemic hit, making the transition much easier and effective for some, while others had to quickly adjust. Many businesses were unable to adjust properly and even with the decisions made and implemented were unable to secure the survival of the company. If more businesses recognized the opportunities that were open before them, it would lead to better overall results and better adjustment to the changes that the pandemic brought. This, paired with the effectiveness of the digital approach, as well as the advantages it offered to the respondents,

like simplification and streamlining of marketing and sales processes, created a notion not to remove the changes after the pandemic ends, but rather encourage them further.

Therefore, from the results, the author can suggest the following:

- 1) Hospitality industry must continue to further digitalize, due to the advantages that the shift has brought many businesses during the pandemic. The new channels of digital marketing and sales, paired with their effectiveness and low maintenance, create great opportunities for hospitality businesses to explore a new avenue of growth and profit.
- 2) Hospitality businesses should focus on creating and maintaining a relationship not only with loyal customers but all possible customers. Positive experiences and associations have significantly boosted respondents' business performance through consideration and preference, allowing them to survive during the pandemic.
- 3) Customer loyalty and advocacy should be encouraged by hospitality businesses to create further value for themselves. Customer advocacy has been heavily underrepresented in this thesis, as many respondents were not familiar with the concept. Businesses and customers alike need to educate themselves on this topic and encourage it, as it offers untapped marketing and commercial value for both parties.
- 4) Closely follow potential hospitality trends, which, if applied quickly and correctly, can increase business performance, and allow for survival through harsh situations, as online food delivery platforms did during COVID-19.

The author believes that further research should be undertaken about changes in the processes of marketing and sales, especially in terms of the hotel industry, as this research has failed to deliver promising results. Similarly, cultural aspects of online ordering could be researched, to understand how different countries welcomed the change or did not welcome it at all. A study into online food delivery platforms, as well as suggestions for its improvement and growth, could be beneficial for hospitality and online food delivery industries.

In conclusion, the author believes that the hospitality industry has forever been changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Digitalization ushering a new age into the stagnant traditionality, with which the hospitality industry operated for ages, it will open a new and fresh avenue of experience for restaurants and cafes. And with this, people will continue to improve their mood with the magical power of food even during the most critical times in our lives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions

	Questions for the businesses	Questions for the customers
Customer awareness	How did hospitality businesses make people aware of the possibility of availability of product/service during the pandemic?	How did you learn that hospitality businesses were offering products/services during the pandemic?
Brand awareness	How did you market your business? What methods/tools did you use? How has the process changed?	How did you learn about different hospitality companies? What kind of marketing material were you exposed to the most?
Brand consideration & Brand preference	What was offered to the customer to create additional value for considering using your products/services? Did you offer something new?	Why did you consider this business for purchasing the product/service? Why did you choose this particular business to satisfy your needs?
Purchase intention & Purchase	How did the process of sales change? How did you adapt to the restrictions? Did the changes stick around after the pandemic?	Were your purchase decisions done on a whim? How did the process of purchasing change? How did you adapt to the restrictions?
Customer loyalty	Did you offer any loyalty programme? How did COVID-19 transform your view of loyal customers?	Would you describe yourself as a loyal customer to the business? What made you so?
Customer advocacy	Did you advocate for your client? How?	Did you advocate for your chosen business? How?

Appendix 2. Business respondent information

Interviewee code	Interviewee gender	Interviewee age	Business concept	Location
1A	Male	27	Fast-food restaurant	Finland
2A	Female	24	Café	Estonia
3A	Female	34	Fine-dining restaurant	Finland
4A	Male	45	Hotel	Finland

Appendix 3. Customer respondent information

Interviewee code	Interviewee gender	Interviewee age	Respondents nationality
1B	Male	23	Finnish
2B	Male	30	Estonian
3B	Female	51	Russian
4B	Female	31	Finnish

Appendix 4. Formatted interview notes

Respondent 1A

Name: ---

Age: 27

Location: Helsinki, Finland

Fast-food restaurant

P1. Customer Awareness

How your business made people aware that it is still active?

New term for respondent. Premises and marketing on premises – no longer available. Restaurant had social media pages, weren't used enough. Photos of the premises with encouragement posts to come and eat. Separate posts about special deals with info on discounts.

After pandemic hit, encouraged to tell friends/family about restaurant still active on online food delivery platforms. Loyal customers helped. "New people coming in on weekly basis, but you always have more faces than you remember." Tell about restaurant + encourage to eat, like social media.

Major switch to social media. Posting information about being available online through Wolt Finland and Foodora + info how to download and order. Online and TV news also helped spread awareness of online food delivery apps. Delivery apps also acted as spreading awareness of being alive.

P2. Brand awareness

How did you market your business?

Social media posts. The social media that was used: Facebook and Instagram. Thoughts of opening TikTok, but harder to manage. Online food delivery platforms acted also as marketing. Good pictures of food + special deals + good ratings. Delivery platform – less manageable, not enough options available, but bigger audience.

Tools used: food pictures + text posts, video capture, info about online food delivery platforms, text posts encouraging people to eat with restaurant, extra effort to take good pictures of food for online food delivery platform – more people want to order.

Process of marketing – non-existent. Before pandemic, no process was established. Primary marketing was done on premise, with physical objects like signs + boards + smells + food. During pandemic – semblance of process established. Social media pages "revived". Primary principle –

more activity on social media. Posts done on whim of social media manager (one of workers) with encouragement coming from management. Process now included social media + online food delivery platform. They work together, with social media posts talking about special deals on application. Extra effort to talk about hygiene + workers were working in masks + gloves. Pictures taken and posted about messages. Done for customers, but also as proof of following restriction rules.

P3. Brand consideration + brand preference

What offered to create additional value? Something new?

Additional value for online food delivery platforms – new special combos developed by kitchen staff to be of most value to customer, who has to pay for food + delivery. Special combos were available before, this was done to capitalize on idea of pandemic. Special deals in online food delivery application also created additional value. Interesting: build your own order, with many options available to change.

Additional question: Role of associations and prior experiences?

Mentioned before, loyal customers would come and go. Some appeared and asked about us during pandemic, meaning associations were important. Moreover, ratings before pandemic were very important + reviews in Google or other websites. Online food delivery platforms also have a rating, but it is “ambiguous” because no comment is given. Fault of restaurant or fault of delivery for bad rating?

P4. Purchase intention + purchase

How did the process of sales change? How did you adapt?

The process now almost 100% digital. Restaurant had their own system of delivery through phone ordering or using restaurant website, but this option – unpopular. This option helped during initial stages of pandemic, but delivery apps were really popular. Own system helped not to “sink”. Delivery services were “saviours”. Everything going digital, own system would not handle deliveries, because of amount of orders (assumption). Foodora and Wolt were established before pandemic, but really started to work during pandemic. Really helped with amount of deliveries. Restaurant – pretty popular during pandemic time.

Did the changes stay after the pandemic?

Changes stick after pandemic. Digital sales implemented before pandemic, no need to get rid of them. Changes in marketing – really important. Gives idea how to market + social media can grow

bigger. At moment, Instagram had ~500 followers, Facebook ~800. Grew by hundreds during pandemic.

P5. Customer loyalty

Offer loyalty programme? How did COVID-19 transform your view of loyal customers?

No real loyalty programme. No loyalty programme established before pandemic. During pandemic, no real way to establish it. After pandemic, during interview, maybe an idea given to think about. Not to say there are no loyal customers, but “There may be a few names, but mostly we have new arrivals and they ate at our place when it was convenient to them.” Friends + family act as big loyal customers. During pandemic, loyal customers arrived through delivery applications. Repeating names. Special deals seen even bigger surge of customers. Loyal customers – great to see repeating names. Really inspiring.

P6. Customer advocacy

Did you advocate for your clients? How?

New term for respondent. Customer advocacy – not really existent. Advocacy = customer loyalty? No real benefits for someone, who leaves reviews or something similar. Customer advocacy = left reviews, especially negative. “I’d rather listen to people who have something wrong with what I do, than those who agree with everything I do.” Initial idea from the start of restaurant – focus on negative + improve + do things better than others. Positive = good, negative = better.

Respondent 2A

Name: ---

Age: 24

Location: Tallinn, Estonia

Café

P1. Customer Awareness

How your business made aware that it was still active?

New term for respondent. People were aware from social media + delivery platforms. Social media inactive before pandemic. Done because “Everyone needs social media pages.” Poor management before pandemic. Sometimes post pictures or info about special deals. Café in high traffic area, no real need for marketing. During pandemic, still high traffic, but focus shifted to digital sales. Digital sales = digital marketing. Through social media, messages were sent that café is active on

online food delivery platforms. Bloggers helped + news outlets. Encouraged to order through online, help small businesses. Café had Bolt account before pandemic. One of first Bolt users/partners.

P2. Brand awareness

How did you market your business? How the process changed?

Marketing done through social media. Variety of channels used: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok. TikTok really popular with workers in café + workers had knowledge of how to work with it because of personal accounts. Process – simple. Post variety of content on social media pages, focus on life of café in pandemic. Important to wear masks in content – gives better picture to customers. Huge focus on variety and quality of food. TikTok videos, Instagram pictures, Facebook posts. Really fun to manage and engage for workers. Pictures of food were taken for Bolt with great care. Bolt application – important channel for marketing. Include ratings, important to uphold with great food.

Additional question: What was marketing process before pandemic?

Before pandemic, marketing process was similar. Less enthusiasm in managing social media. Focus on service and good food. Posts made from time to time, but no focus from management.

P3. Brand consideration + preference

What did you offer to create additional value? Something new?

Many different ideas how to differentiate from others. Ideas in marketing, products, services. Main idea came from customers. Idea – increase variety of pastries/cakes to order. Cafe staff made several meetings, discussed potential pastries/cakes. Decision was made – add option to get multiple fillings, able to select in Bolt application. New flavours were added – cloudberry, blueberry, strawberry (not all listed, only those that respondent remembers). Several combinations of pastry/cake + coffee was made. Easy to choose for customer + great pairings + price was lowered for ordering combination. With entry of new pastries, social media campaign started. Social media posts were made about new tastes. Start of sale – discount on Bolt for first few weeks. People were encouraged to try new tastes.

Additional question: Role of association and prior experience?

Prior experience – huge boost. Quite a few loyal customers, who come to us on regular basis. Idea for new flavours inspired by them. Without physical café, service experience gone, but not loyalty. See many familiar names on Bolt. Loyal community has grown through Bolt. Big part of community – old customers = great associations with café.

P4. Purchase intention + purchase

How did the process of sales change? How adapted to restrictions?

Process changed for the better. Really simple for café + really simple for customers. “Bolt Food really put the burden off of our shoulders.” Process was streamlined. Great for younger generation, often want to just get the food without leaving house. Process now fully digital.

Additional question: Did you possess own system of ordering + delivery?

No system was in place. Café too small to accept outside orders, including delivery. If someone left order through phone = okay, but delivery = not okay. Bolt put away the the burden, allows us to get food to people without spending resources. Before, no real way to deliver. After Bolt – constant deliveries, even before pandemic. During pandemic – main source of orders. Phone orders – rare, because easier to use Bolt. Good to have own system, in case something happens to Bolt, but delivery unavailable to us.

With focus on Bolt, marketing took place and switched to represent Bolt as main source of food. Minimal contact allowed, none is appreciated. High risk. Bolt – lowest possible risk. Courier comes in, takes food, goes away.

P5. Customer loyalty

Did you offer any loyalty programme? How did COVID-19 transform your view of loyal customers?

Loyalty programme established, but rudimentary. Vouchers. Before COVID-19, during physical interactions, people who subscribed to social media received discounts, but it wasn’t done often. Loyal customers really helped us out – need to think of ways to reward them. Food for thought.

Additional question: What was relationship with loyal customers? Active?

Relationship – active. We know many by name and even their preferences. They often ordered same food. Many became friends. Sad we did not reward them enough. COVID-19 showed “great family we’ve made here.”

Staff started to appreciate customers more. Now, when café is open, we often thank them for what they did for us. Often see familiar names on application and order.

P6. Customer advocacy

New term for respondent. Several advocates. One of biggest – given special discounts for efforts. “It’s great to have such loyal friends of the café come out and leave reviews for us!” Social media posts created about such big news. Others should also help us and we will try to reward them for

it. Loyalty programme seems like best choice, had no time to think it through before. Loyalty programme mentioned in previous questions.

Additional question: Are you going to reward anyone else the same way as your biggest advocate?

Yes, if they show same effort. What they did for café was great. We don't want preference, but we also want to reward them for it.

Respondent 3A

Name: ---

Age: 34

Location: Helsinki, Finland

Fine-dining restaurant

P1. Customer Awareness

How your business made people aware that it is still active?

New term for respondent. After initial restrictions, effort was made to contact customers through phone/personal conversations. Some loyal customers started ordering through phone, picking up at set time. When workers were available – food was delivered. Few people came back – severe lack of customers due to restrictions. Decision was made – install Wolt Finland in the restaurant. At first – doubts, because there are more applications. What if wrong one? Less customers on it? Info on effectiveness of online food delivery applications = business will be able to get customers. Spreading awareness about it – hard through traditional means (word of mouth). “We've always, sort of, relied on our impeccable reputation. People talk about how good their experiences are in a restaurant, that brings a lot of people in.” People stopped talking – not relevant = social media channels could help us. First, Facebook. Second, Instagram. While setting up, pictures of food and drinks were taken for Wolt. On social media – posts about availability in Wolt. Very little responses – include loyal customers and make them tell about it. In the end – success, people started ordering.

P2. Brand Awareness

How did you market your business? How did process change?

Marketing – mixture of calls and social media. Process changed entirely. A lot of effort was put in to preserve the image of the restaurant. “Restaurant consists of experience of food and experience of service.” Service – unavailable, because COVID restrictions. Heavy focus on image of food + quality. Loyal customers – concerned with quality. Expected quality – lower, because not in

restaurant + delivered. Expensive food in cheap packaging – “does not look up to standard”. Big effort to promote hygiene (masks, gloves).

What tools were used to market your business?

Primary tools: photos, videos referring to process of making food + high standard of preparation, ingredients etc. Text posts about ordering + customer testimonials, taken from loyal customers + those, who wished to tell about experiences.

P3. Brand consideration + brand preference

How did you create additional value? Did you offer something new?

Term “Additional value” was new for respondent. No effort to really create additional value. Value = good, quality food + nice experience in service. Service not available – focus on quality of food. Value created by loyal customers – testimonials, ratings – really important for social media marketing + Wolt marketing.

Additional question: Role of associations and customer experience?

Associations + experience played major role in creating good Wolt and social media reputation. New fields, no real experience in managing, but good words provided major boost in customers. A lot of “5 star” reviews.

P4. Purchase intention + purchase

How did process of sales change? How did it adapt to restrictions?

Hard to transition. Old way – not relevant anymore. Most workers + management were not familiar with online ordering. No idea how to work with it. Slowly, steadily people got to know systems better. Not hard to understand. Digital selling saved restaurant. While transition – hard, result was great. Marketing shift was harder to implement, than selling. Most selling dependent on customer. We do not call now, we get orders from app = less engagement/work needed. Our focus – food + telling people where to buy it.

Did the changes stay after pandemic?

Changes stayed, a lot of potential with these systems + we already saw them work and know how to use it + train new staff to use it. Very simple, but powerful. Great for those, who just want to order food and stay at home. Cannot skip additional income – very hard rebuilding after pandemic.

P5. Customer loyalty

Did you offer any loyalty programme? How did COVID-19 transform view of loyal customers?

Before COVID-19 – great loyalty programme. Loyal customers had plastic cards for discounts, which they could apply for. During COVID-19 – loyalty system useless, no way for loyal customers to use these cards anymore. Had to depend heavily on Wolt coupons or similar discounts.

Loyal customers – really important before COVID, but now – even more. “Without them, we wouldn’t have lasted even several months, before we would have to close down.” Staff + management shows a lot of gratitude to loyal customers. After restrictions, old loyalty system came back + more benefits were added, like bigger discounts etc.

P6. Customer advocacy

New term for the respondent. Loyalty customers – advocate heavily. We do not advocate for them, no real system in place to advocate for customers. No reward system. Is advocacy different to loyalty? Loyal customers get benefits for advocating, but they are not too different from loyal customers. Staff + management thankful, but no special rewards for that. Mostly loyal customer benefits with card. No other real way to reward for spreading word during pandemic.

Respondent 4A

Name: ---

Age: 45

Location: Helsinki, Finland

Hotel

P1. Customer Awareness

How your business made people aware that it is still active?

The term is new for the respondent. The biggest problem wasn’t telling customers if they were available as a hotel, but that the target audience was gone. Main audience – tourists. “We’ve been online for ages. Booking.com was and still is our bread and butter, but the COVID preventive measures were devastating for the hotel industry in general.” Problem – send message among locals. Social media is active in hotel industry, but had to shift marketing messages. Firstly, message that hotel is active, secondly, message to locals, who have no need of hotels in their original sense (accommodation). With social media – traditional marketing: flyers. Flyers invited customers to change atmosphere and relax in hotel. Most people at home – best way to reach during pandemic. Many different iterations of hotels. “Office spaces, away-from-home resorts...

I have read people try everything they could to keep afloat from the news.” Iteration of this hotel – closer to away-from-home resort.

P2. Brand Awareness

How did you market your business? How did process change?

Marketing, as described before – social media + flyers. Process changed heavily – Booking.com wasn't a primary source of clients anymore, most marketing done through social media. Hotel = risky place during pandemic. Personal contact with staff + other guests. Hygiene took precedence in messages. Heavy drop in service quality, as some sought after service not available anymore, like spa. Flyers and social media posts both contained messages about hygiene. Customers upset at unavailability of spa. Away-from-home resort, but no resort value. Risk – too much.

What tools were used to market?

Primarily, pictures and videos. Most effort put into messages with hygiene – pictures and videos contain staff in masks/gloves + shows how the place is clean and disinfected.

Additional question: What social media was used to market?

Used social media: Facebook and Instagram. Focus on Instagram – easier to manage and more traffic on Instagram page.

P3. Brand consideration + brand preference

What did you offer to create additional value? Something new?

Entire idea of hotel had to be changed. Attracting local population to stay in a hotel, when they have homes – very hard. Hotel needed new unique idea, spin to it. Idea came from news – away-from-home resort. Idea: “People come to hotel to change atmosphere around them. It's boring to stay at home these days, and we give them an opportunity to get out.” Marketing + sales campaign started, social media got a lot of attention. Initially – done very well. After some time, popularity died down. People were coming in, but less. Hotel was in survival mode. Campaign did not get results that management wanted.

P4. Purchase intention + purchase

How did the process of sales change? How did it adapt to restrictions?

Hotel industry – digitalized. Booking.com used for many years. Booking.com not suitable for local audiences and customers, mainly suitable for tourists. New system needed to be integrated so customers can book hotel rooms. Own system was established with orders through website. Many

different services that offer creation of booking systems. Very easy to install – digitalization simplifies many things. New booking system – explained in social media posts + flyers.

Will the changes stay?

Focus on foreign market, while really effective – too narrow. Pandemic showed, that it was hard to survive on tourists alone. Inviting locals or travellers from other country regions – best idea. Changes and opportunity will stay. After restrictions lifted, many services came back (like spa services), so now it was resort. Unique idea may become integrated into our hotel, if attracts people. Locals always close.

P5. Customer loyalty

Did you offer loyalty programme? How did COVID-19 transform your view of loyal customers? Loyalty programme existed for years for hotel, targeting foreign customers. Since no foreign customers could come at the time, loyalty programme had to suit local population. “We thought of several loyalty opportunities that could bring locals back.” Discount opportunities for returning customers, emails for customers who have been to hotel before, asking them to come back. Most loyalty opportunities never used, not many people came back after initial stay. Better loyalty programme needed to take place. Loyalty programme for foreigners came back, when restrictions lifted. Many received offers. No loyal customers were gained during that period, that would keep coming back – view of loyal customers stayed the same (about foreign customers).

P6. Customer advocacy

New term for the respondent. Hotel has loyal customers, but many do not advocate. They may tell friends/close family, but nothing bigger. Sometimes, they leave good review, but in general customer advocacy – not represented in hotel. Customer advocacy should be encouraged and rewarded – management will think about it.

Respondent 1B

Name: ---

Age: 23

Nationality: Finnish

P1. Customer Awareness

How did you learn that hospitality businesses were offering products/services during pandemic?

Before pandemic, already knew place, therefore – no marketing needed. First learned about place through friends/family. Seen social media before, didn't subscribe. After pandemic, news talking about online food delivery platforms. Subscribed to food bloggers, they encouraged to use online food delivery platforms to order + support struggling businesses. "Yeah, there were a lot of messages that told people to go out and support small businesses." Knew about them prior, not used enough – preferred to eat inside. Due to restrictions – had to go through applications. Stumbled on 1A restaurant. Ate there before + good memories = incentive to go back and eat again. Really craved fast food during pandemic.

P2. Brand Awareness

How did you learn about different hospitality companies?

Mostly learned through online food delivery platforms applications. Applications gave info on restaurants + price + how far restaurant is + menu items. Often searched restaurants by using rating setting – seeing best rated restaurants/cafes. If people like them – good food + good service. Food bloggers also gave a lot of info on restaurants even during pandemic. Ordering food + reviewing at home. Not sure if paid advertisement or just to support blog/channel. A lot of info about local restaurants from there + info what app to use to order.

Additional question: What kind of social media did you use and what material were you exposed to on there?

Mostly, Instagram. Restaurants on Instagram posted pictures/videos of food/cooking. Information on how to order online + what application the restaurant was using. Information on new food/drinks. Pictures of masks + gloves and posts about hygiene at workplace. Probably really important during COVID-19. Sometimes – info about satisfied customers.

P3. Brand consideration + brand preference

How did you consider hospitality business for purchasing the product/service? Why did you choose this particular business?

Usually consider restaurant/café through what they offer. Really enjoy fast food – choosing 1A restaurant. Price is also huge, because price of food + price of delivery = expensive meal. Prices rose during pandemic, needed to be conscious about spending. Selected this particular restaurant – big discounts + new items on menu. Restaurant was on front page of application for some time, with info on discount. It is also close to where respondent lives.

Additional questions: Role of past experiences and associations?

Huge role. Ate there before pandemic – really good food. Enjoyed service + atmosphere before. Digital buying – not same as eating in restaurant. Prefer to eat inside. Ratings on application were good too = people liked it even digitally. “The ratings are not clear enough without customer comments, but if they still enjoyed it, it was good.”

P4. Purchase intention + purchase

How did process of purchasing change? Were your decisions done on a whim?

Digital process – very easy. Applications constructed in such a way – anyone can understand them: children, elders etc. Used applications before – know how to order. Processes very similar in different applications. Really easy to find restaurants you want. Checking prices, ratings, menu items, ingredients, time to deliver etc. very easy, convenient. Process simplified. Didn't like applications before – now appreciate them more, because convenience. Still go out to eat, but sometimes use applications.

Decisions done often on a whim. See food in video/TV – instantly want to eat it too. Especially burgers. “I started eating lots and lots of junk food. I'd order something almost every week.” Hunger – affects mood heavily. After eating – happy, full of life. Laziness and dull life in pandemic – more junk food. Bad habit, good for mental health (in opinion of respondent).

P5. Customer loyalty

Would you describe yourself a loyal customer to the business? What made you so?

Wouldn't describe as loyal. Enjoys foods that restaurant makes, but there are other places where eat at often. Maybe somewhat loyal. Friends used different applications, started using application called Huuva more. Restaurant isn't listed on it, cannot order. I can go eat there, but not loyal.

Additional question: Would you apply for loyalty programme if restaurant had one?

Don't know. Mixed feelings. If it gives discount – sure, but I am not really loyal. Enjoy eating out at different places. Eating at one place – boring. Prefer to try new places, was easy through application during pandemic. Now – still use it, but go out more with friends.

P6. Customer advocacy

Did you advocate for chosen business? Why?

New term for respondent. Advocacy – weird. Does advocacy mean loyalty? I left good ratings on application when ordered food from there – advocate? If advocate – more than that – no, didn't advocate. Not really loyal, leave good ratings as a habit. Good rating for couriers + good rating for

restaurant. I enjoyed food. Didn't explain to them what liked, what disliked – hard through applications. Google reviews – too much hassle.

Respondent 2B

Name: ---

Age: 30

Nationality: Estonian

P1. Customer Awareness

How did you learn that hospitality businesses were offering products/services during pandemic?
During pandemic, open up application – hundreds of active restaurants/cafes. A lot of information in the news, applications are becoming new thing in COVID-19, saving businesses. Had experience with application before, ordered food to work. Stumbled on the 2B café – usual spot where respondent eats, on application. Initially, introduced to restaurants by friend from work, who often ate there. Often visited it, almost every day, for a cup of coffee + pastry. Great place to be in after work, became a regular. Often visit with work friends, relax after work. Great place for lunch and working outside office.

P2. Brand Awareness

How did you learn about different hospitality companies?

Mostly through applications. I had some restaurants/cafes in mind before, visited prior to pandemic. Applications show everything you need: price, menu, rating. Rating described as 1 to 5, like any review. “It’s nice that it’s sort of without comments. People can make their own decision on taste, right? I wouldn’t trust other people on food, because I am pretty picky.” Also great application for knowing when discounts are around, get best value for money.

Additional question: What social media applications do you use?

Not big on social media, not really exposed to it, keep away from it most of the time. During pandemic – harder to communicate, resorted to social media. Instagram. Mostly text friends + family, but don’t use it on daily basis.

What kind of marketing material were you exposed to the most?

On applications – photos of food, ratings etc. When I saw something on Instagram related to restaurants/cafes – mostly pictures/videos of food + cooking. Sometimes pictures of chefs in masks cooking.

P3. Brand consideration + brand preference

How did you consider hospitality business for purchasing the product/service? Why choose this particular business?

Usually eat at same places, picky eater. Often consider selection + something I love to eat. This particular café – pastry. Enjoy pastry a lot, therefore select his café. If I want something different, like full meal – go to places I trust and know. Price – big factor, but if food is enjoyable = ready to pay for it. Chose this business, because know and trust. “Even though I am a picky eater, most of the food has grown stale even for me. It was a breath of fresh air for me when they added new pastry.” Restaurant 2A added new types of flavoring + pastry/cakes. Really made respondent come back, try more, order on constant basis.

Additional question: Role of prior experience and associations?

Very important role. Since good experience + food (picky eater) – prior experience very important to continue going to restaurant. Everyone is friendly. Shame, cannot visit.

P4. Purchase intention + purchase

How did process of purchasing change? Decisions done on a whim?

Process of purchase – really easy now. Ordering with few clicks, just select what you want, quantity, click to order, select your address and order will be at doorstep in 20 minutes. Really fast, efficient, streamlined. Very convenient, don't even have to be on premises Previous experience with application helped, but anyone can use it. Everyone introduced to digital purchasing now. “Honestly, this is a great trial purchasing stuff digitally. For everyone.”

Decisions done on a whim. Pastry + coffee = daily occurrence, especially during lunch. Too lazy to cook sometimes, had to use applications. Pandemic – really stressful period, sugary foods help make yourself happy. Flow of life – dull, sugar helps quite a lot. Laziness.

P5. Customer loyalty

Would you describe yourself as a loyal customer? What made you so?

Loyal customer? Yes. Love the place, order from there almost daily for lunch. Great pastry, great food, great care for quality and standard. Really friendly staff. “I really like their sweets, I couldn't live without them.” Restaurant attitude and atmosphere also helped create good impressions. When restrictions lifted – first place visited: 2A establishment. Didn't open for the first few weeks, some staff had to be laid off, recruitment started. Reminded of loyalty programme. Was part of it, sometimes used coupons, when could get hands on it. No real opportunity for coupons, but sometimes discounts on food delivery apps.

P6. Customer advocacy

Did you advocate for your chosen business? Why?

Term is new for the respondent. Advocated heavily for the café. Not big social media guy, but left nice comments on social media pages, under some posts. Before pandemic, left Google Review, telling people to come and eat in café. Told about the place to friends + family, who didn't know about it. "This place was a huge part of my life before the pandemic and I couldn't believe I wasn't allowed there anymore." Lots of memories, really wanted to preserve the business. Pandemic would end, but business may not survive. Decided to help, no need for reward. But 2A still decided to give discounts for help – really nice and appreciate the fact, that people repay in kind.

Respondent 3B

Name: ---

Age: 51

Nationality: Russian

P1. Customer Awareness

How did you learn that hospitality businesses were offering products/services during pandemic? Information on hospitality businesses (restaurants, cafes) came from the online food delivery applications. News reports on hospitality business, how affected etc. Info on the news – applications to order food. Family members helped install application on phone. Exploring the application, many different restaurants were visible. Could see menus, prices – many different things. Afraid to order. "I am not so good with technology, I was afraid to order." After some time, call came from restaurant. Restaurant – available on application.

P2. Brand Awareness

How did you learn about different hospitality companies?

Wasn't really interested in other companies. Mostly – 3A restaurant. Handful of places chose to visit. 3A restaurant – favorite place. Most information on companies – from applications or Facebook. Subscribed to Facebook page for restaurant 3A. There – messages about quality, hygiene.

What kind of marketing material were you exposed to the most?

Marketing material – pictures, videos. Text messages about hygiene and quality with pictures of food. Real concern – not the same experience as in restaurant. "At home, I can cook on my own.

Going to a restaurant is completely different. Ordering food online and eating it at home is not the same as in a restaurant.” Messages left positive feeling. Knowledge – same quality, without service. Lazy to cook – order.

P3. Brand consideration + preference

How did you consider hospitality business for purchasing the product/service? Why choose this particular business?

When choosing any restaurant – good to know what they offer. What cuisine, what items. Not fond of Asian cuisines, preference to Italian. Chosen restaurant serves that. Pricing – important. How close to home, how many visitors. Internal layout of restaurant important, want to sit separately from other people. This restaurant – fits very well within parameters. Trusted + been there many times.

Additional question: Role of prior experience and associations?

Important role. A lot of experience with restaurant, know owner personally. Many times eaten, exceptional + friendly service. Real focus on regulars, always feel at home. Sad – service wasn’t available during pandemic, as well as premises.

P4. Purchase intention + purchase

How did the process of purchasing change? Were purchases done on a whim?

Process – really simple with application. At first – scared, don’t know where to click or how does it work, how do you pick up orders etc. After a while, you get hang of it. Family members helped out, showed how to do it. It was very easy to switch to applications. Don’t like that cannot go to restaurant, but great solution to problem.

Purchases were not done on whim. Usually – planned. Often cook own food for family. Lots of planning into cooking: what to cook, what ingredients to buy. When feel lazy – order, but also make sure to know, what others in family want. Big orders.

P5. Customer loyalty

Would you describe yourself as a loyal customer? What made you so?

Yes, really loyal customers. Regulars. Part of loyalty programme for the restaurant. Ate there every month before pandemic. Schedule increased during pandemic. Loyal, because: great staff, great quality, great food, great atmosphere (before pandemic). A lot of memories with place, really connected to it. When restrictions started, saw news – understood that it was hard for all restaurants

nowadays. We kept on eating there, helping out our friends. “Pandemic has hit everyone and we really wanted to help out and eat good food.”

P6. Customer advocacy

Did you advocate for your chosen business? Why?

New term for the respondent. Yes, we advocated. Before pandemic, we often brought friends + family to eat there. Recommended to co-workers. During pandemic, kept recommending to friends, really wanted to help out our friend. 3A, in phone call, said that they did not have a lot of customers, when restrictions started. Sense of duty to restaurant, who kept feeding good food needed help. They helped us eat good food, we helped with trying to bring more people in. Wasn't done for any reward, happy to help just like that.

Respondent 4B

Name: ---

Age: 31

Nationality: Finnish

P1. Customer Awareness

How did you learn that hospitality businesses were offering products/services during pandemic?

There was information on the news, a lot of it. Especially about restaurants. Familiar with applications + other stuff. Hotels, on the other hand – something new. Was hard to learn anything about them, apart from news and some articles about how hotels changed to stay relevant. Best way was done by 4A's hotel – flyer to mail. Best way – everyone's at home during pandemic, good way to reach out. Got flyer while checking mail, took it home and read it. “Life during COVID was too dull. I didn't go out much, even forgot to check mail sometimes.” Great way to spend couple of days – go to hotel.

P2. Brand Awareness

How did you learn about different hospitality companies? What material were you exposed to the most?

Mostly learned about them from articles and news. There have been many local companies, that tried doing new spin on hotel. Only one to drop a flyer in mail – hotel 4A. Scanned social media channels, get good idea of hotel. In there, pictures of hotel + rooms + spa. Social media present on flyer + info how to book. Pictures of staff in masks, encouragement to come + promises of hygiene.

Really wanted to get into spa after sitting home for a long time. But risky with COVID. “There was this constant, nagging feeling of possibility of catching the virus if I went there, but messages helped a little.” Problem when arriving, however – pictures were somewhat misleading. Spa wasn’t available. Really upset, but understandable.

P3. Brand consideration + preference

How did you consider hospitality business for purchasing the product/service? Why choose this particular business?

Not hard consideration – not exposed to many businesses. Only flyer from 4A received, so decided to go with it. “I kept looking at that flyer and thought that I should try going there.” Real focus on pricing, how much would it cost to stay there? Info on flyer, it was cheap enough – not a lot of people probably tried the idea. Unique idea. Interesting opportunity, COVID-19 is dull and uninteresting and wish to spice up life.

P4. Purchase intention + purchase

How did process of purchasing change? Were decisions done on whim?

Not really exposed to purchasing hotel rooms. Had experience before – Booking.com, but this was new. Generally, experience – nice. Easy, but very mediocre presentation. Didn’t look trustworthy but no need for payment for booking, so no risk before coming to hotel. Info about how to book, where to book etc. on flyer. “And about decision, it was done somewhat on a whim.” COVID – terrible effect on mental health. “...slow and dull way of life...”

P5. Customer loyalty

Would you describe yourself as a loyal customer to the business? What made you so?

No, not loyal. I was at hotel once, really hard to say loyal. Email notification, calling me back to hotel – no time to really do it again. No wish to really come again, nice opportunity, it helped, but now – other things to do.

P6. Customer advocacy

Did you advocate for your chosen business? How?

Term is new for the respondent. Didn’t advocate. Left good review when I was going away. Hotel gave questionnaire. Didn’t leave any other reviews. Told about experience to family, but they weren’t interested.

Appendix 5. Customer awareness analysis

	Social Media	Traditional marketing	Awareness through Application	Outside influence	Marketing message	Prior experience and associations
1 A	Restaurant had social media pages, weren't used enough. Like social media.	Premises and marketing on premises – no longer available Encouraged to tell friends/family	Delivery apps also acted as spreading awareness of being alive.	Online and TV news also helped spread awareness of online food delivery apps	Posting information about being available online through Wolt Finland and Foodora + info how to download and order	Loyal customers helped. Tell about restaurant (encouraged)
2 A	People were aware from social media. Social media inactive before pandemic. Poor management before pandemic. Through social media, messages were sent	Café in high traffic area, no real need for marketing	People were aware from delivery platforms	Bloggers helped + news outlets. Encouraged to order through online	messages were sent that café is active on online food delivery platforms	
3 A	People stopped talking – not relevant = social media channels could help us. First, Facebook. Second, Instagram.	contact customers through phone/personal conversations. Spreading awareness about it – hard through traditional means (word of mouth). “We’ve always, sort of, relied on our impeccable reputation.”	Decision was made – install Wolt Finland	Info on effectiveness of online food delivery applications = business will be able to get customers.	On social media – posts about availability in Wolt	Include loyal customers and make them tell about it.
4 A	We’ve been online for ages. Social media is active in hotel industry.	Traditional marketing: flyers.		“Office spaces, away-from-home resorts... I have read people try everything they could to keep afloat from the news.”	shift marketing messages. Firstly, message that hotel is active, secondly, message to locals, who have no need of hotels in their original sense (accommodation).	The target audience was gone. Main audience – tourists
1 B	Seen social media before, didn't subscribe.	Ate there before + good memories = incentive to go back and eat again.	through applications. Stumbled on 1A restaurant.	After pandemic, news talking about online food delivery platforms. Subscribed to food bloggers, they encouraged to use online food delivery platforms to order + support struggling businesses.		Ate there before + good memories = incentive to go back and eat again.

2 B		introduced to restaurants by friend from work, who often ate there. Often visited it.	open up application – hundreds of active restaurants/cafes.	A lot of information in the news		introduced to restaurants by friend from work, who often ate there. Often visited it,
3 B		After some time, call came from restaurant	Information on hospitality businesses (restaurants, cafes) came from the online food delivery applications. Exploring the application, many different restaurants were visible. Could see menus, prices – many different things	News reports on hospitality business, how affected etc. Info on the news – applications to order food	After some time, call came from restaurant. – Restaurant available on application	After some time, call came from restaurant.
4 B		flyer to mail	Familiar with applications + other stuff.	There was information on the news, a lot of it. Apart from news and some articles about how hotels	Great way to spend couple of days – go to hotel.	

Appendix 6. Brand awareness analysis

	Marketing tools	Marketing message	Traditional marketing	Marketing through Application	Social media variety	Social media exposure	Important marketing quality
1 A	Good pictures of food + special deals + good ratings. Tools used: food pictures + text posts, video capture. Extra effort to take good pictures of food for online food delivery platform – more people want to order.	info about online food delivery platforms, text posts encouraging people to eat with restaurant. Extra effort to talk about hygiene + workers were working in masks + gloves. Pictures taken and posted about messages. Done for customers, but also as proof of following restriction rules.	Process of marketing – non-existent. Before pandemic, no process was established. Primary marketing was done on premise, with physical objects like signs + boards + smells + food.	Online food delivery platforms acted also as marketing. Delivery platform – less manageable, not enough options available, but bigger audience.+ online food delivery platform. Special deals on application	Facebook and Instagram TikTok	During pandemic – semblance of process established. Social media pages “revived”. Primary principle – more activity on social media. Posts done on whim of social media manager (one of workers) with encouragement coming from management. Process now included social media	
2 A	TikTok videos, Instagram pictures, Facebook posts. Pictures of food were taken for Bolt with great care. Include ratings, important to uphold with great food.	Important to wear masks in content – gives better picture to customers. Huge focus on variety and quality of food.	Less enthusiasm in managing social media. Focus on service and good food. Posts made from time to time, but no focus from management.	Bolt application – important channel for marketing.	Facebook, Instagram, TikTok.	Marketing done through social media. TikTok really popular with workers in café. Workers had knowledge of how to work with it because of personal accounts. Post variety of content on social media pages, focus on life of café in pandemic.	
3 A	Primary tools: photos, videos referring to process of making food + high standard of preparation, ingredients etc	Heavy focus on image of food + quality. Expensive food in cheap packaging – “does not look up to standard”. Big effort to promote hygiene (masks, gloves). Text posts about ordering + customer testimonials	Marketing – mixture of calls. Restaurant consists of experience of food and experience of service.” Service – unavailable, because COVID restrictions Expected quality – lower, because not	Text posts about ordering + customer testimonials		Marketing – mixture of calls and social media. Process changed entirely. Preserve the image of the restaurant.	Loyal customers – concerned with quality.

			in restaurant + delivered.				
4 A	Primarily, pictures and videos. Pictures and videos contain staff in masks/gloves + shows how the place is clean and disinfected.	Hotel = risky place during pandemic. Hygiene took precedence in messages. Flyers and social media posts both contained messages about hygiene. Most effort put into messages with hygiene.	Marketing, as described before – social media + flyers		Facebook and Instagram . Focus on Instagram	Marketing, as described before – social media + flyers Booking.com wasn't a primary source of clients anymore, most marketing done through social media	Heavy drop in service quality, as some sought after service not available anymore, like spa. Customers upset at unavailability of spa. Away-from-home resort, but no resort value. Risk – too much
1 B	Searched restaurants by using rating setting – seeing best rated restaurants/cafes. Not sure if paid advertisement or just to support blog/channel.	Food bloggers also gave a lot of info on restaurants even during pandemic. Ordering food + reviewing at home. A lot of info about local restaurants from there + info what app to use to order. Information on how to order online + what application the restaurant was using. Information on new food/drinks. Pictures of masks + gloves and posts about hygiene at workplace.		How did you learn about different hospitality companies? Mostly learned through online food delivery platforms applications	Instagram	Restaurants on Instagram posted pictures/videos of food/cooking.	Applications gave info on restaurants + price + how far restaurant is + menu items. If people like them – good food + good service.
2 B	Rating described as 1 to 5, like any review. Mostly pictures/videos of food + cooking. Sometimes pictures of chefs in masks cooking.	I had some restaurants/cafes in mind before, visited prior to pandemic	Sometimes pictures of chefs in masks cooking.	How did you learn about different hospitality companies? Mostly through applications	Instagram	Not big on social media, not really exposed to it, keep away from it most of the time. During pandemic – harder to communicate, resorted to social media. Instagram. Mostly text friends + family, but don't use it on daily basis.	Applications show everything you need: price, menu, rating. I wouldn't trust other people on food because I am pretty picky.” Also, great application for knowing when discounts are around, get best value for money.

3 B	pictures, videos. Text messages about hygiene and quality with pictures of food	Wasn't really interested in other companies. Mostly – 3A restaurant. Handful of places chose to visit. 3A restaurant – favorite place.	messages about quality, hygiene. Text messages about hygiene and quality. Messages left positive feeling.	Most information on companies – from applications or Facebook.	Facebook	Subscribed to Facebook page for restaurant 3A	Real concern – not the same experience as in restaurant. Ordering food online and eating it at home is not the same as in a restaurant. Knowledge – same quality, without service
4 B	Mostly learned about them from articles and news. Pictures of hotel + rooms + spa. Pictures of staff in masks	Social media present on flyer + info how to book. Encouragement to come + promises of hygiene. But messages helped a little. Somewhat misleading	Only one to drop a flyer in mail – hotel 4A			Scanned social media channels, get good idea of hotel. Social media present on flyer	Really wanted to get into spa after sitting home for a long time. Nagging feeling of possibility of catching the virus. Spa wasn't available. Really upset, but understandable .

Appendix 7. Brand consideration and preference analysis

	Prompted changes	Importance of associations/experience	Consideration qualities	Loyalty importance	Role of application
1 A	Additional value for online food delivery platforms – new special combos developed by kitchen staff to be of most value to customer. Special combos were available before, this was done to capitalize on idea of pandemic.	meaning associations were important. Moreover, ratings before pandemic were very important + reviews in Google or other websites		Mentioned before, loyal customers would come and go. Some appeared and asked about us during pandemic	Special deals in online food delivery application also created additional value. Online food delivery platforms also have a rating, but it is “ambiguous” because no comment is given. Fault of restaurant or fault of delivery for bad rating?
2 A	Idea – increase variety of pastries/cakes to order. Several combinations of pastry/cake + coffee was made. Price was lowered for ordering combination.	Start of sale – discount on Bolt for first few weeks. People were encouraged to try new tastes. Prior experience – huge boost. See many familiar names on Bolt. Big part of community – old customers = great associations with café.		Quite a few loyal customers, who come to us on regular basis. Idea for new flavors inspired by them. Without physical café, service experience gone, but not loyalty.	Decision was made – add option to get multiple fillings, able to select in Bolt application. Loyal community has grown through Bolt
3 A	No effort to really create additional value. Value = good, quality food + nice experience in service. Service not available – focus on quality of food	Associations + experience played major role in creating good Wolt and social media reputation. New fields, no real experience in managing, but good words provided major boost in customers. A lot of “5 star” reviews.		Value created by loyal customers – testimonials, ratings – really important for social media marketing + Wolt marketing	
4 A	Entire idea of hotel had to be changed. Hotel needed new unique idea, spin to it. Idea came from news – away-from-home resort.	After some time, popularity died down. People were coming in, but less. Hotel was in survival mode. Campaign did not get results that management wanted.			
1 B		Huge role. Ate there before pandemic – really good food. Enjoyed service + atmosphere before. Ratings on application were good too = people liked it even digitally	Usually consider restaurant/café through what they offer. Really enjoy fast food. Price is also huge because price of food. Big discounts + new items on menu. It is also close to where respondent lives.		Price of delivery. Restaurant was on front page of application for some time, with info on discount. “The ratings are not clear enough without customer comments, but if they still enjoyed it, it was good.”

2 B		Very important role. Since good experience + food (picky eater) – prior experience very important to continue going to restaurant. Everyone is friendly	Usually eat at same places, picky eater. Often consider selection + something I love to eat. Enjoy pastry a lot, therefore select his café. Price – big factor. Food is enjoyable = ready to pay for it. Restaurant 2A added new types of flavoring + pastry/cakes.	Chose this business, because know and trust. Shame, cannot visit.	
3 B		Important role. A lot of experience with restaurant, know owner personally. Real focus on regulars, always feel at home.	good to know what they offer. What cuisine. Pricing – important. How close to home	Trusted + been there many times.	Sad – service wasn't available during pandemic, as well as premises.
4 B		Info on flyer, it was cheap enough – not a lot of people probably tried the idea. Unique idea. Interesting opportunity, COVID-19 is dull and uninteresting and wish to spice up life.	Not exposed to many businesses. Real focus on pricing, how much would it cost to stay there?		

Appendix 8. Purchase intention and purchase analysis

	Sales changes	Purchasing changes	Changes advantages	Role of impulsivity	Reasons for leave	Prior to changes
1 A	The process now almost 100% digital. Everything going digital. Changes in marketing – really important. Gives idea how to market + social media can grow bigger.	This option helped during initial stages of pandemic, but delivery apps were really popular. Restaurant – pretty popular during pandemic time	Delivery services were “saviour”. Own system would not handle deliveries. Foodora and Wolt were established before pandemic, but really started to work during pandemic. Really helped with amount of deliveries		Digital sales implemented before pandemic, no need to get rid of them. Changes in marketing – really important. Gives idea how to market + social media can grow bigger. At moment, Instagram had ~500 followers, Facebook ~800	Restaurant had their own system of delivery through phone ordering or using restaurant website, but this option – unpopular. This option helped during initial stages of pandemic. Everything going digital, own system would not handle deliveries, because of amount of orders (assumption).
2 A	Process now fully digital. Marketing took place and switched to represent Bolt as main source of food.	Phone orders – rare, because easier to use Bolt	Really simple for café + really simple for customers. Process was streamlined. Great for younger generation, often want to just get the food without leaving house. Bolt put away the the burden, allows us to get food to people without spending resources. Before, no real way to deliver. After Bolt – constant deliveries, even before pandemic. During pandemic – main source of orders. Minimal contact allowed, none is appreciated. High risk. Courier comes in, takes food, goes away.		Phone orders – rare, because easier to use Bolt. Good to have own system, in case something happens to Bolt, but delivery unavailable to us. Bolt – lowest possible risk.	No system was in place. Café too small to accept outside orders, including delivery. If someone left order through phone = okay, but delivery = not okay
3 A	Old way – not relevant anymore. Digital selling saved restaurant	Most selling dependent on customer. We do not call now, we get orders from app = less engagement/work needed	Marketing shift was harder to implement, than selling. We do not call now, we get orders from app = less engagement/work needed. Very simple, but powerful. Great for those, who just want to order food and stay at home		While transition – hard, result was great. Our focus – food + telling people where to buy it. Changes stayed, a lot of potential with these systems + we already saw	Most workers + management were not familiar with online ordering. No idea how to work with it

					them work and know how to use it + train new staff to use it. Cannot skip additional income – very hard rebuilding after pandemic.	
4 A	New system needed to be integrated so customers can book hotel rooms. Own system was established with orders through website. New booking system – explained in social media posts + flyers. Inviting locals or travellers from other country regions – best idea. Changes and opportunity will stay.	Pandemic showed, that it was hard to survive on tourists alone	Many different services that offer creation of booking systems. Very easy to install – digitalization simplifies many things.		After restrictions lifted, many services came back (like spa services), so now it was resort. Unique idea may become integrated into our hotel, if attracts people. Locals always close.	Hotel industry – digitalized. Booking.com used for many years. Booking.com not suitable for local audiences and customers, mainly suitable for tourists. Focus on foreign market, while really effective – too narrow.
1 B		Digital process Didn't like applications before – now appreciate them more, because convenience. Still go out to eat, but sometimes use applications.	Digital process – very easy. Applications constructed in such a way – anyone can understand them: children, elders etc. Processes very similar in different applications. Really easy to find restaurants you want. Checking prices, ratings, menu items, ingredients, time to deliver etc. very easy, convenient. Process simplified. Convenience	Decisions done often on a whim. See food in video/TV – instantly want to eat it too. Especially burgers. Hunger – affects mood heavily. After eating – happy, full of life. Laziness and dull life in pandemic – more junk food		Used applications before – know how to order
2 B		Ordering with few clicks, just select what you want, quantity, click to order, select your address and order will be at doorstep in 20 minutes. Everyone introduced to digital	Process of purchase – really easy now. Really fast, efficient, streamlined. Very convenient, don't even have to be on premises.	Decisions done on a whim. Pastry + coffee = daily occurrence, especially during lunch. Too lazy to cook		Previous experience with application helped

		purchasing now. "Honestly, this is a great trial purchasing stuff digitally. For everyone." Had to use applications.		sometimes, had to use applications. Flow of life – dull, sugar helps quite a lot.		
3 B		At first – scared, don't know where to click or how does it work, how do you pick up orders etc. After a while, you get hang of it. Family members helped out	Process – really simple with application. It was very easy to switch to applications. Great solution to problem		Purchases were not done on whim. When feel lazy – order,	At first – scared
4 B		Generally, experience – nice. Easy, but very mediocre presentation	Info about how to book, where to book etc	"And about decision, it was done somewhat on a whim." COVID – terrible effect on mental health. "...slow and dull way of life..."		Not really exposed to purchasing hotel rooms. Had experience before – Booking.com, but this was new

Appendix 9. Customer loyalty analysis

	Programme inability	Loyalty appreciation	Loyalty aftermath	Loyalty creation
1 A	No real loyalty programme. No loyalty programme established before pandemic. During pandemic, no real way to establish it.		Not to say there are no loyal customers, but “There may be a few names, but mostly we have new arrivals and they ate at our place when it was convenient to them.” Repeating names. Loyal customers – great to see repeating names. Really inspiring.	Friends + family act as big loyal customers. During pandemic, loyal customers arrived through delivery applications. Special deals seen even bigger surge of customers.
2 A	Before COVID-19 people who subscribed to social media received discounts, but it wasn’t done often.	Vouchers. People who subscribed to social media received discounts. Loyal customers really helped us out – need to think of ways to reward them. Now, when café is open, we often thank them for what they did for us	Many became friends. COVID-19 showed “great family we’ve made here.” Staff started to appreciate customers more. Often see familiar names on application and order.	Loyalty programme established, but rudimentary. Before COVID-19, during physical interactions, people who subscribed to social.
3 A	During COVID-19 – loyalty system useless, no way for loyal customers to use these cards anymore	Loyal customers had plastic cards for discounts Had to depend heavily on Wolt coupons or similar discounts. Staff + management shows a lot of gratitude to loyal customers. After restrictions, old loyalty system came back + more benefits were added, like bigger discounts etc.	“Without them, we wouldn’t have lasted even several months, before we would have to close down.”	Before COVID-19 – great loyalty programme
4 A	Since no foreign customers could come at the time, loyalty programme had to suit local population. No loyal customers were gained during that period, that would keep coming back.	Discount opportunities for returning customers, emails for customers who have been to hotel before, asking them to come back. Loyalty programme for foreigners came back, when restrictions lifted. Many received offers.	Most loyalty opportunities never used, not many people came back after initial stay	Loyalty programme existed for years for hotel, targeting foreign customers. “We thought of several loyalty opportunities that could bring locals back.”
1 B	Friends used different applications, started using application called Huuva more. Eating at one place – boring. Prefer to try new places, was easy through application during pandemic.	Would you apply for loyalty programme if restaurant had one? If it gives discount – sure.	I can go eat there, but not loyal. Mixed feelings I am not really loyal.	Maybe somewhat loyal
2 B	No real opportunity for coupons, but sometimes discounts on food delivery apps.	Reminded of loyalty programme. Was part of it, sometimes used coupons, when could get hands on it	When restrictions lifted – first place visited: 2A establishment. Reminded of loyalty programme	Great pastry, great food, great care for quality and standard. Really friendly staff. “I really like their sweets, I couldn’t live without them.” Restaurant attitude and atmosphere also helped create good impressions.

3 B	Ate there every month before pandemic	Email notification, calling me back to hotel	We kept on eating there, helping out our friends. "Pandemic has hit everyone and we really wanted to help out and eat good food."	Loyal, because: great staff, great quality, great food, great atmosphere (before pandemic). A lot of memories with place
4 B	no time to really do it again		No wish to really come again, nice opportunity, it helped, but now – other things to do.	I was at hotel once, really hard to say loyal.

Appendix 10. Customer advocacy analysis

	Advocacy expression	Advocacy intention	Advocacy result
1 A	No real benefits for someone, who leaves reviews or something similar. Customer advocacy = left reviews, especially negative	“I’d rather listen to people who have something wrong with what I do, than those who agree with everything I do.” Initial idea from the start of restaurant – focus on negative + improve + do things better than others	Loyalty programme seems like best choice, had no time to think it through before. Loyalty programme mentioned in previous questions.
2 A	Several advocates. It’s great to have such loyal friends of the café come out and leave reviews for us!” Social media posts created about such big news. Others should also help us and we will try to reward them for it. Loyalty programme seems like best choice.		
3 A	We do not advocate for them, no real system in place to advocate for customers. Mostly loyal customer benefits with card. No other real way to reward for spreading word during pandemic.		Loyal customers get benefits for advocating, but they are not too different from loyal customers. Staff + management thankful, but no special rewards for that
4 A	Hotel has loyal customers, but many do not advocate. They may tell friends/close family, but nothing bigger. Sometimes, they leave good review		in general customer advocacy – not represented in hotel. Customer advocacy should be encouraged and rewarded – management will think about it.
1 B	I left good ratings on application when ordered food from there Not really loyal	Not really loyal, leave good ratings as a habit. Good rating for couriers + good rating for restaurant	I enjoyed food. Didn’t explain to them what liked, what disliked – hard through applications.
2 B	Advocated heavily for the café. Left nice comments on social media pages, under some posts. Before pandemic, left Google Review, telling people to come and eat in café. Told about the place to friends + family, who didn’t know about it	“This place was a huge part of my life before the pandemic and I couldn’t believe I wasn’t allowed there anymore.”	Decided to help, no need for reward. But 2A still decided to give discounts for help – really nice and appreciate the fact, that people repay in kind.
3 B	We often brought friends + family to eat there. Recommended to co-workers. During pandemic, kept recommending to friends, really wanted to help out our friend.	Sense of duty to restaurant, who kept feeding good food needed help. They helped us eat good food, we helped with trying to bring more people in.	Wasn’t done for any reward, happy to help just like that.
4 B	Left good review when I was going away. Told about experience to family.	Hotel gave questionnaire.	Didn’t advocate.

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