

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE MANAGERIAL ADOPTION AND
CONTINUANCE OF DAILY DEALS IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY
THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE
THEORIES**

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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SUMMARY

The thesis is structured in 5 chapters.

Chapter 1, "Management and implications of Daily Deal promotions in the hospitality industry", is a narrative literature review that examines hospitality Daily Deal (DD) websites. The chapter examines DD promotions' incentives, profitability, marketing, operational, and branding effects. It states that hotel capacity management, marketing, customer acquisition, revenue enhancement, and employment stability drive DD promotions. The authors say high commissions and deep discounts undercut profits. The chapter discusses using DD websites to choose platforms and create offers that match the hotel's branding and revenue goals. These choices affect customer value, brand image, and loyalty, proving brand dilution can be good or bad. Continuous or improper DD deals can alter customer price reference perceptions, reducing brand value and exclusivity. The authors suggest using niche DD websites to improve brand perception and attract the right customers. The chapter proposes that hotels use DD promotions strategically in marketing and distribution. Studying DD offers' profitability and long-term effects can help hotels use this complex e-commerce phenomenon in a more informed way.

Chapter 2, "Business model innovation approach to understanding Daily Deals and their development trajectories since 2020: a dual platform-hotel perspective", examines DDs evolving business model innovation (BMI) as a response to COVID-19. The study examines DD websites' post-recession and outlines BM configuration alignment that helped DDs navigate the crises through their formation of temporary and transitional BMs. The chapter outlines key trajectories for generic and niche DDs when navigating through the pandemic, uncovers the differences in the perception of the DDs value among Slovenian and Croatian hotels and discusses their BM configuration alignment processes and their outcomes in the context of integrative BMI model for tourism.

Chapter 3 discusses "The continued relevance of Daily Deals for European hotels – a technology adoption perspective" and how technology adoption and continuance affect DDs in Europe. This chapter examines hotel managers' adoption and use of daily deals (DD) using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) and the 2-Stage Information Systems (IS) Continuance Model. The pragmatism-rooted qualitative research approach, sampling, data collection, and analysis for a qualitative empirical research design on DDs continuity from managerial perspectives are described. Results and discussion demonstrate DDs' initial appeal for inventory management and revenue optimization, especially during recessions. DDs have advantages in marketing, customer acquisition, and occupancy management, making their PE variable important despite DC variable criticisms like brand dilution. Adoption improves hotel managers' DD views, supporting ECT.

Discussion, empirical quantification, and drivers of DD's low discontinuance levels to the UTAUT model's demanding Effort Expectancy (EE) variable and pandemic-induced DC. The study enhances hospitality technology continuance understanding and suggests integrating more IS frameworks into marketing and e-distribution literature in tourism.

Chapter 4, "Daily Deals usage in the pandemic context of Slovenian hotel industry: a mixed-model technology adoption perspective", examines Slovenian hotels' COVID-19 DD use. Constructivist grounded theory is used to analyse senior sales and marketing managers' use of DDs to adapt to pandemic-induced demand changes among Slovenian hotels. The effects of Slovenia's staycation voucher programme, which gives residents hotel and travel vouchers to boost domestic tourism, make the study unique. DD adoption and use are affected by governmental regulation and changed market structure dynamics, confirming that external variables do have an impact on adoption of technologically backed e-commerce solutions, in our case DDs. The study's conceptual model incorporates the logic of Structure-Conduct-Performance Paradigm (SCP), Technology-Organisation-Environment framework (TOE) and UTAUT to best explain how technological attributes, organisational strategies, and external pressures like regulatory interventions are resented and explained. Implications for the future mixing of different IS system frameworks to adjust the models to the currently volatile business environment are provided.

Chapter 5 adds quantitative empirical dimension to the dissertation. By employing web data parsing techniques and linking these data to Italian official tourism statistics it measures actual behaviour of Italian hotels' DD use by linking it to destination characteristics, a classic proxy of hotels' environment. The environmental context and its impact on hotels' behaviour is operationalist through the application of SCP paradigm and TOE framework that have been previously explored and contextualised in the context of DDs use in the Chapter 4. The chapter concludes by outlining clear destination economic and geographic characteristics that effect hotels' use of DDs.

The thesis concludes with general discussion that highlights its limitations and provides avenues for future research.

Keywords: Daily Deals, Flash Sales, Technology Adoption, Technology Continuance, Internet Distribution, Business Model Innovation, SCP paradigm

POVZETEK

Doktorska disertacija je razdeljena na pet poglavij.

1. poglavje z naslovom "Kaj vemo in česa ne vemo o spletnih bliskovitih ponudbah (SBP) v turizmu: sistematični pregled literature" je oblikovano kot sistematični pregled literature in obravnava spletne strani s SBPji. V poglavju je navedeno, da SBP spodbujajo prodajo hotelskih zmogljivosti, trženje, pridobivanje strank, povečanje prihodkov in stabilnost zaposlovanja. Avtorji ugotavljajo, da visoke provizije in veliki popusti zmanjšujejo dobiček, ki ostajaj vprašljiv. Stalne ali neustrezne ponudbe SBP lahko spremenijo zaznavanje referenčnih cen pri strankah, kar zmanjša vrednost in ekskluzivnost blagovne hotelske znamke. Avtorji zaznajo številne pomanjkljivosti in ansprotujoče si ugotovitve v literaturi, ki SBP obravnava predvsem v kontekstu restavracij. Evalviranje donosnosti SBP in dolgoročni učinki za hotele niso jasno raziskani. Prav tako je literatura terminološko neskladna in teoretično šibka.

2. poglavje, "Pristop inoviranja poslovnega modela k razumevanju dnevnih ponudb v spletnih distribucijskih sistemih (SDS)", preučuje razvoj poslovnih modelov (PM) ponudnikov SBP v turizmu. Študija preučuje rast SBP po recesiji in značilnosti PM, ki so jim pomagale konkurirati spletnim potovalnim agencijam. Raziskava razlikuje med generičnimi in nišnimi SBP, ki so bili doslej akademsko zapostavljeni. Generične in nišne modele DD primerjamo z modeli spletnih turističnih agencij (STA) z skozi prizmo PM, da bi analizirali njihove izvirne razsežnosti in elemente. Poglavje potrjuje, da so SBP prešli od velikih popustov k razpoložljivosti v realnem času in personalizirani ponudbi ter je bila pandemija kontekst v katerem so spremenili in prilagodili svoje poslovne modele. Izvedli smo intervjuje in tematsko analizo, da bi pokazali, kako so se PM SBP razvili k bolj izpopolnjenim, prilagojenim in na stranke osredotočenim PM, katerih vrednosti pa hotelirji v trenutni obliki ne zaznavajo kot visoko vredne. Ugotovitev, da se elementi PM ujemajo pri ponudnikih SBP in STA, kaže na hibridne modele, ki združujejo prednosti, da bi zadovoljili različne potrebe strank in partnerjev. Zaključki poudarjajo pomen rekonfiguracije posameznih elementov poslovnih modelov SBP za njihovo ponovno večanje vrednosti za hotelirje z vidika SDS. Inovativna personalizacija in tehnološka integracija bi lahko povečali vrednost nišnih ponudnikov DD za stranke in hotelske partnerje.

3. poglavje, "Nadaljnja raba SBP za evropske hotele - vidik tehnološkega sprejema" preučuje sprejemanje in rabo SBP s strani hotelskih menedžerjev s pomočjo UTAUT modela in dvostopenjskega modela IS kontinuitete. Pragmatični, večinoma kvalitativni raziskovalni pristop je uporabljen za zasnovo empirične raziskave o nadaljni rabi SBP z vidika managerjev. Rezultati in razprava dokazujejo začetno privlačnost DD za upravljanje nastanitvenih kapacitet in optimizacijo prihodkov, zlasti v času recesije. SBP ponujajo

hotelom pomoč pri trženju, pridobivanju strank in upravljanju zasedenosti, zaradi česar je njihova spremenljivka uporabna vrednost (UV) pomembna kljub nasprotnim vplivom spremenljivke "motilnikov", kot je erozija blagovne znamke. Sprejetje izboljša poglede hotelskih menedžerjev na SBP. Razprava, empirična kvantifikacija in dejavniki nizke stopnje prekinitve nadaljne rabe SBP so posledica pričakovanega napora (PN) in "motilnikov" rabe tehnologije, ki jih povzroča pandemija. Študija izboljšuje razumevanje nadaljne rabe tehnologije v hotelski distribuciji in predlaga vključitev več modelov iz področja IS v literaturo o trženju in e-distribuciji v turizmu.

4. poglavje, "Uporaba SBP v pandemičnem kontekstu slovenskega hotelirstva" se poslužuje konstruktivistična utemeljitvene teorije za analizo rabe SBP s strani hotelskih managerjev na prilagajanje spremembam povpraševanja, ki jih je povzročila pandemija, v slovenskih hotelih.

5. poglavje doda kvantitativno empirično dimenzijo disertaciji in proučuje realno rabo SBP v italijanskih hotelih. Študija je edinstvena zaradi učinkov slovenskega programa turističnih bonov, da bi spodbudil domači turizem. Na sprejemanje in rabo SBP tako vplivajo vladna intervencije in tržna dinamika. V študiji je predstavljen konceptualni model, ki združuje modela tehnologija-organizacija-okolje (TOE) in UTAUT, da bi kar najboljše pojasnil, kako tehnološke lastnosti SBP, organizacijske strategije in zunanji okoljski dejavniki, kot so regulativni posegi, vplivajo na rabo SBP v obdobju pandemije. Podana so priporočila za prihodnje kombiniranje različnih modelov s področja IS, da bi modele za proučevanje rabe hotelskih spletnih tehnologij prilagodili trenutno spremenljivemu poslovnemu okolju. Doktorska disertacija se zaključí s splošno razpravo in omejitvami.

Ključne besede: spletne bliskovite ponudbe, kuponska prodaja, sprejem tehnologije, nadaljna raba tehnologije, spletna distribucija, poslovni model, UTAUT, TOE, SCP.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADR – Average Daily Rate

CRS – Computer Reservation System

DC – Disturbance Concerns

DD(s) – Daily Deal(s)

ECT – Expectation Confirmation Theory

EE – Effort Expectancy

FC – Facilitating Conditions

IDS – Internet Distribution System

IS – Information Systems

OSV – Other Specific Variables

OTA – Online Travel Agency

RevPAR – Revenue Per Available Room

SCP – Structure-Conduct-Performance

SI – Social Influence

SLR – Systematic Literature Review

SST – Strategija Slovenskega Turizma (Slovene National Tourism Strategy from 2022)

STRST – Strategija Trajnostne Rasti Slovenskega Turizma (Slovene National Tourism Strategy from 2018)

SURS – Statistični Urad RS (Slovenian Statistics Office)

TAM – Technology Acceptance Model

TOE – Technology-Organisation-Environment

TPB – Theory of Planned Behaviour

TRA – Theory of Reasoned Action

UTAUT – Unified Technology Acceptance and Use Theory

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing process of the digital revolution and its impact on the tourism sector has been unfolding for over two decades. This transformation has not yet reached its zenith, and the tourism industry is continuously reshaped daily. Extensive research has been conducted on technological development and information and communication technologies (ICTs). However, there are still significant gaps in the current literature, particularly in understanding the profound impact of digital transformation on the tourism industry's business practices. It is worth mentioning that technological advancements have outpaced the evolution of management practices in the tourism industry. As a result, various tech and digital companies have emerged, capitalising on the rapid technological changes and seizing the chance to provide online services that traditional tourism operators may be hesitant or unable to offer. As hotels strive for effective promotion, positioning, and revenue generation, e-distribution channels are emerging as a crucial factor (Law et al., 2014; Jiang, 2014). The rise of Internet-enabled channels known as Internet distribution systems (IDS), such as e-mail, websites, and online travel agencies (OTAs), has considerably replaced traditional distribution channels like mail and fax. These efficient channels have been embraced by hotels as intermediaries, facilitating the sale and delivery of their services to consumers.

Coinciding with the times when this dissertation was in its infant form of conceptualisation, the hotel industry was at the peak of the Daily Deal (DD) craze. The DD business model experienced significant growth during the late 2000s recession, as consumers were inundated with deal-oriented offerings in their mailboxes. This phenomenon, also known as Flash Sale, Online Coupon, or Flash Deal, emerged as a response to the economic downturn. Indeed, it proved incredibly successful when expanding into the local market; various retailers like restaurants and beauty salons quickly embraced DD start-up companies, including industry giants like Groupon and LivingSocial. These companies swiftly incorporated hotels into their offerings. As a result, numerous websites started to specialise exclusively in selling hotels and travel experiences. By the mid-2010s, the resurgence of travel has been a driving force, prompting various innovative online platforms like Voyage Privé, Secret Escapes, and Very Chic to shift their focus from mere pricing to offering quality amenities and services in luxury travel.

The initial idea behind this dissertation was to research the DDs to improve their managerial understanding, as at the time, most hotels were running DD campaigns through specialised DD platforms but had no clear strategic directions, and even less had any mechanism for evaluating their usability and performance in place. Similarly, the academic literature on the topic was almost non-existent and mainly focused on online coupons in restaurants, with only limited implications for hotels. A challenging part of this PhD journey was to find an appropriate theoretical background for the research I wanted to conduct. Literature dealing with DD was scant and very fragmented. Everyone seemed to research DDs only from one perspective. However, I was looking for the »bigger picture« framework that would allow

me to capture DDs in their all-encompassing and multi-disciplinary nature, as looking at a phenomenon partially and neglecting potentially important aspects that fall out of a disciplinary boundary did not represent a viable option for the “inquisitive type of mind” shaped by the years of legal studies, who was mostly interested in the cause and consequence type of understanding of the business dynamics. Due to the formative professional years in companies operating as platforms within internet distribution, the choice to treat DD as an IDS and not as a marketing technique was obvious from the start, following the mantra of John Tribe and his stance on tourism researcher being nothing else than a philosophical practitioner. This choice was soon also confirmed by the literature when in 2016 Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu established the DDs as a channel in IDS in the leading hospitality journal.

A challenge with DD IDS is that its use entails at least three separate pre-considerations within the hotel, such as:

- Do I need such a promotion?
- Am I willing to discount that much and sabotage my Average Daily Rate (ADR)?
- Do I want to deal with an integration of another IDS in my distribution portfolio?

These questions can be solved by three distinct departments within the hotels and, even more importantly, by three separate scientific disciplines, namely marketing, revenue management, and Information Systems (IS) research. The challenge with the search for the discipline in which I was expected to make a theoretical contribution took an above-average amount of time and energy. Rather than deriving from the tons of reviewed literature and previous tourism distribution studies that were mostly rooted in marketing, the turning and decisive moment came on the day when a senior colleague, an acclaimed IS researcher, introduced us to the Unified Technology Adoption and Use Theory (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2004). Ten years after its creation and acclaim in the general business and management domain, the hotel e-distribution literature and wider tourism field seemed to have wholly overlooked it. Still, they relied on an older Technology Acceptance Model (Davies, 1989) that I had previously quickly discredited as oversimplified. Having immersed ourselves in UTAUT studies, I realised that it offered us a chance to make a solid contribution, position ourselves among the IS researchers, and be able to import something new to the tourism field. All these and most importantly while being able to maintain the holistic perspective over the understanding of DD, their adoption and continued use which up to the present day, has not been adequately explained in academic literature.

At the proposal stage, the following main objectives and research questions were established to guide the study. While the research was initially designed as qualitative, it also incorporated quantitative methods during its implementation:

1. To progress the academic understanding of DDs channel in hotel IDS;
RQ1: How did the characteristics and academic understanding of DDs change from their appearance in 2008 to the present day?
2. To identify and explain variables and their factors (general and DDs-specific) that lead the hotel managers to adopt an emerging IDS such as DDs;
RQ2: What are the main (UTAUT-based) variables that lead hotel managers to adopt a new distribution channel?
3. To identify and explain variables and their factors (general and DDs specific) that lead the hotel managers to continue using DDs once this channel has been adopted;
RQ3: What are the main (UTAUT-based) variables that lead hotel managers to continue using the adopted distribution channel?
4. To explore on whether the variables of adoption and continued use are the same as suggested by the Extended two-stage DDs continuance model, or if they differ;
RQ4: Is the DDs continuance really determined by the confirmation of the same variables that determine their adoption?
5. To identify and explain the disturbance concerns of DDs channel adoption in the form of managerial concerns over the potential channel conflict of DDs channel and its effects on existing channels in hotel e-distribution portfolio;
RQ5: Which concerns lead the managers to hesitate with DDs adoption and in what way does the adoption and continued use of DDs impact other e-distribution channels?

The dissertation, in its present form, presents the collection of research results conducted over almost ten years collaboratively with colleagues from the author's home institutions and those from abroad, whom I had the pleasure of learning from, co-creating and growing together as researchers.

The dissertation comprises five chapters that follow this introduction and conclude with a general discussion chapter. It follows the research objectives and questions set above initially yet also integrates the unique events that appeared during the research process and shaped the evolution of the hotel industry and IDS through the years dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the present days of volatile market conditions and geopolitical turmoil.

In Chapter 1, I conduct a systematically review of available academic literature and attempt to assess the state and nature of knowledge available dealing with DDs in peer reviewed journals included in the Web of Science (WoS) database. Free from any research field boundaries, I screen and thoroughly analyse and evaluate available knowledge and spot significant terminological and methodological gaps as well as worrying share of

insufficiently theoretically backed research present in the field. From this I articulate future research recommendations which I to a certain extent also conduct in the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, I adopt the perspective of business models (BM) and business model innovation (BMI) and try to dig deeper into understanding DD BMI processes that characterised their development from 2020 onwards. This way I fill the evident knowledge gap and actualise and contextualise the DD research field which has not yet accounted for the changes that happened in tourism since 2020. The chapter enables me to gain novel insights and a further layer of understanding of DDs that will result relevant to complement the findings of Chapter 1 in my quest of exploring the variables of managerial adoption and use of DDs in my major empirical exploration.

In Chapter 3, I set out to understand the variables of DDs adoption and their continued use until the present day among hotel managers in Slovenia and our neighbouring countries. Which UTAUT variables can be used by hotel managers to explain their adoption? Which psychological mechanisms govern the formation of their attitudes once they start using DDs (Bhattacharjee & Premkumar, 2004) and which variables lead to their continued use? It is amid this qualitative exploration that COVID-19 hit and further complicated the established mechanism of tourism with clear implications for the use of all IDS who were forced to change their operations through the process of BMI that I explored in Chapter 2. I provide relevant explanation of DD adoption and use on a longitudinal basis for pre-, during- and post- pandemic contexts.

In Chapter 4, I use the very particular context of the pandemic to understand if UTAUT can also explain the DD usage in the Slovenian tourism market in that period, significantly affected by significant governmental intervention that immensely changed the demand patterns and marketing focus in the Slovenian hotel industry. I quickly realise UTAUT's limits in the given context. I thus extend the lens through the application of TOE framework and link it to Structure-Conduct-Performance paradigm, which I use as a base to understand and explain the drivers of DD's (lack of) use through a 2-dimensional micro-macro perspective. My output confirms the benefits of combining IS models from different research streams and connecting them with economic paradigms in order to make them applicable to volatile and unpredictable contexts in which markets function in "different to normal" conditions.

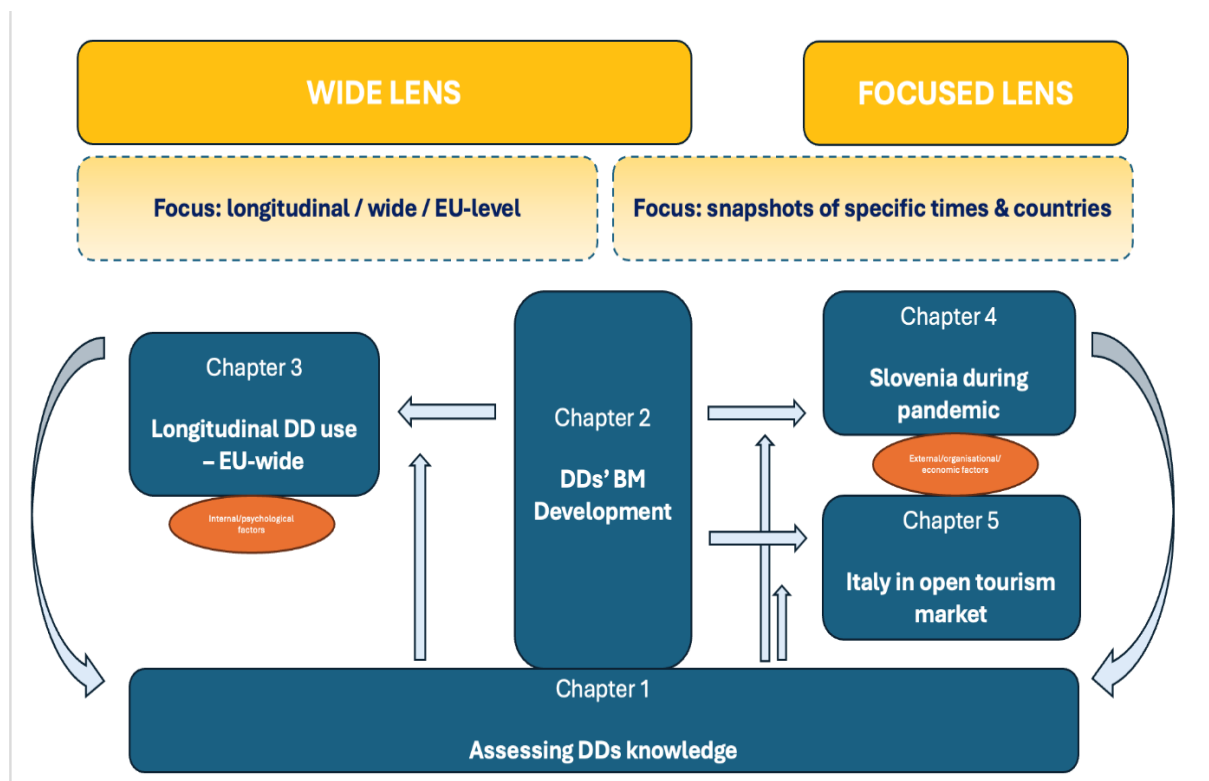
Chapter 5 complements the exploratory and qualitative nature of previous chapters that rely on established methods of collecting data and observing reported behaviour in a quantitative manner. As the last chapter, it adds a quantitative empirical dimension to the findings in which it employs innovative methods of online data parsing as a method of data collection. This is used to observe the actual behaviour of Italian hotels in regard to their use of DDs. Through the help of previously used environmental context from the TOE model in connection with the industry structure-conduct relationship from the SCP paradigm it employs Italian official census destination data to test how destination characteristics (actual

hotels' environmental context) impact the hotels' actual use of DDs in the context of “normally” functioning tourism market.

In the concluding Discussion, I connect the contributions and crucial findings from the longitudinal research journey, review the accomplished research objectives and their limitations, and outline directions for future research to be conducted at the intersection of IS, marketing, revenue management, e-distribution, hotels and tourism economics.

The dissertation combines both longitudinal observations and specific temporal context and combines a wide research lens of Chapters 2 and 3 with the focused one of Chapters 4 and 5 that observe DDs in a specific geographic, geopolitical and temporal contexts. Both psychological-internal and external technology adoption factors are discussed in respective Chapters. The structure of the dissertation with all its loops is presented in Figure 0.1 below.

Figure 0.1: The structure of the dissertation



Source: own work

The dissertation should be viewed as a collection of separate papers dealing with the adoption and use of DDs in diverse contexts. Chapters 1 and 2 provide a theoretical and applied business basis for understanding DD adoption and use mechanisms. The theoretically lacking and fragmented nature of DD literature does not give enough information to guide the researchers or help them articulate the dominant theoretical perspective that would cover all aspects of the set research objectives. Therefore, BM research, a newly developing field and its subsector BMI, has been chosen as a way of

gaining an in-depth understanding of the IDS under observation. Thus, they are set centrally within Figure 0.1.

To the left is Chapter 3, which presents a longitudinal, multi-country perspective illustrating the adoption and continued use of DDs across different phases of their development and time contexts. This chapter constitutes the most substantial empirical part of the research and fulfils the dissertation's key objectives as outlined in the proposal. However, the study took longer than initially anticipated. During this extended research period, the onset of Covid-19 occurred, creating a unique and temporary context that warranted separate investigation in order to maintain the research's relevance and alignment with real-world business conditions.

This focused analysis, conducted in Chapter 4 on the right side, serves to explore the specific environmental drivers that rendered the Slovenian tourism market distinct from its neighbouring ones. During this period, the UTAUT model temporarily lost its explanatory power: a positive attitude towards the use of DDs no longer translated into actual adoption. This disconnect emerged clearly from the empirical data and prompted a deeper analysis. As a result, I developed a tailored model that more accurately captured the observed dynamics. I acknowledge that the model is highly time- and context-specific; nevertheless, it may offer valuable insights in an era characterised by frequent geopolitical disruptions. Chapter 4 should therefore be regarded as a snapshot and a business-historical account of a particular moment in the Slovenian tourism industry – a perspective from which future lessons for studying technology adoption in a broader than usual sense may be drawn.

Ultimately, Chapter 5 should equally be considered context-specific and a snapshot of the past, as it depicts the DD actual use behaviour of Italian hotels in the context of an open and functioning tourism market from 2019 that is however somewhat aligned with the tourism market of the years 2024 and 2025. It should be seen as a non-conventional empirical exploration of DD use behaviour, providing novel insights into the role of the hotel's environment in the hotel's DD adoption and use pattern, which adds to the previously questioned lack of quantitative studies within the dissertation.

In the following chapters, which were coined as individual journal papers, I use the plural form as the research was done under supervision of my mentors and, to a certain degree, as a collaboration with colleagues.

1 WHAT WE KNOW – AND DO NOT KNOW – ABOUT DAILY DEALS IN TOURISM: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE¹

1.1 Introduction

The rise of e-commerce has significantly transformed the hospitality sector, altering the framework of hotel distribution and marketing. The digital transformation, propelled by various internet distribution systems (IDS) and notably online travel agencies (OTAs), has introduced hotels to a complex interplay of new opportunities and considerable challenges (Jiang, 2014; Law et al., 2014; O'Connor & Frew, 2004). The economic pressures of the 2009 recession served as a significant catalyst, expediting the adoption of an innovative promotional strategy termed Daily Deals (DDs), which are heavily discounted, time-sensitive online offers (Runfola et al., 2013; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova and Cobanoglu, 2016).

Fifteen years after their inception, the Daily Deals model has evolved through a defined business life cycle (Budler et al., 2020). Initially met with industry scepticism, DDs have since experienced fluctuations in popularity and have undergone substantial adaptation, establishing themselves as a frequently permanent component of hotel marketing and distribution. The maturation process is evidenced by the evolution into distinct typologies, such as niche and generic DDs, which demonstrate a sophisticated adaptation to varying market needs (Budler et al., 2020). The operational logic of the hospitality industry has recently faced significant disruption due to the global pandemic, which fundamentally altered many established business practices.

The intersection of the model's maturity, its under-the-radar status within IDS research, and a significant change in the external environment establishes a crucial point of decision. Despite demonstrating resilience and evolution, the enduring significance of DDs in a post-pandemic context remains unclear. While some technologies arrive, generate hype, and truly disrupt traditional ways of doing things – such as the Internet and now AI – many others go through periods of hype and leave no lasting impact (see NFTs in tourism). Some arrive and, after the initial hype, remain slightly under the radar of academic attention – and this is the case with DDs. This literature review seeks to synthesise existing knowledge on DDs, evaluate the current state of research, estimate its size, and identify its strengths and limitations, as well as provide avenues for future research.

¹ This chapter under supervision of assoc. prof. Kir Kuščer is being prepared for submission to the European Journal of Tourism Research.

1.2 Daily Deal definition & evolution

As a starting point for this research inquiry, we initially provide a thorough definition of DDs based on the existing literature. DDs are promotional campaigns offering discounted products and services available for purchase within a time frame designated by the seller (Parsons, Ballantine, Ali & Grey, 2014). Daily Deals (DDs) have also been identified as online coupons, flash deals, group buying, and private sales (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova and Cobanoglu, 2016; Budler et al., 2020). They have been employed in the hospitality and tourism sector for the distribution of hotel stays, dining experiences, cruises, and travel packages (Cassia et al., 2017). DDs are most often disseminated through platforms specifically intended for this function (e.g., Groupon; Secret Escapes), but can also feature as part of a business's own website (e.g., a hotel brand.com website), or an intermediary in the internet distribution system (IDS) such as an online travel agency (OTA).

The concept of group buying has historical origins in ancient Eastern cultures, particularly in China, where collective action was employed to obtain more favourable pricing (Stulec et al., 2011). In Western contexts, analogous principles developed in the 19th century via B2B club buying and consumer cooperatives (Dameron, 1982; Jia & Wu, 2011), with the objective of utilising collective power to secure reduced prices (Sharif-Paghaleh, 2009). This model remained largely unchanged until the advent of the internet facilitated the emergence of early online group buying platforms. Auction-based websites, as examined by Anand and Aron (2003) and Liu et al. (2012), utilised dynamic pricing models that provided greater discounts for larger purchase volumes (Kauffman & Wang, 2001; Chen et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the majority of these platforms encountered failure attributed to financial instability, delayed deliveries, insufficient price transparency, and inadequate market segmentation (Flynn, 2001; Tang, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2010).

A contrasting model, characterised by transparency and consumer initiation, known as Tuangou, emerged in China in the early 2000s. This method of social shopping allowed users to organise in online forums prior to engaging in collective negotiations with merchants (Arredy, 2006; Xiong & Hu, 2011b). The model was enhanced by cultural norms that support negotiation and collectivism, further amplified by social media and electronic word-of-mouth (Tang, 2008; Jing & Xie, 2011; Wang et al., 2013). Western DD websites, exemplified by Groupon, have adopted an individualistic, user-centric model that emphasises social media integration, viral marketing, and incentivised peer-to-peer referrals (Dholakia, 2010; Ye et al., 2011; Sigala, 2013). These platforms converted consumers into brand advocates by providing incentives for sharing deals, leveraging the trust associated with user-generated endorsements (Subranani & Rajagopalan, 2003; Li & Wu, 2012).

Contemporary DD websites differentiate themselves from earlier auction platforms and Tuangou by implementing various innovations: they utilise a push strategy for promoting locally targeted services, provide transparent and significant discounts, showcase deal popularity as a form of social proof, and depend on post-purchase voucher redemption to

mitigate merchant risk (Boon et al., 2012; Jia & Wu, 2011; Sigala, 2013; Lo et al., 2014). Moreover, previous models primarily stressed tangible goods and collectivism, whereas the DD platforms focus on local services, including dining, fitness, and hospitality for individual enjoyment. This shift is advantageous for managing perishable capacity and improving visibility for small tourism industry service providers (Piccoli & Dev, 2012; Sigala, 2012). Ultimately, as an upgrade and in parallel with a specialised form of niche DDs purely focused on tourism products and offering real-time availability instead of coupons, emerged and established itself as a popular IDS (Budler et al., 2020).

1.3 Methodology

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a form of review that aims to thoroughly identify, evaluate, and synthesise all pertinent studies that adhere to predefined eligibility criteria using a clear and established methodology (Xiao & Watson, 2019). It must follow a replicable, scientific, and transparent process while minimising bias in the representation of a field (Cook, Mulrow & Haynes, 1997; Nightingale, 2009). SLRs evaluate past research (Vrontis et al., 2021) and are effective in identifying research gaps within a domain and in determining future research directions (Paul & Criado, 2020). This study utilised the methodology proposed by Xiao & Watson (2019) for performing a systematic literature review (SLR) to determine, map, and assess the research dealing with DDs in tourism. We have developed the following research questions:

- RQ1: What is the extent of DDs research, its structure and publication outlets?
- RQ2: Which are the key terms used in DDs research?
- RQ3: What is the subject and geographic focus of the DDs research?
- RQ4: Which methods and theories are prevalent in DDs research?
- RQ5: What is known about DD demand, DD supply and DD intermediary?
- RQ6: What is known about managerial use of DDs in hotels?
- RQ7: Which are the empirical, theoretical, methodological and contextual research gaps in the field that deserve attention?

In the process of conducting the SLR we relied on thematic analysis (Brown & Clark, 2006) and qualitative content analysis (Rourke & Andersen, 2019) to help us analyse the studies and gain a deeper understanding of the literature.

1.4 Systematic literature review

1.4.1 Sample selection

Stage 1 of this review is based on a systematic literature search performed using the Web of Science (WoS) database in April 2025 – the primary platform for identifying pertinent studies in tourism (Rosalina et al., 2021). The initial query, using the keyword ‘Daily Deals’

and its variants without restricting the search to a specific field, yielded a total of 678 results. To optimise coverage and relevance for tourism in line with recommendations from Xiao & Watson (2019), the search strategy avoided field-specific filters and instead employed various keyword combinations, including ‘daily deal’, ‘flash sale’, ‘online coupon’, ‘group buying’, and ‘private sale’, each paired with tourism-related terms such as ‘tourism’, ‘hotel’, ‘hospitality’, and ‘restaurant’. These combinations were selected to ensure the inclusion of all potentially relevant studies across various segments of the tourism and hospitality sector that might also be hidden under different disciplines than tourism & leisure.

The search identified 144 articles published between 2012 and 2025. These were screened for relevance through an initial review of abstracts and keywords, reducing the number of relevant hits to 113. In the next step, result batches were merged and duplicates removed, resulting in 56 unique papers considered for further review. Following this, we followed a common SLR strategy to exclude conference proceedings (Xiao & Watson, 2019) and include only peer-reviewed journal publications, considered the most rigorously reviewed form of academic output, which reduced the final sample to 37 papers. The abstracts for these 37 papers were initially coded and analysed. Subsequently, all 37 papers were reviewed and thoroughly examined using an analytical template consisting of publication year, author, journal, thematic focus, purpose, key findings, theoretical background, and methods used (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The search term combination ‘group buying’ and ‘tourism’ yielded the highest number of results, producing 31 publications, 18 of which were classified as relevant. The terms ‘group buying’ and ‘restaurant’ produced 21 results, with 17 deemed relevant. The pairing of ‘online coupon’ and ‘tourism’ also proved productive, with 10 out of 11 hits assessed as relevant. Conversely, certain combinations – including ‘private sale’ with ‘hospitality’ or ‘restaurant’ – resulted in minimal or no relevant outcomes. The cumulative total of relevant articles across all search batches was 113. Table 1.1, as per Xiao & Watson (2019), presents the outcomes of the search queries.

Table 1.1: Search queries

Search	Search term	Publication timeframe		Number of Hits	Number of Relevant Hits	Batch
1	"daily deal*" and tourism	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	6	6	1. Batch Tourism
2	"flash sale*" and tourism	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	5	3	
3	online coupon* and tourism	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	11	10	

To be continued

Table 1.1: Search queries (cont.)

Search	Search term	Publication timeframe		Number of Hits	Number of Relevant Hits	Batch
4	"group buying" and tourism	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	31	18	
5	"private sale*" and tourism	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	2	2	
6	"daily deal*" and hotel	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	7	7	2. Batch Hotel
7	"flash sale*" and hotel	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	2	2	
8	"online coupon*" and hotel	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	2	2	
9	"group buying" and hotel	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	11	8	
10	"private sale*" and hotel	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	3	2	
11	"daily deal*" and hospitality	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	10	10	3. Batch Hospitality
12	"flash sale*" and hospitality	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	3	3	
13	"online coupon*" and hospitality	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	3	2	
14	"group buying" and hospitality	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	13	8	
15	"private sale*" and hospitality	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	0	0	
16	"daily deal*" and restaurant	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	9	9	4. Batch Restaurant
17	"flash sale*" and restaurant	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	1	1	
18	"online coupon*" and restaurant	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	3	3	
19	"group buying" and restaurant	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	21	17	
20	"private sale*" and restaurant	1/1/2000	5/31/2025	1	0	
TOTAL				144	113	

Source: own work

Table 1.2: Studies identified in the SLR sample

Year	Citations	Authors	Study Location	Terminology	Thematic Focus
2012	51	Ku, ECS	Taiwan	group buying	Demand
2012	16	Liang, ARD; Chen, HG	Taiwan	online auctions	Demand
2012	2	Lo, A; Wu, J; Law, R	China	group buying	Supply
2013	225	Lu, XH; Ba, SL; Huang, LH; Feng, Y	China	online coupons	Supply, Intermediary
2013	70	Zhang, ZQ; Zhang, ZL; Wang, F; Law, R; Li, DC	China	group buying	Supply
2013	32	Runfola, A; Rosati, M; Guercini, S	Italy	private sales	Supply, Intermediary
2013	24	Boon, E	No data	daily deals	Demand
2014	51	Kim, MJ; Lee, CK; Chung, N; Kim, WG	South Korea	group buying	Demand
2014	9	Liang, ARD	Taiwan	online auctions	Demand
2015	21	Kim, MJ; Chung, N; Lee, CK; Preis, MW	South Korea	private sales	Demand
2015	13	Zhang, J; Savage, SJ; Chen, YM	China	online coupons	Demand
2015	11	Ong, BS	USA	daily deals	Demand
2015	10	Cox, C	Australia	social coupons	Demand
2015	10	Cassia, F; Magno, F; Ugolini, M	Italy	social coupons	Supply
2015	7	Lacerda, A; Santos, RLT; Veloso, A; Ziviani, N	Brazil	daily deals	Intermediary
2015	4	Aday, JB; Phelan, KV	USA	flash sales	Intermediary
2016	52	Lee, YK; Kim, SY; Chung, N; Ahn, K; Lee, JW	South Korea	group buying	Demand

To be continued

Table 1.2: Studies identified in the SLR sample (cont.)

Year	Citations	Authors	Study Location	Terminology	Thematic Focus
2016	24	Heo, CY	USA	group buying	Supply
2016	20	Berezina, K; Semrad, KJ; Stepchenkova, S; Cobanoglu, C	USA	flash sales	Supply
2016	8	Chen, HS; Phelan, KV; Chang, HJ	No data	online deals	Demand
2016	5	Liu, YB; Liu, W; Yuan, P; Zhang, ZG	China	group buying	Demand
2016	2	Langvinienė, N; Zemblyte, J; Sliziene, G	Lithuania	group buying	Demand
2017	32	Bai, X; Marsden, JR; Ross, WT; Wang, G	USA	daily deals	Supply
2017	7	Jeon, S; Qi, JY; Wang, JY	China	group buying	Demand
2017	4	Cox, C	Australia	daily deals	Demand
2018	52	Li, XT	USA	group buying	Demand
2018	21	Kitchens, B; Kumar, A; Pathak, P	USA	daily deals	Supply
2019	50	Reimers, M; Xie, C	USA	online coupons	Supply, Demand
2020	54	Yi, S; Jai, TM	USA	daily deals	Supply
2020	23	Bai, X; Marsden, JR; Ross, WT; Wang, G	No data	daily deals	Supply
2020	5	Zhang, TH; Zhang, JL; Zhao, F; Ru, YH; Sutherland, JW	China	group buying	Supply
2020	4	Budler, M; Bratec, M; Minor, KB; Tomat, L	Europe	daily deals	Intermediary
2022	9	Geerts, A; Masset, J	Europe	private sales	Demand
2023	2	Dai, DB; Ma, HX; Zhao, M; Fan, TJ	China	group buying	Intermediary

To be continued

Table 1.2: Studies identified in the SLR sample (cont.)

Year	Citations	Authors	Study Location	Terminology	Thematic Focus
2023	0	Li, WC; Chang, KF; Chen, CJ	Taiwan	group buying	Demand
2024	1	Wang, YC; Guo, R; Yang, SH	China	group buying	Demand
2024	0	Chen, MM; Beaufort, C; Earl-Erpelding, K	Switzerland	daily deals	Supply

Source: own work

1.4.2 Research field characteristics

The examination of publication outlets – as detailed in Table 1.3 – reveals that the selected studies appeared in a relatively narrow range of academic journals. The Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management emerged as the most prolific outlet, publishing five articles that collectively received 136 citations. This was followed by Information Systems Research, which published four articles with a total of 389 citations, and the International Journal of Hospitality Management, also with four articles, but garnering 197 citations. Additional contributions came from the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management and the Journal of Business Research, which published two and one articles, respectively. The citation data indicate substantial variation in scholarly impact – clearly favouring Information Systems Research, as its published papers received markedly higher citation counts compared to those in tourism-related journals.

Table 1.3: Five most popular outlets with citations

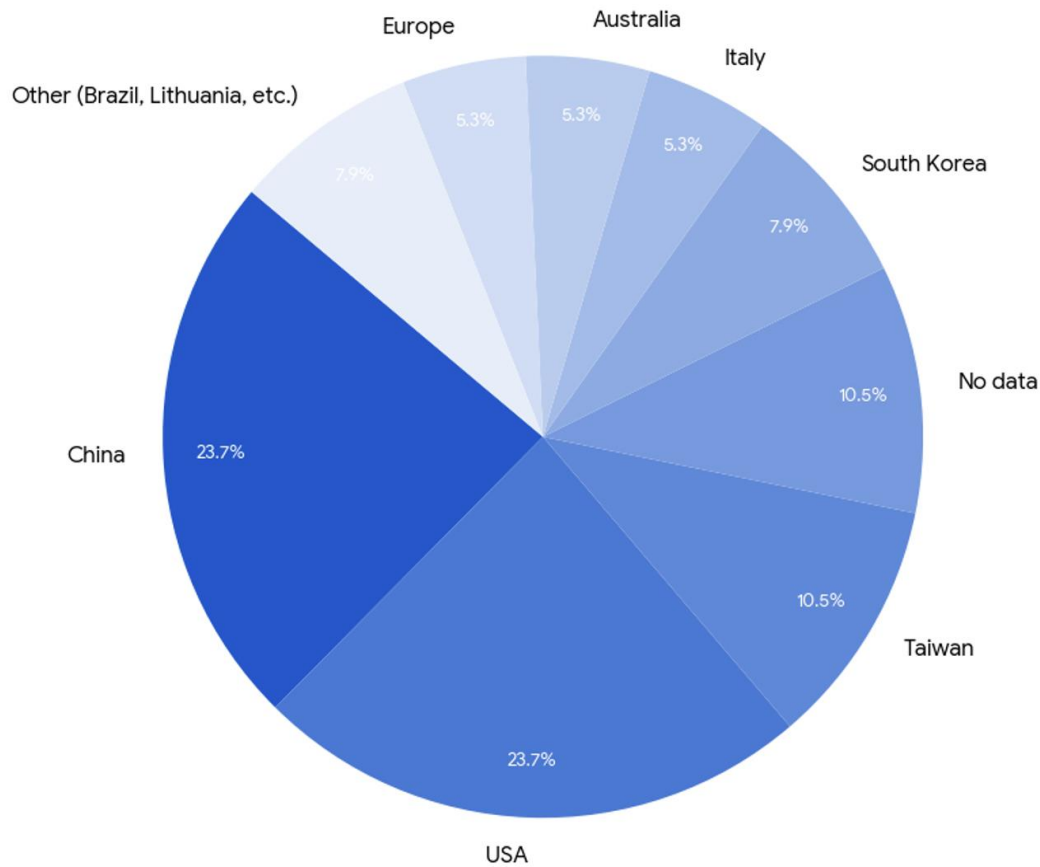
Journal	Number of papers	Citations
Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management	5	136
Information Systems Research	4	389
International Journal of Hospitality Management	4	197
Journal Of Hospitality and Tourism Management	2	17
Journal of Business Research	1	15

Source: own work

The studies examined encompass various geographic regions, as illustrated in Figure 1.1 – which maps the spatial distribution of the research. Almost half of DDs research originates from China (23.7%) and the USA (23.7%) – both equally represented. These are followed by Taiwan (10.5%) and South Korea (7.9%), with Australia contributing a smaller share –

making Asia the most represented continent in tourism DD research. Europe – with studies conducted across multiple countries (5.3%) – and Australia, equal with Italy (5.3%), conclude the list, while all remaining countries were featured in only one study each.

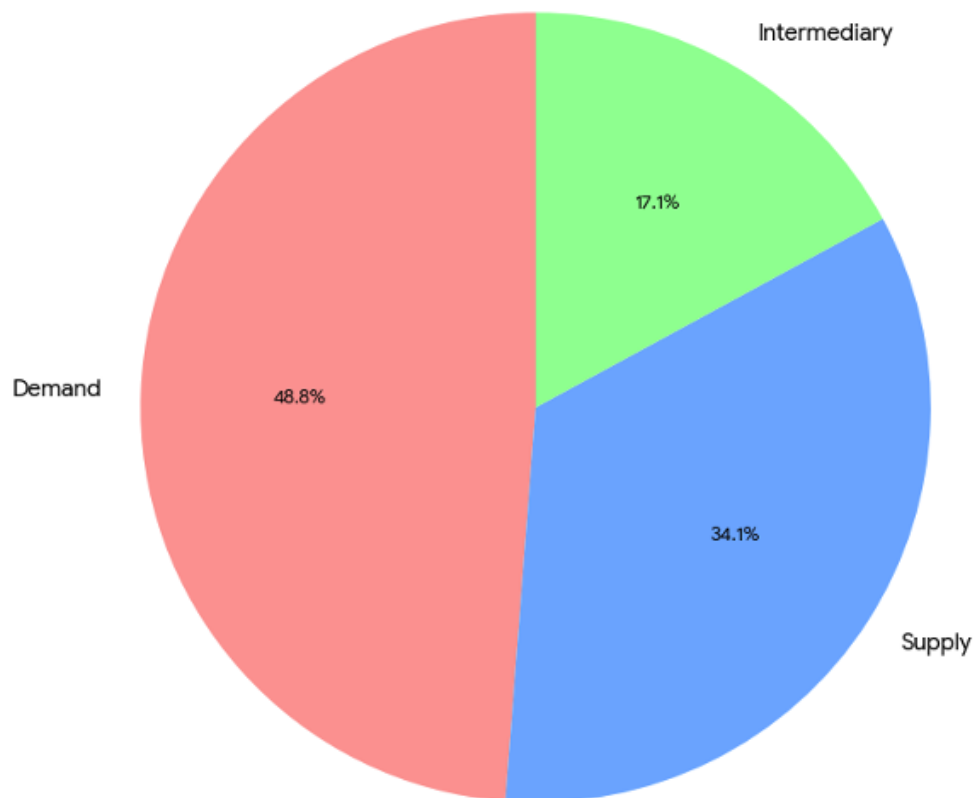
Figure 1.1: Geographic focus of the studies



Source: own work

A supplementary Figure 1.2 illustrates the thematic focus of the studies, indicating a varied spectrum of research that predominantly centres on the demand side of DD use – i.e. tourists purchasing travel online via DDs (48.8%). This is followed by the supply side – i.e. tourism companies (mainly restaurants and hotels) utilising DDs to sell their products (34.1%). The lowest share of studies focuses on the intermediaries themselves – i.e. the DD platforms.

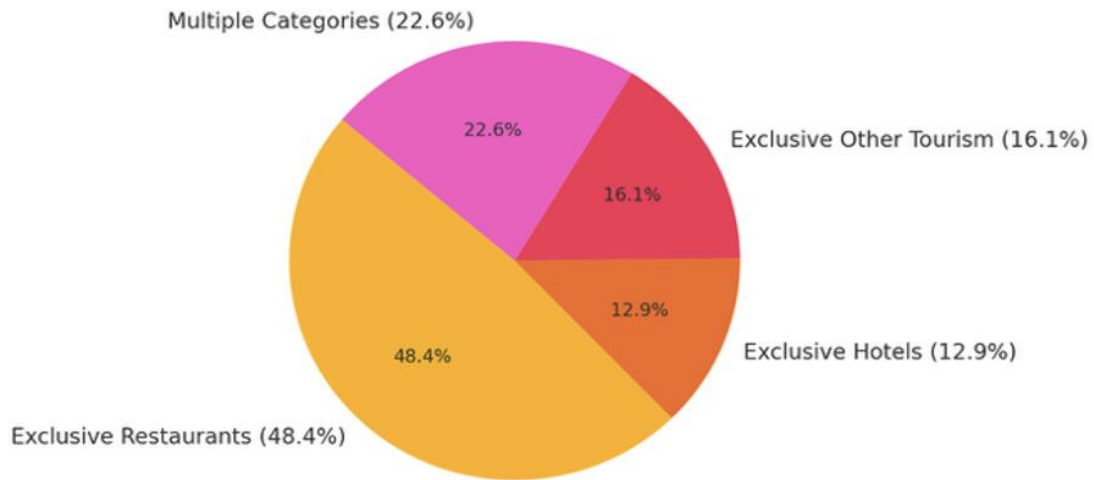
Figure 1.2: Thematic focus of the studies



Source: own work

Following an overview of the stakeholder categories researched, the analysis turned to the structure of the subject under observation. Again, qualitative content analysis (Rourke & Andersen, 2019) was conducted to categorise the focus of the reviewed studies based on the type of tourism product in focus. The analysis indicated that a substantial portion of the sample (48.2%) focused exclusively on the restaurant sector. An additional 16.1% of the studies centred solely on other tourism products, including spas, cultural attractions, and guided tours, whereas studies with a focus on examining the hotel sector comprised 12.9% of the total. A further 22.6% of the studies adopted a more integrative approach by simultaneously analysing multiple tourism sectors and products, most commonly a combination of hotels and restaurants.

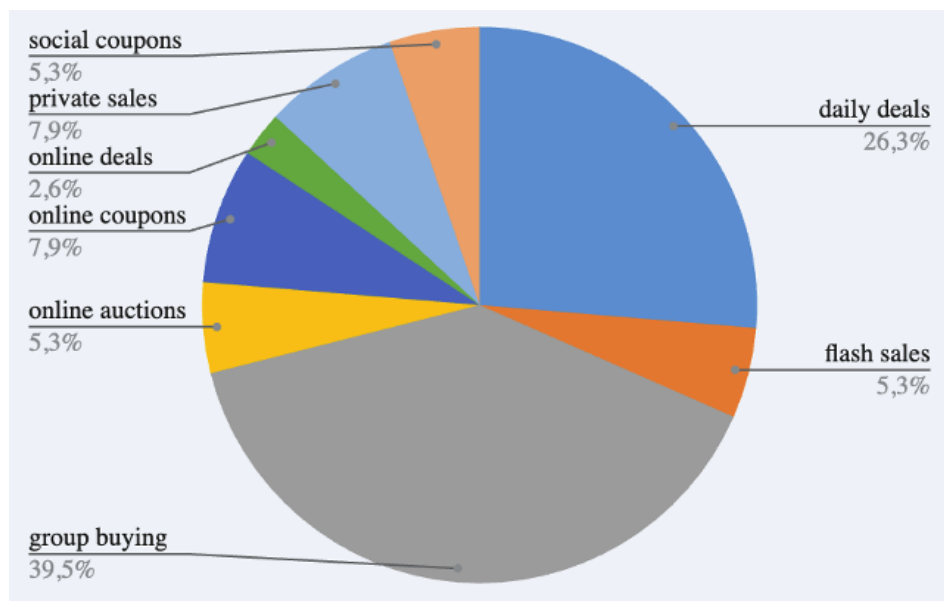
Figure 1.3: Subject under observation



Source: own work

The next Figure 1.4 illustrates the terminology employed in the studies, highlighting the variability in language used to describe DD-related phenomena. A table summarising the most frequently used terms in the reviewed studies reveals highly dispersed terminology, with authors often referring to the same phenomena using very different expressions. The most commonly used term is ‘group buying’ (39.5%), followed by ‘daily deals’ (26.3%), ‘online coupons’ (7.9%), and ‘private sales’ (7.9%). Interestingly, a closer look at the temporal evolution of the terminology shows that all terms continue to appear in the literature. ‘Group buying’, an ancient Asian business model to which the predecessors of modern DDs were linked, remains the dominant term, even though modern Western DDs offer benefits to individuals and have no connection in their business logic to collective bargaining.

Figure 1.4: Terminology use



Source: own work

The absence of definitional clarity hinders both theoretical integration and the practical operationalisation of research outcomes. This is most clearly illustrated in a recent general marketing paper (outside the scope of the SLR) titled “All About Social Coupons” (Ram et al., 2024), which entirely overlooks the term ‘flash sales’. As a result, it omits a substantial stream of literature that employs this terminology and – without clear justification – categorises DDs, group buying, and prepayment as three subgroups of social coupons. Rather than offering clarity and integration – the intended contribution of an SLR – this paper adds further conceptual entropy to an already terminologically fragmented field.

1.4.3 Content & thematic analysis of the abstracts

A word cloud was compiled from the abstracts to provide an initial overview of the studies and as a departing point for the exploration of the substance represented in the sample. A word cloud, which was created with the help of online tool wordclouds, is a graphic representation of the frequency of words in a written corpus and provides researchers an effective approach to visually summarise the corpus, prior to more advanced analyses (Atenstaed, 2021).

The central position in the cloud is taken by the terms customers and consumers, indicating the tourists being a key focus in the DDs research. This aligns with the findings on thematic focus of the studies presented above, which equally ranks the DD demand side as the focus of almost half of reviewed DD studies.

Figure 1.5: Wordcloud with the most commonly used words in the 37 abstracts of the papers



Source: own work

To gain more profound insight, the abstracts were thematically coded following the principles of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process, employing a multi-level coding structure, identified four overarching categories: business operations, consumer behaviour, marketing practices, and research methodologies. These are shown in the table below.

Within business operations, three main themes emerged: business tactics, such as price discrimination and advertising effects; platform usage, which included group buying sites and social media; and sales performance, assessed through measures such as return on investment and operational efficiency.

The consumer behaviour category encompassed themes such as buying behaviour, including impulse buying and repurchase intention; consumer emotions, such as perceived value and customer satisfaction; and customer segmentation strategies.

Marketing practices were classified into marketing strategy, which addressed group buying and social couponing; review effects, including electronic word-of-mouth and rating dispersion; and trust and risk concerns, covering issues such as transaction costs, uncertainty, and service quality.

Finally, research methodologies were divided into research design, which involved case studies and panel data analysis, and data collection methods, with surveys, interviews, and data scraping identified as the most frequently used approaches.

Table 1.4 Thematic analysis

3rd-Level Category	2nd-Level Theme	1st-Level Code
Business Operations	Business Tactics	['price discrimination', 'advertising effect', 'competition response', 'market expansion', 'firm differentiation']
	Platform Usage	['online platforms', 'group buying sites', 'recommendation algorithms', 'smart phone shopping', 'social media']
	Sales Performance	['sales impact', 'capacity use', 'profit analysis', 'operational efficiency', 'return on investment']

To be continued

Table 1.4: Thematic analysis (cont.)

3rd-Level Category	2nd-Level Theme	1st-Level Code
Consumer Behaviour	Buying Behaviour	['impulse buying', 'repurchase intention', 'urge to buy', 'purchase motivation', 'consumer loyalty']
	Consumer Emotions	['perceived value', 'hedonic desires', 'utilitarian desires', 'positive emotion', 'customer satisfaction']
	Customer Segments	['deal mavens', 'emotional loyalty', 'market mavens', 'visitor vs local', 'consumer profiles']
Marketing Practices	Marketing Strategy	['price discounting', 'promotional campaigns', 'group buying', 'social couponing', 'deal strategy']
	Review Effects	['review ratings', 'word-of-mouth', 'rating dispersion', 'e-WOM', 'consumer feedback']
	Risk and Trust	['transaction cost', 'uncertainty', 'service quality', 'risk perception', 'privacy concerns']
Methodologies	Research Methods	['survey analysis', 'regression analysis', 'case study', 'panel data', 'model testing']
	Data Collection Methods	['survey', 'interview', 'data scrapping']

Source: own work

The final step of the preliminary analysis based on the abstracts involved the quantification of themes using qualitative content analysis (Rourke & Andersen, 2019), which, by utilising code occurrence frequencies, enhances the thematic data structure. The most frequently occurring code was ‘group buying’, cited 29 times, followed by ‘social couponing’ (9), ‘repurchase intention’ (7), and ‘perceived value’ (7). Other recurring codes included ‘survey’ (7), ‘service quality’ (6), ‘social media’ (5), and ‘impulse buying’ (4). Several codes appeared only once, such as ‘price discrimination’, ‘customer satisfaction’, ‘deal mavens’, and ‘emotional loyalty’. This suggests that the research has concentrated on a relatively narrow set of core concepts – primarily situated within the domain of marketing activities or examined through the lens of marketing theory – while comparatively less attention has been given to other potentially relevant constructs such as platform usage or the supplier’s business tactics, both of which are significant aspects of engaging with DD platforms. The

results may also be skewed due to the codes ‘group buying’ and ‘social couponing’, categorised under the theme of marketing strategy, also functioning as descriptors of the DD phenomenon.

Table 1.5: Quantitative content analysis by code occurrences

Theme	Code	Occurrences
Marketing Strategy	group buying	29
Marketing Strategy	social couponing	9
Buying Behavior	repurchase intention	7
Consumer Emotions	perceived value	7
Data Collection Methods	survey	7
Risk and Trust	service quality	6
Platform Usage	social media	5
Buying Behavior	impulse buying	4
Review Effects	review ratings	4
Risk and Trust	uncertainty	4
Business Tactics	advertising effect	3
Platform Usage	group buying sites	3
Risk and Trust	transaction cost	3
Platform Usage	online platforms	2
Platform Usage	recommendation algorithms	2
Consumer Emotions	positive emotion	2
Research Methods	panel data	2
Consumer Emotions	utilitarian desires	2
Data Collection Methods	interview	2
Review Effects	rating dispersion	1
Customer Segments	emotional loyalty	1
Customer Segments	deal mavens	1
Consumer Emotions	customer satisfaction	1
Business Tactics	price discrimination	1

Source: own work

These findings offer a preliminary, systematic overview of the scope, focus, and methodological composition of the existing academic literature on DDs within the tourism and hospitality sector. The dataset highlights key trends in terminology, thematic focus, and research design, thereby establishing a basis for further determination, mapping, and assessment of the literature in the following section.

1.5 Key substantive findings

1.5.1 DD demand: What do we know about DD consumers behaviour?

The characteristics of daily deal consumers are multifaceted, involving their buying behaviours, perceptions, and the consequences of their actions on businesses. Research has identified distinct patterns and trends among these consumers, particularly in relation to online promotions and their impact on local retailers. These are outlined below.

Discount-focused behavior

Consumers of DDs are frequently motivated by substantial discounts, often representing a demographic that might not typically engage with a business at full price. This cohort includes new patrons who may not value the quality of the food or service provided, potentially resulting in negative reviews (Bai et al., 2020). A further study revealed that a significant proportion of DD users are occasional bargain seekers, with many customers purchasing only one or two deals – a pattern that limits the effectiveness of conventional recommendation systems used by the platforms (Lacerda, 2015). The most recent study in the sample, from 2024, found that generic DD guests generated lower revenues, had shorter lengths of stay, longer lead times, lower retention rates, and gave less favourable reviews compared to non-DD guests (Chen et al., 2024).

Value perception

The perceived value of daily deals among consumers can vary significantly. Subscribers who have not purchased deals may find them less appealing than those who have, indicating a potential social disincentive to redeem coupons (Ong et al., 2015). Perceived value is shaped by factors such as the size of the discount and the terms attached to the offers, both of which can influence consumer attitudes towards the deals (Ong et al., 2015). Moreover, when deciding whether to purchase deals, cognitive factors play a more decisive role in shaping booking intentions than emotional influences (Chen et al., 2016).

Consumer experience and satisfaction: influence on customer contentment

Studies indicate that consumers of DDs frequently report diminished satisfaction, particularly when they perceive inferior service due to an influx of deal users overwhelming the establishment (Bai et al., 2020). Factors affecting guest satisfaction with accommodation deals include the transparency of the offer, overall contentment with the stay, and any difficulties encountered during redemption (Cox, 2017). Conversely, other studies conclude that while the majority of DD customers reported a positive experience, a significant minority expressed dissatisfaction – highlighting the mixed nature of satisfaction outcomes and the contradictions present in the literature (Cox, 2015).

Externality impacts

The presence of deal users can adversely affect the experiences of regular customers, resulting in prolonged wait times and diminished service quality, which in turn influences overall satisfaction and online ratings for businesses (Bai et al., 2020). This negative externality implies that although DDs can attract new customers, they may unintentionally detract from the experiences of existing patrons, leading to reduced customer loyalty (Bai et al., 2020) and complicating efforts to maintain an appropriate atmosphere in the hotel. Surprisingly, the same sensitivity to dissatisfaction among 'prestige-seeking' customers when sharing a hotel with DD users is also a noted trait of a segment within the niche DD customer base (Geerts & Masset, 2022).

DD customer psychological profiles

DD customers appear to possess a complex psychological profile, shaped by their perceptions of value, brand trust, and internalised attitudes towards luxury and savings. Consumers frequently use discount dynamics to rationalise their purchases – particularly within the luxury tourism sector – where certain individuals display a distinctive ability to reconcile the apparent contradiction between luxury and discounting (Geerts & Masset, 2022). Their traits include price sensitivity coupled with brand awareness, suggesting a desire to maximise value while preserving perceived prestige. Additionally, DD consumers may rely on such promotions to reinforce brand loyalty and trust, indicating that the emotional reassurance provided by discounts plays a significant role in their decision-making processes (Cassia et al., 2015). Research indicates that different types of consumers are influenced by varying psychological factors, ranging from straightforward money-saving motives to more complex aspirations to express identity while staying within budget. Their tendency to behave as market mavens means they respond more to cognitive impulses than emotional ones – an aspect businesses and platforms promoting DDs should carefully consider (Chen et al., 2016).

1.5.2 DD supply: What do we know about businesses using?

Businesses – particularly restaurants – engage in DD promotions for a variety of reasons, aiming to leverage the platform’s popularity to their advantage (Lacerda et al., 2015; Ong et al., 2015). Their experiences with these platforms encompass both notable advantages and significant disadvantages. The primary motivations for using DDs are strategic marketing objectives and financial considerations.

DD use motivators

Firstly, customer acquisition and awareness: DDs can result in immediate sales surges, facilitate the acquisition of new customers, and enhance overall consumer awareness of the business (Bai et al., 2017). They also present an opportunity to provide trials for first-time customers (Chen et al., 2024). Motivators listed explicitly for hotels include mitigating seasonality – commonly employed by larger hotels (Cassia et al., 2015) – and, in some cases, sheer ‘desperation’ (Runfola et al., 2013).

Secondly, revenue generation and inventory management: These platforms can create additional revenue opportunities for diverse operational departments within a business (Chen et al., 2024). They are also beneficial for managing perishable inventory more efficiently (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016).

Thirdly, marketing extension and reach: DDs enhance brand visibility by increasing exposure and advertising with relatively low risk and no upfront financial commitment (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). They enable businesses to engage with customers via new media or mobile devices that may otherwise be inaccessible through traditional marketing channels (Chen et al., 2024).

Fourthly, forecasting and feedback: DD platforms can also serve as tools for forecasting demand and gathering customer feedback on new service offerings, making them suitable for the launch of new hospitality products.

Psychology of DD-using hoteliers

The psychological profile of hoteliers who incorporate DDs into their distribution strategies reflects a primarily rational and strategic mindset, with decisions driven by perceptions of market efficacy rather than emotional factors (Runfola et al., 2013). Hoteliers appear motivated by the functional advantages of DD platforms – such as broader reach and inventory optimisation – rather than by consumer affection or loyalty dynamics (Chen et al., 2024). The emotional considerations of hotel managers play a minimal role in shaping their distribution behaviour, suggesting a pragmatic orientation focused on measurable booking intentions and conversion outcomes. This utilitarian approach implies that hoteliers perceive DDs as tactical tools to navigate competitive pressure, reduce unsold inventory, and respond to consumer demand trends – rather than as mechanisms for fostering emotional brand

engagement. Their attitudes are thus marked by calculated risk-taking, strategic experimentation with IDSs, and a strong emphasis on performance-based efficacy, which – surprisingly – is often very vaguely assessed (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). However, Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu's (2016) framework of DDs advantages and disadvantages is probably the most suitable piece of literature allowing us to ground the further analysis of DDs use and continuance upon – one of the research questions we have set ourselves initially.

Businesses' experiences with DDs

Although motivations are evident, businesses face a range of experiences – both advantageous and detrimental – when utilising DDs. Merchant satisfaction and return on investment (ROI) have been examined in studies regarding the outcomes of DD promotions (Bai et al., 2017). Nonetheless, previous studies on the profitability of DDs for tourism merchants exhibit inconsistencies (Cox, 2017), with success often only vaguely defined among hoteliers (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016) and restaurants providing general assessments that deals were 'somewhat successful' (Heo, 2016). Similarly, the quality, retention rates, and spending patterns of DD-acquired customers remain questionable (Chen et al., 2024). Lastly, some hotels have reported that so-called 'show-off customers' perceive them negatively when they appear on DD platforms (Geerts & Masset, 2022).

1.5.3 DD intermediary: What do we know about the functioning of DD platforms?

DDs represent an e-commerce solution that has evolved from traditional couponing into a sophisticated IDS (Cox, 2017; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). DD platforms function as intermediaries between customers and businesses and operate on the so-called revenue split model, charging businesses commissions and offering customers discounts (Runfola et al., 2013). As an IDS platform, they must provide an appealing website and an enhanced user experience in order to gain customer trust (Kim et al., 2013). Similarly, DD platforms should refrain from offering sensational discounts, as such deals lead to diminished consumer trust and often result in a decision not to purchase, due to the formation of an expectation of inferior quality regarding the advertised product or service (Boon et al., 2015).

The vast majority of research relies on generic platforms such as Groupon, which introduced a unique business model that was subsequently imitated by many companies (Cassia et al., 2015). However, only the paper by Budler et al. (2020) introduced a distinction between websites specialising in tourism (niche DDs) and more generic, Groupon-style platforms offering a selection of localised goods and services. Niche DDs, which tend to offer highly curated selections of quality hotels and were the stronger and faster-growing segment of the DD market between 2015 and 2020, target higher-spending guests (Budler et al., 2020). Yet,

they are the focus of only two studies, so their functioning and the experiences of hotels with them remain largely unknown.

On the other hand, while earlier studies presented somewhat conflicting findings, a recent study by Chen et al. (2024) concluded that, for hotels, cannibalisation between DDs and other IDS platforms is minimal. However, when used without clear limitations, the volume of distribution through generic DD platforms can increase, thereby shifting the IDS mix towards a less profitable channel. This can result in reduced revenue and a customer base that is not retainable.

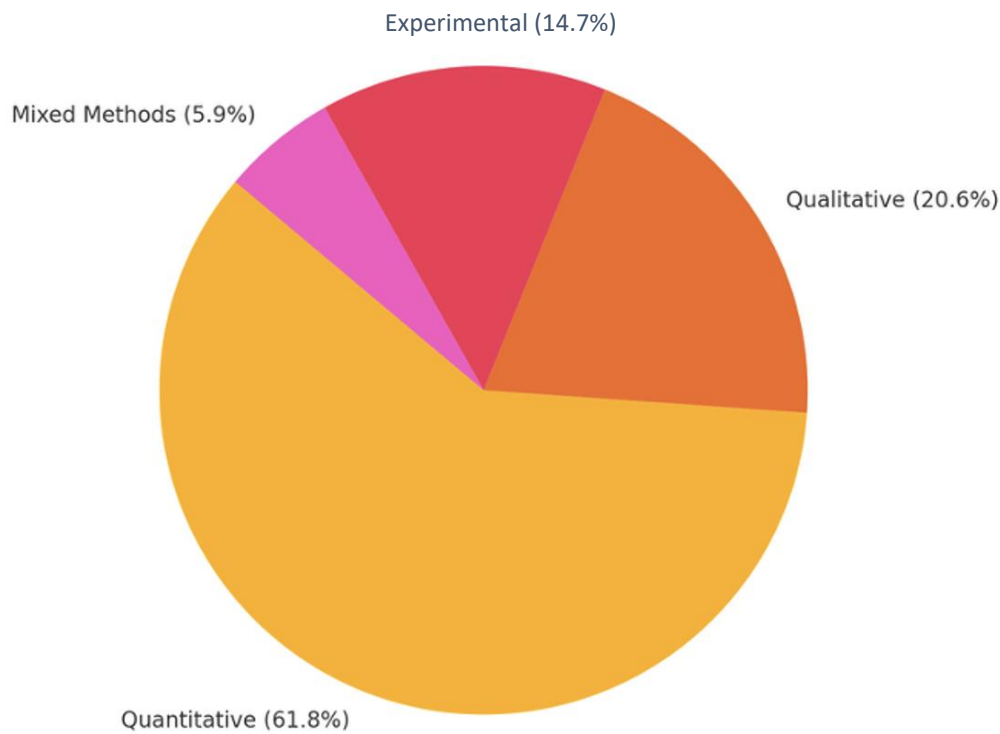
Lastly, DDs can increase sales volumes through advertising, the advertised depth of discounts, and by using persuasive strategies that create a sense of urgency around the expiry of deals (Liu et al., 2015). Such a basis of motivators and consequences of engagement with DDs provides a solid background and starting point for the exploration of DD managerial adoption processes.

1.5.4 Methodological considerations

The analysis of methodological approaches in the reviewed studies, as presented in Figure 1.6 below, indicates a significant prevalence of quantitative research designs. A total of 61.8% of the studies employed quantitative methods, reflecting a clear preference for structured data analysis via surveys, econometric modelling, and statistical techniques. Qualitative approaches were applied in 20.6% of the studies, suggesting a more interpretive and exploratory focus in a smaller segment of the literature.

Experimental designs accounted for 14.7%, indicating a growing interest in establishing causal relationships under controlled or quasi-controlled conditions. Only 5.9% of the studies used mixed-methods approaches, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Figure 1.6: Methodological approaches in studying DDs



Source: own work

This distribution highlights the prevalence of a positivist paradigm in the field and indicates the potential to enhance methodological diversity by incorporating more qualitative and mixed-method approaches in future studies on DDs.

1.5.5 Theoretical underpinnings of DD research

The theoretical underpinnings of DD research in tourism deserve particular attention. The field may be characterised as theoretically underdeveloped and lacking in conceptual depth. In fact, only 8 of the 37 reviewed published papers explicitly refer to a specific theory, meaning that just 19% of the literature can be considered theoretically grounded. The remaining 81%, or 30 papers, address knowledge gaps and limit themselves to contributing to practical knowledge development or the extension of research fields such as digital marketing, online consumer behaviour, or revenue and distribution management, but do not attempt to make a theoretical contribution.

Among the theories used in the eight theoretically grounded papers, several perspectives prevail. Psychological theories are most prominent, particularly in studies examining DD consumer behaviour and the impact of discounted pricing for tourism products on DD platforms. Liang et al. (2012) use prospect theory to understand consumer choice in relation to relative and reference-based thinking when evaluating leisure deals. They also draw on mental accounting theory to explain how consumers assess product value based on absolute

and relative savings (Liang et al., 2012). Furthermore, Liang et al. (2014) discuss auction theory constructs, such as Independent Private Value, Common Value, and Affiliated Private Value, to explain the influence of other shoppers and their social media experience-sharing on purchasing intentions on DD platforms.

Similarly, in their study of DD-related buying behaviour, Yi et al. (2020) rely on the Belief–Desire Theory of Emotion (BDTE) to describe impulse buying as a combination of arousal and cognitive perception that forms emotions driving the consumer to purchase coupons for restaurant deals. Zhang et al. (2020) utilise queuing theory as a foundational framework for operational recommendations on the allocation of tables in restaurants between ‘regular’ and DD customers. Lastly, Wang et al. apply social influence theory in the context of restaurant group buying, explaining how the presence of other online shoppers affects an individual’s cognition, emotions, and behaviour when deciding to purchase a DD offer.

Technology adoption perspectives follow, with Heo (2016) applying the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explain DD adoption among restaurant customers and extending it with commodity theory to account for the effect of limited product availability. Similarly, TAM is adopted by Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; and linked to the more applied e-distribution channel adoption model (O’Connor & Frew, 2004) in an effort to construct a cost–benefit theory-driven framework for evaluating DDs.

Surprisingly, among the 37 papers, only Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu (2016) briefly mention economic pricing theories, specifically peak-load pricing, in relation to optimising variable demand in hotels. In contrast, other studies address revenue management aspects of DDs without referencing any specific economic or pricing-related theoretical framework.

Last but not least, although several studies deal with e-marketing and advertising aspects of running DDs, no study relies on any established strategic marketing theory – in contrast with DD research outside of tourism, which extensively covers promotional and brand-related theoretical perspectives (see Jing & Xie, 2011; Wang et al., 2013; Nigam et al., 2020). Overall, we can conclude that one of the key and most surprising findings of this research is the so-called theoretical deficiency of DD research in tourism.

1.6 Discussion and future research

As an initial observation, a significant issue is posed by the variability in terminology employed across studies. Terms such as ‘group buying’, ‘online coupons’, ‘flash sales’, and ‘private sales’ are used interchangeably – despite the first describing conceptually and operationally distinct mechanisms (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Kim et al., 2014; Liang et al., 2012). Terminological ambiguity is particularly evident in the dominant yet inappropriate use of the term ‘group buying’, which originates from collective

purchasing models but – at least in studies outside the Asian context – is persistently misapplied to individually triggered, Groupon-style online deals that dominate in Europe and have no remaining connection to collective bargaining (Dholakia, 2010; Sigala, 2013).

The literature primarily focuses on the restaurant sector (Zhang et al., 2013; Heo, 2016), with comparatively sparse research addressing hotels (Cassia et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2024) and additional tourism offerings. This seems surprising given the existence of more appealing modern mobile and location-based apps that, in our opinion, outperform the traditional coupon-based restaurant marketing offered by generic DDs. Further concern arises as to whether findings from restaurant settings are transferrable to hotel operations – given the distinct dynamics of service delivery, capacity management, and customer expectations.

Moreover, the majority of hotel-related research emphasises generic DD platforms such as Groupon, while niche and tourism-specific DD platforms – despite their practical relevance – have received limited academic attention (Runfola et al., 2013; Budler et al., 2020; Geerts & Masset, 2022). None of the studies in our sample examine DDs as promotional techniques used by OTAs or on hotels' own websites. Instead, they focus exclusively on DD platforms, representing a clear empirical gap in the hotel-focused literature.

Geographically, the literature is predominantly concentrated on China and the United States. This narrow focus restricts the transferability of findings to other markets – especially in Europe and transitional economies, where consumer behaviour is shaped by different economic and cultural traditions. These under-represented regions constitute a clear empirical gap in our understanding of the mechanisms behind consumer and managerial DD adoption and usage, which we believe to be culturally bound.

Methodologically, the field is dominated by quantitative research designs (Kim et al., 2014; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016) with limited use of qualitative or mixed-method approaches (Cox, 2015; Boon, 2012). This positivist bias limits contextual depth, particularly regarding stakeholder motivations, consumer experiential outcomes, and managerial attitudes toward evolving DD models. In our view, this reveals a distinct methodological gap that constrains substantive knowledge creation.

This SLR further identifies a significant deficiency in theoretical development – a challenge common in e-tourism research (Gretzel et al., 2020) but particularly pronounced here. Only eight of the 37 reviewed papers apply a clearly defined theoretical framework. These include prospect theory (Liang et al., 2012), belief–desire theory of emotion (Yi & Jai, 2020), and technology acceptance models (Heo, 2016; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). However, many contributions remain practically oriented and lack theoretical anchoring. Notably absent are strategic marketing and pricing theories – despite their relevance to understanding DD use in the hotel sector. We also observe a disconnect from DD research in other domains, where such frameworks are more frequently employed

(Hagiu, 2014; Agarwal et al., 2011). In our opinion, this theoretical gap represents a key limitation of current DD research and widely opens the doors for future scholars to make the future DD research more theory driven.

Several critical questions remain unaddressed, posing a significant contextual knowledge gap. No longitudinal studies examine the long-term effectiveness of DDs, and no research addresses their evolution post-2019 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, no study investigates why hotels continue to use DDs despite known challenges – such as reduced guest revenue, poor retention, and brand image risks (Chen et al., 2024; Geerts & Masset, 2022). These research questions point to urgent knowledge needs with direct implications for both theory and practice.

Based on the above-identified research gaps, we propose future research directions across three perspectives:

Prospective trajectories – understanding DD demand: Further research should explore consumer perspectives on DDs, particularly satisfaction or dissatisfaction drivers (Cox, 2017). The impact of DD use on perceived service quality and guest satisfaction, especially in high-end tourism contexts where social signalling is influential (Geerts & Masset, 2022), also warrants investigation. Scholars should examine why some consumers express dissatisfaction (Cox, 2017) and how such experiences influence reviews and repeat purchases. Moreover, the role of specific deal features in shaping decision-making should be analysed using IT-based methods that assess actual (rather than self-reported) behaviour. In sum, DD consumers are motivated by discount incentives and both cognitive and emotional factors, but their impact on businesses can be complex. Understanding these dynamics is essential for firms aiming to use DDs strategically.

Prospective trajectories – understanding DD supply: The key unanswered question is why hotels adopt and continue to use DDs. While the literature lists motivators, it does not explain the mechanisms behind sustained engagement. Future studies should explore the strategic, organisational, environmental, and psychological drivers of longitudinal DD use. Industry-focused research should address risk management, particularly around brand dilution and channel strategy. It would also be valuable to examine the performance of DDs run via hotels' own websites or other IDS platforms, especially considering recent findings about the risks of visible price promotions (Sharma et al., 2025).

Prospective trajectories – DDs as intermediaries: DD platforms, as intermediaries, are under-researched in tourism. While existing studies focus on consumers or suppliers, few examine platform operations, strategic roles, or platform evolution. Comparative research is needed to differentiate niche and generic DDs. Budler et al. (2020) provide the only clear distinction, noting that niche DDs target higher-spending tourists and offer curated content – yet their business implications remain unstudied. No research has explored developments post-2019.

Further research is needed on platform strategy and how DDs fit within the broader IDS portfolio. Chen et al. (2024) suggest limited cannibalisation but warn against over-reliance on generic DD platforms. Studies should explore how tourism businesses integrate DDs within multichannel strategies and examine inter-platform power dynamics.

In addition, the role of platform design, usability, and trust merits attention. Poorly structured offers or deep discounts can harm trust and deter purchases (Boon et al., 2015). Future work should assess how features like transparency, urgency cues, and mobile optimisation influence platform credibility and conversion.

Finally, research should evaluate whether DD platforms create sustained value or merely offer short-term promotions. While some evidence suggests benefits such as brand exposure and feedback (Chen et al., 2024), these remain empirically unverified. Future work should assess the net value of DDs for all stakeholders and examine how such perceptions change over time and across distinct market conditions.

In summary, DDs require a more systematic, longitudinal, and theory-driven research agenda. Addressing the outlined gaps will enhance our understanding of DDs within the tourism IDS ecosystem and assess their potential to evolve into more effective and sustainable tools for hotel distribution and marketing.

1.7 Limitations and conclusions

This SLR emphasises the evolving and underexplored characteristics of ‘DDs’ in tourism research. Originally introduced in response to the economic crisis and recognised for their potential in marketing and distribution, ‘DDs’ have attracted relatively limited academic attention, with only 37 peer-reviewed journal papers available in the Web of Science (WoS) database. The current literature corpus exhibits considerable fragmentation in terminology, a narrow focus on specific hospitality sectors with limited generalisability to broader tourism contexts, and a notable deficiency in theoretical foundations.

Despite our adherence to rigorous methodological procedures, several limitations must be acknowledged. Our aim was to portray the state of ‘DDs’ research and uncover its underlying characteristics within the tourism domain, based exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles. Nevertheless, several tourism-related ‘DDs’ publications that are widely cited – and, arguably, foundational to the field – are not indexed in our WoS-based sample (e.g. McCabe & Branco Illio; Sigala, 2013). This raises an important consideration: whether SLR methodology is suitable for researchers new to the field, as it may lead to the inadvertent exclusion of critical knowledge. This limitation could be addressed by incorporating multiple databases into future SLRs.

Moreover, given that ‘DDs’ research is applied and inherently multidisciplinary – situated at the intersection of information systems, marketing, revenue management, and hospitality operations – we believe that a significant body of current knowledge likely resides in business-oriented publications, trade sources, and grey literature. These sources, typically excluded from SLRs, may contain more recent insights, including industry reports, conference proceedings, or pre-print research. This disconnect underscores the well-known time lag between dynamic market trends and the slower pace of academic publication, particularly within fast-evolving areas such as e-tourism.

We also made a deliberate decision to exclude bibliometric methods, which have become a routine addition to many contemporary SLRs. In our view, such approaches offer limited value for content-driven understanding and risk devolving into exercises in ‘research for the sake of research’ (Marginson, 2020), yielding little substantive knowledge (Korstanje, 2021). Consequently, we do not consider this omission a limitation. On the contrary, we believe that research on ‘DDs’ – with all its complexities, contradictions, and resilience – calls for a content-oriented rather than a metrics-driven advancement of academic discourse.

In conclusion, although ‘DDs’ remain a stable element of the tourism internet distribution system (IDS) – particularly through hotel engagement with niche ‘DD’ platforms – the corresponding academic literature remains constrained in scope, inconsistent in focus, fragmented in terminology, and underdeveloped in its theoretical contributions.

2 BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING DAILY DEALS AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT TRAJECTORIES SINCE 2020: A DUAL PLATFORM-HOTEL PERSPECTIVE²

2.1 Introduction

DD platforms have become an integral part of the IDS in the tourism industry. These platforms, which first gained prominence following the 2009 financial crisis, have evolved into a distinct business model that blends discount-based inventory liquidation, digital marketing, and consumer engagement strategies (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). While DDs were originally designed as short-term sales boosters to combat the crisis, their role has expanded as hotels increasingly rely on digital channels for revenue management and demand stimulation (Budler et al., 2020).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted global tourism, forcing DD platforms to rethink their business models. Travel restrictions, fluctuating consumer confidence and shifting hotel revenue strategies required DDs to adjust their pricing, supplier relations, and customer engagement methods (Foss & Saebi, 2018) – despite their origins as crisis mitigation tools (Starkov, 2011) within the IDS during the previous major crisis – the Global Financial Crisis (Minor, 2017). While prior research has explored hotels' perspectives on using DDs as a sales channel (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016), as a revenue management tool (Minor, Ivanov & Bratec, 2025), as well as the profiles and attitudes of their consumers (Berezina, Semrad, Cobanoglu & Tasci, 2016) and hotels' crisis response strategies (see Yu et al., 2023), no single study to date has investigated how e-intermediaries and IDSs – such as OTAs and DD platforms – responded to the crisis. More specifically, how these platforms adapted their BMs in response to the crisis remains a largely underexplored aspect of the recent pandemic (Geerts & Masset, 2022). Arguably the last remaining unanswered stakeholder perspective in understanding DD operation, we aim to analyse in depth how DD platforms innovated their BMs and their configurations during the pandemic, and to assess their strategies and attempts to sustain their value proposition through the pandemic and within the post-pandemic tourism recovery. In a broader sense, our purpose is to investigate, through the application of BMI research frameworks and constructs, changes occurring within the field of hotel e-distribution and to offer an empirical perspective on business model transformation beyond the visible 'front-of-house' service delivery.

Unlike previous studies that have focused on hotels' marketing and pricing strategies when using DDs, this research positions DD platforms as the central unit of analysis. It continues the discussion on their strategic shifts across multiple aspects of their BM configuration

² This chapter, supervised by assoc. prof. Anton Manfreda, is being prepared in a shortened form for submission to the Journal of Contemporary Management Issues.

adjustments, such as pricing models, supplier partnerships, revenue generation strategies and digital engagement mechanisms – building on where the extant literature left off before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Budler et al., 2020; Berezina & Semrad, 2022).

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How did DD platforms alter their operations and business models during the pandemic to remain viable within the IDS?
2. What strategies did DDs employ to maintain relationships with their suppliers (hotels) and customers?
3. How have hotels perceived the BMI occurring within DD platforms, and has this led to changes in their value perception during the post-pandemic recovery and ongoing geopolitical turmoil?
4. Which BMI constructs best describe and explain the observed DD transformation processes?

This study employs a qualitative case study approach (Yin et al., 2018), integrating the analysis of four complementary data sources to provide comprehensive and contextually rich findings. The study applies thematic analysis to interpret the collected data. A multi-stakeholder and multi-source perspective in case study design ensures relatively robust triangulation of findings (Reinhold, Zach & Krizaj, 2019) – essential for thoroughly observing business model innovation in the field of e-tourism (Gretzel, 2024; Kraus et al., 2022).

Building on the literature of BMI in e-tourism, the Chapter offers empirical insights into how DD platforms adapted their pricing, supplier relations and digital engagement strategies during the pandemic (Kraus et al., 2022) – through both BM innovation (Kraus et al., 2022) and the adoption of transitional business models (Budler & Božič, 2024). Unlike earlier research that primarily frames DDs as simple discounting tools for hotels, the present analysis underscores their role as evolving IDS intermediaries. By combining technology, marketing and revenue-sharing mechanisms to sustain their value proposition (Budler et al., 2020), DDs are portrayed as complex business actors actively seeking to innovate their BMs and progress beyond the temporary–transitional configurations adopted during the crisis – while continuing to provide relevance for hotels and the next generation of consumers. The findings carry practical implications for both DD platforms and hoteliers as they navigate the post-pandemic tourism landscape.

The remainder of the Chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review, outlining key concepts of business model innovation, the role of DDs in tourism, and the crisis adaptation literature. Section 3 details the methodology, including data collection and analysis techniques. Section 4 presents the findings, highlighting BM

adaptations and their perception among DD managers and hotels. Section 5 discusses the implications of these findings for the long-term viability of DD platforms. Section 6 concludes with theoretical contributions, practical recommendations, limitations, and directions for future research.

2.2 Literature review

2.2.1 Impact of the COVID crisis on tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted business operations, compelling organisations to innovate their business models. This period highlighted the interdependence between BMI and traditional models, as companies sought to enhance resilience and adaptability in the face of unprecedented disruptions.

Research indicates that the pandemic accelerated digital transformation, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Maiolini et al. (2025) emphasise that digital innovations emerged as strategic responses to the crisis, enabling vital adaptations that fostered social impact and organisational resilience. Similarly, Huang and Ichikohji (2024) demonstrate that dynamic capabilities allowed SMEs to withstand and even thrive through the development of innovative business models. The urgency of adaptation led many enterprises to reconsider their operations and strategies under external pressures – a phenomenon often described as “imposed service innovation” (Heinonen and Strandvik, 2021).

2.2.2 Business model innovation during the pandemic

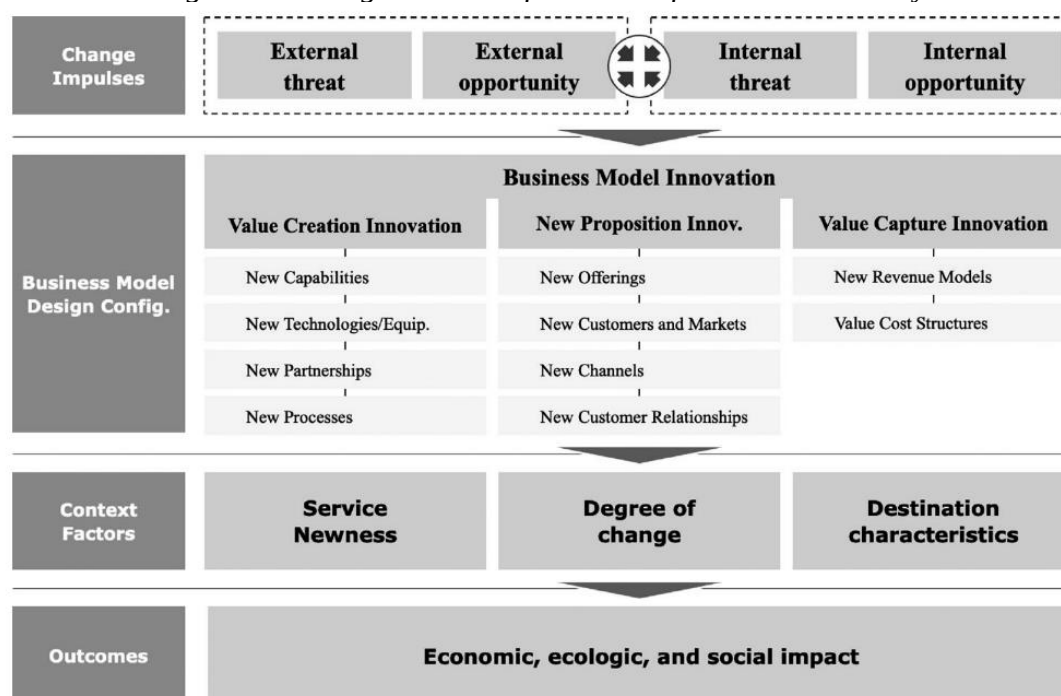
The concept of BMs has evolved from a simple revenue-generation tool (Timmers, 1998) to a holistic structure encompassing value creation, delivery and capture (Amit & Zott, 2001; Osterwalder et al., 2005). In tourism e-distribution, BMs serve to explain value creation, revenue models, resource utilisation and stakeholder roles (Reinhold, Zach & Krizaj, 2017; Teece, 2010).

BMs offer a conceptual framework for understanding how firms operate, generate value, identify target markets, and achieve profitability (Chesbrough & Schwartz, 2007; Teece, 2010). Their growing relevance has made them a central unit of analysis for assessing firms and predicting how alterations to core elements may influence future trajectories (Chesbrough, 2010; Kraus et al., 2022). As the BM concept gains popularity, researchers have called for greater 'salience' in designing BM options, due to the lack of consensus surrounding its definition (Wirtz et al., 2016; Teece, 2015, 2018). The appeal of BMs lies in their adaptability across ecosystems, industries and organisational types. However, it is important to assess how changes to one element or configuration may impact others (Teece, 2018).

BMI explicitly refers to modifications of existing models in response to changing sources of value, particularly in volatile environments (Andries et al., 2013; Dmitriev et al., 2014). BMI is characterised by firms' endeavours to formulate, implement and sustain strategies for generating, delivering and capturing value (Casadesus–Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Schneider, 2019). It is therefore used to alter the logic through which companies operate and manage partnerships. BMI can support a range of objectives, such as reducing costs, optimising internal processes, launching new products, entering new markets and – notably – improving financial performance (Foss & Saebi, 2017). Often reactive in nature, BMI in established firms tends to be driven more by external threats than by proactive opportunity-seeking (Khin & Lim, 2018; Saebi et al., 2017). In tourism, BMI is currently shaped by digital transformation, evolving consumer behaviour and crises such as COVID–19 (Reinhold et al., 2019; Kraus et al., 2022). While tourism–related BMI research remains in its infancy and is fragmented across siloed and heterogeneous structures (Zott et al., 2011), only a limited number of studies exist – despite clear calls to unify and connect research efforts in order to synthesise findings across disciplines and domains of expertise (Reinhold et al., 2017; Kraus et al., 2022).

A relatively recent and seminal attempt in this area was made by Pelegrina et al. (2022), who examined digital business models in tourism and identified 55 distinct BM configurations – yet failed to include the DD business model. Kraus et al. (2022) sought to develop an integrative framework for business models in tourism. This framework combines BM configurations with change impulses, contextual factors and the outcomes of BMI initiatives into a comprehensive model tailored to the specificities of the tourism sector.

Figure 2.1: Integrative BMI framework for tourism industry



Source: Kraus et al., 2022

The pandemic exemplified the reactive nature of BMI in tourism, forcing rapid adaptations across the sector (Foss & Saebi, 2018; Witschel et al., 2019). Its disruptions – including lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and closures – transformed service delivery and severely impacted tourism. Modern tourism increasingly relies on digital BMs, reshaping service distribution and consumer interaction (Mitas et al., 2015; Pencarelli, 2020). Sharp declines in travel and events led to occupancy drops, financial losses, and workforce reductions (M. Kim, 2022; Piotrowski & Piotrowska, 2021). Hospitality firms, along with their IDS partners – including DDs – were compelled to restructure operations and explore new strategies for continuity. Such trial-and-error adjustments – mainly in value propositions – are theoretically referred to as interim or temporary BMs (Clauss et al., 2022). When maintained over longer periods and capable of sustaining customer loyalty, these evolve into so-called transitional BMs (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), which can survive disruption and form part of broader organisational change.

Beyond COVID-19, persistent global shocks – including financial volatility, geopolitical tensions, accelerated globalisation, and digitisation – continue to challenge businesses, amplifying uncertainty and complexity (Akbulaev et al., 2020; Kraus et al., 2020). These disruptions have made BMI essential for survival, often involving transitional models trialled through iterative, adaptive strategies that enabled companies to overcome the pandemic and adapt to a changing context dominated by ongoing geopolitical turbulence. Notions closely connected to BMI, and affected by recent crises, include dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997), absorptive capacity (Engelen et al., 2017), and flexibility and resilience (Karman, 2020) – though all of these remain loosely defined and are often used interchangeably in current pandemic-related tourism literature, which clearly focuses on BM changes occurring in service delivery processes (see Jiang & Wen, 2020; Kim et al., 2021).

2.2.3 Daily Deals and their business models

Daily Deals (DDs), or flash sales, emerged in the aftermath of the 2008 recession as online marketplaces that enabled hotels to sell surplus capacity at discounted rates (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). Blending advertising with discounting mechanisms, DDs stimulate sales through social media and targeted email marketing campaigns (Byers, Mitzenmacher & Zervas, 2012; Li & Wu, 2012). They typically offer prepaid packages with discounts of 20–50% below market rates for limited periods (Sigala, 2013; Lo et al., 2014), acting as classic intermediaries by charging hotels a commission of 20–30% on each reservation generated. Initially, generic DD providers such as Groupon (Kuponko in Slovenia and Crno Jaje in Croatia) focused on consumer goods but later expanded to include hotel inventory (Green & LoManno, 2012), operating as traditional coupon-based marketplaces. In later years, a wave of niche DD platforms – including Voyage Privé and Secret Escapes – emerged, specialising exclusively in hotel and travel offers and operating internationally across all major European tourist markets. These

providers positioned themselves as full Internet Distribution Systems (IDSs), offering real-time availability and instant booking confirmations to consumers (CNBC, 2018).

Hotels collaborate with both generic DDs (e.g. Groupon) and niche DDs (e.g. Voyage Privé, Secret Escapes). Niche platforms are particularly appealing to upscale four- and five-star properties, which use them as part of broader marketing strategies aimed at attracting new clientele (Budler et al., 2020). These platforms resemble Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) by providing instant booking and functioning as semi-permanent marketing channels that increase visibility – a phenomenon known as the billboard effect (Anderson, 2009). They allow hotels to reach younger, affluent, and digitally literate audiences, especially valuable during periods of low occupancy (Minor et al., 2025). Budler et al. (2020) offered a comprehensive business model (BM) analysis of both types of DDs. This is extended below with insights from additional sources, following the BM components proposed by Osterwalder et al. (2015).

Generic DD platforms such as Groupon offer hospitality services alongside a broader portfolio of goods and services, typically targeting local and national markets. Their BM primarily appeals to price-sensitive, brand-disloyal consumers who are motivated by discounts and value offers (eMarketer, 2011; Minor, 2017). The core value proposition of these platforms lies in their ability to provide merchants with tools to manage unsold capacity during low-demand periods, enhance brand exposure, and capture customer data for future promotional activities (Dholakia & Kimes, 2011; Edelman et al., 2016; Piccoli & Dev, 2012; Sigala, 2013; Subramanian, 2012; Wu et al., 2012). For consumers, generic DDs reduce the perceived risk of trying new products or services by offering significant discounts, often supported by social proof mechanisms such as showing how many deals have been sold (Cox, 2012; Dholakia, 2010; Edelman et al., 2016; Amblee & Bui, 2012). These platforms operate primarily through mobile applications and DD emails, which serve as the main distribution channels (Statista, 2018; Minor, 2017). Customer relationships are largely automated and low-touch, relying on self-service interfaces, emails, and app notifications. Revenue is generated primarily through commissions ranging from 20–50% on discounted offers, supplemented by fees for premium deal placements and optional subscription services (Byers et al., 2012; Sigala, 2013). Key resources include an extensive customer and merchant base, a robust digital platform with data analytics capabilities, and strong brand recognition. Core activities focus on onboarding merchants, curating deals, executing marketing campaigns, and maintaining and enhancing the technology platform. Partnerships with local merchants, app platforms, ad networks, and strategic collaborations, such as Groupon Getaways with Expedia, support the BM (Hughes & Breytenbach, 2013; Piccoli & Dev, 2012). The cost structure is dominated by marketing expenditure, technology development, personnel costs, payment processing fees, and general administrative expenses.

In contrast, niche DD providers such as Secret Escapes and Voyage Privé focus exclusively on the hospitality sector, offering tailored deals curated by destination, length of stay, or

budget (Budler et al., 2020). Their customer segments consist of affluent, well-educated, and frequent travellers, typically aged between 30–50, who seek premium travel experiences at reduced rates (Budler et al., 2020; Minor, 2017). The value proposition centres on providing hotels with access to high-value customer segments while safeguarding brand integrity and leveraging the advertising benefits of the billboard effect (Anderson, 2009). For consumers, these platforms offer luxury stays at discounted prices and the convenience of curated, real-time booking options (Budler et al., 2020). Distribution is managed through targeted email campaigns, mobile apps, affiliate partnerships, and collaborations with lifestyle media outlets. Customer relationships are high-touch, characterised by personalised recommendations, loyalty programmes, and dedicated customer support. Revenue streams are derived from commissions on bookings, transaction fees, and premium listing fees, with arrangements adapted over time in response to market conditions (Budler et al., 2020). Key resources include exclusive hotel and travel partnerships, a strong and trusted brand, a curated travel inventory, and a specialised team for deal negotiation and curation. Key activities involve securing exclusive agreements, managing technology platforms, conducting affiliate marketing, and delivering customer service. The model is supported by partnerships with hotels, airlines, tour operators, technology providers, and marketing agencies, as well as through significant investment backing and acquisitions aimed at expanding market presence (May, 2014). Cost structures reflect commission payments, marketing and acquisition costs, technology maintenance, staffing, and administrative overhead. The findings are summarised in a comparative table of BM elements of DDs as of 2019 (Table 2.1) below:

Table 2.1: BM elements of niche and generic DDs in 2019

Business Model Element	Generic DDs (e.g., Groupon)	Niche DDs (e.g., Secret Escapes)
Customer Segments	Price-sensitive, brand-disloyal consumers seeking discounts	Affluent, educated, frequent travellers (30–50 years old)
Value Proposition	Merchants: fill capacity, brand exposure, data capture Customers: discounted, low-risk trials, social proof	Merchants: access high-value segments, brand protection, billboard effect Customers: discounted premium stays, curated offers
Channels	Mobile apps, daily emails, website	Email campaigns, mobile app, website, affiliates, lifestyle media

To be continued

Table 2.1: BM elements of niche and generic DDs in 2019 (cont.)

Business Model Element	Generic DDs (e.g., Groupon)	Niche DDs (e.g., Secret Escapes)
Customer Relationships	Automated engagement, low-touch, self-service interfaces	Personalised service, loyalty programmes, dedicated support
Revenue Streams	Commissions (20–50%), premium placements, subscriptions	Commissions, transaction fees, premium placements
Key Resources	Large customer and merchant base, digital platform, analytics, brand	Exclusive hotel partnerships, curated inventory, brand, expert team
Key Activities	Merchant onboarding, deal curation, marketing, platform development	Exclusive contracts, platform/app management, marketing, customer service
Key Partners	Local merchants, app platforms, ad networks, Expedia (Groupon Getaways), investors	Hotels, airlines, tour operators, tech providers, affiliates, investors
Cost Structure	Commissions, marketing, tech infrastructure, staff, processing fees, admin	Commissions, marketing, tech, staff, processing fees, admin

Source: own work

2.2.4 Historical overview in Daily Deals' business model evolution up to 2019

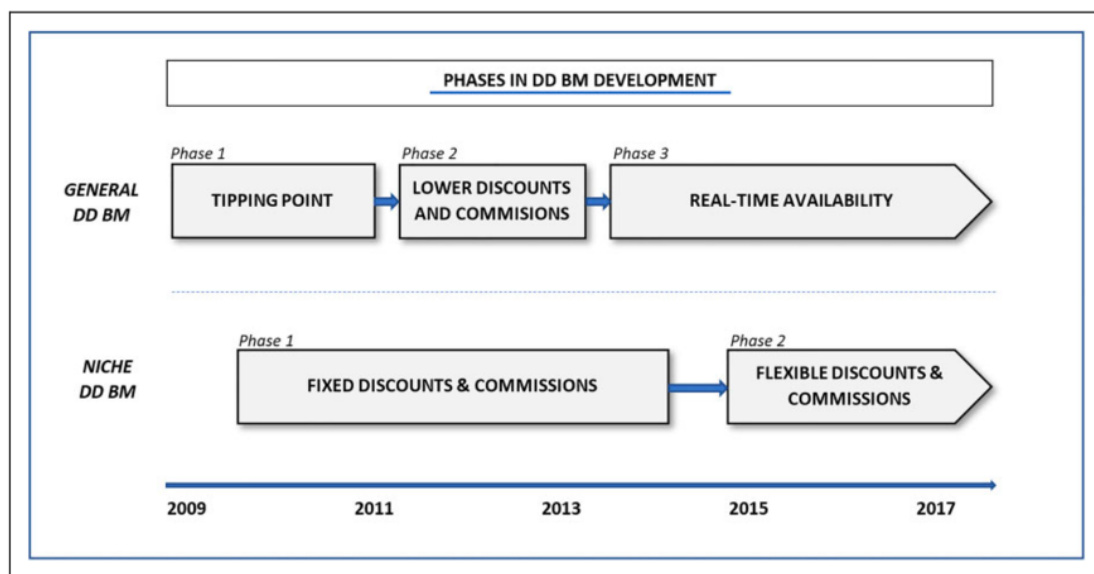
As with most digital business models, the evolution of DDs from their meteoric rise involved several readjustments. Budler et al. (2020) also identify the necessity of differentiating between generic and niche DD business models, as they uncover significant variations in their BM elements. Both types were benchmarked against the OTA business model, offering insight into areas of overlap and convergence. This comparison offers insight into the role of DDs within the IDS.

The study by Budler et al. (2020) further delineates specific phases in the development of DD business models, enhancing the comprehension of DDs as a hospitality IDS instrument. Three phases have been identified for generic DDs. Phase 1 (2008–2011) included significant discounts and tipping-point mechanisms that necessitated a minimum sales threshold for deal activation. Sales depended exclusively on online vouchers, which were

redeemed manually with providers. Phase 2, starting in 2012, marked a period of maturity characterised by more moderate discounts, reduced commissions, and the removal of minimum sales thresholds. Phase 3, commencing in 2013, involved generic distribution channels collaborating with online travel agencies to provide travel deals featuring live inventory availability. This development required the establishment of new capabilities and partnerships, similar to those of specialised distribution channel providers.

Niche distribution developments occurred in two phases that were influenced by economic conditions. Phase 1 (2008–2014) entailed gradual expansion through a market-by-market expansion strategy, providing a restricted portfolio, fixed commissions (approximately 20%), and minimum required discounts (25–30%) along with additional upgrades or inclusions. Phase 2, initiated in 2015, following a wave of significant mergers and acquisitions, implemented increased flexibility in commission rates, diverse agreements, and negotiable discounts, ensuring customers consistently received the lowest available online rates. Figure 2.2 below illustrates the phases of historic DD BM development.

Figure 2.2: Historic DD BM development up to 2019



Source: Budler et al. (2020)

Ultimately, Budler et al.’s study (2020) concludes with the notion that BM configurations in the IDS space are increasingly converging in essential aspects – a view with which we fully concur. This convergence emphasises value co-creation and customer-centric strategies, as providers modify business model elements to enhance competitive advantage. A key commonality is the real-time availability of hotel rooms, which was initially a feature of OTAs but was later adopted by both generic and niche DDs in subsequent development stages. Niche discount platforms such as Voyage Privé and Very Chic now provide last-minute deals with immediate departures. Conversely, OTAs have incorporated features akin to DDs – exemplified by Booking.com’s ‘secret deals’ and daily discounts – illustrating the continuing relevance of DD attributes in IDS. The evolution of DD BMs reflects market

demands for differentiation and collaboration. Niche DDs are increasingly attracting investment or partnerships with hotel chains (CNBC, 2018), leading to a shift towards more balanced relationships with hoteliers. Allotment-based contracting and flexible commissions promote year-round discounted inventory, facilitating mutual value creation. Budler et al. (2020) conclude that, going forward, DDs should offer distinct advantages to consumers through tailored offers, while also benefiting hotels through strategic inventory sales, enhanced integration, and automation. This overview captures the state of DD BMs as of 2019 – before the pandemic struck, disrupting many established practices of hotel management (Jiang & Jun, 2020). It is at this point that our investigation begins. While literature has extensively covered marketing and management changes in the hotel sector (see: Japutra & Situmorang, 2021; Bonfati et al., 2021; Ju & Jang, 2023), the perspective of hotel distribution, IDS systems, and DDs as intermediaries calls for further research to examine how these fundamental stakeholders in the modern tourism distribution system have responded and evolved.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Research context – two countries in focus

Slovenia and Croatia are both highly dependent on tourism, with the sector contributing 13% to Slovenia's GDP (STRSTO, 2019) and nearly 25% to Croatia's GDP (WTTC, 2022; TSA, 2022). Tourism accounts for 13% of total employment in Slovenia (STRST, 2018; OZS, 2019) and 23.2% in Croatia (WTTC, 2022; TSA, 2022), with gross value added (GVA) contributions of 4% (SURS, 2020) and 11.35%, respectively (WTTC, 2022; TSA, 2022).

Slovenia welcomes 6.2 million visitors annually, 75% of whom are international (STO, 2019). Croatia attracts around 20 million visitors, 86% of whom are foreign (MINT, 2021). Slovenian hotels comprise 22,443 rooms across approximately 200 hotels, representing 32% of national bed capacity and generating 70% of overnight stays (STRST, 2018; STO, 2019). In contrast, Croatian hotels offer 129,028 rooms across 760 hotels, comprising 15% of bed capacity and 24% of overnight stays (MINT, 2021; HTZ, 2020).

Both countries face strong seasonality. In Slovenia, occupancy rates range from 36% in January to 76% in August, with an annual average of 50.5% (STO, 2019). Croatia averages 52.9% occupancy, with 49% of hotel overnight stays concentrated in July and August (HTZ, 2020).

Hotels in both nations predominantly fall into the 3-, 4-, and 5-star categories (Slovenian Chamber of Commerce, 2019; HTZ, 2020), with average hotel sizes of 80 rooms in Slovenia and 170 rooms in Croatia. Slovenia's hotel sector exhibits low international brand presence and remains largely state-owned, due to unsuccessful privatisation efforts (Mihalič et al.,

2012). In Croatia, hotel availability is declining as private accommodations and camps expand (HTZ, 2020).

Table 2.2: Two countries at a glance

Aspect	Slovenia	Croatia
Tourism GDP share	13%	~25%
Tourism employment share	13%	23.2%
GVA	4%	11.35%
Annual visitors	6.2 million (75% foreign)	20 million (86% foreign)
Hotel rooms / properties	22,443 rooms in ~200 hotels	129,028 rooms in ~760 hotels
Share of hotel bed capacity	32%	15%
Share of hotel overnight stays	70%	24%
Occupancy rates	50.5% annual average	52.9% annual average
Seasonality	36% Jan, 76% Aug	49% of stays occur in July–August
Hotel location	Coastal, thermal, mountain areas	Mainly coastal
Hotel category	3-, 4-, 5-star (90%+)	3-, 4-, 5-star (90%+)
Average hotel size	80 rooms	170 rooms
Ownership / Industry structure	State-owned, low brand presence	Shrinking hotel share due to growth of private rentals

Source: own work based on Bratec & Šegota (2023)

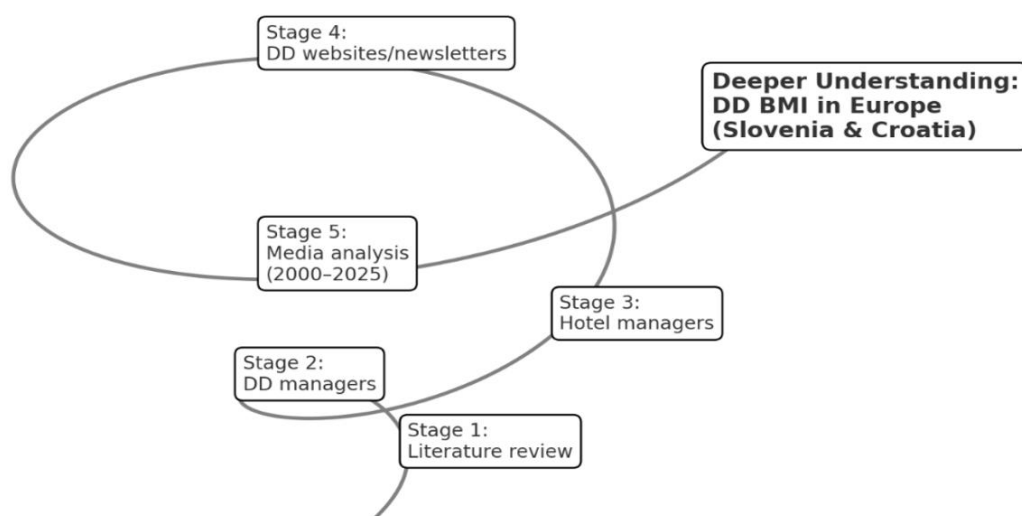
In Slovenia, in contrast to the widespread use of generic DDs, niche DD adoption has been cautious, primarily limited to newer or recently renovated hotels that cater to higher-end international tourists. In Croatia, niche DDs have been more widely adopted to attract foreign visitors, while generic DDs are typically used to stimulate off-season business (Minor, Ivanov & Bratec, 2025). Furthermore, the two countries implemented differing strategies to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis: Slovenia prioritised domestic tourism through 'staycation voucher schemes', whereas Croatia intensified marketing efforts in neighbouring countries, promoting proximity tourism as a crisis response.

2.3.2 Research approach

The study adopts a qualitative, constructionist approach, motivated by the aim to explain, describe, classify, and evaluate the process of DD BMI and BM transformations. This aligns with the need for in-depth exploration of a relatively under-researched topic, where quantitative methods may constrain discovery due to the absence of clearly defined constructs (Coombes & Nicholson, 2013; Patton, 2002; Suddaby, 2010). We maintain that qualitative insights are essential to understanding the BMI processes occurring within tourism distribution – a field that arguably lacks sufficient empirical investigation (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Navio-Marco et al., 2018).

The study utilises a hermeneutic methodology characterised by a spiral process and informed by thematically sampled informants. Understanding evolved through stages as new perspectives emerged, supporting a holistic interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Figure 2.2 below illustrates the methodological approach.

Figure 2.3: The hermeneutic research spiral



Source: own work

The research followed a five-stage process. Stage 1 involved a review of the literature to identify gaps and clarify conceptual ambiguities regarding DDs and their BMs. Stages 2 and 3 gathered insights from key stakeholder groups: DD managers and hotel managers. Stage 4 included the analysis of written communication from DD websites, including newsletters, and Stage 5 reviewed media publications about DDs between 2000 and 2025. This iterative approach ensured a well-rounded, multi-stakeholder and multi-source understanding of BMI in DDs during this period in Europe, with a focus on their perception among hoteliers in Slovenia and Croatia.

2.3.3 Data collection

Primary data collection took place primarily in Stages 2 (11 hotel managers in Slovenia and 10 in Croatia) and Stage 3 (5 DD managers from across Europe – three with responsibilities specifically covering the Slovenian and Croatian markets, and three representing global, niche DD platforms) through semi-structured interviews, following established protocols to reduce variability (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). In total, 22 interviews were conducted, with recordings made via online tools (Skype, Zoom, MS Teams), and two interviews were held in person. The interviews were mainly conducted in English, except for four conducted in Slovene or Croatian among hotel managers, and two among DD managers, based on the informants' preference. The duration of interviews ranged from 21 to 67 minutes. English interviews were transcribed using Trint, an AI transcription tool, and subsequently refined manually, while Slovenian and Croatian interviews were transcribed by hand. The main questions were consistent across both stakeholder groups to ensure a comprehensive examination of key concepts, while the flexible structure allowed for follow-up enquiries to improve understanding (Bryman, 2008; Sarantakos, 2013). Additionally, tailored questions were developed for each stakeholder group, reflecting their specific roles in relation to the DD business model. This was supplemented by visual observation of DD platforms' communication via their email newsletters (Stage 4). These data were preserved and organised chronologically in an archival manner, following the principles of historical media research (Godfrey, 2008). Ultimately, Stage 5 involved the examination of online media disseminating information related to DD platforms. This stage was conducted innovatively, as suggested by Christou (2023), using Google Gemini AI Pro Deep Research Function and Perplexity AI Pro. The prompt utilised was: *“For the academic study on the evolution of business models in daily deal/flash sale platforms in tourism, please gather all relevant data published between 2020 and 2025 that can aid in understanding their evolution and changes.”* To enhance accuracy, only data that appeared in both searches and was explicitly referenced in an AI output was considered for analysis. In this way, Stages 4 and 5 aimed to supplement, contextualise, and support the interpretation of findings from interviews conducted in Stages 2 and 3.

Table 2.3: Interview profiles DD managers

DD Type	Informant pseudonym	Position	Years of experience with DDs	DD Company	Location	Interview Year
Niche	Kaya	Market Manager	0–5	International DD platform	France	2021
Generic	Clemente	Regional Manager	5–10	Local DD platform	Slovenia	2022
Niche	Denny	Regional Manager	5–10	International DD platform	Croatia	2022
Generic	Ali	CEO	5–10	Regional DD platform	Switzerland	2023
Niche	Boris	Director Business Development	10–20	International DD platform	UK	2023

Source: own work

Table 2.4: Interview profiles hotel managers

Coun-try	Infor-mant pseudo-nym	Position	Years of expe-rience	Hotel Org.	Cate-gory	Quality Score: Tripadvisor	Interview Year
HR	Tony	E-Commerce Manager	5–10	National chain	4	4	2019
HR	Magda	Director of Sales & Marketing	5–10	National chain	4	4.5	2019
SI	Erna	Assistant to GM	5–10	International chain	5	4.5	2019
HR	Steph	Director of Sales & Marketing	10–20	International chain	5	4.5	2022
SI	Babette	Director of Sales	10–20	International chain	4	4	2022
HR	Pearl	GM	10–20	Independent	4	4.5	2023

To be continued

Table 2.4: Interview profiles hotel managers (cont.)

Country	Informant pseudonym	Position	Years of experience	Hotel Org.	Category	Quality Score: Tripadvisor	Interview Year
HR	Mya	Director of Sales & Marketing	20–30	International chain	5	4.5	2023
HR	Marcel	E-Commerce Manager	10–20	National chain	4–5	4.5	2023
HR	Emilio	Director of Revenue Management	10–20	National chain	4–5	5	2023
SI	Leona	Director of Marketing	10–20	National chain	3–5	4.5	2023
SI	Josie	Director of Sales	20–30	National chain	4	3.5	2023
SI	Karina	Director of Sales	10–20	National chain	4	4	2023
SI	Mae	Director of Sales	10–20	National chain	4	4.5	2023
SI	Jessica	Sales Manager	10–20	Independent	4	3.5	2023
SI	Joe	Reservations Manager		National chain	3–5	3.5	2023
SI	Kirsten	Head of Sales	10–20	National chain	4	4	2023
SI	Seb	Sales Manager	20–30	National chain	4–5	4	2023
SI	Portia	Director of Sales and Marketing	10–20	National chain	4	4.5	2023

To be continued

Table 2.4: Interview profiles hotel managers (cont.)

Coun- try	Infor- mant pseudo- nym	Position	Years of expe- rience	Hotel Org.	Cate- gory	Quality Score: Tripadvisor	Interview Year
HR	Claude	Director of Sales	5–10	National chain	3–5	4.5	2024
HR	Sue	Sales & Marketing Consultant	20–30	Independent	3–5	4.5	2024
HR	Salomon	Director of Direct E-Sales	20–30	Regional chain	3–5	4.5	2024

Source: own work

2.3.4 Data analysis

Although the use of multiple data sources and mixed methods is typical in case study research, our study relies on an exploratory qualitative approach and treats Slovenia and Croatia as geographical case contexts. Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for identifying patterns while preserving the context of the analysed data (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). The analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2008) framework, combining deductive codes from existing literature with inductive codes that emerged from the data. Analysis was conducted at both manifest (explicit) and latent (interpretive) levels (Braun & Clarke, 2008; Joffe & Yardley, 2004; Strachan et al., 2015). The data were arranged chronologically, and this structure is maintained in the presentation of our results.

Coding was performed inductively using NVivo 14 software on empirical data collected through interviews and media coverage of DDs and merged into higher-order descriptive themes. The visual material from direct DD communication was stored in chronological order and analysed descriptively.

In the final step, the total coded data were systematically outlined and reorganised by the researcher, and then abductively consolidated into the dimensions of the established BM Canvas Framework (Osterwalder et al., 2005) for both the DD managers’ and hoteliers’ perspectives.

Table 2.5: DD managers inductive coding structure

Theme	Codes Included	Illustrative Quote(s)
Business Model Adaptations	Prepaid model disruption, OTA-like transformation, Hybrid business model, Model restructuring, No diversification move	<i>"The other brand, -----, which is a --- - website, it's also a closed user group. And what they have... they have the rates constantly on the web. And so do we now" (Denny)</i> <i>"We tried to stick with a business model that was successful, so it shouldn't change." (Kaya)</i>
Operational Responses to Crisis	Cost-cutting survival mode, Cash flow challenges, Refund issues, Survival over strategy, Payment delay impact, Payment T&C's overhaul	<i>"I mean, it was really like going into survival mode, right, for all these companies." (Boris)</i> <i>"It was way better to focus on cancellations, try to postpone those, try to not return the money..." (Kaya)</i>
Marketing and Customer Strategy	Ad-hoc partnerships, Website changes, Marketing strategy shift, Push advertising model, Impulsive buying trigger, Transparent communication, Customer trust preservation, Focus on wellness products Development of tech capabilities	<i>"And then we start that, I don't know selling affiliates to decorate homes and stuff like this." (Boris)</i> <i>"We had to pivot quickly toward local experiences. By using AI-driven marketing, we improved engagement and conversion rates." (Ali)</i>
Sales and Booking Flexibility	Shift to flexibility, Last-minute booking trend, Consumer behavior change, Flexibility in discount & commission	<i>"During the early pandemic phase, deep discounts stopped working. Customers weren't willing to commit, so we introduced longer validity and risk-free deals." (Clemente)</i>
Value Proposition and Packaging	Value-added packages, Customer value focus, Rich package preference, Commodity to experience, Focus on long-term cooperation	<i>"The post-COVID traveler is more cautious but also more experience-driven. Offering just a discounted room isn't enough anymore—we need curated, flexible packages." (Denny)</i>

To be continued

Table 2.5: DD managers inductive coding structure (cont.)

Theme	Codes Included	Illustrative Quote(s)
Hotel Partner Engagement	Platform not agency, Reputation management, Partnership leverage, Wellness demand growth, Destination targeting logic, Hotel partner persuasion	<i>"Our business model was created as a platform for advertising hotels, for example. The coupon model is our business model, our business relationship between the hotel and the guest. We don't even call it a coupon sale, we just sell the customer an option under certain conditions"</i> (Ali) <i>"And hotels opened to us much more during those times because they they were missing markets."</i> (Denny)
COVID-Specific Measures	Safety over sales, Sanitary compliance checks, High season hope in 2020 and 2021, Coupon-based market distortion (Slo only), Localized market focus, Partner targeting logic	<i>"We stopped the sales, we started to sell again in early summer..."</i> (Kaya) <i>"Especially in UK. A very, very long lockdown and you never knew it's gonna end and come back"</i> (Boris).

Source: own work

Table 2.6: Hoteliers inductive coding structure

Theme	Code	Country	Illustrative Quote
Strategic Use of Flash Sales	Fill Empty Rooms	CRO	<i>"Flash sales are a tool for filling empty rooms during off-peak periods."</i> (Claude)
	Cash Flow Motivation	SLO	<i>"Strategic motivations are to fill low occupancy and increase sales, visibility, new markets, cash flow, promotion."</i> (Portia)
	Exposure to New Audience	SLO	<i>"The main goal... is to expose the hotel to a new audience and generate some revenue."</i> (Erna)
	Specific Timing	CRO	<i>"Flash sales are primarily used during the pre and post-season periods."</i> (Emilio)

To be continued

Table 2.6: Hoteliers inductive coding structure (cont.)

Theme	Code	Country	Illustrative Quote
Perception & Evolution	Initial Skepticism	CRO	<i>“There was a negative perception... but later realized guests often increased additional consumption, so they spend well.” (Magda)</i>
	Adaptation to Tech	SLO	<i>“Flash sales, especially international like Secret and Voyage, are evolving to incorporate dynamic pricing and more flexible conditions.” (Portia)</i>
	Recognition of Value	CRO	<i>“One interesting insight is the shift in perception towards flash sales from initial skepticism to recognition of their value.” (Magda)</i>
	Strategic Channel Use	SLO	<i>“Flash sale providers were adapting to technological advancements and considering online sales options.” (Portia)</i>
Challenges Identified	Fixed Pricing Limits	SLO	<i>“Fixed price and room blocking limited flexibility.” (Jessica)</i>
	Price Cannibalisation Risk	CRO	<i>“Guests who pay less through flash sales tend to be more demanding.” (Pearl)</i>
	Non-refundable Problems	SLO	<i>“The non-refundable nature became a significant problem during COVID.” (Mae)</i>
	Staff Burnout	SLO	<i>“Worried about service quality and staff burnout because million of cancellations and postponements” (Joe)</i>
Guest Behavior & Loyalty	Low Price Habit	SLO	<i>“Guests can become accustomed to low prices and wait and ask for them”. (Jessica)</i>
	One-time Buyers	SLO	<i>“Customers with coupons were mostly one-time buyers.” (Mae)</i>
	No Loyalty Contribution	SLO	<i>“Lack of contribution to loyalty or future marketing campaigns.” (Mae)</i>
	Low Income Guests	SLO	<i>“Customers who purchase through Groupon have less money.” (Seb)</i>
Impact of COVID-19	Sales Channel Collapse	CRO	<i>“Flash sales died after COVID due to changes in travel behavior.” (Pearl)</i>
	Year-Round Usage	CRO	<i>“Flash sales are still relevant for year-round hotels.” (Claude)</i>
	Voucher Substitution	SLO	<i>“Now we use tourist vouchers instead of flash sales.” (Seb)</i>

To be continued

Table 2.6: Hoteliers inductive coding structure (cont.)

Theme	Code	Country	Illustrative Quote
Future Outlook	Desire to Reduce Reliance	CRO	<i>“We want to reduce reliance on them on the long run.” (Mya)</i>
	Automation & AI	SLO	<i>“Automation in pricing and channel management makes flash sales less necessary.” (Mae)</i>
	Remain part of marketing	SLO	<i>“Still part of arsenal, collaboration with partners... blending online and offline promotions.” (Leona)</i>
	Digital Shift	SLO	<i>“Other digital marketing options became more effective than flash sales.” (Jessica)</i>

Source: own work

Table 2.7: AI media scan inductive coding structure

Theme	Code	Illustrative information passage
Strategic Transformation	Radical business pivot	Groupon shed physical goods to focus on local services incl. travel
	Data-first evolution	Secret Escapes invested heavily in a modern data stack.
	Curated model reinforcement	Voyage Privé deepened its premium niche through B2G partnerships.
Technology & Data	Full data stack implementation	Secret Escapes adopted Snowplow, Snowflake, dbt Cloud.
	AI personalisation	AI models at Secret Escapes optimised marketing and customer experience.
	Agentforce deployment	AI-powered service layer introduced for customer support.
	Analytics maturity curve	From descriptive to prescriptive analytics at Secret Escapes.
Partnership Models	B2G strategic alliances	Voyage Privé partnered with national tourism boards.
	Merchant reintegration	Groupon restructured take-rates to regain merchant trust.
	Co-funded marketing	Voyage Privé leveraged tourism boards for marketing reach.

To be continued

Table 2.7: AI media scan inductive coding structure (cont.)

Theme	Code	Illustrative information passage
Brand & Culture	Mission-driven identity	Voyage Privé invested in a unique campus ecosystem.
	Community initiatives	‘Les Tremplins’ competition engaged social entrepreneurs.
	Talent magnet	Corporate culture used to attract elite professionals.
Financial Restructuring	Going concern resolved	Groupon removed the 'going concern' warning in Q4 2023.
	Debt profile restructured	Groupon swapped notes for longer maturity and fewer covenants.
	Profit turnaround	Secret Escapes achieved £1.6M profit after prior loss in 2022.
Customer Experience	Hyper-local focus	Groupon committed to becoming the go-to local experience platform.
	White-glove service	Secret Escapes' AI concierge service enhanced luxury feel.
	Club-based loyalty	Voyage Privé nurtured loyalty through exclusivity and brand.

Source: own work

2.4 Results

The results section is structured chronologically, covering the period from 2019 to the present.

2.4.1 Daily Deal pre-pandemic growth plans vs. maturity

The year 2019 saw tourism in Europe booming, and Slovenia and Croatia were no exceptions. Optimism was also shared among DD managers. “Luxury travel was growing; hotels saw the result we can bring them, and we forecasted another year of growth for our company,” says Kaya, market manager for a niche DD platform then responsible for the Iberian Peninsula. Similarly, a hotel manager from a Slovenian chain stated that the years 2015 to 2019 were “golden years for Flash platforms” (Joe), accounting for up to 20% of total sales through various, often challenging, mainly generic DD platforms. Yet, some hotels felt the value proposition of generic DDs was declining, as they became increasingly aware of the rate and brand erosion effects associated with over-reliance on such channels in previous years (Portia, Salomon). On the other hand, the niche DD market was performing strongly, with hoteliers realising that the customer base it attracted was a good fit and inclined to spend more (Magda). Similar sentiments were shared among DD managers, with

one working for a generic DD platform focused on the Balkans noting: “we sensed we aren’t so competitive as those luxury sites who offer instant booking with our classic vouchers” (Clemente), clearly pointing out that the pre-pandemic period was one in which the BM of generic DDs was already struggling with its value proposition.

2.4.2 Initial shock and reactive crisis management (early 2020)

The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 brought the flash sales travel sector to a near standstill. Government-imposed lockdowns, border closures, and widespread uncertainty created immediate and unprecedented operational paralysis. For DDs, platforms fundamentally built on prepaid, non-refundable travel packages, the disruption was existential. As one DD manager explained, “The main feature of the flash model, which is prepaid sale, was gone” (Denny), indicating that in early 2020, at a time when the whole world was in panic about the novel virus, nobody was interested in booking travel – even less so on a non-refundable basis. Thus, DD platforms opted for a temporary halt in operations. The figures below indicate how they communicated this to their customers and confirm the statement made by Kaya: “We notified our customers via email that we are temporarily ceasing operations for as long as the lockdowns last.”

Figure 2.4: Secret Escapes Italy website warning – 15 March, 2020



Source: <https://it.secretescapes.com/>

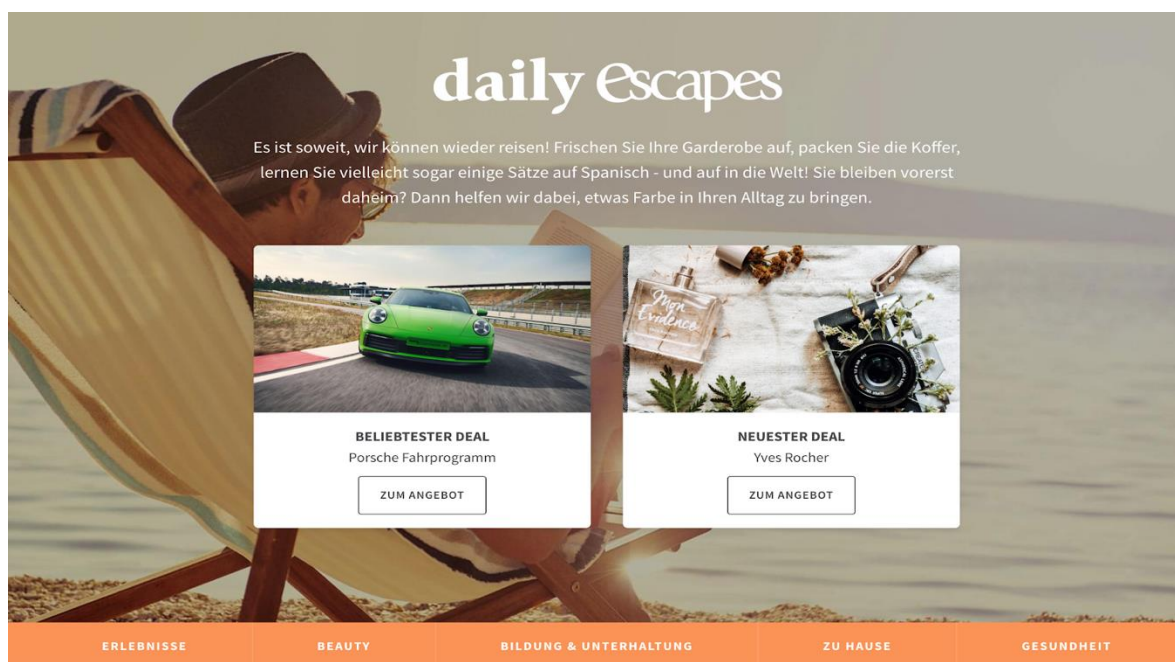
The decline in consumer confidence and booking patterns precipitated a refund crisis, straining the platform’s financial resources as individuals who had already paid for travel were unable to depart from their homes and consequently required refunds. “You pay the

hotels 300 K... good luck retrieving that money when all hotels are compelled to close,” remarked Boris, highlighting the liquidity shortfall, as most platforms traditionally paid their hotel partners at the end of each month for all generated bookings – and the collapse of the fundamental rationale of the DD business model

In response, managers assumed an emergency stance, implementing stringent cost-reduction measures and conserving resources. “We cut the staff, cut the cost and just tried to overcome this spring of 2020” (Denny). “We worked half time, from home, terminated all office agreements we had around Europe and were told we will only operate from our headquarters from now onwards” (Kaya).

Moreover, DDs promptly recognised that while they could not sell their own products, they could at least provide their web space and customer bases for affiliate advertising, thereby generating minimal revenues, as illustrated in the figure below. This ad-hoc attempt was visible after about a month of the temporary suspension of travel product sales. It entailed offering home products and “lockdown allowed” leisure time activities to entertain their guests. Yet, the initiatives did not really bring financial relief, as noted by Denny: “These actions brought in peanuts.” Similarly, Clemente stated, that even though his generic DD platform continued featuring some travel offers, “they virtually sold nothing until late May”, when there were clear signs the restrictions would be lifted before summer. At that time “hotels from Croatia also started to ring us - they wanted to offer coupons immediately” proposing highly reduced packages for the weeks immediately after opening in late June and early July (Clemente).

Figure 2.5: Ad-hoc commercialisation of website space – late April 2020



Source: <https://de.secretescapes.com/>

Further, as summer approached and it appeared that lockdowns in Europe might be eased for the peak summer period, DDs initiated more strategic revenue model adaptations. Namely, payment terms with hotel partners were revised, transitioning from prepaid disbursements to deferred settlements, which from then on usually occurred "28 days after checkout" (Boris). These modifications indicated a shift from transactional efficiency to deferred cash realisation – aimed at maintaining operational continuity and ensuring the cash-flow survival of the DDs should disruptions persist.

DD managers strategically characterised this period as one of survival mode rather than long-term planning. Their approach was predominantly defensive, lacking any strategic diversification initiatives. Nonetheless, although reactive, these adjustments established the foundation for future adaptations of the business model.

2.4.3 Tactical, reactive flexibility and the emergence of transitional models (late 2020–2021)

In the latter half of 2020 – and more prominently in 2021 – DD platforms began a long-term shift away from their traditional non-refundable and prepaid revenue model (Kaya, Clemente, Ali). Platform managers responded to consumer uncertainty and extremely hesitant travel decision-making by implementing full refundability, flexible cancellation policies, and a range of value-added insurance packages tailored to pandemic-related concerns. Boris noted, "Currently (2023), still nothing is non-refundable." Rather than offering static deals, DDs developed comprehensive packages centred on wellness, local accessibility, and safety – reflecting an evolved understanding of consumer needs. As one manager explained, "Our best-sellers are wellness hotels and thermal spas" (Clemente), illustrating how wellness had become both a tangible product attribute aligned with shifting travel preferences and a symbol of post-COVID reassurance.

In terms of marketing, DDs implemented push advertising strategies across digital platforms, emphasising urgency and value. "We intensified our marketing efforts due to individuals being at home for most of the autumn and winter" (Denny). Transparency and communication were prioritised – platforms employed impulse triggers in their messaging and adjusted their tone to sustain customer engagement. Rather than relying on aggressive sales techniques, they encouraged travel daydreaming by showcasing collections of bestsellers from pre-pandemic times and highlighting the flexibility of bookings for summer 2021, once restrictions – lasting throughout autumn, winter and into early May across much of Europe – were expected to be lifted (Denny, Boris). This period exemplifies how reactive forms of innovation were primarily driven by transformations in the external environment.

Figure 2.6: Flexible booking conditions on DDs



TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

- Flex: cancel before departure date on a selection of offers without transport
- Private Travel Guarantee: you'll be offered an alternative solution in the event of the unexpected
- Voyage Privé Guarantee: we've selected the best companies & hotels for you

The details:

- Flex by Voyage Privé:
On a selection of offers without transport (bookings without flights): you are guaranteed the flexibility to cancel your booking without justification before departure date. You will be refunded the amount paid in the form of a voucher minus the administration fees (£35 for a reservation of less than £700 and £65 for a reservation of £700 or more).
Offers with transport: subject to the availability of stock, you can postpone your stay up to 7 days before the day of departure.

The Flex cancellation allows you to refund your reservation in the form of a voucher. A voucher will be immediately credited to your member account and can be used on all offers available on the Voyage Privé website. The voucher is available for use for two years, starting on the date of the cancellation of your booking. The voucher may be split across different bookings on the Voyage Privé, but can not be refunded. This is not refundable upon expiration.

- Voyage Privé Guarantee: in case of any unforeseen events (health crisis* or flight cancellation), we guarantee on all offers with included transport, an alternate solution for your entire stay.

* In the event of exceptional and unavoidable circumstances relating to the Covid-19 health crisis either at your place of departure, in transit, or at your destination, making it impossible to carry out your holiday.

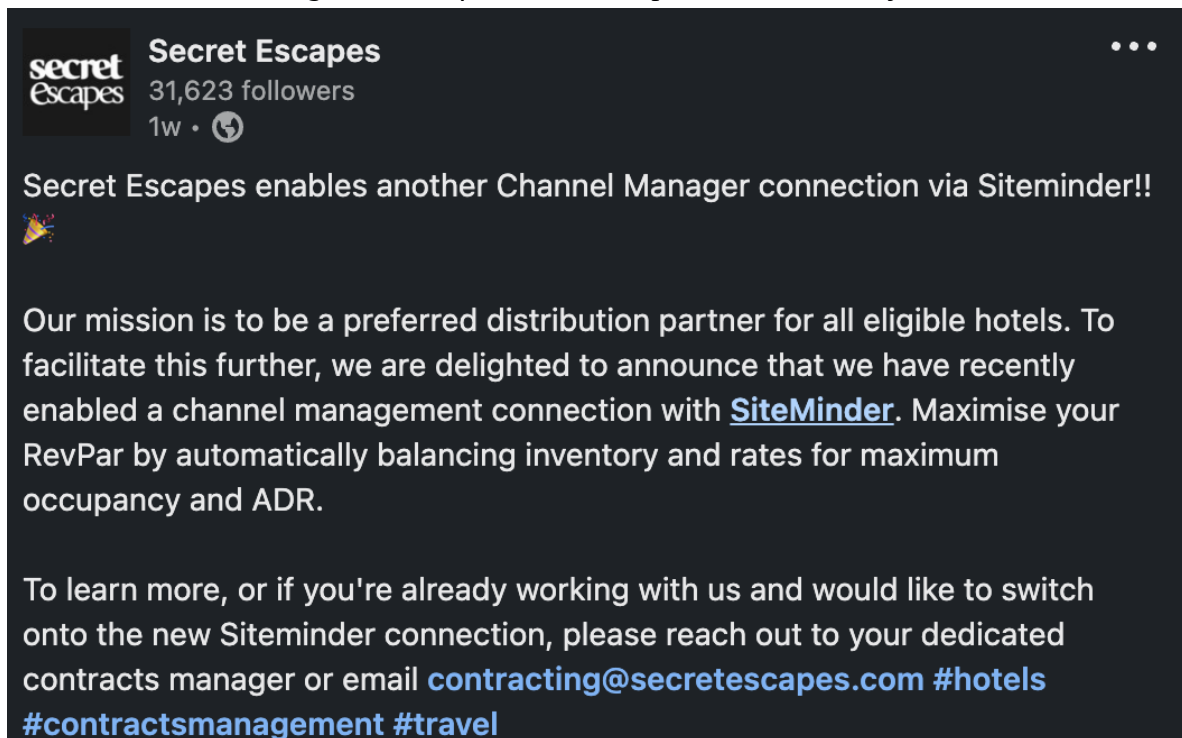
- Rigorous selection: Voyage Privé ensures the best hotels and airlines hand-picked by our experts

Source: <https://www.voyage-prive.co.uk/>

While a complete strategic transformation had not taken place, these modifications signified the advent of a transitional BM – a temporary arrangement allowing the firm to endure uncertainty while experimenting with new strategic initiatives. This phase coincided with sectoral transitions identified in the AI media analysis. Secret Escapes, for example, commenced investments in data infrastructure (Snowflake, Snowplow, dbt Cloud) as soon as it collected a new investment round for debt restructuring – “£72 million for restructuring” (Boris) – and improved its connectivity with key channel managers used by most hotels in

the target markets. As Denny noted, “we clearly knew staff shortages will make hotels unable to run the collaboration manually through extranet as before”, indicating the industry's progressive shift towards automation, data-driven decision-making, and personalisation.

Figure 2.7: Info about the improved connectivity



Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/secret-escapes/posts> [Oct 2021]

2.4.4 Strategic repositioning through proactive changes and hybridisation (2021–2022)

In 2021, as pandemic uncertainty gradually diminished, DD platforms began a more deliberate strategic realignment. Generic DD platforms increasingly sought to redefine their business identity, eschewing comparisons to conventional OTAs. “We operate as an advertising platform within the tourism sector,” emphasised Ali. Nonetheless, the operational structure of niche DDs increasingly resembled an OTA-like model, featuring permanent or long-term offers, flexible booking conditions, dynamic inventory, and an intensified focus on technology. “Secret Escapes has now become increasingly akin to Travalyst,” noted Denny, acknowledging the model's blurring boundaries between the DD platform and its sister company, which had already operated similarly to an OTA prior to the pandemic. Some managers went even further: “Now the platform is like an online catalog, featuring permanent collection of hotels. Occasionally these hotels offer deals of the day, or flash promotions... Also contracts are now signed on yearly bases and not like before, when each flash sale required separate agreement” (Boris). Moreover, while some other niche and generic DD platforms retained the concept of limited-time deals, their periods were extended to 21 days, and high-performing hotels were permitted to reappear after only

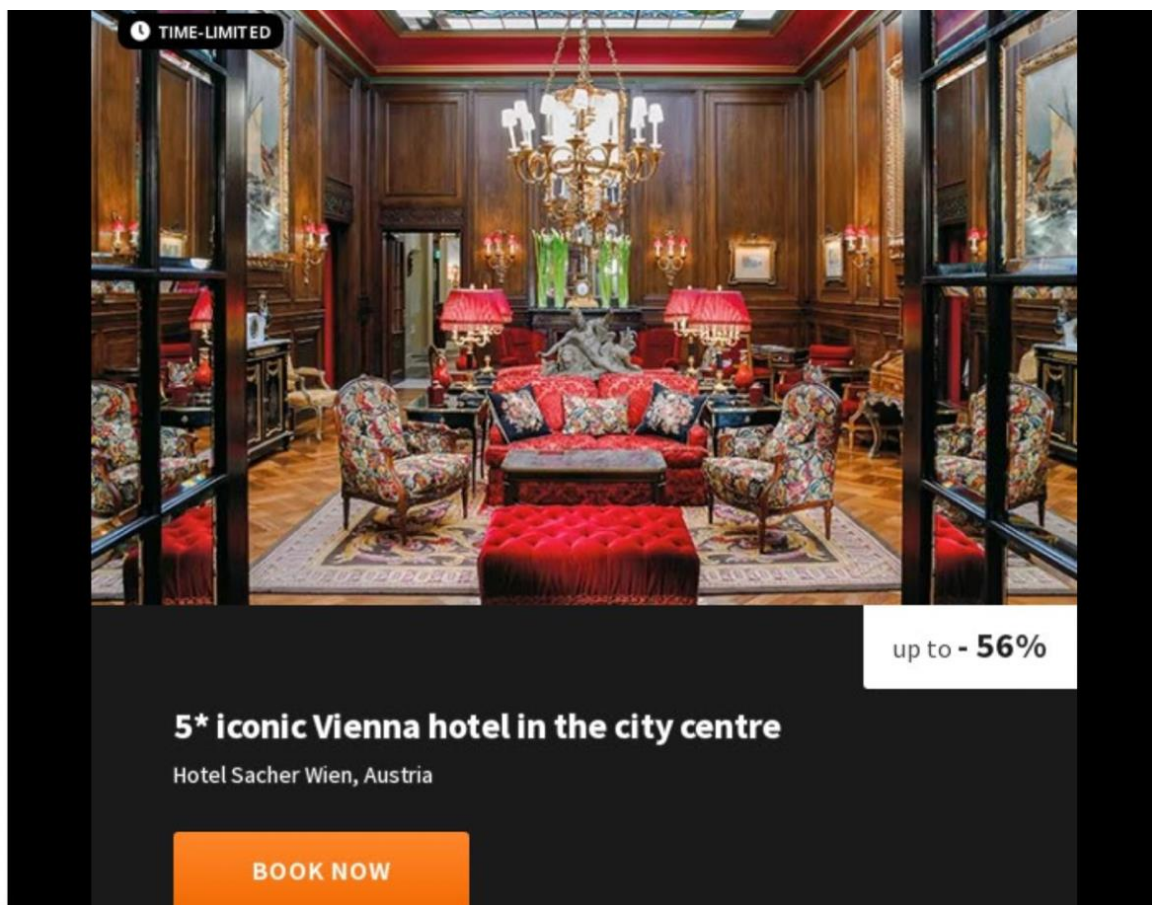
a one-week break. This effectively rendered the offers near-permanent, reflecting an optimised balance between the time investment required to prepare a sale and the resulting revenue.

Despite this hybridisation, managers explicitly stated that diversification was not a priority. “No, we maintained our focus—we did not venture into other sectors” (Boris). Emphasis was placed on partnerships, package curation, and supplementary content. As the platform transitioned from commoditised offerings, it concentrated on providing experience-oriented packages: “You were purchasing a commodity, not an experience,” lamented Boris, reflecting on previous deficiencies.

Hotel engagement emerged as a fundamental component of the strategy. DD managers adopted a reputation-enhancing strategy, employing prestigious listings to entice hesitant partners: “If Kempinski is involved, then you should be as well” (Clemente). This is evident in the figures below, which showcase two legendary properties – New York’s Plaza and Vienna’s Sacher – both renowned worldwide and never previously featured on DD platforms before the pandemic. Such collaborations also required significantly more flexible discount and commission terms to attract these partnerships, which was confirmed by Denny: “Yeah, now we can be much more flexible, when a well-known hotel or brand wants to distribute with us”. Generally, the request for discount levels to be featured on the platform diminished across generic and niche DDs. The former now require “the best price on the market for our customers” (Ali), while the latter are even less demanding with “the lowest refundable rate with some extra value that can be found online” (Denny).

These quotes clearly point towards DD platforms trying to establish a more symbiotic relationship with their hotel partners, strategically trying to proactively seize the opportunities that presented themselves due to the crisis – a characteristic academically often described as absorptive capacity (Diacono & Dutu, 2014).

Figure 2.8: The Vienna Sacher on offer with Voyage Privé



Source: <https://www.voyage-prive.co.uk/> [Nov 2021]

There was also a growing focus on destination-driven logic and proximity marketing – aiming at locations accessible within a 4-to-5-hour drive, particularly for domestic tourism markets with ongoing safety apprehensions. As Kaya emphasises: “We had hotels out of EU with whom we worked before virtually begging us to feature them and it was hard to explain them that there is no sense, as there is basically zero demand for their country”. Slowly but steadily, the super-flexible cancellation conditions of up to 48 hours prior to check-in were gradually replaced by still flexible terms, typically extended to 7 or 14 days in advance.

Figure 2.9: Cancellation conditions in 2022

The screenshot shows the Secret Escapes website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Current deals', 'Hotels', 'Package holidays', 'Trending destinations', 'Special offers', and 'SWISS'. Below this, there's a search bar and a 'My Favourites' button. The main content area features two hotel offers: 'Superior room with shared pool (dinner, B&B)' for £120 per room per night (up to -43% off) and 'Superior room with private pool (dinner, B&B)' for £152 per room per night (up to -41% off). Both offers are for 2 adults. To the right, there's a 'Best price guarantee' section and an 'Added extras' section. On the far right, there's a vertical banner for 'secret escapes' promoting a 'snow-topped winter in Switzerland'. Below the offers, there's a 'Cancellation policy' section stating: 'Unlimited free date changes up to 8 days before you check-in. You can also cancel within this time period and get a refund in Secret Escapes credit, minus a £35 cancellation fee. Find out more'.

Source: <https://secretescapes.co.uk> [Jan 2022]

Simultaneously, digital transformation across the hotel industry accelerated. Media reports indicate that Secret Escapes introduced AI-based customer support tools (e.g. Agentforce) and Voyage Privé implemented club-based loyalty programmes, thereby providing a more tailored and data-informed customer experience, which had suffered during 2020 and 2021 due to heavy workloads and reduced staffing levels. These trends impacted DDs' BMI activities but were not yet fully implemented or integrated into their BMI configurations. Table 2.8 below shows the transitional DDs BM canvas as perceived by the DD managers.

Table 2.8: DD's managers BM Canvas constructed from inductively generated codes

BMC Component	Code	Quote	Interviewee
Channels	Customer trust preservation	<i>...we didn't want to lose them, so we prefer to focus on what we do well.</i>	Kaya
	Impulsive buying trigger	<i>We did bit more impulsive push advertising</i>	Ali
	Marketing strategy shift	<i>we pushed more marketing because people were home</i>	Denny
	Push advertising model	<i>Booking does not do push advertising but rather does pull advertising</i>	Ali
	Transparent communication	<i>we send an e-mail to our customers and we are stopping</i>	Kaya

To be continued

Table 2.8: DD's managers BM Canvas constructed from inductively generated codes (cont.)

BMC Component	Code	Quote	Interviewee
Cost Structure	Cash flow challenges	<i>you pay the hotels 300 K... good luck with getting that money</i>	Boris
	Cost-cutting survival mode	<i>cut the staff, cut the cost and just tried to overcome this spring of 2020</i>	Denny
	Model restructuring	<i>Secret Escapes took... £72 million for restructuring</i>	Boris
	Payment delay impact	<i>Now they are getting paid 28 days after checkouts</i>	Boris
Customer Relationships	Hotel partner persuasion	<i>If it's Kempinski... if there are a few 5-star hotels in Dubrovnik...</i>	Clemente
	Partnership leverage	<i>We need the offer now... it's better to work on it now</i>	Clemente
	Reputation management	<i>if Kempinski is on board... then it won't be an issue for you either</i>	Clemente
Customer Segments	Destination targeting logic	<i>targets destinations within 4 to 5 hours' drive</i>	Clemente
	Last-minute booking trend	<i>people are scared to travel so they wait</i>	Kaya
	Localized market focus	<i>Slovenes who had the possibility to somehow escape across the border</i>	Clemente
	Wellness demand growth	<i>what sells best here are wellness hotels and thermal spas</i>	Clemente
Key Activities	Sanitary compliance checks	<i>you have to see how the health conditions are there</i>	Kaya
Key Partnerships	OTA-like transformation	<i>Secret Escapes now became more similar to Travalyst than it was before</i>	Denny
	Advertising platform, rather than OTA	<i>we are an advertising platform in the field of tourism</i>	Ali

To be continued

Table 2.8: DD's managers BM Canvas constructed from inductively generated codes (cont.)

BMC Component	Code	Quote	Interviewee
Revenue Streams	Consumer behavior change	<i>lots of people are not booking nonrefundable</i>	Boris
	Legal refund issues	<i>they have to give refunds... but they didn't have the cash</i>	Boris
	Prepaid model disruption	<i>main feature of flash model, which is prepaid sale, was gone</i>	Denny
	Refund flexibility increase	<i>the deals became all kind of refundable</i>	Denny
	Shift to flexibility	<i>Nothing is nonrefundable right now</i>	Boris
Value Propositions	Customer value focus	<i>it is important what added value our customer brings</i>	Ali
	Experience to commodity	<i>You are buying a commodity, you're not buying an experience</i>	Boris
	Rich package preference	<i>we offer the most comprehensive packages possible</i>	Clemente
	Safety over sales	<i>it's not safe for people to travel</i>	Kaya
	Value-added packages	<i>our offers are essentially packages</i>	Ali

Source: own work

2.4.5 Hoteliers' experience: practical involvement and growing disillusionment (2020–2023)

Although DD platforms evolved strategically, hotel partners largely continued to perceive them as tactical tools rather than opportunities for long-term collaboration. In Slovenia, hoteliers reported using DDs primarily as short-term occupancy solutions. “The strategic objectives include addressing low occupancy, enhancing sales, improving visibility, penetrating new markets, optimising cash flow, and facilitating promotion” (Portia). Others framed the platform more as a visibility tool: “The primary objective... is to present the hotel to a new audience and generate revenue” (Erna).

Croatian hoteliers demonstrated a more operational focus, deploying flash sales during off-peak periods: “Flash sales are a mechanism for occupying vacant rooms during off-peak times” (Claude). However, this enthusiasm was tempered by structural concerns. Pearl cautioned that “guests who pay less through flash sales tend to be more demanding,” highlighting the cost–service trade-offs that hotels must manage.

In Slovenia, criticism was more pronounced, with hoteliers voicing concerns over rigid commission structures, required allotments, and particularly the continuation of flexible booking conditions that had proven useful during the pandemic (Mae) but were now perceived as unnecessary “now that the travel functions again normally” (Portia). These remarks suggest shortcomings in the reconfiguration of DD business models – despite efforts during the pandemic, the perceived value proposition among Slovenian hotel partners remained relatively low.

This dissatisfaction also appears linked to broader concerns about guest behaviour. Generic DDs were still attracting local customers with limited income, low loyalty, and transactional purchasing patterns, as reflected in statements such as: “Clients predominantly made single purchases” (Mae); “Patrons might acclimatise to reduced prices” (Jessica). These issues were further exacerbated by staff burnout, especially in reservation departments, where reduced post-pandemic teams had to manage high-maintenance customers whose behaviour – such as repeatedly changing booking dates – had become normalised during the crisis. Concerns about service delivery and staff wellbeing were clearly expressed: “There is one girl in reservations and one in marketing, before there were 5” (Joe). Altogether, these insights suggest that hoteliers were not fully satisfied with the ways in which DDs adapted their business models during the pandemic – in fact, many appeared to prefer the pre-pandemic model configurations.

2.4.6 Hoteliers’ experience: structural reconfiguration and prospective direction (2023–2024)

By 2023, niche DD platforms and their hotel partners began shifting from reactive responses to more structurally advanced BMI alignments, designed to ensure the long-term resilience of their cooperation. These alignments featured a permanent or semi-permanent hotel collection, regularly accompanied by additional discounts in the form of ‘Deals of the Week’ or ‘Flash Sales’. This strategy was linked to efforts to reintroduce less flexible booking conditions – an initiative still not fully reinstated to this day, as illustrated in the figures below.

Figure 2.10: Deals of the Week campaign (2023)



Source: <https://secretescapes.co.uk> [August 2023]

Figure 2.11: Flash Sale – luxury summer focus (2025)

A promotional banner for a Flash Sale. The background is a dark red gradient. In the center, there is a yellow-outlined square containing the text "FLASH SALE" in large, bold, yellow letters, with "72HR" in smaller, bold, yellow letters below it. Above the text is a yellow lightning bolt icon. Below the square is an orange button with the text "See deals" in white. At the bottom, there is a paragraph of text in white: "Unlock the best prices online with our exclusive 72-hour Flash Sale! We've handpicked incredible luxury four and five-star stays, giving you unbeatable value and massive savings. But don't wait—these deals won't last, and when they're gone, they're gone! Hurry and secure your dream getaway now at the lowest possible price!". At the very bottom, in small white text, it says "This promotion ends at 10 am on 07/07/25."

Source: <https://secretescapes.co.uk> [4 July, 2025]

DDs' development increasingly reflected wider industry trends towards AI-driven personalisation and a data-centric approach. Secret Escapes reported a £1.6 million profit turnaround, attributed to prescriptive analytics and enhanced customer insights (AI media analysis). Groupon divested its physical goods operations to concentrate solely on local experience platforms, reflecting DDs' parallel transition towards localised, high-trust leisure offerings. This shift was also evident among the leading generic DD platforms in Slovenia and Croatia, which have largely refocused on local service delivery, with only a few (for example 1naDan in Slovenia) still offering tangible consumer goods such as electronics.

The long-term perspective among hotel partners was mixed. Croatian hoteliers continued to make selective use of DDs. "Flash sales are still relevant for year-round hotels" (Claude), indicating conditional continuity in contexts with stable occupancy flows.

Conversely, Slovenian hoteliers indicated a clearer desire to diminish their DD reliance. "Flash sales have become less essential due to automation and improved use of digital marketing." (Mae). Numerous hotels have implemented automated pricing tools, enhanced channel management systems, and embraced digital marketing as substitutes for distributing through DDs. Nevertheless, DDs continued to be "part of the arsenal" (Leona), frequently serving as a contingency strategy during periods of diminished demand. Yet, in order for DDs to regain interest from hotels, they would need to "truly raise up the game and offer us AI-based targeted personalisation that we can't reach on our own" (Leona), indicating the view of hoteliers that DDs needed to pursue upgrading their value proposition. It is evident the hoteliers interpret various aspects of DDs' BMI through how their collaboration with them impacts and manifests itself in their own challenges.

2.4.7 Transition from emergency response to hybrid maturity

Over a four-year period, the DD response to COVID-19 illustrates a progression in BMI, commencing with operational triage and advancing to a more stable, hybrid platform framework. Preliminary endeavours were characterised by survival strategies, strategic cost reduction, and refund administration. As uncertainty persisted through early 2021 and only diminished by 2022, the platform implemented long-term bookable and refundable offers, wellness-oriented value propositions, and digital engagement strategies – establishing a basis for strategic realignment.

This evolution was not uniformly reflected among stakeholders and indicates a clash between value propositions of DDs that seem to satisfy their customers, but to a lesser extent their hotel partners. As DDs progressed towards structural maturity, hotel partners approached flash sales in a pragmatic and reactive manner, frequently viewing them as temporary, transactional instruments. The relationship between the platform and its partners is functionally interdependent, yet strategically misaligned. DDs continue to operate – not as the foundation of hospitality distribution – but as a strategic tool used in specific market

contexts and increasingly embedded within broader and quickly evolving, digitally supported IDS strategies. The lack of complete alignment in the understanding of BMI activities between DDs and hoteliers is evident from the table below.

Table 2.9: BM Canvas perception in comparison

BMC Component	DD Managers	Hoteliers
Channels	Website, email newsletters	Supplementary channel to push staycation voucher-based local sales initially (SLO)
Cost Structure	Staff numbers (reduced), paid out partner commission, partner payments, restructured operational costs	-
Customer Relationships	Trust preservation, partner persuasion, transparent communication	Transactional, desire to reduce reliance, human interaction
Customer Segments	Last-minute, flexible, wellness-seeking domestic travellers	Price-sensitive, one-time, low-income
Key Activities	Sanitary checks, marketing shifts, model restructuring	Collaboration condition improvements, dynamic pricing automation, developing connectivity integrations
Key Partnerships	Positioning as a marketing platform, maintaining hotel cooperation, novel distribution & affiliate agreements, focus on maintaining long-term partnerships.	Selective retention of DDs, developing channel manager integration.

To be continued

Table 2.9: BM Canvas perception in comparison (cont.)

BMC Component	DD Managers	Hoteliers
Revenue Streams	Shift from prepaid to flexible bookings, commercialization of website for other products	Cash flow tool, particularly in off-peak periods
Value Proposition	Wellness, trust, safety, rich packages	Fill empty rooms, exposure to new audiences

Source: own work

2.4.8 Convergence and divergence in narratives

Although there is some agreement on the necessity for enhanced booking flexibility, safety guarantees, and immediate tactical modifications, the perspectives of DD managers and hoteliers differ markedly in their strategic focus.

For DDs, the crisis served as a catalyst for BMI. This entailed a comprehensive reconfiguration of the platforms' architecture – incorporating structural investment, OTA-like functionalities, and wellness-focused packaging.

In contrast, hoteliers – especially in Slovenia – adopted a cautious and pragmatic approach to these developments. Their experience with the flash sales model during COVID-19 underscored its structural deficiencies, particularly concerning non-refundability, guest quality, and operational strain. Slovenian hoteliers articulated a clear desire to reduce reliance: “Flash sales ... became less necessary with automation and better digital channels” (Mae). Croatian hoteliers, although more amenable to utilising DDs as a seasonal strategy to reach more distant markets for longer summer holiday stays, acknowledged the model's constraints and articulated apprehensions regarding guest expectations and potential price cannibalisation.

2.5 Discussion

2.5.1 Perceptions of business model innovation among stakeholders

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as both a disruption and a crucial strategic inflection point, aligning with findings by Ratten (2020). It initiated a proactive and transformative process of business model innovation (BMI) for the daily deal (DD) platforms, encompassing structural, technological, and marketing modifications – all of which occurred during a

period of diminished dynamic capabilities and limited absorptive capacity due to drastic staff reductions (Diacono & Dutu, 2014; Teece et al., 2016; Engelen et al., 2017).

Hoteliers perceived BMI as a necessary obligation, which prompted strategic engagement with DDs while simultaneously fostering increased scepticism – particularly among Slovenian participants, who, after two years of guaranteed sales driven by staycation vouchers (2020 to summer 2022), occasionally exhibited overconfidence regarding the long-term viability of DD-based collaboration.

As a result, BMI exhibited clear asymmetry: while the platforms initiated transformation, hotel partners adapted their distribution strategies reactively, in response to shifting conditions. The outcome was a reconfigured, though not fully integrated, relationship characterised by ongoing operational interdependence but only partial strategic alignment. This dynamic is aptly summarised by the statement: “Prior to Corona, we sold 20% over DDs; now this share is at maximum 10%.” (Seb).

2.5.2 Evaluating the business model innovation in Daily Deal platforms

The progression of DDs during the COVID-19 crisis presents a significant case study of BMI under intense strain, leading to the so-called “imposed service innovation” (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2021). We can unequivocally affirm the previous literature that differentiates between the temporal (Kraus et. al., 2020) and transitional BMI (Mody et al., 2020). Our empirical findings further delineate the evolution of BMI through temporary, transitional, and “sustained transitional models”. Our chronologically structured analysis demonstrated that the mature DD BM from 2019 converged into a panic-induced Temporary Business Model in early 2020. During the initial shock phase, DDs suspended travel-related operations and reallocated their digital infrastructure for alternative commercial purposes, such as marketing non-travel products or paid advertisements (see Figure: Ad-hoc Commercialisation of Website Space). Communication with users focused on reassurance, as managers implemented a wait-and-see approach while minimising financial risk (reflecting behaviour described by inertia by Diacono & Dutu, 2014).

As the initial lockdown's shock subsided and Europeans predominantly engaged in national or nearby travel during the summer of 2020, the Temporary Business Models evolved into Transitional Business Models (late 2020–2022). During this phase, DDs employed transitional strategies focused on flexibility, perceived as a precondition for building resilience (Mueller et al., 2008; Karman, 2020). These measures encompassed the extension of cancellation policies, the implementation of post-checkout payment systems for hotel partners, and the introduction of wellness-oriented packages targeting risk-averse clientele. Marketing strategies transitioned to impulse-driven, emotionally impactful communication through push advertising and curated content sourced from pre-pandemic bestsellers.

As the repercussions of the pandemic established a new normal, this facilitated further convergence into what we term as “Sustained Transitional Models” (2022 onwards). While reverting to the original flash-sale mechanics, DDs preserved numerous innovations prompted by the crisis. Distribution deals became more flexible, discount terms were rendered negotiable, and certain platforms established semi-permanent ‘collections’ of highlighted hotels offering recurring flash deals with less advantageous cancellation policies for customers in return for greater discounts. Structural investments, including AI-driven personalisation (see AI Media Scan Table), and annual contracts, have entrenched these modifications into a new operational standard. This indicates that the BMI trajectory was cumulative rather than linear, incorporating transitional elements within extended strategic frameworks. This tri-phased development trajectory substantiates the assertions of sufficient flexibility and dynamic capabilities of DDs (Sharma et al., 2020), while concurrently providing a distinctive empirical narrative of how intermediaries in IDS, rather than service providers, adapt through externally induced disruption.

A more profound level of analysis can be achieved by systematically applying the findings of this study through the integrative BMI framework for the tourism industry proposed by Kraus et al. (2022). This framework asserts that effective BMI is not an isolated endeavour but an integrated process comprising four essential components: change impulses, business model design, contextual factors, and outcomes.

2.5.3 Transformative impulses: the catalyst for innovation

Kraus et al. (2022) propose that BMI is influenced by both external and internal threats and opportunities. The principal external threat to DD platforms was the COVID-19 pandemic, which precipitated an existential crisis by immobilising travel and rendering the platforms' fundamental business model – prepaid, non-refundable deals – instantaneously obsolete. The external shock revealed a significant internal vulnerability: the inflexibility of the current business model, which was ill-equipped to manage such a disruption. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that the crisis also created external opportunities. The transition to domestic and proximity-based tourism generated new, localised markets for targeting. Moreover, the financial difficulties encountered by even luxury and prestigious hotels rendered them amenable to novel distribution collaborations, enabling DDs to showcase brands such as The Plaza and Sacher for the first time. The platforms capitalised on their existing customer base and web infrastructure to engage in ad-hoc affiliate marketing of non-travel products, generating a modest yet essential revenue stream during the initial operational suspension through their Temporary Business Model formulation stage (Claus et al., 2022).

2.5.4 Business model design configuration: a three-dimensional pivot

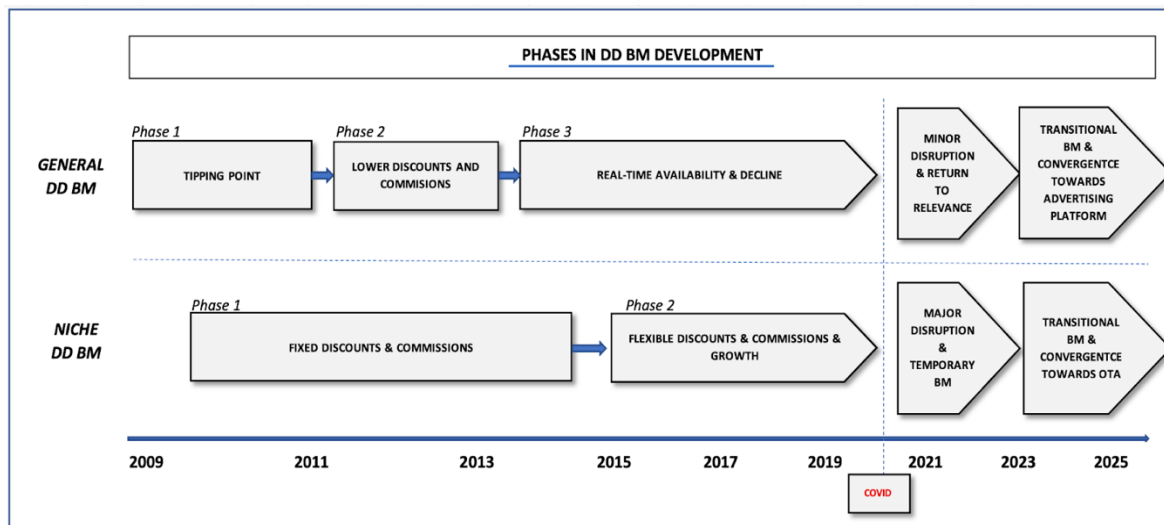
The essence of the platforms' response, as outlined in the findings, entailed innovation across the three dimensions of business model design specified in the framework: value creation, new proposition, and value capture (Kraus et al., 2022).

Value creation innovation: This entailed the development of novel capabilities, technologies, and collaborations, albeit being limited by reduced dynamic capabilities. DDs established innovative collaborations with luxury hotels that were previously inaccessible. They allocated resources towards innovative technologies and digital competencies, including sophisticated data infrastructures (Snowflake, dbt Cloud), AI-enhanced customer support (Agentforce), and enhanced channel manager integration to adapt to an automated, post-pandemic environment. They reformed internal processes, particularly by altering payment terms with hotels from prepayment to post-checkout settlement to safeguard their cash flow.

Innovative proposition: The value provided to customers was fundamentally transformed, though at the expense of hoteliers. The new offerings transitioned from fixed deals to adaptable, fully refundable packages, frequently accompanied by wellness features and pandemic-related travel insurance to restore consumer confidence. This also signified a transformation in customer relationships, which became more transparent and reassuring, bolstered by refined communication strategies and improved support tools, confirming the centrality of end-customer focus when engaging in BMI activities (Andreassen et al., 2018). The emphasis on proximity and domestic travel signifies a shift towards new markets.

Value capture innovation: The crisis necessitated a comprehensive reevaluation of revenue and expenditures. New revenue models emerged, featuring flexible commission structures to entice premium partners and short-term revenue from affiliate advertising. The cost structure was fundamentally transformed by immediate survival strategies such as workforce reductions and office closures, in addition to the essential modification of payment terms with hotel partners, which served as a mechanism to defer costs. The figure below captures the key changes in DD evolution in a simplified manner.

Figure 2.12: BM evolution of DDs - an outcome of BMI through the pandemic



Source: own work based on Budler et. al, 2020

2.5.5 The influence of contextual factors

The framework by Kraus et al. (2022) emphasises that the success of BMI is influenced by contextual factors such as the *novelty of the service*, the *extent of change*, and the *attributes of the destination*.

Service novelty: To regain momentum, DDs needed to launch offerings characterised by substantial novelty. The transition to entirely refundable and cancellable bookings was fundamentally novel for a business model that had previously been predicated on the contrary principle and was essential for reinstating customer trust. Similarly, incorporating globally acclaimed luxury hotels constituted a novel value proposition for this market segment.

Degree of change: The evolution of the platforms illustrates a transition from incremental to radical transformation. Initial responses consisted of incremental survival strategies, such as improvised communication campaigns, affiliate advertisements, and cost reductions in their *temporary BM* phase (Claus et al., 2022). As the crisis continued, this led to a significant transformation in the business model, with platforms embracing a hybrid, OTA-like approach characterised by flexible pricing, permanent listings, and long-term contracts in the phase that saw the convergence of the *transitional BM* (Mody et al., 2020) into what we refer to as *sustained transitional BM*. This corresponds with the framework's perspective that radical business model innovation entails concurrent alterations across all dimensions of the business model (Kraus et al., 2022).

Attributes of the destination: The results of this study significantly affirm the significance of this factor. The contrasting experiences in Slovenia and Croatia serve as a prime illustration.

In Slovenia, a government ‘staycation voucher scheme’ replaced the necessity for discounting and thus DDs, resulting in increased scepticism and disillusionment among hoteliers. DDs remained a more relevant tactical tool in Croatia, where the focus was on luring foreign proximity markets. This illustrates how local policies and market structures directly affected the perception and efficacy of the DDs’ BMI initiatives, thus confirming the claim that BMI outcomes in tourism can only be discussed in the context of the destination and its socio-political environment.

2.5.6 Assessing the consequences of BMI in DDs

The integrative BM framework necessitates a comprehensive evaluation of economic, ecological, and social outcomes (Kraus et al., 2022) akin to the modern ‘ESG-esque logic’. The economic outcomes identified in this research were complex. The BMI was deemed successful for the DD platforms, resulting in operational viability, debt restructuring, and a subsequent return to profitability. The result for hotel partners was less clear-cut. DDs evolved into a less pivotal yet still strategically advantageous IDS channel, characterised by strategic misalignment and a diminished sales share relative to pre-pandemic levels, confirming the claims of Sabaruddinn and MacBryde (2023) who were among the first to also discuss the darker sides of BMI.

The findings offer limited detail on social and ecological outcomes, a prevalent deficiency in contemporary BMI research (see Štrukelj et al., 2023). The principal social outcome identified was adverse: workforce reductions and employee burnout were direct repercussions of the crisis and the ensuing operational stress. The strategic shift toward local and proximity tourism may be inferred to yield a beneficial, albeit likely inadvertent, ecological effect by promoting shorter-distance travel. The lack of comprehensive data in these domains underscores a potential direction for future research, consistent with the framework’s recommendation to expand the assessment of tourism BMI success beyond purely financial and business indicators (Kraus et al., 2022).

2.5.7 Originality and contributions

This research enhances both theoretical and practical insights into BMI within the tourism sector by examining several inadequately explored domains.

First, it expands Budler et al.’s pre-pandemic DD BM typology by demonstrating how both niche and generic platforms altered their operational models after 2019. While the pandemic posed significant challenges to the more progressive niche DDs, it seems to have had less severe effects on the operations of generic DDs. In fact, the uncertainties and focus on local travel appear to have contributed to a kind of rejuvenation of their value proposition, based on a technologically less advanced *light* BM focusing on selling vouchers that could be consumed when health conditions and regulations allowed customers to redeem them and travel. Their pivot thus encompasses convergence towards the BM of digital advertising

platforms. Conversely, the niche DDs' pivot involves enhanced OTA-like capabilities, adaptable booking terms, technological integration with providers to guarantee automated hotel connectivity, tailored consumer-partner affiliations, and a focus on consumer data analytics and the data-driven personalisation of deals.

Second, to our knowledge, this is the inaugural study in the tourism sector concentrating on intermediary innovation in IDS. Most BMI research in tourism focuses on hotels or destination organisations (e.g., Reinhold et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021). This study highlights innovation within IDSs, offering new empirical insights into how digital intermediaries are compelled to innovate in response to external shocks that disrupt demand and operations. The research enhances the understanding of the e-tourism ecosystem, as previously called for by Law et al. (2014), wherein IDSs function as strategically adaptive entities in their efforts to respond to the *needs* of their hotel partners (Pearce, 2008), rather than passive components, despite their relatively fixed roles within the ecosystem. Such studies serve as a bridge between industry and academia, thereby improving our understanding of relationships and developments within IDS and e-tourism. A comparable BMI analysis should be undertaken every five years to ensure the research remains aligned with the rapid technological and non-technological innovations transforming the industry, which have significantly altered the dynamics and power equilibrium among diverse platforms and intermediaries within the IDS sector. This study thus addresses the outdated nature of academic literature on DDs, which has largely neglected the evolution of their BMs since their emergence in the early 2010s (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Cox, 2017; McCabe & Branco Ilodo, 2019). We recommend conducting similar studies for other IDS systems to advance the relevance of hotel distribution research.

Third, our research advances the formation of BMI theory within the context of e-tourism. It contributes to the theory-building process for digital tourism business models by analysing stakeholder perceptions and examining specific platform modifications across all nine components of the Business Model Canvas. Specifically, it validates the applicability of Kraus et al.'s (2022) tourism BMI framework while also revealing subtleties in partner misalignment (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010).

Fourth, our study advances cross-disciplinary integration with management studies. The findings intersect with overarching management concepts such as dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997), imposed innovation (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2021), and absorptive capacity (Engelen et al., 2017), thereby supporting the appeals by Zott et al. (2011) and Reinhold et al. (2017) for interdisciplinary integration within BMI scholarship.

Collectively, these contributions emphasise the necessity of perceiving DDs not solely as tactical sales instruments but as dynamic IDS participants. Deepening the understanding of BMI among intermediary platforms is integral to the strategic development of digital tourism research and the broader tourism economy.

2.5.8 Implications

This study offers important recommendations for the growing body of knowledge on crisis-related innovation management, which can be summarised under the following three straplines:

1. *Innovation at the platform level beyond hospitality and aviation:* This study empirically documents BMI processes within DD platforms, traditionally under-represented in innovation research, affirming that intermediary actors also undergo complex transformation journeys. These include strategic repositioning, OTA-like hybridisation, and enhancements to technological infrastructure.
2. *Crisis as a stimulus for innovation, yet not for cohesion:* The pandemic acted as a catalyst for digital and structural transformation in DD platforms. However, alignment with hotel partners was only partial. The perceptual disparity shown in the Business Model Canvas (see Table 2.9: BM Canvas Perception in Comparison) reveals that platform managers viewed their initiatives as proactive and visionary, whereas hoteliers – especially in Slovenia – perceived digital developments as largely static, short-term instruments with limited value in a post-COVID context.
3. *Significance of ecosystem co-evolution:* The research underscores that innovation cannot be evaluated in isolation. For BMI to be effective, platforms must involve their partners in comprehensible ways, incorporating both technological enhancements and collective narratives of value generation (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010). The absence of strategic alignment hindered comprehensive BMI implementation and restricted the reputational restoration of DDs in specific markets (including Slovenia). These insights reinforce the role of DDs as exemplars for ecosystem-based innovation in unstable tourism contexts – where technology, trust, and timing converge to influence post-crisis pathways.

The study also offers three practical implications:

1. For platform managers: This research can enhance their understanding of value creation and destruction. Ongoing investments in digital infrastructure and AI-driven personalisation must be complemented by enhanced partner communication and co-creation frameworks. Hotel partners expect technological advancement, but also desire greater control over commissions, cancellation policies, and brand presentation.
2. For hotel partners: DDs should be regarded as a strategic tool integrated within comprehensive channel management strategies. While automated pricing and direct infrastructure may reduce reliance on intermediaries, cooperation with niche and generic DDs can still be beneficial during low-demand periods to attract both distant and proximate guests, aligning with key principles of distribution (Beritelli & Scheeg, 2016).

3. For policymakers and destination marketing organisations: National crisis responses – such as Slovenia’s staycation voucher initiatives and Croatia’s regional marketing – produced differing outcomes regarding the perceived effectiveness of DDs’ BMI activities.

2.5.9 Limitations

This study focuses on a geographically confined yet diverse case involving two Southern European tourism countries, each characterised by distinct tourism structures and governmental strategies in response to the pandemic-induced crisis. The results may not be fully applicable to areas with different dynamics – such as countries outside the Mediterranean European context – or regions where travel restrictions and accessibility barriers were more prolonged, such as in the Asia–Pacific.

Furthermore, the study relies predominantly on platform managers and their hotel partners, omitting insights from consumers, investors, or technology providers. This results in a limited perspective on the wider BMI ecosystem. Additionally, although it combines multiple data sources to support triangulation, the qualitative and interpretative nature of this exploratory study limits generalisability and objectivity – particularly due to the integration of novel AI-assisted media analytical methods, which have not yet undergone sufficient academic validation for reliability.

2.6 Conclusions

The research highlights the uneven progress of business model innovation between daily deal (DD) platforms and hotels. While platforms moved towards hybridisation, AI personalisation, and long-term strategic shifts, many Slovenian hoteliers remained cautious, continuing to regard DDs as a short-term remedy rather than a sustainable sales strategy. This misalignment suggests that the success of innovation depends not only on strategic vision or technological advancement but also on ecosystem coherence and stakeholder endorsement. The outcomes of business model innovation in tourism can only be properly evaluated within the context of the specific destination. Without trust, communication, and contextual alignment, even robust innovation efforts risk falling short within the internet distribution system (IDS) landscape.

Based on the insights obtained, several directions for future research are evident. Cross-regional comparative studies may examine the evolution of DD innovation processes in markets with varying levels of tourism maturity and digital infrastructure, specifically in Asia or the United States. These studies could also adopt a broader IDS perspective by applying a comparable analytical framework to other intermediary entities – such as online travel agencies (OTAs), metasearch engines, or emerging AI-driven platforms – in order to foster a comparative understanding of co-evolving business models within e-tourism.

In addition, demand-side research should further explore consumer behaviour and perception, focusing on how end-user trust, loyalty, and value perceptions evolved during and after the pandemic. It is essential to understand the extent to which flexible booking models and demand-oriented positioning influenced purchasing decisions.

Finally, in more technologically progressive contexts, the integration of artificial intelligence in intermediary IDS models warrants further examination. Future research could assess how AI technologies may be employed not only for marketing personalisation but also for channel integration, price forecasting, and operational optimisation across platform–partner interfaces.

3 THE CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF DAILY DEALS FOR EUROPEAN HOTELS – A TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION PERSPECTIVE³

3.1 Introduction

The swift development of digital infrastructure in the last 20 years, coupled with progress in information systems (IS), social media, e-learning platforms, Internet distribution systems (IDS) and the rapid expansion of innovative technologies like mobile payments, smartphones, and smart wearables have led to significant transformations in the technological domain of how sellers distribute their products and how consumer select and purchase them (Jeyaraj & Zadeh, 2020). These alterations have led to significant transformations in the global technological environment, which naturally impacted tourism. Scholars in the field of IS have been observing the constantly changing and evolving technology and studying various factors affecting the acceptance and spread of different technologies (Davis, 1989; Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Among these, the Unified Theory of Technology Adoption and Use (UTAUT) proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2003) established itself as the most used framework in IS research. Nevertheless, in numerous cases, the initial triumph of technology did not lead to substantial commercial success or its long-term usage (Mishra et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2021). Thus, studying the antecedents of continuance intention and actual continuance of technologies and studies focused on technology's initial adoption has developed into a relevant research stream in digital marketing and e-commerce (Yan et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it seems this stream of research has not yet adequately established itself in the hospitality and tourism domains, which is what this chapter seeks to overcome by explaining the adoption and continued use of DDs through a longitudinal observation.

The above-described, technology-induced shift in consumer behaviour has affected traditional retail industries and naturally extended to the hospitality sector. The rise of e-commerce and online shopping has revolutionised how tourists select their hotels and purchase travel. Online travel agencies (OTAs) have entirely replaced the traditional distribution channels in the hospitality industry (Buhalis & Laws, 2001; O'Connor, 2002; Stangl, Inversini, & Schegg, 2016). Currently, electronic reservations constitute between 50% to 80% of the total sales of hotels worldwide, depending on the region, and in 2023, they have already surpassed the previously set record levels of 2019 (Bui, Jeng, & Lin, 2015; Eurostat, 2023; Statista, 2023). As a result, e-distribution is increasingly becoming an essential element of hotel distribution (Law, Buhalis, & Cobanoglu, 2014; Jiang, 2014) and an essential aspect of strategic hotel marketing activities (Meriläinen, 2017). A study conducted by Beritelli and Schegg in 2016 has provided evidence that having a presence on

³ This chapter, supervised by assoc. prof. Kir Kuščer and assoc. prof. Anton Manfreda, is being prepared for submission to the Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management.

multiple Internet distribution systems (IDS), also known as e-distribution channels in the marketing domain, is crucial for achieving successful online hotel visibility. Consequently, hotel managers must know about and eventually adopt a range of established and emerging IDSs (Jiang, 2014; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016) into their e-distribution portfolio, while carefully monitoring and evaluating their performance (O'Connor & Frew, 2004). Their framework for evaluating IDS is still considered the most influential and widely used theoretical framework (O'Connor & Frew, 2004) in hotel distribution literature.

Besides the OTAs, they have been the dominant e-tourism force regarding transaction volumes (Anderson & Han, 2018). One of the innovative marketing strategies that hotels have adopted following the global financial crisis of 2008 is the adoption of daily deal websites (DDs), also known as flash sales, group buying, or private sale websites (Geerts & Masset, 2022; Gupta & Keiningham, 2012). These limited-time promotions postulated significant discounts to customers who book within a specific time, creating a sense of urgency and excitement, stimulating their impulse buying behaviour and filling the unsold inventory in low season periods (Yi, 2023). After the recession of 2008, DDs transitioned from being purely promotional, coupon-based marketplaces to becoming real-time intermediaries similar to OTAs, and they have since become an important IDS and part of the hotel distribution portfolio (Budler et al., 2020; Minor, 2017). Surprisingly, DDs have mostly been overlooked in the broader academic discussion on IDS in the e-distribution and e-marketing literature. Further, the use of DDs as an IDS has been described as controversial, a phenomenon that occurs during times of economic recession, and a “dumb” managerial strategy that should only be employed as a last resort to address the issue of vacant rooms during times of crisis (Starkov, 2011).

Paradoxically, DDs have been thriving through the 2010s despite the global economic recovery and record tourism levels and were even considered one of the key IDS to help mitigate the disastrous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on hotel performance (Singh, 2020; Chung et al., 2022; Zhi & Ha, 2023). This raises the following questions: Why do hotel managers still utilise DDs as one of their IDS today? What is the value they add to hotels' e-distribution portfolio? What factors contribute to their continued popularity among hotel managers? Do they gain or lose relevance during economic upturns? How do they hold against the digital transformation affecting the entire hotel sector?

Hence, the questions set above are relevant, from both a managerial and an academic perspective, to understand what initially contributed to DDs' success. Why and how did they maintain their relevance? Are DDs still relevant hotel IDS in the present day? These are the questions that this chapter aims to answer due to the apparent lack of research on the exact antecedents that influence hotel managers' decisions to adopt and continue using the services of DDs as an additional IDS in their e-distribution portfolio. To address this deficiency, we will employ the combination of the 2-stage IS continuance model (Bhattacharjee &

Premkumar, 2004) and UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003) as proposed by Venkatesh, Morris & Davis (2014) and contextualise it to the case of DDs IDS managerial adoption for arguably the first time in the field of hotel management and marketing research. Our objective is to perform a long-term qualitative examination of the factors behind the continued use and “staying power” of DDs as an IDS that European hotel managers continue to rely on. This examination will apply UTAUT-inspired variables and test their explanatory power through qualitative empirical interviewing of hotel managers.

Our theoretical contribution is three-fold. It first involves enhancing the 2-stage IS continuance model by incorporating variables from the UTAUT framework and specific DD variables to apply it to the context of hotel IDS by creating a research model construct. This method enables us to conduct an informed collection of empirical data, to deductively observe and qualitatively elaborate on, which UTAUT variables and their factors made DDs a relevant IDS in the period of their initial adoption some 15 years ago, and which factors have made it an IDS relevant to the present day. Secondly, through exploratory qualitative interview inquiry and the analysis following the method of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we generate rich textual data that enables us to inductively and in parallel uncover novel findings related to the development of DDs through the years of their use and different contexts leading to the changes in their practice. These naturally point to managerial changes in attitude, affecting the importance of specific UTAUT variables and factors for their continued use through economic upturn, the COVID-19 pandemic and up to 2024. Thirdly, the comprehensiveness and richness of our empirical dataset collected in 7 years and covering the discussion on DDs use in different time periods within the last 15 years allow us to conceptually outline and theorise the mixed hotel, managerial, and destination characteristics that act as “moderators” of DDs' initial and continued use. The novelty and originality of our approach are guaranteed by contrasting the majority of IS continuance studies, which tend to provide quantitate snapshots of IS continuance at a fixed point in time (Conboy, Fitzgerald, & Mathiassen, 2012). To the contrary, we commit to qualitative and longitudinal ‘ex-post’ observation of ‘de-facto’ adoption and use. This is presented in the form of a ‘historic, time-linear model’ and consciously omit the hypothetical behavioural intention variable used so commonly in technology adoption studies.

The Chapter is structured as follows: In the literature review, we initially define the DDs and review the aspects of their use relevant to studying their adoption. We then present state-of-the-art IS, e-commerce and tourism research dealing with initial adoption. We conclude our literature review section with the presentation of IS continuance research and the presentation of our research DD continuance model construct. After describing the methodology, we present our results and conclude the chapter with a discussion and conclusions, where the implications for theory and practice are provided and the limits of the adopted research framework proposed and discussed.

3.2 Literature review

In this chapter, we initially define DDs as IDS, present the specifics of their use, and elaborate on their role in the hotel's e-distribution portfolio. We later expose key developments in IS research related to technology adoption and continuance.

3.2.1 Defining Daily Deals, their specifics, and their role within the hotel e-distribution

The industry refers to DDs as highly discounted and time-limited sale promotions that hotels usually use as a way of discounted sales to sell an unsold inventory (Xotel, 2024). While such promotions can be found across all e-commerce marketplaces, including the OTAs and hotels' websites, their most known form are the specific websites specialising in this type of sale as a unique BM feature and representing an independent IDS (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Budler et al., 2020; Runfola, Rosati & Guercini, 2013). As an IDS, they are characterised by limited deal size, limited purchasing time (7–14 days usually), a high discount when compared to the regular sales price (between 20 and 50% off), and non-flexible, non-refundable reservation conditions (Budler et al., 2020; Parsons, Ballantine, Ali et al., 2014).

Groupon and Living Social were the first companies to popularise DDs as an e-commerce model while offering a variety of products and services, with a significant portion of their offerings being hotel stays (Green & LoManno, 2012) and represent the generic DDs BM (Budler et al., 2020). The continued expansion of the DDs market through the 2010s was marked by its fragmentation and the emergence of specialised, niche DD providers that only offer high-end hotel stays. Three European examples of such websites that operate across multiple European markets are Voyage Privé, Secret Escapes, and Very Chic, as reported by CNBC in 2015. These DDs managed to attract investors from significant technology and hotel chain companies, such as Google and Accor Hotels (Accor Hotels, 2017), emphasising the significance and relevance of this specific IDS in the hotel industry.

While travellers not only sign up to receive newsletters but also proactively and regularly refer to DDs when making hotel reservations (Runfola et al., 2013), DDs have inexplicably been neglected in the broader academic discourse on hotel e-distribution. The academic understanding of DDs remains incomplete and requires further theoretical and empirical development (Sigala, 2013; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Minor, 2017; Berezina & Semrad, 2022). Most studies focus on consumer aspects of DD clients, profiling them and observing their psychological characteristics (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016) analysing their impact on consumers' purchasing decisions and emotions (Geerts & Masset, 2022), motivations (Yang et al., 2016) and satisfaction (Cox, 2017).

Previous research that adopted the supply-side perspective, i.e. the hotels and managers, has focused on listing the benefits and drawbacks of using DDs (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). It has also examined how DDs affected the profitability of merchants (Dholakia, 2012) and analysed their impact on service quality and brand image in hotels (Minor, 2017). Furthermore, these studies strongly suggest that unless DD promotions are appropriately designed and executed, they do not generate profitability for hotels (Minor, 2017), further questioning their utility and relevance over time. Therefore, it seems challenging to thoroughly evaluate the variables that drive hoteliers to adopt and continue utilising DDs as their IDS from only the available academic literature. A synthesis of available advantages and disadvantages of distributing via DDs is provided in the following paragraph.

Firstly, Sigala (2013), when discussing online coupons in tourism and hospitality as novel forms of promotions, suggested they might help enhance brand exposure, acquire customers, and increase profits. Sigala also warned against their required steep discounts that might impact long-term profitability and their tendency to attract low-spending customers. Further, Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu (2016), in their seminal work on DDs, listed the advantages of using DDs as IDS to be observable in inventory management (selling unsold rooms), revenue management (generating cash flow and improving occupancy levels), branding (boosting visibility), marketing and customer relationships management (attracting new clients). In all these domains of hotel management, notable disadvantages have been identified that substantially impact operational activities. These include considerable challenges like the necessity for meticulous preparation and the substantial time and effort required for staff training (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). Later studies once again focused on DD guests and revealed these were variety-seeking, demanding, had characteristics of being market mavens and were spontaneous in their travel choices. They were thus prone to impulse buying, making them appealing targets for hotels (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Cox, 2017; Lamis, Handayani & Fitriani, 2022; Martaleni, Hendrasto, Hidayat, Dzikri & Yasa, 2022).

Further relevant findings for understanding the adoption processes related to DDs' continued use were provided by Budler et al. (2020), who, for the first time, focused on tourism-specialised DDs and provided a clear distinction between generic and niche DDs BM, with the latter having fewer disadvantages for hotels in terms of maintaining their brand value and pricing level reference unaffected. In 2021, Tomat, Bratec and Budler depicted the changes in DDs BM caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which must be considered when discussing their use over the last few years. Nevertheless, the knowledge related to their adoption and present-day use still remains to be uncovered.

3.2.2 Technology adoption in information systems, e-commerce, and tourism research

Several theoretical models have been proposed to evaluate and assess the relationships and effects of technology adoption. Dahnil et al. (2014) identified that these can be categorised into two distinct groups, depending on the viewpoint employed during their formulation. The first perspective focuses on theories of technology diffusion to explicate and forecast the process by which technology is adopted across various channels. The second perspective examines the influence of human behaviour on an individual's willingness to embrace technology and their anticipated proficiency in utilising it. On the other hand, Deil and Brune (2017) categorised theories into two primary groups: those that have a psychological focus, such as TAM, UTAUT and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and their extensions, and those that have more of an organisational perspective, such as Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOI) and the Technology-Organisation-Environment (TOE) model (Fedeli, 2021). Among those with a psychological focus, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), developed by Venkatesh, Morris, Davies, and Davies in 2003, is widely regarded as the most influential theoretical framework in technology adoption in recent years. UTAUT is a compilation of pre-existing models and theories that aim to explain technology adoption. Venkatesh et al. (2003) consolidated these models into a comprehensive theory by thoroughly examining and evaluating eight previously dominant models on technology acceptance and use. The theories mentioned are Rogers' (1983) Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DIT), Davis' (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Motivational Model, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Combined Theory of Planned Behaviour and Technology Acceptance Model (CTPB/TAM), Model of Personal Computer Use (MPCU), and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The UTAUT model has undergone extensive testing in various fields and has demonstrated its ability to explain nearly 70% of the variance in adoption behaviour (Mandal & McQueen, 2012). UTAUT has effectively been utilised in the organisational setting to elucidate the managerial utilisation of social media (Gruzd, Staves, & Wilk, 2012), e-learning tools (Yueh, Huang, & Chang, 2015), and mobile banking (Oliveira et al., 2014), among other applications. Venkatesh et al. (2003: 447–451) identified four primary factors proposed by UTAUT that impact the intention and usage of information technology:

- *“Performance expectancy (PE) refers to the extent to which an individual believes that using the system will assist them in improving job performance.*
- *Effort expectancy (EE) is the level of ease associated with using the system.*
- *Facilitating conditions (FC) refer to the extent to which an individual believes that the organisational and technical infrastructure is in place to support the system's use.*
- *Social influence (SI) refers to the extent to which an individual perceives that important people in their life believe they should use the new system.”*

In addition to the four primary factors, UTAUT incorporates four additional “moderating” factors: gender, age, experience, and voluntariness of use. These factors have the potential to either amplify or diminish the impact of the four main factors on the dependent variables – behavioural intention and use behaviour (Gruzd et al., 2012).

Since its development, the UTAUT Framework has demonstrated robustness in explaining e-commerce phenomena through quantitative and qualitative analysis in various contexts. This leads to the assumption that it possesses the capability to explain the adoption and continued use of novel forms of IDS, such as DDs, by hotel managers. UTAUT-based theories and models were successfully used in the past to explain the adoption processes dealing with the organisational use of social media, e-banking, e-commerce, and e-learning (Cimperman, Makovec Brenčič, & Trkman, 2016; Gruzd, Staves, & Wilk, 2012; Mandal & McQueen, 2012; Oliveira, Faria, Thomas, & Popovič, 2014) and should thus be deemed appropriate to be applied to the field of hotel e-distribution.

Various authors have expanded the fundamental variables of the framework by incorporating additional factors such as attitude (Dwivedi, Rana, Jeyaraj, Clement, & Williams, 2017), innovativeness (San Martín & Herrero, 2012), perceived credibility, and task-technology fit (Tarhini, El Masri, Ali, & Serrano, 2016). These additional factors aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of adopting technology-based applications and activities in specific contexts. In their recommendations for future UTAUT studies, Venkatesh, Thong, and Xu (2014) suggest including time and events as contextual attributes and moderators. This will allow for a more comprehensive examination of how time and events influence changes in user perceptions, use patterns, and adoption outcomes.

A narrower research area is dedicated to examining the concerns related to technology adoption. Disturbance concerns (DC) refer to any issues or problems arising from using information systems, such as malfunctions, interruptions, stress, anxiety, hidden transactional costs, or potential losses (Lai, 2011). These studies investigate the factors that impede the acceptance of a particular technological solution among customers or within an organisation. In his research, Lai (2011) examines various obstacles that interfere with the rapid adoption of mobile commerce in Asia. Lai and Lai (2014) discovered the disruptive issues related to the adoption of mobile commerce by consumers and incorporated them into a privacy concerns variable that expands upon the four original UTAUT variables. This body of literature advocates for a more equitable and comprehensive perspective on the factors influencing the acceptance of new technologies, which also includes an examination of the potential drawbacks of these emerging technologies. It addresses individuals' issues when adopting a specific new electronic application or IDS.

Remarkably, the UTAUT framework has received little to no attention in the context of hotel distribution and broader research in tourism. In the recent systematic literature review on technology adoption in tourism conducted by El Archi and Benbba (2023), they only spotted

14 studies published in the Q1 indexed Scopus Journals that mention UTAUT, while none of them dealt with IDS or other hotel distribution-related technology. To the contrary, in most contemporary studies, researchers continue to utilise an older and simpler technology adoption model, referred to as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davies, 1989), a predecessor of UTAUT. Its two variables are integrated into and enhanced by UTAUT, which can provide a more nuanced and holistic adoption perspective to the somewhat oversimplified TAM.

The limited number of studies published in tourism journals that employ the UTAUT focus exclusively on the demand side of e-commerce adoption. These studies examine topics such as e-airline ticket purchasing (Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014), e-purchasing of rural tourism services (San Martín & Herrero, 2012), consumer adoption of mobile payments in hotels (Morosan & DeFranco, 2016), the utilisation of mobile hotel booking applications (Fong, Lam, & Law, 2017) and factors influencing online hotel booking (Chang, Liu, Huang, & Hsieh, 2019). The recent COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdowns further fuelled research on adopting contactless technologies in hospitality (Hao, 2021) and virtual tourism adoption among consumers (Bilynets et al., 2023; Huang, 2023). However, there is still no single supply-side-based research on the adoption of technologies, e-commerce tools, or the IDS within the hotel industry that would be based on the UTAUT framework. This leads to assuming that the fields of IS and e-marketing have not yet really overlapped and the researchers in hotel management are lagging behind the theoretically more updated e-commerce scholars from another discipline, notwithstanding the prominence and growth of e-tourism research field (Gretzel et al., 2020).

With all of the ideas mentioned above in mind, the suggested investigation can be regarded as innovative and unique, as it employs the UTAUT framework in a context that has never been previously explored. Yet, limitation-wise, the original UTAUT variables can only explain why hotel managers intend to adopt and subsequently adopt the DDs as a distribution channel. Therefore, it is expected to be a valuable tool for hotel managers to comprehend the initial acceptance of a new IDS, such as DDs. However, the model cannot explain why hotel managers continue to use the DDs channel after its initial adoption, even through years of economic upturn, major crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current situation of tourism recovery and booming “revenge tourism” all around Europe (Abdullah, 2021). To achieve that, we will need to look at the theories and models of technology continuance.

3.2.3 Technology continuance in information systems, e-commerce, and tourism research

The continuous utilisation of information systems (IS) is crucial for their sustained effectiveness and success (Bhattacharjee, 2001). Therefore, theories and frameworks that help explain the phase after the initial adoption are just as important as those that explore adoption antecedents (Mishra et al., 2023) to provide a holistic picture of specific technology or e-commerce products' success. According to the expectation confirmation theory (ECT),

originating from social psychology and consumer behaviour research, users' satisfaction, and usage after adopting a product or service are influenced by their perception of how well the product or service performs and whether it meets their initial expectations formed before its use (Oliver, 1980). On the other hand, the disconfirmation concept is congruent with cognitive dissonance theory, which posits that individuals undergo a psychological conflict when their behaviour is incongruous with their beliefs and thoughts (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

The ECT theory forms the theoretical underpinning of diverse models at the core of IS continuance research. Researchers commonly employ such models to assess user satisfaction and post-purchase intention regarding products, services, and technology (Hossain & Quaddus, 2012). The post-acceptance model proposed by Bhattacharjee (2001) further develops the ECT. Bhattacharjee (2001) posited that the prosperity of companies operating in the IT/IS field relies more on sustained usage than initial adoption followed by abandonment (Mishra et al., 2023), which explains why certain technologies and e-commerce solutions stay relevant, while others quickly vanish following the initial hype surrounding their early adoption (Dedehayir & Steinert, 2016). The ECT and the post-acceptance models based upon it share certain similarities while exhibiting differences in their methodologies. ECT assesses both pre- and post-adoption variables and has traditionally been widely used in marketing research (Hossain & Quaddus, 2012), while the post-acceptance model (Bhattacharjee, 2001) focuses solely on post-acceptance parameters and has had a more considerable impact among IS scholars (Mishra et al., 2023). A further variation that somehow bridges both approaches and provides an additional variation of the model was proposed by Bhattacharjee and Premkumar (2004) in the form of their 2-stage IS continuance model. This explains the change in cognitive beliefs and consequential formation of satisfaction and attitude that lead to continued IS usage. The 2-stage IS continuance model is capable of *“linking usage-related beliefs and attitudes in the pre-usage stage with those in the usage stage and positing disconfirmation and satisfaction as emergent constructs affecting post-usage beliefs and attitudes that in turn influence continuance intention”* (Venkatesh, Thong, Chan, Hu, & Brown, 2011).

While the 2-stage IS continuance model (Bhattacharjee & Premkumar, 2004) has a more substantial explanatory power on the continuance of IS over its predecessors, its difficulty of practical operationalisation has hindered its broader applicability, as its use, if applied accurately, requires quantitative empirical work to be performed twice – before and sometime after the adoption. Notwithstanding this limitation, it has been recently successfully applied in studying the continued use of fitness apps (Yousaf, Mishra, Gupta, 2021), COVID-19 contact tracing apps (Tran, Nguyen, Tran, 2022), mobile government services (Xiong, Wang, & Wang, 2022), and social media (Chen, Wang, & Wang, 2023).

Before its pandemic-influenced resurgence in popularity, where technology adoption theories gained momentum as they were found useful to analyse the continuance of COVID-19

travel-related app use among tourists (Coves-Martínez et al., 2023), the IS continuance has seldomly been the subject of attention among tourism scholars (Filieri et al., 2020). The IS post-acceptance model (Bhattacharjee, 2001) that focuses solely on the post-adoption perspective has inaugurally been applied in the tourism context to evaluate the continued demand-side relevance of the leading tourism user-generated content e-commerce platform, TripAdvisor (Filieri et al., 2020). In this study, Filieri et al. (2020) merged Bhattacharjee's (2004) model with TAM constructs in the tradition of tourism research still relying on TAM. To the contrary, in the present chapter, we attempt a step further towards the more contemporary conceptualisation of IS continuance in which we use the Bhattacharjee & Premkumar (2004) 2-stage IS continuance model as a base, which we akin to the steps previously taken by Venkatesh et al. (2011), merge with four key UTAUT variables plus additional variables deemed appropriate to depict the DDs adoption and use specific context. This should enable us to explain the continued use of DDs over different periods and contexts, ranging from their initial adoption amidst the recession, its use during the years of economic upturn, through the COVID-19 period and its recovery, and up to the present day.

3.3 Conceptual development of research framework

Whereas the four core UTAUT variables and their extensions can help to explain why hotel managers develop the intention to adopt, and consequently, de-facto adopt, the DDs distribution channel, they fail to explain the second research question posed – why hotel managers continue to use the DDs as IDS after their initial adoption even to the present day. To find an appropriate framework for this continued use of the DDs channel, we need to take a closer look at the upgrades of the UTAUT framework and its applications that merged it with other IS continuance-focused models. In one such combining attempt, Venkatesh et al. (2011) successfully merged the original UTAUT model, and the 2-stage IS continuance model developed by Bhattacharjee and Premkumar (2004) to propose an “Expanded two-stage model of IS continuance”, which is the model upon which we base our conceptualisation. This model can capture the changes in attitudes by the individuals in the pre-usage and usage stages that determine the continuance of IS use. Venkatesh et al. (2011) filled the model with the four core UTAUT variables presented above. They modelled the expanded two-stage IS continuance model for adopting e-government services. Therefore, they also added the key contextual variable of trust to address the issue of sensitive personal information involved in adopting e-government services. In the context of the current study of DDs’ adoption, there is no issue of personal sensitive information and trust issues. Therefore, such key contextual variables of trust can be substituted with variables specific to the DDs’ adoption context, which the four core UTAUT variables fail to cover with an explanation.

Further, for a more balanced and holistic view, the disturbance concerns (DC) related to the adoption of DDs IDS need to be added to the model following Lai's (2011) suggestion. This will also leave room for some potential inductive discovery that does not fit any of the

model's variables yet is strictly related to the DDs context. We name this additional category other DDs-specific variables (OSV). The complete list of variables used in creating our research model construct is available in Table 3.1 below.

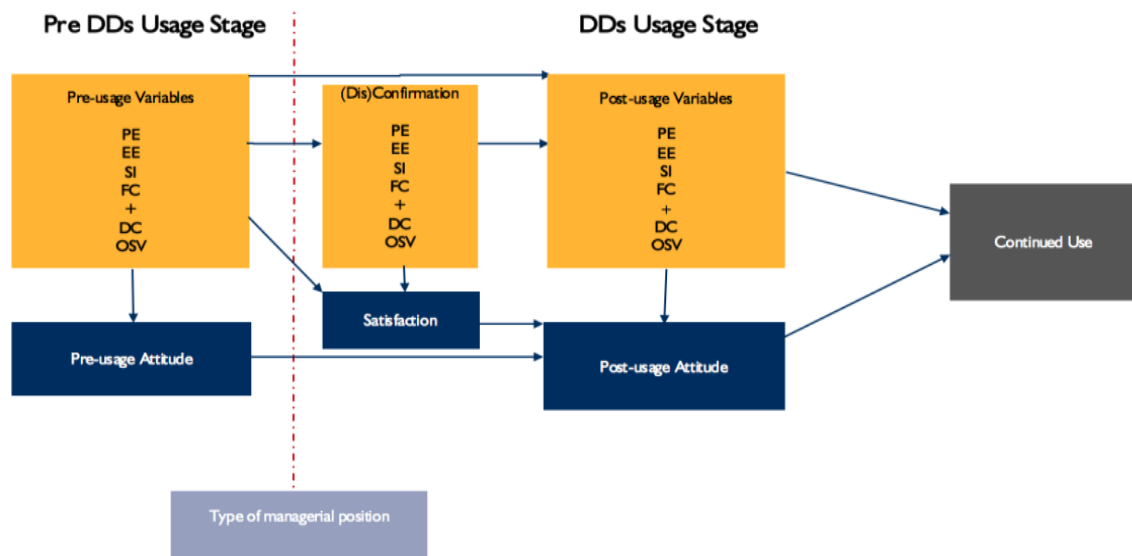
Table 3.1: Variable definitions

VARIABLE	ORIGINAL DEFINITION
Performance Expectancy (PE)	Performance expectancy is defined as the degree to which an individual believes that using the system will help him or her attain gains in job performance (Venkatesh et al., 2003).
Effort Expectancy (EE)	Effort expectancy is defined as the degree of ease associated with the use of the system (Venkatesh et al., 2003).
Facilitating Conditions (FC)	Facilitating conditions are defined as the degree to which an individual believes that an organisational and technical infrastructure exists to support use of the system (Venkatesh et al., 2003).
Attitude (AT)	An individual's favourable or unfavourable evaluation of an object leads to consistent behaviour toward that object. (Davis et al., 1989; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975).
Confirmation	Matching the user's expectation with the performance of IS or technology (Bhattacharjee, 2001).
Social Influence (SI)	Social influence is described as the extent to which an individual feels that significant others think they should adopt the new system (Venkatesh et al., 2003).
Satisfaction	User's feelings after confirmation of expectation from IS or technology usage (Bhattacharjee, 2001).
Continued use (CU)	Refers to the user's ongoing utilisation of an information system after the initial acceptance and adoption phase (Bhattacharjee, 2001).
Disturbance concerns (DC)	Any issues or problems arising from using information systems, such as malfunctions, interruptions, stress, anxiety, hidden transactional costs, or potential losses (Lai, 2011).
Other DDs specific contextual variables (OSV)	A non-defined variable was left to explore unpredictable DDs in a context-specific way that cannot be classified into any other variable presented in the model.

Source: own work

In addition, the structure of this model is consistent with O'Connor and Frew's (2004) electronic distribution channel evaluation framework – an established and heavily influential framework in the hotel e-distribution literature that proposes the methodology to assess novel IDS while considering their adoption and integration into the hotel's e-distribution portfolio. This framework equally distinguishes between the main variables influencing the initial adoption and continued use of a distribution channel. Further, it stresses the importance of “operational” and “performance” variables in the process of IDS adoption (O'Connor and Frew, 2004). Although based on marketing theory and practitioner-oriented, its variables seem closely aligned with the “effort expectancy” and “performance expectancy” variables of the UTAUT. Such similarities further point towards the suitability of the Expanded two-stage IS continuance model (Venkatesh et al., 2011) to explain the adoption and continued usage of DDs. Thus, based on the logic and the necessary context-driven variable substitution described (and defined in Table 3.1) above, this model can easily be transformed into the Expanded two-stage model of DD continuance. As such, it serves as our research construct and is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Expanded two-stage model of DDs continuance



Source: own work based on Bhattacharjee & Premkumar (2004) and Venkatesh et al. (2011)

The proposed expanded two-stage model of DD continuance can encompass two distinct stages of the DD adoption process. With its other DDs-specific variables (OSV) and the DC variable, it can also encompass the potential situation of channel conflicts. These are at the core of e-distribution research and occur when another IDS influences one IDS to attract the same customer with the same brand at the same time and setting (Lamb, Hair, & McDaniel, 2012). Pursuing multiple e-distribution channels comes at an expense. The different channels do not constantly interact harmoniously. They can either cannibalise each other (Lu et al., 2015), substitute each other (Schegg & Scaglione, 2014), or, in rarer cases, serve as a billboard to each other (Anderson, 2009). All these situations can be attributed to the channel

conflict that regularly appears in the e-distribution among the direct IDS and different intermediary IDS (Tan & Dwyer, 2014). Channel conflict is an established area of study in marketing.

Nevertheless, it has recently regained attention as e-commerce has become more common: though IDS undeniably increase the intensity of bookings, hotel managers also see intermediary IDS as competitors (Myung, Li, & Bai, 2009). Therefore, the concerns over the potential channel conflict can be linked to the DC of DDs adoption. These elements of uncertainty on how the new DDs IDS will interact with the existing ones in the e-distribution portfolio are the reason behind some of the significant managerial concerns that cause their hesitation in adopting and continuing the DDs channel.

3.4 Methodology

The methodology section systematically depicts the steps taken during the research. It focuses on explaining the crucial decisions that must be made during the longitudinal process, which lasted almost seven years.

3.4.1 Research approach

IS tends to be dominated by quantitative research and positivist paradigms. However, the nature of our inquiry does not allow for quantitative techniques, as DDs have been adopted long ago. Their initial adoption, if attempted quantitatively, would need to be measured back at the time before their first adoption. Thus, the qualitative approach remains the obvious choice. Nevertheless, this is executed in a pragmatic manner, following a careful literature review of the DDs phenomenon and IS adoption and continuance literature, including constructing a research model derived from what we presented above. While not mainstream and often epistemologically disputed, such forms of pragmatism, positivist-conceptualised qualitative research is slowly establishing itself in social and business studies (Berkovich, 2018, Pansiri, 2005). The stance that we take as researchers is that of pragmatic realists (Flatscher, 2011), acknowledging the complexity of the social world and emphasising the importance of uncovering causal mechanisms through the researcher's interpretation that is naturally not objective as influenced by his experience and positionality.

3.4.2 Sampling

The sampling considerations that we employed were the following. Initially, we set a criterion only to consider hotel managers from hotels who have used DDs IDS at least once. Using convenience sampling principles (Robinson, 2014), we based our research on Slovenia, where the lead researcher lives and works. However, when pooling the Slovenian sample from the population of European hotels and tourism offerings, we realised that Slovenia provides Mediterranean, Alpine, and thermal tourist experiences yet fails to offer

worldwide famous urban and cultural destinations (SST, 2022). Therefore, we decided to diversify the sample of hotel managers by including hotels that used DDs IDS at least once from Slovenian neighbouring countries, i.e., Austria, Croatia, Hungary, and Italy. This decision enabled us to increase the sampling pool and gain internationally diverse, rich, and relevant insights from hotels offering various tourist experiences, i.e., Alpine, Mediterranean, thermal, and urban destinations. Moreover, this also gave us a balanced view of how hotel managers in the Western, established, and highly ranked countries (i.e., Austria and Italy) and the emerging, Eastern tourism countries (i.e., Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia) (WEF, 2021) behave regarding the adoption and continued use of DDs.

Table 3.2: Sample characteristics

Country	Number of Interviews	WEF TTDI 2021 Ranking
Slovenia	14	39.
Hungary	11	37.
Croatia	10	46.
Italy	8	10.
Austria	6	11.

Source: own work

3.4.3 Data collection

Given the novelty of this research area and the fact that no previous studies have used the IS continuance models to examine the managerial adoption of hotel IDS, such as DDs, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for data collection. The interview data is expected to enable us to identify and investigate various factors that could potentially impact the reasons and ways by which hotel managers start and continue using DDs. Additionally, it will help us assess the suitability of UTAUT variables as a research tool to explain the adoption and use of DDs through different periods. The interview guide (see Table 3.3) was developed in 2018 based on our research construct. We opted for semi-structured interviews as they allowed us to gather factual information while delving further into the interviewees' experiences (Halperin & Heath, 2017). Following the two test interviews, the semi-structured interview guide was refined in dialogue with another researcher specialising in DDs and hospitality management. Further refinement was done once COVID-19 hit Europe in May 2020, and the section dedicated to the COVID-19 period was added. Lastly, the interview guide was ultimately updated in early 2023, when all the travel limitations in Europe were lifted with the section for the period we refer to as 2023/2024, or 'present day' use.

Table 3.3: Interview guide

PART 1: INITIAL ADOPTION	• Think of the time you first heard about Flash sales/DD... • How did you become aware of them? Did someone recommend their use to them? • Did you have any doubts about testing them out? If so, what were these doubts? • What were your expectations prior to starting using them? • Anything else that comes to mind from the time before you tried them out?
PART 2: REGULAR USAGE	• What was your initial experience when you started using them? • How did you evaluate the success of their use? • When were they most relevant for your hotel (time/context)? • Any problems you think of surrounding their use? • Anything else that comes to mind from the period of their regular use?
PART 3: COVID-19 PERIOD	• How did your use of Flash Sales during COVID-19 differ from the times before? • Does the fact that they became flexible in terms of booking conditions matter to you? • Anything else that comes to your mind from your use during the COVID period?
PART 4: THE PRESENT	• Do you use flash sales today, and why? • Who plays a significant role in your organisation when you decide to use them? Do competitors/colleagues have any impact on you when you decide to use them? • What is your opinion on them, what bothers you about them, and how would you like them to develop in the future? • In which context are they most useful? • What is the best practice for their use in your company? • How do you plan to use them in the near future?

Source: own work

The interview candidates were emailed with an interview invitation, and most interviews were conducted online via Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp Messenger and MS Teams. Before the interviews, all participants were provided information for both the interview process and the recording of the interviews – their informed consent was then recorded at the beginning of each interview. They were also guaranteed anonymity. The interviews were recorded and transcribed either manually or using transcription software. They were conducted over six years, between 2018 and 2024 and lasted between 21 and 55 minutes. In three instances, interviewees expressed the desire to answer in a written form over e-mail, which we

accommodated. Then, we went through their answers over the phone if clarifications were needed. We made follow-up emails and calls with interviewees who had been interviewed before 2020 to inquire about the specifics of their COVID-19 usage of DDs and their current practices related to DD usage. We received responses from 49 hotel managers of 3-, 4-, and 5-star hotels working for organisations operating from 34 to 21,000 accommodation units. Detailed information about the interviews conducted can be found in Table 3.4 below. Data saturation was reached after 44 interviews were conducted; since then, no new relevant data has emerged.

Table 3.4: Interview profiles

Coun- try	Infor- mant pseudo- nym	Position	Years of experience	Hotel Organisation	Category	Quality Score: Trip- advisor	Inter- view Year
HU	Terry	Consultant	20–30	Regional chain	4–5	4.5	2018
SI	Angelo	Owner	10–20	Independent	4	4.5	2018
AT	Steve	E-Commerce Manager	5–10	Regional chain	4	4	2019
HR	Tony	E-Commerce Manager	5–10	National chain	4	4	2019
HR	Magda	Director of Sales & Marketing	5–10	National chain	4	4.5	2019
HU	Isaac_1	Head of Revenue and Reservations	10–20	Independent	4	5	2019
SI	Erna	Assistant to GM	5–10	International chain	5	4.5	2019
SI	Jade	Director of Sales	20–30	Independent	4	4.5	2019
SI	Miles	Director of Sales & Marketing	5–10	National chain	4–5	4	2019
IT	Caro	GM	20–30	Independent	5	4.5	2020
IT	Fred	GM	20–30	Independent	4	4.5	2020
IT	Orlando	GM	20–30	National chain	5	4.5	2020

To be continued

Table 3.4: Interview profiles (cont.)

Coun- try	Infor- mant pseudo- nym	Position	Years of experience	Hotel Organisation	Category	Quality Score: Trip- advisor	Inter- view Year
HR	Steph	Director of Sales & Marketing	10–20	International chain	5	4.5	2022
HU	Isaac_2	Head of Revenue and Reservations	10–20	Independent	5	5	2022
SI	Babette	Director of Sales	10–20	International chain	4	4	2022
AT	Myra	Director of Sales & Marketing	10–20	International chain	5	4.5	2023
AT	Jane	GM & Chain Commercial Lead	10–20	Regional chain	4–5	4.5	2023
AT	Roxanne	Consultant	10–20	Independent	3–4	4	2023
AT	Mick	Director of Operations	10–20	Independent	4	4.5	2023
HR	Pearl	GM	10–20	Independent	4	4.5	2023
HR	Mya	Director of Sales & Marketing	20–30	International chain	5	4.5	2023
HR	Marcel	E-Commerce Manager	10–20	National chain	4–5	4.5	2023
HR	Emilio	Director of Revenue Management	10–20	National chain	4–5	5	2023
HU	Gustave	Director of Operations	20–30	Regional chain	4	4.5	2023
HU	Audrey	Director of Sales & Marketing	20–30	National chain	4–5	4.5	2023
HU	Cassie	Director of Sales & Marketing	20–30	International chain	5	5	2023

Table 3.4: Interview profiles (cont.)

Coun- try	Infor- mant pseudo- nym	Position	Years of experience	Hotel Organisation	Category	Quality Score: Trip- advisor	Inter- view Year
HU	Edith	Director of Revenue Management	20–30	Regional chain	4	4	2023
HU	George	GM	10–20	International chain	4	4.5	2023
HU	Geoffrey	Consultant	10–20	Independent	3–4	4.5	2023
HU	Jules	GM	10–20	Independent	5	5	2023
HU	Zac	Revenue Manager	5–10	Independent	5	5	2023
IT	Patrick	GM	20–30	Independent	5	4.5	2023
IT	Amerigo	Consultant	10–20	National chain	4–5	4.5	2023
IT	Francis	Director of Reservations	10–20	Independent	5	4.5	2023
IT	Mareike	Owner	20–30	National chain	4	4.5	2023
IT	Max	Owner	20–30	Independent	4	4	2023
SI	Leona	Director of Marketing	10–20	National chain	3–5	4.5	2023
SI	Josie	Director of Sales	20–30	National chain	4	3.5	2023
SI	Karina	Director of Sales	10–20	National chain	4	4	2023
SI	Mae	Director of Sales	10–20	National chain	4	4.5	2023
SI	Jessica	Sales Manager	10–20	Independent	4	3.5	2023
SI	Joe	Reservations Manager	30–40	National chain	3–5	3.5	2023
SI	Kirsten	Head of Sales	10–20	National chain	4	4	2023
SI	Seb	Sales Manager	20–30	National chain	4–5	4	2023

To be continued

Table 3.4: Interview profiles (cont.)

Coun- try	Infor- mant pseudo- nym	Position	Years of experience	Hotel Organisation	Category	Quality Score: Trip- advisor	Inter- view Year
SI	Portia	Director of Sales and Marketing	10–20	National chain	4	4.5	2023
AT	Christian o	Director of Sales	10–20	National chain	4	4	2024
HR	Claude	Director of Sales	5–10	National chain	3–5	4.5	2024
HR	Sue	Sales & Marketing Consultant	20–30	Independent	3–5	4.5	2024
HR	Salomon	Director of Direct E- Sales	20–30	Regional chain	3–5	4.5	2024

Source: own work

3.4.4 Data analysis

Aligned with the recommendations of Braun and Clark (2006) for thematic analysis, we followed the established stages of data familiarisation before commencing the deductive coding process. This was done in interpretation-focused coding Adu, (2019) following a set of predetermined codes based on our research model and their potential manifestation in the interview guide. The codes were then merged into themes on the abstract level and ultimately aligned with UTAUT variables. The second coding round involved inductive scanning for relevant and interesting codes to help explain the narrative behind the DDs. The continued relevance was not perceived through the initial deductive coding phase. In the last stage, we added the method that we borrowed from the quantitative content analysis toolbox (Rourke & Andersen, 2019) and quantified the key codes representing the variables of pre-adoption and post-adoption attitude as well as the ones representing the usage continuance in the present-day.

3.5 Results

The results below depict the different stages of DD use and the mechanism behind their staying power through the years. We employ the structure of different stages of continuance and provide excerpts from collected interviews to depict the various themes that build the

UTAUT-inspired interpretation of results. In each section, the table illustrates the themes that represent the factors of each UTAUT variable and their changes through different stages.

3.5.1 Pre-DDs usage stage

Most hotel managers became aware of DDs sometime around 2010. The OTAs first used the new marketing strategy with their super-discounted offers that lasted 24 or 48 hours and were utilised mainly by the hotel managers to improve the visibility and ranking of their properties. These deals were especially popular in big urban destinations, where many hotels competed for the list's best position. Edith, HU, remembers:

"You know, there was this deal of the day and Booking.com... And I remember that it was very important for us because we were able to gain position on Booking.com ... We just opened, so we were never visible... I think it was about €90 or 99 maybe that we ran this, this sale on and it wasn't a huge success. We we came to, I think the first page, last position of the first page on Booking.com ..."

Similarly, DDs became a common retail strategy among the emerging e-commerce platforms for local service. Thermal hotels often learned about DDs by contacting such local Groupon-esque marketplaces to sell swimming pool entries and beauty services before they started offering overnight stays as part of their offer.

The time was characterised by generally low demand due to the global financial crisis, and many hotels were struggling with occupancy and reaching their financial targets. George, HU, remembers: *"We were desperately needed business, and I remember that I received a few requests to work with several flash sales companies, and we didn't know anything about them, honestly."* However, the perception then was that they were very expensive IDS. Claude, HR, remembers: *"And I would say from the beginning when this flash sale model has started, at that time because it was normal then to have a 30–40% or even 50% discount on the regular rates."*

Generally, the initial perceptions of DDs as potential IDS were mixed, and many hoteliers were sceptical about trying them out, no matter if they were struggling with performance. Angelo, SI, admits:

"... before starting to cooperate with Secret Escapes I was very sceptical as, as a consumer, I always considered Daily Deal websites to be a trick and selling low-quality products only, however, once we started distributing via this channel, we realised the platform was a perfect fit for our 4 plus product, and we managed to reach very similar profile of the guests in terms of their behaviour and spending as through the OTAs."*

Angelo's response above hints at the surprise that happened during his initial trial of the niche DD platform, Secret Escapes, which made him change his attitude completely. While

he was sceptical before trying the new IDS, his opinion shifted entirely due to his satisfaction with the guest profile the DD platform brought.

Contrary to Angelo's scepticism, other hotel managers were following the novel developments in marketing. They were curious about the novel websites bombarding them with e-mails and offering distribution and marketing services. Many were facing severe dilemmas that questioned their previous perceptions on pricing: Myra, AT, admits:

"So, before I personally signed the first flash sale deal, I was thinking very intensely about it because. Because it is like a form of discounting that obviously large companies do not like to do, let's say. Yeah, it is the the proof it was that it's like a closed community that the that the offer is being sent to. So basically, it's let's call it semi-public but of course the requirement on the sale was very high so you know like you're told you'll have to show this discount, you have to add benefits. You have to, you know, like it's, it's, it's... basically it is the typical I would say decision that anyone takes, taking a sales decision or distribution decision on a luxury product. Do I want to do this or not? Do I want to give my product such a price and would not want to give such like my product, my luxury product, such a price. So that was the thoughts that I, that, that I, that I was having basically thinking, do I want to do it?"

Coupled with unfavourable economic conditions, some curious individuals tried it without much consideration. Terry, HU, explains:

"I like trying out new things ... When you are down, you have nothing to lose ... We went into Groupon when we were facing a month of extremely low occupancy. We managed to fill the rooms, yet failed to collect additional revenue in terms of extra services from these customers ..."

Terry's initial experience with DDs was untypical, as his pre-adoption positive attitude and curiosity did not change drastically after the first trial. Most initially sceptic hotel managers were extremely satisfied and had a very positive first experience when adopting DDs, which resulted in a very positive change in their attitude towards DDs once they completed their first attempt at using them as an IDS. This is exemplified by Frances, IT, who recalls:

"The first experience was ... kind of a revelation, actually. We saw this unexpected surge in bookings, largely thanks to those tempting discounts."

Table 3.5 below quantifies hotel managers' initial attitudes toward DDs and their changes in attitude. Almost 90% of hotel managers have shown a positive change in their attitude towards DDs following their initial use.

Table 3.5: Pre-adoption attitude and change in attitude following the first usage

Country	Initial Attitude	Positive change in attitude
Slovenia	Sceptical: 10/14	12/14
Croatia	Positive: 7/10	9/10
Hungary	Sceptical: 6/10	10/11
Austria	Positive: 5/6	6/6
Italy	Positive: 6/8	8/8
TOTAL		44/49

Source: own work

The clear motivator that convinced the hotel managers to try out the DDs was their possibility of generating volumes of sales and income rapidly. Most did not consider the marketing potential these platforms brought back then. Still, they were somewhat worried about the brand damage their involvement with such platforms might bring and the high costs associated with using DDs compared to other IDS. Similarly, no concern over the EE was voiced among the managers before their first adoption of DDs. Regarding their SI, most were under the influence of DD Market Managers, who were actively contacting them and offering their services, or they were curious about the vast presence of DDs as sponsors or exhibitors at industry trade events. Lastly, the novelty of IDS and the lack of knowledge about how to use it and how reliable the companies operating it caused for DC.

3.5.2 DDs usage stage

Following the initial adoption, the managers started using DDs. The strongest driver of their use was the initial satisfaction with their initial adoption, which caused their improved attitude towards this new IDS. Similarly, they gained experience and started considering other aspects of DDs' PE beyond their contribution to income generation. *"The objective of flash sales is to increase ADR and volume"*, states Amerigo, IT, at the time gaining understanding in DDs functionality for revenue management. Marketing starts to become a much more relevant part of their PE, as Jane, AT, emphasises:

"You really have to choose which channels to work with because there are different facets, and some are more luxury-minded while others are more focused on discount."

In this period, the managers started to understand the differences between niche and generic DD platforms and the customers they usually bring to the hotels, so they more carefully evaluated their marketing potential as part of assessing their PE. Similarly, they gained experience in what worked in their market and what not as Babette, SI, who was at the time working for a lower-end 4-star hotel: *"Secret Escapes we had, um, but there wasn't much of a response – our old hotel is not attractive enough for them, I guess."*

Other, tried to use the marketing opportunity and sacrifice the low margin by seeing their PE in terms of improved visibility. Pearl, HR, working for a high-end 4-star hotel, elaborates:

“When we started to use them regularly, we were all praying that won't be coming much reservations because net price we would get would be half of the price we should get through other channels. So, we did it just because we all were told they will send newsletters to millions of people. They will all see about your property, you will become famous, everyone will try to book your hotel. And then we said, okay, we will try to do the flash sale, but we never converted much. And we were happy because of that, because, you know, the the rate, the amount of the money we would get through through that channel wouldn't want to be on to be so much about the we said, okay, this will be like investing in marketing.”

Similarly, learning how DDs work also meant observing more of their DCs. One such issue was channel conflict, as the use of DDs was a clear violation of rate parity, which was then an established business practice in the hotel industry. Amerigo, IT, explains:

“As far as pricing and then the flash sales are massively undercutting ... if you look at the basic rules of revenue management is you have price fences. So, if I give you a discount, I'm giving you that for a reason. Right? So, what's the trade-off... And the trade-off with the flash sales was the fact that it's opaque... But then it's not really opaque.”

Further, Portia, SI, recalls:

“... so, the first thing I thought of then was price uniformity and rate variability, because what I was then faced with was problems with agencies that were selling in a dynamic way and or in a variability way, which had a significant difference in price. From flash sales like that, no, and then there were complaints clearly from agencies that were selling a lot more, for example, for many years...”

The channel conflict also affected the interactions between consumers and hotel reservation departments. Amerigo, IT, reports:

“Because at least in Italy, everyone calls the reservation department and says, hey, I saw this flash sale. Can you do the same? Yeah ... We would say to our reservation manager you and the entire team are authorised to offer the same conditions direct, but fully prepaid.”

Along with becoming aware of the DCs, managers realised that crafting successful deals takes time and consideration. Thus, the EE variable became more relevant, reflecting itself through promotion preparation, management, and operational challenges, with reservations getting calls and requests for similar rates.

Hotels were busy studying the characteristics of the packages that would convert best. Joe, SI, recalls: *“We tried everything: Saunas, massages, drinks, restaurant discounts – our marketing girls were constantly busy.”* On the intersection of EE and SI and constant evaluative reasoning in collaboration with the team, Isaac 1, HU, points out:

“So, it was it was a compromise from myself, from the GM that okay, out of the three aspects, ADR, occupancy and revenue, let's try to reach at least two of them, occupancy and revenue.”

Additional themes and codes characteristic of the DDs usage stage are presented in Table 11 below under the appropriate UTAUT variables.

3.5.3 COVID-19 usage stage

Once COVID-19 hit in early 2020 and hotels across Europe needed to close, the “regular” continued DD use was put on hold. Following the months of closure, hotel managers entered a new “era”. Fred, IT, states:

“After lockdown, we have to think to restart as a start-up, a totally new start-up in a totally unknown destination. We have to rebuild the turnover, the revenue from point zero, thinking that we have to attract new customers, new markets.”

Managing an upmarket hotel in one of the world's most famous destinations, Fred quickly recognised his traditional overseas markets were not returning for at least a year and used the DDs to make his hotel, with a drastically lowered ADR policy, visible on the Italian national market, however, even before looking out for new clients, many previously generated bookings from DDs needed to be cancelled and refunded, resulting in a significantly raised perception of EE relating to DDs. Caro, IT, remembers the periods as *“immense challenges and workload in terms of cancellations, refunds and rescheduling”*. Similarly connected to EE, Joe, SI, noticed that with significantly reduced staff in sales and marketing, there was no time to plan the DD packages as carefully as before and *“what we found was, you know, just put in a credit, right, resort credit”*.

On the other hand, for hotels in specific locations, *“flash sales during COVID did not meet the expectations of generating additional revenue ... so we basically went from 40% share of flash sales to 0% ... and paused them completely”*, recalls Amerigo, IT. Similarly, lacking staff and focusing on achieving the highest possible ADR at a lowered capacity, certain hotels adopted a strategic shift. Seb, AT, adds: *“With COVID-19, we stopped using flash sales altogether. Simply, the focus was on generating high ADR to compensate for the lack of occupancy.”*

Mainly, however, the most significant change and a shared DC for the use of DDs were the altered conditions of cooperation that DDs embraced during 2020 by making all their rates refundable and cancellable until the very last moment:

“The pandemic was a game-changer. You know, Flash Sales are all about those prepaid, non-refundable offers, which suddenly didn't make sense anymore ...” (Francis, IT).

Some DD providers even went a step further and, as a consequence of financial trouble and consequential staff layoffs and restructuring, also changed their business model entirely in a

way that they moved away from pure flash sales to a mixed e-commerce model with constant catalogue sales with minimally discounted rates plus seasonal offer and yearlong contracting akin to traditional wholesalers (Bratec, Fedeli, & Budler, forthcoming). This was not met favourably by some hoteliers as they believed DDs lost part of their value and key characteristics. Amerigo, IT, emphasises DCs connected to this change, as he mentions:

“First reason, Secret Escapes changed their business model ... Now, it's catalogue sale, basically ... But they still expect you to adjust your rates and availabilities manually through extranet – no live integration ... ”

On the other hand, those DDs that developed live integrations through the channel managers to hotels' PMS were seen favourably by hotel managers – an integration being a key FC. As Isaac, HU 2, depicts:

“When borders reopened again and we again after more than one year. Yeah. Again started target international markets, we signed with Voyage Privé. They were the only ones that offered channel manager connection”.

For some hotels, especially for leisure-oriented properties in Slovenia and Croatia, there was no need to use DDs as part of their distribution portfolio. Croatian hotels primarily only operate in the summer season, and the first two COVID-related seasons were much shorter. They could fill all rooms with last-minute guests who were ready to pay high prices for the “luxury” of being able to travel to the sea in their car. Marcel, HR, mentions:

“Before Corona, we used them for low season months of May, June, and September. In 2020, immediately after we opened after lockdown, we did some local sites, Megabon and Crno Jaje, but this season started filling better and faster than ever”.

Similarly, the staycation voucher in Slovenia caused a surge in local demand to such proportions that there was no need for a discount. As Portia, SI, explains: *“... flexible rates, high commission and extra discount, why would I do this?”*. Such a particular situation, explained in more detail in Bratec, Baruca, and Minor (2023), led to the temporary, almost complete discontinuation of DDs use, at least the niche ones targeting international tourists. Any of the UTAUT variables cannot explain the “no need” theme and is thus merged into the variable OSV, which was added to the model to be the place for factors that would not fit into any other variable.

5.4 2023/2024 ‘Present day’ usage stage

Once the effects of COVID-19 vanished, international travel recovered, and the situation in the hotel industry stabilised to pre-pandemic times, hotels seem to have entered the second DDs continued usage phase. Those who have discontinued DDs are using the IDS again to reposition themselves on the market they neglected during the pandemic; others are targeting new customer segments and new generations of guests. They mostly wish the non-refundable rates would become the standard condition for DDs again but are generally happy with the

improved flexibility and upgraded technological capacity in DDs. The dynamic cooperation and integration with CM are a primary FC, whereas the lack of such integration represents a significant DC. Hotel managers still have a vast majority of positive attitudes toward DDs and view their PE mainly in terms of low-risk marketing options and help generate additional income in periods of need. The use of the DD IDS is steady again, yet for most hotels presents in total, between 5–10% of total e-sales volumes.

Claude, HR, states: *“Well, as I said, as I said, we actually, me personally, I am also involved for quite a long time with this kind of, let's say, channel, and I think it is a very good channel if you use it wisely. Caro, IT, confirms, “Flash sales continue to be a part of our revenue strategy, particularly during the off-season, and we have seen positive results in terms of increased bookings and revenue.” Magda, HR, concludes: “The appropriate time to use flash sales is during need periods when other channels aren't performing well.”*

Regarding DDs' market reach, Toni, HR, explains: *“Flash sale websites have their place on the market ... they have the trust of their customers.”* Mareike, IT confirms:

“We just seem to reach some additional extra guests with Secret Escapes that we cannot reach through other channels. They are very Secret Escapes loyal. But our cooperation with them is very good, even on refundable terms...”

Akin to the days of continued usage before the pandemic, hotel managers seem to monitor DDs performance more strategically, as Jane, AT, emphasises hinting towards the “billboard effect” of using DDs as one of its factors related to the PE variable:

“It's good, because if you have tried all the other channels before and all the other promotions, then Flash sale is, in my opinion, the best way to get some further revenue, some further bookings in a very short-term related way ... and also the website traffic increases once flash is on.”

3.5.4 Longitudinal DD continuance

Based on the development and continued adoption of DDs since 2010 and to the present day, which we presented in our findings above, we once again adopt a quantitative lens and quantify the continued usage of DDs through the occurrences presented in Table 14 below. As of 2024, only seven of the 49 hotel managers we have interviewed have discontinued the DDs IDS. Four come from Slovenia, and one from Austria, Italy, and Hungary, respectively. All these seven managers discontinued the DDs during the COVID-19 pandemic for various reasons and never felt the need to re-adopt them. Among the managers that continue using DDs, niche DDs are the more popular option, even though some hotel managers from Croatia and Slovenia mentioned they are not happy how they changed their cooperation conditions after the pandemic.

Table 3.6: Longitudinal DDs continuance

DDs Usage Type	Occurrences	Discontinuance
None	7/49	4 hotel managers in SI
Generic	8/49	1 hotel manager in AT
Niche	17/49	1 hotel manager in IT
Both Niche & Generic	14/49	1 hotel manager in HU

Source: own work

The reasons for discontinuance are different, but most of them mention the lack of channel manager integrations between DDs and their PMS or simply the focus on dynamic pricing, direct sales and improved focus on revenue management techniques within their company that makes DDs an unattractive and too work-intense and inflexible option now. This leads us to assume that the EE variable is the crucial reason for their discontinuance. However, they all seem open to future collaborations once the integrations are developed, and rate conditions return to non-refundable. This hints towards the FC variable being the key to the re-adoption of DDs IDS in the future.

In terms of drivers of continuance, we observe the following UTAUT variables and their factors to be crucial for the continued relevance of DDs:

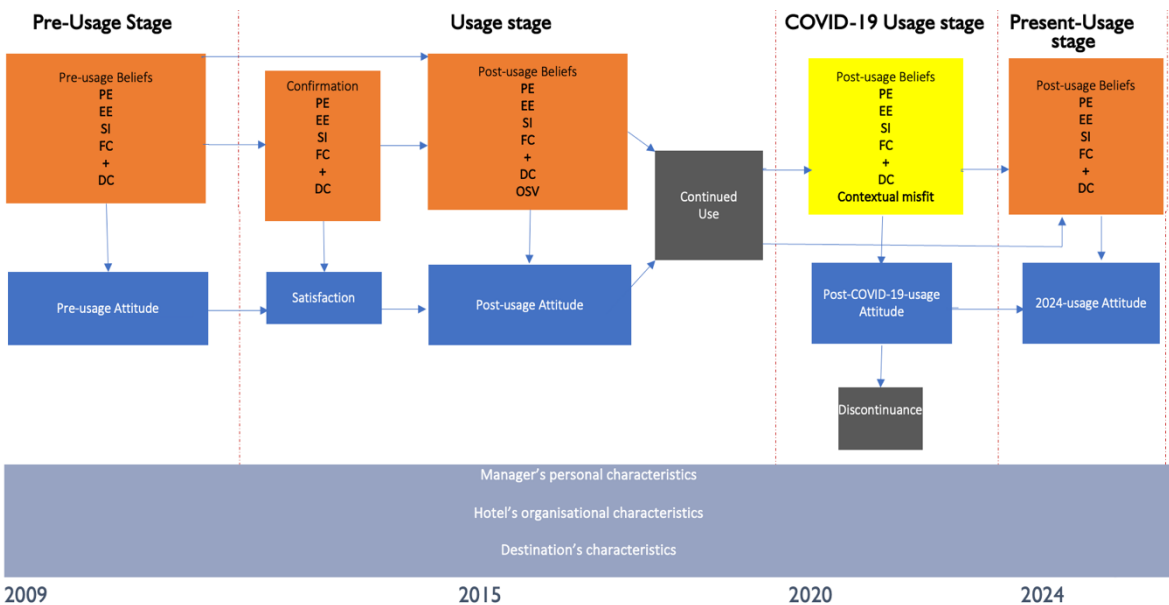
- PE: Income generation capacities and marketing possibilities DDs offer.
- FC: Familiarity with the IDS and its technological integrations with the hotel's CRS through the channel manager.

Based on our extensive empirical results chapter, we present the Long-term DD Continued Usage Model as the last stage of the section. The model should be interpreted from left to right in a linear manner, with years below only serving as an indication of when the specific phase occurred, yet they can also be omitted altogether. The model postulates that the Pre-usage Beliefs that managers have towards DDs lead to the formation of their Pre-usage Attitude. Pre-usage attitude and beliefs can either be confirmed, and this confirmation leads to Satisfaction that contributes to Post-usage Beliefs and the formation of Post-usage Attitude. Both then lead to the Continued use of DDs.

As our empirical data tells, the continued use then uninterruptedly lasted until the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. At that point, the minority of hotels stopped using the DDs altogether, leading to their discontinuance, while the majority re-evaluated their beliefs in the COVID-19 context and either put their use on pause and waited for the recovery phase to start, where they reassumed their continued use with the adaptation of their beliefs to the Present-day

usage in which the FC and EE played slightly more relevant roles than in the regular use period prior to COVID-19, when DDs were at the peak of their popularity among the IDS for hotels. Such empirically backed model is aligned with our reviewed theory and empirical data, which we discuss in the following section.

Figure 3.2: Long-term DD continued usage model



Source: own work, based on Bhattacharjee & Premkumar (2004) and Venkatesh et al. (2011).

3.6 Discussion

In the discussion sector, we initially explain the Long-Term DD Continued Usage Model and discuss its explanatory power and the capacity of UTAUT variables to justify the adoption of DDs. We also theorise our inductively generated moderators and unfold them to relevant theories. Last, we present key findings from the data analysis process inductively and deem them appropriate for understanding DDs' continued usage.

3.6.1 Long-term DD's continuance model's explanatory power

Our final stage in the research process is to assess the proposed model's explanatory power and limits. In a very linear manner, we can claim that, in line with the findings of other quantitative UTAUT studies (Venkatesh et al., 2014), UTAUT variables can fully explain the DDs' adoption behaviour – even more so when extended with DC. Apart from the particular COVID-19 period, the model did not need additional “free” variables that we predicted in the research model and named OSV.

When integrated into Bhattacharjee's (2004) Continuance model, UTAUT variables explain the usage of DDs well. While EE and FC are irrelevant in the pre-usage stage, they gain

relevance immediately after the continued usage commences. Hotel managers get better acquainted with the DDs IDS and its characteristics. As predicted in the model, the critical driver of continuance is the satisfaction with the initial use and consequential increased positive attitude towards the DDs IDS entirely attuned to the “laws” of Oliver's 1980 ECT. It is this positive attitude, based on previous experiences, that is the key driver of the continued use of DDs, showing that the adoption of DDs causes no cognitive dissonance described by Harmon-Jones and Mills (2019) for the hotel managers, as their attitude towards DDs is only more positive following their initial adoption.

As our time of observation spanned unique times of the pandemic, we expanded the model to cover DD usage throughout the pandemic and to the present day. While the pandemic context was specific and UTAUT variables failed to explain the lack of need for DD usage, this fact possesses the capability to raise a question about whether the UTAUT model might be showing signs of struggle in circumstances that are so extreme and unpredictable. On the other hand, as soon as the effects of the pandemic vanished, it regained its explanatory power immediately. The mechanisms of continuance, however, show robustness and seem to function perfectly throughout the observation period, with the attitude enhanced by previous satisfaction remaining the clear driver of continued use.

Finally, the strength of the UTAUT variables is further proven by the fact that the thematic codes representing their factors seem to be precisely the same as the factors from Berezina's (2016) DDs evaluation framework, even though they are structured differently and are based on entirely different theoretical basis and empirical datasets. UTAUT variables and their factors change in power and relevance through the continued usage of DDs. The pandemic seems to limit the PE's power and add relevance to EE. If the integration of DDs with PMS through the channel manager connection was considered a factor of FC variable, the lack of it would become a major DC during the pandemic and afterwards, as the consequences of reduced workforce and technological progress of the hotel industry and with hotel managers always looking for IDS boasting a similar level of PE, but with a less comprehensive EE variable.

3.6.2 DDs' continuance model's theorised ‘moderators’

As the moderators are an integral part of UTAUT, we cannot neglect them in our model. While Gruzdt et al. (2012), when using the qualitative approach in their UTAUT-based study of academic social media adoption, decided their sample was too small to seek moderators, yet inductively still hinted at them, we dare take a similar stance and follow their practice, as we believe these characteristics clearly emerged from the narratives of our 49 interviews. In our research model, we hypothesised that the type of managerial position would be the one to either amplify or diminish the impact of four core UTAUTs and our two additional contextual variables. Yet, our interaction with data revealed a more complex picture, which we theorise fully interpretatively.

We believe the initial adoption and longitudinal use are ‘moderated’ by an interplay of personal, organisational and destination characteristics surrounding the hotel managers. Most of our managers, with positive attitudes towards DDs, could be described as having “entrepreneurial characteristics” (Miller, 1983) as their dominant personal traits – being flexible, daring and loving to try out new things. A further personal (occasionally also organisational) characteristic that we hint to be acting as a diminisher of DDs use is the “need for status” (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2012; Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn 1999). This was studied concerning DDs from the consumer perspective by Yang et al. (2015), observing that people with a high “need for status” would be less interested in luxury hotels that are also bookable through DD websites, in case they were available on such IDS. Yet, we believe it is also very applicable as a trait of managers and organisations, as shown by the example of Amerigo, IT, whose hotel owner and manager at the time once signed and tore the contract for a flash sale collaboration – proposed to him to counter fight an extremely slow pickup of reservations before the high season – in front of his eyes, saying “*my hotel up there, never ever!*”.

Another organisational factor that emerged as a very probable moderator of DD usage, or at least the intensity of their usage, was “bureaucratism” (Monteiro & Adler, 2022). This is best represented by Emilio, HR, who, among the deal preparation steps mentioned the factor of EE being the “necessary approval of our management *board*”. We feel obliged to add that this bureaucratism moderator was only present in data related to managers from Slovenia and Croatia, but we can assume the more bureaucratic the organisation, the less prone are the managers to use DDs.

Finally, and rather logically, the destination in which the hotel is located also moderated the usage of DD IDS, further confirming the claims of Tomat et al. (2019), who observed the DD patterns in Mediterranean destinations. Pearl, HR emphasises this moderation effect clearly:

“Yes, because there’s no demand for this destination. We are in a city that has nothing to offer. Okay? We are located in this area. But there are no attractions like when you’re going to Split. You have two or three days to explore. Here we are like a summer destination, but the hotel works all year. So, we are finding different channels to have certain occupancy so we can pay the salaries.”

3.6.3 Inductively Generated Relevant DDs Usage Findings

The immersion and various interactions with the data following the initial deductive coding and sorting of themes according to the UTAUT-inspired variables also enabled us to spot data and patterns that we deemed relevant to present inductively. We spotted the following patterns that deserve a mention. We observed that hotel managers working for regional hotel companies had the most comprehensive knowledge of different DD providers and their

specifics. They also more often expressed that the marketing factor of DDs is more important than the income generation factor of PE. Similarly, the managers working for internationally branded hotels had an excellent understanding of DDs and very positive attitudes towards them. However, their usage was limited due to the corporate rules aimed at safeguarding the brand and their best rate guarantee. George, HU, mentions: *“We are part of Accor, so the only DD we are allowed to use is Very Chic, which is also owned by Accor. But it is not very useful for the markets we would need to target ...”*. Mya, HR, goes even further, stating her reasons for reaching out to a very local generic DD provider that is not monitored by her brand’s head marketing office as opposed to the large niche DD providers: *“Our headquarters control all the big flash sites. But we use Megabon, which they don't know about, and we successfully target Slovenian guests out of season.”*

As expected, we could observe the difference in DD evaluation between hotel managers and consultants. While the first rarely looked beyond the mere sales volumes and revenue generated, which is totally in line with previous research claiming that the DD evolution mechanisms are vague and intuitive (Minor, 2017), the consultants had much more sophisticated and IS-driven methods to evaluate the suitability of a particular DD platform. As an example, Amerigo, IT, reports:

“... then obviously, there were the internal debates, you know. Well, are we as long as we get more people in the hotel, that's fine, because then we'll sell additional services. So, as a premise, I accept that. But as a revenue manager, you need to verify that. So, we would that use the business intelligence software that we had through the PMS, we pulled all guest revenue data, dividing the guests between where the bookings came from. Yeah. So direct. So, we took an average of, you know, what's the average ADR? And then what's the average extra spend? So, the flash sales, the extra spend, I don't remember the exact amount, but it was like €15 or something... So, equal to 3 bottles of water in a 5-star hotel...”

Lastly, while larger hotels mostly see the sales volumes and generated revenue as key PE for their DD usage, smaller hotels see the PE of DDs mainly through the eyes of low-risk marketing opportunity, as Sue, HR, confirms: *“It is in a positive way because we work for many little hotels which usually doesn't have a lot of marketing budget and we do them simply to make them visible”*. This is in line with earlier findings of Boon (2013), who suggested that the most considerable value for smaller hotels is the marketing visibility DDs give them.

3.7 Conclusions

3.7.1 Contribution

This chapter seeks to explain DD IDss' adoption and continued usage through the lens of technology adoption theories. Technology adoption and continuance literature were reviewed to create an appropriate model for explaining the DD adoption. This was achieved

by combining Bhattacharjee's (2004) model and Venkatesh et al. (2003) UTAUT variables. Additional variables were added to UTAUT to look at the barriers to adoption known as DC (Lai, 2011), and an intentional "open space" was left to accommodate OSV variables related to the DD context that might emerge through data analysis.

Following the construction of our conceptual research model, we started with data collection. We followed the principles of qualitative semi-structured inquiry and interviewed 49 hotel managers from 5 different European countries between 2018 and 2024, which provided us with comprehensive and valuable insights into their usage of DDs in the last 15 years. The interviews were transcribed and analysed following the thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clark (2023), which stimulates iterative processes and creativity. In addition, to quantify the key variables in our model, namely the pre- and post-usage attitude and the DD continuance, we used quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012). We present our findings following the positivistically constructed research model, and these are divided into four distinct "historic" stages that characterise DDs' continued usage: pre-adoption and post-adoption usage, during COVID-19 usage and the current 2023/2024 usage. Each UTAUT-inspired variable is presented with thematic codes derived from the data characteristic of each stage. Excerpts from interviews enrich the interpretation of key themes and codes that serve as factors of UTAUT variables. Our findings reveal that DDs stay relevant for so long mainly because of the initial satisfaction hotel managers experienced during their adoption mostly linked to their PE, as they outperformed the expectations hotel managers had prior to their first DD trial. While the EE became more of a barrier to continued use during COVID, the technical integration DDs managed to develop following the initial COVID-19 wave represented a strong FC for their staying relevance.

As our findings reveal, while COVID-19 (mostly its first lockdown) put their continued use on hold, these quickly reassumed once the hotels started operating. Only 7 out of our interviewed 49 hotel managers discontinued the use of DD IDS, meaning they still represent a relevant IDS for most hotels, who continue their use. Findings also suggest that niche DDs are the more popular DD type among European hotels. We conclude the chapter by presenting our conceptual Longitudinal DD continued usage model grounded in our empirical data. We thoroughly discuss it and confirm its suitability to explain the continued usage of DDs through its UTAUT-inspired set of variables switching in relevance through different periods and consistent application of ECT (Oliver, 1980).

This chapter makes contributions on various theoretical levels. First, it merges UTAUT with the IS continuance model, which has not been done within the hotel management field before. Second, it applies the IS continuance lens instead of IS adoption, which is still present in a minority of IS studies and only in the infancy of tourism. Third, it bridges the fields of e-distribution, hotel management, and IS by applying the UTAUT to observe the supply side of IS adoption related to e-commerce phenomena, another aspect previously not yet conducted. Fourth, it moves away from the overwhelmingly quantitative tradition of IS

research (Yan et al., 2021) and adopts longitudinal and qualitative observation instead to answer the question of why DDs remain a relevant IDS up until the present day. Fifth, it provides a European perspective on adopting tourism technology, which is significantly lacking in contemporary literature. Sixth, it proposes a model that can provide an alternative to the dated and less theoretically backed O'Connor and Frew's (2004) IDS evaluation framework as the dominantly used model to analyse IDS in e-tourism research.

Regarding its practical contribution, the chapter should be helpful for individuals involved in DDs business as it clearly outlines which factors are relevant for their continued use from the side of hotel managers. They should also gain new insights into how their colleagues use this IDS strategically.

3.7.2 Limitations and future research

The chapter depicting the present study, although conducted in a positivist manner and deeply rooted in verified theoretical models, is qualitative, and the findings may not be applicable or transferable to European countries other than the one where it was conducted. However, the countries accurately represent the interplay between “Eastern” and “Western” Europe and the cultural characteristics of Alpine, Mediterranean and Pannonic countries. Future studies should consider these cross-cultural elements that might prove relevant for technology adoption behaviour. Our longitudinal approach, while providing a holistic picture of the last 15 years of DD continuance, certainly leaves room for oversight of specific details that were only relevant at a certain point in time. We are aware of our model's simplification in which we skipped the variable of continuance intention as a predictor of continued usage (Bhattacharjee, 2001), but we found this legitimate as our observation was of a completely “ex-post nature”. Further, though data saturation was reached in the study, it was reached for the sample as a whole. Therefore, individual country comparisons, organisational type comparisons, and theorised moderators should be deemed mere indications and empirically verified.

Lastly, future research at the intersection of technology, marketing and hotel management should also investigate the impact of contemporary issues – such as the escalating cost of living, the automation of revenue management through AI, and the prevalent staff shortages as the “new normal” – on the continued use of DDs and other emerging IDS in hotels across different cultural contexts, diverse range of destinations and different hotel segments.

4 DAILY DEALS USAGE IN THE PANDEMIC CONTEXT OF THE SLOVENIAN HOTEL INDUSTRY: A HOLISTIC TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION PERSPECTIVE CAPABLE OF ADDRESSING THE VOLATILE TOURISM MARKET CONDITIONS⁴

4.1 Introduction

Coupon marketing is a classic marketing strategy that attracts new customers by offering discounts and special deals, i.e. by altering the default sales conduct as a response to specific market conditions requiring promotional activities. In recent years, the rise of the internet and social media has dramatically increased the popularity of online coupons among tourists, yet there has been relatively little scholarly focus on this topic (Sigala, 2013). Daily Deal (DD) websites, sometimes referred to as Flash or Private sales, use a technologically enhanced coupon-based model (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova and Cobanoglu, 2016; Berezina & Semrad, 2022). They combine marketing advantages with notable price reductions for consumers and serve as an additional semi-permanent channel in hotels' distribution (Budler, et al. 2020). Initially, DDs were characterized by non-refundable, advance-purchase requirements, a limited deal size, a short purchasing window (usually 7–14 days), and substantial price cuts ranging from 20% to 50% of the usual rate (Parsons et al., 2014). They have established themselves as an autonomous business model. Emerging during the global financial crisis of the early 2010s, they have since remained a channel in the hotels' internet distribution system (IDS).

Despite their presence in the market, DDs have drawn limited attention in academic discussions of digital marketing, apart from a few studies examining DD customers (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Cox, 2017). Research indicates that hotel managers' knowledge of DD usage is still insufficient (Semrad & Berezina, 2022). Because DDs have been closely linked with economic downturns (Starkov, 2011), the COVID-19 pandemic presents an appropriate new and unexplored context for investigating their role in hotel marketing and tourism economics. As the pandemic brought severe disruptions to global tourism in 2020, this study investigates how the hotel industry reacted to the resulting demand crisis by deploying DDs – known from previous crises – to successfully attract guests and improve hotel performance. The Slovenian context is particularly notable due to the government's introduction of a staycation voucher programme (Knežević Cvelbar et al., 2021), which spurred unprecedented domestic demand by giving

⁴ This chapter, a collaboration with assist. prof. Petra Zabukovec Baruca and supervised by assoc. prof. Kir Kuščer and assoc. prof. Anton Manfreda, is currently under the second round of reviews in the *Tourism Economics*.

vouchers to every resident (for accommodation in 2020 and tourism or leisure activities in 2021) and thus significantly altered the already altered pandemic tourism market structure during the times when international travel remained restricted.

Simultaneously to altered market conditions, hotels were grappling with reduced marketing budgets, limited staffing, and suspended cooperation with foreign tour operators, all resulting in requiring organisational shifts. Under such volatile conditions, that currently seem to be becoming the norm, local and foreign DD websites with a “neighbouring countries’ reach” offered an arguably appealing channel to stimulate sales. Consequently, this Chapter poses three main research questions to critically address the gap in present DDs literature: (a) What factors influenced the use (or lack) of (use of) DDs in Slovenia during the pandemic?; (b) Can established technology adoption and use models properly explain DD usage in this specific context?; (c) How can we link the pandemic-induced market changes and technology adoption research for best explicating the use of DDs in Slovenia during that period? For the purposes of this chapter, the pandemic is defined as spanning from June 2020 to June 2022, when the availability of staycation vouchers was the primary driver of Slovenian hotel demand.

Grounded in qualitative and constructivist paradigms, this chapter first explores the factors that affected the adoption and usage of DDs amid the pandemic. It then examines the applicability, explanatory power, and limitations of established technology adoption models in explaining DD adoption. Based on empirical insights, the study proposes a new conceptual model that captures DD use in the pandemic context and links it to tourism market conditions, thereby extending current literature on technology adoption in hospitality with a tourism economics perspective rooted in industrial organisation theory. Finally, it discusses practical implications and addresses the challenges posed by DDs use for digital marketing, e-distribution and hotel sales during the altered market conditions dominated by external environment factors through the prism of industrial organisation and tourism economics. By adding this novel perspective and insights from the last major crisis in tourism market, the Chapter opens up a new, broader direction in researching e-commerce adoption relevant for the current volatile times of economic uncertainty in which external shocks seem to be becoming the new norm.

The chapter begins by presenting DDs in more detail and reviewing the state of the literature relating to them. It continues with an overview of tourism organisations’ adaptations and crisis responses during COVID-19, followed by a discussion of market functioning and hotel marketing conduct under pandemic conditions. The literature review section concludes with an outline of various technology adoption frameworks and presents the Structure-Conduct-Performance paradigm. The methodology section then describes the research approach and data analysis techniques. Next, the findings of performed thematic analysis (automatic and human-based) findings are introduced, followed by a discussion framed by psychological, organisational and economic models strength in explicating the DD adoption and use in the particular period. The Chapter concludes by presenting a hybrid model that best interprets

DD adoption among Slovenian hotels during the pandemic, before offering a final discussion of the study's main contributions and limitations.

4.2 Literature review

4.2.1 Daily Deals

Daily Deals (DDs) encompass two distinct business models: generic DDs, which feature a limited local presence and largely rely on coupon redemption, and niche DDs, which provide real-time availability (Budler et al., 2020). The earliest entrants, such as Groupon, promoted various products and services, including hotels, thereby defining the generic category. By contrast, niche DDs focus on upmarket accommodations and curated travel experiences (Budler et al., 2020). Voyage Privé and Secret Escapes exemplify this niche approach, expanding travel DD offerings across Europe in the 2010s. While generic DDs appeared to reach maturity in that decade, niche platforms garnered interest from major investors, notably Accor – eventually acquiring the French niche DD marketplace Very Chic (Accor Hotels, 2017). Minor (2017) observed that niche DDs align with the socio-economic profile of selective customers, whereas generic DDs reach broader audiences but may not match upmarket hotels' price expectations. These two distinct business models consequently played different roles during times of crisis.

Research on DDs in hospitality remains limited (Sigala, 2013). Most existing studies focus on restaurants, investigating users' perceptions of quality (Dholakia & Tsabar, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013; Heo, 2015; Bai et al., 2020). Few examine hotels, addressing potential benefits and drawbacks (Berezina, 2014; Berezina & Semrad, 2022), effectiveness (Cassia et al., 2015), guest experiences (Kimes & Dev, 2013; Cox, 2017; Dsilva & Elangovan, 2021; Geerts & Masset, 2022; Zhi & Ha, 2023), reviews (Nakahata & Kuo, 2013), or hoteliers' motivations (Piccolli & Dev, 2012). These works yield contradictory conclusions about the function and the overall economic value of DDs' use.

Nevertheless, DDs can serve as a valuable IDS option during volatile periods by drawing in customers who are willing to pay reduced rates. They also enable experimentation with multiple pricing and revenue management strategies – such as discounts, bundling, best available rates, advance purchases, and last-minute deals (Minor et al., 2024). Such flexibility in their use is deemed particularly relevant for hotels worldwide facing the upheaval caused by the pandemic.

Adaptation and resilience building dominated tourism research during COVID-19, with numerous studies examining resilience and crisis management, but rather focused on organisational as on economic dimension of these two concepts. Darling et al. (1996, in Kash & Darling, 1998) identified crisis management as a preventive process, while Ritchie and Jiang (2019) noted that over half of crisis management research between 1960 and 2018 focused on response and recovery. Faulkner (2001, in Lachhab et al., 2022) outlined six

phases of tourism crisis management – pre-crisis, prodromal, emergency, intermediate, recovery, and resolution. Resilience itself can manifest in survival, adaptation, or innovation (Dahles & Susilowati, 2015; Ghaderi et al., 2022), though it remains unclear if businesses formulated resilience strategies prior to or during the pandemic. Conz and Magnani (2020) propose resilience as time-based and dynamic, without specifying which activities it entails. Among all this, Daily deals (DDs) have been suggested as a marketing strategy for fostering resilience under volatile market conditions and economic downturn for hotel industry worldwide (Zhi & Ha, 2023).

Marketing was likewise deemed crucial for economic recovery of the hotel industry, particularly through adoption of digital platforms emphasizing new technologies, online shopping, and contactless services. However, research on employed digital marketing during the pandemic surprisingly remains sparse (Dimitrios et al., 2023) and it seems like the academia has not attempted to properly dig into the learnings from the crises from an ex-post perspective. Huang and Wang (2023) identified only one study specifically focusing on the industry perspective entailing economic and marketing specifics during COVID-19 in tourism, while most other work centres on evolving alternations of tourist behavior. Supply-side investigations remain extremely rare, focusing chiefly on framing messages designed to reassure cautious travellers (Kim, Li, & So, 2023; Šuligoj, 2023). More tangible operational facets – such as online positioning or the use of specific digital distribution channels – remain unexplored, despite their importance for retaining visibility among customers in a period when direct selling was constrained (Seshadri et al., 2023). By analysing Slovenian hotels' use of DDs in this particular period we are to the best of our knowledge the first study to look at the DD-related distribution in the “new normal” post the 2019. Similarly, looking at it through the technology adoption models and assessing their applicability in such particular economic conditions, this study further addresses the evident research gap of distribution dilemmas and usability of previously unquestioned adoption models in these particular and volatile market conditions.

4.2.2 Slovenian case characteristics

Before the pandemic, Slovenia's hotel industry offered 22,443 rooms in around 200 properties, representing 32% of the nation's total bed capacity but generating 70% of overnight stays (STRST, 2018; STO, 2019). Foreign visitors comprised 75% of Slovenia's 6.2 million annual arrivals (STO, 2019). Historically, Slovenian hotels have underperformed relative to other national industries and to neighbouring markets (Gomezelj & Mihalič, 2008). Their average annual occupancy of 50.5% (STO, 2019) contrasts with the EU average of 70% (Statista, 2019). Most Slovenian hotels (over 90%) fall into the 3-, 4-, or 5-star categories, with an average of 80 rooms, indicating a dominance of mid-sized corporately run properties and limited representation of smaller, family-run hotels (Slovenian Chamber of Commerce, 2019). International hotel brands remain scarce, reflecting historical

privatisation issues that left many hotels under state ownership (Mihalič et al., 2012; SST, 2022).

The 2022 national tourism strategy highlights the pandemic's deep and uneven impact, despite extensive government support. Slovenian tourism largely retained international competitiveness, yet below-average value-added levels and staffing challenges persist (SST 2022–2028). While domestic tourism constitutes around 75% of overnight stays in many OECD countries (OECD, 2020), it accounted for only 25% in Slovenia before COVID-19 (STO, 2019). To address plummeting demand, the government introduced a staycation voucher programme (Knežević Cvelbar et al., 2021), offering each resident 200 EUR in 2020 for accommodations and an additional 100 EUR in 2021 for broader tourism or leisure services. This intervention, supported by 356.86 million EUR in 2020 (UL RS, 2020) and 192.2 million EUR in 2021 (UL RS, 2021), greatly boosted domestic demand and completely altered the normal structure of Slovenian hotel market (Gabruč, 2022).

Early assessments suggest remarkable short-term benefits. Slovenian hotels reached a record RevPAR in 2020, propelled by higher occupancy and a 20% surge in ADR, largely attributed to voucher-driven domestic travel (Bratec & Šegota, 2023). However, in 2021, occupancy fell to around 30%, and RevPAR dropped by 36%, while in comparison to the neighbouring Croatian hotels saw a major recovery (Bratec & Šegota, 2023). This stark reversal highlights how Slovenia's staycation voucher scheme incentive briefly offset pandemic losses, at a cost of altering the key economic functions of the tourism market, but it did not ensure sustained competitiveness post-lockdown. This unique market conditions are notably a context worth further exploration in terms of their impacts on the adoption of DDs channel as they can provide previously undiscussed and unexplored implications for both the adoption and tourism market functioning perspectives.

4.2.3 Technology adoption research

Technology adoption has long been a focal point of information systems (IS) research, prompting the development of multiple models that explain the use of novel online marketing and e-commerce solutions. Within tourism, Davis' (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is widely employed for its simplicity and adaptability, despite critiques of its limitations (Morosan & Jeong, 2008; Pourfakhimi et al., 2019). Numerous IS scholars argue that broader cognitive models, such as the newer Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), more effectively capture the psychological processes behind travel technology adoption, yet they remain underutilised in hospitality research (El Archi & Benbba, 2023). According to Venkatesh et al. (2003), UTAUT explains user intentions and technology use through performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions – factors that Fong et al. (2017) found integral to assessing e-commerce uptake in hotel bookings. However, UTAUT's limited attention to

external disruptions can restrict its relevance for pandemic-affected market conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2012).

In contrast to above-described psychological models that tourism scholars still lack agreement upon (Iskender, 2024), Tornatzky and Fleisher's (1990) Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) model is widely acknowledged as a comprehensive organisational model of technology adoption. TOE groups influential factors into technological, organisational, and environmental contexts (Thong, 1999; Chatterjee et al., 2002; Kowath & Choon, 2001). Its theoretical validity is supported by extensive e-commerce adoption research (Eze et al., 2013), including recent studies on SMEs' social media use during the pandemic (Effendi et al., 2020) and consumer online shopping (Batada, 2021), yet again mostly absent in the tourism research. By highlighting external and organisational factors (Andersen & Henriksen, 2006), TOE provides a broad lens for evaluating DD adoption in Slovenia's pandemic setting, where government-issued staycation vouchers and reduced international travel created unique market structure further shaping the organisation and conduct of hotel marketing and sales.

4.2.4 Structure-conduct-performance paradigm

Environmental factors significantly influence firm conduct (Bain, 1956), encompassing local and national conditions (Camisón & Forés, 2015). Price adjustments and discounts are common strategies for addressing occupancy fluctuations driven by external disruptions (Croes & Semrad, 2012), requiring flexible pricing that adapts to market dynamics and country-specific factors (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2019). Because hotels operate with perishable inventory and fixed capacity, unsold rooms translate directly into lost revenue. Consequently, revenue management focuses on allocating the right capacity to the right customers at the right price, time, and channel (Kimes, 1989; Kimes & Renaghan, 2011). Yet in crises – such as the 2007 Recession or COVID-19 – historical sales data become unreliable, often compelling hotels to rely on deep discounts and negotiated rates (Xiong & Hu, 2011a; Croes & Semrad, 2012; Sharma et al., 2023). Successful discounting further depends on distributing these offers via suitable channels, which increasingly include DD platforms (Meriläinen, 2017; Kim et al., 2009; Minor & Bratec, 2019b).

From a Structure-Conduct-Performance (SCP) perspective (Bain, 1952), the level of competition and demand volatility within a destination shapes firms' conduct, i.e. pricing and distribution strategies, all having an impact on final firms' performance and tough seldomly used in analysing hotel market, can be a viable economic tool (Bratec, Dwyer, Mihalic, 2018). In this context, adopting DDs is a direct response to external market factors, including the conduct of competitors and local demand dynamics. Through the lens of organisational theory, such decisions also reflect the technology–environment–adoption (TOE) framework (Tornatzky et al., 1990), wherein both macro-level environmental conditions and the micro-level organisational constraints of individual hotels collectively

inform discounting and distribution channel adoption beyond its mere technological capacity, making both frameworks, albeit used across different disciplines, relatively similar or at least related in their core nature.

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Research approach

This study follows a constructivist paradigm, applying both Charmaz and Thornberg's (2021) grounded theory method and Nelson's (2020) computational grounded theory. While traditional grounded theory advises delaying a literature review until after data collection, Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) instead allow for an iterative engagement with the literature, which informed exploratory questions about hotel managers' perceptions and use of DDs before and during the pandemic. The exploratory methodology chosen on purpose due to relatively easy access to informants and in the quest of rich, contextually specific data, combines focus groups and subsequent individual interviews to provide greater data richness, longitudinality and triangulation (Lambert & Loisel, 2008). Given the pandemic's atypically volatile economic and business environment, newer methodological guidance (Assaf et al., 2022) supports creative data collection approaches, including multiple data-gathering stages over time as the pandemic evolves and slowly vanishes.

4.3.2 Research execution

Data collection unfolded in two stages. First, a focus group of four senior sales and marketing managers from medium-to-large Slovenian hotel chains was conducted via Zoom in June 2022, lasting 1 hour 22 minutes. The session was recorded, transcribed, and subjected to introductory thematic analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). The hotel chains represented in the focus group covered over 25% of Slovenia's total hotel room inventory.

In the second stage, an interview guide was developed based on themes identified in the first phase, expanding to include topics central to pandemic recovery in summer 2022, such as the tourism market changes i.e.- return of international tourists and the expiry of governmental staycation vouchers. An additional 15 seasoned hotel sales and marketing managers were approached using non-probability and convenience sampling (Robinson, 2014) aiming to also capture smaller and individual hotel narratives and improve the coverage of total hotel room inventory within the country. Ten managers agreed to participate: eight interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom, and two were held face-to-face. Interviews lasted between 21 and 40 minutes. Two were conducted in Slovene (manually transcribed) and the others in English, transcribed using the AI-powered tool Trint and then manually refined. Through this second stage, the sample covered approximately 60% of Slovenia's hotel room inventory, approaching an industry-wide census while slightly underrepresenting independent micro and small hotels and those located in the capital city that traditionally do not rely on DDs.

Table 4.1: Focus group info

Participant Pseudonym	Position	Type of Hotel	Organisation	Experience (in years)	Tripadvisor Quality Score	DD attitude
Marina	Director of Revenue Management	Hotels and resorts 3–5 stars on different locations	National group	10–20	4	positive
Benito	Revenue Manager	Resorts in different locations 3–5 star (seaside)	Regional group	0–5	3.5	negative
Tosca	E-Distribution Manager	Resorts on one location 4–5 star(seaside)	National group	5–10	4	positive
Patrizia	Marketing Manager	National group 3–5 stars with hotels in one location (thermal)	National group	10–20	4	positive

Source: own work

Table 4.2: Individual managerial interviews

Participant Pseudonym	Position	Experience (in years)	Type of hotel	Organisation	Category	Tripadvisor Quality Score
Leona	Director of Marketing	10–20	Resort	National chain	3–5	4.5
Babette	Director of Sales	10–20	Resort	International chain	4	4
Josie	Director of Sales	20–30	Resort thermal	National chain	4	3.5
Karina	Director of Sales	10–20	Resort	National chain	4	4
Mae	Director of Sales	10–20	Resort thermal	National chain	4	4.5
Jessica	Sales Manager	10–20	Resort thermal	Independent	4	3.5
Joe	Reservations Manager	30–40	Resort thermal	National chain	3–5	3.5
Kirsten	Head of Sales	10–20	Resort thermal	National chain	4	4
Seb	Sales Manager	20–30	Resort	National chain	4–5	4
Portia	Director of Sales and Marketing	10–20	Boutique	National chain	4	4.5

Source: own work

The third part of the research employed Leximancer 4.5 to add a further perspective and enhance interpretive reliability (Haynes et al., 2019; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The full set of transcripts from both earlier stages was uploaded into the software, which performs machine-learning-driven text analysis (Rooney, 2005). Leximancer automatically identifies concepts and themes by quantifying conceptual seeds and their co-occurrence (Cretchley et al., 2010), reducing biases that can arise from prior expectations. A Leximancer heat map visualisation provided an overview of interview transcripts, helping to pinpoint core themes and their relationships (Hannigan et al., 2019; Sotiriadou et al., 2014). This tool is gradually gaining traction in tourism research (Manthiou et al., 2022), but like many machine-learning

approaches, it struggles with emotive topics requiring deeper contextual understanding (Engstrom et al., 2022).

Consequently, the Leximancer-assisted analysis was used in combination with traditional human-performed thematic analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Therefore, the lead researchers conducted a “deep reading” (Nelson, 2020) of the transcripts in which first-order codes were inductively created, then consolidated into higher-level themes. Two lead researchers used NVivo 14 to code the data independently, comparing and reconciling any differences until full agreement was reached.

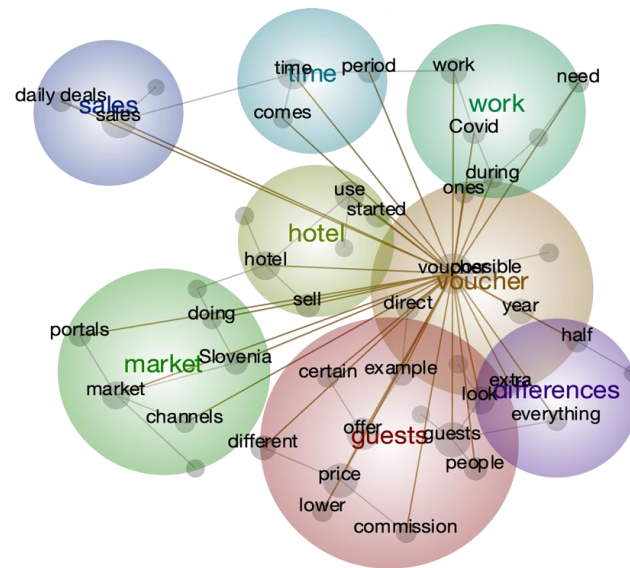
In the final step, these codes and themes were abductively consolidated into two established technology adoption frameworks and aligned with the logic of SCP paradigm. The lead researchers carried out these analyses iteratively and together synthesised findings, culminating in a constructivist conceptual model of Slovenian hotels’ DD usage during the pandemic.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Leximancer heat map analysis

In the Leximancer heat map, warm colours near the centre denote core themes, while cooler hues on the periphery represent less central topics. Staycation vouchers emerge as the dominant theme of Slovenian hotels’ pandemic sales – shown in orange and closely linked to guests, who used them as their primary holiday budget. This arrangement enabled hotels to bypass traditional IDS, avoid commissions, and charge higher rates, given that voucher-funded travellers were less price sensitive. From the first lockdown until June 2022, hotels focused on selling domestically, sustained by these government-subsidised bookings and interrupted only by periodic Covid-19 restriction-related closures. While the staycation voucher initiative added administrative complexity, it filled inventory without requiring extensive external marketing. In contrast, the hotel sales concept itself occupies a more peripheral position (coloured blue), and daily deals (DDs) appear even farther from the map’s centre. This spatial arrangement indicates that, during the pandemic, DDs remained a marginally used channel compared to the central role of staycation-voucher driven sales showing a significantly altered market structure and firm conduct. The vouchers connect directly to nearly all other concepts identified by Leximancer, including market and sales – encompassing daily deals (DDs). Nevertheless, Leximancer maps and concept lists provide only a simplified representation of the data’s broader narrative; however, they arguably confirm the unique market conditions and the evolving sales strategies of hotels. To achieve deeper understanding and fully address the Chapter’s research question, more nuanced, context-focused thematic analyses – relying on human interpretation – are needed.

Figure 4.1: Leximancer heat map with exposed staycation voucher paths



Source: own work

4.4.2 Focus group and interview analysis

The focus group discussion formed the basis of the study's narrative and was subsequently corroborated and enriched by 10 additional interviews. Three time frames were defined in NVivo for the analysis: the pre-COVID-19 period, the COVID-19 period, and the post-COVID-19 period (from mid-2022 onward).

4.4.2.1 Pre-COVID-19 use

Prior to COVID-19, Slovenian hotels utilised both generic and niche daily deals (DDs) within their IDS. Niche DDs, such as Secret Escapes and Voyage Privé, catered primarily to international markets throughout the year. Generic DDs targeted domestic guests during shoulder seasons and midweek in high season, bringing volume but attracting price-sensitive clientele who spent less (Zhang et al., 2018) and posed potential brand erosion risks (Wan et al., 2016). Still, as Tosca noted, hotels needed them to fill low-demand periods. Meanwhile, Benito distinguished niche DDs – better for “quality guests” – from “mishmash” local coupon sites. Hotels also used niche DDs to penetrate new markets, such as the Czech and the Polish, as Tosca reported. Marina observed a 'billboard effect' (Anderson, 2009), whereby posting deals on coupon portals seemed to boost overall demand.

Table 4.3: Inductive coding structure pre-COVID

Second-Order Theme	First-Order Code	Example Quote
The Role of DDs in Hotel Sales	Seasonality Mitigation	"Yeah, yeah, they come in very handy for us there in the winter months ... " (Tosca)
	Indirect Benefits of DDs (The Billboard Effect)	"We start seeing more website hits, and telephones in the reservation department start ringing ... " (Marina)
Value of Niche DDs	Niche DDs as a Strategic Sales Tool	"I'd rather work with Secret Escapes than with all these 'mishmash' sites. They sell pizzas, make-up, pneumatics, underwear, and our hotels..." (Benito)
	Upmarket Positioning	"Secret Escapes was closer to the idea of our product positioning, so we didn't cooperate with local DD at all." (Portia)
	Market Positioning Requirement	"We tried international coupons, but they didn't really work; our hotel is simply not upmarket enough, I think." (Babette)
The Challenges of Generic DDs	Customer Inferiority	"Bringing in very price-sensitive guests ... who had an extremely low spending pattern while staying at the hotels." (Benito)
	Brand Concerns	"So we didn't cooperate with local DD at all." (Portia)

Source: own work

The in-depth interviews largely confirmed the focus group findings, refining certain themes and developing more nuanced interpretations. As in the focus group, niche international DDs remained preferable to local, generic platforms, which tended to attract lower-spending guests and carried more pronounced risks for brand image. One exception came from an interviewee whose hotel lacked an upmarket reputation: "We tried international coupons, but they didn't really work; our hotel is simply not upmarket enough, I think" (Babette). Otherwise, participants described niche DDs as aligning more closely with their property's positioning and more likely to deliver higher-value clientele and thus being the preferred choice.

4.4.2.2 During COVID-19 use

When the pandemic began, many hotels still used niche and generic DDs, which accounted for about 20% of e-sales. However, widespread cancellations led to difficulties in reimbursing prepaid bookings. Tosca described halting Groupon Italy partnerships for this reason, while Benito noted Secret Escapes introduced "force majeure" clauses that allowed numerous cancellations at very last instant. Attempting to stay relevant, niche DDs revised their policies in 2021 to offer more flexible conditions – such as dynamic pricing and direct integration with channel managers (Bratec, & Budler, 2024). Despite these efforts, most Slovenian hotels, overstretched by staffing shortages, did not adopt them.

With the introduction of government staycation vouchers in June 2020, guests' price sensitivity plummeted, diminishing the need for deep discounts. Marina explained that coupon offers generated reservations beyond what limited staff could handle. Local DDs adapted by collecting only a commission, allowing the remainder to be paid with vouchers at the hotel, but managing the additional administrative load was challenging. Benito recalled needing to hire staff just to field coupon calls, questioning whether it justified the cost. Another issue arose from channel conflict (Tan & Dwyer, 2014; Tsay & Agrawal, 2009), as offering deals on one local DD forced hotels to maintain parity across all sales channels. This climate of high demand generally rendered discount-based platforms less valuable, and some managers found OTAs like Booking.com much faster for last-minute fills when needed.

During COVID-19, the consensus was that staycation vouchers generated enough local demand to forgo complex promotions. As one manager succinctly put it, there was "simply no need" to chase foreign markets with skeletal staffing (Seb). Many noted a shift in DD offerings, from near-hibernation in 2020 to enhanced technical capabilities, such as channel manager integrations, by 2022. However, most hotels lacked the resources or motivation to adopt these new features, given the consistent domestic demand from staycation vouchers.

Table 4.4: Inductive coding structure during COVID

Second-Order Theme	First-Order Code	Example Quote
Disruptions and Shifts in DD Collaborations	Disruptions in International DD Partnerships	"With the start of COVID, there were problems with reimbursements, so we had to stop the collaboration." (Tosca)
	Adaptation of DD Platforms	"DDs went from hibernation in 2020 to adjusting conditions and collaboration models starting in 2021... Secret Escapes also introduced permanent features with regular dynamic hotel pricing to stay relevant ..." (Portia)
The Impact of Staycation Vouchers	Operational Challenges	"We put out the coupons and then needed to employ an additional person only to handle the coupon-related calls and mails." (Benito)
	Primary Revenue Driver	"Simply no need, as trying to survive and fill the hotel with Slovenians on vouchers." (Seb)
Challenges in Pricing and Distribution	Pricing Challenges and Channel Conflicts	"We quickly learnt to have the same prices everywhere ... pure rate parity, constantly high season ..." (Patrizia)
	Targeting Foreign Markets	"Foreign markets were too unpredictable, and staycation vouchers created enough demand at home." (Mae)
Shifted Channel Strategies	Away from DDs Towards OTAs	"It really takes too much time between you start discussing the sale, the terms, and the content. With few clicks, I put on the rooms and reduce the rates, and they are gone in a couple of days." (Marina)
Digital Transformation	The Growing Necessity of Automation	"Dynamic way of collaboration with channel manager is becoming the norm with all IDS, as marketing departments are chronically understaffed and require automation." (Jessica)

Source: own work

4.4.2.3 Post COVID-19 use

All managers agreed that staycation vouchers, though central to pandemic sales, were overshadowed by a broader shift toward dynamic revenue management. Leisure properties phased out fixed-rate plans and allotments, as Benito explained, aiming for direct connections to each IDS. Local generic DDs lacked the technical capacity for such integrations, losing ground in hoteliers' distribution mixes. While Secret Escapes now supports dynamic connections, it still seeks fix discounts and flexible conditions. As Marina noted, hotels are reluctant to provide cancellable advance rates without a pressing need. Although participants remain open to future collaborations with DDs, they insist on dynamic pricing compatibility and are hesitant to offer the heavy discounts typical of pre-pandemic deals. By 2025, most DDs still promote flexible booking conditions, clashing with hoteliers' evolving revenue management strategies.

By mid-2022, with COVID-19 restrictions eased, managers remained open to collaborating with DDs under specific conditions: fully automated dynamic pricing, no allotment requirements, and minimal discount requirements. Rate parity had also become integral to revenue management, so local generic DD usage continued primarily in off-peak periods, while niche DDs again became relevant for targeted international visibility. As Leona explained about DDs, "they remain in the sales toolbox" but are less frequently used – hotels can now craft tailored promotions and leverage direct marketing more effectively. Overall, interviewees agreed that DDs occupy a smaller share of total hotel sales post-pandemic, and future collaboration hinges on further technological improvements and return to less flexible booking policies that align with evolving revenue management strategies.

Table 4.5: Inductive coding structure post-COVID

Second-Order Theme	First-Order Code	Example Quote
<i>Technological Shifts in Revenue Management</i>	Adoption of Dynamic Pricing	"Next year, we want to integrate to sell our dynamic rates with all the IDS." (Benito)
	Digital Integration	"Maintaining only those IDS in the hotel's distribution portfolio that allow Channel Manager form of integration." (Seb)
<i>Relevance and Evolution of DDs</i>	Declining Relevance of Generic DDs	"Local, generic DDs face additional disadvantages since they did not develop dynamic connectivity." (Josie)
	DDs Evolving into OTA-Like Platforms	"Now they get our normal rates and sell like an agency ... actually becoming a kind of an agency, but their power to sell fast is gone ..." (Marina)
	Hotels' Unacceptance of Refundable Rates	"As long as the rates remain refundable, we have no intention to give them such rates ... simply no need for now ..." (Marina)
	Persistent Flexibility in DD Booking Conditions	"Most of DDs continue to offer flexible booking conditions for their guests." (Portia)

To be continued

Table 4.5: Inductive coding structure post-COVID (cont.)

Second-Order Theme	First-Order Code	Example Quote
<i>The Declining Role of DDs</i>	DDs as a Secondary Sales Tool	"They remain in the sales toolbox, yet I think they will be used less regularly in the future ..." (Leona)
	Direct Booking Strategies	"We mostly try to mimic them on our website for our loyal clients and offer big discounts for early booking around Black Friday." (Leona)
	DDs Losing Significance	"DDs IDS's share in our sales has dropped and stays below 5% of total sales." (Joe)
<i>Strategic Use of DDs</i>	Pricing Transparency	"Today, every rate is visible – it's all so transparent, so we should be very careful." (Mae)
	Niche DDs for International Visibility	"Advertising in Austria is very expensive, and we need visibility there. So Secret Escapes offers us to achieve that, plus it brings high-spending guests." (Kirsten)
<i>Future Expectations for DDs</i>	AI and Targeted Sales	"Hope they develop AI soon and enable more sophisticated and targeted sales." (Leona)

Source: own work

4.5 Discussion

4.5.1 Conceptualising the model of DD adoption during the pandemic

Venkatesh et al.'s (2003) UTAUT model posits four adoption predictors – performance expectancy (PE), effort expectancy (EE), social influence (SI), and facilitating conditions (FC) – with the first two resembling Davis' (1989) TAM (with perceived usefulness and ease of use). However, our analysis above indicates that social influence was minimal in managers' decisions, likely because DDs were already familiar and used independently, rendering peer pressure or external persuasion largely irrelevant. Table 4.6 shows how PE, EE, SI and FC map onto the empirical data, yet these UTAUT variables alone do not fully explain how pandemic-specific market conditions – especially government-issued staycation vouchers – shaped DD adoption.

Table 4.6: Abductive coding structure UTAUT constructs

	Performance Expectancy	Effort Expectancy	Social Influence	Facilitating conditions
Pre-COVID-19	- Permanent visibility in international markets (niche DD) - Sales volumes - Contribution to revenue and sales targets (both DD) - Filling need periods in shoulder season (generic DD)	- Manual-labour intense management of DD IDS - Finding the right partner and designing the right package for sale on specific market (niche DD)	- Encountering DD representatives in trade shows and business events - Seniors and colleagues who already had experience with DD	- Well-known IDS - Established partner relationships

To be continued

Table 4.6: Abductive coding structure UTAUT constructs (cont.)

	Performance Expectancy	Effort Expectancy	Social Influence	Facilitating conditions
During-COVID-19	- Sales on national market to target customers in possession of staycation voucher (generic DD) - Stimulating sales in shoulder season (generic DD) - Filling the rooms in periods immediately after the lockdowns (generic DD)	- Highly labour intense channel causing problems in reservations departments		- Terms and conditions that do not allow for last-minute cancellations - Possibility to connect through channel manager integration
Post-COVID-19	- Permanent visibility and branding on selected foreign markets that are too expensive to target directly (niche DD) - Stimulating sales in shoulder season (generic DD)	- Only considered when automated through channel manager	- Team members	- Support of dynamic pricing

Source: own work

To incorporate broader organisational and environmental forces, we draw on the Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). Three salient contexts emerge:

- *Technological context (T)* is characterised by the characteristics of the technology in question. In our case, the characteristics of DDs align well with the performance expectancy of hotel managers who use them as one of their IDS, as presented in detail in Table 17.
- *Organisational context (O)* links structures at formal and informal levels with the work process. This takes the form of staff shortages in marketing and operations departments, which diminished the attractiveness of DD usage. Further, it was reasoned that DDs (a) increased operational tasks that require manual work; (b) brought undesirable, ‘inferior’ discount consumer profiles that were similar to the ones coming through the staycation voucher scheme, yet without paying the inflated regular rates; (c) caused communication problems linked to the questionable reputation and image of hotel products featured on DDs, especially the generic ones operating on the domestic market, (d) caused situations of channel conflict on the

market, (e) proposed flexible booking conditions that were unattractive to senior hotel management representatives.

- *Environmental context (E)* is most notably impacted by government regulation through various lockdowns through 2020 and 2021 and the introduction of staycation vouchers. These influenced the change in marketing focus. Simply put, there was enough demand to fill the capacities at rack rates by solely targeting the domestic market provided with the "government-sponsored" staycation voucher. Industry characteristics and market structure related to the regulation of terms and conditions adopted by the DD (who, for the pandemic period, adopted flexible booking conditions to attract booking from highly uncertain tourists) increased the risk for hotels that were used to work with DDs on non-refundable terms of sale. Similarly, the switch to dynamic pricing and the pursuit of maintaining rate parity across all channels were the trends that characterised the industry at the same time. Lastly, we identified issues with inadequate technological support infrastructure related to dynamic pricing and the lack of integration of DD with the channel manager and CRS systems used in technology providers supplying Slovenian hotels with channel manager integrations.

4.5.2 Presentation of the DD empirical pandemic model and discussion

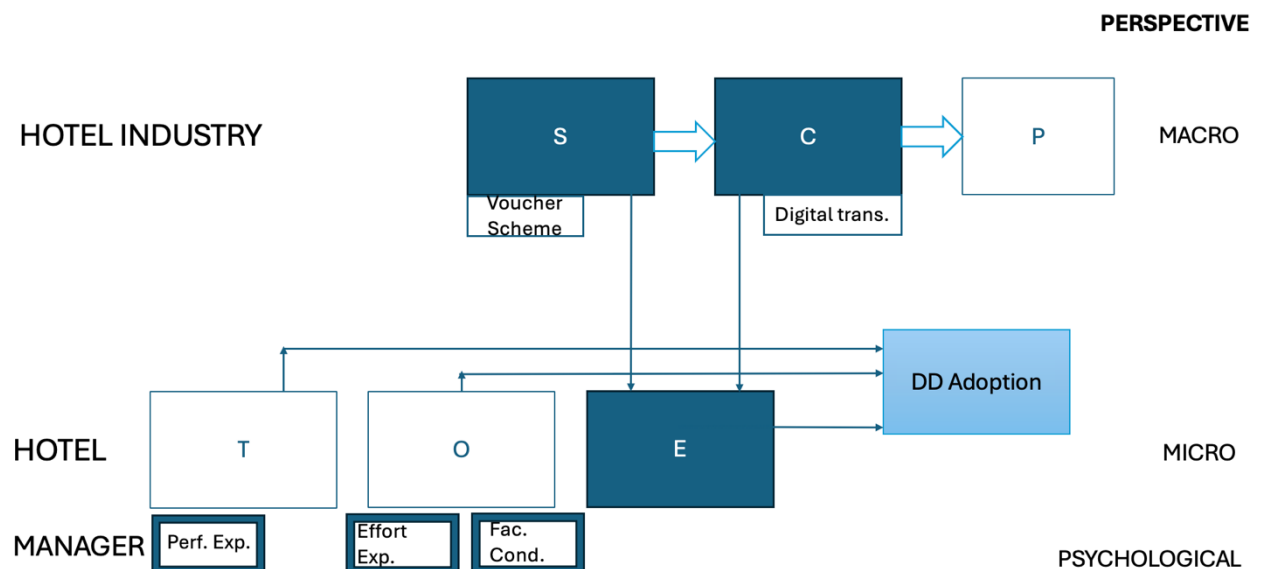
Based on these findings, we propose a conceptual model that situates PE, EE, and FC within TOE's technological and organisational contexts. Our data show that while DDs emerged during previous recessions to boost occupancy, they proved less suitable for Slovenia's pandemic-era circumstances. The heightened importance of staycation vouchers, coupled with minimal staffing, rendered niche DDs nearly obsolete and generic DDs onerous. Specifically, effort expectancy (EE) became problematic: once managers considered staff constraints, the added administrative workload needed to run DDs was too significant. Likewise, perceived performance expectancy (PE) declined as domestic staycation voucher spending replaced the discount-hunting market segment that DDs usually attract.

The argument to use TOE is that by layering the UTAUT variables onto the broader TOE framework, we capture both the technology-related features of DDs and the pandemic-driven organisational and environmental shifts that shaped their (non-)use in Slovenian hotels. This integrated approach highlights how macro-level factors, such as government interventions, can redefine perceived usefulness of a given channel – ultimately revealing that while DDs might thrive in typical economic downturns, they falter when policy-based stimuli (staycation vouchers) alter the market structure and circumvent the usual reliance on discounted promotions within the industry with now changed conduct (Figure 4.3 below). This reveals a completely novel finding, unexplored in any existing distribution channel, or e-commerce study conducted so far.

Our findings revealed that of the four UTAUT variables, only three were observed; Social Influence (SI) was absent during the pandemic, likely because DDs were already embedded in Slovenian hotels' IDS portfolios before COVID-19. This suggests that even Davis' (1989) older TAM model – with Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use – could nearly match UTAUT's explanatory power. Facilitating Conditions mattered mainly later in the recovery period, when DDs became technologically ready for channel manager integration. However, neither TAM nor UTAUT can account for the organisational and environmental complexities that emerged in our data.

To address these broader factors, we turned to the TOE framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). The pandemic context demands a holistic approach that includes organisational and external business conditions, moving beyond the purely psychological focus of TAM or UTAUT. This perspective challenges the validity of dominant technology adoption models in times of crisis. Our findings align with Andersen and Henriksen (2006), who suggest organisational and environmental contexts exert a stronger, more direct influence on technology usage. This further confirms the complete alignment of Slovenian pandemic-hotel market with the key postulation of SCP paradigm: The environmental factors of TOE are in our case nothing else than the market conditions on the national tourism market, or more precisely looking, hotel market (Structure) and the consequentially altered behaviour of the hotel industry players (Conduct) when it comes to e-distribution and sales impacted by the pandemic-caused changes in the market structure. This relationship on how the SCP, TOE and UTAT interact on various levels across different perspectives of the industry in the matters of DD adoption is shown in the Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: Macro-micro-psychological DD adoption framework

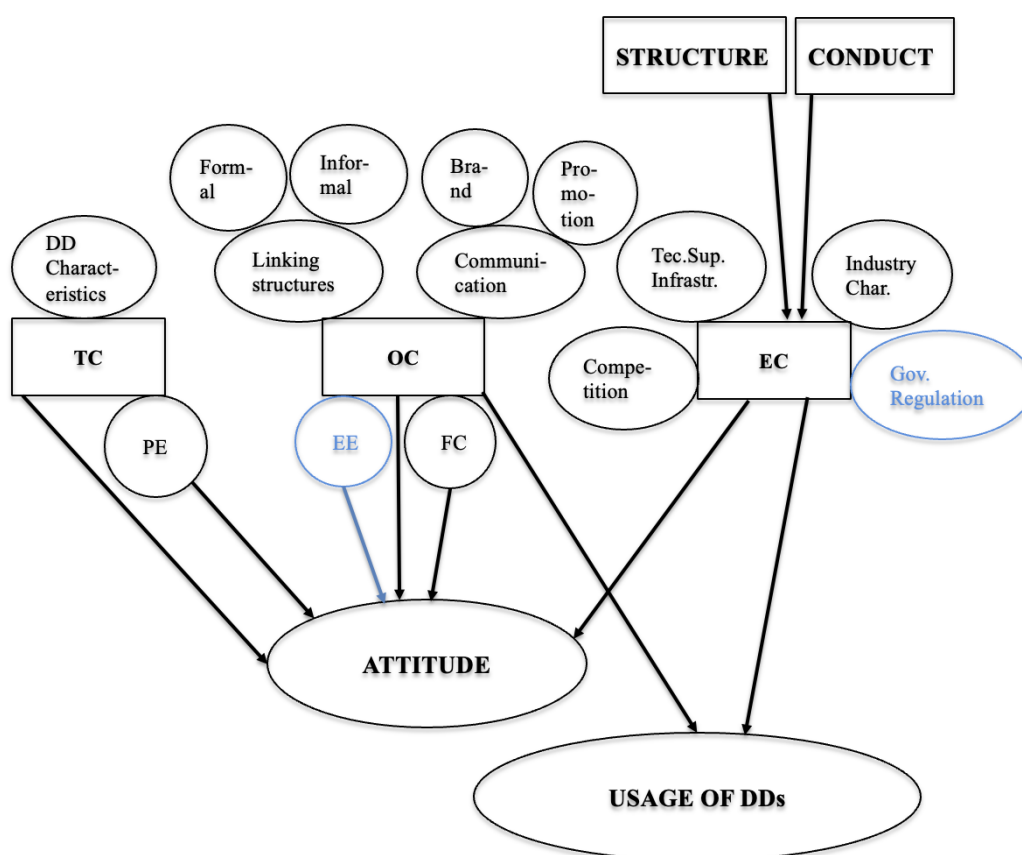


Legend: S - Structure, C - Conduct, P - Performance; T - Technology Context, O - Organisational Context, E - Environmental Context

Source: own work

By contrast, the Technological context appears to shape only managers' attitudes rather than actual usage, indicating the lack of explanatory power for psychology-based technology acceptance models in such context. For example, while managers may see DDs as "extremely useful," abundant domestic demand – driven by governmental regulation – renders manual DD-related work inefficient. This interplay of internal staffing (Organisational) and strong domestic demand (Environmental) overshadows the perceived usefulness of DDs (Technological), thus directly hindering adoption. Figure 4.3 below illustrates in detail how the Technological dimension influences attitudes, whereas Organisational and Environmental factors more decisively affect usage - the latter being consequences of changes in market structure and industry's conduct. Consequently, such organisational-based, business-centred technology adoption model appears better suited to understanding hotel adoption of e-commerce solutions (in our case DDs), particularly during pandemics.

Figure 4.3: DD empirical pandemic model



Legend: TC – Technological Context; OC – Organisational Context; EC – Environmental Context: TOE structural dimensions

PE – Performance Expectancy; EE – Effort Expectancy; FC – Facilitating conditions: UTAUT variables

Source: own work

4.6 Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the adoption of DDs during the pandemic using the case of the Slovenian hotel market. A key novelty and theoretical contribution of this study lies in the integration of the TOE framework with selected UTAUT variables – an approach rarely used in hotel e-marketing research – and further observing it through the economic lens of the tourism market economy by applying the industrial organisation-based SCP paradigm. By situating performance expectancy, effort expectancy and facilitating conditions within the broader organisational and technological domains of TOE, we explain the limited use of DDs in Slovenia during the pandemic, when government intervention in the form of staycation vouchers completely changed the structure of the Slovenian tourism market and thus, through the changed behaviour of the hotel industry, also significantly affected the adoption of DDs, mainly through the environmental context of TOE.

While previous work has merged TAM with TOE, this study, to our knowledge, is the first attempt to embed UTAUT constructs within the T and O contexts of TOE and to further link E with the economic structure and conduct dimensions of the long-established SCP paradigm, thereby fully confirming its applicability. Given the turbulent nature of the pandemic, our findings call into question the continued uncritical application of purely psychological models of technology adoption, on which much of the tourism literature continues to rely during and after the pandemic (Iskender et al., 2024). These models for evaluating e-distribution systems in business were in fact developed during past, very stable periods and, as our case shows, often provide only a partial picture of the real factors influencing the adoption of e-distribution channels, therefore solely relying on them might provide skewed picture of reality for the hotel managers and an only partial understanding of adoption processes for academics.

Researchers studying emerging e-commerce channels should therefore combine psychological and organisational frameworks, integrating multiple industry dimensions and ensuring that the economic dynamics of the market as a whole are not overlooked, in order to provide a holistic picture of technology adoption and use dynamics. Such broader models are believed to offer greater explanatory power and accuracy and are considered more appropriate in an era of rapid technological advancement, persistent geopolitical uncertainty, and increasingly severe environmental shocks. Naturally they should in the future be empirically tested in quantitative manner.

From a managerial perspective, our analysis highlights key hurdles for DD platforms and their technology partners as they seek to regain a central position in hotels' distribution strategies. Post-pandemic recovery - and future challenges - will require tighter integrations and greater automation to reduce the manual workload for understaffed hotels. This is particularly relevant because, in the current period of geopolitical uncertainty, governments may introduce new regulatory measures that reshape market demand in unforeseen ways,

much like staycation vouchers reshaped domestic demand and the tourism market structure in Slovenia during the pandemic in our case study.

This study is rooted in a specific context - Slovenia during COVID-19 - and uses a constructivist paradigm, which makes the proposed model highly context-dependent and thus difficult to replicate. Although the sample covered 25% of population in the focus group phase, and around 60% of population through the interviews of the country's hotel room inventory, it remains biased towards medium to large hotels situated in leisure destinations that characterise Slovenian tourism offer (Minor, Ivanov, Bratec, 2025). Methodologically, data analysis followed classical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023) combined with Leximancer-assisted computational grounded theory (Nelson, 2020) for improved triangulation, showing inherent limitations of the latter that cannot fully account for accurate interpretation of time-specific data (pre, during and post the pandemic), yet still represents a methodologic novelty in tourism economic research.

Future research could employ more longitudinal designs to compare DD use under normal and crisis conditions, explore the adoption of new e-channels (e.g., metaverse or AI-driven), and test the proposed model in other (inter)national and in additional settings with different forms of government interventions. Additional investigation of SCP and TOE factors - including industry/organisation size, ownership structure or brand affiliation - could further refine the understanding of the adoption of DD or other novel e-distribution channels. Moreover, quantitative methods such as structural equation modelling could validate the proposed framework by empirically testing it in order to confirm the validity of illustrated relationships and the power of different above-mentioned variables and their factors (Fig. 4.3). Finally, a purist, data-only grounded theory approach could explore DD use without relying on existing theoretical models and economic paradigms that have been used to guide this research, perhaps able to capture additional, previously overlooked dynamics in crisis related e-distribution.

5 DAILY DEAL DISTRIBUTION AND LOCAL DESTINATION CHARACTERISTICS: DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS OF UPMARKET ITALIAN HOTEL ONLINE SALES PRACTICES⁵

5.1 Introduction

Environmental factors have long been recognised as critical in shaping firm behaviour (e.g. Bain, 1956, Tornatzky et al., 1990, Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990; Andersen & Henriksen, 2006). These are subject to both local, i.e. destination and wider, national external characteristics accounted for in decision-making processes (Camisón and Forés, 2015). Hotel price adjustments and discounts are a common and frequent strategy to manage occupancy fluctuations (Croes and Semrad, 2012) often consequent of external to firm factors. Pricing strategies should be flexible, adapting to market dynamics and country-specific factors (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2019). Daily Deals (DDs), or flash sales, have become a popular marketing and distribution channel for hotels used to address occupancy variations. Despite their prevalence in the travel market, little is known about when hotels use DDs or which types of hotels and destinations typically adopt them (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Geerts and Masset, 2022). As such, DDs prevail to be linked to the internal pricing strategies and thus the performance of a hotel (Cassia et al., 2015; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016), despite Tomat et al. (2019) showing that in the Mediterranean tourist-popular countries feature more DDs offers, suggesting their demand- not supply-driven use, warranting the need for further examinations. Therefore, we stipulate that mapping the localised external influences (Camisón and Forés, 2015) and regional differences (Jeon et al., 2019) in line with the DD discount behaviours identifies that DD discount engagement is related not only to the internal pricing strategies of a hotel but is used as a direct consequence of external local destination characteristics.

This Chapter aims to observe actual hotelier DD adoption behaviour by examining the typological structure of the hotels' environment, i.e. the market and competition conditions within the destination concerning the use of DD websites. As such the study adopts Structure-Conduct-Performance (SCP) framework as a fitting for exploring how the external environment structure influences hotel conduct (pricing strategies like DDs), which in turn impacts hotel performance in terms of occupancy and revenue generation, aspects already explored in the literature (Tian et al, 2024). The study focuses on Italy due to its strong tourist appeal, strong presence on DDs and robust, official, municipality-based tourism classification and statistical information system (ISTAT). Aikin to Liu et al. (2023) this study uses web scraping and publicly available official statistical data to achieve its principal goal

⁵ This chapter is co-authored with dr. Katarzyna Minor, dr. Dario Bertocchi, dr. Giancarlo Fedeli and assist. prof. Luka Tomat and is published in the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Volume 63, 2025, Pages 290-300, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2025.03.013>.

of establishing an accurate picture of discounting adoption determinants, capturing heterogeneous effects between niche DD (niche DD) engagement and external environment factors such as seasonality (Cuccia and Rizzo, 2011), tourist demand (Fernández-Morales et al., 2016), competition density (Camisón and Forés, 2015) and economic reliance on tourism (Agrusa et al., 2021). The context of this study is niche DDs, i.e. higher-end travel deal websites, hence the study focuses on 4-and 5-star hotels, which are well-represented on those sites due to niche DD specific business model (Geerts and Masset, 2022; Budler et al., 2020). This study proposes that the hotel conduct, i.e. total amount of unique offers and levels of discount are used independently to address these external factors, leading to the development of dual hypotheses. It is reasoned that this approach showcases the typology of destinations whose external market structure influences the hotels to adopt niche DDs. By merging the macro perspective of destination as the hotel's environmental context, we extend the available knowledge on the adoption and use of niche DDs, rooting it in industrial economic and organisational theory.

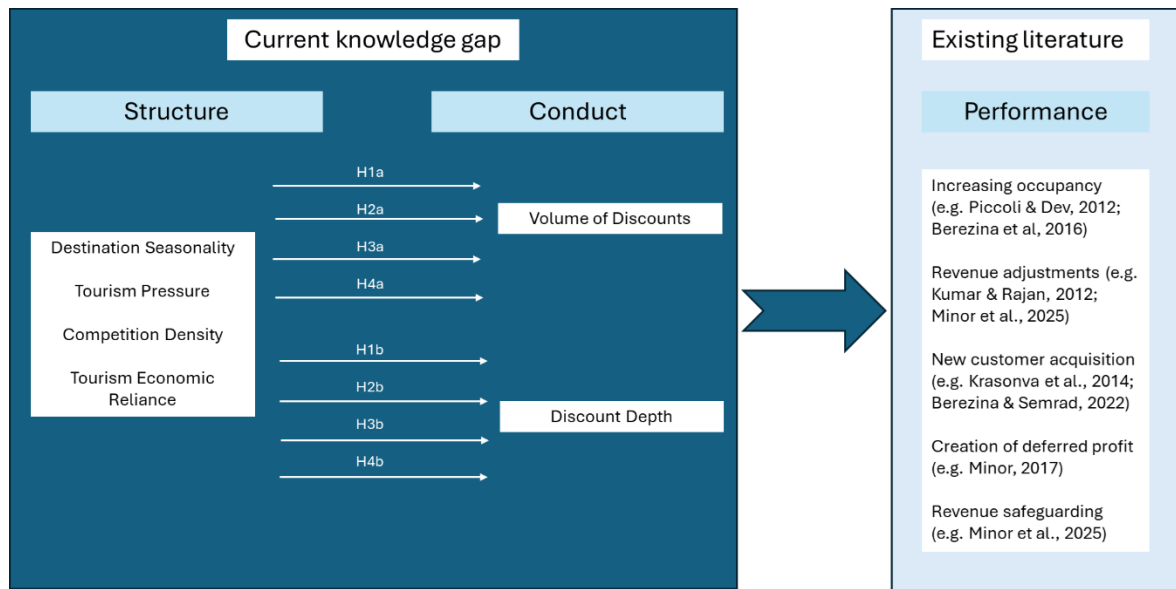
5.2 Literature review and hypotheses development

5.2.1 Daily Deals in the tourism

Hotels operate under two key constraints: perishable products and fixed capacity, meaning any unsold rooms result in lost profits. Revenue management has traditionally addressed this by allocating the right capacity to the right customer at the right price, time, and channel (Kimes, 1989; Kimes and Renaghan, 2011). Discounting is a common strategy, often combined with negotiating lower group or corporate rates (Xiong and Hu, 2011a) and serves as a tactic to adjust supply and demand (Croes and Semrad, 2012; Sharma et al., 2023). To be effective, discounts must be distributed through the right channels, often seen as part of strategic e-marketing (Meriläinen, 2017). These channels, which these days include the proliferation of DDs, can vary in complexity and number but help customers match their needs with the hotel's offerings (Kim et al., 2009; Minor and Bratec, 2019b).

The typical relationship between a firm and its environment is at the core of SCP framework (Bain, 1951). According to it the market structure – such as the level of competition and demand fluctuations – directly influences the conduct of firms, including their pricing strategies. Thus, for a hotel located in a particular destination, the adoption of DDs could be a direct response to market conditions (Figure 5.1), e.g. as competition intensifies or tourism demand weakens, hotels might use DDs as a strategic tool to manage occupancy and optimise revenue, even if the short-term profits may be lower due to steep discounts (Minor & Bratec, 2019a).

Figure 5.1: Study theoretical framework



Source: own work

Budler et al. (2020) highlight that over time the DDs business model proliferated into ‘generic’ and ‘niche’ DDs which appeal to varied clientele driven by hedonic or utilitarian desires. Whilst the value each of those offers is different, Yi and Jai (2020) show that at least in the restaurant setting DDs serve hedonic and utilitarian purposes, and as such are effective in stimulating buying behaviour. Geerts and Masset (2022) associate niche DD websites with the sale of luxury products, highlighting the challenge of balancing price perception with brand value. While Piccoli and Dev (2012) suggest that DDs can be effective for luxury hotels, Jang and Moutinho (2019) and Yang et al. (2015) emphasise the risks of luxury discounting, particularly the potential for reputational damage. This creates uncertainty for luxury hotels in determining whether, and to what extent, they should engage with DD platforms. The influence of market structure on strategic decision-making is evident, as external competitive pressures play a crucial role in shaping discounting strategies (Viglia et al., 2016). Geerts and Masset (2022) and Viglia et al. (2016) note that these pressures compel hotels to carefully assess discount depths, as excessive reductions can undermine perceived quality (Jang and Moutinho, 2019). Thus, the adoption of DD strategies by luxury hotels is not only a response to consumer perceptions but also a function of broader market dynamics, where competition and demand dictate discounting decisions. This Chapter seeks to explore these dynamics further.

5.2.1.1 Hotels and destination seasonality

Butler (1998) defines seasonality as a temporary imbalance between supply and demand in tourism, which can be measured through factors like visitor numbers, expenditure, traffic and employment. Tourism products located in destinations which are only attractive seasonally are particularly vulnerable to capital underutilisation and unstable earnings

(Stojčić et al., 2022), as such the accommodation sector, with its high fixed costs, is particularly affected. DDs can help mitigate these challenges by attracting large volumes of customers (Piccoli and Dev, 2012; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016).

Hotel seasonality is a multifaceted issue shaped by diverse trends, often influenced by a hotel's location, which correlates with the seasonality of the destination based on its climate (Capó Parrilla et al., 2007). For instance, sun-and-sand, urban, and winter sports destinations exhibit different visitation patterns (Sainaghi et al., 2019). Lundberg et al. (2009) observed that businesses in rural or coastal, remote areas face more severe seasonality effects, whereas city locations, with multiple attractions, can draw visitors year-round. However, even urban destinations can experience demand fluctuations due to local events (Sainaghi et al., 2019) and destinations catering to different customer types, such as cultural versus leisure tourists, will follow distinct patterns (Cuccia and Rizzo, 2011). Zhang et al. (2021) further highlight that the financial impact of seasonality varies by region, influenced by factors like dependence on specific tourist types or the predictability of demand changes.

Since most causes of seasonality are external and beyond businesses' control (Baum and Hagen, 1999), hotels often respond to occupancy fluctuations through pricing strategies. Therefore, factors like hotel location and destination type must be considered when analysing the use of DDs. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1a: destinations that traditionally are affected by a high degree of seasonality, e.g. sun/beach or winter destinations, will record a higher number of DDs when compared to urban, city or cultural destinations.

Espinet et al. (2012) argue that under perfect competition, fluctuations in supply and demand will impact price. In destinations not heavily affected by seasonality, where supply remains steady, the accommodation sector may not need to rely on discounts. Vilchez (2013) emphasises the importance of price in understanding seasonality, suggesting that the level of discount can reflect the severity of its effects. Further, they note that destinations and accommodation types have a "tourist valuation," or a price range customers are willing to pay, therefore, DD discounts must be considered in relation to a destination's seasonal characteristics. Carlson and Kukar-Kinney (2018) note that consumers often view steep price cuts with scepticism, as it distorts their internal reference price and acceptable discount range. Similarly, Cao et al. (2018) warn that deep discounts may harm sales by creating negative perceptions of quality. Nusair et al. (2010) found a link between heavy DD discounting and lowered quality perceptions. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1b: destinations that traditionally are affected by a high degree of seasonality, e.g. sun/beach or winter destinations, will record higher discount percentages offered on DDs when compared to urban city or cultural destinations.

5.2.1.2 *Discounting and tourism demand*

When demand is strong, hotels have little need for rate-based differentiation through discounts (Lee and Jang, 2012), particularly since using DDs to address seasonality is more about attracting custom to cover fixed costs than customer acquisition (Minor, 2017). Moreover, DDs are expensive to the business due to discount and commission and can hinder the generation of profit. Thus, DDs are often viewed as a last-resort tactic to stimulate demand. Hotels in destinations with consistently high tourist numbers may not need to engage in DDs, as they do not need to rely on discounts to attract customers. This aligns with Fernández-Morales et al. (2016), who emphasised that demand concentration helps to understand seasonal variations. Conversely, Turrión-Prats and Duro (2018) noted that in Spain, seasonality worsens with increased tourist demand. Therefore, hotels with high demand and profitability during peak seasons may not need to use DDs to protect their revenues.

Economic characteristics of peripheral areas have long been recognised as influencing seasonality and a destination's ability to manage supply and demand fluctuations (Baum and Hagen, 1999). Factors such as geographic isolation from major population centres or a lack of destination attractiveness can drive the need for discounting to attract customers. As Yang et al. (2014) highlight, hotel occupancy is harder to predict in smaller, less popular destinations, making these hotels more likely to use DDs to safeguard occupancy. Skuras et al. (2006) also note that rural tourism, while diverse, remains niche, accounting for 9.4% of the total. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2a: hotels located in areas of high tourist demand will record lower numbers of DDs.

H2b: hotels located in areas of high tourist demand will offer shallower discounts.

5.2.1.3 *Discounting and the effect of competition*

Kalnins (2016) linked hotel business survival and increased local competition, considering factors such as the number of hotels, their size, and pricing. In supply-saturated areas, hotels often maintain similar pricing strategies (Yup Chung, 2000) with Soler et al. (2019) showing that oversaturation in central tourist areas results in price decline. Further, hotels located in dense competition areas command higher prices, albeit in the luxury sector hotels located further apart tend to have a higher-level price point (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2019). However, Mitra (2020) emphasises that competition in the hotel market is complex and far from perfect, leading hotels to use price and discounts as differentiation tools. Similarly, DDs can help hotels "stand out from the competition" by increasing exposure to customers (Berezina & Semrad, 2022). Offering DDs can benefit businesses both directly, through customer acquisition, and indirectly, through increased auxiliary spending (Reimers and Xie, 2018).

Enz et al. (2009) observed that some hotels use price discounting to gain market share, with the increased trade volume compensating for the cost of the deal. Karakaya and Yannopoulos

(2011) found that hotel price fluctuations can have a localised effect, where a price change by one hotel triggers similar responses from competitors. Lee and Jang (2013) noted a similar effect in the case of short-term discounting, however, this applies mainly to hotels with a comparable customer base, such as upper-mid to luxury hotels (Zhao et al., 2020) which have been shown to have more stable pricing policies (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2019). This "leader-follower" pricing strategy can be risky, as it may alter customers' price reference, making them more likely to expect and adapt to lower prices and fluctuations (Viglia et al., 2016), which is a key disadvantage of relying on DDs. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3a: High competition in the destination will increase the number of DDs offered.

H3b: Hotels located in destinations with dense supply will offer higher discounts.

5.2.1.4 Discounts and tourism economic reliance

Enz et al. (2009) highlight that hotels within the same geographic area face similar external competitive and economic conditions, leading them to follow local pricing behaviours. According to Kotler (2017), the customer's perception of price is a key factor, and Viglia et al. (2016) add that this perception can be historically influenced and location-specific. Since discounting can boost demand (Melis and Piga, 2017), hotels in destinations heavily reliant on tourism may be more inclined to use discounts to stimulate demand, gain market share, and safeguard revenues (Chen et al., 2016). In markets saturated with hotels offering similar products and with a high dependence on tourism income, the need for discounted room inventory becomes more pronounced (Pearce, 2008).

Conversely, Lee and Jang (2013) note that hotels located near visitor attractions face greater challenges in maintaining steady prices and may have a higher need for discounts. This raises the question of whether hotels in peripheral destinations, with lower economic reliance on tourism, would be more or less prone to discounting:

H4a: Hotels located in destinations, which have a high economic tourism reliance, will offer more discounts.

H4b: Hotels located in destinations, which have a high economic tourism reliance, will offer deeper discounts.

5.2 Methodology

5.3.1 Data collection and sample

5.3.1.1 Data retrieval

Data scraping is a common method in hospitality research (Han et al., 2021) used to collect hotel DD practices, extracting unstructured website data into a structured format for analysis (Sirisuriya, 2015). A custom-built tool was developed to scrape data from Verychic, a luxury

hotel DD provider. Running on Linux Debian OS, the tool was coded in JavaScript and PHP (c. 1,000 lines) for data classification. Appendix 5.A contains further description of the web scraping and data collection procedure.

Once deployed, the tool collected data daily via API, accessing the Document Object Model (DOM) to retrieve the DD website's database schema and offer attributes. The API enabled stable data extraction, even under high traffic. Using Node.js, the scraped unstructured data were converted into a semi-structured format and stored in a MongoDB database, while a CRON job every 10 minutes grouped entries via Symfony, a PHP framework, ensuring deduplication using hashing techniques. Finally, the structured dataset was stored in MySQL for advanced querying.

The dataset included offer details (e.g., name, dates, discount size, price) and hotel attributes (e.g., provider, star rating, location, number of rooms, TripAdvisor ID). After data cleaning – removing inconsistencies and unifying hotel names – the dataset contained 11,512 unique Mediterranean offers. This study focuses on 3,809 Italian DD offers from 2019, avoiding pandemic disruptions and coinciding with the availability of official, municipality-level ISTAT statistical information. Each unique DD offer represents a new promotional listing, as renewed offers are treated separately in the dataset.

5.3.1.2 *Employing census and spatial data*

In addition, the study employed official data provided by ISTAT (2022), the main producer of official economic census statistics in Italy, as well as spatial data. By combining different sources of data using geographical information, this study merged unique information with complementary data to extend the level of understanding of Italian accommodation providers embedded in the geographical and economic context of the area of reference. A spatial query was developed using QGIS software using the latitude and the longitude information of the unique offers adding the name, the statistical municipality code and the spatial layers to map all the DDs.

Finally, it has been possible to merge the unique offers database with macro indexes at the municipality level for the year 2019 such as tourism typology; tourism/economic reliance index; seasonality index; and tourism pressure, which were developed to allow for in-depth analysis of the significance of the usage of DDs by national accommodation operators. The offers without spatial information were deleted and municipalities without tourism (category I) were not used for the analysis. Appendix B details all variables used in the study and Table 1 all corresponding descriptive statistics.

Table 5.1: Study variable descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard Error	Median	Standard Deviation	Sample Variance	Kurtosis	Skewness	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Count	Confidence Level (95.0%)
<i>Tourism/economic reliance_index</i>	4.39	0.02	5	0.96	0.92	2.51	- 1.74	4.00	1	5.00	14,602	3,323	0.03
<i>Price</i>	162.97	18.02	89	1,071.08	1,147,213.76	943.78	28.58	38,233	34	38,267	575,456	3,531	35.34
<i>Discount</i>	49.46	0.19	50	10.20	103.94	1.05	- 0.34	84	-	84	135,804	2,746	0.38
<i>Tourism pressure</i>	15.10	0.42	1	43.65	1,905.56	105.33	7.91	1,023	-	1,023	163,396	10,821	0.82
<i>Tourism Seasonality index</i>	39.87	0.46	20	48.22	2,325.34	0.56	1.12	332	-	332	431,427	10,821	0.91
<i>Number Four_stars Hotels</i>	61.26	4.84	8	278.94	77,806.99	2,502.22	46.71	15,033	-	15,033	203,395	3,320	9.49
<i>Number Five_stars Hotels</i>	8.80	0.45	1	26.15	683.81	1,529.56	32.57	1,250	-	1,250	29,223	3,320	0.89
<i>Overnight amount of tourists per square Km</i>	8,042.04	222.57	134	23,152.58	536,041,815.81	29.42	4.70	298,314	-	298,314	87,022,882	10,821	436.28

Source: own work

5.3.2 Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted in STATA using two multiple linear regression models to examine relationships between key variables (Table 1) and the target variables: the number and extent of unique DD offer discounts. The first model groups niche DD offers by municipality and tourism typology, while the second analyses individual niche DD offers across Italy. This approach tests the dual nature of four hypothesis sets – assessing both DD adoption and regional discount dynamics. Additionally, a t-test with equal variance was used to compare the levels of discount into different tourism destinations based on their level of seasonality, enhancing the analysis. A Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test was conducted for both regressions to assess multicollinearity, yielding values of 3.00 and 9.00, respectively. Residuals were tested using Shapiro-Wilk W test and revealed normal distribution. Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test was run and revealed heteroscedasticity for regression 1, but not for regression 2. Therefore, following Li (2015) we performed quantile regressions for both sets of linear regressions as well as further linear regression based only on robust residuals for regression 1, which revealed similar to the original results without heteroscedasticity present. Please refer to Appendix 5.C outlining the results of all tests run. Based on those, we report the results of the linear regressions below.

5.4 Results

5.2.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 5.2 presents the study's descriptive statistics. Seaside Destinations (n=1,183) and Large Cities (n=850) recorded the highest number of niche DDs, followed by destinations with multiple tourism types (n=371), with the top two categories comprising 56% of the sample. These municipalities also have the highest concentration of 4- and 5-star hotels. The average discount was 49% (SD=2.64), indicating relatively uniform pricing across municipalities, while the average price was €183 (SD=64.70), reflecting significant price

variation. Notably, a higher Tourism Seasonality Index corresponds to greater seasonal fluctuations in tourism activity for each typology.

Table 5.2: Characteristics of DDs adoption by tourism typology area

Tourism Typology	Number of Daily Deals	Daily Deals Distribution	Average of advertised Discount	Discount standard deviation	Average Price (€)	Price standard deviation	Total stays overnight	Number of five-star Hotels (municipality)	Number of four-star Hotels (municipality)	Tourism Seasonality Index
Large Cities	950	24,94%	48%	9,808,457	189	1,624,954	15.387.734.825	25	170	20
Municipality without a tourism category	346	9,08%	50%	9,876,397	144	2,964,517	9.019.343	16	221	58
Cultural Destinations	358	9,40%	48%	9,969,756	303	2.247,43	69.499.002	211	1	58
Lake Destinations	180	4,73%	44%	8,723,379	169	122,397	43.095.913	37	328	76
Mountain Destinations	283	7,43%	46%	1,142,551	264	6,871,725	56.803.063	66	922	76
Seaside Destinations	1.183	31,06%	51%	1,009,188	188	2,006,174	617.294.115	2	12	94
Spa Destinations	133	3,49%	52%	9,695,624	132	6,714,567	49.898.074	180	672	48
Two or more tourism typology	371	9,74%	52%	9,907,403	187	1,745,293	191.149.605	345	3	70
Total/Average	3.809	100,00%	49%		183		16.424.493.940	28	188	62

Source: own work

Out of 3,809 unique niche DD offers for Italy, tourism activity-related information about their location could be retrieved for 2,741 unique DD offers, representing 72% of the Italian sample. Figure 5.2 shows the geographical distribution of niche DD offers per tourism typology of the accommodation provider's destination.

Figure 5.2: Geographical map of niche DDs distribution per tourism typology



Source: own work

Table 5.3: T-test: accommodation providers, level of discount and seasonality
. Ttest Discount, by(Seasonalityindex_group)

Two-sample t test with qual variances						
Group	Obs	Mean	Std.Err.	Std.Dev.	[95%Conf.	interval]
1	1,356	50.12684	.2728864	10.04874	49.59152	50.66217
2	1,385	49.01227	.2633557	9.800937	48.49565	49.52889
Combined	2,741	49.56366	.1898236	9.938132	49.19145	49.93587
diff		1.114569	.3791401		.3711397	1.857999
diff = mean(1) -mean (2)				t =	2.9397	
H0: diff = 0				Degrees of freedom =	2739	
Ha: diss < 0			Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0	
Pr(T < t) = 0.9983			Pr(ITI > ItI) = 0.0033		Pr(T > t) = 0.0017	

Source: own work

A t-test (Table 3) was conducted to compare the level of discount based on tourism seasonality levels. Results show significant differences above and below the median discount level, highlighting the impact of seasonality on niche DD use. To explore these differences further, a linear regression analysis was performed, as discussed in the following section.

5.4.2 Hypotheses testing

5.4.2.1 Seasonality

The results of the two multiple linear regressions served mainly to test the study hypotheses. The first regression was performed to assess the relationship between several factors that may potentially influence the extent of the adoption of such tools, measured by the number of unique niche DD offers. This regression is characterised by a high R^2 of 83.9%, therefore explaining the data set substantially. Conversely, the second regression revealed a relatively low R^2 value of 9 %. This regression is constructed by grouping all the single offers of the first regression by the Italian municipality. Although it entails a lower significance value, it is based on the data of the first regression, which has an objectively high value. Therefore, even though this regression has a lower model significance value than the first one, overall, the phenomenon can be agreeably considered to be explained by the analysis.

The first set of hypotheses modelled in this study concerned the seasonality aspect and how this may impact the number of offers per municipality, as well as according to the type of destination typically affected by seasonality. The results of the first linear regression revealed that the number of niche DDs is not significantly associated with seasonality (p coefficient, 0.0163 and standard error, 0.0141; Table 4), therefore indicating that the use of

niche DDs is not directly associated with levels of the seasonality of destinations. Accordingly, *H1a: destinations that traditionally are affected by a high degree of seasonality, e.g. sun/beach or winter destinations, will record a higher number of DDs when compared to urban, city or cultural destinations*, was not confirmed through the evidence, suggesting that accommodation providers do not use niche DDs (in terms of numbers of niche DD offers issued) as a way to offset seasonality.

As for the level of niche DD discount, the second linear regression (Table 4) shows that higher discounts were associated with municipalities with two or more tourism types, while large city providers have higher discounts than providers in historical destinations. Further, while lake destinations adopt lower discounts but still employ a heavy number of niche DDs, thermal tourism providers adopt higher discounts. Generally, higher levels of niche DD discounts were found in municipalities that are connected to tourism. Overall, the evidence shows that niche DDs measured by the discount extent are a way to tackle seasonality, extending Berezina and Semrad (2015), i.e. the bigger the seasonality within the destination, the larger the discount recorded, therefore confirming the second hypothesis; *H1b: destinations which traditionally are affected by a high degree of seasonality, e.g., sun/beach or winter destinations will record higher discount percentages offered on DDs when compared to urban city or cultural destinations*.

Table 5.4: Results of linear regressions 1 and 2 (coefficient and std. error values)

VARIABLES	(1) DDs_per_municipality	VARIABLES	(2) Discount
Two or more tourism typologies [1]	-11.406*** (7.783)	Two or more tourism typologies [1]	3.564*** (0.927)
Cultural Destinations [2]	-12.487*** (7.683)	Cultural Destinations [2]	-1.143 (0.973)
Seaside Destinations [3]	-14.786*** (7.670)	Seaside Destinations [3]	1.542* (0.860)
Mountain Destinations [4]	-11.813*** 7.747	Mountain Destinations [4]	(1.183) (1.231)
Lake destinations [7]	-9.143** 7.918	Lake destinations [7]	-5.278*** (1.234)
Spa Destination [8]	-10.701** 7.953	Spa Destination [8]	3.768*** (1.185)
Municipality without a tourism category [9]	-13.814*** 7.674	Municipality without a tourism category [9]	1.093 (1.093)
1 Tourism economic index (very low reliance)	0.110 2.279	1 Tourism economic index (very low reliance)	1.075 (1.397)
2 Tourism economic index (low reliance)	-0.470 1.235	2 Tourism economic index (low reliance)	-0.083 (1.070)

To be continued

Table 5.4: Results of linear regressions 1 and 2 (Coefficient and Std. error values) (cont.)

VARIABLES	DDs_per_municipality	VARIABLES	Discount
3 Tourism economic index (medium reliance)	-0.806 1.466	3 Tourism economic index (medium reliance)	3.155*** (0.802)
4 Tourism economic index (high reliance)	-0.566 1.342	4 Tourism economic index (high reliance)	2.630*** (0.568)
Tourism_Seasonality	0.0163 (0.0102)	Tourism_Seasonality	0.0337*** (0.007)
Tourism_pressure	-0.0341*** (0.00867)	Tourism_pressure	-0.0171*** (0.005)
Four_stars_Hotels	0.454*** (0.127)	Four_stars_Hotels	0.0791*** (0.014)
Five_stars_Hotels	2.575*** (0.817)	Five_stars_Hotels	--0.504*** (0.100)
Overnights per square km	-0.000*** (0.000)	Overnights per square km	0.000*** (6.730)
Discount	0.132*** (0.0373)		
Price	-0.0003 (0.000)		
Constant	10.053** 7.933	Constant	46.63*** (0.635)
Observations	359	Observations	2.724
R-squared	0.839	R-squared	0.09
Standard errors in parentheses		Standard errors in parentheses	
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

Source: own work

5.4.2.2 Tourism demand

Regarding the hypotheses concerning tourism demand, i.e. the popularity of a given destination and the use of niche DDs, this study refers to tourism demand using the proxy indicator of tourism pressure, defined as the total overnight stays per inhabitant in the municipality of the provider. The first linear regression (Table 4) reveals that more intense use of niche DDs is linked to a decrease in tourism pressure. This indicates and reinforces the use of niche DDs as a tool to offset a decrease in demand, namely a reduction of presence in the associated destination and therefore demand for accommodation (p coefficient, -0.0341; standard error, 0.00934). Therefore, *H2a: hotels located in areas of high tourist demand will record lower numbers of DDs* is confirmed.

The second associated hypothesis that concerns the level of niche DD discount states *H2b: hotels located in areas of high tourist demand will offer shallower discounts*. The linear regression shows results in line with the previous hypothesis (p coefficient -0.0171; standard error 0.005, Table 4), therefore confirming the *H2b: hotels located in areas of high tourist demand will offer shallower discounts* hypothesis. The relationship between tourism

pressure and niche DD discount levels is significant but negative, therefore, niche DD discounts are generally higher when the tourism pressure diminishes.

5.4.2.3 *Destination competitiveness*

The third set of hypotheses concerned competition levels at the destination of the accommodation provider and the adoption of niche DDs. In this study, the competition was assessed via the inclusion of the number of four and five-star hotel establishments per single municipality as dependent variables of the regressions (Table 4). The first regression reveals a positive relationship between market competitiveness and the use of niche DDs for both four and five-star hotels located in competitive destinations; however, five-star hotels show a stronger relationship than their counterparts. Therefore, *H3a: High competition in the destination will increase the number of DDs offered is confirmed.*

In terms of the level of discounts offered, the second regression shows that the bigger the presence of four-star hotels, the higher the discount of the niche DDs is (p coefficient 0.0791; standard error 0.014, Table 5.4); and conversely, a bigger discount occurs when there is less competition between 5-star hotels, with the latter value being relatively low and therefore not particularly influential in the model. Therefore, *H3b: Hotels located in destinations with dense supply will offer higher discounts* is also confirmed, but only for 4 and 5-star hotels.

5.4.2.4 *Tourism economic reliance*

The last set of hypotheses relates to the reliance on tourism activities of destinations and includes measurements based on the incidence of employment in the tourism and culture sectors at the different destinations. Interestingly, the first regression (Table 4) reveals the existence of no relationship between economic dependency on tourism and the number of niche DDs, therefore rejecting *H4a: Hotels located in destinations that have a high economic tourism reliance will offer more discounts.*

Conversely, the second regression highlights the positive relationship between the economic dependency of a municipality and the level of niche DD discounts in municipalities that are connected to tourism (Table 5.4), confirming *H4b: Hotels located in destinations that have a high economic tourism reliance will offer deeper discounts.*

5.3 **Discussion and conclusions**

5.3.1 **Discussion**

The results show that when the hotels use niche DD as a means to offset seasonality, they only do so by manipulating the depth of discount but not the volume of offers. When compared to our base, i.e. Large City destinations, destinations that struggle with seasonality are more likely to offer deeper discounts, thus confirming this particular trait in the use of

DDs. However, there is no noted difference in the volume of DD between the destinations affected and those unaffected by seasonality. Therefore, our findings suggest that DDs are used as a stable and permanent distribution channel, not a one-off use platform. They are used flexibly to adjust discount rates to offset seasonality. This confirms the conclusions of Budler et al. (2020) concerning the use of niche DDs as a part of the distribution channel mix, and not merely as an ad-hoc promotion method.

Examining the destination typology and seasonality index further, deeper discounts, again compared to the base of Large Cities, are found in: municipalities with two or more tourism types; maritime/seaside destinations; thermal tourism destinations; or with no specific tourism type. This leaves mountain, lake and cultural/historical destinations less likely to heavily discount, suggesting these destinations can attract customers with alternative offerings out of season. The opposite findings relating to spa and cultural destinations contrast with Cuccia and Rizzo (2011) who note discounting is less pronounced in areas characterised by specific customer types. This finding therefore suggests that niche DD use is location but not seasonality-specific per se, extending the findings of previous research to niche DD context (e.g. Sainaghi et al., 2019) and thus questioning the established function of DDs as a distribution channel whose key attribute has been long associated with its power to mitigate the effects of seasonality (Berezina & Semrad, 2015) following the ‘needs-based’ distribution channel logic (Pearce, 2008).

Our results evidence a relationship between the concentration and variations of tourism demand and niche DD availability found in a given destination, thus supporting the work of Fernández-Morales et al. (2016). Additionally, the results extend Yang et al. (2014) findings which showed that hotels located in low-tourist demand locations offer more deals and deeper discounts. This provides new evidence of the specific effect of niche DDs use and indicates them to be a tool to simulate location-based demand. Equally, most of the niche DD offers are noted in Large Cities categories, areas of high tourism pressure that, however, record shallow discounts. This use of niche DDs reminisces the traditional use of discounting (Lee and Jang, 2013) and points to niche DDs being used as a management tool designed to address the specific circumstances of the wider destination-specific business environment the hotel operates in, in opposition to its organisational environment reflected in its performance alone.

Further, our findings clearly show a localised effect of niche DD discounting, extending the work of Karakaya and Yannopoulos (2011), who postulated that in areas of high competition, DD discounting, in terms of the number of deals offered, is more commonly applied. Our findings confirm that this is true for both 4 and 5-star hotels, evidencing that niche DDs are a viable distribution strategy even on the luxury end of the hotel spectrum; this further supports observations by Budler et al. (2020) of the inclusion of the DD within the permanent distribution channel mix. However, the application of the discount is the point of differentiation and thus shows the true localisation effect on the use of niche DDs.

Namely, the discount increases in line with the density of 4-star hotels per inhabitant but decreases with 5-star providers' presence. This leads to several observations; since there are more 4-star hotels operating on the market, to gain a competitive advantage (Enz et al., 2009) the hotel may be more likely to utilise niche DDs websites as a way of accessing the specific market. Equally, in areas of high competition, 5-star luxury establishments are less prone to offer deep discounts, even on more 'exclusive' niche DD websites. The lack of discount proneness is likely due to reputational ramifications in the 5-star segment (e.g. Jang and Moutinho, 2019) which outweigh the quest for competitive advantage. Namely, the deepness of the discount may be a signal of inferior quality, thus instead of gaining, losing market share. Only in destinations of low 5-star competition, our data show deeper discounts applied. This is particularly significant, as it can expose the hotels to a greater risk of changes in price reference points where the customers adapt to the lower price over time (Viglia et al., 2016). This discounting approach might be explained by external destination factors, which are not per se aligned with the expectations of 5-star guests.

The last sets of results signal that hotels in areas of high economic tourism reliance use niche DD websites, but the number of offers featured is no different than in areas of low tourism reliance. This signals that the decision to engage or not with the DDs channel is influenced by other aforementioned external, destination characteristics such as competition and internal, organisational factors such as financial stability. The point of differentiation, however, is the level of discount applied, with the hotels located in high economic tourism reliance areas offering deeper discounts, signalling a concession-based not quantity-led strategy of niche DD sales. This may signal clearance-like (Nakhata and Kuo, 2013) use of the websites to address problems with distressed inventory (e.g. Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016) and point to the destination factors external to the hotel as the ones stimulating more aggressive discounting strategies.

5.3.2 Theoretical and practical implications

This study contributes to the growing extant knowledge derived from utilising machine learning to assess and establish spatial distributions of regional tourism patterns. As such, similarly to Morales-Pérez et al. (2024), it empirically records the spatial distribution of niche DD offers to showcase patterns and hubs of adoption but expands this by accounting for tourism dimensions of the local municipalities. It contextualises findings with the use of publicly available secondary data to showcase the heterogeneous effect of external, regional tourism environment and thus building a robust picture of the market structure (S) in relation to the use of niche DDs (P) (Liu et al. 2023) within the quest for improved hotel performance (P).

Further, by incorporating SCP framework we provide a link between market conditions and hotels' niche DD usage strategies, thus moving beyond firm-centric literature perspectives. This represents the first study to systematically identify the external factors that contribute

to the use of DDs as a distribution channel, reinforcing the notion that discounting strategies are not solely a function of internal revenue management practices but are contextually adapted to macro-environmental conditions. Specifically, we show that niche DDs serve as a dynamic and flexible mechanism, wherein hotels adjust the depth of discounts, volume of offers, or a combination of both, to counteract external pressures. As such our study contributes by identifying distinct patterns of niche DD usage linked to seasonality, economic reliance on tourism, local demand fluctuations, and competition intensity. Namely, we evidence that highly seasonal destinations tend to mitigate demand volatility by increasing discount depths rather than volume, reaffirming DDs as an adaptive pricing tool rather than a temporary crisis-management solution. We confirm that hotels in high tourism-reliant economies employ deeper discounts, thus illustrating a dependence on aggressive pricing strategies to maintain competitiveness. In highly competitive markets, 4-star hotels respond with both a higher volume of DDs and deeper discounts, whereas 5-star hotels demonstrate an inverse trend, offering fewer discounts in dense competitive environments to preserve brand integrity. This supports the broader pricing literature, evidencing how competition affects price elasticity differently across market segments. Lastly, hotels in high tourism-demand destinations exhibit lower DD adoption and shallower discounts, aligning with demand-driven pricing logic, where strong visitor inflows negate the necessity of steep price reductions.

These insights contribute to price management literature by contextualising competitive pricing strategies within local market structures, showing how geographical and economic determinants shape niche DD adoption and discounting behaviour. This has critical implications for destination-based competitive pricing theories, particularly in luxury markets, where price sensitivity and exclusivity trade-offs must be carefully managed. As such, we show leader-follower behaviour in the niche DD behaviour; if a hotel is located in a municipality with a high number of daily deals, they need to follow discounting trends to elicit a change in competitors' discounting behaviour.

From a practical perspective and in line with SCP logic, we show that niche DD adoption challenge lies in balancing pricing flexibility with brand positioning, since the engagement is not purely an internal strategic choice, but a reactive decision to external environmental conditions. Revenue managers can use this knowledge to predict competitive pricing responses and proactively adjust their DD strategies in line with market pressures. Crucially, this study evidences that discount depth and volume are employed as independent strategies, enabling destination-specific adaptations. This flexibility allows hotel managers to better align their pricing approaches with local market conditions, mitigating the risks of price erosion while maintaining competitive positioning within the luxury and upmarket hospitality segments. Beyond hotels, niche DD operators can refine their targeting strategies – specifically, focusing on 5-star hotels in low-competition markets to secure deeper discounts, while approaching 4-star hotels in high-competition zones for higher volume deals.

5.3.3 Limitations and avenues for future research

As this study focused on Italy, results may differ in less tourism-developed countries. Future research should explore niche DD usage in such contexts or across broader geographical regions to enhance generalisability. Additionally, this study adopted a holistic approach, using overnight stays per inhabitant as a proxy for tourism pressure. Alternative measures may yield different results, warranting validation in future studies. Moreover, multiple concurrent destination characteristics – such as large cities, mountain destinations, and tourism economic reliance – may influence discounting strategies differently. Competitive pressures, market structure, and external economic conditions also play a role in shaping pricing decisions. Thus, future research should employ multivariate analyses to examine niche DD deal volume and discount levels against multiple external factors, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of discounting behaviour in varying market conditions. Finally, our study relied on two main sets of data to enable the relationships to emerge, namely the data collected from the DD booking platform and the official ISTAT statistical information per municipality. Due to delays in the publication of the official statistics and the exclusion of the pandemic period, the Chapter derives from 2019 data. Any future studies should therefore use post-pandemic recorded datasets to build upon this work.

6 GENERAL DISCUSSION

Hotel e-distribution issues have been largely overlooked in recent academic literature. The current body of literature primarily centres around established concepts, such as adopting distribution channels and models for evaluation. An influential framework to consider is the one developed by O'Connor and Frew (2004), who approached the topic from a marketing perspective yet developed their framework with the help of practitioners and without any theoretical background. This framework remains the most widely used to this day. To keep up with the fast-paced advancements in technology over the past decade, which have significantly impacted distribution strategies (Hjalager, 2010), it is imperative to breathe new life into the current hotel distribution theory.

The ever-changing landscape of IDS is seen as a result of technological advancements. Even though it is not a novel IDS any longer, the current state of academic knowledge regarding DDs remains fragmented and requires further theoretical and empirical refinement, as highlighted by various scholars (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Minor, 2017; Berezina & Semrad, 2022). Previous research has explored the pros and cons of using DDs (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). It has also examined how DDs affect the profitability of merchants (Dholakia, 2012), the quality of service in hotels and the brand image (Minor, 2017). Yet, many directions of DD use remain open to the present day as indicated in the SLR reported in Chapter 1. I attempted to fill only a few of them.

6.1 Achievement of research objectives

In line with the objectives set at the stage of defining and defending the research proposal, I have posed myself the following research questions, which I also assess in terms of how much and where I have managed to answer them:

1. To progress the academic understanding of DDs channel in hotel IDS;
RQ1: How did the characteristics and academic understanding of DDs change from their appearance in 2008 up to the present day?

Assessment: This objective has been fully achieved with Chapters 1 (SLR in Chapter 1) and Chapter 2 (IDS perspective). The development of DD platforms into its two distinct BMs certainly updates and enriches tourism literature. Further updating the field, I have observed DDs BMI from 2020 onwards and thus incorporated the most recent aspects of DDs evolvement and BM reconfigurations into the literature, which have relevant implications for understanding their managerial adoption and use. Certain aspects of DD development after COVID-19 pandemics are also presented in Chapter 3.

2. To identify and explain variables and their factors (general and DDs-specific) that lead the hotel managers to adopt an emerging IDS such as DDs;

RQ2: What are the main (UTAUT-based) variables that lead hotel managers to adopt a new distribution channel?

Assessment: Chapter 3 describes in detail the variables and factors that lead the hotel managers to adopt, as well as the psychological mechanisms that guide such adoption based on beliefs and satisfaction. Chapter 4 describes them in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic – an element that was unforeseeable at the time of this dissertation's conceptualisation, but that made the research much more complex and in certain aspect also valuable. With this addition, I assess that I have actually “overdelivered” what I had originally promised, as the events lead me to also explore broader and less commonly utilised theoretical frameworks that explain the adoption, namely the TOE model.

3. To identify and explain variables and their factors (general and DDs specific) that lead the hotel managers to continue using DDs once this channel has been adopted;

RQ3: What are the main (UTAUT-based) variables that lead hotel managers to continue using the adopted distribution channel?

Assessment: The variables and their factors that lead the hotel managers to continue using DDs have been elaborated and explained in detail in Chapter 3. Within the same chapter I also explain how the variables and factors for continued use changed during and post the COVID-19 pandemic based on the grounds of expectation-confirmation theory that stands behind the 2-stage IS continuance model utilised to model the continued use of DDs.

4. To delve into whether the adoption and continued use variables align with the Extended two-stage DDs continuance model, or if they diverge;

RQ5: Is the DDs continuance really determined by the confirmation of the same variables that determine their adoption?

Assessment: The same variables that lead the hotel managers to adopt and continue using DDs have been confirmed in Chapter 3. However, the relevance and intensity of the factors of UTAUT variables changes between the adoption and continued use, as well as shows clear differences between the use through the COVID pandemic and its recovery.

5. To identify and explain the disturbance concerns of DDs channel adoption in the form of managerial concerns over the potential channel conflict of DDs channel and its effects on existing channels in hotel e-distribution portfolio;

RQ5: Which concerns lead the managers to hesitate with DDs adoption and in what way does the adoption and continued use of DDs impact other IDS?

Assessment: The disturbance concerns that lead the hotel managers to hesitate with the adoption, discontinue the use of DDs during the pandemic, or not reassume their use in the recovery phase have been described and explained in Chapter 3. However, the question about how DDs impact other IDS has not been answered. The key reason for this was that most of my interviewees did not attempt to analyse the impact of DD adoption on other IDS and did not have a clear idea about such impacts. Nevertheless, they generally assumed that the impact was somewhat positive, so I could hypothetically interpret this as a “billboard effect”. This aspect must be empirically verified with more structured analytic techniques to examine the data obtained from hotels’ PMS and channel manager systems.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

An evident contribution to knowledge can be seen in the fact that within this doctoral research process I managed to be the first to have provided a distinction between generic and niche DD in terms of their BM (Budler et al., 2020). The value of my work has been acknowledged in later research, and its impact has continued to inform and shape recent scholarly inquiry (Berezina & Semrad, 2022). Further, in line with the quest for more research focusing on IDS rather than tourists or hotels and tour operators, which is present in numerous literature reviews in the e-tourism domain (Law et al., 2014), my focus on observing IDS directly and its evolution through the words of DD and hotel managers by applying the BM and BMI lens adds the previously completely absent perspective to DD literature, which I managed to bring past its 2019 “stillstand” by incorporating the dynamics of the pandemic and its recovery period in DD evolution and current nature. As an additional contribution beyond the original proposal, this doctoral research was also the first to observe actual DD-related managerial behaviour. In Chapter 5 (Minor et al., 2025), I linked the use of DDs among Italian hotels to specific characteristics of their economic environment. Through the geo-economic characteristics of Italian tourist destinations and based on the industrial-economic SCP paradigm, I was the first to outline how tourism economic characteristics of the destination impact DDs use behaviour.

The main challenge in the PhD progress was trying to understand and explain why hoteliers still choose to use the DDs channel, even outside the “need period”. To bridge this gap in understanding, I tried to explore the applicability of managerial technology adoption theories from the field of information systems (IS) research. The research undoubtedly enhanced our comprehension of the processes involved in adopting hotel IDS, especially the DD. In this dissertation, I delved into the various factors contributing to hotel managers' adoption and ongoing utilization of the DDs channel. I aimed to qualitatively explore these variables and gain a deeper understanding of their impact. My findings further state that the variables of

adoption and continuance are indeed the same, yet their power changes through different contexts and periods of their use. What also changes are the factors of each variable. As I observe in the longitudinal study, each of the distinct time contexts reveal changes in factors that hotel managers perceive as relevant and associated with each variable. These are influenced by the pandemic and the general progress of technological development in the sector that the pandemic helped to accelerate.

On the theoretical level, my research has made a significant contribution by incorporating relevant concepts and technology acceptance theories from the field of IS research into the study of distribution within the academic field of tourism, which seems to only be familiar with the outdated TAM model. I have utilized well-established technology adoption theories to shed light on the adoption and continuation of DD in the realm of hotel e-distribution in a longitudinal, making ours the first DD-related study to do so. This approach has addressed a significant gap in the existing literature that explores the intersection of marketing and information systems in the context of tourism, as identified by Leung, Xue, and Bai in 2015. Additionally, my study located in Europe and featuring Mediterranean, Central European countries including transitional economies adds a valuable perspective to the predominantly Asia-and USA-centric technology acceptance and DD research, making a clear geographic contextual contribution.

This research applied several models for the first time within the context of hotel e-distribution, thereby contributing conceptually even prior to generating empirical results. Furthermore, the longitudinal and qualitative approach adopted in Chapters 2 and 3 stands in contrast to the predominant trend in IS and e-tourism literature, which is largely based on quantitative studies focused on single points in time. Consequently, my empirically constructed qualitative models can guide and inform future e-distribution research, as well as serve as a base for further quantitative testing and refinement.

In the following section I depict each Chapter and its contribution:

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 exposes several critical deficiencies in the fragmented literature on DDs in the tourism sector, particularly within the hotel context. It identifies substantial terminological ambiguity, notably the widespread misapplication of the term “group buying” to individualised, Groupon-style promotions, indicating a need for clearer conceptual definitions. A pronounced sectoral imbalance is evident, with research disproportionately focused on restaurants and generic DD platforms. Geographically, the literature is heavily centred on China and the US, limiting the transferability of findings to other tourism markets, especially in Europe and transitional economies. Methodologically, the field shows a strong bias toward quantitative approaches, constraining insights into stakeholder motivations, consumer experiences, and the evolution of platform strategies; moreover, there is a notable

lack of theoretical grounding present in the studies. Finally, there is a marked absence of longitudinal and post-pandemic studies, and a lack of inquiry into the continued use of DDs by hotels despite documented challenges—revealing a pressing gap in both theoretical understanding and practical application clearly confirming the suitability of the research conducted in the following Chapters.

Chapter 2

Based on this chapter, it appears that there is a pressing need to reevaluate the value proposition of the niche DD BM, especially concerning hotels as my results reveal a strategic misalignment and lack of con value consensus among the DD and hotel managers as an outcome of COVID-induced BMI processes. This will help these channels avoid becoming outdated, burdensome, and less significant IDS. The increasing convergence of business model elements among the different analysed IDS may suggest challenges in maintaining distinct characteristics of niche DD providers. From the customers' perspective, the IDS are becoming more alike due to the overlapping elements of their business models. This "hybrid" model combines aspects of both the OTA and generic DD business models. The chapter provides valuable insights for future IDS researchers who want to understand the intricate and interconnected aspects of business models within the field. A deeper analysis of the evolving IDS can be achieved through an enhanced understanding, allowing for a more quantitative and in-depth examination.

From a practical standpoint, it is essential for hoteliers to strategically collaborate with the type of DD providers that best align with their needs. This strategic collaboration can lead to significant benefits for both parties. The IDS providers also stand to gain from the heightened understanding of the BM elements and value propositions that the competing and co-existing IDS currently present in the distribution ecosystem when thinking over their future transitions.

Chapter 3

This chapter offers valuable insights on multiple theoretical levels. In a pioneering move, this study combines the UTAUT framework with the IS continuance model, a novel approach that has not yet been explored in the realm of hotel management. Furthermore, it employs the IS continuance lens instead of the more typical IS adoption focus, a perspective that is still relatively underexplored in IS research and even more so within tourism studies. Additionally, it explores the intersection of e-distribution, hotel management, and IS by utilising the UTAUT to examine the tourism supply side of IS adoption in relation to e-commerce trends, an area that has not been extensively studied before. In addition, this study departs from the predominant quantitative approach in IS research and instead embraces a longitudinal and predominantly qualitative observation. This shift allows us to delve into the enduring significance of DDs as IDS in contemporary times. Furthermore, this work offers a unique European perspective on adopting tourism technology, filling a notable gap in

current literature. In addition, it presents a novel model that offers a fresh perspective on evaluating IDS in e-tourism research. This model is a compelling alternative to the traditional O'Connor & Frew's (2004) IDS evaluation framework, which lacks robust theoretical support and can be used as its theoretical backbones.

In terms of its practical value, this chapter will prove beneficial for individuals engaged in the DD industry, as it provides a clear overview of the key factors that hotel managers need to consider for their ongoing utilisation. They will also develop a deeper understanding of how their peers strategically utilise this IDS. This study will provide valuable insights for anyone interested in IDS and e-marketing.

Chapter 3 undoubtedly managed to enhance my comprehension of the processes involved in the adoption of hotel IDS, especially the DDs. In this dissertation, I examined the various factors that contribute to the adoption and ongoing utilisation of DD channels by hotel managers. I aimed to qualitatively explore these factors and gain a deeper understanding of their impact. In addition, this research investigates whether the variables influencing the initial adoption of DDs are the same as those impacting their ongoing usage. My findings here state the variables are certainly the same, yet their power changes through different contexts and time periods of their continued use, such as when during COVID-19 the 'effort expectancy' becomes a much determinental driver of DD continuance than it was previously.

For the first time, I have utilised well-established technology adoption theories to depict the adoption and continuance of DDs in hotel e-distribution. This approach addresses a key gap in literature on the intersection of marketing and information systems in tourism and hotel management (Leung, Xue, and Bai, 2015).

Chapter 4

This study's important aspect and theoretical contribution is linking the psychological dimensions of technology adoption present in UTAUT framework with a wider organisational perspective of TOE framework and an even broader SCP perspective. This approach successfully explained DDs' utilisation (or lack thereof) in Slovenia during the pandemic. In previous research, only the integration of TAM framework into the context of TOE has been explored. However, this study represents a unique attempt to combine three UTAUT constructs within TOE's T and O contexts and inserting bot inside the S and C contexts of SCP paradigm. Using IDS and other emerging e-commerce solutions in hospitality and tourism can be better understood by applying combined organisational and pure IS research rooted adoption frameworks. These approaches are not commonly utilised in hotel marketing research but can potentially provide valuable insights in the context of tourism. Therefore, my main contribution to the theory is demonstrating the imperative nature of merging two separate adoption frameworks into a single entity that can effectively explicate the usage behaviour within the unpredictable context of pandemic disruption.

Furthermore, also linking it to the logic of SCP paradigm to provide a needed macro-level perspective, with all these having clear implications for observing and evaluating the use of tourism technologies and e-commerce solutions in currently turbulent geopolitical situation. This also presents an opportunity for further exploration into whether the widely utilised IS methodologies created during periods of relative stability can still be unquestioningly employed in the current era of geopolitical volatility and uncertainty, or should the lens, as in this case, be extended.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 rests on similar theoretical underpinnings to Chapter 4, yet explores the role of environmental context's structure for the use (conduct) of DDs by the Italian hotels in a quantitative way. By combining innovative technique of web data scrapping to obtain the data of actual DD use from an established international niche DD platform and linking it to characteristic of the destinations (collected by the Italian official statistics) in which the individuals hotels are situated, the Chapter manages to be the first to explore how destination characteristics (structure) affect the use of DDs by the hotels (conduct) in terms of their intensity and discount levels they are offering. The findings provide novel insights by indicating a correlation between destination seasonality, economic reliance on tourism, local competition, and tourism demand with the volume and/or depth of discounts on hotel offers presented through daily deal websites. Chapter 5 empirically demonstrates and systematically outlines the relationship between localised destination characteristics and hotel discounting behaviour, thereby contributing novel insights to DDs knowledge base and the outcomes of their adoption and use, pricing, marketing, and broader tourism economics research.

6.3 Practical implications

As a whole, in terms of practical implications, my research has uncovered key obstacles that need to be addressed by DDs and their technological infrastructure providers through the pandemic. By overcoming these challenges through BM re-configuration and value proposition alignment, they can regain a prominent position within the hotels' IDS portfolio and contribute to future digital marketing and e-distribution development. Whether it is the era of post-pandemic recovery or the current period of uncertainties and unknown industry developments, there is a growing demand for technological integrations and automation. These advancements are necessary to alleviate the heavy manual workload caused by the changed market conditions and governmental regulations, which have led to a decline in the use of the DD, especially by the Slovenian hotels as evidenced in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Similarly, the findings offer guidance for both the DD managers to further develop the value proposition of their platforms and align them with the expectations of hoteliers, having benefits for their perception of DDs 'performance expectancy' and 'ease of use'. This will

lead to improved relationships, as well as contribute to re-adoption and long-term continued use of the DD channel.

Lastly, hotel managers may draw on my findings as guidance for effectively engaging in advance selling and implementing promotions that largely remain unnoticed by their loyal customer base. This approach allows them to preserve brand value and avoid undermining their price reference position, as would likely occur if similar discounts were offered through major IDSs, such as OTAs.

On a broader scale, understanding the usage of DDs also has implications for a wider sustainability discussion within tourism, as their strategic use has the potential to produce positive externalities or societal impacts. It can lead to better efficiency in hotels with only slightly increased emissions if they fill additional capacities in shoulder seasons. The efficient use of DDs can also prolong the season during which hotels operate, thus enhancing the quality of tourism employment and contributing to improved social sustainability of hotels and tourist destinations. From the consumer perspective, the effective use of DDs can lead to the ‘democratisation of luxury’, making upmarket hotels more accessible to tourists who might otherwise be unable to afford them and are pleased to experience such stays during shoulder seasons. Ultimately, destination marketers can also consider looking into options to co-design promotional campaigns with participating hotels and DD platforms in which they can split the costs along with the promotional benefits. Lastly, DD platform managers can benefit from the dissertation as it can provide them guidance on their needed BMI processes and BMI configuration alignments in order to improve their value proposition towards the hotels. Similarly, they benefit from the findings of the impact of destination characteristics on DD use in way that they understand hotels in which destinations they should target in order to obtain hotel partners that will use DDs more often and be willing to offer higher levels of discounts that appeal to their consumers.

6.4 Avenues for future research

Many avenues remain open for future scientific inquiry, as already exposed by the SLR conducted within Chapter 1. I present the future avenues of research divided into activities already in progress with my research collaborators and the activities that I consider suitable for consideration in the future.

Already in progress

The first and most obvious choice for future research is to look at the consumer side of the DD adoption, something that was not considered within this doctoral project. Similar theoretical models can explain the consumer adoption of IDS and thus the UTAUT variables are retained in this research in which I examine the adoption DDs for purchasing travel among the consumer in Northern Adriatic. The quantitative research utilises SEM PLS method to examine the psychological factors influencing consumers' intentions to book

leisure travel on DDs evaluating the extent to which perceived value and risk augment the explanatory capacity of the UTAUT model in this context. This approach addresses the identified theoretical gap and contextualises the socio-economic realities influencing travel behaviour in Europe, including the rising cost of living, evolving digital habits, and increased price sensitivity of consumers. The research is about to be submitted for publication.

Second clear avenue is to also attempt quantifying the models that have been developed qualitatively in the process of preparation of this dissertation. Therefore, my colleagues and I are conducting a mixed-methods study on managerial DD adoption in Croatia, where data collected within the interviews conducted for this doctoral project is enriched with newly conducted interviews. The outcomes of the combined qualitative inquiry served us to develop a tailored and contextualised questionnaire guided by TOE model. The study is in the late stage of quantitative data collection.

Third obvious research avenue is to further explore the database obtained by web scrapping of the international DD platform and after having established the link between the environmental ka destination characteristic of using the DDs in Italy, I am now aiming to look at the organisational characteristics of hotels and their impact on DD use across Europe. This way I am extending the geographical generalisability of my findings and seek to spot the whether the internationalisation and corporatisation of the hotel industry impacts on the hotel's DD usage patterns. This study is the phase of final conceptualisation with data already collected and waiting to be analysed.

Open for the future

Several avenues of research remain open for future exploration, and I invite other interested researchers to join the exploration of DDs.

Firstly, this research did not explore the DDs as a promotional marketing technique, and I invite future research to analyse to impacts of running DDs on their own channels in light of the effectiveness of their own e-marketing activities. A comparative study on running DDs across direct and 3rd party platforms would certainly be interesting and provide interesting implications for hotel marketing theory and practice.

Secondly, based on the findings of the Systematic Literature Review from Chapter 1, I can recommend the following:

- To explore the segmentation of DD consumers (e.g., bargain-hunters vs. loyal customers) to better understand varied motivations, usage patterns, and expectations. Future studies could examine psychological or socio-demographic factors that influence DD adoption and satisfaction.
- To investigate how DD use affects perceived service quality and guest satisfaction—particularly in high-end or prestige tourism contexts where social signalling matters

(Geerts & Masset, 2022). Explore why some consumers report diminished satisfaction (Cox, 2017) and how that affects reviews and repeat purchase intent.

- To study the impact of specific deal features (e.g., discount depth, expiry urgency, fine print) on consumer decision-making, using frameworks like prospect theory or mental accounting (Liang et al., 2012) in current business climate.
- To examine the short- and long-term ROI of DD campaigns for hotels. Compare performance metrics (occupancy, yield, retention) between DD-acquired customers and standard IDS channels such as OTAs (Chen et al., 2024), or against the DDs run on the hotels' own websites.

Thirdly, based on the BMI driven Chapter 2, I recommend exploring the following:

- To conduct comparative studies of generic vs. niche DD platforms, examining differences in consumer profiles, booking behaviour, business perception, and profitability.
- To conduct a follow-up study on the evolvement of the transitional BM and also collect the perspective of customers and their perceptions of value towards the post-pandemic BM configuration.
- To examine the role of website features (e.g., transparency, reviews, urgency cues, branded hotel selection) in shaping trust and conversion among DD consumers in current stage of e-commerce landscape.

Fourthly, based on Chapter 3, I would recommend an attempt at measuring DD continuance in a quantitative way, by surveying the attitudes of hotel managers with regards to DDs on a yearly basis over a longer period of time. This would enable real-world insight into the success of DD ongoing BMI and its relevance among the IDSs. Similar results could be obtained by analysing the longitudinal channel manager data of a selected hotel group.

Fifthly, based on Chapter 4, I suggest a quantification of the proposed model, in which the outlined factor's impact on DD managerial use would be tested by the use PLS SEM methodologies.

Lastly, based on Chapter 5, I recommend using a similar dataset to attempt to profile characteristics of a typical DD user hotel and develop a typology of DD hotel partners based on their DD use pattern.

Actually, DDs present infinite possibilities for future research, but the developed frameworks presented in this dissertation and tested in a DD context can also provide a solid base for evaluating numerous other novel IDS and e-commerce solutions that the future development will bring.

6.5 Limitations

The initial limitation lies in the fact that, throughout this dissertation, DDs are treated as an independent IDS. When referring to DDs, I refer to the companies that operate as a platform specialised in offering DDs. This means that my findings relate to managerial adoption of DDs as a third-party distribution channel, an intermediary and not as an adoption of a promotional e-marketing technique of offering DDs across hotel's own website or participating in DD campaigns occasionally offered by the OTAs. This decision, which is driven personally and due to the relevance of such platforms for the industry, makes my findings less generalizable in the broader context of marketing and promotional academic and trade literature, yet more in line with hotel e-distribution reality (where third-party channels provide much more significant sales volumes to hotels' individual channels) and previous research on DDs within the tourism domain (see Chapter 2).

Further, my primarily qualitative approach rooted in the interpretative paradigm certainly opens areas for concern about the objectivity and generalizability of my findings. In order to truly hear about first-hand experience with the adoption and use of DDs, I have intentionally set the criterion that I only sampled among the hotel managers who have at least once used DDs. This contributed to the limitation that I completely omitted the perspective of DD sceptics, who formed negative Pre-usage beliefs about DDs and never attempted to try them out. Such hotel managers are rare, and surveying them could provide additional insights that, in this case, remain unexplored. The last stage of research, Chapter 5, which relies on data scrapping and quantitative analysis adds a layer of objectivity and in an innovative way empirically tests the concepts and relationships developed qualitatively in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, I fully acknowledge that my findings are specific to the time and context of individual studies and may not be broadly applicable. However, I have used different lenses and context, as well as different case countries to be able to provide data generalizable enough for application in this part of Europe and the surrounding countries. I intentionally followed different schools and methods of qualitative research. I applied different theoretical lenses to the data and used a combination of classic and novel, computer-assisted data collection and analysis methods when interpreting the data. The involvement of various co-researchers involved in Chapter 4 and 5 helped to objectify my findings and balanced the lead author's positionality. As an academically sound practitioner with hands-on experience in the hotel digital distribution domain, the lead author contributed to interpreting and co-constructing the pragmatic nature of my inquiry and interpretation.

6.6 Final remarks

To summarise this discussion, this dissertation offers a valuable contribution to hotel e-distribution research and IS technology adoption and continuance, both in theory and practice. First and foremost, this study fills a significant void in the understanding of DD BM with the conceptualisation of niche and generic DDs. The analysis portrays the evolution

and advancement of scholarly comprehension of the DDs channel. It also reveals how the processes of BMI have triggered as a consequence of the pandemic and to my best knowledge provides the first piece of research dedicated to the crisis response of an IDS, making a valuable contribution to the fields of crisis management and innovation research. In addition, this study contributes to the ongoing academic discussion on tourism distribution by incorporating theories and models from IS research, which can effectively address the impact of technological advancements on hotel e-distribution.

Further, this dissertation makes a significant contribution to theory by utilising the combination of UTAUT and 2-stage IS continuance framework to explain the adoption of DD from the supply-side perspective. Additionally, this research delves into the intricacies of UTAUT variables and their factors in the adoption and continued use of DD IDS. It also empirically investigates whether the variables for adoption and continuance align. These variables also possess the potential to forecast the adoption and consequent utilisation of future IDS brought about by technological advancements. The empirical data showed that it is also essential to address the potential concerns related to the possible disruptions that may arise from adopting this technology. This signifies a novel contextual enhancement of the UTAUT model with the integration of Lai's (2011) disturbance concerns (DC). This venture has not been previously explored in hospitality and tourism. By examining disturbance concerns, this research delves into the unmapped territory of the consequences of DD adoption and its potential conflicts with other IDS in the hotel e-distribution. Last, integrating the COVID-19 pandemic into the technology use and adoption models and empirically investigating the explanatory power of models developed by the combinations of different existing adoption models while linking them to the macro-economic lens of SCP paradigm that have previously not been used together, represents a contextual upgrade to both tourism, economics and IS literature.

This dissertation as a whole successfully explored the adoption and continuance of DD IDS, showcasing the staying power of DDs, which, albeit not at their pre-pandemic peak, are still a relevant IDS for hotels in 2025. It produced substantial longitudinal empirical evidence and completely fulfilled 4 out of its five research objectives through which it progressed the practical and academic understanding of DD IDS in tourism through the periods of normal, pandemic and "new normal" times. Ultimately, the most current research findings on the long-term effects of price promotions in hospitality (Sharma et al., 2023) showcase reference-price erosion as one of the key dangers for hotel profitability. This lets assuming that knowing how to handle a separate, "hidden" promotional IDS such as DDs would be a strategically sound option for informed hotel managers instead of discounting on other more mainstream and visible channels in the near future, potentially leading to a further boost in DD adoption and continued use.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sample int. transcript

Intervju projekt - Claude-20240216_094121-Meeting Recording

0:03

I don't know.

0:03

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

0:04

Let me start at recording.

0:05

OK. I still agree to participate.

0:06

So thanks for participating,

0:09

We we, we said at the beginning that you have quite a long experience with our topic of today, but I would first like to ask you just to warm up and then I'll explain you the steps.

0:23

What are the first associations that pop into your mind when we talk about flash sales, daily deals or coupons, whatever you want to call them.

0:34

For me that would be, that would be how that would be actually the way how to fill our rooms in a very quick way when we need it.

0:46

So this is a quick fix for low occupancy I would say, OK.

0:51

So so the first association would be let's say low occupancy and need to fill the rooms.

0:56

Yes, that would be first thing for me, do it quickly.

1:00

We have low occupancy quickly, quickly because you can have quite a big boost in bookings if you use this kind of channel when you need it.

1:12

OK.

1:13

OK.

1:14

OK.

1:15

So now in the first part, we would stay in the present day, so in season 2023-2024, right?

1:24

And I would like to ask you, how did you use flash sales in or how do you use flash sales at the current time?

1:37

If you can describe me a bit, maybe the context, the the processes, just generally whatever comes to your mind.

1:45

Yes.

1:46

Well, as I said, as I said, we actually, me personally, I am also involved for quite a long time with this kind of let's say channel and I think it is a very good channel if you use it wisely.

2:05

This is not just the channel.

2:07

I would say a regular channel such as selling bookings, selling rooms through our reservation office or let's say some OTAs or even booking engine etcetera.

2:22

This is something that it's used when we need it as I said just to fill empty rooms during off peak periods and this is the way how we use it to use it in a very last minute when we see let's say one or two weeks before first arrival that we have two low occupancy.

2:44

We say, OK, do this daily deal or flash sale and wisely you have to have packages for certain days, for certain room types, certain board services and certain special conditions of course for certain hotels.

3:05

So it has to be done very wisely and this is how it is used because as I said, it cannot be considered as a regular channel.

3:15

This is very, very important.

3:16

So it's still used and I see also it is used widely especially in Slovenia and and Croatia in these two markets.

3:26

And I think that this is a a common way how to to do to sell the rooms, But as I say only when you need it.

3:37

This is very important to highlight, OK.

3:39

Would you say this only when you need it?

3:42

Is mostly I mean in low season or it also happens in summer?

3:50

This is I would say in 95% of all these deals related to off peak and offseason periods and in during the high season only If you have some special issues for certain hotels or if the market goes down such as which

can happen of course sometimes especially maybe maybe in July, beginning of July, which is usually of the most challenging period in the high season.

4:28

Then sometimes it can be used during high season for a very short period of time just to boost little bit occupancy, little bit more let's say to make a base bookings up to certain percentage.

4:44

And then when you say, OK, I feel now much more, I feel now better with this level of occupancy now shut down this campaign and then fill the rooms with other regular higher pricing channels.

4:59

Oh, OK.

5:00

So so like this base covering the base is really important, right?

5:05

Yes, yes.

5:06

What, what would that be just approximately?

5:09

I know it's difficult to say what would that be in percent of total capacity, What what is this base that well, this is, it all depends I would say on the destination, on the hotel, etcetera.

5:25

But you know it, it's difficult to mention a certain percentage.

5:32

It really depends upon expectations for certain periods, midweek days, weekends, et cetera.

5:39

I can say 20%.

5:42

I can say 30% or something like that would be a minimum to have hotel operating bare minimum for certain days.

5:54

Of course, this is not.

5:56

Yeah.

5:56

Yeah.

5:57

Yeah, we cannot have 5:00 rooms in a booking or something.

6:01

That would be a panic attack.

6:04

But this is something let's say maybe better to say these deals, daily deals, splash sales, these campaigns are not those out of which we expect that we will have this base bookings.

6:24

Base bookings come mostly from the leisure group segments or some mice businesses etcetera.

6:30

This is what is considered the base booking to have a volume.

6:34

And then this is a add on on that, OK.

6:36

We are not covering base bookings with flash tails.

6:39

Just to understand we would not even open this hotel if we would count only on flash deals.

6:45

Mm hmm.

6:47

So this is not for covering the base bookings, just to add on, on the base bookings, if I explained that better.

6:54

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

6:55

OK.

6:56

So, so basically to feel, let's say, to cover the cost with leisure sales plus flash sales, let's say.

7:02

And then you start yielding and making profit on yes, yes, let's say yes, leisure groups, yeah, group business mostly group or business groups.

7:13

But group business is a is a base and then add on is flash sales which also brings certain high volumes and altogether is a base booking.

7:23

And after that of course there are individuals who pay the highest prices and then hopefully until 100% occupancy.

7:37

OK.

7:37

To get, Yeah, yeah, yeah to yeah go.

7:40

OK.

7:41

So would you say that the for individual clients, right and public sales, let's say the flash sales are usually the channel that is the has the lowest price in your company or in the companies you worked for in the past, this is.

8:01

Yes, Usually it is the truth.

8:04

Yes.

8:05

OK.

8:05

Publicly, let's say available rates, which can be, let's say, booked online.

8:13

Yeah, that in the majority of situations has to be the lowest price.

8:21

OK, OK.

8:23

Do you have any tricks how basically not to go too low?

8:27

Did you learn anything about what functions in flash sales or how you can negotiate with these providers not to give so much discount as they usually require?

8:39

Well, this is a actually good question to explain the way how the rates are created because the influence on the rates and the offer and everything is actually completely on the hotel, on the property.

8:58

And I would say from the beginning when this flash sale model has started, there is a significant change from that time because it was normal then to have a 3040 or 50% of discount on the regular rates.

9:19

But this is something I would say only in the past in the beginning and now the the rates are not that significantly different from the usual regular channels.

9:32

There is of course a discount, but it's not 3040 or 50% and this is something that is completely up on the hotel and this kind of partners, let's say platforms.

9:51

They of course accept the way the hoteliers do their business.

9:56

And yes, there is a discount for sure it has to be, but not 50% or something like that.

10:03

What was normal in the past and that was the problem.

10:07

This is a way of selling rooms, way of promotion, way of having some better conditions for the client and to push some marketing more to the clients to push certain periods but not giving 50%.

10:27

I don't think that there is anywhere this kind of percent any longer that would be that would not be feasible for the for anyone in my opinion.

10:36

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

10:37

Because at the end you just keep on like basically running on minus know if you put 50% of discount plus 20% Commission.

10:45

How is it with Commission?

10:46

Are they also a bit more flexible nowadays or is it still, I mean when I still used to work in the industry, it was 20% right with all these flesh.

10:55

Yeah, yes.

10:57

Well, the, the Commission says something really I would say depending on the hotel as I understood also talking now generally about how this Commission structure works, it really is very different.

11:15

You know, it's not the same for a big hotel chain As for a single hotel.

11:20

It's not the same if you have a bigger volumes with some partners or lower volumes.

11:26

This is really something which depends as I understood.

11:31

OK, OK.

11:33

Yeah.

11:34

What I wanted to ask you also like there are basically two different types of flash sales, right?

11:40

I mean, it's one that is like classical Groupon model, let's say in our cases, or Anna Nadan, which sells everything from underwear to condoms and to some hotels, right?

11:55

And then there is this specialized niche, more international flash, say, like Secret Escapes or Voyage Preview, let's say more upmarket websites.

12:08

How do you treat them?

12:09

Do you treat them equally or there are different goals or and different?

12:15

Let's say you choose particularly which hotel to put on which of this website.

12:22

Yes, we usually already know.

12:24

Well, I I also have to say generally not not just talking about the company I, I work.

12:30

It's important just to to highlight because this is for the whole hotel business, I believe the same way you know that certain hotels are better promoted or or it is a better chance the to gain higher volumes on certain channels.

12:48

It's not the same as you said on the Internet done one hotel is going better than on Secret escapes because they're covering different markets, different markets have different let's say expectations of a certain hotel or category of a hotel etcetera.

13:10

So we already know which hotel would be better on certain channel and then we say of course put this hotel on certainly I because last five times it it had, they had great, great success because obviously there a base of clients actually prefer this kind of a hotel which is great.

13:38

So during many, let's say times that we tried certain hotels, now we're ready for for sure know which hotel goes better where and also they have some different promotional types of campaigns.

13:57

We know how Secret Escapes does their promotional campaigns, for example they have sometimes big campaign which will last for two weeks.

14:08

They will target UK market, German market and they need a certain volume of rooms for the whole year, not only for a certain periods because they will not take it.

14:18

You have to give them whole year, but in the high season only one room.

14:22

So you know, but they need to have continuity for this kind of campaign because they they will invest 50 or €100,000 for the big campaigns and you have to give them more capacity of course.

14:35

So they have different ways how they operate different models and we use them depending on our needs.

14:43

So it is not a unified way how they operate.

14:47
OK.

14:47
So so basically they they request certain allotment, right.

14:50
And then you give just probably I assume very small discount, right?

14:55
And then when there is this special campaigns, you can go down with the price or they go down, they decide how to adjust prices or it's still you, they give a recommendation that will be like that.

15:09
If you don't give minimum this kind of percent then the campaign will not be successful.

15:14
So it's you know, they know what would be a good price, which would have good production in the end.

15:24
So they have a vast experience and of course we, we say, OK, we can give you for this and this hotel this kind of percentage, but unfortunately for this we cannot.

15:36
So please exclude it from the campaign.

15:39
This is how it usually works.

15:42
OK, Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, cool.

15:46
Makes sense to me.

15:47
Then I wanted to ask you, do you have any specific, let's say measures that you look at once the campaign is finished with certain flash sale to say OK, this was successful, this was not successful.

16:02
What, what are the numbers you're looking at or KPIs?

16:05
Yeah, this is now we the KPI that we can look is actually usually comparison with the last year with the similar campaign that we had.

16:18
This is how we usually do it.

16:24
We can say, OK, last year for the Hotel X we sold the 100 coupons and this year only 50.

16:33
This was not successful campaign this year did we have availability the same?

16:39

Did we have maybe too higher price this year?

16:44

But usually with the last year's numbers, this is the best we can UH.

16:49

And of course uh, when we UH publish certain campaign UH we already say OK, it would be great to have at least UH 10% higher than last year.

17:01

So everything is with the last year.

17:03

Now when you ask me, I'm thinking out loud, but this is the way when we say, yes, it was successful or not.

17:11

But you know as the rates go substantially higher each year due to all this situation with inflation and everything, the rates must go also up.

17:23

But we are always very careful not to push too much our luck.

17:27

And so we know sometimes we push too much and then we end up with the lower numbers than last year.

17:36

But this is the way we have to play with the rates and and compare it to the last year's numbers.

17:44

This is the best we can.

17:46

OK.

17:47

So now, now the time start again, let's say normal, right, predictable.

17:51

This is a good.

17:52

Yeah.

17:55

What I wanted to ask you as well is, did you ever face any, let's say, conflicts, channel conflicts, I mean theoretical, we would call them channel conflict when some of other partners would complain because you gave better rates to flash sale or some client would kind of request the same rate that he sees on the coupon?

18:18

Well, mainly but rarely are those other partners, let's say more regular partners FIT or wholesale, however you call them today, allotment, that's it.

18:33

And usually they usually actually but very rare they say OK, you give this kind of price to them but you're not giving it to us.

18:45

What do you think how can I then sell on on the same market And then of course we give some other campaign or some other benefits to this kind of partners just to have a good collaboration with those partners.

19:00

So we end, we end up with some kind of good deal for them, for other other hotel.

19:07

But this is not happening very often really.

19:09

So maybe in the beginning it was 10 years ago chaotic with the guests and partners, but today it's really not that significant even to to have any problems with that.

19:22

OK.

19:23

So, So everyone kind of got to know these channels and knows how it functions.

19:28

It's there.

19:28

Yes, Yes, OK.

19:33

Throughout the years.

19:34

Did you figure out somehow what kind of package works best for flash sales or Yeah, we we already know it like that.

19:45

You know, I will not give you all my tricks, but yeah, yeah, but we really know what what goes well and what doesn't.

19:57

And we stick to this, let's say a good experiences and everything.

20:06

Everything that we learned during many years and it really does have a sense.

20:13

This market expects I would say that mainly the full package that you can give them as much as you can in the price in the package that they do not have to worry about any extra costs.

20:29

And really as much as you put in the package, it really goes goes better because they're usually more price sensitive.

20:38

So they do not want to have any surprises on the spot.

20:44

OK.

20:44

So, so you also mentioned guests are more price sensitive, right, that use this sort of channels.

20:52

Have you noticed a big difference between, let's say, the international flash channels such as Secret Escape Guests and the local hour, let's say Tsernoaya and Megabon guests?

21:04

Would you say there are two different types of guests?

21:08

Well, it really sometimes even depends for a certain hotels.

21:15

You know it depends hotel by hotel and I cannot make any general conclusion, but also I would say that these are little bit more sensitive guests to the price.

21:30

But usually since these are not let's say as I said thirty 4050% discounts or something like that selling for nothing.

21:38

These are pretty much regular guests, little bit more sensitive, but maybe as I understood for certain hotels they will not maybe spend that much on our card.

21:53

This is related to all those international or national.

21:59

Just this is maybe subjective opinion of some of my colleagues who work at the hotel that maybe they will not spend that much on our card, let's say like that this is general opinion.

22:12

Mm hmm.

22:14

OK.

22:14

All right.

22:15

Then we were talking creating the package.

22:18

You have experience, right?

22:20

You know what?

22:20

It works, what works best.

22:23

Who is usually involved in this process of preparing for a flash sale within the hotel within the company?

22:32

Let's say yes, if in my in my experience is only this channel, this chain level, let's say centralized way of doing business.

22:46

So we have now also centralized the sales department and sales department is in charge to create this kind of offers completely 100% for any of the hotels in the chain.

23:03

And in this team, pretty much depends It, it can be either reservation office manager, which is who is directly in charge to handle all those reservations to track all those lists and payment and everything, but always with the revenue manager and director of of sales.

23:32

And there is no offer that can go out without approval of the revenue management and director of sales.

23:39

OK.

23:40

So it's but the board, let's say, does not intervene where to kind of no, no, no.

23:46

The GMs of the hotels also have nothing to say on the chain level experience that I have.

23:52

No, no.

23:53

OK.

23:55

OK, 'cause this is also something that it's different in different countries, in different hotels.

24:01

Yeah, that that's why I'm kind of trying.

24:04

You can't just match information.

24:06

Yeah.

24:06

Yeah.

24:07
OK.

24:08
So if you would need to say what are the biggest problems with flash sales, what would you like to change in the flash sales?

24:15
What, what bothers you the most, let's say very personal.

24:18
Again, what would be as now I'm thinking because this is something that in many years we tackled with all these kind of issues that have bothered us in the past, maybe maybe what is left to be covered for certain partners not for all.

24:47
Is this operational, let's say strain or how would you say that operational vast operational process of handling this kind of reservations.

25:03
Maybe that would be one of the things because you know when hundreds of guests are calling to check do we have availability, then again make a booking, then again have certain questions, everything, phone mail, phone mail, yeah, this is in certain periods can be a high influx of of operational processes which then sometimes doesn't allow too much time to handle, let's say regular guests who pay higher.

25:38
And but some of the partners they did investments in the digitalisation and informatisation of these processes.

25:51
So the the guests can also book online and then we get these bookings directly into our system which is a great way but not all.

26:00
They still stick to some let's say old fashioned way.

26:04
But that would help a lot when when most of them would be digitalized maximally and the bookings go online completely and then what else could be to be improved of pretty much Now I'm thinking we really in so many years we polished so many things and now we really use this kind of channels completely as in the way we want it.

26:39
So and we have good, good partnership relations with those few let's say and because I would not highlight for the moment anything else beside this operational handling things for the moment.

26:58
So, so in your way, you would like to be connected to them VI Channel Manager as much as possible.

27:04
As much as possible, yes.

27:06
So that the guest can go to the platform of the partner and then check a date and make booking directly for availability is there.

27:16

And of course, the hotel has to manage the availability in their system.

27:22

And then we would avoid many, many unnecessary calls.

27:26

Yeah.

27:26

And emails.

27:28

OK, All clear.

27:32

All right.

27:33

I'm just thinking what we haven't covered yet, yet.

27:39

I haven't asked you really how is it with competitors?

27:45

Do they play any role in your decision?

27:48

If you see, OK, the competitors are there, so we choose we should be there as well or we should take another channel not to be on the same one.

27:57

What is this logic behind?

28:00

Well, I'm happy when the competitors are there and we are not because we don't need it.

28:05

This is good and then but of course to have analysis what competition does before we make some promotion deal.

28:22

This is very important because we analyse firstly all, let's say hotels which we consider our competitors and OK, five star hotels loan is there for the same.

28:39

They have price of €300.

28:42

Yeah, OK.

28:43

We have to now consider this rate and see does it fit with our freight policies.

28:50

So we do, I think everyone does this analysis of the competition because you cannot have in the same time 2-5 star hotels let's say like that or four-star doesn't matter, similar destination and that we are 30% more expensive then the offer would not be any feasible or there will be no production.

29:18

So we will say better, OK, we cannot go with that low the competitor, we will not go another way how to sell these rooms.

29:27

So we we do this kind of analysis.

29:32

OK, I just removed my camera cuz my Internet is a bit unstable so that we have at least the voice.

29:38

Very.

29:39

Yeah, no problem.

29:40

It's not hiding.

29:40

I'm not hiding.

29:41

Yeah.

29:43

Did you hear me or did you hear my *** heard you?

29:46

It was just like I saw that it's a bit getting stuck.

29:50

So I said OK, let's just remove this, OK.

29:54

So another aspect, who would be your first reference?

30:01

For example, if you are unsure, should I do the flash sale?

30:05

Is it the right one?

30:06

Is this the right channel?

30:08

Who would have an impact on your decision?

30:10

Would this be your colleagues within the company?

30:13

Outside the company?

30:15

Someone Let's say that you consider your mentor who you worked with at the beginning of the career.

30:21

Who would be, let's say the person you would gather information from?

30:27

Usually it is always upon myself.

30:31

I yeah, I don't don't consult with anyone about this due to so many years of experience in this field.

30:43

This is really something that myself and my in my career, one or two people which is in my team, we really do it by ourselves and decide whether this is good for us or not.

31:00

And of course sometimes before we want to go with certain hotel, we rather call those partners and say you know we have this kind of hotel for this.

31:12

What do you think?

31:14

Would it be good promotion?

31:18

Would we sell something?

31:19

What do you say?

31:20

Still we consult maybe only with those partners who have also vast experience, but the main decision is upon ourselves here.

31:31

So this is it.

31:33

OK.

31:34

So it's also like you said this collaboration with flash sales throughout the years has been good.

31:41

If we compare this like sort of relationship you have with flash sales, are they different from the ones you have with OTAs in certain way?

31:52

Well, this is completely, yes, it is different of course because they are, they have different way of doing business completely and what what we really do, we hope we work with those partners who really fit our business models and which are good for our business.

32:15

But yes, there is a different way how they operate.

32:18

So there is different approach and everything and different campaigns, different way of doing bookings, promotions, everything is quite different.

32:32

OK.

32:34

Now the last set of questions for the present and then we'll jump into the future and then we'll go to the past.

32:41

OK.

32:41

So what would you say?

32:43

I mean, I don't need the concrete specific number, but generally just an estimate how much of your, let's say capacity throughout the year gets sold through different flash sale channels.

32:58

Would this be let's say less than 5%, five to 10 to 20, just let's say an estimate.

33:04

I know it's different for a specific hotel, but if you have general, I would like to say yes, generally what I'm also not talking about the company that they work just in general what I know from the market and from everywhere that I know from colleagues etcetera, this is always less than 5%, eight and that that would be for sure.

33:31

OK.

33:31

So, so small, small amount let's say, yeah.

33:35

OK.

33:36

OK.

33:37

All right.

33:38

And if we look at the future, the season is coming, right.

33:42

Will anything change in your use of flash sales in the let's say near future that you can predict or well I don't think so for the near future that anything would change in a in a some let's say quite different way than we operate now in my opinion.

34:13

So it keep it's it's stable a regular yes, let's say yes, I would say it's quite stable.

34:20

OK, OK, good.

34:24

OK.

34:24

So let's now travel back into the past now to the near past to the COVID.

34:32

And there we have some sort of a phenomenon, right.

34:36

I mean what the theory says is that this sort of channels should be performing extraordinary well in crisis times.

34:45

But then we are coming to the situation where Slovenia and Croatia where at the are at the center of Europe, right.

34:52

And basically had very good seasons during the COVID years and with the prices going up instead of going down like it's usual in the crisis.

35:03

So.

35:03

So I I want to ask you, was there a need to use flash sales in this COVID years with all these free cancellation possibilities and so on, right where you can't, couldn't really use the essence of flash sale, which is you prepare your stay and it's basically considered a salt room, right.

35:27

Yes, by during the COVID.

35:32

It also of course depends on the hotel by hotel basis because it's not the same if you operate a hotel let's say during the whole year for example, and not only during the high season, because if you operate the whole year it's more difficult to sell rooms in the pre and the postseason.

35:58

And then in these periods of course in a certain days you have to have this kind of booking boosters such as the flash sales.

36:10

So and the second thing is that you usually do these campaigns in the last minute for a short term arrivals.

36:19

So the guest is pretty much confident that if he books today and he wants to have his arrival in next 7 or 10

days, he's pretty much confident that this will happen and they book it without any let's say consideration that he may be lose his money in the case that he doesn't come etcetera.

36:47

This is everything short term.

36:49

So the guests are pretty much confident that they will come, the majority of them.

36:55

It's not that they will book a coupon now or in the for the stay in September at least this is not according to my experience that it is done in that way, in this way of in this kind of channel.

37:14

So I think during the COVID time or no or outside this time, it is a good way to push last minute bookings.

37:25

And with increased rates of course then the inflation and everything also was related and included in the rates for the flesh.

37:37

This is of course clear.

37:41

Yeah, yeah, yeah, 'cause idea of some hotels was that during COVID they have much less staff.

37:48

I mean, I'm just like now discussing with you if this was also the case in Croatia or this is not, they had less staff.

37:54

So they just went for the highest possibles AD Rs right, and not run the hotels at full capacity.

38:02

So they eliminated flash sales.

38:04

So it didn't happen in Croatia as much as well I yes, I I I as I said it really depends on the way how the hotel operates.

38:17

If they operate for the high season only and or at least five or six months for example, then they want to push in this high need.

38:28

High occupancy periods, better rates of course, but if you operate whole year you have to have this kind of bookings to cover the base costs to have some groups as I said in the beginning.

38:45

So and everything depends how you create your rates.

38:50

And this is very important because you cannot have any campaign, even this or any other which which has, which could have an impact on the feasibility or actually on the break even point or something like that, because you have to do carefully the rates.

39:16
Yeah.

39:16
So you cannot have any campaign, not even this which will put you into minuses.

39:22
This is not good.

39:24
OK.

39:25
OK, I'll explained all clear.

39:28
OK.

39:28
And now some we covered COVID basically what was significant right during this.

39:36
If we go even further back to the times where flash sales became popular.

39:41
So I think it's 2011, 12 and onwards, right after during this big, the biggest financial crisis we had in our adult lives, right, that we really remember.

39:56
Do you remember the situation?

39:58
I know it's quite a while ago, right when you first encountered them and what was your opinion before getting to know them?

40:08
It was, yes.

40:09
It it was a no.

40:11
So I said no, we will not work that with that.

40:14
I was much younger, but I was very negative and me and my team and everyone and my supervisors, directors, everyone, board, whoever was then.

40:26
I know, I remember it was very negative.

40:29
It, it was a big fight with this.

40:34

I remembered it very well.

40:35

You know we will not sell our rooms with a 50% discount, this is crazy, etcetera.

40:44

But then slowly after that we said, OK, we will, we will start with this, we will explore this market.

40:52

But then in a very short period after that, today those partners said, OK, we do not any longer need this high discounts because as I remember they said you have to have 50% or 40% discount.

41:10

Then they compare their website and they compare the, the, the, the, the offer that we gave them and if it's not 4 to 50%, they would not accept it.

41:21

That was the issue.

41:22

And then later on, I believe also hoteliers helped a lot, those kind of partners because now it's not obligation to have this kind of discount.

41:34

You just call it a super price and you give some discount.

41:38

It depends on the offer and everything.

41:41

But for sure there is a discount, but it's not 50%.

41:46

And this is how this evolved.

41:49

But the first beginning was very, very rough because the conditions from the partners was very, very strict.

41:56

Mm hmm.

41:56

Mm hmm.

41:58

And at that time when this was all new, right?

42:01

Who was the point of information for you again in the team or came from somewhere outside, if you can recall?

42:12

I know it's.

42:13
I recall it.

42:14
Yeah.

42:14
Yeah.

42:14
I had one director.

42:16
My director, who I believe then talked to some other hotel years from the past, bigger hotel chains probably, who consulted together, maybe something like that.

42:30
As I recall it, I was working there really following orders and I I remember just in my head something like that that my director had communication with someone consulting from other hotelier something like that.

42:48
OK, OK, no, that's fine.

42:50
That's perfectly, let's say good, good answer.

42:56
What I also wanted to ask at the beginning, right at this very beginning of the flash sales, what was then then you say, OK, you consulted, you gathered information, the discounts went down.

43:08
What was then the thing that actually make convinced you that this is a good way of selling higher volumes bookings in a short period of time for periods which we need.

43:24
So this was then no brainer a lot of bookings and and really when we when you need it.

43:32
So it's like a dream, you know.

43:34
Yeah.

43:35
OK.

43:35
So quick easy fix to the problem, right.

43:38
Yeah, Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

43:42
And in terms of marketing, I mean there is some sort of contrasting views, right.

43:50

If the flash sales are good for marketing, they boost your visibility, right.

43:57

They expose you to some new clients audiences, but at the same time they communicate that you're in the need, right, Which is not something like hotel managers like to communicate.

44:12

How would you say their market is their marketing appeal to use them or you would say you just forget about marketing, the good, the bad and you just go for the volume.

44:25

Yes.

44:27

Well, as I say, this is.

44:30

Yeah, a good question.

44:32

But there is no doubt that there is a marketing not only for the hotel but also for the whole destination.

44:40

So this kind of channels as I understood really invest a lot in marketing for particular campaigns but also for the destination.

44:52

And maybe this guest will come this time through the flash tails channel and then during the high season or or post season or any other period will come directly booking through our website or because he likes now this destination a lot.

45:10

And so the impact of marketing is for sure there.

45:15

And yes, you maybe sometimes someone would will not like this, but then it is always a question, OK, what can you do else to make this kind of bookings with your own marketing efforts.

45:29

So this is for all those who are negative, they can really then create their own strategies, invest money and substitute this kind of business for these periods when you need it with other campaigns.

45:45

So yes, who is a lot, who has a lot of creativity and resources can do this of course, and it should do this.

45:54

Always try to invest own money and own creativity to to push sales in the need periods.

46:02

Why not?

46:05

And would you say marketing wise, they offer like a good value?

46:08

I mean, it's no risk, right?

46:09

If you don't sell, you don't spend.

46:12

Yeah.

46:13

Yes, this is, this is a perfect way, the same as the OTAs you pay them for the booking which is which happened.

46:22

So this is really the best way that you can have some business generated.

46:32

Yeah, marketing wise, maybe budget wise, where does the budget for discounting, let's say on flash sales come from?

46:44

Is this like taken from the marketing budget or internally?

46:48

No, it's just your price and Commission Commission like a Commission.

46:53

OK.

46:54

So you say, OK, you calculate, you treat it like the discount plus the Commission, you pay, you sum it up and this is considered.

47:00

Yes.

47:01

And you haven't really plans, let's say Commission levels that you should not surpass.

47:06

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

47:08

This is very strict in my experience.

47:12

I'm always very personally cost oriented, So for me it's very important to have a full control of the costs.

47:21

Mm hmm.

47:22

So this is the biggest, let's say the biggest entry barrier.

47:28

So yes.

47:29

Yeah.

47:31
Yes.

47:31
OK.

47:33
OK.

47:33
So I think we covered pretty much, uh huh, Everything.

47:38
So, Yellena, if you're here, you can stop the recorder.

47:43
Yes, I'm here.

47:46
OK, so I think.

Appendix 2: Nvivo file classification sheet

Name	Country	Position	Years of experience	Hotel characteristic	Organisation
Amerigo	IT	Consultant	10-20	Resort	National...
Angelo	SI	Owner	10-20	Resort	Indepen...
Audrey	HU	Director...	20-30	Boutique	National...
Babette	SI	Director...	10-20	Resort	Internati...
Caro	IT	GM	20-30	Boutique...	Indepen...
Cassie	HU	Director...	20-30	Boutique...	Internati...
Christiano	AT	Director...	10-20	Boutique	National...
Claude	HR	Director...	5-10	Resort	National...
Edith	HU	Director...	20-30	Business	Regional...
Emilio	HR	Director...	10-20	Resort	National...
Erna	SI	Assistant...	5-10	Resort	Internati...
Francis	IT	Director...	10-20	Resort	Indepen...
Fred	IT	GM	20-30	Boutique	Indepen...
Geoffrey	HU	Consultant	10-20	Boutique	Indepen...
George	HU	GM	10-20	Business	Internati...
Gustave	HU	Director...	20-30	Business	Regional...
Isaac_1	HU	Head of...	10-20	Boutique	Indepen...

Interview Execution	Language of Interview	Interview length	Transcription method	Use of DDs in 2023...
Zoom	EN	28	Trint	Niche
in person	EN	20	manual	Niche &...
Zoom	EN	35	Trint	Niche
Zoom	SLO	38	manual	Niche
MS Teams	EN	55	MS Teams	Niche
Zoom	EN	47	Trint	Niche
Zoom	EN	26	Trint	Niche
MS Teams	EN	48	MS Teams	Niche &...
Zoom	EN	50	Trint	No
Zoom	CRO	22	manual	Generic
in person	EN	22	manual	Generic
Email	ITA	Email	-	Niche &...
MS Teams	EN	54	Trint	Niche
Zoom	EN	50	Trint	Niche &...
Zoom	EN	22	Trint	Niche
Whatsapp	EN	36	Trint	Niche
Skype	EN	45	Trint	Niche

Isaac_2	HU	Head of...	10-20	Boutique	Indepen...
Jade	SI	Director...	20-30	Boutique	Indepen...
Jane	AT	GM & Ch...	10-20	Classic I...	Regional...
Jessica	SI	Sales Ma...	10-20	Resort th...	Indepen...
Joe	SI	Reservati...	30-40	Resort th...	National...
Josie	SI	Director...	20-30	Resort th...	National...
Jules	HU	GM	Oct-20	Boutique	Indepen...
Karina	SI	Director...	Oct-20	Resort	National...
Kirsten	SI	Head of...	Oct-20	Resort th...	National...
Leona	SI	Director...	Oct-20	Resort	National...
Mae	SI	Director...	Oct-20	Resort th...	National...
Magda	HR	Director...	05-Oct	Resort	National...
Marcel	HR	E-Comm...	Oct-20	Resort	National...
Mareike	IT	Owner	20-30	Resort	National...
Max	IT	Owner	20-30	Boutique	Indepen...
Mick	AT	Director...	Oct-20	Business	Indepen...
Miles	SI	Director...	05-Oct	Resort	National...
Mya	HR	Director...	20-30	Resort	Internati...

No	5	5,0	city	Worldwid...	2022
No	4	4,5	lakeside	Country'...	2019
Yes	4-5	4,5	lakeside	Country'...	2023
No	4	3,5	countrysi...	Emergin...	2023
No	3-5	3,5	countrysi...	Country'...	2023
No	4	3,5	countrysi...	Country'...	2023
No	5	5,0	city	Worldwid...	2023
No	4	4,0	ski	Country'...	2023
No	4	4,0	countrysi...	Country'...	2023
No	3-5	4,5	country-,...	Country'...	2023
No	4	4,5	countrysi...	Country'...	2023
No	4	4,5	seaside	Emergin...	2019
Yes	4-5	4,5	seaside	Country'...	2023
No	4	4,5	seaside	Country'...	2023
No	4	4,0	seaside	Emergin...	2023
No	4	4,5	city	Worldwid...	2023
No	4-5	4,0	seaside	Country'...	2019
Yes	5	4,5	seaside	Country'...	2023

No	5	4,5	city	Worldwid...	2023
No	5	4,5	city	Worldwid...	2020
No	5	4,5	countrysi...	Country'...	2023
No	4	4,5	seaside	Country'...	2023
No	4	4,5	seaside	Country'...	2023
No	3-4	4,0	countrysi...	Emergin...	2023
No	3-5	4,5	seaside	Country'...	2024
No	4-5	4,0	seaside	Country'...	2023
Yes	5	4,5	seaside	Emergin...	2022
No	4	4,0	city	Worldwid...	2019
No	3-5	4,5	seaside	Country'...	2024
No	4-5	4,5	city	Worldwid...	2018
No	4	4,0	seaside	Country'...	2019
Yes	5	5,0	city	Worldwid...	2023

Zoom	EN	21	Trint	Niche
in person	SLO	26	manual	No
Zoom	EN	52	Trint	Niche
Zoom	EN	35	Trint	Generic
Zoom	SLO	18	manual	Generic
Zoom	EN	40	Trint	Niche
Email	EN	Email	-	Niche
Zoom	EN	31	Trint	Generic
Zoom	SLO	20	manual	Niche &...
in person	EN	25	manual	No
Zoom	EN	30	Trint	Niche &...
Skype	EN	27	manual	Niche
Zoom	EN	40	Trint	Generic
Zoom	EN	48	Trint	Niche
Zoom	EN	39	Trint	Niche &...
Zoom	SLO	38	manual	No
in person	EN	28	manual	Niche &...
Zoom	EN	27	Trint	Generic

Zoom	EN	39	Trint	Niche	
MS Teams	EN	36	MS Teams	No	
Zoom	EN	21	Trint	Niche	
Zoom	EN	28	Trint	Niche &...	
in person	SLO	27	manual	No	
Zoom	EN	39	Trint	Niche &...	
MS Teams	EN	37	MS Teams	Niche &...	
in person	SLO	22	manual	No	
Whatsapp	EN	48	Trint	Generic	
Skype	EN	35	manual	Niche	
MS Teams	EN	39	MS Teams	Niche &...	
in person	EN	35	manual	Niche &...	
Skype	EN	31	manual	Niche &...	
Email	EN	22	-	Niche	
Myra	AT	Director...	Oct-20	Classic I...	Internati...
Orlando	IT	GM	20-30	Boutique...	National...
Patrick	IT	GM	20-30	Boutique	Indepen...
Pearl	HR	GM	Oct-20	Boutique	Indepen...
Portia	SI	Director...	Oct-20	Boutique	National...
Roxanne	AT	Consultant	Oct-20	Boutique	Indepen...
Salomon	HR	Director...	20-30	Resort	Regional...
Seb	SI	Sales Ma...	20-30	Resort	National...
Steph	HR	Director...	Oct-20	Resort	Internati...
Steve	AT	E-Comm...	05-Oct	Business	Regional...
Sue	HR	Sales &...	20-30	Boutique	Indepen...
Terry	HU	Consultant	20-30	Boutique	Regional...
Tony	HR	E-Comm...	05-Oct	Resort	National...
Zac	HU	Revenue...	05-Oct	Boutique	Indepen...

Appendix 3: Leximancer ConceptCooccurrence

concept	x	y	weight	sales	rank	time	diff	need	people	market	company	year	after	during	renew	channel	discount	business	COVID	channels	period	attend	manager	everything	season	low	and	booking	start	nom	things	nom	website	half	best	usually	partners	probably	are	experience	change	marketing	coming	commission	money	star	comes	problem	important	identifying								
sales	0.038038303474405	0.289082803838774	517.999982439	3105	94	259	175	148	170	131	131	144	122	120	85	111	105	108	87	81	81	85	75	82	78	84	66	86	74	85	80	83	70	70	75	67	70	72	79	59	54	58	59	60	52	53	49	65	43	46	35	35						
fish	0.14162654087284	0.32222330344654	259.99998314659	964	965	96	57	30	40	50	70	31	40	34	41	39	28	33	36	33	40	41	19	23	25	39	23	34	14	17	22	26	16	23	33	25	20	16	29	20	24	17	6	6	11	21	16	7	10									
line	0.08173813915486	-0.04027003081615	259.99997912612	259	809	22	25	21	15	20	13	15	26	20	12	12	15	16	16	12	11	37	26	9	12	17	5	14	8	12	8	11	10	6	15	13	8	14	15	6	10	11	4	10	5	6	5	5	1									
different	-0.3707071719044	0.3373420629121	594.99999451190	175	53	279	12	14	13	18	19	6	12	11	10	12	19	5	10	7	21	7	3	8	11	7	2	4	7	5	7	8	7	3	1	4	5	3	7	8	2	6	4	4	5	3	1	2	7									
need	-0.03073040432565	-0.4541545175243	579.00005665339	148	57	25	12	259	11	18	18	13	11	9	8	10	12	7	16	14	6	8	10	3	6	11	13	14	3	7	12	9	10	3	4	3	7	3	7	1	8	5	7	3	7	1	1	6	3	3								
people	-0.388084335072556	-0.24865702467006	579.99998918626	170	30	21	14	11	270	14	16	7	12	13	7	10	7	12	6	6	4	6	5	5	6	17	4	10	10	5	6	3	8	10	10	11	4	6	6	6	4	7	18	4	11	3	5	4	4									
example	-0.15344674395957	-0.14575031623072	514.99999104553	131	40	15	13	15	14	201	20	13	15	6	6	6	7	3	5	9	7	4	11	9	6	7	4	9	4	9	4	9	11	7	4	4	8	2	2	5	3	7	3	4	2	1	2	3										
market	-0.31162802302306	0.055471707222256	507.99994625213	131	50	20	18	18	16	20	226	12	13	10	6	4	10	7	2	8	6	8	4	5	11	5	7	6	8	4	6	5	2	6	2	4	5	6	2	6	8	3	11	4	5	1	6	2	5	4								
company	-0.0767848465553	0.42886071830205	481.000005919	144	70	13	19	12	7	13	12	207	8	4	10	5	8	4	5	7	1	3	9	12	4	0	12	9	4	5	3	1	3	4	6	3	7	4	4	4	5	4	5	3	2	4	1	5	3									
year	0.1718017330844	-0.7180347941909	465.00001664254	122	31	15	6	11	13	15	13	8	221	13	7	6	2	6	5	7	7	10	8	3	12	6	4	2	3	8	9	3	7	2	16	5	2	2	2	4	7	1	7	8	4	5	0	5	2	1								
offer	0.14082346557124	-0.0810487487665	143.99994108716	120	31	26	12	9	12	15	13	17	116	4	3	3	6	13	3	5	8	11	2	2	9	6	6	2	4	4	3	8	11	12	5	6	6	5	3	4	1	4	3	12	2	3	2	1	2	1								
during	0.35434507518915	-0.2443201427278	414.99994662716	95	40	11	8	7	6	6	4	13	4	137	5	6	4	6	52	5	16	4	1	6	20	8	0	7	1	4	5	7	1	2	3	3	1	1	2	8	7	0	2	0	2	1	1	2	3									
renew	-0.0714378169915	-0.3016537159642	408.00000336021	111	34	12	10	10	6	4	10	7	3	5	200	10	3	6	3	4	4	12	5	4	6	5	1	4	5	6	5	1	6	15	2	3	5	1	6	3	4	2	9	4	2	5	0	2	9	1								
discount	-0.18050251574002	0.39703062964512	385.99998552067	108	39	15	16	7	12	6	7	8	2	6	4	3	139	4	1	1	14	2	6	35	2	4	2	6	4	3	5	4	2	7	0	2	5	9	3	4	2	7	3	2	2	1	3	2	1	3								
channel	0.3174723154733E-4	-0.29815918658402	348.000043524178	87	28	16	5	16	6	7	2	4	6	13	6	6	4	131	1	0	6	5	2	4	4	3	9	4	4	2	3	11	8	3	5	9	5	7	7	0	6	1	0	15	4	0	2	2	2	0								
business	0.0209084148732	-0.29110745328915	341.0000117587	91	30	16	10	14	6	3	8	5	5	3	8	3	12	1	173	8	4	4	6	1	2	3	7	1	4	5	4	1	3	3	4	5	12	3	1	4	4	1	10	5	3	2	6	1	3	0								
COVID	0.520788153732024	-0.081074877665	338.99998335966	81	30	12	7	6	4	5	6	7	5	52	2	5	1	0	142	1	14	6	1	8	5	3	1	6	1	0	8	1	0	8	1	0	2	1	4	1	4	9	0	6	2	2	0	2	4	3	2							
channels	0.0810063456403	0.118671384452498	337.00003345641	95	38	11	21	8	6	9	8	1	7	8	5	4	14	6	4	1	103	3	8	3	4	7	4	3	1	2	4	5	5	3	3	2	4	4	2	4	4	3	2	0	1	0	1	0	3	2	1							
period	0.01142058657184	-0.10804302664791	336.000011544463	75	30	37	7	10	5	8	4	3	10	11	16	2	4	2	5	4	14	3	117	4	4	10	4	2	3	3	3	1	1	4	4	2	6	4	3	4	2	6	4	3	4	2	0	3	1	2	0							
attend	0.34582075276394	0.085669752914529	335.0000644697144	92	40	26	3	5	7	5	9	8	2	4	3	5	6	2	6	6	4	2	1	6	6	4	1	3	1	3	1	3	129	9	0	1	2	5	1	4	2	1	2	0	1	2	7	3	2	7	4	2	0	0	1	2	0	1
manager	-0.4592388849478	0.11808144462354	327.00002632666	79	41	9	8	6	6	4	11	12	3	2	1	30	6	35	4	1	1	1	3	1	3	129	9	0	1	2	5	1	4	2	1	2	0	1	2	7	3	2	7	4	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1			
everything	-0.324257591819556	-0.77786872744602	322.000013007163	84	19	12	11	17	11	5	4	12	9	6	6	5	2	4	2	8	4	4	3	9	168	0	1	3	3	4	2	2	9	1	2	2	3	8	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	4	5	3	4	2	1	6						
season	0.345849146441894	-0.32636872720077	310.999986574005	86	25	7	13	4	9	7	0	6	6	20	1	6	4	4	3	5	7	10	2	0	121	29	5	4	3	6	1	6	3	3	0	3	2	4	2	1	3	3	2	4	2	0	1	1	1	5	4							
low	0.24516718303257	-0.303821075591796	302.000059124075	26	17	5	2	14	6	6	0	4	6	8	5	1	2	3	7	3	4	4	3	1	0	127	5	3	3	7	1	6	4	7	1	3	1	5	1	4	1	4	6	0	3	2	1	2	1	1	1							
deal	0.0258717215899	0.187402874735083	289.99998658655	74	39	14	4	10	7	8	12	2	2	0	4	6	6	9	1	1	3	2	1	5	5	86	4	6	0	1	5	9	8	4	1	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	0	3	1	0	1						
booking	-0.58078202044806	-0.1047820279683	289.99998565130	85	23	8	7	3	10	9	4	9	3	4	7	5	12	4	4	6	1	3	4	5	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	148	3	4	2	4	6	2	1	3	0	4	2	1	0	2	3	5	3	1	5	0					
start	0.027186907421786	0.077136680775853	271.999986715916	80	34	12	5	7	10	4	6	4	8	4	1	7	8	3	4	5	1	2	3	9	1	3	5	6	3	111	2	5	2	2	3	6	0	0	0	3	3	3	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	0	2						
rooms	-0.48404725884674	-0.47752558551657	271.999987758084	80	14	8	7	12	5	9	6	5	9	4	4	11	5	2	4	0	4	3	4	3	6	7	0	3	4	3	4	2	137	1	9	1	1	0	1	3	3	1	2	1	6	1	2	0	1	2	0							
things	-0.375283798073	-0.37796707179481	265.00008238916	70	17	11	8	9	6	4	5	3	3	5	6	7	4	3	4	8	5	8	2	4	1	1	1	2	5	1	1	2	5	1	138	3	0	1	3	5	2	1	6	2	10	0	7	2	2	1	1	2	6	3				
room	-0.16941831013677	-0.37814655764534	262.99999445378	70	22	10	3	10	3	9	2	1	7	8	7	15	4	2	11	1	5	3	2	1	2	6	5	4	2	9	3	107	0	3	1	0	1	3	2	1	3	2	4	4	3	1	2	3	1	3								
website	-0.17917935025107	0.0513237802921882	259.000030462118	75	26	6	7	3	8	11	6	3	2	1	2	3	7	8	3	0	3	1	2	2	3	4	9	6	2	1	0	0	101	2	3	2	3	4	5	0	0	2	4	4	3	1	2	3	1	3								
half	0.1584745488332	-0.17555861672776	257.000048522913	67	16	15	3	10	11	2	3	16	12	2	3	0	3	5	1	3	4	7	0	9	3	7	8	2	3	1	1	3	84	5	0	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	4	2	2	1	0	2										
best	0.237204688734968	0.07944651701146	250.0000545774796	76	23</																																																					

Appendix 4: Data retrieval additional explanation.

To collect hotel Niche Daily Deal (niche DD) practices, a data scraping tool was used. We provide additional information about the scraping tool and processes employed to supplement the explanation provided in the paper.

A custom-built tool was developed to scrape data from Verychic, a luxury hotel DD provider. Running on Linux Debian OS, the tool was coded in JavaScript and PHP (c. 1,000 lines) for data classification.

The tool ran once a day at 2 AM and parsed all relevant data. It works by firstly automatically logging into the target website and then executing predefined tasks. Initially, the scraping tool retrieved offers URL links, from which it read DOM elements, which enabled the determination of common classes. This way, the scraping tool obtained the relevant data of individual offers, such as URLs, offer names, start and end dates, discount size, original and reduced price, price types, provider names, star rating, address, city, country, longitude, latitude, number of rooms, and TripAdvisor IDs. The data was subsequently stored as raw, unstructured data in the form of objects within arrays.

Since the targeted website has used a traditional front-end and back-end structure, where the back-end provided data to the front-end via an API, this API has been utilised to retrieve structured data schematics, which eliminated the need for extensive HTML scraping.

Once the data was collected, it was processed and structured. The scraping tool used a JavaScript runtime library, Node.js, to handle the extraction and transfer of data into a MongoDB database, where it was stored in a semi-structured format. At scheduled intervals, a tool (written in PHP utilising the Symfony framework) retrieved records from MongoDB, grouped them by entities and attributes, and processed them into a fully structured format. This refined data was then stored in a MySQL database for further use.

Appendix 5: Study variable specification (source: authors)

Variable name	Description	Source
Tourism Typology	Identified mainly based on geographical (proximity to the sea, altitude, etc.) and anthropic (large urban municipalities) attributes. The identification of the prevailing tourist category is linked to the presence of minimum conditions regarding tourist overnight stays. 9 tourism categories were identified: A. Large Cities [10], B. Cultural Destinations [2], C. Lake Destinations [7], D. Mountain Destinations [4], E. Seaside Destinations [3], F. Spa Destinations [8] , G. Two or more tourism typologies [1], H. Municipality without a tourism category [9], I. Municipality without tourism (not considered for this study).	ISTAT
Tourism/Economic Reliance Index	Represents the economic variables that belong to the Italian Economic Activities Classification (ATECO) sectors related to tourism. These are based on the incidence of employment in the tourism and culture sectors, the added value per capita imputable to the tourism and culture sectors, and finally the location ratio of tourism and culture local units. Measured on a 1 (very low reliance) - 5 (very high reliance) scale based on quintiles distribution.	ISTAT
Tourism Seasonality	Coefficient of variation of total monthly overnight stays applying the standard deviation of monthly overnight stays/average*100. A higher value of the tourism seasonality Index corresponds to a concentration of tourist overnight stays in a certain period of the year (e.g., Rome has a value of 19,55 while Rimini has a value of 100,46).	Developed by the authors per single municipality using 5 years of monthly data (2015-2019) following ISTAT methodology.
Tourism pressure	Total overnight stays per inhabitant.	Developed by the authors per single municipality following ISTAT methodology.
Overnights per square km	Overnight amount of tourists per square kilometre. Total number of the year overnight tourists stays per square km in all types of accommodation (control variable).	ISTAT
Number of Four stars Hotels	Number of 4-star hotel establishments per single municipality (year 2019).	ISTAT
Number of Five stars Hotels	Number of 5-star hotel establishments per single municipality (year 2019).	ISTAT
Price	Final price of a daily deal offer.	Unique offers database
Discount	Discount rate of the daily deal offer.	Unique offers database

Appendix 6: Results of tests run

Section 1: Regression 1 – Number of daily deals per municipality

Table C.1 Multicollinearity, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test, regression 1

Two or more tourism typologies [1]	5.06	0.197546
Cultural Destinations [2]	5.99	0.166940
Seaside Destinations [3]	12.35	0.080994
Mountain Destinations [4]	5.94	0.168401
Lake destinations [7]	3.39	0.294779
Spa Destination [8]	2.54	0.393965
Municipality without a tourism category [9]	8.59	0.116416
1 Tourism economic index (very low reliance)	1.24	0.805809
2 Tourism economic index (low reliance)	1.59	0.627851
3 Tourism economic index (medium reliance)	1.54	0.648732
4 Tourism economic index (high reliance)	1.60	0.624093
Tourism_Seasonality	1.51	0.661160
Tourism_pressure	1.87	0.535517
Four_stars_Hotels	7.99	0.125193
Five_stars_Hotels	7.16	0.139754
Overnights per square km	1.35	0.740912
Discount	1.12	0.889238
Price	1.09	0.921283
Mean	4.00	

Figure C.1 Residual distribution – regression 1

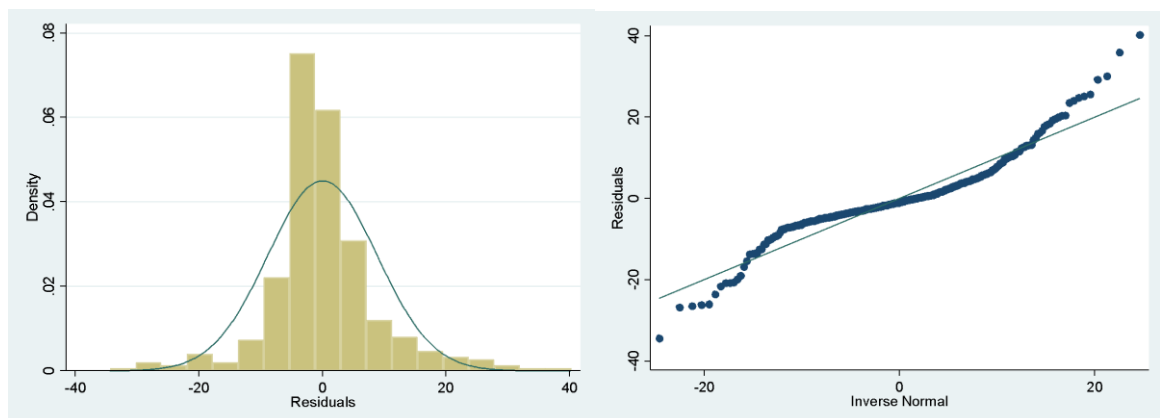


Table C. 2 Normality test -regression 1
Shapiro-Wilk W test for normal data

Variable	Obs	W	V	z	Prob>z
residuals	359	0.90975	22.556	7.377	0.00000

Note: the normal approximation to the sampling distribution of W' is valid for $4 \leq n \leq 2000$.

. sktest residuals

Skewness and kurtosis tests for normality

Variable	Obs	Pr(skewness)	Pr(kurtosis)	Joint test	
				Adj chi2(2)	Prob>chi2
residuals	359	0.0001	0.0000	40.41	0.0000

Table C.3 Heteroscedasticity Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for regression 1

Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity

Variable: Fitted values of Daily deals per municipality

H0: Constant variance

chi2(1) = 89.91

Prob > chi2 = 0.0000

Table C.4 Endogeneity test regression 1- Durbin-Wu-Hausman

Number of Daily deals

Tests of endogeneity

H0: Variables are exogenous

Durbin (score) chi2(1) = 16.1143 (p = 0.0001)

Wu-Hausman F(1,353) = 16.4935 (p = 0.0001)

Table C.5 Linear (robust residuals) and Quantile Regression 1 – Number of daily deals per municipality

	LRM	0.05	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.90
VARIABLES	DDs_per_municipality					
Two or more tourism typologies [1]	-11.406*** (7.783)	0.4296953	-9.464922***	-14.31371***	-37.2706***	-27.26413***
Cultural Destinations [2]	-12.487*** (7.683)	0.3810105	-9.778572***	-15.02114***	-36.2478***	-29.99513***
Seaside Destinations [3]	-14.786***	0.4046423	-9.813557***	-14.98416***	-36.79892***	-29.62394***

	(7.670)					
Mountain Destinations [4]	-11.813***	-0.0002152	-9.82687***	-13.96304***	-37.27223***	-28.3345***
	7.747					
Lake destinations [7]	-9.143**	0.4332139	-9.031182***	-13.13959***	-31.94772***	-19.48347***
	7.918					
Spa Destination [8]	-10.701**	0.4528912	-9.499737***	-11.86918***	-35.25161***	-25.89771***
	7.953					
Municipality without a tourism category [9]	-13.814***	0.4014687	-9.649563***	-14.55886***	-38.55783***	-33.09185***
	7.674					
1 Tourism economic index (very low reliance)	0.110	-0.4462626	-0.7167139	-1.090294	-2,136,922	3.476706
	2.279					
2 Tourism economic index (low reliance)	-0.470	-0.0614228	0.1016618	0.7315967	-0.3421184	-5.174755
	1.235					
3 Tourism economic index (medium reliance)	-0.806	-0.0152396	-0.3471398	-0.1939917	-0.9017766	-5.676964
	1.466					
4 Tourism economic index (high reliance)	-0.566	-0.0559617	-0.4892478	-0.8020592	-0.4498772	-3.226102
	1.342					
Tourism_Seasonality	0.0163	-0.0000283	0.0045602	0.0080699	0.0030536	0.0144889
	(0.0102)					
Tourism_pressure	-0.0341***	-0.0017248	-0.0032056	-0.0137741***	-0.0229874	-0.0577821***
	(0.00867)					
Four_stars_Hotels	0.454***	-0.0024581	0.0006812	0.4451243***	0.3373152***	0.6846876***
	(0.127)					
Five_stars_Hotels	2.575***	0.060489	0.2445667	2.525017***	0.5509144***	1.177143
	(0.817)					
Overnights per square km	-0.000***	6.10*	-2.65e-06	-0.000069***	0.0000278	0.00001
	(0.000)					
Discount	0.132***	0.000889	0.0204141	0.0645053	0.1795783	0.2254941***
	(0.0373)					
Price	-0.0003	0.0000211	0.0000166	-0.0005757	0.0010872	0.0010823
	(0.000)					
Constant	10.053**	0.5652665	1.009725***	13.36193***	34.57259***	33.12368***
	7.933					
Observations	359	359	359	359	359	359
R-squared	0.839	0.0080	0.0854	0.2248	0.4186	0.5982

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Section 2: Regression 2 – Discount

Table C.6 Multicollinearity, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test, regression 2

Two or more tourism typologies [1]	2.16	0.463118
Cultural Destinations [2]	2.22	0.450237
Seaside Destinations [3]	4.56	0.219419
Mountain Destinations [4]	2.30	0.435304
Lake destinations [7]	1.71	0.585046
Spa Destination [8]	1.47	0.679900
Municipality without a tourism category [9]	2.47	0.404389
1 Tourism economic index (very low reliance)	1.27	0.790378
2 Tourism economic index (low reliance)	1.46	0.685453
3 Tourism economic index (medium reliance)	1.35	0.743473
4 Tourism economic index (high reliance)	1.63	0.615357
Tourism_Seasonality	2.28	0.439418
Tourism_pressure	1.82	0.549208
Four_stars_Hotels	57.20	0.017482
Five_stars_Hotels_beds	58.58	0.017070
Overnights per square km	1.60	0.623714
Mean	9.00	

Figure C.2 Residual distribution – regression 2

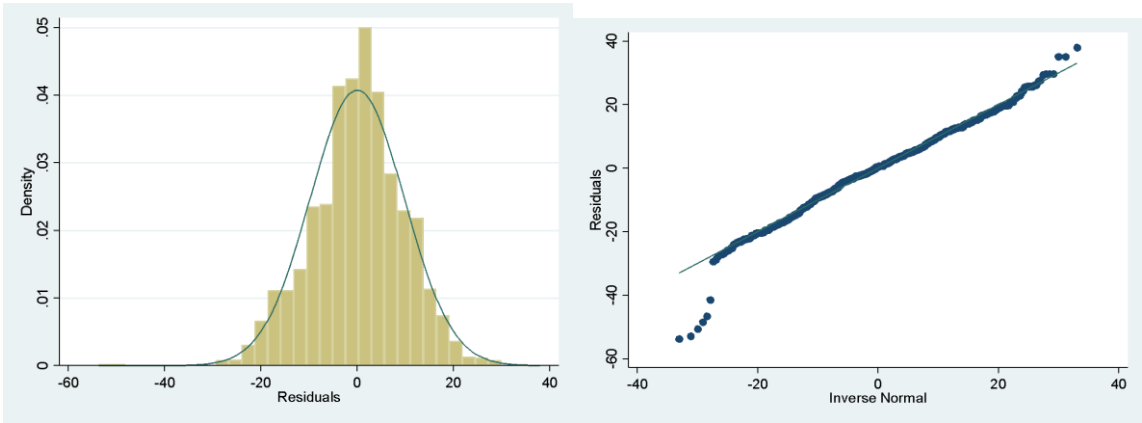


Table C. 7 Normality test -regression 2
Shapiro-Wilk W test for normal data

Variable	Obs	W	V	z	Prob>z
residuals	2,724	0.98767	19.355	7.621	0.00000

Note: the normal approximation to the sampling distribution of W'
is valid for $4 \leq n \leq 2000$.

.
.sktest residuals

Skewness and kurtosis tests for normality

Variable	Obs	Pr(skewness)	Pr(kurtosis)	Joint test	
				Adj chi2(2)	Prob>chi2
residuals	2,724	0.0000	0.0000	99.44	0.0000

Table C.8 Heteroscedasticity Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test for regression 2

Breusch–Pagan/Cook–Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity

Variable: Fitted values of Discount

H0: Constant variance

$\chi^2(1) = 3.87$

Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.0500$

Table C.9 Endogeneity test regression 2- Durbin-Wu-Hausman

Discount

Tests of endogeneity

H0: Variables are exogenous

Durbin (score) $\chi^2(1)$ = 50.1225 (p = 0.0000)

Wu-Hausman F(1,353) = 50.9489 (p = 0.0000)

Table C. 10 Linear and Quantile Regression 2 – Discount

VARIABLES	LRM	0.05	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.90
	Discount					
Two or more tourism typologies [1]	3.564*** (0.927)	5.971117** *	2.016538	.5060918	6.903531** *	5.533162** *
Cultural Destinations [2]	-1.143 (0.973)	.7173256	- 4.604541** *	- -.9722948	1.886224	3.807176** *
Seaside Destinations [3]	1.542* (0.860)	6.547291** *	-1.249441	-.116987	2.840349** *	7.603286** *
Mountain Destinations [4]	(1.183) (1.231)	1.033951	- 4.566567** *	- 4.049811** *	1.843919	5.377672** *
Lake destinations [7]	-5.278*** (1.234)	6.430237** *	- 6.07913***	8.209011** *	4.890835** *	0.0939649
Spa Destination [8]	3.768*** (1.185)	14.28724** *	2.320545	.369224	3.470828**	12.87903** *
Municipality without a tourism category [9]	1.093 (1.093)	2.215812	-1.196239	-.710636	2.871915*	5.989214** *
1 Tourism economic index (very low reliance)	1.075 (1.397)	9.37459***	3.38999	-2.400155*	-.3570085	-2.795355
2 Tourism economic index (low reliance)	-0.083 (1.070)	5.778054** *	2.94908	.1754987	-2.325442	-2.58475**
3 Tourism economic index (medium reliance)	3.155*** (0.802)	5.58774***	3.975109** *	1.583543**	2.012667*	1.225734
4 Tourism economic index (high reliance)	2.630*** (0.568)	6.287619** *	2.808222** *	.2539931	3.452733** *	1.632885** *
Tourism_Seasonality	0.0337*** (0.007)	0.0139618	0.0388044* **	0.0180636* **	0.0437371* **	0.0230931* **
Tourism_pressure	-0.0171*** (0.005)	-0.0064547	- 0.026868** *	- -0.0063016	- 0.018619** *	- 0.0241035* **
Four_stars_Hotels	0.0791*** (0.014)	0.1173994* **	0.1192434* **	.0062061	0.0315661	0.0595391* **
Five_stars_Hotels	--0.504***	-0.65922	-0.8570074	-0.0372255	-0.1839894	-0.304972**

Overnights per square km	(0.100) 0.000*** (6.730)	6.23	5.26	6.14	0.0000403* **	0.0000606* **
Constant	46.63*** (0.635)	24.64127** *	42.12792** *	49.23709** *	49.45353** *	53.68706** *
Observations	2.724	2.724	2.724	2.724	2.724	2.724
R-squared	0.09	0.0964	0.0835	0.0227	0.0558	0.0680

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Appendix 7: Summary in Slovenian language / Daljši povzetek disertacije v slovenskem jeziku

Analiza managerske vpeljave in dolgoročne rabe bliskovitih ponudb v hotelirstvu z uporabo teorij tehnološkega sprejetja

Novi elektronski distribucijski kanali oz. internetni distribucijski sistemi (v nadaljevanju IDS), kot so spletne turistične agencije (STA), so nadomestili tradicionalne distribucijske kanale na področju hotelirstva (Bhalis in Laws, 2001, O'Connor, 2002; Stangl, Inversini in Schegg, 2016). IDSje definiramo kot poti, prek katerih hoteli oglašujejo in prodajajo svoje izdelke in storitve (Huang, Chen, in Wu, 2009). Ker se prek spleta opravi že med 50 in 80% hotelskih rezervacij (Bui, Jeng in Lin, 2015; Statista, 2023, je upravljanje IDS postalo ključni sestavni del hotelske distribucije (Law, Buhalis in Cobanoglu, 2014; Jiang, 2014). Prav zapletenost upravljanja IDS v današnjem večkanalnem okolju je izziv za panogo, še posebej za managerje manjših hotelov, ki predstavljajo večino evropskega hotelirstva (Beritelli in Schegg, 2016). Ti hoteli večinoma vpeljujejo kanale ad hoc, brez jasne strateške usmeritve (Lu, Yang in Yuksel, 2015). Pogosto se hotelski managerji ne zavedajo, kako dodatni kanali vplivajo na učinkovitost delovanja celotnega portfelja IDSjev (Lu, Yang in Yuksel, 2015). Nedavna spoznanja avtorjev Beritelli in Schegg (2016) kažejo, da je ravno prisotnost na več različnih IDSjih ključni pogoj za uspešno upravljanje hotelskih distribucijskih kanalov (2016). Posledično se morajo managerji zavedati raznovrstnosti obstoječih IDSjev in vpeljati tiste, ki so skladni z njihovimi strateškimi cilji (Jiang, 2014; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016).

Spletne strani z bliskovitimi ponudbami (v nadaljevanju SBP) spadajo med novejše e-distribucijske kanale in so v angleščini poznane kot Daily Deals, Flash Sales ali group buying strani (Gupta in dr., 2012; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016). Te spletne strani povezujejo oglaševalne prednosti za prodajalce s privlačnimi popusti za stranke. Zanje je značilno, da ponujajo omejen obseg ponudbe, omejen čas nakupa (praviloma 7–14 dni) in velik popust v primerjavi z običajnimi cenami (med 20 in 50 % običajne cene) (Berezina & Semrad, 2022). SBP so postale relevanten del hotelske distribucije po krizi leta 2008; uvodoma so imele le vlogo promocijskih tržišč, osnovanih na kuponih, toda sčasoma so podobno kot spletne turistične agencije (STA) postale posrednik z neposredno možnostjo spletne rezervacije (Minor, 2017). Pionirja na tržišču SBP sta portala Groupon in Living Social, ki ponujata mešanico izdelkov in storitev, velik delež njune ponudbe pa so prav hotelske nastanitve (Green in LoManno, 2012). Nadaljnja rast tržnega prostora SBP je s seboj prinesla razvoj specializiranih nišnih ponudnikov SBP, ki ponujajo hotelske nastanitve višjega cenovnega razreda. Primera za to sta spletni strani Voyage Privé in Secret Escapes (CNBC, 2015). Prav ti ponudniki trenutno privabljajo tehnološke in hotelirske investitorje, kot sta Google in Accor Hotels (Accor Hotels, 2017), kar dokazuje, kako relevantni so ti distribucijski kanali v hotelirstvu.

Čeprav turisti poleg prejemanja e-novic tudi aktivno pregledujejo SBP, kadar iščejo hotelsko nastanitev (Runfola in dr., 2013), so bile SBP v širšem e-distribucijskem akademskem diskurzu pretežno zanemarjene. Poimenovali so jih kontroverzen IDS, recesijski fenomen in nespametna managerska strategija, ki se uporablja kot obupan poskus polnjenja praznih sob v času krize (Starkov, 2011). Toda paradoksalno so SBP še vedno priljubljene tudi med gospodarskim okrevanjem, v času, ko ima hotelirstvo dobre rezultate (The Economic Times, 2018), prav tako so preživele obdobje pandemije in ostajajo sestavni del hotelskega portfelja IDSjev tudi v letu 2024. Tako se postavljajo naslednja vprašanja: Zakaj hotelski managerji še naprej uporabljajo SBP kot enega izmed IDSjev? Kakšno vrednost prinašajo hotelskim IDS portfeljem? Kakšni so razlogi za njihovo popularnost med hotelskimi managerji ter njihovo kontinuirano rabo?

Akademsko znanje v zvezi z SBP je razdrobljeno ter zahteva teoretično in empirično izpopolnitev (Sigala, 2013; Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016; Minor, 2017). Do zdaj so bile izvedene študije v zvezi z njihovo rabo (Berezina, Semrad, Stepchenkova & Cobanoglu, 2016); o neposrednem vplivu SBP na donosnost za prodajalce (Dholakia, 2012); o vplivu SBP na storitve v hotelu in na ugled blagovne znamke (Minor, 2017), toda nobena izmed študij ni teoretično obravnavala postopka vpeljave in dolgoročne rabe SBP. Povrh tega te študije močno podpirajo naslednjo tezo: če promocije SBP niso pravilno zasnovane in izvedene, za hotele niso donosne (Minor, 2017). Posledično je težko kritično ovrednotiti razloge, zakaj hotelirji še naprej vpeljujejo in uporabljajo kanal SBP tudi izven tako imenovanega obdobja potrebe (Pearce in Taniguchi, 2008), ki ga je sprožila zadnja recesija ali pa se pojavlja kot tipično sezonsko nihanje v povpraševanju (Piccoli in Dev, 2012; Cassia in dr., 2015; Berezina in Semrad, 2015). Zaradi tega je treba preveriti uporabnost študij s področja informacijskih sistemov (v nadaljevanju IS) in njegovih teorij managerskega tehnološkega sprejemanja tehnologij in e-poslovanja, ki se kažejo kot perspektivne in za poglobljeno raziskovanje spremenljivk, ki vplivajo na managersko vpeljavo in dolgoročno rabo distribucijskega kanala SBP, česar se ta disertacija loteva.

Glede na zgornje izjave je namen disertacije izboljšati razumevanje postopka vpeljave hotelskih distribucijskih kanalov. Natančneje je poudarek na kvalitativnem raziskovanju spremenljivk, ki vodijo k vpeljavi kanala SBP in dolgoročni rabi SBP med hotelskimi managerji. Poleg tega v disertaciji proučujemo, ali so spremenljivke vpeljave SBP in dolgoročne rabe SBP enake. Ker v trenutni literaturi na področju distribucije v hotelirstvu in širšem turizmu ni zaznati aktualnih teorij ali raziskovalnih okvirjev, je namen disertacije vključiti primerne koncepte in teorij tehnološkega sprejetja s področja raziskav IS. Za pojasnitev vpeljave in dolgoročne rabe SBP v kontekstu hotelske distribucije smo uporabil uveljavljene teorije tehnološkega sprejetja, kot je vplivna združena teorija sprejemanja in uporabe tehnologij (UTAUT), ki so jo razvili Venkatesh, Morris, Davies in Davies (2003). Z uporabo tega pristopa disertacija doprinaša k zapolnitvi obstoječe vrzeli v literaturi na

preseku trženja in IS v kontekstu turizma, kot so jo predhodno že zaznali Leung, Xue in Bai (2015).

Vprašanjem hotelske distribucije v preteklih letih niso namenjali veliko pozornosti. Večina literature se ukvarja s splošno uveljavljenimi trženjskimi koncepti, kot sta vpeljava distribucijskih kanalov ter ovrednotenje modelov in okvirjev za njihovo presojo; primer tega sta avtorja O'Connor in Frew (2004). Nadalje klasična dela iz obdobja po letu 2000 obsegajo večinske raziskave avtorjev Buhalis (2001), O'Connor in Frew (2002), Pearce (2006) ter Pearce in Taniguchi (2008). Da bi bili karseda ažurni s hitrim tehnološkim napredkom preteklega desetletja, ki je občutno spremenil strategije trženja in distribucije (Hjalager, 2010), bi morali te »speče« teorije hotelske distribucije posodobiti. Tovrstna posodobitev mora vključevati posebnosti in izzive, ki so jih glede dinamike in sestave distribucijskih kanalov s seboj prinesle moderne internetne tehnologije in prehod na e-poslovanje.

Na drugi strani pa so raziskave na področju IS zelo številčne in ponujajo razne teorije in modele tehnološkega sprejemanja, ki pojasnjujejo vpeljavo in rabo tehnologij. Te bi lahko pomagale razumeti vpeljavo in dolgoročno rabo novih oblik distribucijskih kanalov, kot so SBP, s strani managerjev. Sistematski pregled literature, opravljen spomladi leta 2018, je pokazal, da so te teorije in modele uporabili že v preteklosti, da so pojasnili postopek vpeljevanja v zvezi z organizacijsko rabo družbenih omrežij, e-bančništvom, e-trgovanjem in e-učenjem (Cimperman, Makovec Brenčič in Trkman, 2016; Gruzd, Staves in Wilk, 2012; Mandal in McQueen, 2012; Oliveira, Faria, Thomas in Popovič, 2014) ter jih posledično lahko smatramo za primerne za rabo na področju e-distribucijskih kanalov v hotelirstvu.

UTAUT je presenetljivo spregledan v raziskavah na področju hotelske distribucije in širše v turistični literaturi. Sodobne študije se na tem mestu opirajo na starejše modele tehnološke sprejetosti (v nadaljevanju MTS), ki jih UTAUT vključuje in nadgrajuje. Posamezne študije, ki izjemoma uporabljajo model UTAUT, pa se osredotočajo le na stran turističnega povpraševanja pri vpeljavi distribucijskih kanalov, kot so spletni nakup letalskih vozovnic (Escobar-Rodríguez in Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014), spletni nakup storitev podeželskega turizma (San Martín in Herrero, 2012), vpeljava mobilnih plačilnih poti v hotelih (Morosan in DeFranco, 2016) in raba mobilnih aplikacij za hotelske rezervacije (Fong, Lam in Law, 2017). Študij, ki bi se ukvarjale s stranjo turističnih ponudnikov glede vpeljave distribucijskih kanalov znotraj hotelirstva in ki uporabljajo model UTAUT, pa za zdaj še ni. Predlagana raziskava je torej izvirna, saj uporablja model UTAUT na še neraziskan način.

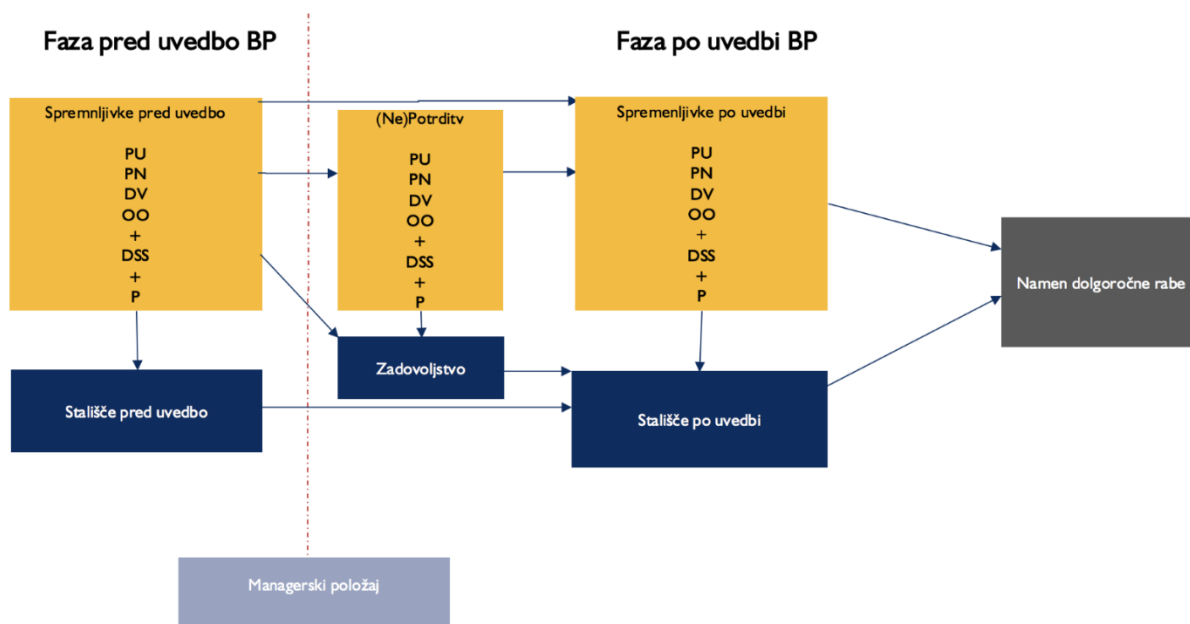
Te raziskave nakazujejo na najvplivnejšo teorijo IS – združeno teorijo sprejemanja in uporabe tehnologij (UTAUT), ki so jo razvili Venkatesh in dr. (2003). V zgoraj omenjenih kontekstih je bila potrjena in dokazana, da je zmožna pojasniti skoraj 70 % obnašanja ob vpeljavi novih tehnoloških rešitev (Mandal in McQueen, 2012). UTAUT sintetizira pretekle modele in teorije tehnološkega sprejetja. Venkatesh in dr. (2003) so združili znanje v

združene teorije z obsežnim pregledom in analizo osmih najuglednejših modelov sprejetja tehnologije. Te vključujejo Rogersovo (1983) difuzijo teorije inovacij (DIT) in Davisov (1989) model sprejetosti tehnologije (TAM), teorijo razumnega delovanja (TRA), motivacijski model, teorijo načrtovanega vedenja, kombinirano teorijo načrtovanega vedenja in modela za sprejetost tehnologije (CTPB/TAM), model uporabe osebnega računalnika (MPCU) in socialno kognitivno teorijo (SCT).

Štiri osrednje spremenljivke modela UTAUT in njihove razširitve sicer lahko pojasnijo, zakaj hotelski managerji razvijejo namero za vpeljavo in posledično de facto vpeljejo distribucijski kanal SBP, a mu ne uspejo dati odgovora na drugo raziskovalno vprašanje: zakaj hotelski managerji še naprej uporabljajo kanal SBP tudi v času konjunktore. Da bi našli primeren okvir za dolgoročno rabo kanala SBP, smo se obrnili na nadgradnje izvirnega modela UTAUT. Venkatesh, Thong, Chan, Hu in Brown (2011) so združili izvorni model UTAUT ter dvostopenjski model sprememb prepričanja in odnosa do IS, ki sta ga razvila Bhattacharjee in Premkumar (2004) v razširjen dvostopenjski model dolgoročne rabe IS. Ta lahko zajame spremembe odnosa posameznika v fazah pred in med rabo, ki določa namen dolgoročne rabe IS v prihodnje. Vankatesh in dr. (2011) so za model uporabili zgoraj omenjene osrednje štiri spremenljivke modela UTAUT. Ker so svoj dvostopenjski razširjen model dolgoročne rabe IS oblikovali na modelu vpeljave storitev e-uprave, so dodali ključno kontekstualno spremenljivko zaupanja, da bi lahko ustrezno pokrili obravnavanje občutljivih osebnih podatkov, ki so vključeni pri vpeljavi storitev e-uprave. V kontekstu trenutne študije o vpeljavi SBP občutljivi osebni podatki niso pomemben dejavnik, zato smo ključno kontekstualno spremenljivko zaupanja zamenjali s spremenljivkami, specifičnimi za kontekst SBP, ki smo jih izluščili iz literature, ki razkriva specifikke SBP, ter jim dodali tudi spremenljivko pomislekov, povezanih z vpeljavo distribucijskega kanala SBP.

Nadalje je zgradba tega modela skladna z okvirjem za vrednotenje e-distribucijskih kanalov, uveljavljenim e-distribucijskim modelom v hotelirstvu, ki sta ga razvila O'Connor in Frew (2004). Ta prav tako razlikuje glavne spremenljivke, ki vplivajo na vpeljavo, in tiste, ki vplivajo na dolgoročno rabo distribucijskega kanala. Model nadalje poudarja pomen determinant operativnost in uspešnost v postopku vpeljave e-kanala. Zasnovan na drugačni teoretični podlagi je model vsebinsko blizu spremenljivkama pričakovanega napora in pričakovane uspešnosti iz razširjenega dvostopenjskega modela dolgoročne rabe IS. Tovrstne podobnosti dodatno potrjujejo primernost razširjenega dvostopenjskega modela dolgoročne rabe IS za pojasnitev vpeljave in dolgoročne rabe SBP. Na njegovi podlagi razvit dvostopenjski model dolgoročne rabe SBP, prikazan na sliki 1, bo torej služil kot raziskovalni model v disertaciji.

Slika 1: Razširjen dvostopenjski model dolgoročne rabe SBP



Legenda: PU: pričakovana uspešnost; PN: pričakovan napor; DV: družbeni vpliv; OO: olajševalne okoliščine; P: pomisleki; DSS: druge, za SBP specifične spremenljivke; +: dodatne spremenljivke, ki niso prisotne v izvornem modelu UTAUT.

Vir: lastno delo

V začetku raziskovanja smo si v dispoziciji v skladu z zgoraj predstavljenimi temami in teorijami zastavili glavne cilje in raziskovalna vprašanja te doktorske disertacije:

1. Razviti akademsko razumevanje kanala SBP v hotelirski e-distribuciji;

RV 1: Kako so se značilnosti in akademsko razumevanje SBP spremenili od pojava leta 2008 do danes?

2. Določiti in pojasniti spremenljivke ter njihove parametre (splošne in specifične za SBP), ki vzpodbujajo hotelske managerje k vpeljavi nastajajočih kanalov, kot so SBP;

RV 2: Katere so glavne spremenljivke, ki privedejo hotelske managerje do vpeljave novega distribucijskega kanala?

3. določiti in pojasniti spremenljivke ter njihove parametre (splošne in specifične za SBP), ki vzpodbujajo hotelske managerje k dolgoročni rabi SBP po tem, ko je bil kanal že vpeljan;

RV 3: Katere so glavne spremenljivke, ki privedejo hotelske managerje do tega, da še naprej uporabljajo vpeljan distribucijski kanal?

4. Ugotoviti, ali so spremenljivke vpeljave enake tistim dolgoročne rabe, kot to predlaga razširjen dvostopenjski model dolgoročne rabe SBP, ali se razlikujejo;

RV 4: Ali je dolgoročna raba SBP resnično pogojena s potrditvijo istih spremenljivk, ki določajo vpeljavo SBP?

5. Odločiti in pojasniti pomisleke pri vpeljavi kanala SBP v obliki managerskih pomislekov o morebitnem konfliktu s kanalom SBP in njegovim vplivom na obstoječe kanale v hotelskem e-distribucijskem portfelju;

RV 5: Kateri pomisleki odvrčajo managerje od vpeljave SBP in kako vpeljava ter dolgoročna raba SBP vplivata na druge e-distribucijske kanale?

Disertacija se drži konstruktivistične paradigme. Empirična raziskava je izvedena kvalitativno, saj tako dovoljuje raziskovanje področja v celoti ter tako tudi vključi edinstvene izkušnje, ki so jih ljudje doživeli ob dejanskih dogodkih in situacijah (Parker, 2003), kot sta vpeljava in dolgoročna raba postopkov za managersko rabo SBP. Kljub kvantitativnim koreninam teorije UTAUT je ta koristna tudi v kvalitativnem smislu za poglobljeno pojasnitev postopkov vpeljave pojavov v e-poslovanju (Gruzd in dr., 2012). Skladno s cilji te disertacije smo se odločil raziskavo zasnovati tako, da bo raziskovalni model temeljil na kvantitativnih modelih, ki jih nato pojasnim, nadgradim in po potrebi nadgrajujem skozi konceptualno in empirično fazo. Ti sta po zasnovi konstruktivistični in kvalitativni, saj predvidevata rabo polstrukturiranih intervjujev z odprtimi vprašanji. Ta metoda je še posebej koristna pri ustvarjanju poglobljenega razumevanja spremenljivk in postopkov, ki vplivajo na vpeljavo in dolgoročno rabo SBP v managerskih krogih. Izbira metodologije podpira tudi dejstvo, da je akademska literatura o SBP še v zgodnji fazi razvoja. Ta disertacija je prvi znan poskus razlage vpeljave e-distribucijskih kanalov v turizmu s stališča ponudbe, ki se naslanja na teorijo UTAUT. Nadalje predlagana metodologija deluje tudi kot varnostni element za raziskovalca v začetku svoje raziskovalne poti, saj daje jasne smernice, usmeritev in analitično orodje.

Prvo poglavje disertacije naslovljeno "Kaj vemo in česa ne vemo o uporabi bliskovitih ponudb v hotelirstvu" je zasnovano kot sistematski pregled literature, ki združuje obstoječe znanje o SBP. V poglavju se zavestno ne omejujemo na posamezne disciplinarne omejitve temveč sintetiziramo ugotovitve predhodnih raziskav o SBP, tako v hotelirstvu kot širše. SBP so opredeljene kot promocijske kampanje, ki za omejen čas ponujajo storitve ali izdelke po nižji ceni. Z njimi so povezani izrazi, kot so "flash ponudbe", "spletni kuponi", "skupinski nakupi" in "zasebne razprodaje". Najpogosteje se razširjajo preko platform, kot sta Groupon ali Secret Escapes, vendar se lahko pojavijo tudi na spletnih straneh hotelov ali na OTA-kanalih. Zgodovina koncepta skupinskega nakupa sega daleč v preteklost, zlasti v vzhodnih kulturah, a je šele digitalizacija omogočila njegov ponovni vzpon. Zgodnje spletne platforme so skušale posnemati kolektivno pogajalsko logiko, a so pogosto propadle zaradi pomanjkljive preglednosti, finančne nestabilnosti in slabe segmentacije. Zahodni modeli so se nato usmerili bolj na posameznika, vključili družbena omrežja in viralno trženje, kar je močno vplivalo na razširjenost SBP. Sodobne platforme temeljijo na lokalno usmerjenih

oglasih, prikazu priljubljenosti ponudb in postopnem unovčenju kuponov, kar zmanjšuje tveganje za ponudnike. V nasprotju s preteklimi modeli SBP danes ciljajo na storitve, kot so prehrabeno in nastanitveno gostinstvo in wellness, ter pripomorejo k boljšemu upravljanju kapacitet.

Uporabljena metodologija omogoča identifikacijo, vrednotenje in sintezo relevantnih študij o SBP v turizmu. V raziskavi je bilo zastavljenih sedem ključnih vprašanj o obsegu, strukturi, geografskem fokusu, terminologiji, metodah in teoretskih izhodiščih. Iskalna poizvedba v podatkovni bazi Web of Science je sprva prinesla 144 rezultatov, od katerih jih je bilo po filtriranju zaradi ustreznosti in kakovosti izbranih 37. Študije so bile objavljene v obdobju med letoma 2012 in 2025, kar odraža naraščajoče zanimanje v zadnjem desetletju.

Večina raziskav izvira iz Kitajske in ZDA, vsaka z 23,7 % deležem, sledijo Tajvan, Južna Koreja in nekatere evropske države. Azija tako prevladuje v raziskavah o SBP v turizmu. Tematski poudarek je izrazito usmerjen na povpraševanje – torej vedenje potrošnikov – sledi ponudbena stran (hoteli, restavracije), najmanj pozornosti pa je posvečene samim posrednikom oziroma platformam.

Analiza je pokazala tudi izjemno raznolikost v uporabljenih izrazih. Avtorji za isto pojavnost uporabljajo izraze, kot so skupinski nakupi, SBP, spletni kuponi in zasebne razprodaje. Najpogostejši izraz je bil »skupinski nakup«, čeprav je njegova uporaba pogosto napačna – saj današnje individualno sprožene SBP niso več povezane s kolektivnim pogajanjem. Ta terminološka razdrobljenost onemogoča teoretsko poenotenje in zmanjšuje primerljivost študij.

Vsebinski pregled literature je razkril štiri glavne tematske sklope: poslovne operacije, vedenje potrošnikov, trženjske prakse in raziskovalne metodologije. Podjetja so obravnavana z vidika učinkovitosti, odzivov konkurence in uporabe platform. Raziskave o potrošnikih se osredotočajo na nakupne navade, vrednostne zaznave, čustvene odzive in lojalnost. V trženjskem sklopu prevladujejo teme, kot so cenovne strategije, ocene uporabniških izkušenj in vprašanja zaupanja. Metodološko so raziskave večinoma kvantitativne, z uporabo anket, regresijskih modelov in statističnih orodij, medtem ko so kvalitativne in eksperimentalne metode manj zastopane.

Vedenje potrošnikov razkriva več pomembnih spoznanj. Kupci SBP so pogosto motivirani s popusti in običajno predstavljajo nove stranke, ki so večinoma občutljive na kakovost storitev, kar vodi do slabših ocen in nizke zvestobe. Večina teh kupcev kupi eno ali dve ponudbi in se nato ne vrača, kar zmanjšuje učinkovitost priporočilnih algoritmov. Dojemanje vrednosti je zelo raznoliko – pri odločanju pa prevladujejo kognitivni dejavniki. Zadovoljstvo kupcev je mešano: nekateri so zadovoljni, drugi izražajo nezadovoljstvo, zlasti če ponudba ni bila transparentna ali če je bil proces unovčenja otežen. Prisotnost SBP kupcev

lahko vpliva tudi na izkušnje rednih gostov, kar poslabša ocene hotelov in zmanjša lojalnost. Zanimivo je, da so tudi v segmentu nišnih SBP zabeleženi primeri nezadovoljstva med zahtevnejšimi gosti. Psihološki profil potrošnikov SBP je kompleksen – odlikuje jih cenovna občutljivost, zaznavanje blagovne znamke in nagnjenost k racionalizaciji nakupov luksuznih storitev prek popustov. Pogosto gre za "tržne poznavalce", ki se odzivajo bolj na miselne kot na čustvene dražljaje.

Na strani ponudnikov, podjetja – zlasti restavracije in hoteli – uporabljajo SBP zaradi promocije, pridobivanja strank in ustvarjanja prihodkov. Pomembni razlogi so tudi obvladovanje sezonskih nihanj, predstavitev novih storitev ter izkoriščanje kapacitet. Odločitve hotelirjev so racionalne in temeljijo na pričakovanih učinkih, a je njihovo ocenjevanje uspešnosti SBP pogosto nejasno. Obstajajo pomisleki glede dolgoročne donosnosti, vpliva na blagovno znamko in kakovosti pridobljenih gostov. V nekaterih primerih je prisotna tudi stigma – nekateri gosti menijo, da hotel znižuje svojo vrednost, če se pojavi na SBP platformi.

Platforme same delujejo kot posredniki med potrošniki in ponudniki ter uporabljajo model delitve prihodkov. Pomembno je, da zagotavljajo dobro uporabniško izkušnjo, preglednost in ne pretiravajo s popusti, saj lahko to zmanjša zaupanje uporabnikov. V večini raziskav so analizirane generične platforme (npr. Groupon), medtem ko so nišne platforme, ki so posebej prilagojene turizmu, raziskane le v nekaj primerih. Njihovo delovanje in vpliv na hotele ostajata večinoma nepoznana. Prekomerna uporaba generičnih SBP platform lahko vodi tudi do preusmeritve rezervacij kar vpliva na realizirane prihodke in zvestobo gostov.

Metodološko prevladujejo kvantitativne raziskave, kar odraža prevladujoč pozitivistični pristop. Kvalitativnih in mešanih metod je malo, kar zmanjšuje razumevanje konteksta, motivacij deležnikov in potrošniških izkušenj. Le osem izmed 37 analiziranih študij eksplicitno uporablja teoretični okvir, kar pomeni, da je področje teoretsko šibko razvito. Uporabljene teorije vključujejo teorijo pričakovanih koristi, psihološke pristope, zastarele modele sprejemanja tehnologije in teorijo družbenih vplivov. Teorije strateškega trženja ali cenovne teorije so presenetljivo odsotne.

Pomembne vrzeli so tudi vsebinske. Raziskave so osredotočene na restavracije, hotelom pa je namenjene precej manj pozornosti, čeprav imajo SBP pomembne implikacije za razpoložljivost in cene hotelskih kapacitet. Prav tako ni raziskav o uporabi SBP preko lastnih hotelskih spletnih strani, ali na uveljavljenih STAjih. Geografsko je raziskovanje omejeno na ZDA in Kitajsko, medtem ko Evropa in države v tranziciji ostajajo neraziskane, čeprav imajo različno potrošniško vedenje in tržne razmere. Dolgoročne študije o učinkovitosti SBP ne obstajajo, prav tako ni raziskav o vplivu pandemije in razlogih za nadaljnjo uporabo SBP kljub poznanim tveganjem, kar široko odpira vrata raziskavam managerske rabe SBP z vidika njihovega teoretskega in znanstvenega doprinosa k področju.

Na področju povpraševanja bi bilo treba podrobneje raziskati dejavnike zadovoljstva, dojemanje kakovosti in vlogo SBP pri odločanju. Pomembno je tudi razumeti, kako posamezne lastnosti ponudbe vplivajo na vedenje in zakaj nekateri uporabniki izražajo nezadovoljstvo. Na strani ponudnikov pa je ključno vprašanje, zakaj hoteli še vedno uporabljajo SBP in kakšni so dolgoročni mehanizmi angažiranosti. Prav tako bi bilo koristno primerjati uspešnost ponudb preko lastnih kanalov z generičnimi SBP platformami. Na ravni platform je potrebna diferenciacija med generičnimi in nišnimi SBP, analiza njihove strategije, zasnove uporabniške izkušnje in vpliva na konverzijo. Prihodnje raziskave bi morale tudi oceniti, ali SBP ustvarjajo dolgoročno vrednost ali zgolj kratkoročni promet.

Čeprav je bila analiza izvedena po preverjenih in priporočenih postopkih, je treba priznati določene omejitve. Naslonili smo se izključno na znanstvene članke iz podatkovne baze WoS, kar je lahko pomenilo izključitev konferenčnih prispevkov in profesionalne literature. Sklenemo lahko, da SBP kljub svoji stalni vlogi v distribucijskem sistemu turizma ostajajo slabo raziskane, z izrazito terminološko razdrobljenostjo, omejenim geografskim obsegom in pomanjkanjem teoretskih okvirov. Naslavljanje teh vrzeli je ključno za razvoj učinkovite in dolgoročne raziskovalne agende, ki bo prispevala k boljšemu razumevanju SBP v turizmu.

V drugem poglavju z naslovom “Razumevanje bliskovitih ponudb skozi perspektivo analize inoviranja poslovnih modelov od leta 2019 dalje” se naslonimo na proučevanje poslovnih modelov, ki se je v turizmu šele pred kratkim uveljavilo (Zach idr, 2018) in je še posebej pomembno za zapolnjevanje lukenj pri razumevanju IDSjev ter njihovih poslovnih modelov. Skozi poglavje osvetlimo ključne elemente in faze razvoja poslovnega modela (Ostewalder, 2004; Teece, 2018) SBP ter ga z uvedbo koncepta inoviranja poslovnih modelov (IPM) (Kraus idr, 2023) nadgradimo ter prek njegovega razvoja opazujemo skozi obdobje zadnjih 5 let. Študija se je osredotočila na SBP platforme in raziskala njihove strateške premike v cenovnih modelih, partnerstvih z dobavitelji, strategijah ustvarjanja prihodkov in mehanizmi digitalnega angažiranja. Glavna raziskovalna vprašanja so se nanašala na prilagoditve poslovnih modelov SBP platform med pandemijo, njihove strategije za ohranjanje odnosov z dobavitelji in strankami, dojemanje inovacij s strani hotelov ter konstrukcije inovacij poslovnih modelov, ki najbolje pojasnjujejo te procese. Uporabljen je bil kvalitativni pristop s študijo primera, ki je vključevala analizo štirih virov podatkov: intervjuje z managerji SBP platform in hoteli, analizo spletnih strani SBP ter medijske objave. Tematska analiza je zagotovila celovitost ugotovitev, ki so poudarile, kako so se SBP platforme preoblikovale iz zgolj orodij za popuste v pomembne IDS posrednike. Pandemija COVID-19 je pospešila digitalno preobrazbo in prisilila podjetja k inovacijam. Koncept poslovnih modelov se je razvil v celovito strukturo, ki zajema ustvarjanje, dostavo in zajemanje vrednosti. Inoviranje poslovnih modelov (IPM) je postalo ključno za preživetje in prilagoditev na nestabilna okolja, saj so podjetja iskala načine za zmanjšanje stroškov, optimizacijo procesov in vstop na nove trge. V turizmu IPM oblikujejo digitalna preobrazba, spreminjajoče se vedenje potrošnikov in krize. SBP platforme, ki so se pojavile po recesiji

leta 2008, so delovale kot spletne tržnice, ki so hotelom omogočale prodajo presežnih kapacitet s popustom. Obstajale so splošne SBP platforme (npr. Groupon), ki so ponujale širok spekter storitev, in nišne SBP platforme (npr. Voyage Privé, Secret Escapes), specializirane izključno za hotelirstvo in potovanja. Slednje so delovale kot polni spletni distribucijski sistemi (IDS) z razpoložljivostjo v realnem času. Primerjava teh dveh tipov SBP platform je pokazala, da so se razlikovale v segmentih strank, vrednostnih predlogih, kanalih in prihodkovnih tokovih. Splošne SBP so privabljale cenovno občutljive potrošnike in omogočale hotelom upravljanje neprodanih kapacitet, nišne pa so se osredotočale na premožne popotnike in luksuzne ponudbe.

Zgodovinski razvoj SBP platform do leta 2019 je vključeval več prilagoditev, pri čemer so se splošne SBP razvijale skozi tri faze, nišne pa skozi dve. Skupno je bil viden trend konvergence poslovnih modelov v IDS, s poudarkom na ustvarjanju vrednosti in strategijah, osredotočenih na stranke, vključno z razpoložljivostjo hotelskih sob v realnem času. Nišne SBP so privabljale naložbe in partnerstva z hotelskimi verigami, kar je vodilo v bolj uravnotežene odnose s hotelirji. Ta pregled je zajel stanje SBP poslovnih modelov pred pandemijo, ki je prekinila ustaljene prakse upravljanja hotelov in sprožila to raziskavo.

Študija se osredotoča na Slovenijo in Hrvaško, ki sta močno odvisni od turizma. Obe državi sta se soočali s sezonskostjo in sta imeli različne strategije za blaženje posledic COVID-19 (Slovenija s turističnimi boni, Hrvaška s poudarkom na turizmu bližnjih trgov). Raziskovalni pristop je bil kvalitativni in hermenevitičen, z uporabo tematske analize za interpretacijo podatkov iz intervjujev z managerji SBP in hoteli, spletnih strani SBP ter medijskih objav, vključno z inovativno uporabo GUI za iskanje medijskih podatkov.

Rezultati kažejo, da so se SBP platforme soočile z začetnim šokom pandemije, kar je povzročilo začasno zaustavitev poslovanja in krizo vračil denarja. Sprva so se osredotočale na stroškovne reze in ohranjanje virov ter se preusmerile na oglaševanje drugih izdelkov, da bi ustvarile minimalne prihodke. Sredi leta 2020 so prešle na strateške prilagoditve prihodkovnega modela, vključno z odloženimi plačili hotelom. V letih 2020–2021 so SBP platforme prešle na taktično fleksibilnost, uvajanje povračil denarja in prilagodljivih odpovednih pogojev ter ponudbo paketov, osredotočenih na dobro počutje in varnost. Povečali so marketinške aktivnosti in se osredotočali na transparentno komunikacijo. Nišne SBP so začele vlagati v podatkovno infrastrukturo in izboljšale povezljivost z avtomatiziranimi upravljavci spletnih distribucijskih kanalov.

V letih 2021–2022 so SBP platforme začele strateško preusmeritev. Splošne SBP so se poskušale redefinirati kot oglaševalske platforme, medtem ko so nišne SBP platforme vse bolj spominjale na spletne potovalne agencije (OTA), saj so ponujale stalne ponudbe, prilagodljive pogoje rezervacije in dinamično razpoložljivost. Čeprav diverzifikacija ni bila prioriteta, so se osredotočale na partnerstva in kuriranje paketov, ki so ponujali doživetja.

Managerji SBP so privabili luksuzne hotele z bolj fleksibilnimi pogoji sodelovanja in zmanjšanimi zahtevami po popustih. Osredotočili so se tudi na destinacije, ki so bile dostopne v 4-5 urah vožnje, in postopoma zmanjševali izjemno prilagodljive odpovedne pogoje. Hkrati se je pospešila digitalna preobrazba v hotelirstvu, kar je vplivalo na IPM aktivnosti SBP.

Dojemanje hotelirjev se je od leta 2020 do 2023 razlikovalo. Slovenski hotelirji so SBP uporabljali predvsem kot kratkoročno rešitev za zasedenost, medtem ko so se hrvaški osredotočali na njihovo uporabo v izvensezonskih obdobjih. Hotelirji so izrazili pomisleke glede zahtevnih gostov, toge provizije in prilagodljivih odpovednih pogojev. Splošne SBP so še naprej privabljale lokalne stranke z omejenim dohodkom in nizko zvestobo. Do leta 2023 so se nišne SBP in hoteli preusmerili na strukturno naprednejše prilagoditve IPM, z vedno bolj stalnimi hotelskimi zbirkami in UI-personalizacijo. Hrvaški hotelirji so še naprej selektivno uporabljali SBP, medtem ko so slovenski izrazili željo po zmanjšanju odvisnosti, saj so se avtomatizacija cen in digitalni marketing izkazali za učinkovitejše. V štiriletnem obdobju so se SBP platforme razvile od operativnega odziva na preživetje do stabilnega, hibridnega modela. To je bil proces inovacij poslovnih modelov, ki se je začel z obvladovanjem stroškov in vračil ter se nadaljeval z dolgoročnimi, povratljivimi ponudbami in digitalnimi strategijami. Vendar ta evolucija ni bila usklajena med deležniki, saj so SBP-ji uspešno zadovoljevali svoje stranke, manj pa hotelske partnerje. Medtem ko so platforme prešle v strukturno zrelost, so hoteli SBP še vedno obravnavali pragmatično in reaktivno, kot začasna, transakcijska orodja. Kljub funkcionalni soodvisnosti ostaja strateška neusklajenost.

Razprava poudarja, da je pandemija delovala kot katalizator za IPM SBP platform, čeprav je zmanjšala njihove dinamične sposobnosti. Hotelirji so IPM dojemali kot nujno obveznost, kar je povzročilo skepticizem. Rezultat je bila preoblikovana, a ne v celoti integrirana, strateška poravnava. Razvoj IPM v SBP je potekal skozi začasne, prehodne in »vzdrževane prehodne modele«. To potrjuje tezo o zadostni fleksibilnosti in dinamičnih zmogljivostih SBP, kar zagotavlja empirično pripoved o tem, kako se posredniki v IDS prilagajajo na zunanje motnje. Raziskava je potrdila, da so na IPM vplivale tako zunanje (pandemija) kot notranje grožnje (nefleksibilnost modela) ter zunanje priložnosti (lokalni trgi, odprtost luksuznih hotelov za sodelovanje). Inovacije so se dogajale v vseh treh dimenzijah oblikovanja poslovnega modela: ustvarjanju vrednosti (nove zmogljivosti, tehnologije, partnerstva), novi ponudbi (prilagodljivi, povratljivi paketi, wellness ponudbe, transparentna komunikacija) in zajemanju vrednosti (fleksibilne provizije, prihodki od partnerskega oglaševanja, zmanjšanje stroškov).

Vpliv kontekstualnih dejavnikov, kot so novost storitev, stopnja sprememb in značilnosti destinacije, je bil ključen. Prehod na povratne rezervacije in vključitev luksuznih hotelov sta bila nova elementa. Stopnja sprememb je prešla iz inkrementalne v radikalno transformacijo.

Kontrastne izkušnje v Sloveniji in na Hrvaškem so ponazorile, kako lokalne politike (npr. slovenski turistični boni) in tržne strukture neposredno vplivajo na učinkovitost IPM iniciativ. Ocena posledic IPM v SBP je pokazala gospodarski uspeh za platforme, a manj jasne rezultate za hotele, kar kaže na strateško neusklajenost transformacije in zmanjšan delež prodaje prek SBP.

Raziskava prispeva k teoriji in praksi IPM v turizmu. Razširja prejšnje tipologije poslovnih modelov SBP s prikazom prilagoditev po letu 2019, poudarja inovacije v IDS in prispeva k teoriji digitalnih turističnih poslovnih modelov z analizo dojemanja deležnikov in platformnih modifikacij. Preseka se tudi s poslovno-znanstvenimi koncepti, kot so dinamične sposobnosti in vsiljene inovacije. Zaključek je, da SBP ne smemo obravnavati zgolj kot taktična prodajna orodja, temveč kot dinamične udeležence v IDS.

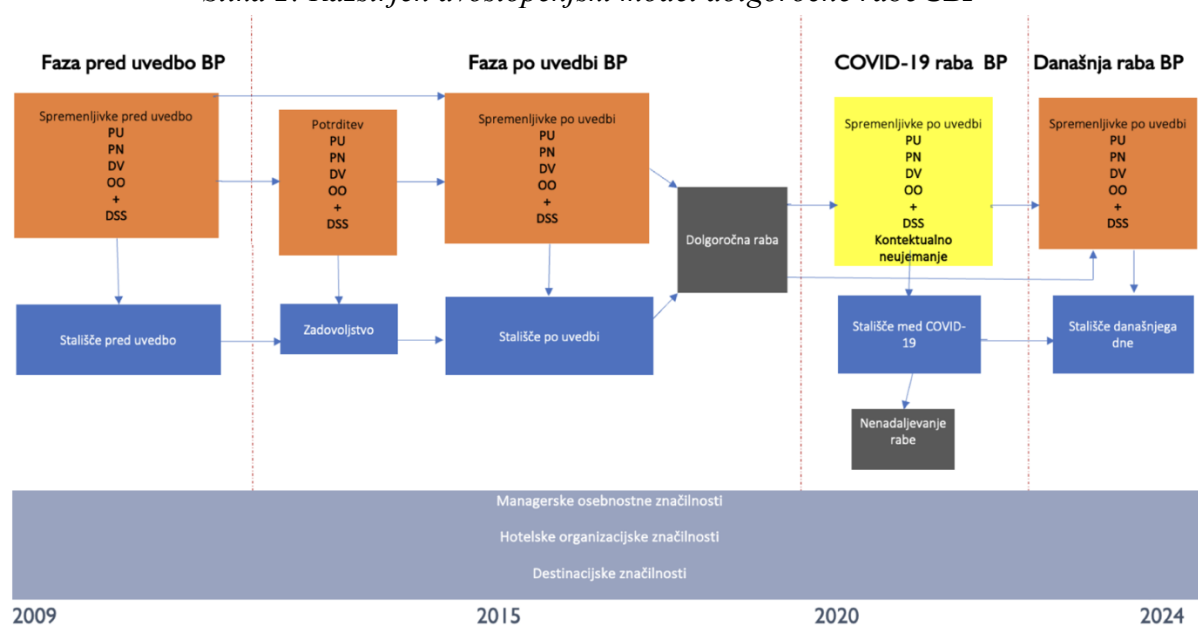
Študija ponuja priporočila za upravljanje inovacij v krizah. Za managerje SBP: vlaganja v digitalno infrastrukturo in personalizacijo z umetno inteligenco je treba dopolniti z izboljšano komunikacijo s partnerji. Za hotelske partnerje: SBP je treba obravnavati kot strateško orodje v celovitih strategijah upravljanja kanalov. Za oblikovalce politik: nacionalni odzivi na krize vplivajo na učinkovitost IPM aktivnosti SBP.

Kljub omejitvam (geografska osredotočenost, omejeni viri podatkov) raziskava poudarja, da je uspeh inovacij odvisen od ekosistemske kohezije in podpore deležnikov. Brez zaupanja, komunikacije in kontekstualne usklajenosti, tudi robustna inovacijska prizadevanja ne bodo v celoti uspešna v IDS krajini. Prihodnje raziskave bi se lahko osredotočile na primerjalne študije med regijami, širšo perspektivo IDSov in nadaljnje raziskovanje integracije umetne inteligence v posredniških modelih IDS. Poglavje zaključimo z diskusijo o nadaljnjem razvoju poslovnih modelov za SBPjev, ki bodo pomembni za njihovo rabo in popularnost v hotelskem gospodarstvu.

Tretje poglavje: na podlagi obeh uvodnih poglavij smo usvojili poglobljen vpogled v značilnosti in delovanje SBjev in zato lahko na trdnih temeljih pričnemo tudi z empirično preverbo spremembe spremenljivk pomembnih za njihovo uvedbo in rabo, ki jih utemljimo na podlagi modela UTAUT (Venkatesh idr, 2003) ter dvoetapnega modela za njihovo dolgoročno rabo, ki so ga razvili Bhatacherjee idr (2001). Modela predstavljata teoretski okvir za raziskovanje spremenljivk in faktorjev, ki narekujejo uvedbo in dolgoročno rabo SBP s strani hotelskih managerjev v tretjem poglavju naslovljenem "Dolgoročno opazovanje nadaljnje rabe SBPjev in njihove relevantnosti v danšnjem času". S pomočjo 49 polstrukturiranih intervijuev s hotelskimi managerji iz Slovenije, Hrvaške, Italije, Avstrije in Madžarske ter tematsko analizo njihovih odgovorov, opišemo spremenljivke njihove uvedbe in rabe ter ugotovimo, da so spremenljivke sicer enake, se pa razlikujejo v intenzivnosti ter njihovih faktorjih skozi različna časovna obobja in etape rabe. Medtem, ko je družbeni vpliv (DV), ki narekuje uvedbo SBP prihaja predvsem iz zunanjega okolja, je za

njihovo dolgoročno rabo bolj pomemben DV znotraj kolektiva. Prav tako ugotovimo, da so bili hotelski managerji pred uvedbo do SBPjev bolj zadržani, a so ob uvedbi in ob prvi rabi SBP po njihovi pričakovani uspešnosti (PU) močno presegle njihova pričakovanja in s tem vplivala na dvig njihovega zadovoljstva z njimi, kar je botrovalo njihovi nadaljni rabi. Četudi je pandemija iz različnih vzrokov povečala pomisleke (P) povezane z njihovo rabo, pa je rabo zaustavila zgolj začasno in je stopnja prekinitve dolgoročne rabe zanemarljiva in tako SBPji še danes ostajajo pomemben IDS za hotele vseh oblik. Poglavlje zaključimo s prikazom modela, ki oriše rabo SBPjev skozi zadnjih 15 let in diskusijo o razlikah med različnimi vrstami hotelov ter dejavnikih ki bi lahko na rabo SBPjev vplivali kot neke vrste “moderatorji”.

Slika 2: Razširjen dvostopenjski model dolgoročne rabe SBP



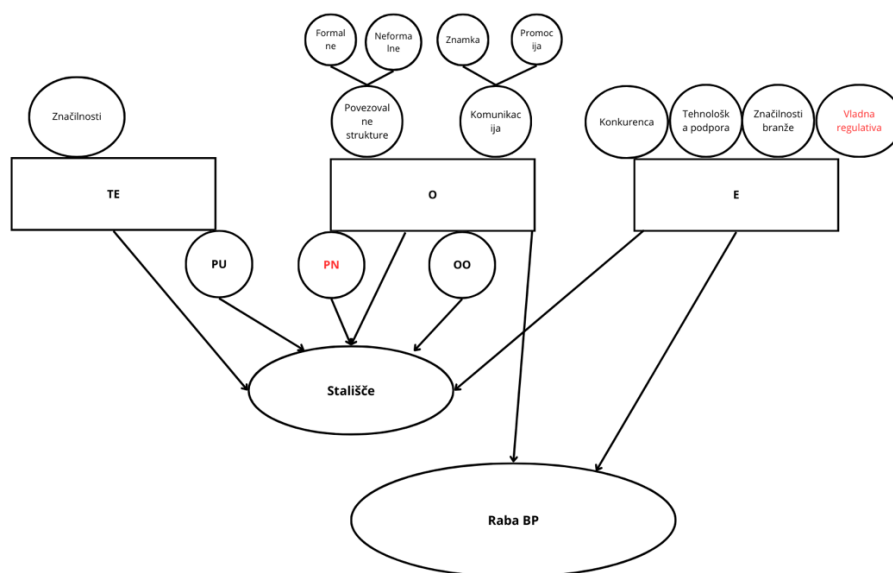
Legenda: PU: pričakovana uspešnost; PN: pričakovan napor; DV: družbeni vpliv; OO: olajševalne okoliščine; P: pomisleki; DSS: druge, za SBP specifične spremenljivke;

Vir: lastno delo

V četrtem poglavju z naslovom “Raba bliskovitih ponudb v slovenskem pandemičnem kontekstu - pristop širokega modela, ki kljubuje nepredvidljivosti tržišča” se posvetimo proučevanju rabe SBPjev v slovenskih hotelih v obdobju pandemije, ko so značilnosti turističnega povpraševanja v veliki meri krojili turistični boni. Ta unikatni kontekst uporabimo, da uporabimo sposobnost UTAUT spremenljivk ter UTAUT modela v njegovi izvorni obliki za analizo uporabe SBP med slovenskimi hotelskimi managerji. Ker hitro zaznamo, da sam UTAUT ni sposoben pojaniti vseh značilnosti rabe SBPjev med pandemijo, mu kot teoretično podstat dodamo še bolj organizacijsko usmerjen model Tehnologija-Organizacija-Okolje (TOE), ki sta ga razvila Tornatzky & Fleischer (1990). Skozi fokusno skupino in nadaljnjih 10 individualnih intervijuev s hotelskimi managerji

zajemo več kakor 80% nastanitvenih enot v Sloveniji, kar nam omogoča, da rezultate generaliziramo na celotno populacijo slovenskih hotelov. Ugotovimo, da sta v obdobju pandemije bolj kot same značilnosti SBPjev njihovo rabo narekovala predvsem okoljska dejavnika: vladna regulativa v obliki hotelskih bonov, ter pomanjkanje pospešena digitalna transformacija podjetij v tem obdobju. Prav tako je na uporabo SBPjev odločilno vplival organizacijski dejavnik pomanjkanja delovne sile v marketinških in trženjskih oddelkih hotelskih podjetij, ki je botroval omejeni rabi SBPjev ter dejstvu, da so hoteli po SBPjih posegali zgolj v primeru, da so ti uspeli razviti tehnične integracije, ki so SBPjem omogočale zajem hotelskih dinamičnih cen nepsoredno iz rezervacijskih sistemov hotelov in ne več po klasični metodi uporabe kontingentov po znižanih cenah, saj je tovrsten način poslovanja postal eden izmed glavnih P za nadaljno rabo SBP.

Slika 3: Razširjen dvostopenjski model dolgoročne rabe SBP



Legenda: PU: pričakovana uspešnost; PN: pričakovan napor; DV: družbeni vpliv; OO: olajševalne okoliščine; P: pomisleki; DSS: druge, za SBP specifične spremenljivke;

Vir: lastno delo

V petem, zaključnem poglavju, naslovljenem „SBP in lokalizirani destinacijski dejavniki“ se ukvarjamo s tem, kako okoljski dejavniki vplivajo na rabo SBP. Okoljski dejavniki že dolgo veljajo za ključne pri oblikovanju vedenja podjetij, zlasti v turističnem in hotelirskem sektorju. Ti vplivi segajo od lokalnih značilnosti destinacije do širših nacionalnih dinamik. V hoteliskem gospodarstvu so cenovne prilagoditve pogosta strateška odzivna taktika na zunanje dejavnike, ki vplivajo na zasedenost. V tem kontekstu so SBP zlasti v obliki nišnih

različic, postale priljubljeno orodje za obvladovanje nihanja povpraševanja in maksimizacijo prihodkov.

Kljub njihovi vse večji razširjenosti pa v znanstveni literaturi še vedno primanjkuje razumevanja, kdaj, kako in zakaj hoteli uporabljajo BP. Čeprav se te pogosto obravnavajo kot del notranjih cenovnih strategij, to poglavje predlaga širši pogled, ki poudarja vlogo zunanjih destinacijskih dejavnikov skladno z organizacijskim pojmovanjem tehnološkega sprejema. Z uporabo okvira Struktura–Vedenje–Učinek (angl. Structure-Conduct-Performance (SCP)) raziskava analizira, kako lokalna tržna struktura vpliva na vedenje hotelov – konkretno na uporabo nišnih BP – in kako to vedenje posledično vpliva na uspešnost. Študija se osredotoča na italijanske hotele s 4 in 5 zvezdicami, saj imajo močno prisotnost na nišnih BP in razpoložljive obsežne uradne destinacijske statistične podatke prek ISTAT-a. Cilj poglavja je ugotoviti, ali hoteli uporabljajo BP kot odziv na makrookoljske dejavnike, kot so sezonskost, konkurenca, stopnja povpraševanja in ekonomska odvisnost od turizma.

Hotelska industrija deluje v razmerah fiksnih zmogljivosti in pokvarljivosti – vsaka neprodana soba pomeni izgubo prihodka. Tradicionalne metode upravljanja prihodkov, kot je segmentacija cen glede na čas ali vrsto gostov, danes dopolnjujejo digitalna orodja, vključno z SBP. Posebej SBP, usmerjene v turiste višjega ranga, so del širše e-marketingne strategije. Vendar pa je njihova uporaba gotovo pogojena z več okoljskimi in tržnimi dejavniki.

Okvir SCP teoretično utemeljuje, da tržna struktura – zlasti raven konkurence in nihanja povpraševanja – oblikuje vedenje podjetij, vključno s cenovno politiko. Tako lahko uporaba SBP v določenem hotelu predstavlja neposreden odziv na razmere na njegovem lokalnem trgu. Glede sezonskosti destinacije, kot so obmorska letovišča ali zimska središča, pogosto doživljajo velika nihanja v obisku. Hoteli v teh območjih lahko uporabljajo SBP-je za stabilizacijo zasedenosti v nizki sezoni. Tako se postavi hipoteza, da bodo takšne destinacije uporabljale BP-je pogostejše (H1a) in ponujale večje popuste (H1b) kot npr. mestne destinacije.

Ko gre za turistično povpraševanje, v destinacijah z visoko obiskanostjo hoteli običajno ne potrebujejo pogostih akcij ali popustov. Zato naj bi hoteli v takšnih območjih BP-je uporabljali redkeje (H2a) in z manjšimi popusti (H2b). Tudi intenzivnost konkurence lahko vpliva na uporabo BP-jev. V območjih z veliko hotelsko ponudbo se SBP lahko uporabijo kot način diferenciacije. Predpostavlja se, da bo večja konkurenca povezana tako z večjo uporabo SBP-jev (H3a) kot z večjimi popusti (H3b). Nazadnje lahko stopnja ekonomske odvisnosti od turizma prisili hotele v uporabo agresivnih cenovnih strategij. Zato se hipotezira, da bodo hoteli v destinacijah, močno odvisnih od turizma, pogostejše uporabljali SBP-je (H4a) in ponujali globlje popuste (H4b).

Za preverjanje hipotez je bila uporabljena kombinacija posnetkov spletnih podatkov (angl. web scrapping) in uradnih turističnih statističnih podatkov. Z uporabo posebej razvitega orodja so bili zbrani podatki s platforme Verrychic, specializirane za nišne SBP. Analiza se je osredotočila na leto 2019, da bi se izognila izkrivljanju zaradi pandemije, in zajela 3.809 edinstvenih SBP ponudb iz Italije. Podatki so bili obogateni z uradnimi kazalniki iz ISTAT-a, kot so tipologija turizma, sezonskost in gospodarski indeks.

Geolokacijska analiza je bila izvedena z orodjem QGIS, regresijska analiza pa s programom STATA. Uporabljeni so bili dve regresiji, t-testi, testi normalnosti ostankov in robustni modeli, da bi zagotovili veljavnost rezultatov.

Analiza je pokazala, da so obmorske destinacije in velika mesta beležile največ BP-jev. Povprečni oglaševani popust je znašal 49 %, z velikimi razlikami glede na vrsto destinacije. Termalne in obmorske destinacije so ponujale največje popuste, medtem ko so gorske in jezerske ponujale nižje. Pri sezonskosti rezultati niso pokazali pomembne povezave med številom BP in stopnjo sezonskosti, zato H1a ni bila potrjena. Vendar je bila potrjena H1b – večja sezonskost je bila povezana z globljimi popusti. To kaže, da hoteli uporabljajo BP kot cenovno prilagodljivo orodje, ne pa kot enkratno rešitev za presežek kapacitet. V povezavi s povpraševanjem sta bili obe hipotezi potrjeni. Hoteli v destinacijah z visoko turistično obremenitvijo so BP-je uporabljali manj pogosto in z nižjimi popusti (H2a in H2b), kar potrjuje, da BP-ji služijo aktivaciji povpraševanja v manj obiskanih območjih. Kar zadeva konkurenco, so rezultati pokazali, da večje število hotelov s 4 in 5 zvezdicami v občini pomeni več BP, kar potrjuje H3a. Popusti so bili večji pri hotelih s 4 zvezdicami, medtem ko so hoteli s 5 zvezdicami bolj zadržani pri globokem diskontiranju, kar delno potrjuje H3b in poudarja vpliv ugleda blagovne znamke. V primeru ekonomske odvisnosti od turizma je bila H4a zavrnjena – v destinacijah z visoko turistično odvisnostjo ni bilo več BP kot drugod. Vendar pa so bili popusti globlji (H4b), kar nakazuje na vrednostno orientirano strategijo, usmerjeno v znižanje cen namesto količine ponudb.

Rezultati kažejo, da so nišne BP trajnostna sestavina distribucijskega spleta hotelov, ne pa zgolj kratkoročno promocijsko orodje. Hoteli jih uporabljajo prilagodljivo – prilagajajo globino popusta, ne pa nujno števila ponudb. To potrjuje, da BP predstavljajo cenovno odziven kanal, vgrajen v dolgoročno strategijo upravljanja prihodkov. Razlike med tipi destinacij kažejo, da lokalne tržne razmere bistveno vplivajo na diskontno strategijo. Mestne destinacije z visoko celoletno obiskanostjo ponujajo manj BP z manjšimi popusti, medtem ko jih destinacije z izrazito sezonskostjo uporabljajo intenzivneje in z večjimi popusti. Pomembna ugotovitev je t. i. vodilno-sledilna dinamika v uporabi BP-jev: hoteli, ki poslujejo v občinah z velikim številom BP, sledijo strategijam konkurence. A 5-zvezdični hoteli se izogibajo globokim popustom, saj bi to lahko ogrozilo njihovo blagovno znamko. Pri 4-zvezdičnih hotelih pa BP-ji služijo kot orodje diferenciacije, še posebej v močno konkurenčnih okoljih. Nazadnje ugotovitve kažejo, da so BP-ji v turizmu pomemben

reaktivni odziv na makro okoljske pogoje, kot so sezonskost in povpraševanje. Posebej globoki popusti v destinacijah z visoko odvisnostjo od turizma kažejo na njihovo uporabo kot kanala za prodajo presežnih kapacitet.

Teoretično peto poglavje prispeva k razširitvi uporabe okvira SCP v raziskovanju hotelirstva, saj premakne pozornost z notranjih strategij na vpliv zunanjega okolja. Raziskava razkriva, da uporaba BP-jev ni naključna, temveč pogojena z destinacijskimi dejavniki, kot so sezonskost, konkurenca, povpraševanje in gospodarska odvisnost.

Praktično pa rezultati ponujajo prihodkovnim managerjem pomembne smernice: strategije BP naj bodo prilagojene lokalnim tržnim razmeram in ne le notranjim finančnim ciljem. Platforme z nižnimi BP lahko na podlagi rezultatov ciljajo 5-zvezdične hotele v manj konkurenčnih okoljih za globlje popuste ter 4-zvezdične hotele v konkurenčnih okoljih za večje število ponudb. Ker se študija osredotoča na Italijo, so rezultati manj posplošljivi na druge države. Prihodnje raziskave naj vključijo manj razvite turistične trge ali primerjajo več držav. Poleg tega uporaba podatkov iz leta 2019 pomeni, da pandemični vplivi niso upoštevani, zato bodo potrebne novejšje študije z aktualnimi podatki. Nadaljnje raziskave naj vključijo multivariatne modele za celovitejše razumevanje uporabe BP-jev v različnih tržnih razmerah.

Skladno s postavljenimi raziskovalnimi cilji in konkretnimi vprašanji v fazi dispozicije doktorske disertacije, v nadaljevanju podajamo pojasnitev izpolnjenih ciljev, ki jih je doktorsko raziskovanje doseglo.

1. Razviti akademsko razumevanje kanala SBP v hotelirski e-distribuciji;

RV 1: Kako so se značilnosti in akademsko razumevanje SBP spremenili od pojava leta 2008 do danes?

Ocena dosega zastavljenega cilja: Ta cilj je bil v celoti dosežen v poglavjih 1 (operativni vidik) in 2 (vidik IDS). Razvoj značilnosti PM DD od leta 2020 naprej je ena od tem, ki smo jih že začeli raziskovati na podlagi zbranega empiričnega gradiva za to disertacijo, vendar formlano ni del te disertacije. Nekateri vidiki razvoja SBP po pandemijah COVID-19 so predstavljeni v poglavju 3.

2. Določiti in pojasniti spremenljivke ter njihove parametre (splošne in specifične za SBP), ki vzpodbujajo hotelske managerje k vpeljavi nastajajočih kanalov, kot so SBP;

RV 2: Katere so glavne spremenljivke, ki privedejo hotelske managerje do vpeljave novega distribucijskega kanala?

Ocena dosega zastavljenega cilja: V poglavju 3 so bile podrobno opisane spremenljivke in njihovi dejavniki, ki vodijo hotelske menedžerje k sprejemanju, ter psihološki mehanizmi, ki vodijo takšno sprejemanje na podlagi prepričanj in zadovoljstva, v poglavju 4 pa so le-te

opisane v kontekstu pandemije COVID-19 - element, ki v času zasnove te disertacije še ni bil znan in tako dejansko dokazuje aktualno prilagoditev in nadgradnjo zastavljenega cilja.

3. določiti in pojasniti spremenljivke ter njihove parametre (splošne in specifične za SBP), ki vzpodbujajo hotelske managerje k dolgoročni rabi SBP po tem, ko je bil kanal že vpeljan;
RV 3: Katere so glavne spremenljivke, ki privedejo hotelske managerje do tega, da še naprej uporabljajo vpeljan distribucijski kanal?

Ocena dosega zastavljenega cilja: Spremenljivke in njihovi dejavniki, zaradi katerih hotelski menedžerji še naprej uporabljajo DD, so bili podrobno opisani in pojasnjeni v poglavju 3. V istem poglavju pojasnjujemo tudi, kako so se spremenljivke in dejavniki za nadaljnjo rabo spremenili med pandemijo COVID-19 in po njej.

4. Ugotoviti, ali so spremenljivke vpeljave enake tistim dolgoročne rabe, kot to predlaga razširjen dvostopenjski model dolgoročne rabe SBP, ali se razlikujejo;

RV 4: Ali je dolgoročna raba SBP resnično pogojena s potrditvijo istih spremenljivk, ki določajo vpeljavo SBP?

Ocena dosega zastavljenega cilja: V poglavju 3 so bile potrjene iste spremenljivke, zaradi katerih so hotelski menedžerji sprejeli in še naprej uporabljali DD. Vendar se pomembnost in intenzivnost dejavnikov spremenljivk UTAUT spreminjata med sprejetjem in nadaljnjo rabo ter samo rabo v času pandemije COVID in njenega okrevanja.

5. Odločiti in pojasniti pomisleke pri vpeljavi kanala SBP v obliki managerskih pomislekov o morebitnem konfliktu s kanalom SBP in njegovim vplivom na obstoječe kanale v hotelskem e-distribucijskem portfelju;

RV 5: Kateri pomisleki odvrčajo managerje od vpeljave SBP in kako vpeljava ter dolgoročna raba SBP vplivata na druge e-distribucijske kanale?

Ocena dosega zastavljenega cilja: V poglavju 3 so bili opisani in pojasnjeni pomisleki glede motenj, zaradi katerih so hotelirji oklevali s sprejetjem ali celo prenehali uporabljati SBP med pandemijo ali jih niso ponovno začeli uporabljati v fazi okrevanja. Vendar pa ni bilo odgovorjeno na vprašanje, kako uporaba SBP vpliva na druge IDS. Ključni razlog za to je, da večina naših intervjuvancev ni poskušala analizirati vpliva sprejetja SBP na druge IDS in ni imela jasne predstave o teh vplivih. Kljub temu so na splošno domnevali, da je vpliv precej pozitiven, zato bi ga lahko hipotetično razlagali kot "učinek oglasne deske". Vendar bo treba ta vidik empirično preveriti z bolj strukturiranimi analitičnimi tehnikami, ki bodo analizirale podatke, pridobljene iz hotelskih PMS sistemov in sistemov za upravljanje IDS.

Disertacija predstavlja teoretičen in praktičen doprinos na področju raziskovanja hotelske distribucije in tehnološkega sprejetja IS. S teoretičnega stališča s pomočjo vsebinske analize obstoječe literature odpravljamo vrzel v razumevanju SBP s povzetkom in strukturiranjem znanja, povezanega s SBP, s čimer doprinalamo k razvoju in napredku akademskega razumevanja kanala SBP. Poleg tega prispevamo k vsebinskemu področju širše turistične

distribucije, saj apliciramo in povezujemo teorije in modele s področja IS, ki so zmožni zaobjeti pomen tehnološkega razvoja, ki je na področju hotelske e-distribucije vedno hitrejši. Ključen doprinos te disertacije teoriji je pionirska raba modela UTAUT in dvostopenjskega okvirja dolgoročne rabe IS za pojasnitev vpeljave sodobnih IDSjev kot so SBPji z vidika hotelske ponudbe. Nadalje v raziskavi razkrivamo, poglobljeno pojasnujemo in kontekstualiziramo splošne spremenljivke UTAUT in njihove faktorje, ki določajo vpeljavo in dolgoročno rabo kanala SBP, ter empirično ugotavljamo, da so spremenljivke, ki opredeljujejo vpeljavo in dolgoročno rabo, dejansko enake, razlikujejo pa se v faktorjih in njihovi intenziteti vpliva. Te spremenljivke nakazujejo potencial za predvidevanje vpeljave in dolgoročne rabe tudi drugih IDSjev, ki jih bo tehnološki razvoj prinesel v prihodnosti. Dopriinos je nadalje povezan z orisom spremenljivk, specifičnih za kontekst SBP, ki podpirajo vpeljavo in dolgoročno rabo kanala v hotelski distribuciji na način, ki upošteva tudi pomisleke glede sprejetja tehnologije. To pomeni dodatno kontekstualno nadgradnjo modela UTAUT, ki v kontekstu hotelirstva in turizma predhodno še ni bila izvedena. Z raziskovanjem pomislekov disertacija prav tako odkriva predhodno neraziskane posledice vpeljave SBP in potencialnih konfliktov kanalov ter drugih vplivov na obstoječe e-kanale v današnji hotelski distribuciji. V disertaciji torej povezujemo dva osrednja konstrukta, ki sta prisotna na področju raziskav o IS v turistični distribuciji. Posledično z disertacijo ustvarjamo na preseku literature o IS in literature o hotelski distribuciji, kar nadalje potrjuje originalnost raziskovalnega prispevka. Ne nazadnje disertacija pomeni tudi ključen doprinos praksi, saj oblikuje praktične usmeritve za hotelske managerje, ki trenutno uporabljajo SBP ter druge IDSje brez jasno utemeljene strateške usmeritve.

Z vidika prihodnjih raziskav disertacija omenja številna področja, ki jih bo potrebno v prihodnje dodatno znanstveno raziskati. Med njimi je prva, ki je v teku, izvedba nadaljnje študije o razvoju PM v IDS, da bi ugotovili, kako je COVID-19 vplival na inovacije PM in oblikovanje začasnih PM med izvajalci SBP. Nadalje nameravamo uporabiti podatke, zbrane z razčlenjevanjem spletnih strani SBP na internetu, da bi opazovali, kako značilnosti destinacije, v kateri se nahaja hotel, vplivajo na uporabo IDS SBP. Seveda tudi vabimo raziskovalce, da poskušajo predlagane konceptualne modele kvantificirati in empirično preveriti na večjih vzorcih in v drugačnih kontekstih, kot smo jih uporabili v naši raziskavi. Potrošniški vidik sprejemanja in uporabe SBP je področje, ki smo ga prav tako začeli aktivno raziskovati in bi moralo prinesiti nekaj zanimivih spoznanj ter dodatno plast celostnega razumevanja SBP.