



# Analyzing the Economic Impact of COVID-19 on the Growth of Hospitality Industry in Rwanda: A Case of Radisson Blu Hotel and Kigali Convention Center

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*The general objective of the study was to assess the economic impact of COVID-19 to the growth of hotel industry in Rwanda. This study was guided by the following specific objectives: to assess the impact of COVID-19 to the employees' welfare, to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the development and to identify the impact of COVID-19 to the stakeholders at Radisson Blu Hotels and Convention Center. This research was descriptive. The total population was 150 people and the sample size was 60 respondents. The research used universal sampling technique for choosing the respondents. The main findings for first objective revealed that 62.8% of the respondents agreed that COVID-19 has caused the management to reduce the salaries and wages of employees. Also, 44.2% strongly agreed and 55.8% agreed that COVID-19 has decreased the employees' welfare. For the second objective, 41.9% of respondents strongly agreed and 58.1% agreed that COVID-19 affected the development by decreasing hotel occupancy rate, whereas 32.6% strongly agreed and 67.4% agreed that COVID-19 reduced the number of customers reflecting the reduction of revenues. On the last objective, 30.2% strongly agreed and 69.8% agreed that COVID-19 led to reduce the number of suppliers. So COVID-19 has affected negatively the growth of hotel sector. The hotels should look at different strategies that can help them to sort out the problems caused by COVID-19 pandemic.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Growth, Economic Impact, Hospitality Industry, Rwanda.

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the world's economy was shut down almost overnight. The pandemic has confronted the hospitality industry with an unprecedented challenge. Strategies to flatten the COVID-19 curve such as community lockdowns, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, travel and mobility restrictions have resulted in temporary closure of many hospitality businesses and significantly decreasing the demand for businesses that were allowed to continue to operate. As per an Oxford

economics study, Asia is expected to be the worst affected and data suggests the industry could take many months to recover. However, organization indicated that international tourists were down by 20% to 30% in 2020, when compared to 2019 (Yang, Zhang, Chen, 2020).

Disruptions to production, initially in Asia, have spread to supply chains across the world. All businesses, regardless of size, are facing serious challenges, especially those in the aviation, tourism and hospitality industries, with a real threat of significant declines in revenue, insolvencies and

job losses in specific sectors (Peeri, et.al, 2020). Sustaining business operations will be particularly difficult for small and medium enterprises. In India, the hotel sector is likely to be hit hard. Experts suggest that domestic hotel companies faced a weak Quarterly 4 of 2020 and a weaker Q1 FY21. March has borne the brunt of many large-scale cancellations across the corporate, MICE and leisure segments (Morawska, Cao, 2020).

In Europe, industry experts indicated that the effect upon the global hotel industry for 2020, the profit decline of 11-29%. The bars, cafés and hotels met with the emergency measures to limit the spread of the virus which so far has caused a serious impact for industry. Cancellations have risen by almost half which made the losses of 33% due to the emergency measures put in place by the government (Bakar, Rosbi, 2020). In China compared to 2019 figures, occupancy is down by as much as 68%. As China was the first market to deal with the corona virus, it is also the first to show signs of stabilization (Yu, Xu, Li, Kong, 2020). As per data, 87% percent of the country's hotels are now open and occupancy is beginning to rise. Hotels across the U.S. were experiencing unprecedented booking cancellations due to the pandemic, which eliminated up to four million posts (this accounts for 50% of all hotel jobs in America). The average occupancy in Italy was down by 96%; the United Kingdom was down by 67% (Tappe, Luhby, 2020).

In Africa, the impacts of COVID-19 on hospitality sector in Kenya were severe the staffs were asked to take annual leaves, probationers and contract employees were terminated, and banks were appealed for loan repayment deferments for making way to pay for the employees. Further the financial front of hotel stocks performance was acutely impacted during the same outbreak that triggered panic among shareholders and confirmed extreme fragility of the hotel businesses toward epidemics and also signaled at the ominous consequences of future outbreaks (Liberati, Altman, 2020).

In Rwanda, the Government policy on tourism encourages investors in the hotel sector to provide accommodation facilities matching international standards which not only makes tourists feel comfortable, but also accords them the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful natural resources that Rwanda has to offer. The hospitality industry in Rwanda has been focusing on standardization, in line with the East African Community's guidelines for grading and classification of hotels and other related service providers. Radisson Blu Hotels and Convention Center was also inaugurated in July with 292 rooms in Kigali in the middle 2016, this rapid pace of modern business improves the development of hotel sector. Hospitality is among the hardest hit due to fears of community spread through travel and group environments (Stanton, 2020). This study was guided by the following specific objectives: to assess the impact of COVID-19 to the employees' welfare, to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on the development and to identify the impact of COVID-19 to the stakeholders at Radisson Blu Hotels and Convention Center. The content

of the study concentrated on the impact of COVID-19 on the growth of hotel sector in Rwanda, the research was conducted in Kigali City, Gasabo District, Kimihurura sector, specifically at Radisson Blu Hotels and Convention Center. This study covered information of 2 years from 2020 to 2021.

## **2. Literature Review**

A review of existing literature focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the growth of hospitality industry. In this section, the researcher formulates literature review in line of specific objectives.

### **2.1 The Impact of COVID-19 to the employees' welfare in hotel sector**

COVID-19 has far-reaching impacts on labour market outcomes. Beyond the urgent concerns about the health of workers and their families, the virus and the subsequent economic shocks impact the world of work across three key dimensions: 1) The quantity of jobs (both unemployment and underemployment); 2) The quality of work (e.g. wages and access to social protection); and 3) Effects on specific groups who are more vulnerable to adverse labour market outcomes. Initial ILO estimates point to a significant rise in unemployment and underemployment in the wake of the virus and based on different scenarios for the impact of COVID-19 on global GDP growth, there is a rise in global unemployment of around 5.3 million though direct contract termination and employee rotation, (Barrows, Gallo, Mulleady, 2020). Underemployment was increase on a large scale and the shock to labour demand was likely to translate into significant downward adjustments to wages and working hours. While self-employment does not typically react to economic downturns, it acts as a "default" option for survival or maintaining income - often in the informal economy and (Gosling, Scott, Hall, 2020). In additional 8.8 million people in working poverty around the world than originally estimated (i.e. an overall decline of 5.2 million working poor in 2020 compared to a decline of 14 million estimated preCOVID-19) (Leung, Lam, 2020).

### **2.2 The impact of COVID-19 on the development of hotel sector**

The COVID-19 presents an unprecedented case before all the sectors, in that the reduced demand and revenues are obvious consequences, which can resonate with the previous crises that also had detrimental effects. Businesses, large or small, face the dilemma to continue to pay employees in the event of reduced demand. Especially in the case COVID-19, impacts would arguably be damaging for the industry (Gosling, et al., 2020). Massive job loss and weakened contribution of the sector to the GDP is imminent, and calls of bailout are rising. While the sector is known to be prone to sporadic crises and economic crests and troughs owing to the seasonal

variations, the effects of the current pandemic are yet to be abundantly realized. The virus has had a visible effect on some aspects of everyday life in some parts of the country. The authorities have imposed unprecedented travel restrictions and many local areas such as railway, road and air travel and retail, tourism and entertainment activity and hospitality activities (Bharwani, Mathews, 2020). Hospitality businesses are expected to make substantial changes to their operations in the COVID-19 business environment in order to ensure employees' and customers' health and safety, and enhance customers' willingness to patronize their business (Gössling et al., 2020). This pandemic is also likely to have a significant impact on the research agenda of hospitality marketing and management scholars. With unprecedented challenges faced by the hospitality industry in the COVID-10 era, hospitality scholars are expected to shift their research focus to develop solutions for the industry. The revenue generation of hotel sector reduces due to the decrease of customers and travelers. According to Chien, Law (2020) a large portion of individuals (over 50%) are not willing to dine in at a restaurant immediately. De Sausmarez(2020) suggested that customers in general still do not feel comfortable to dine in at a sit down restaurant, travel to a destination and stay at a hotel. Since the breakeven point in the hospitality industry is relatively high due to high operating costs, the survival of many hospitality businesses heavily depends on increasing the demand for their services and products.

## **2.3 The impact of COVID-19 to the stakeholders of hotel sector**

The private sector was active in recent years building hotels and restaurants, tour guide and travel agencies while local communities benefited from this sector directly or indirectly through jobs in hospitality, small businesses in food, agriculture, transportation, culture and crafts; conservation and anti-poaching initiatives (Dimitropoulos, 2020). Since the beginning of March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was manifested in Rwanda resulting in the taking of serious preventive measures such as in and out travel restrictions, suspended events and flights. According to the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) report, Rwanda tourism sector experienced huge losses estimated at about \$7.6 million in tourism and hospitality industry, while at least 3,888 employees in the sector have been temporally laid off (Bretag, 2020).

Some of the measures being taken by the Rwandan government to bounce back tourism sector after COVID-19 crisis include the promotion of domestic tourism, establishment of heavy promotions to attract international tourists, and negotiation for credit incentives for the private sector. This will serve as a recovery fund, to help businesses, especially micro-, small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), entrepreneurs, and workers to adapt and thrive in a new post-crisis era, for example by fostering innovation and digital technologies that enable sustainable practices and seamless travel (Jauhari, 2020).

In line with the Rwandan government to support affected tourism businesses and livelihoods of those suddenly unemployed people; there is a need for more innovative and sustainable solutions that would help bounce back those businesses, create jobs, at the same time facilitating the achievement of sustainable and green economic development (Konarasinghe, 2020). Therefore, schemes to engage workers and support industries through capacity building; re-purposing skills development and providing income to sustain people and economies can help reduce COVID-19 impacts in Rwanda (Yang, Henthorne, George, 2020). The hotel stakeholders set up various businesses and establishments by generating employment in the economy, this is a major contribution that an employer provides to the community such as to hire the employees, paying tax.

Further, the most common benefit that come to mind when thinking about hotel, is job creation. In the process of creating new companies and opening new businesses, hotel owners require assistance from others. This means they will hire people with the required skills, therefore creating many jobs in the community (Kabote, 2015). In turn, job creation means that the economy will also improve at the same time. This is true because the more jobs there are, the more money people have to spend, and the more other businesses benefit in return. However, the COVID -19 stopped the benefit obtained by the public community both social and economic.

Hotels are important in economic growth by providing the facilities for recreation and entertainment, meeting and conferences and business transmission. Hotels contribute to the output of goods and related services which build well-being of their nations and communities. Visitors spend on hotels and contribute to the local economies directly and indirectly (Kim, Chun, Lee, 2016). When foreign visitors avail the facilities of these hotels, the foreign currency is earned through the visitor's payments. Hospitality industry becomes the source of employment, especially. for the entry job levels and management. Thousands of jobs are provided to locals as well as foreigners by these hotels in its different occupations. Hotels are also an alternative source for the locals as facilities.

## **3. Methodology**

For the present study, the research design was a descriptive research design. This type of design was used because data was obtained at a single point in time. The target population was 50 staff of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. Since the number of populations was small, the researcher applied universal sampling technique to have a sample size of 50 staff. In this study both primary and secondary data was used. In this research, researcher used the following techniques: documentation technique, interview and questionnaire as tools for data collection. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and interview guide for data collection in order to complete and increase the reliability of data

collected. Secondary data sources are the foundation for which the theoretical framework of the research is built. Relevant literature from existing studies and reports and websites were contacted for obtaining the necessary information. Editing was done to check the completed responses with purposes of detecting and eliminating errors and identifying vital information that was essential in coding and tabulation. Coding was done according to whether or not the response was a representative of the objective of the study and realistic to the subject matter. While tabulation involved mainly the use of simple statistical techniques like use of tables and percentages to test significance of the information from which meaning interpretation was drawn. The researcher used descriptive statistical such as frequency and Percentage to analyze the data. The findings were presented in a logical and sequential way so that conclusions can be drawn from them. The data was presented according to research questions and research objectives. Tables were used to present data. In this perspective, ahead of designing the final questionnaire, the researcher conducted a pilot test to predict accurately the effectiveness of survey instruments by submitting the questionnaire to the supervisor before final submission in order to express his views on the questions raised. This was done to verify clarity of questions set in the questionnaire. In this regard, the researcher in carrying out his research, he considered the research ethics so that the selected respondents participated in the research willingly, and with a sense of security. Before submitting the questionnaire, firstly, the participants were explained on the objectives of the research so that they participated willingly. Further, the names and other personal identifications of respondents were not mentioned on the questionnaires, for the confidentiality purposes.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 The impact of COVID-19 to the employees' welfare at Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center

The following tables summarize information related to the impact of COVID-19 to the employees' welfare at Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. Furthermore, the following findings are supported by another research by (Dolores M et. al, 2020) who noted that it was further identified that about 80% of the respondents had their salaries reduced, and that work schedules and working hours were altered, particularly during the lockdown and closure of the country's borders.

**Table 1: COVID-19 has caused employees to lose their employment at Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	14	32.6
Agree	23	53.5
Disagree	6	13.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The researcher was interested to know whether COVID-19 has caused employees to lose their employment at Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. The findings showed that 32.6% strongly agree and 53.5% agree while 13.9% disagree. Due to COVID-19 some employees' employment contracts were suspended due to the decreasing of customers hosted by hotel since the pandemic started which stopped international travels.

**Table 2: COVID-19 has caused the management of Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center to reduce the salaries and wages of employees.**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	16	37.2
Agree	27	62.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings indicated that 37.2% and 62.8% strongly agree and agree, respectively that COVID-19 has caused the management of Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center to reduce the salaries and wages of employees. The management of hotel opted to reduce salaries of employees as one measure of covering financial issue caused by pandemic where employees are working in rotational shifts and wages are paid according the number of days worked.

**Table 3: COVID-19 has affected employees of Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center due to the temporary termination of their employment contracts**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	15	34.9
Agree	20	46.5
Disagreed	8	18.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The researcher sought to find out whether COVID-19 has affected employees of Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center due to the temporary termination of their employment contracts; the result indicated that 34.9% of respondents strongly agree and 46.5% agree while 18.6% of respondents disagreed. It's been a year since covid-19 started, where employee contracts were not extended for those employees, their contracts were terminated.

**Table 4: COVID-19 has decreased the employees 'welfare at Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	19	44.2
Agree	24	55.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 above revealed that 55.8% and 44.2% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed COVID-19 had decreased the employees 'welfare at Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. Regarding these findings, the researcher indicated that employees' benefits were reduced as a result of losing employment which led to the reduction of salary and lack of work stability.

**Table 5: COVID-19 has raised fear and job insecurity among employees at Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	12	27.9
Agree	26	60.5
Disagree	5	11.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The researcher was interested in knowing whether COVID-19 had raised fear and job insecurity among employees at Radisson Blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. The findings stated that 60.5% of respondents agreed and 27.9% of respondents strongly agreed. On the other hand, 11.6% of respondents disagreed. An employee may fear for their job when the business is not in profitable situation, particularly during periods of economic uncertainties which creates job dissatisfaction. It also decreased employees' well-being, reluctance to fully commit to the organization, demotivation, and decreased productivity and enhanced personal stress.

**4.2 The impact of COVID-19 on the development of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center**

The following tables summarize information related to the impact of COVID-19 on the development of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. Furthermore, the following findings are supported by another research by (Elaine Simon, 2020) who noted that with COVID-19 crisis progresses, the impact to the travel industry is nine times worse than 9/11, with forecasted occupancy rates for 2020 hitting record lows worse than rates in 1933 during the Great Depression.

**Table 6: COVID-19 affected the development of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center by decreasing hotel occupancy rate**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	18	41.9
Agree	25	58.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The study asked whether COVID-19 affected the development of Kigali Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center by decreasing hotel occupancy rate. The findings showed that majority of respondents agreed the statement at 58.1% followed by 41.9% strongly agreed. Since there's no demand to use hotel facilities during covid-19 pandemic period, the number of customers' visits hotel decreased.

**Table 7: COVID-19 reduced the number of customers reflecting the reduction of revenues at Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	14	32.6
Agree	29	67.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

According to the table 8 above, the respondents agreed that COVID-19 reduced the number of customers reflecting the reduction of revenues at Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center where 67.4% agreed and 32.6% strongly agreed the statement while 8.7% were not sure and 6.5% disagreed. Without customers, sales cannot be generated thus indicating loss to the business.

**Table 8: COVID-19 decreased the number of employment provided by Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	15	34.9
Agree	28	65.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings confirmed that COVID-19 reduced the number of employment provided by Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center where 65.1% of respondents agreed and 34.9% strongly agreed. The respondents explain that only less than 100 employees among 300 are on a rotational contract and this indicates a big reduction in the number of contracts.

**Table 9: COVID-19 has decreased the market share of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center due to the stopping of international movement of tourists**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	12	27.9
Agree	31	72.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The results indicated that 72.1% and 27.9% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Without the inflow of international flights, travel business is on its stand still thus causing loss in business for the Kigali Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center.

**Table 10: COVID-19 reduced the amount of money invested by Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center in infrastructure development**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	11	25.6
Agree	28	65.1
Disagree	4	9.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings showed that 65.1% of respondents agreed and 25.6% strongly agreed that Radisson blu hotel and Kigali convention center decreased the investment rate because of reduction in revenues while 9.3% disagreed this reduction of revenues by COVID-19's effects.

#### 4.3 The impact of COVID-19 to the stakeholders of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center.

This section indicated the impact of COVID-19 to the stakeholders of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. Furthermore, the following findings are supported by another research by (Brajesh Kumar K, et. al, 2020). Who noted that, Customers are preferred hotel type of stakeholders by 18% due to getting higher satisfaction standards?

**Table 11: COVID-19 led the Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center to reduce the number of suppliers who supply the hotel**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	13	30.2
Agree	30	69.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings indicated that 69.8% of respondents agreed and 30.2% strongly agreed that COVID-19 led the Kigali Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center to reduce the number of suppliers who supply to the hotel.

**Table 12: COVID-19 stopped the benefit obtained by the public community both social and economic from Kigali Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	15	34.9
Agree	26	60.5
Disagree	2	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings showed that 60.5% of respondents agreed and 34.9% strongly agreed that COVID-19 stopped the benefit obtained by the public community both social and economic from Kigali Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. However, 4.6% disagreed.

**Table 13: COVID-19 affected the services provided by Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center to the community**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	9	20.9
Agree	34	79.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

According to the table above 79.1% of respondents agreed and 20.9% strongly agreed that COVID-19 affected the services provided by Kigali Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center to the community.

**Table 14: COVID-19 declined the international tourists or guests accommodated by Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center.**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	12	27.9
Agree	31	72.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The study sought to find out that COVID-19 affected the international tourists or guests as the movements were

restricted. The following responses were revealed 72.1% agreed and 27.9% strongly agreed.

**Table 15: COVID-19 reduced the performance and creation of employment of surrounding business or people at Kigali Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	17	39.5
Agree	26	60.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings indicated 60.5% of respondents agreed and 39.5% strongly agreed that COVID-19 reduced performance and creation of employment of surrounding business or people at Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center.

#### 4.4 The findings from managers' interview of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center

The researcher conducted interview for managers of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. The responses are as follows:

During interview session with managers, they were asked the impacts of COVID-19 to the employees' welfare at Kigali Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center they responded that the Covid-19 has led to loss of jobs to Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center employees and this has caused damages in insurance and salaries which has affected so many families and individuals. It has also led to the low morale and regrets in career decisions where a number of employees already joined other functioning sectors. Further, employees who had other responsibilities including paying rent, tuition fees and others were highly affected and a number of them decided to go back to their villages as they were no longer able to cater for all those expenses.

Views on the impact of COVID-19 on the development of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention from respondents indicated that with no hotel reservations there's no revenue generation and this causes total product perishability. In addition, Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center cannot make any further investments as a result of Covid-19.

Views on the extent has COVID-19 impacted stakeholders of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center. The findings revealed that larger extent of covid-19 has impacted the stakeholders of Radisson blu hotel and Kigali Convention Center such as suppliers whose businesses experienced loss. In addition, companies that were

contracted to perform certain services were no longer needed because there were no guests and the hotel was unable to continue paying for those services such as entertainment groups. Also, stakeholders have negatively been impacted because they are not able to pay for their loans which has resulted into increased interest rate. Furthermore, a community activity that supports vulnerable groups has been stopped and this affected the wellbeing on those communities.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that COVID-19 pandemic has affected the growth of hospitality industry in different ways such as employees' welfare, hotel performance and stakeholders. As indicated by the findings whereas the employees lost their employments and their salaries were

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reduced, this has a significant negative effect on the employees and their families' welfare. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the performance of hotel has been affected negatively which affected all the development activities in this sector.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The hotels should look at different strategies that can help them to sort out the problems caused by COVID-19 pandemic such as using digital solution as the health professionals suggested to avoid reduction of customers and revenues. Hotels need to fight against corona virus and maintain health and safety to develop performance of employees by providing the regular trainings and the hotels have to retain their employees strategically in order to retain their customers.

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