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**TITLE: MARRIOT INTERNATIONAL-MARRIOT'S RESPONSE TO THE
COVID CRISIS**

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SUMMARY

The covid-19 pandemic has been one of the most challenging global crises in recent history, significantly impacting the hospital industry. Marriott International, a leading hotel chain, faced unprecedented challenges during this period. To navigate these turbulent times successfully, Marriott deployed various marketing strategies to adapt to the changing market conditions and customer behaviours.

This report includes the critical evaluation of the marketing strategies deployed by Marriott international during covid crisis and its impact on stakeholders. Also, it contains critical evaluation of swot analysis, competitive analysis and evaluation of success of strategies using the measurement metrics. Besides this report provides managerial implication of marketing strategies based on case study and provide recommendation to improve the marketing strategies in the post covid era.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriott International is a leading American hospitality company renowned for its extensive portfolio of hotel brands and services. J. Willard Marriott established the business in 1927, and since then, it has expanded to rank among the biggest and most recognisable hotel chains globally. Marriott serves a wide range of travellers and manages more than 7,500 properties in more than 130 countries and territories from its headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland, in the United States.

The key to the business' success is its dedication to giving customers exceptional experiences and individualised services. A wide range of brands, from full-service hotels and luxury resorts to more affordable options, are included in Marriott's portfolio, each of which serves a different market segment. They have many popular brands, some of which include Marriott Hotels & Resorts, JW Marriott, Sheraton, Westin, Renaissance Hotels, Courtyard by Marriott, and many more.

Additionally, Marriott International places a strong emphasis on social responsibility and sustainability in an effort to have a beneficial impact on the areas in which it works. Marriott has developed a reputation as a good corporate citizen through initiatives including sustainable business practises, community involvement, and diversity and inclusion activities. Travellers looking for comfort and quality in their accommodations continue to favour Marriott International because of its extensive history, global reach, and commitment to outstanding hospitality.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MARKETING THEORIES AND STRATEGIES USED BY MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

The COVID-19 pandemic unleashed an unprecedented wave of disruption, affecting every facet of society on a global scale. As one of the biggest and most well-known hotel chains in the world, Marriott encountered unanticipated challenges as travel restrictions, lockdowns, and health issues significantly affected the hospitality sector. The Covid-19 pandemic has been shown to have an impact on hotel industries from an economic, social, and psychological standpoint. (Demira M., 2021; Demirb S.S., 2021 ; Dalgıcc A., 2021; Ergend F.D., 2021). Effective marketing during this period became crucial to not only survive but also to position the brand for a strong recovery once the pandemic subsided. During this time, effective marketing became essential to the brand's survival as well as positioning it for a robust comeback after the epidemic was finished. Everyday management techniques are altered by health protocols, pricing schemes, and cost-cutting. (Choirisa S.F., 2022).

The magnitude of Marriott, comprising its company-operated, franchised, and licenced hotels, served as its primary resource. Long-term management and lease agreements with property owners and condominium communities were in place for company-operated assets. A management charge based on hotel revenue and an incentive fee based on profits were received by the company. These contracts were adaptable, allowing property owners to either end the agreement or change their property's status to a franchised one if it failed to achieve financial performance standards over time. The company was in charge of the personnel, supplies, and upkeep of those Marriott-run hotels. Additionally, they offered advertising, centralised reservation services, bookkeeping, and processing. Additionally, Marriott sold residential real estate while using its trademark, earning branding fees in the process. Additionally, Marriott used its trademark to sell residential real estate while also receiving branding fees.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strength

- The brand recognition of Marriott is indeed strong, and its multinational and diversified brand portfolio across 30 brands in 130 countries contributes to this recognition. For instance, it does not examine the potential effects on brand awareness of increased competition and shifting consumer preferences.
- It is true that having a sizable cash reserve gives Marriott the ability to withstand the effects of COVID-19 better than its smaller rivals. However, it would be beneficial to assess the potential limits of cash reserves and the requirement for strategic financial planning in order to continue the business through a protracted crisis.
- The study recognises Marriott's robust operating network, which enables the business to disperse risk and minimise damage. This is a big benefit, but it would be interesting to talk about how Marriott may use this network to adjust to shifting market conditions and take advantage of new opportunities.
- The research recognises the benefits and difficulties associated with Marriott's substantial presence in North America. However, a more critical review may consider how Marriott can reduce these risks while taking advantage of the region's robust economy, as well as any potential long-term consequences of the COVID-19 situation on the North American market.

Weaknesses:

- The fact that Marriott's employees are unionised is seen as a vulnerability, with a focus on the potential danger posed by Unite Here's growth and expanded membership. It does not go into detail about how unionisation can affect labour relations, employee satisfaction, or overall operational effectiveness. A more critical assessment would look at how union activities would affect Marriott's capacity to keep a competitive edge in the market.
- It accurately points out Marriott's benefit of having sizable cash reserves to lessen the impact of the existing debt as a drawback. However, the analysis might go beyond to evaluate the long-term effects of debt and the methods Marriott can use to efficiently manage and lower its debt load.

Opportunities:

- The analysis identifies Marriott's sizable development pipeline and collaborative ventures as growth potential. It doesn't, however, critically assess how these potential fit with changing customer demands and expectations in the post-COVID-19 age. A more thorough analysis would be produced by evaluating the potential risks and difficulties linked to these prospects.
- The analysis identifies Marriott's sizable development pipeline and collaborative ventures as growth potential. It doesn't, however, critically assess how these potential fit with changing customer demands and expectations in the post-COVID-19 age. A more thorough analysis would be produced by evaluating the potential risks and difficulties linked to these prospects.

Threats:

- Marriott's primary rivals are identified in the report as Accor, Hilton, and Hyatt, demonstrating how well it recognises the industry's intense competition. It does not, however, evaluate Marriott's competitive edge or the possible dangers of pricing wars and market saturation. The research would be strengthened by examining Marriott's initiatives for distinctiveness and its capacity to adjust to shifting market circumstances.
- A threat identified is the potential response from unions and furloughed employees. A more rigorous assessment, however, would examine the precise actions Marriott may take to address worker issues, uphold morale, and reduce the detrimental effects on the staff.
- Although the financial impact of COVID-19 is acknowledged as a threat to insolvency, Marriott's mitigation strategies are not thoroughly evaluated in the analysis. A thorough review would go into great detail on Marriott's financial plans, cost-cutting efforts, and risk management procedures.

The SWOT analysis highlights some of the most important characteristics of Marriott's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, but a more critical assessment is required to examine the potential ramifications, risks, and strategic considerations connected with each item. Additional research would improve our awareness of Marriott's competitive position within the market and its capacity to overcome COVID-19's problems.

MARKETING STRATEGIES DEPLOYED DURING COVID

- Product strategy:

To protect both staff and visitors, Marriott implemented enhanced health and safety procedures. This includes improved cleaning techniques, contactless services, and social exclusionary practices.

To meet the evolving needs of its customers, the corporation reevaluated its product line and modified its portfolio. For instance, they converted some hotels to offer alternate applications like remote offices or to house healthcare staff.

- Price strategy:

To encourage reservations in uncertain times, Marriott developed variable pricing schemes. To entice tourists, they provided reduced prices, unique packages, and expanded loyalty programme perks.

Additionally, the business introduced cancellation procedures that gave customers more freedom and let them modify or cancel appointments without incurring fees.

- Place strategy:

To contact clients who were making vacation plans or looking for lodging, Marriott made use of digital platforms and online travel agents. To make bookings simple and offer up-to-the-minute hotel availability data, they optimised their website and mobile application. While traditional hotel operations were limited, Marriott also increased its delivery and takeaway services to interact with local communities and create income.

- Promotion strategy:

To promote its improved safety procedures and reassure guests about the hygienic standards in its properties, Marriott initiated focused marketing efforts. They made use of a variety of platforms, such as social media, email marketing, and website banners.

To spread its message and reach a larger audience, the organisation also worked with influencers, travel bloggers, and reliable partners. These collaborations intended to boost traveller confidence and encourage bookings.

EFFECTS OF MARKETING STRATEGIES ON STAKEHOLDERS

- Customers: Customers' trust and confidence in the brand were increased as a result of the marketing tactics' reassurances of Marriott's dedication to safety. Increased consumer

satisfaction was brought on by the flexible pricing and cancellation procedures, which also offered convenience and assurance.

- Employees: The focus Marriott placed on health and safety procedures helped to safeguard its employees' wellbeing and provide a secure work environment. During a difficult time, the repurposing of hotels gave employees some job security and opportunity.
- Shareholders: The marketing strategies aimed to minimize revenue losses by attracting customers and driving bookings. While the pandemic had a significant impact on the hospitality industry as a whole, Marriott's efforts mitigated the financial impact to some extent.
- Local communities: Marriott's activities, such as delivery services and hotel repurposing, had a good effect on the neighbourhood by fostering job possibilities and boosting economic activity.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

- Marriott's flexible booking and cancellation policies attempted to reassure clients and promote upcoming reservations. The business made it simple for customers to change their plans as needed by waiving cancellation fees and allowing free modifications or refunds. This strategy gave Marriott a competitive edge and allowed them to keep their customers' loyalty.
- Marriott International modified their marketing and communication tactics to take into account shifting client wants and expectations. For updates on health and safety measures, flexible policies, and the condition of its properties, the corporation used a variety of media. Marriott sought to establish trust and retain client loyalty by being open with them.
- Marriott stepped up its digital transformation initiatives to improve the customer experience and prepare for contactless transactions. For guests to bypass the front desk and reduce personal contact, the company invested in technological solutions including mobile check-in and digital key capabilities.
- Marriott International prioritised the health and safety of both visitors and staff by putting in place strict cleaning processes. The organisation established the Marriott Global Cleanliness Council, which includes professionals in infection control and hygiene, to create improved

cleaning standards which inspire confidence in travellers and set itself apart from rivals by emphasising sanitation, social distance, and contactless services.

- Marriott established strategic alliances and collaborations with healthcare organisations and providing front-line staff and first responders with special rates. Through partnerships with OTAs and other platforms, Marriott was able to expand its customer base and increase bookings during a difficult time.

- To lessen the financial effects of the crisis, Marriott International assessed its property portfolio and implemented cost-cutting measures. When necessary, the corporation reduced its employees, integrated operations, and temporarily closed various hotels. Marriott sought to restructure operations, cut costs, and guarantee the long-term viability of the company by optimising its portfolio.

In the midst of unknown difficulties, Marriott International's response to the COVID-19 epidemic showed flexibility and adaptation. The business was able to stay competitive in a sector that was changing quickly due to its emphasis on health and safety, adaptable policies, digital transformation, focused marketing, partnerships, and cost optimisation. Marriott International put its guests and staff first while also addressing changing customer expectations in order to position itself for recovery and future growth.

IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY IN STRATEGIES

Digital Marketing:

During the epidemic, Marriott International extensively relied on digital marketing like M live studio to maintain brand awareness and communicate with customers. Utilising social media and influencer marketing, they personalised marketing campaigns and improved their online presence.

Communication:

During the pandemic, communication became essential, and technology was instrumental in enabling Marriott International to implement successful communication tactics. They

implemented technology to enable contactless interactions, real-time updates, and remote work and collaboration capabilities.

Internationalization:

The pandemic hampered international travel, making Marriott's internationalisation initiatives difficult. But with the aid of digital platforms, multilingual digital platforms, market intelligence, and data analytics, technology allowed them to overcome these obstacles.

In conclusion, Marriott International's strategies throughout the COVID-19 issue heavily relied on technology. It assisted them in maintaining brand recognition, customising marketing initiatives, fostering effective communication, and overcoming the difficulties of internationalisation. Marriott was able to adjust to the shifting environment and position itself for recovery when travel restrictions loosened by embracing digital solutions.

EVALUATION OF SUCCESS OF STRATEGIES AND MEASUREMENT METRICS

It's essential to note that the success of marketing strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic depended heavily on external factors such as government regulations, travel restrictions, and overall consumer sentiment. Marriott's ability to navigate these challenges, adapt quickly, and demonstrate resilience would have played a significant role in their overall success. However, there are some metrics for evaluation of success of marketing strategies. They are

- **Financial Performance:** Important measures like sales, profit, and market share can show whether Marriott's strategies have been generally successful. It would be beneficial to compare their performance to that of the competition and industry benchmarks.
- **Occupancy Rates:** Tracking the occupancy rates at Marriott properties can show how well their marketing initiatives are working to draw visitors and increase demand.
- **RevPAR (Revenue per Available Room)** is a measure of revenue generated per available room and can show whether Marriott is able to increase revenue in difficult economic conditions.
- **Customer satisfaction:** Surveys, ratings, and reviews can be used to gauge client loyalty and contentment, offering information about how well marketing tactics maintain customer satisfaction.

Controlling Marketing Functions:

If Marriott's marketing strategies were found to be ineffective, several measures could be taken to control marketing functions:

- **Reassess Strategy:** Conducting a detailed review of the market, client preferences, and rivals' strategies would assist identify areas where Marriott's approach fell short. This evaluation would enable them to alter their marketing plans and techniques accordingly.
- **Reallocating the budget** to more productive channels or activities might help maximise marketing efforts if particular marketing campaigns or channels are not producing the expected results.
- **Customer Segmentation and Targeting:** By re-examining customer segments and improving targeting standards, marketing activities could be targeted to the most receptive and lucrative audiences. **Creative Messaging and Offerings:** Revamping marketing messaging and offerings to align with the evolving customer needs and preferences would help attract and retain customers.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation:** By setting up a reliable monitoring system and regularly assessing marketing performance, Marriott would be able to spot any weaknesses or areas for improvement and adjust their plans as necessary.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION ON MARKETING STRATEGIES

- **Agility and Flexibility:**

To respond to evolving market dynamics swiftly, organisations should place a high focus on developing flexible and adaptable marketing strategies. The epidemic caused swift and unexpected changes in the travel industry. Marriott's ability to quickly alter its marketing strategies to satisfy shifting consumer needs, such as by promoting staycations and putting an emphasis on local markets, serves as an example of the necessity of agility and adaptation. The marketing team should employ real-time analytics and data-driven decision-making to immediately identify trends and customer preferences.

- **Digital Transformation:**

To increase online presence and engage customers in contactless environments, use digital transformation. The pandemic accelerated the shift to digitalization, and Marriott benefited from this growth by enhancing its online, social media, and mobile app presence. Digital

marketing enables personalised targeting, improved consumer experiences, and the collection of pertinent data for market segmentation. To enhance their digital marketing capabilities and ensure seamless customer interactions online, managers should invest in talent and technology.

- Health and Safety Communication:

To gain customers' trust, highlight health and safety in marketing messages. During the crisis, customers' concerns for their health and safety escalated. As a result, Marriott implemented stringent health policies and made public mention of them in its marketing campaigns. This emphasis on safety relaxed guests and helped them regain confidence in travel. To gain customers' trust, managers must recognise the value of health and safety communication and ensure that it is at the centre of all marketing communications.

- Customer-Centric Approach:

Use a client-centered marketing strategy to meet the evolving needs of visitors. Because of the outbreak, consumer expectations have altered, and travellers now demand safety, cleanliness, and customised experiences. Marriott's customer-centric strategy, which focused on specific needs and preferences, allowed it to preserve client loyalty despite challenging circumstances. Managers should give client input top priority and use it to create marketing strategies that are tailored to their target market's particular needs.

- Sustainability and Purpose-Driven Marketing:

To attract ethical customers, combine sustainability and purpose-driven marketing. Sustainability and corporate social responsibility have gained importance as a result of the COVID-19 issue. In its marketing initiatives, Marriott underlined its commitment to sustainability and help for the neighbourhood. Customers that care about the environment and the world might be attracted and kept by brands that share their values. To ensure that they appeal to clients looking for socially conscious firms, managers should incorporate sustainability programmes into their marketing strategies.

- Collaborative Partnerships:

Encourage collaborative partnerships to expand reach and provide customers with more. Marriott partnered with local businesses, travel operators, and airlines during the pandemic to create package discounts and joint promotions. The company was able to increase its customers and offer enticing travel packages thanks to partnerships with other companies. Managers should consider strategic alliances to capitalise on one another's strengths, increase brand recognition, and provide customers with more.

- Brand Resilience and Crisis Management:

Build the resiliency of your brand and invest in crisis management equipment. Marriott was put to the test by the epidemic, but its strong crisis management practises helped soften the blow. Managers should invest in crisis readiness, scenario planning, and communication protocols to effectively address impending uncertainty. Building brand resilience is essential for maintaining customer loyalty and trust during times of crises.

CONCLUSION

Marriott International has made excellent attempts to navigate the enormous difficulties brought on by the global crisis. During times of restricted travel and uncertainty, Marriott's strategic choices, such as emphasising digital marketing, utilising social media platforms, and concentrating on local and domestic markets, have proven to be successful in retaining brand visibility and connecting with customers. Travellers began to trust Marriott as a result of the company's fast messaging changes in response to shifting consumer demands and safety concerns. Additionally, their accommodating booking methods and loyalty programme rewards have been crucial in preserving customer loyalty and promoting future reservations. While there were many challenges for the hospitality sector during the epidemic, Marriott's flexible marketing strategy made a huge difference in reducing the damage and putting the company in a good recovery position when travel restrictions eased and consumer confidence rose. To achieve sustained growth and success in the changing hospitality industry as we approach a post-pandemic period, Marriott must keep building on the lessons learned and keeping a customer-centric focus.

RECCOMENDATION

- Continue making investments in digital transformation to improve online visibility and interact with clients in a contactless environment. This entails boosting user experience, personalising targeting based on consumer preferences and behavioural data, and updating its website and mobile app.
- Continue to emphasize on health and hygiene protocols and showcase them in marketing materials and on their website to instil confidence in potential guests.
- Conduct regular customer surveys and feedback collection at different touchpoints to gain insightful information that can be used to improve service offerings and marketing communications.
- Use the information from its loyalty programme to develop customised services and targeted marketing initiatives, boosting client happiness and encouraging repeat business.
- Embrace hybrid travel experiences that satisfy tastes for both actual and online interactions. The use of technology to support virtual meetings, online events, and tours will be appealing to clients looking for more adaptable and accessible solutions.
- Keep a keen emphasis on health and safety communication in its marketing messages. Travellers' faith and confidence will be maintained by prominently showcasing the company's strict policies and procedures for ensuring guest safety.
- Incorporate sustainability practices into operations, and use marketing efforts to successfully explain its initiatives. The company can draw in environmentally conscientious and socially conscious travellers by displaying a commitment to both of these issues.
- Make investments in regional and local marketing campaigns to attract local market desire. Domestic tourists looking for staycations or quick getaways will respond to marketing messages that are specifically tailored to showcase the unique experiences and attractions in each region.
- Create strategic connections with relevant players in the travel sector to draw in a wider audience and set oneself apart in an increasingly competitive environment.
- Place a high priority on crisis preparedness and spend money building strong crisis management skills. The company's reputation and consumer trust will be protected by employing efficient crisis communication techniques and keeping a transparent attitude.

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