

# Impact of COVID-19 on the global hospitality industry: a brief review of current academic literature and meta-analysis to determine primary qualitative themes

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this study is to examine the current literature pertaining to the impact of COVID-19 on the global hospitality industry. The research has a two-fold approach. First, a succinct examination of the literature highlights the significant negative effects of the pandemic on the multiple fields of hospitality. Second, a lexicological meta-analysis is completed with a relatively small sample of the current literature to find congruency of qualitative themes across the gleaned research. It is apparent that multiple instances of concentration are evident in the ongoing research. However, five primary themes were identified during the analysis. This study is beneficial as a “snapshot” of current research within the field and a starting point for more in-depth investigation to commence.

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19 impact, international hospitality commerce, inquiry, literature review

## Introduction

COVID-19 has reached epidemic proportions as the virus continues to evolve (McCallum et al., 2021; Sigal, 2022; Takashita et al., 2022) and mutate. The current pandemic has impacted most industries, economies and societies to a degree across the globe (Siddiqui, 2020). Hospitality fields of endeavour are feeling the burden of the onslaught as operations are disrupted while trying to navigate the ever-changing environment. As the virus is a hot topic which is on most people's minds, research in the academic arena has come to the forefront of interest, not only considering the mechanics of the disease, but its impact in various fields. Researchers are attempting and struggling to keep current as viral mutations continue to evolve, and its impact on societies and industries is constantly changing at a dramatic rate (Davahli et al., 2020; Haleem et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study is to formulate a general understanding of how the pandemic has affected the hospitality industry in a global context. Specifically, an understanding of the current research paths in the industry through the determination of investigation concentrations is desired as the research is relatively new. The current pandemic is modern, without any previous literature explicitly focused on a virus that did not exist until approximately three years previously.

An approach was deployed to search for significant current research concerning the impact of the virus on the hospitality industry. Current literature was captured and reviewed, and conclusions were drawn concerning the primary themes discovered across the articles analysed.

## Literature review

An approach to finding relevant hospitality industry academic literature was deployed with the use of keyword searches utilising Google Scholar and journal databases held in the electronic libraries of Lander University and New Mexico State University. Keywords included, and were not limited to *hospitality industry*, *covid*, *COVID-19*, *impact* and *pandemic*. Returns were relatively substantial in current literature as the impact of the virus has driven an overwhelming concentration on the subject. However, articles were chosen that specifically addressed the impact of the virus on the industry, were current within the past two years and realised relatively strong citations scores. Thirty-six articles were selected, reviewed and analysed for qualitative thematic congruency. The review highlights significant impact across multiple segments of the hospitality industry. The thematic congruency discovery through meta-analysis is discussed in the research methodology and summary sections.

## Hospitality industry generalisations

Across the hospitality industry, there is a significant loss of labour within the market (Baum et al., 2020) that are either not able to work, not willing to work, or have selected alternative fields of employment. This is not only a case for the hospitality industry, but is also evident across multiple trades. During the pandemic, there has also been a realised loss of customer or consumer demand (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). This is driven by the closure of establishments and patrons fearful of being out in public. The future of the hospitality industry as a whole is still uncertain. A

global recession is being realised (Crespí-Cladera et al., 2021) and its duration and long-term impact are still to be seen.

### ***Lockdown and impact***

Reviewing historical studies of previous epidemics, response to lockdown and impact are similar today as in the past (Kim et al., 2020). The current literature supports this fact; however, it also points out specific effects across multiple industry segments.

### ***Travel and tourism***

Travel and tourism are impacted by lockdowns negatively as much of the global travel segment of the industry was halted or significantly diminished. Many forms of travel including air, rail, bus and ship were frozen, and business and leisure travel were all but halted for a significant period. Without methods of transport, the tourism industry was crippled without a supply of potential customers (Quang et al., 2022) to patronise their offerings and locations. Significant decline and recession are evident not only in the travel industry, but in the destinations that are reliant on their support (Duarte Alonso et al., 2020).

### ***Food and beverages***

Food and beverages, while making some recovery as restrictions eased, faltered as the virus spread across the planet. Temporary closures from fine dining to fast-food were the norm during the early days of the pandemic (Dube et al., 2020). Many restaurants have yet to reopen, and when they do reopen, they are often restricted with limitations to capacity (Nhamo et al., 2020).

To coincide with this loss, food and beverage operations are also realising that as restrictions and limitations are lifted, pre-pandemic numbers are not being met as many customers have not returned (Gursoy et al., 2020). This could be based on a myriad of issues, including that potential consumers are afraid to venture out in public. Lack of available clientele is certainly problematic, however, when and if customers return, there is another caveat to consider. The supply chain providing everything from the simplest to the most complex foodstuffs has been severely crippled (Aday & Aday, 2020). Also, there is a significant lack of labour supply willing to meet the demand of a hungry public (Bucak & Yiğit, 2021).

Food and beverage business owners are facing possible dire consequences if circumstances do not improve soon as supply and demand are out of sync. During the pandemic, many consumers were also staying home and consuming increased amounts of alcohol (Barbosa et al., 2021; Biddle et al., 2020). These actions are possibly taking the "beer out of the hand" of local neighbourhood bars and restaurants.

A few positive realisations are of note concerning the food and beverage industry during the COVID-19 surge. As business owners were faced with diminished patronage, they made changes in their service offerings to supplement some of the lost income. There is an augmentation of alternative methods to sell their items (Jung et al., 2021). Increases in takeaways/takeouts, delivery, third-party transport and technology have propelled some owners beyond the possibilities of closing their operational doors (Hemington & Neill, 2022; Hoang & Suleri, 2021). An increase in health, sanitation and safety awareness and practices is also evident (de Freitas & Stedefeldt, 2020). Business owners are putting measures in place to not only make sure that their employees are practising appropriate measures to stay safe and healthy, but that they are also implementing these practices

with the potential consumer in mind. This is attractive to many patrons who are very wary of coming into contact with anything that may cause them to become sick.

### ***Accommodation***

Hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, hostels and resorts have closed, been restricted with availability and are dealing with uncertainty for the future. The lockdowns have caused a lack of potential clientele as well as a slowdown in available labour to meet demand. Some of the impact has been based on the negative sentiment of patrons that do not want to venture beyond the perceived safety of their homes and into a place they do not have control over safety (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). As a result, not only have small independent accommodation business owners closed their doors, many major hotels have followed suit (Rotondo, 2021), and over 700 000 rooms continue to be closed temporarily across the globe (Baker, 2021). The future of accommodations is uncertain, and recovery is beginning to take place as restrictions are lifted. However, the realised recuperation is slow.

### ***Entertainment and recreation***

Theatres, amusement parks, live music venues and other entertainment settings were closed and/or limited during the pandemic. Limited recovery is just now being accomplished as concerts, live theatre, movie venues and amusement parks are beginning limited operations in most areas. However, many are recovering well as most restrictions have been lifted in certain locations and people are eager to get back to some sort of normalcy.

Gaming venues, including race tracks, general sports gambling establishments and casinos were closed and these destinations have declined to a degree (Ho, 2020). Because the gambling adoring public was not able to get their "fix", an increase in online gambling (Emond et al., 2021) was evident during the early days of the pandemic. Some traditional gaming institutions were able to take advantage of this new opportunity. However, gambling destinations have a long road to recovery, and this segment of the hospitality industry is seeing one of the slowest improvement rates (Ho, 2020).

### ***Future and recovery***

The hospitality industry is reeling with uncertainty as the future impact of the virus is unknown. The virus continues to mutate, and forecasting the reliability of how industries will cope is unclear (Chen et al., 2021). However, while all the negativity associated with the impact of the virus is evident, recovery is becoming more promising as travel bans and restrictions are slowly easing (Coutaux, 2021). As restrictions are lifted, however, uncertainty with labour force supply sustainability is becoming evident (Shigihara, 2020). If changes are not made to supply chain, health and safety, technology and labour offerings, the future might not be as bright as some hope.

### ***Methodology***

The purpose of this study is to review the current academic literature considering how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the hospitality industry on a global scale. To coincide with a review to garner a succinct understanding of the subject, a concise meta-analysis was performed to uncover the main qualitative themes in the articles reviewed. A rigorous search and data analysis of the literature was performed.

**Data collection**

A search started for academic literature that focused on the impact of COVID-19 in the global hospitality industry. Google Scholar and electronic libraries from public universities were searched for relevant information concerning the subject. Thirty-six scholarly articles were selected for analysis based on publication dates within a relative timeframe of three to four years maximum and high citation scores. The articles were organised into a Mendeley reference library repository for ease of association and analysis. The articles were reviewed and analysed using qualitative assessment software. MAXQDA2020 qualitative research suite was used to organise the articles, facilitate lexical searches and manually code the thematic instances. The papers were all from publications that are considered academic research journals in the hospitality industry field with significant citation scores.

**Data analysis**

Documents were reviewed for content, rigour and relevancy about the impact of the current pandemic on the global hospitality industry. Using the MAXQDA2020 qualitative research suite, a lexical search was employed to determine the emerging similar qualitative themes. The analysis uncovered multiple themes, over 30, that were identified in the literature. However, a succinct account of the top five themes is presented here.

**Results**

**Themes**

Over 30 substantial qualitative themes were discovered during qualitative analysis. Five themes are predominant through frequency and are applicable for discussion. Table 1 is a list of the top five themes.

**Sustainability**

Sustainability, with 290 instances, is the foremost qualitative realisation in the data analysis. A realised lack of sustainability in an operational context in the industry and the development of sustainability were both identified. The texts present concern for the future of the industry if sustainability is not developed in time for survival and the ability to cope with sustainability ambiguity is evident. A sample of excerpts is found in Table 2.

**Health**

Health (*n* = 267) is also a primary concern in the industry. Health is not only a concern of employees, but for the public. Samples of instances are illustrated in Table 3.

**Financial impact**

As a capitalistic industry, the ability to make money is a foremost concern for businesses. The financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was evident in the literature with 244 discovered instances. Text extracts from the literature are illustrated in Table 4.

TABLE 1: Top thematic instances (*N* = 36)

Thematic code	Number of instances	Number of documents
Sustainability	290	18
Health	267	23
Financial impact	244	20
Employee	216	18
Safety	186	17

**Employees and employment**

Impact on the employment sector is evident in the literature, with 180 text excerpts found. Samples of these instances are illustrated in Table 5.

**Safety**

Safety of employees and the public were found as qualities in 155 coded segments. Samples of these are illustrated in Table 6.

**Thematic similarities**

This is a brief sample study of the current literature. However, harmony within a small sample (*n* = 36) of the literature is evident. Thirty-six journal articles concerning the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a particular segment of the world economy were found to have similar themes. Not only were the themes similar in context, but they also illustrated rigour with the number

TABLE 2: Sustainability

Source	Text extract
(Jones & Comfort, 2020, p. 3037)	"dramatic effect the crisis has had on sustainability in the hospitality industry"
(Jung et al., 2021, p. 2)	"COVID-19 poses both threats and opportunities to the sustainability of the foodservice industry"
(McCartney et al., 2022, p. 61)	"sustain tourism recovery"
(Haleem et al., 2020, p. 1524)	"are finding it difficult to sustain"

TABLE 3: Health

Source	Text extract
(Wiitala & Mistry, 2022, p. 61)	"impacted employees' mental health"
(Haleem et al., 2020, p. 1526)	"COVID-19 pandemic is a public health emergency"
(Emond et al., 2021, p. 9)	"activities during lockdown for men and that women who were shielding for health reasons"
(Ho, 2020, p. 563)	"striking a careful balance between public health and economic needs"

TABLE 4: Financial impact

Source	Text extract
(Siddiqui, 2020, p. 26)	"they worry about their finances and their employment"
(Duarte Alonso et al., 2020, p. 8)	"devastating impacts on the financial health of the business"
(Nhamo et al., 2020, p. 205)	"This led to substantial financial losses"
(Emond et al., 2021, p. 8)	"financial hardship"

TABLE 5: Employees and employment

Source	Text extract
(Dube et al., 2020, p. 1487)	"unprecedented loss of employment"
(Baum et al., 2020, p. 2813)	"regard to responses to crises and their impact on employment in hospitality"
(Shigihara, 2020, p. 30)	"employee layoffs"
(Aday & Aday, 2020, p. 168)	"the health and safety of employees"

TABLE 6: Safety

Source	Text extract
(de Freitas & Stedefeldt, 2020, p. 1)	"responding to the pandemic in terms of the safety of food production"
(Kim et al., 2021, p. 423)	"safety food message framing as a survival strategy for small independent restaurants"
(Davahli et al., 2020, p. 9)	"following recommended safety guidelines and"
(Coutaux, 2021, p. 1)	"safety concerns ease and business travel improves"

of top themes evident in the number of "hits" or "instances" realised. While these findings are not necessarily groundbreaking research, it can be assumed that congruency can be found with other research articles as they continue to be written. The congruency of the top themes is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Impressions**

Much research has been recently conducted concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the hospitality industry. It is also of note that there are few research articles available that compare and contrast similar themes in the field about the subject. Because of this fact, the study can provide a "snapshot" or a small sample of current literature to possibly base opinion

upon concerning the influence of the disease on a particular industry. The pandemic has raised awareness of safety, health and instability for hospitality entities. Overall, the effects of the pandemic have been negative; however, through analysis of current literature areas of opportunity are evident. Scholars and practitioners may take note of where the concentration of current research lies and be able to adjust study efforts to address any potential gaps in the field. This study provides support of thematic similarity from a small sample of current hospitality industry literature addressing the impact of COVID-19. Furthermore, it adds a succinct review and comparison of the current knowledge to support possible needs of future research as this type of analysis gap exists.

**Future research**

This project is a snapshot of current literature on the subject of COVID-19's impact on the hospitality industry. Further research could include a longer linear observation of literature as it continues to evolve. Furthermore, the research could include a larger sample of literature across more diverse subjects in the field of the hospitality industry. Additional types of research in the industry could include surveys, global and regional economic impacts and addressing wider social issues concerning the pandemic. With additional insights, the research will become more robust and assist more practitioners and scholars in the field.

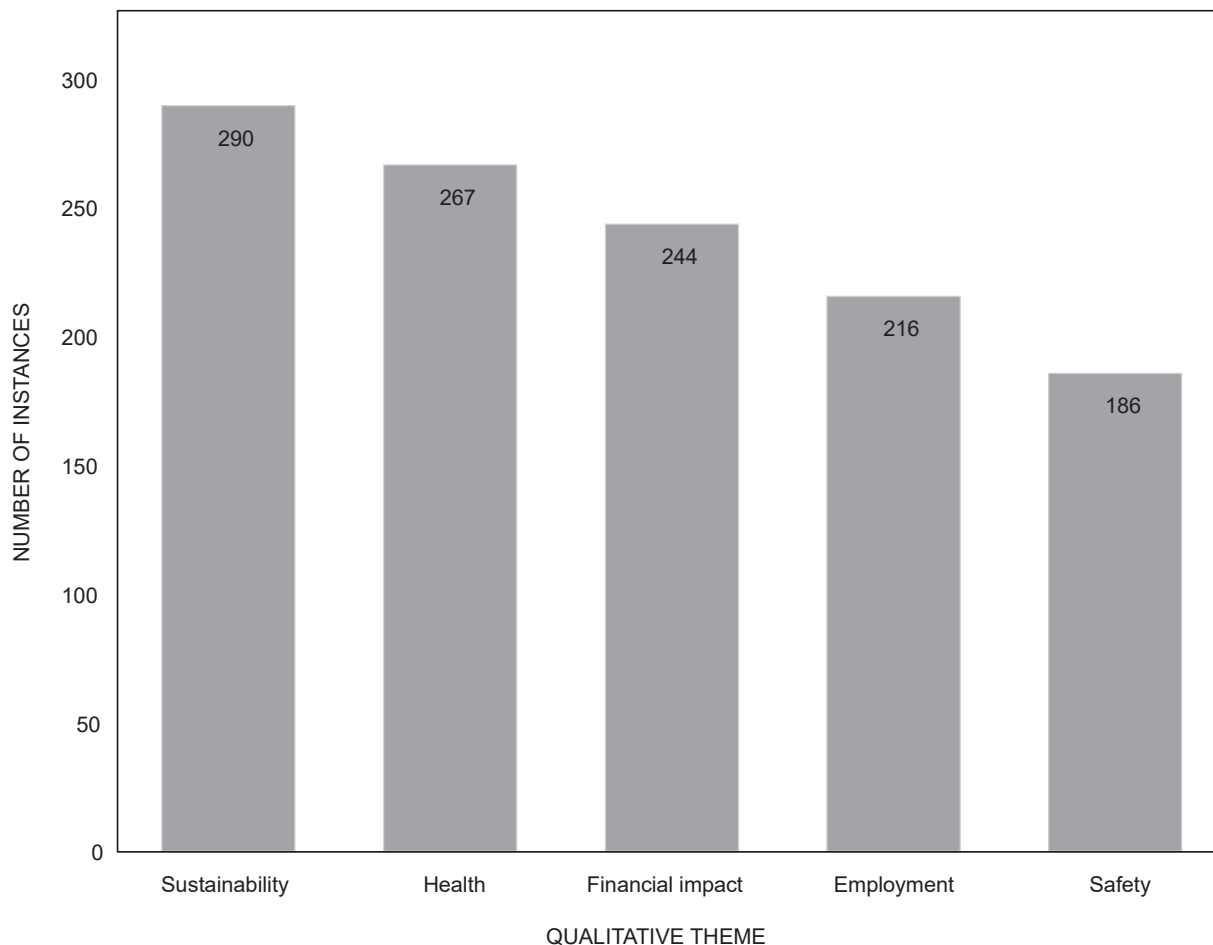


FIGURE 1: The five themes that were found to be prominent in 36 academic journal articles

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