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## The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marketing mix concepts used by hotel facilities. Theoretical and analytical considerations

**Abstract.** The aim of the article is to identify changes in marketing instruments used by hotels as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, the authors review selected marketing mix concepts found in the literature, list restrictions that the hotel industry in Poland was directly and indirectly affected by during different periods of the pandemic, present changes in marketing tools (in particular 7P, 7C and 4V) used by different hotels in response to COVID restrictions in Poland and propose marketing tools that hotel facilities should introduce in order to prepare for future pandemics. Empirical data were collected by observation in the course of stays at eight Polish hotel facilities during the state of epidemic in Poland. It can be concluded that the pandemic definitely influenced the choice of marketing tools used by the surveyed hotels, regardless of the adopted marketing mix model. The state of epidemic in Poland and the resulting restrictions on the operation of hotels is an opportunity for hoteliers to reflect on how to deal with similar situations in the future.

**Keywords:** marketing mix, hospitality industry, COVID-19

**JEL Codes:** M31, L83, I18

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## 1. Introduction

Dynamic market changes, especially those are now taking place in Europe and in the world, have a direct impact on the functioning of entire economies, regions or enterprises (Alonso et al., 2020; Bayat, 2020; Kumar, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic changed the reality of many business entities, forcing them to look for tools enabling them to survive on the market. Economic difficulties caused by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, rising inflation, and the uncertain future affect market immediate decisions of all market participants as well as their short- and long-term strategies.

Marketing activities and tools have also changed significantly in recent years.<sup>1</sup> According to Jacek Piasta, marketing in the hotel industry is the sum of all activities undertaken by employees, hotel managers and staff, with the goal of satisfying the needs of hotel customers more effectively and better than the competition (Piasta, 2007). Various marketing activities are known as the marketing mix (MM), a set of related elements (activities, processes, methods and techniques) used by a company to influence the company's market environment (customers, competitors).

The aim of the following study is to identify changes in marketing tools used by hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study is based on a review of the relevant literature and regulations as well as virtual ethnographic research and observation regarding eight hotels selected to ensure a variety of types, standards and operation formula (chain versus independent hotels). The reference period is the duration of the pandemic in Poland (2020-2022).

## 2. Literature review

The main contributions to the concept of marketing and its components were made by Neil H. Borden (1984), Jerome McCarthy, Bernard H. Booms and Mary J. Bitner (Khan, 2014; Londhe, 2014), Philip Kotler (2012; Kotler et al., 2015) or Michael J. Baker et al. (1995). In a historical overview of MM by Chai Lee Goi (2009), which includes both practical and theoretical perspectives, the author points out that the process of describing and researching the components of marketing has evolved over decades, due to the changing socio-economic environment, globalization and technologies. Goi compiled views of many authors

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, the term "marketing tools" is used interchangeably with "marketing mix", abbreviated to "MM."

on the classic MM concept based on 4Ps (product, price, place, promotion) including later modifications that account for additional factors or approaches (e.g. in the context of service marketing, retail or the theory of consumer marketing).

Marketing mix is described with reference to the distinction between the traditional and modern concepts (Londhe, 2014; Eti, 2020) or to changes in marketing orientation (e.g. product, sales, customer or needs orientation, relationships). Theoretical considerations also address numerous factors that have directly affected the understanding of marketing mix, for example the development of the Internet (Kalyanam & McIntyre, 2002; Chen, 2006; Dominici, 2009). The conditions that arose during the pandemic also have a direct effect on customers, who changed their purchasing habits (Altay et al., 2022), which in turn caused companies to modify their marketing mix.

Marketing tools proposed in the literature depend on the evolution of marketing itself. A variety of MM concepts can be distinguished, including 4Ps (McCarthy) (Goi, 2009), 7Ps (Booms & Bitner; Kuada, 2014), 8Ps (E-center of Na-

Table 1. Selected MM concepts

Producer / Service Provider		Customer
4P	7P	4C
1. product 2. price 3. place 4. promotion	1. product 2. price 3. place 4. promotion 5. people 6. physical evidence 7. process	1. customer needs and wants 2. cost 3. communication 4. convenience (of purchase)
8P	5I	7C
1. product 2. price 3. place 4. promotion 5. precision 6. payment 7. personalisation 8. push and pull	1. identification 2. individualization 3. interaction 4. integration 5. integrity	1. customer needs and wants 2. cost 3. communication 4. convenience (of purchase) 5. competence 6. comfort 7. coordination/completion
Producer / Service Provider and Customer		
4V (4 values-based marketing)		
1. valued customers 2. value to the customers 3. value to society 4. value to the marketer		

Source: based on Goi, 2009; Kuada, 2014; Chen, 2006; Lotko, 2009; Peppers & Rogers, 1997; Londhe, 2014.

tional Taiwan University of Science and Technology) (Chen, 2006), 4Cs (Lotko, 2009), 7Cs (Shimizu) (Ikechi, Chinenye & Chiyem, 2017; Chongkonsatit et al., 2022), 5Is (Peppers & Rogers, 1997), or 4Vs representing values-based marketing (Londhe, 2014). Table 1 presents specific components of these concepts along with their main orientation.

Until recently, the 7Ps concept was considered crucial from the perspective of businesses providing hospitality services, so switching to a customer-centred concept (7Cs) or a value-based model (4Vs) has been both a challenge and an innovation. The authors were inspired to investigate this topic as a result of their own observations while staying at different hotels during the pandemic and seeing how they operated under pandemic restrictions and adapted their marketing instruments.

### 3. Methods

The aim of the study described in the article can be expressed in the form of the following research questions:

1. Has the pandemic affected existing marketing instruments used by hotel facilities?
2. How has the pandemic modified marketing instruments used by hotel facilities?
3. How should hotel facilities change their marketing mix in order to prepare for future pandemics?

In order to answer these questions, the authors start by reviewing the literature in the field of marketing and hospitality. The actual analysis of the Polish context is based on three main sources of data:

- national regulations imposing restrictions on the operation of hotels during the pandemic;
- online information posted by hotels, on the “Enjoy Your Stay” hotel and travel blog (<https://enjoyyourstay.pl>), and on social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) of selected Polish hotel facilities or industry groups (e.g. Polish Hoteliers and “Hotelarze – Marketing i MICE”);
- information collected by the authors during their stay at 8 hotel facilities<sup>2</sup> in the period of epidemic emergency in Poland, i.e. from March 20, 2020 to May

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<sup>2</sup> 1. an independent guesthouse in Świnoujście (May 2020), 2. an independent guesthouse in Darlowo (August 2020), 3. an independent 5-star hotel in Sopot (November 2020), 4. an independent holiday complex in Mierzęcin (June 2021), 5. a 4-star chain hotel in Kraków (June 2021), 6. a 2-star chain hotel in Kraków (September 2021), 7. a 5-star chain hotel in Sopot (November 2021). 8. a 3-star chain hotel in Piła (October 2021).

15, 2022 regarding changes in their operations as a result of epidemic restrictions imposed by the government.

Observation data were used to compare the actual experience with declarations made by hoteliers online.

## **4. Research results**

### **4.1. Epidemic restrictions affecting operations of the hotel industry**

Restrictions, orders and prohibitions aimed at preventing and combating the pandemic in Poland are based mainly on regulations of the Minister of Health and the Council of Ministers. By September 5, 2022, nearly 100 ordinances of the Council of Ministers were issued to introduce “restrictions, orders and prohibitions” and six ordinances of the Minister of Health, starting with the announcement of the state of epidemic emergency on March 20, 2022, lifted on 16 May 2022 (System Informacji Prawnej LEX, 2022). Some of those regulations directly related to the hotel industry and affected operations of individual accommodation entities. Table 2 contains a list of the main regulations introduced at different stages of the pandemic with details about their effect on the operation of hotel facilities.

As can be seen above, the restrictions directly and indirectly affecting the hotel industry can be divided into 13 periods, during which hoteliers had to introduce some changes in the way they operated. These changes were mainly related to the number and category of guests hotels were allowed to accommodate and the ability to provide catering and additional services (e.g. the use of in-door swimming pools and gyms).

### **4.2. Changes in the marketing instruments used by hotel facilities as a result of epidemic restrictions in Poland**

Table 3 presents practical examples of how pandemic restrictions affected the use of marketing instruments with respects to particular elements of the following MM concepts: 7Ps, 7Cs and 4Vs .

It can be concluded from the above compilation that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the choice of marketing tools used by the surveyed hotels, regardless of the adopted marketing mix model, thus contributing to changes that will be maintained in the future.

Table 2. Direct and indirect restrictions concerning the hotel industry during different stages of the pandemic in Poland

Period	Regulation	Restrictions
I March 13, 2020 – May 3, 2020	Regulation of the Minister of Health of March 13, 2020, announcing the state of epidemic emergency in Poland and Regulation of the Minister of Health of March 20, 2020 regarding the announcement of state of epidemic emergency in Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– suspension of international air and rail services</li> <li>– prohibition of group gatherings with more than 50 people</li> <li>– suspension of dine-in service in restaurants, bars, cafes</li> <li>– restrictions on freedom of movement</li> <li>– closures of gyms, swimming pools, fitness clubs, libraries, cinemas, theatres</li> <li>– a complete ban on the operation of tourist accommodation facilities and short-term accommodation (included in subclass 55.20 of the Polish Classification of Activities)</li> <li>– introduction of strict sanitary rules</li> </ul>
II May 4, 2020 – October 22, 2020	Regulation of the Council of Ministers of May 2, 2020, introducing certain restrictions, orders and bans related to the state of epidemic emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– hotel restaurants and recreational spaces in hotels and accommodation establishments allowed to operate to a limited extent</li> <li>– gyms and swimming pools remain closed</li> <li>– meals could only be served to hotel guests in their rooms</li> <li>– sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>
III October 23, 2020 – February 11, 2021	Regulation of the Council of Ministers of October 16, 2020, amending restrictions, orders and bans introduced previously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Poland declared to be a red zone country</li> <li>– suspension of the operation of health resorts with the possibility of completing already commenced stays</li> <li>– hotel services only available to guests on business trips – from 7 to 29 November, with the exception of workers' hotels which could operate without restrictions</li> <li>– limited operation of hotels – available to selected groups, incl. uniformed services, medics, patients of specialized hospitals</li> <li>– sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>

<p>IV February 12, 2021 – March 19, 2021</p>	<p>Regulation of the Council of Ministers of February 11, 2021, amending restrictions, orders and bans introduced previously</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- hotels allowed to reopen but can only offer 50% of available rooms</li> <li>- meals served only in rooms, at guests' request</li> <li>- hotel restaurants remain closed</li> <li>- cinemas, theatres, operas and philharmonics allowed to reopen provided that no more than 50% of available seats are occupied; masks are required; food consumption is prohibited</li> <li>- swimming pools and ski slopes allowed to reopen (except for aqua parks)</li> <li>- sanitary rules still in force</li> <li>- suspension of hotel operations (except for workers' hotels and accommodation provided as part of business trips)</li> <li>- closure of swimming pools (except for swimming pools in health care entities and those used by members of the national swimming team)</li> <li>- closure of saunas, solariums, Turkish baths, casinos and gyms</li> <li>- closure of theatres, museums and art galleries</li> <li>- sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>
<p>V March 20, 2021 – May 07, 2021</p>	<p>Regulation of the Council of Ministers of March 19, 2021, introducing certain restrictions, orders and bans related to the state of epidemic emergency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- hotels and other accommodation facilities allowed to reopen (the 50% occupancy restriction)</li> <li>- meals served only in rooms or to take away</li> <li>- swimming pools, gyms, playrooms for children remain closed</li> <li>- saunas, solariums, Turkish baths, casinos and gyms remain closed</li> <li>- sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>
<p>VI May 8, 2021 – June 5, 2021</p>	<p>Regulation of the Council of Ministers of May 6, 2021, introducing certain restrictions, orders and bans related to the state of epidemic emergency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- hotels and other accommodation facilities allowed to take place (with the requirement of 1 person per 15 m<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>- playrooms for children reopen (with the requirement of 1 person per 15 m<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>- sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>
<p>VII June 6, 2021 – June 25, 2021</p>	<p>Regulation of the Council of Ministers of June 4, 2021, amending restrictions, orders and bans introduced previously</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- fairs, conferences, congresses and exhibitions allowed to take place (with the requirement of 1 person per 15 m<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>- playrooms for children reopen (with the requirement of 1 person per 15 m<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>- sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>

VIII June 26, 2021 – November 30, 2021	Regulation of the Council of Ministers of June 11, 2021, amending restrictions, orders and bans introduced previously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– hotels and other accommodation facilities allowed to operate (including the provision of catering services) at 75% of the available places (this limit does not apply to children up to the age of 12 or fully vaccinated persons)</li> <li>– no passenger limits in public transport but face masks still required</li> <li>– gyms, clubs, fitness centres, casinos allowed to reopen (with the requirement of 1 person per 10 m<sup>2</sup>)</li> <li>– discos and nightclubs allowed to reopen (no more than 150 people)</li> <li>– sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>
IX December 1, 2021 – December 17, 2021	Regulation of the Council of Ministers of November 29, 2021, amending restrictions, orders and bans introduced previously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– occupancy limit in hotels, restaurants, swimming pools reduced to 50%</li> <li>– gatherings and celebrations such as weddings, communions, meetings, discos limited to 100 people</li> <li>– one person per 15 m<sup>2</sup> in gyms, clubs and fitness centres, casinos, fairs, exhibitions, congresses and conferences</li> <li>– sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>
X December 18, 2021 – February 28, 2022	including: Regulation of the Council of Ministers of December 16, 2021, amending restrictions, orders and bans introduced previously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– attendance in theatres, concert halls, opera houses limited to 30% of available seats (the limit does not apply to vaccinated people)</li> <li>– sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>
XI . March 01, 2022 – March 27, 2022	Regulation of the Council of Ministers of February 25, 2022, amending restrictions, orders and bans introduced previously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– most restrictions lifted</li> <li>– no customer limits in shops and restaurants</li> <li>– nightclubs and discos allowed to reopen</li> <li>– sanitary rules still in force</li> </ul>
XII March 28, 2022 – May 15, 2022	Regulation of the Council of Ministers of March 25, 2022, amending restrictions, orders and bans introduced previously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– all pandemic restrictions lifted</li> <li>– no obligation to cover the mouth and nose with a mask in closed rooms (except for health care entities and pharmacies)</li> <li>– no quarantine and self-isolation requirement</li> <li>– no more restrictions in hotel facilities</li> </ul>
XIII May 12, 2022	Regulation of the Minister of Health of 12 May 2022, cancelling the state of epidemic emergency in Poland	

Source: based on Dahlke et al., 2021; *Akty Prawne i Dokumenty Wydane w Związku z COVID-19 – Śląski Urząd Wojewódzki w Katowicach, 2022.*



Table 3. Practical examples of changes in the provision of hotel services regarding different elements of three MM concepts

7Ps	7Cs
<p>product</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- temporary inability to even provide accommodation services (apart from the exceptions indicated in the regulations)</li> <li>- some hotels used for quarantine</li> <li>- temporary inability to provide thematic packages (e.g. when swimming pools and saunas were closed – it was not possible to provide services included in SPA &amp; Wellness packages)</li> <li>- temporary limitation of activities associated with the provision of accommodation and catering services (in the form of room service or external food supplies)</li> <li>- creation of new services related to the possibility of remote work and learning (e.g. the Mierzęcin Palace package called “Home office in the Palace<sup>a)</sup>” (“Home office” in the Palace, 2022)</li> <li>- creation of new thematic packages during and after the epidemic associated with so-called “post-COVID tourism,” with the aim of strengthening the body’s immunity before the winter period and the next wave of the pandemic (these packages were usually available in resort hotels with medical and rehabilitation facilities); e.g. the “Building Resilience” package at the “Fabryka Węlny” Hotel<sup>b)</sup> (Budowanie Odporności, 2022)</li> </ul>	<p>consumer wants and needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- temporary inability to use accommodation services</li> <li>- demand for a remote or mixed product (e.g. stationary conferences with the possibility of remote connection) (e.g. conference offer of the Gromada Hotel in Pila)</li> <li>- demand for accommodation services for medical professionals</li> <li>- the needs for safety, hygiene, to stay healthy</li> </ul>
4 Vs (product, consumer wants and needs)	
<p>valued customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- medics, public service employees – valuable, often the only clients value to the customers</li> <li>- modification of the marketing structure of the product because of the restrictions (hybrid meetings – in-person and online) value to society</li> <li>- support for medics, public administration activities</li> <li>- public support in the event of quarantine</li> <li>- maintaining jobs</li> </ul>	

4 Vs (product, consumer wants and needs)	
value to the hotel	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– an innovative product</li> <li>– revenues for the hotel (no assessment, however, whether it is sufficient)</li> <li>– changes to the real product (accommodation, room service)</li> <li>– changes to the extended product (sanitary accessories and measures)</li> </ul>	7Ps
	price
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– as a result of changes in booking dates, caused by the closure of accommodation facilities, some hotels increased the prices of stays previously booked and paid for, which were postponed to new dates<sup>c</sup></li> </ul>	7Cs cost <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– incurring costs without using the service</li> <li>– possible higher cost</li> <li>– price negotiation</li> <li>– deferred purchase (new conditions)</li> </ul>
	4Vs (price, cost)
value to the customers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– cost incurred without using the service or with deferred use is a value for the client as an expression of solidarity with and support for the industry</li> </ul>	
value to the hotel	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– income (e.g. for partial salaries paid to employees)</li> </ul>	7Ps
	place/distribution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– due to higher processing capacity, an even greater role of direct sales, i.e. activating sales by telephone and own website; the intention was to reduce commission costs charged by intermediaries, which may generate additional revenue when bookings are made directly</li> </ul>	7Cs convenience (of purchase) (availability) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– convenient, direct purchase (without intermediaries)</li> </ul>
	4 Vs (place, convenience)
value to the customers	
value to the hotel	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– mutual benefits</li> </ul>	

7Ps promotion	7Cs communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- incentives used by hotel facilities to encourage prospective guests to change their reservation dates without cancelling them, to buy quota vouchers that can be redeemed during the next 12 months and plan future holiday trips while remaining in the country</li> <li>- hotel guests are informed about implemented safety procedures and measures taken to minimize the risk of infection; an example of very reliable information on this subject is the Arłamów Hotel, which was awarded the title of "Safe facility"<sup>4</sup> in the MP Power Awards<sup>5</sup> competition (Safe Arłamów, 2020); (#BezpieczArłamów   NEW TECHNOLOGIES – YouTube, 2020)</li> <li>- a similar information campaign was created by the Nosalowy Dwór Resort &amp; SPA hotel (#BbezpieczniewNosalowym, 2020), which presented its safety package and a video on one of its subpages (#BbezpieczniewNosalowym, 2020)</li> <li>- a nationwide campaign "Dear Guests, we miss you!" devised by Karol Weber, hotelier and author of the enjoyyourstay.pl blog together with the Chamber of Commerce of the Polish Hotel Industry and associated hotels; action graphics with the hashtag #wypocznijbezpiecznie, encouraging potential guests to stay in hotels, emphasizing their appropriate preparation to receive customers</li> <li>- activities in the field of corporate social responsibility undertaken by hotel facilities, e.g. providing meals and accommodation to medical employees, providing cleaning products for hospitals</li> <li>- image campaigns directly targeted at the product (e.g. Hotel Gromada in Pila – involvement in local events such as Juwenalia (student festival), sports competitions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- clear and transparent communication of information</li> <li>- overcoming fear of traveling and using hotel facilities</li> <li>- expression of support and solidarity for the industry</li> <li>- a sense of real influence on maintaining employment in the hotel,</li> <li>- a sense of safety in the facility (including sanitary issues)</li> <li>- understanding the rules of staying in the facility</li> <li>- selecting the facility because of its form of communication</li> <li>- a sense of maintaining a continuous guest-hotel relationship through communication in social media or direct marketing</li> <li>- receiving a message about modifications in the product structure, its adaptation to the real market situation</li> <li>- recognizing the facility as one integrated with the region</li> </ul>

4 Vs (promotion, communication)	
<p>valued customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– clients responding to promotional activities, also in the field of public relations – not cancelling reservations, maintaining concluded contracts</li> <li>– a loyal customer value to customers</li> <li>– providing information,</li> <li>– awareness of the pandemic situation in the country and in the world</li> <li>– awareness of methods of preventing or reducing the risk of infection</li> <li>– the ability to meet one's needs in a modified form value to society</li> <li>– maintaining employment in hotel facilities</li> <li>– acquiring new skills</li> <li>– a sense of community in a difficult situation for the whole society value to the hotel</li> <li>– a sense of understanding by the customer</li> <li>– ensuring the physical (health) and mental safety of guests and employees</li> <li>– taking all possible actions to maintain the facility on the market</li> <li>– building strong relationships with the environment and guests</li> <li>– chance to build a strong team</li> </ul>	
7Ps	7Cs
Personnel/people	Competence/Prudence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the emergence of an industry risk of staff dismissal as a result of costs incurred by the accommodation facility or employees leaving the job because of the uncertain situation of the industry; this may consequently result in a lower quality of service</li> <li>– the possibility of conducting internal training sessions for employees (e.g. on the quality of guest service, reception, waiter and SPA sales)</li> <li>– the possibility of creating or refreshing the organizational culture of individual hotel facilities (e.g. writing down common values that should guide the team during the performance of official duties)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– thoughtful purchase, supported by understanding the difficult situation of the facility</li> <li>– ability to cope with a difficult market situation (e.g. a company cooperating with a hotel does not suspend an existing contract, but modifies it)</li> <li>– the ability to choose a hotel facility based on its activities</li> </ul>

4Vs (personnel, competence)	
<p>valued customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– customers empathetic towards the staff</li> <li>– rational clients, able to make decisions in a risky environment</li> </ul> <p>value to the customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the need for greater caution when choosing accommodation services</li> <li>– expanding knowledge, orientation in the current economic and social situation</li> </ul> <p>value to society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– maintaining employment in hotel facilities or a decision to change the place of employment</li> <li>– value to the hotel</li> <li>– an opportunity to refresh the organizational culture, build strong relationships with and between employees</li> </ul>	7Cs
7Ps	Coherence/Coordination
<p>Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the possibility of analysing and updating the existing procedures (particularly those relating to the standard of service and security)</li> <li>– changes of existing procedures (e.g. changes regarding catering services, such as replacing self-service buffets with dishes served directly to the table or to rooms,</li> <li>– change of the rules regarding room cleaning (routine cleaning was limited and carried out only at guests' request)</li> <li>– the obligation to wear a mask by guests and employees, regular disinfection, at least every hour, of general toilets, elevators, reception desk (after each guest), door handles, handrails, handles, telephones, computer keyboards, devices in rooms and other frequently touched surfaces etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– ensuring safe service</li> <li>– adapting to the rules prevailing in the facility</li> <li>– becoming familiar with the modified service process prior to arrival</li> <li>– additional or modified forms of service at the facility</li> </ul>
4 Vs (process, coordination)	
<p>valued customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– guests who understand and respect changes in service</li> <li>– acceptance of modified rules of hotel stay</li> </ul>	

4 Vs (process, coordination)	
<p>value to the customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- safe stay in the facility</li> <li>- additional knowledge of safety rules</li> <li>- flexibility in terms of how needs are met (e.g. dinner in the room, instead of a hotel restaurant)</li> </ul> <p>value to society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maintaining jobs</li> <li>- new skills of employees in the field of guest services</li> </ul> <p>value to the hotel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- implementation of new solutions, development, preparation for future limitations</li> </ul>	
7Cs	
Comfort	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the need to accept new rules in the facility</li> <li>- better safety thanks to the rearrangement of space and additional equipment</li> <li>- limitations in the facility (e.g. the inability to organize a conference)</li> <li>- lack of access to the full offering of the facility (e.g. closed sauna)</li> </ul>	
7Ps	
Physical evidence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the possibility of a thorough cleaning of the interior of the facility and the exterior facade</li> <li>- the possibility of conducting renovation work inside and outside the accommodation facility</li> <li>- hand sanitizer dispensers provided in the hotel, particularly at the entrances, in the reception area, at the entrance to elevators, catering outlets and toilets</li> <li>- dedicated room for people (guests and employees) suspected of being infected with the SARS-COV<sub>2</sub> virus</li> <li>- the furniture was rearranged to meet the requirement of social distance, especially in spaces where catering services were provided</li> </ul>	
4 Vs (physical evidence, comfort)	
<p>valued customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- guests accepting the rules in the facility</li> <li>- guests flexibly reacting to changes</li> </ul> <p>value to customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- certainty of a safe stay in the hotel</li> <li>- a sense of responsibility for oneself and others (other guests, staff)</li> </ul>	

4 Vs (physical evidence, comfort)
<p>value to society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– collective prevention of the spread of the virus,</li> <li>– awareness of the introduced changes and their effects</li> </ul> <p>value to the hotel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– implementation of new solutions, development, preparation</li> <li>– respecting the law</li> <li>– image of a safe and responsible entity</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> The package includes: accommodation, breakfast, the possibility of printing, scanning and photocopying documents, access to high-speed business internet connection, access to tennis courts and rental of tennis equipment, Nordic Walking sticks, free parking and a discount on the rental of a conference room with teleconference equipment.

<sup>b</sup> The stay package includes outdoor recreation (bicycle, Nordic Walking sticks, walks in parks), physical activity (spacious fitness club, group activities according to the club's schedule), healthy food (menu including seasonal, valuable energy-boosting dishes, freshly squeezed juices), SPA treatments (including regenerating full body massage), relaxation (unlimited use of the Wellness zone – swimming pool, dry sauna, steam bath) and good sleep (accommodation in industrial rooms, comfortable beds, complete darkening of room, quiet intimate hotel).

<sup>c</sup> On his blog, K. Weber recounted the case of a reader who wrote to him to share a negative experience regarding the price of a hotel stay. Rather than cancel reservations in two hotels in Gdansk and Warsaw (both part of large hotel chains), the guest wanted to change the date. One change was from March to October, the other from March to June. In both cases, the hotels increased the cost of stay by 20% and 30% in relation to the previously paid reservation.

<sup>d</sup> The Arłamów Hotel Security Policy consists of the following areas: safe technological solutions (including the implementation of the most modern air purification system); personal security; safe location (it is located in the middle of a forest, at the edge of three nature reserves, away from public places, stations, shops and galleries); security gate (e.g. visitors' temperature is taken at the entrance); medical care (a paramedic is available at the hotel every day), safe interiors (rooms are regularly disinfected and the number of people who can stay in them is limited).

<sup>e</sup> Meeting Planner Power Awards is the first competition dedicated to the event industry that looks for the best implementations and practices in all its sectors; one of the categories is MP Power Venue.

Source: based on data obtained through observation and virtual ethnography; including: Hotelowy, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020g, 2020f, 2021, #WypocznijBezpiecznie, 2020, Wytyczne dla funkcjonowania hoteli/ obiektów/ pensjonatów w trakcie epidemii COVID-19 w Polsce, 2020.

It can be concluded from the above compilation that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the choice of marketing tools used by the surveyed hotels, regardless of the adopted marketing mix model, thus contributing to changes that will be maintained in the future.

## 5. Discussion

The analysis of regulations made it possible to identify restrictions that directly and indirectly affected the hotel industry at different stages of the epidemic in Poland (Table 2). The legal conditions in which hotels operated during the pandemic necessitated practical changes regarding the choice of marketing instruments (Table 3).

The information contained in Table 3 clearly indicates that the MM instruments complement each other. The key thing is that hotel-oriented (7Ps) and guest-centred (7Cs) approaches interpenetrate and generate effects in the form of broadly understood values (4Vs). The table focuses on the options desired and expected on both sides. The above analysis shows that hotel guests did not always understand or accept the new rules introduced because of the pandemic. In other words, the new marketing mix model is a reflection of new values created as a result of the pandemic situation but also a reaction to numerous crisis situations involving employees, guests and their relationships between them.

The most noticeable changes in the marketing mix tools (Table 3) are the physical evidence and processes that are important both for the hotel (7Ps) and its guests (7Cs). The changes regarding these two instruments had a very big impact on the safety of guests and helped to prevent the spread of the virus, which is why they turned out to be so important. There is also evidence of compatibility and mutual relations with respect to promotion (7Ps) and communication (7Cs). The effects of the pandemic and the ways of dealing with them were a social challenge and a verification of human relations.

Hotel services and the way they meet the needs of guests has also changed considerably as a result of modifications made to the marketing structure of hotel products. The introduction of these changes was certainly a challenge for operators of hotel facilities. One evident result of these changes is greater sensitivity to customer needs and mutual benefits in times of crisis.

An additional literature review was also conducted in order to compare changes in the choice of marketing instruments used by Polish hotels with those observed in other countries. Only one article was found on marketing mix, hospitality and the pandemic. Its authors conducted a qualitative case study of 7Ps marketing mix used by the Excelton Hotel ([www.excelton.id](http://www.excelton.id)) in Palembang (Sumatra) (Permasari et al., 2021). Compared with the Polish hotels, there are differences regar-



ding two components: “people” and “physical evidence”/“processes.” Namely, the Excelton Hotel gave vaccines to all its employees and obtained a CHSE<sup>3</sup> certificate confirming its compliance with standard health protocols.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the theoretical and analytical considerations presented in this study it can be concluded that the pandemic caused the hotel industry to modify its existing marketing mix models, as evidenced by the choice of individual 7Ps and 7Cs marketing tools.

The most noticeable changes undertaken by the hotels had to do with marketing communication strategies (newsletters, online information and social media posts) and verbal and non-verbal communication with guests during their stay (information given by the reception staff and displayed on information boards, disinfectant dispensers). These changes, which can be associated with two MM components – physical evidence and process – that were most instrumental in ensuring the safety of guests and preventing the spread of the virus.

The pandemic and the resulting restrictions were an opportunity for hoteliers to think about ways of dealing with similar situations in the future. Based on the analysis of K. Weber’s blog the following forward-looking postulates regarding individual MM instruments (7Ps and 7Cs) can be made (Hotelowy, 2020e):

- with respect to product, hotel facilities should think about alternative ways of organizing leisure time for guests, i.e. how to replace traditional additional services such as SPA. Solutions could include the organization of open-air movie screenings on the terrace / in the hotel park / from balconies, campfires, yoga and meditation classes, open-air concerts, walks, the use of selected gym equipment in the fresh air; all of these cater to the needs defined in 7C;

- as regards staff, hotel facilities should establish an internal team responsible for the safety of visitors and work, consisting of representatives of all departments (experienced line employees or supervisors / teams of managers), whose task would be to coordinate the implementation of security procedures and internal compliance audit. In large hotels, it would be advisable to create one coordinator/ manager responsible for sanitary safety;

- with respect to promotion, hotel facilities should place greater emphasis on information for guests regarding sanitary safety. Following the experience of

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<sup>3</sup> The CHSE (Clean, Health, Safety, and Environment) certification program for the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, supported by TÜV Rheinland Indonesia, serves as a guarantee to tourists and the public that the products and services provided have met protocols for cleanliness, health, safety and environmental sustainability (tuv.com).

the COVID-19 pandemic, hotel managers should compile a list of possible and frequently asked questions from visitors about safety rules with responses and publish it on the hotel website; any changes or improvements should be based on communication with guests from the perspective of 7Cs;

- with regard to physical evidence, the furniture in the hotel facility should be rearranged to ensure social distancing between guests, without compromising their safety and comfort (7C). As was the case during the pandemic, barrier posts should be placed in larger hotels – at the entrance and at the reception desk;

- with respect to processes, hotel facilities should consider how to improve services at the reception and in the restaurant in order to shorten service times and minimize queues, and how to ensure positive customer experience despite limited direct contact. Moreover, critical points in the service process (e.g. where guests can congregate and interactions may be too close) should be identified, scenarios of possible crisis situations (complaints from guests) regarding new safety rules should be written, and behaviour and communication strategies should be discussed with employees. From the perspective of guests, these activities should be clear and consistent with the principles of 7Cs.

A flexible approach to marketing instruments helps to foster broadly understood four values (valued customers, value to the customer, value to society, value to the hotel), which should support and strengthen the foundations of the hotel facility, and thus build resilience against possible future crises.

In the post-pandemic era, automation in the area of marketing mix is likely to play an increasingly important role, despite pre-pandemic concerns about limitations of interpersonal relationships, which are so important in the provision of hotel services. However, this trend will probably not be adopted by all accommodation entities, as the use of advanced technologies is a cost that only a few can afford.

## 7. Limitations of the study

The study findings are based on the authors' interpretations of data collected online and through non-participatory, unstructured observation, which may not have been entirely objective. One way this limitation could be addressed would be to collect data directly from hotel managers and employees, for example during semi-structured interviews.

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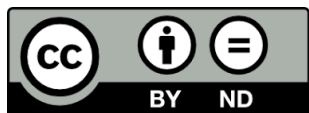
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wych badanych obiektów hotelarskich, niezależnie od przyjętego przez nie modelu kompozycji marketingowej. Stan epidemii w Polsce oraz wynikające z niej restrykcje dla działalności hotelarskiej stanowią okazję do przemyślenia przyszłych działań na wypadek podobnych sytuacji.

**Keywords:** marketing-mix, hotelarstwo, COVID-19



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