

## Examination of complaints during the pandemic process: A research on five-star hotels operating in Antalya

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### Abstract

Hotel businesses, which have obtained a safe tourism certificate by performing these mandatory practices, have made efforts to meet the expectations of their guests and to satisfy them. Understanding the elements that do not satisfy the guests and underlie the issues that cause complaints is thus important. In this regard, this study aims to identify the complaint elements based on comments. To that end, it analyzes the comments on the "TripAdvisor" site from 01.05.2020 to 01.01.2021 made by the guests of five-star hotel businesses that continue their activities in the coastal areas of Antalya province by obtaining a "safe tourism certificate". A total of 5.949 comments are examined using the descriptive analysis method. The complaints are grouped under four categories as "guest-related", "management-related", "cleaning-related" and "service-related". Considering these complaints, this study suggests that the legal authorities need to perform more inspections and that the hotel managers need to frequently supervise the practices in the hotel.

**Keywords:** Complaint behavior, Complaint factors, Safe tourism, Tripadvisor

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### 1. Introduction

The spread of Covid-19 all over the world since 2020, has hit many sectors. The tourism sector has been one of the most affected sectors due to the closure of borders, the ban on flights and other restrictions in everyday life caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. From the perspective of the tourism sector, which already suffers from flexible demands, most of the year 2020 could be considered lost revenue. During the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, when the number of cases decreased, the measures taken were eased; efforts were made to revitalize domestic tourism. In this period, one of the key measures taken for the hotel businesses to continue providing their services is the requirement of obtaining a "safe tourism certificate". Through the requirement of safe tourism certificate, hotel businesses attempted to increase the satisfaction levels of their guests by offering safe holiday services to them during the pandemic period. It can be argued that the greatest expectation of the guests during the pandemic period is "safety" in terms of health.

With the safe tourism certificate being made mandatory, hotel businesses now undergo "mandatory practices" (procedures and protocols regarding the hygiene of the facilities,

social distance and disinfectant, training and follow-up of staff, information signs for staff and guests, ventilation, necessary measurements for staff and guests, etc.), "practices related to check-in process" (informing guests about the measures taken and other measures to reduce physical contact between the staff and guests) and "precautions and practices for staff" (providing them protective equipment and explaining how to use, training staff and providing them psychological support, informing them about the social distance rule), "arrangements in public areas" (bedrooms, kitchens, food and beverage units, swimming pools and beaches, fitness centers and SPA, animation centers and some measures for mini club), "security", "hotel vehicles", "staff accommodation units and lodgings", "waste management", "purchasing, acceptance and storage", "regulations on sign boards, logo, certificate and QR code" (TGA, 2020).

There are many regulations that hotel businesses must follow for the health of their guests before and after obtaining a safe tourism certificate. It can be said that individuals, who spend their holidays in hotel businesses that obtain a safe tourism certificate, desire to feel safer than other seasons and have higher expectations in terms of health and

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safety. It is not surprising that guests whose expectations are not met or who do not meet the promised service standards leave the facilities unsatisfied. Dissatisfied guests are likely to follow the complaint path. Complaining guests expect facilities to compensate this; making good use of this also means an opportunity for facilities to organize their activities.

This study examines the comments on the “TripAdvisor” site by the guests of the five-star hotel businesses that operate in the coastal regions of Antalya with the “safe tourism certificate”. The aim of this study is to reveal the complaint elements through comments. This study is of particular importance in that it determines the issues that hotel businesses should pay attention and evaluates the complaint elements. This study thus presents the theoretical framework including related studies. Afterwards, it offers information on the participants, the data collection and analysis process, and the analysis method used under the “methodology” section. The “findings” section presents some remarks on the analysis and complaint elements. This study concludes with the “conclusion” section, which includes the theoretical and practical implications.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Customer satisfaction is essential for businesses operating in all sectors. To achieve customer satisfaction, the products or services offered must meet or exceed customer expectations (Oliver, 1987). The main purpose of ensuring customer satisfaction is perhaps to create loyal customers. With loyal customers, it may be possible for businesses to achieve their goals such as providing competitive advantage, increasing profitability, and becoming a market leader. Nowadays, various factors including the increase in the number of businesses, the awareness of consumers, and the increasing uncertainty of the environment continue to trigger competition. That said, it is critical for businesses to fully deliver the product or service they promise and to meet the expectations of consumers under difficult market conditions. Satisfaction levels may also be affected when consumers focus on the difference between the product or service offered and the price incurred, or compare their past experiences with the current experience (Boote, 1998). Consumers who are not satisfied with the product or service are likely to follow the “complaint” path. Complaint can be defined as the cognitive and emotional struggle that consumers engage in during the process (before, during and/or after consumption), to show their dissatisfaction or to get back the price they have incurred (Dalgıç, Güler & Birdir, 2016).

Customer complaints are important opportunities for businesses to regulate their operational activities, increase the quality of the products or services they offer, and take precautions against future problems that may arise. Consumers can seek compensation by showing their complaints through different behaviors. Proposing the first complaint model for consumers, Hirschman differentiated between complaint behaviors: “loyalty (no action)”, “voice” and

“exit”. “Voice” refers to the situation of seeking compensation; “exit” is when consumers do not revisit the business and seek different ones (Ro & Mattila, 2008). In another complaint behavior model, Day and Landon, put forth another classification as “public action” (voicing and/or complaining to third parties) and “private action” (negative word of mouth and/or exit) (Ro & Mattila, 2008). Also, Singh (1988) classified consumer behaviors as “voice responses”, “private responses” (abandonment and/or negative word of mouth) and “third party responses” (complaining to private and/or public institutions).

In another classification of complaint behaviors, Susskind (2004) distinguished between “face to face” (employees and/or managers) and “written complaints” (complaint cards, mail, Internet, etc.). Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) grouped the complaint behaviors under three categories as “loyalty (no action)”, “indirect response” (negative word of mouth and/or exit) and “direct response” (complaint to business and/or complaint to third parties). Similarly, Kim, Wang, and Mattila (2010) examined consumer complaint behaviors in four categories: “loyalty (no action)”, “negative word of mouth”, “complaining to third parties” and “voice”. Further, Berry, Tanford, Montgomery, and Green (2018) found that complaining behaviors are often exhibited as “voice response after the event”, “talking to managers” and “negative word of mouth”. Berry et al. (2018) further stated that consumers often write about their negative experiences on social media and websites on the Internet.

Recent research on the complaint elements in hotel businesses show that complaints related to cleaning are the most notable complaints (Ayyıldız Yazıcı & Baykal, 2020; Davras & Durgun, 2021; Doğancılı, Karaçar & Ak, 2019; Efendi, 2021; Geranaz & Yetgin, 2021; Keskin, Bilgiç & Yazıcı Ayyıldız, 2021; Kızıldemir, Ibiş & Çöp, 2019; Zengin & Haliloğlu, 2020). Cleaning-related complaints are followed by those on the food and beverage units. In particular, the guests complained about the lack of product variety, product quality, delay in the food service, and food being tasteless (Ayyıldız Yazıcı & Baykal, 2020; Doğancılı et al., 2019; Efendi, 2021; Geranaz & Yetgin, 2021; Güllü & Akçay, 2021; Keskin et al., 2021; Kızıldemir et al., 2019; Zengin & Haliloğlu, 2020). Lastly, after cleaning and food and beverage, the most complained element is about staff. The highest number of complaints in this category are made on the attitudes and behaviors of staff (Ayyıldız Yazıcı & Baykal, 2020; Doğancılı et al., 2019; Güllü & Akçay, 2021; Kızıldemir et al., 2019; Zengin & Haliloğlu, 2020).

Examining the customer comments made on the Internet for the five-star hotel businesses operating in Afyonkarahisar, Kızıldemir et al. (2019) aimed to determine the complaint elements. They looked into 2.868 comments and analyzed 1.004 of them using content analysis technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods. They concluded that the highest number of complaints about hotel businesses are about rooms (dirtiness and sound-noise, etc.), food and beverage (lack of variety, low quality, and hygiene,

etc.), service quality (poor service and Internet connection problem, etc.), staff (behavior, attitude, communication, and indifference, etc.) and cleanliness (pool and towels). They argued that five-star hotels operating in Afyonkarahisar need to increase the variety of breakfast and other meals, value food quality and pay attention to hygiene. In another study, Doğancılı et al. (2019) examined the positive and negative comments of hotel businesses in the Lakes Region on TripAdvisor. They revealed that the most discussed positive elements included staff, cleaning and food, while the negative elements included cleaning, staff, and food.

Ayyıldız Yazıcı and Baykal (2020), in their study, aimed to categorize the online complaints made by hotel guests and to determine the most common complaints by the nationality and travel type of hotel guests. They analyzed 424 complaint comments on the “TripAdvisor” website about 15 five-star hotels operating in Kuşadası by content analysis. They ascertained that e-complaints made by hotel guests about hotel businesses could be categorized under 11 headings. The categories that had the highest number of complaints are respectively as follows: general (over crowdedness, service quality, maintenance of equipment in common areas and price-benefit balance, etc.), food and beverage (food taste and variety, beverage and food quality, etc.), cleaning (room cleaning, cleaning of common areas and sea and beach maintenance etc.), staff (attitude and competence etc.) and room (lack of room equipment and materials, maintenance of equipment in rooms and comfort etc.). They concluded that the highest number of complaints were made on the attitude of the staff, food taste and variety, and room cleaning, respectively.

Zengin and Haliloğlu (2020) examined e-complaints about hotel businesses to group the complaints into dimensions, to find the elements that are common in complaints and to bring solutions to them, and to determine the response rates of the businesses to these complaints. They identified eight main and 48 sub-categories based on 305 e-complaints about hotel businesses in Sakarya on the websites of Şikayetvar and TripAdvisor using the qualitative analysis method. The researchers analyzed hotel businesses by the number of stars and ascertained that the majority of the complaints were made on five-star hotels. Most complaints in the main complaint category were about the facilities of the hotel, management policy whereas price practices, staff behavior and attitudes were the most common complaints in the sub-categories. They further reported that the complaints about rooms, restaurants and food and beverage were primarily related to cleanliness and hygiene. Lastly, they focused on the issues about which hotel businesses receive the most complaints and emphasized the need to overcome these complaints. They suggested that following up e-complaints and developing quick suggestions to customers would help hotel businesses increase the prestige of the business as well as achieve customer satisfaction.

Kırıcı Tekeli and Tekeli (2021) intended to evaluate the e-complaints aimed at increasing the service quality of the

hotels operating in Sarıkamış district of the city of Kars. They assessed a total of 127 customer comments on “TripAdvisor”, one of the important travel websites. The researchers determined that the complaints of tourists were about concrete aspects (crowded lobby, need for restoration, lack of repair and maintenance of rooms, etc.), reliability (poor food quality and poor service delivery, etc.), prompt service (failure to deal with problems promptly, lack of solution and lack of staff indifference, etc.), trust (lack of staff communication and training) and empathy (lack of behaviors aiming customer satisfaction and behavior disorder towards children). In another study, Avcı and Bardakoğlu (2021) explored the negative holiday experiences of domestic tourists who purchased services from hotel businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic. They analyzed 5.108 online reviews on TripAdvisor, covering the 2020 (January-December) pandemic period, using the content analysis technique. They first divided the data into two main dimensions as positive (4.401) and negative (707). Then, the negative comments were examined considering the main purpose of this study and the findings were gathered under six themes: non-compliance with the pandemic rules by the business, non-compliance with the pandemic rules by the guests, reducing the service quality by using the pandemic rules as an excuse, increase in service prices due to the pandemic, ignoring the complaints by the business and impact of the pandemic period on employee behavior.

The findings from the thorough examination of real consumer comments show that the aspects that consumers pay the most attention were as follows: Contactless check-in and check-out processes committed by hotel businesses via the TripAdvisor website, leaving the room empty between guests for 24 hours after check-out, disinfection of towels and sheets by washing them on high temperatures, offering disposable and packaged hygiene kits in the rooms, the mandatory mask-wearing rule in common areas, social distance marking of the hotel floors, availability of disinfectants at various points of the facility, performing frequent disinfections, directing the staff to wash their hands, temperature testing of staff. In the light of the findings, the researchers suggested that it is necessary to consider the consumer comments that describe their experiences as negative, to develop solutions-oriented behaviors, and made further suggestions on the survival of the businesses.

Efendi (2021) probed into the complaints received by small-scale hotel businesses on the Internet. He used the complaints made on the “TripAdvisor” for 85 small-scale hotel businesses in Çeşme, one of the tourist destinations in Turkey. Analyzing 120 comments, he reported the most complained issues as follows: cleaning of rooms and public areas, old, small, and useless bathrooms, poor quality and worn furniture in the rooms and lack of variety of products used in food and beverage areas. In conclusion, Efendi (2021), suggested that the facility managers should pay attention to the cleanliness of the common areas and rooms, and that useless material should be renewed. In another

study, Keskin et al. (2021) categorized the online complaints made by the guests about the five-star hotel businesses operating in the Covid-19 process in Kuşadası to determine the most common aspects of the complaints. To that end, they analyzed 306 e-complaint comments on the “TripAdvisor” website on a total of 11 five-star hotels operating in Kuşadası by content analysis. They found that the most common complaints were about the rooms (cleanliness, worn and small bathrooms, old furniture and broken electronic equipment, etc.), food and beverage (product quality, delayed service and variety, etc.) and overall aspects of the hotel (cleaning of common areas, elevators and room service, etc.). They concluded that hotels should prioritize the cleanliness of the rooms, food and beverage quality and hygiene.

Güllü and Akçay (2021), in order to contribute to the awareness of hotel businesses about e-complaints during the Covid-19 pandemic, categorized the e-complaints made by the guests of the hotel businesses operating on a global scale to determine the e-complaints of the hotel guests in the Covid-19 process. They focused on 366 e-complaint comments of hotel guests in Antalya, Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Muğla on the top 10 hotels in the Hospitality ON-2019 list operating in Turkey on the TripAdvisor website and analyzed these comments by content analysis. They then classified the e-complaints of hotel guests into six main categories and 26 sub-categories as general, restaurant and food and beverage, rooms, front desk, service quality and management.

The most common e-complaints were in the categories of “general” (staff generally being tired and indifferent, hotels being dirty, lack of precautions taken specifically for the pandemic, poor cleaning), “restaurant, and food and beverage” (poor-quality food and poor ingredients, slow service, the indifference of the staff, lack of even most basic utensils like cutlery, etc.), “rooms” (the furniture in the rooms in bad condition, moldy and inoperable furniture, bad smells in rooms due to poor cleaning), “front desk” (rude staff, and rude attitudes and behaviors, slow check-in, etc.), “service quality” (slow room service and poor customer service, general technical problems in devices such as air conditioners, entertainment services not being offered) and “management” (indifference of the management towards guests, unannounced room changes). The researchers concluded that hotel businesses that provide services already with various difficulties during the pandemic process need to keep up with the changes to survive. They suggested that these businesses should strictly implement certain measures such as cleaning, hygiene and social distance for the Covid-19 pandemic, and also that hotel business should adopt policies to eliminate their shortcomings mentioned in all e-complaints.

Davras and Durgun (2021) investigated the dimensional structure of the measures taken against the pandemic in hotel businesses to understand whether these measures contribute to the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the tourists. They examined 1.418 online reviews through content analysis on TripAdvisor from June to August 2020, and identified 10

main categories and 28 sub-categories. They concluded that while the tourists had high perceptions of safety regarding the measures taken on disinfection, hygiene and temperature measurement, their perceptions were low on social distance and mask use. In conclusion, they suggested that the hotels should establish an online customer complaint tracking system and the first step in this regard is to try to gain the trust of existing guests and get online positive feedback from them.

Geranaz and Yetgin (2021) revealed the expectations of the guests about the five-star SPA hotels serving in Sapanca and determined the factors affecting satisfaction in SPA hotels. For this purpose, they reviewed a total of 485 positive and negative comments made on the Tripadvisor.com website, and analyzed the comments using the content analysis method; they were gathered these comments under nine main themes and 54 sub-themes: the physical conditions of the rooms (defective-insufficient furniture in the rooms), the facilities of the hotel (lack of the measures against Covid-19), the location of the hotel, the food and beverage (insufficient and poor food varieties), SPA (lack of Spa services and insufficient hygiene in the Spa area), human resources (indifference and insufficient number of staff), housekeeping (dirty rooms, rooms not adequately cleaned, dirty room toilets, dust in common areas), hotel (crowd and noise) and prices. The researchers found that it is of great importance for SPA hotels to provide a suitable atmosphere for rest and relaxation, to offer successful SPA services, food and beverage services, to keep an eye on staff's attitude, to present various activities, to take measures against the Covid-19, to prioritize hygiene in common areas, to consider the occupancy in taking reservations.

### 3. Methodology

The aim of this research is to reveal the complaints of customers who stay in five-star businesses with a safe tourism certificate operating in coastal areas in Antalya during the pandemic process. The safe tourism certificate was introduced for hotel businesses operating during the pandemic process. This certificate involves certain practices mandatory for hotel businesses. Based on the customer complaints, this study also determines the extent to which these practices are followed.

With changes in the tourist profile, the development of technology day by day, and the ease of access to information sources, tourists have become more conscious. The widespread use of technological devices also led guests to share their complaints on hotel businesses online more and more every day. These e-complaints further mentioned the recent experiences in the practices on the Covid-19 outbreak and the measures taken by the countries. For this reason, it is important to classify the e-complaints made by the guests of hotel businesses operating on a global scale and to uncover the e-complaints made by them during the Covid-19 process. Thus, this study addresses “customer complaints” as a single variable. It presents categories for customer complaints and

offers examples of customer complaints. To that end, the complaints only on the “TripAdvisor” website were evaluated.

This study performs a complete count to examine the complaints on the five-star coastal hotels operating in Antalya between 01.05.2020 and 01.01.2021 on the TripAdvisor site. The population consists of five-star coastal hotels with a safe tourism certificate operating in the province of Antalya. This study reveals that there are 161 five-star hotels with a safe tourism certificate in Antalya within the specified date range (TGA, 2020). Following the identification of the hotels, all the comments of the guests staying in these hotels (1=very bad, 2=bad, 3=average, 4=good and 5=very good) on www.tripadvisor.com were examined. A total of 5,949 comments were analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. Through the descriptive analysis method, this study identifies the practices that are specified as a requirement of the safe tourism certificate but that the guest’s complaint about not being performed. This study further offers detailed information on the themes and sub-categories through descriptive analysis.

**4. Findings**

The sub-categories of guest-related complaints are as follows: “violation of the mandatory mask requirement”, “violation of the social distance rule”, “violation of maintaining distance in food queues” and “violation of the mandatory mask-wearing rule in the restaurant”. Violation of the mandatory mask requirement (f= 106; 40.5%) and violation of the social distance rule (f= 77; 29.4%) by the guests were the most frequent complaints. Table 1 presents the items of complaints related to the guests.

Table 1. Guests-related complaints

Items	f	%
Violation of the mandatory mask requirement	106	40,5
Violation of the social distance rule	77	29,4
Violation of maintaining distance in food queues	52	19,8
Violation of the mandatory mask-wearing rule in the restaurant	27	10,3
Total	262	100,0

Some of the complaints related to the guests are as follows:

*...we visited the hotel during the pandemic period and it was overcrowded; social distance rules were not followed at all; masks were not worn...*

*...social distance rules were not followed. Because the hotel was very crowded...*

*...the warning to wear masks made by your team is for show only. Guests wear a mask at the hotel entrance and restaurant entrance and then take off their masks in closed areas 1 meter ahead. We asked many people of your team*

*why they don't warn other guests to wear a mask indoors, they told us: “tourists don't want to wear masks, and warnings cause their dissatisfaction” ...*

*...not even five out of 100 people wear a mask...*

*...masks are provided at the entrance to restaurants and I first thought this was a very good practice. Then I saw that almost 95% of foreign tourists did not wear their masks while putting food on their plates, and only Turkish guests wear a mask, and there is no warning on this. While we are putting food on our plates, there was a large crowd and we had to eat next to foreigners...*

Among the complaints on the management, the most common ones were “low number of staff”, “over-capacity”, “long food queues”, “too crowded restaurants”, “insufficient warnings to those who do not wear a mask” and “staff working without masks”. Notably, the guests most frequently mentioned the low number of staff (f= 124; 29.0%) and over-capacity (f= 98; 22.9%). In addition, long food queues (f= 54; 12.6%), too crowded restaurants (f= 41; 9.7%) and insufficient warnings to those who do not wear a mask (f= 23; 5.5%) were among the most common complaints. Table 2 presents the complaints related to the management.

Table 2. Management-related complaints

Items	f	%
Low number of staff	124	29,0
Over-capacity (over 50%)	98	22,9
Long food queues	54	12,6
Too crowded restaurants	41	9,7
Insufficient warnings to those who do not wear a mask	23	5,5
Staff working without masks	16	3,7
Empty disinfectant boxes	14	3,3
Lack of thermometers in units	13	3,0
Overcrowded pools	12	2,8
Too many people without a mask on the elevators	10	2,3
Cancellation of hotel activities	9	2,1
Sunbeds not being disinfected	8	1,9
Inappropriate distance between dining tables	3	0,7
Closed snack areas	2	0,5
Total	427	100,0

Some of the comments on the complaints related to the management are as follows:

*...no social distancing is followed; it is overcrowded. When you ask, they tell that the hotel is only 80 percent full...*

*...the only thing is that they should hire more staff, because staff serve everywhere and they are obviously very tired, which frankly upsets me...*

*...when we called the hotel to ask about pandemic rules, they said that the hotel was at 50% capacity, but when we were in the reception, this increased to 70%; then we entered the hotel and it was running at full capacity...*

*...despite everything, we did not care anything in the slightest, but there were queues at the open buffets at the*

restaurant. It was almost impossible to find a place outside. Social distancing and mask rules were never followed...

...to give an example, I counted how many people were in food queues and there were 17 people. Let me give you another example so that you can understand the crowd in the hotel; on the day we checked in, it took 20 minutes for us to find a sunbed near the pool...

...we did not want to get our room cleaned every day because we saw the staff cleaning without a mask...

...the disinfectant boxes in the elevator and in the social areas were usually empty...

The cleaning-related complaints were categorized as “poor cleaning of rooms”, “dirty/uncleaned washbasins in common areas”, “dirty/uncleaned pool”, “dirty/uncleaned dining tables”, “dirty/uncleaned lobby” and “dirty/uncleaned utensils”. The most common complaints were “poor cleaning of rooms” ( $f= 72$ ; 48.0%), “dirty/uncleaned washbasins in common areas” ( $f= 22$ ; 14.7%) and “dirty/uncleaned pool” ( $f= 20$ ; 13.3%). Table 3 presents the complaints related to cleaning.

Table 3. Cleaning-related complaints

Items	f	%
Poor cleaning of rooms	72	48,0
Dirty/uncleaned washbasins in common areas	22	14,7
Dirty/uncleaned pool	20	13,3
Dirty/uncleaned dining tables	14	9,3
Dirty/uncleaned lobby	12	8,0
Dirty/uncleaned utensils	10	6,7
Total	150	100,0

Some of the complaints on cleaning are as follows:

...cleaning of the rooms is skipped. During the day, the staff only empty the bins. Supplies in the rooms are not replenished and you constantly need to call the reception and ask for this. When you tell the staff that I need supplies, you may encounter a harsh and inappropriate attitude. I do not recommend you to choose this hotel with poor cleaning services amidst this pandemic...

... the toilets in common areas smelled very bad. There was no soap in the toilets to wash our hands...

...the pool is filthy, hair sticks to your hands when you take a dip in the pool. The bottom of the pool is full of sand...

...staff serve food on the tables before they clean them, and if this is the case during a pandemic, I cannot imagine what it would be like otherwise...

The service-related complaints included “insufficient variety of food”, “unsavory food”, “long wait times for ordering food and beverage”, “insufficient number of sunbeds” and “poor quality of drinks”. It appears that the guests often complained about the lack of food options ( $f= 96$ ; 41.0%) and unsavory food ( $f= 58$ ; 24.8%). Table 4 presents the complaints related to the service.

Table 4. Service-related complaints

Items	f	%
Insufficient variety of food	96	41,0
Unsavoring food	58	24,8
Long wait times for ordering food and beverage	30	12,8
Insufficient number of sunbeds	30	12,8
Poor quality of drinks	20	8,6
Total	234	100,0

Some of the complaints related to the service are as follows:

...the variety of food in restaurants is way too much reduced, a complete disappointment...

...we went outside the hotel to eat last night because we had to eat cold and tasty food for the first two days at the hotel...

...it was very difficult to find sunbeds, as people left their towels to keep them and we spent two hours to find sunbeds.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined the comments on the “TripAdvisor” site of the guests staying in five-star coastal hotels with “safe tourism certificate” operating in Antalya. The complaint elements were grouped under four categories: “guest-related complaints”, “management-related complaints”, “cleaning-related complaints” and “service-related complaints”. The category of guest-related complaints included “violation of the mandatory mask requirement”, “violation of the social distance rule”, “violation of maintaining distance in food queues” and “violation of the mandatory mask-wearing rule in the restaurant”. Foremost among the management-related complaints were “low number of staff” and “over-capacity”. The category of cleaning-related complaints included “poor cleaning of rooms”, “dirty/uncleaned washbasins in common areas”, “dirty/uncleaned pool”, “dirty/uncleaned dining tables”, “dirty/uncleaned lobby” and “dirty/uncleaned utensils”. Lastly, the complaints such as “insufficient variety of food”, “unsavory food”, “long wait times for ordering food and beverage”, “insufficient number of sunbeds” and “poor quality of drinks” were among the service-related complaints.

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

It is remarkable that there are similarities and differences between the results of this study and the results of the relevant research in the related literature. In particular, the complaints about “cleaning” and “service” are supported by previous research. “Poor cleaning of rooms”, which is foremost among the complaints related to cleaning, was also reported by Kızıldemir et al. (2019), Ayyıldız Yazıcı and Baykal (2020), Efendi (2021), Geranaz and Yetgin (2021), and Keskin et al. (2021). In addition, the complaint about the “cleaning of common areas” is similarly reported by Ayyıldız Yazıcı and Baykal (2020), Zengin and Haliloğlu (2020), and Efendi (2021). “Cleaning”, which was valued by

the guests before the pandemic, appears to be an important factor for the satisfaction of the guests during the pandemic period.

When this is not met, guests may exhibit the following complaint behaviors: “voice” (Hirschman, 1970; Day & London, 1977; Singh, 1988; Kim et al., 2010; Berry et al., 2018), “negative word of mouth” (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007; Kim et al., 2010; Berry et al., 2018), “written complaint” (Susskind, 2004) and “making complaints on websites on the Internet” (Berry et al., 2018). Failure to comply with the rules regarding cleaning and to show the solution-oriented behaviors to customers during the pandemic process will further increase complaints (Avcı & Bardakoğlu, 2021; Güllü & Akçay, 2021).

The factors such as “insufficient variety of food”, “unsatisfactory food” and “long wait times for ordering food and beverage”, which were valued by the guests before the pandemic period, were frequently mentioned in the category of service-related complaints as well. These findings are congruent with the results of studies by Kızıldemir et al. (2019), Ayyıldız Yazıcı and Baykal (2020), Geranaz and Yetgin (2021), Güllü and Akçay (2021), and Keskin et al. (2021). To achieve the satisfaction of the guests, the service-related factors must be kept at a level that will meet the expectations. Failure to meet expectations in the service may result in complaints where guests refer to the measures that must be taken during the pandemic period. As stated by Berry et al. (2018), this may result in the loss of customers and a negative perceived image of the business due to negative comments and complaints on the websites on the Internet. This study reveals that in this pandemic period, the perceptions of the customers on crowdedness also affect their satisfaction. Over-capacity (over 50%) appears to be one of the most frequent complaints among “management-related complaints”. This finding is supported by Ayyıldız Yazıcı and Baykal (2020) and Geranaz and Yetgin (2021). The guests were also dissatisfied by the increased risk of exposure to the virus in crowded areas and the failure to comply with the mandatory and promised capacity limitation. Further, the use of masks, an integral part of our lives with the pandemic period, is another factor frequently complained by the guests. Although this has not been mentioned in the research conducted in the relevant literature, the “use of mask” is a critical expectation of the guests.

The “safety” element, which is at the core of tourism, has become one of the key variables affecting customer satisfaction due to the importance attached to health in this period. In addition, violation of social distance was one of the most common complaints. Many complaints were made on “social distance” in different units of hotel businesses. In the related literature, the findings on “social distance” were reported by Davras and Durgun (2021). Overall, it can be said that cleaning, mask, and social distance, which have become indispensable to our daily life, are important factors in the expectations of the guests and may cause complaints if these expectations are not met.

## 5.2. Practical implications

The Covid-19 outbreak has enforced various new mandatory rules. These rules have led to changes in the operational activities of businesses. One of the fundamental changes has been experienced in the tourism sector. Hotel businesses now require a “safe tourism certificate” to continue their activities. This certificate specifies the set of rules that must be put into practice for the “health safety” of guests in hotel businesses. The security element, which is at the core of tourism, has gained a new significance in this period. During the outbreak, “health safety”, a key factor foremost among the guests’ expectations, may lead to dissatisfaction if it is not met by the hotel businesses. Dissatisfied guests may exhibit complaint behaviors. This study looked into the reviews of five-star coastal hotels in Antalya, one of the most important cities of the tourism sector. The findings show that there were many “guest-related”, “management-related”, “cleaning-related” and “service-related” complaints. The management, managers of hotel businesses and hotel staff have critical roles to play in this regard.

The analyses of the complaints highlight that the hotels run at overcapacity, that there are insufficient measures related to mask and social distance, and that cleaning is not performed. Needless to say, that, businesses with the safe tourism certificate have obtained such certificate because they have committed to implement the specified practices along with many other ones. However, this study reveals that, based on the complaint categories and expressions, many practices are implemented only for show in order to be eligible to obtain this certificate. Therefore, legal authorities need to step in and tighten control mechanisms. Further, legal authorities should inspect not only hotel businesses but also those that have obtained a “safe tourism certificate”. Through inspection, it can be ensured that more businesses implement these mandatory practices. The guests, who felt that their health was at risk, made complaints. The managers of hotel business need to resolve these complaints in the short term. Compensating the shortcomings in the businesses and inspecting the practices frequently can enhance customer satisfaction. Most of these complaints were related to administrative aspects. It would be wrong not to follow the mandatory rules during the outbreak and to try to find ways to evade them. It is clear that fewer staff and over-capacity mean a decrease in service quality. This may also cause customer loss, as well as adversely affect the business in creating competitive advantage and profitability through negative word of mouth communication.

## 5.3. Limitations

The most important limitation of this research is that this study only focused on the complaints between certain dates (01.05.2020-01.01.2021). While the outbreak continues to spread, the evaluation of customer complaints made until today can contribute to comprehensive information in this regard. Another limitation is that this study included only coastal hotels in the Antalya region. It is also important to

evaluate customer complaints on hotels and city hotels located in different regions.

#### Author contribution statements

Authors contributed equally to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

#### Disclosure statement

No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

#### Ethics committee approval

All responsibility belongs to the researchers. All parties were involved in the research of their own free will.

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