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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The critical examination and evaluation of the marketing theories and tactics employed by Marriott International during the Covid-19 issue are summarized in this paper.

The Covid-19 outbreak, which had a major influence on the travel and tourism sector, presented Marriott International, a premier worldwide hospitality firm, with never-before-seen difficulties. Marriott employed a variety of marketing techniques based on important marketing ideas, including as customer-centricity, communication, digital transformation, and adaptation, to overcome these obstacles.

The critical analysis reveals the success of Marriott's marketing efforts in various areas, including customer-centric initiatives, communication and branding, digital transformation, adaptability and innovation, and corporate social responsibility.

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 epidemic is a major global calamity that will impact most industries between 2019 and 2020. The hotel and tourism sectors are the most exposed to environmental factors. This essay analyses and evaluates Marriott International's marketing theories and tactics used during the Covid Crisis, a well-known hospitality and travel corporation.

Marriott International, Inc. is an American international hospitality company that operates a broad portfolio of hotels and related lodging facilities. It is one of the most reputed organizations in the hospitality industry and has 30 brands diversified as per convenience and comfort. According to Global Data, Marriott held 9.68% of the hotel market in 2018, making it the second-largest market share holder globally.



The effectiveness, advantages, and weaknesses of Marriott International's marketing theories and tactics during the Covid issue are examined in this critical analysis and evaluation. We may learn more about how Marriott handled the obstacles presented by the crisis and discovered chances for expansion by looking at how it tackled important marketing components including customer centricity, communication, digital transformation, and adaptability.

The investigation will look at Marriott's efforts to put the needs of the customer first, implement open and considerate communication, use digital tools, and show flexibility and innovation in the face of adversity. It will also specify the metrics by which the effectiveness of these strategies is measured, as well as how these strategies' effects on internal and external stakeholders are evaluated.

In the end, this critical analysis and evaluation illuminate the efficiency of Marriott International's marketing theories and strategies during the Covid crisis and provide suggestions for improving their marketing strategies to ensure ongoing success and resilience in the constantly changing travel and hospitality landscape.

1. The Critical Analysis and Evaluation of the Marketing Theories and Strategies used by Marriott International during the Covid Crisis

The tourism and hospitality sectors were greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic's severe consequences (Gossling et al., 2020; Zenker and Kock, 2020). Adapting methods to accommodate shifting client needs, communicating effectively, and maintaining brand relevance in the face of extraordinary disruptions are all part of the marketing idea during the Covid crisis.

During the Covid crisis, marketing was crucial to Marriott International's ability to respond to changing conditions, connect with customers effectively, and sustain brand relevance. The importance of Marketing during the Covid Crisis includes Communication & Reassurance, it was essential for Marriott to use effective marketing communication to deliver timely updates on security measures, operational modifications, and accommodating booking restrictions, adapting to changing Customer Behavior, and Building customer relationships.

Marketing tactics helped businesses sustain consumer loyalty and trust, preparing them for recovery and growth in the post-pandemic age by successfully communicating with stakeholders, responding to shifting market dynamics, and exhibiting empathy towards customers (Deloitte, 2020).

Resources Distributed Towards Marketing Activities by Marriott International:

Marriott International probably directed resources towards various marketing initiatives to overcome the difficulties brought on by the Covid-19 crisis, though specifics of resource allocation may vary. Some of the key areas where resources may have been allocated include:

1. Digital Transformation: Resources were probably allocated to improving the usability of their website and mobile apps in order to adjust to the shift towards online interactions.
2. Communication Channels: Marriott would have set aside funds for avenues of communication. This made sure that material was widely disseminated in order to reach and interest target audiences.
3. Crisis Communication: For accurate, fast, and transparent communication concerning safety procedures, property status, and reservation modifications, resources had to be allocated for crisis communication planning and implementation.
4. Initiatives for Customer Engagement: Marriott made an investment in initiatives for customer engagement in order to preserve customer loyalty and trust. To encourage clients to schedule future stays and maintain their engagement with the brand, funds were directed towards loyalty programme improvements, tailored incentives, and targeted promotions.

5. Market research and data analytics: It were investments made by Marriott to comprehend shifting consumer preferences and behaviours during the epidemic. With the use of these insights, marketing plans and resource allocation were modified to reflect new trends and needs.
6. Health and Safety Measures: For customers' confidence, it was essential to provide resources to establish and explain health and safety precautions, such as contactless services, personal protective equipment (PPE), and cleaning protocols.

By allocating resources to diverse marketing initiatives, Marriott was able to overcome obstacles and put itself in a position to succeed after the epidemic.

1.2 SWOT analysis of Marriott International during the Covid Crisis

STRENGTHS

- **Strong Brand Reputation**: An internationally renowned and well-known brand, Marriott International is renowned for its excellent service and hospitality. Throughout the crisis, Marriott was able to keep customers' trust and loyalty thanks to their great brand awareness and market share.
- **Large Cash Reserve or Diverse Portfolio**: To lessen the effects of COVID-19, Marriott has substantial liquidity reserves and diverse funding sources.
- **Strong Operational Network**: A Strong Operational Network will make it possible for the business to share risk and, when possible, reduce impact.
- **Customer-Centric Approach**: Marriott International adopts a customer-centric strategy, emphasizing the provision of unique experiences and first-rate service. During the crisis, Marriott was able to maintain client loyalty and forge stronger bonds because to this strategy.

WEAKNESSES

- **Unionized Personnel**: They have broadened their repertoire to entice new Marriott members after recent success in specific states with strikes. Unite The union gained 1,000 additional members after Here won four elections at various locations, which could one day represent a threat to Marriott.
- **Existing Debt**: The recovery of hotels is complicated by existing debt.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Large Investment Pipeline** - With a sizable cash reserve, Marriott has a wide range of potential projects. It has been delayed by one year, to 2021, because to COVID-19, but once the pandemic has passed, it will serve as a competitive edge.
- **Joint Venture:** In the past, Marriott has taken part in collaborative ventures that have fostered the growth of novel concepts, such facial recognition check-in at several hotels in China.

THREATS

- **Incredibly competitive market:** There are many competitors competing for market share in the fiercely competitive hotel sector. Marriott's pricing strength and market positioning may face difficulties as there is more competition among hotels and other types of lodging.
- **Threat of Insolvency:** The possibility of bankruptcy is the largest problem facing all hoteliers, as COVID-19 is causing daily losses in the millions of dollars.

1.3 The marketing mix deployed by Marriott International during the Covid Crisis and the effect on its stakeholders.

The group of strategies a business employs to reach its target market is frequently referred to as the marketing mix. A marketing mix can also be utilized to comprehend how a company is operating from a marketing standpoint. It contains the four Ps, which define a company's success.

1. PRODUCT:

A group of hospitality services makes up the bulk of Marriott's marketing mix. Their product strategy covers every aspect of running the hotels. They have more than 30 brands, including well-known hotels like Ritz-Carlton, Sheraton, Renaissance, and many more. To assure visitor wellbeing, the company implemented improved health and safety precautions, such as stringent cleaning procedures, contactless check-ins, and social distance rules. These strategies helped reassure customers and build trust in the brand's commitment to safety.

Internal stakeholders: Marriott showed its dedication to its employees' health and safety by putting into place strict health regulations and security measures.

External stakeholders: Enhanced health and safety measures provided peace of mind to customers, leading to increased confidence in choosing Marriott properties for their stays.

2. PRICE:

The cost of Marriott International varies according to the hotels, clients, and locations. The company's main goal is to provide customers with an exceptional experience that goes above and beyond what they expect to receive for the amount they pay.

Internal stakeholders: Adapting pricing strategies helped Marriott maintain occupancy levels and retain employees, mitigating the need for drastic layoffs.

External stakeholders: Flexible pricing and promotional offers incentivized customers to book with Marriott, fostering customer loyalty and driving demand during uncertain times.

3. PLACE:

Marriott took advantage of its vast worldwide network to adjust to changes in regional demand. In order to increase occupancy in certain areas, the corporation deliberately concentrated on internal and local markets where travel restrictions were less rigorous.

Internal stakeholders: By aligning operations to focus on specific regions, Marriott could retain jobs and maintain staff in areas where business was more active.

External stakeholders: Focusing on local markets helped support local economies and communities that relied on tourism and hospitality industries for revenue.

4. PROMOTION:

Marriott's marketing communication during the crisis emphasized transparency, empathy, and reassurance. The company utilized digital platforms, social media, and email marketing to keep customers informed about health and safety protocols, flexible booking policies, and updated property status.

Internal stakeholders: Transparent communication reassured employees about Marriott's commitment to their safety and well-being during the crisis.

External stakeholders: Clear and empathetic messaging helped Marriott maintain customer trust and loyalty during a time of uncertainty, leading to increased brand preference and repeat business.

1.4 COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Marriott International's Competitive Analysis of Its Strategies During the Covid Crisis

- **Customer-Centric Initiatives:** Marriott differentiated itself from rivals by prioritising customer requirements with flexible booking policies and loyalty programme upgrades.
- **open Communication:** Marriott set itself apart from rivals with less open communication by providing consumers with frequent updates on health and safety procedures.
- **Digital transformation:** By embracing digital technologies, Marriott was able to provide contactless experiences, giving it an advantage over slower-adapting rivals.
- **Health and Safety Procedures:** Marriott stood out from rivals with less obvious safety procedures thanks to its extensive safety policies that gave prospective customers a sense of security (*Brown et al., 2020*).
- **Virtual Experiences:** Marriott distinguished itself from rivals that lacked creative virtual experiences by investing in virtual tours and online events that maintained consumer engagement.

1.5 TECHNOLOGY ANALYSIS

Technology was essential in allowing Marriott to quickly adjust to the issues the pandemic presented. Prior to COVID's arrival, Marriott was working on several innovative digital platforms and solutions. These have been designed to better target potential clients and enhance the Marriott hotel and room experience.

❖ Digital marketing:

Technology aided Marriott's attempts at digital marketing, enabling the company to maintain contact with consumers despite a lack of in-person contacts. Marriott advertised its services, interacted with customers, and modified its marketing messaging to reflect shifting wants and behaviours through digital platforms. Several effects of digital marketing were visible:

- a. **Online Presence:** With travel restrictions restricting in-person visits, Marriott improved its online presence to make sure prospective customers could quickly discover information and make reservations via the company's website or mobile app.
- b. **Targeted Advertising:** Marriott was able to target client segments with personalised adverts thanks to data-driven digital marketing, which increased conversion rates and user engagement.

c. Virtual Experiences: Thanks to technology, it is now possible to create online workshops, virtual events, and virtual tours that let clients participate in interactive activities without leaving their homes.

❖ **Communication**

Effective communication was crucial during the Covid crisis to reassure stakeholders, employees, and customers. Technology was essential to the success of Marriott's communication plans:

Real-Time Updates: Digital systems enabled Marriott to give stakeholders fast updates on operational changes, health and safety precautions, and flexible booking options.

b. Omni-Channel contact: Marriott engaged with stakeholders through a variety of touchpoints while maintaining seamless contact through digital channels like social media, email, and mobile apps.

c. Two-Way Interaction: Technology has made it easier for customers to interact with brands and provide comments or enquiries, promoting trust and good customer-brand connections.

❖ **Internationalization**

The epidemic impacted international travel and made Marriott's aspirations to become global more difficult. Nevertheless, technology assisted Marriott in overcoming some of these difficulties and maintaining its global presence:

a. Virtual Meetings and Conferences: Marriott was able to stay in touch with partners, investors, and stakeholders all around the world thanks to technology-enabled virtual meetings and conferences.

b. Localised Digital Marketing: By utilising technology, Marriott customised marketing initiatives to account for local tastes and cultural quirks, increasing its appeal in a variety of global marketplaces.

c. Technology-enabled contactless services increased the guest experience for visitors from other countries by enabling them to interact with Marriott properties in a secure and practical way.

1.6. Critically Evaluating the Success of Marriott International's Strategies during the Covid Crisis:

Given the tremendous obstacles the hospitality industry encountered during the Covid-19 crisis, Marriott International's strategies in general can be regarded effective in several ways. The business showed flexibility, a focus on the needs of the client, and a dedication to health and safety, all of which had a good effect on stakeholders. The measurement metrics used for the evaluation includes Customer satisfaction Surveys, Net Promoter Score (NPS), Brand reputation survey, Online engagement metrics etc.

Customer trust and confidence were boosted by Marriott's adoption of improved health and safety practises and open disclosure about these actions. Customer satisfaction ratings, visitor comments on cleanliness, and personnel comments on safety procedures could all be used as evaluation metrics (*Brown et al., 2020*). Customer-Centric Initiatives: Customers liked Marriott's flexible booking policies, tailored discounts, and improved loyalty programme (*Smith & Jones, 2021*). Increases in repeat reservations, enrolment in reward programmes, and client comments on how simple the reservation and cancellation processes are all examples of success measures.

Marriott was able to communicate digitally with customers, attending to their requirements, and providing useful information by focusing on digital platforms like the smartphone app and M Live Studios. High user participation and favourable guest reviews were clear indicators that these strategies worked. Despite the challenges, Marriott was able to maintain client loyalty and brand tenacity. Constantly outlining safety procedures and providing flexible scheduling options assisted in fostering and maintaining client loyalty. Throughout the crisis, Marriott showed their ability to respond to market trends by fast adjusting to changing consumer behaviour, such as the emphasis on local and regional travel.

1.7 Measures to Improve the Strategy

If it turned out that the marketing methods weren't successful, Marriott might have managed the marketing operations by Performing In-Depth Analysis, i.e, Using data-driven analysis and market research to pinpoint the underlying reasons for a strategy's failure, Quickly altering marketing plans in response to shifting consumer trends and market conditions, by tailoring marketing messages and deals to meet the unique requirements and tastes of each customer, Increasing open and regular communication with clients to foster confidence and trust, Using performance analytics to allocate resources to high-impact marketing channels and activities, and by Increasing customer interaction and maximising marketing efforts by investing in cutting-edge technology and data analytics.

2. Managerial implication on Marketing Strategies implemented by Marriott International during the Covid Crisis

Several significant managerial implications for marketing plans are provided by the case study of Marriott International's response to the Covid-19 crisis during a period of extraordinary difficulty for the travel and tourism sector.

- 1. Digital Transformation & Technology:** During the Covid crisis, Marriott focused on implementing digital transformation, making investments in contactless services, mobile apps, and website development. This highlighted the importance of technology in marketing tactics.
- 2. Stressing Health and Safety:** Marriott's implementation of enhanced health and safety measures reassured customers and employees during the crisis. The managerial conclusion is that companies should make health and safety a top priority and a key component of their marketing strategies. Customers feel more confident when choosing a brand when contactless services, stringent cleaning standards, and safety precautions are highlighted.
- 3. Agility and Adaptability:** The Covid crisis highlighted the importance of agility and adaptability in marketing strategies. The managerial implication is that businesses should promote an agile culture that allows marketing teams to quickly alter their strategy, messages, and product offerings in reaction to emergency events.
- 4. Transparent and Empathetic Communication:** During the crisis, Marriott's Transparent and Empathetic Communication was important in preserving the reputation of the company and the confidence of its clients. The managerial conclusion is that during difficult times, organisations should prioritise honest and prompt communication with stakeholders.
- 5. Crisis Preparedness and Contingency Planning:** The case study shows that Marriott was able to successfully address unforeseen obstacles thanks to its crisis preparedness and contingency planning. Organisations should proactively create thorough crisis communication strategies and contingency plans, according to the management implication.
- 6. Continuous Evaluation and Innovation:** Continuous evaluation and innovation were the keys to Marriott's success amid the Covid crisis. The management implication is that businesses should periodically assess their marketing approaches, track market developments, and obtain customer feedback to pinpoint opportunities for innovation and improvement.
- 7. Customer-Centric Approach:** Marriott International's customer-centric initiatives. The management conclusion is that businesses should prioritise a customer-centric approach in their marketing campaigns, spending money to learn about their preferences, cater to

them, and create lasting connections. It helps to encourages loyalty and places the company in a favourable position while facing disruptions.

3. Recommendations on how Marriott International can improve their marketing strategies in the POST PANDEMIC era.

Some of the recommendations on how Marriott International can improve its marketing strategies in the POST PANDEMIC era could be:

- **Focus on Health and Safety Communication:** Putting Health and Safety First, given the heightened focus on health and safety, Marriott should continue to give excellent communication of their hygiene standards and health routines top priority. Utilize numerous communication channels, such as your website, social media, and email, to regularly update visitors on the steps you are taking to secure their safety. Use pictures, videos, and customer reviews to increase people's faith in your properties.
- **Domestic Tourism and Staycations:** Domestic travel and staycations have increased as a result of the limits on foreign travel. To target this market, Marriott might concentrate on advertising staycation and local travel packages.
- **Enhance Digital Transformation:** In the post-pandemic environment, Marriott International must continue to invest in digital transformation. This entails improving user experiences on their websites and mobile apps, integrating cutting-edge data analytics tools, and utilizing cutting-edge technology like artificial intelligence and machine learning. To improve the digital client journey, place a strong emphasis on personalization and easy online booking procedures.
- **Utilise Influencer Marketing:** In the post-pandemic environment, influencer marketing can be a potent strategy for connecting with and engaging target audiences. Find influential people who have the same values as Marriott and their target audience. Work together with influencers to promote distinctive experiences, increase brand recognition, and magnify satisfying visitor experiences.
- **Evolve Event and Group Marketing:** As the events and group travel industries gradually recover, Marriott should modify its marketing plans to meet the evolving needs of this industry. To draw corporate events, weddings, and conferences, create specialized packages, provide flexible booking options, and use event-specific marketing initiatives.
- **Develop Partnerships and Collaborations:** Investigate partnerships and collaborations with complementary brands, regional companies, and influencers in the tourism industry to broaden reach, enter new markets, and produce distinctive visitor experiences. Collaborations can increase brand visibility and give access to new client segments.
- **Strengthen Loyalty Programmes:** To encourage customer engagement and retention, Marriott should strengthen its loyalty programs considering the increased competition and changing customer expectations. To reward members' loyalty and promote a feeling of community among them, provide them with customized prizes, exclusive privileges, and

exceptional experiences. Utilise data analytics to better understand customer preferences and adjust your offerings.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis and evaluation of Marriott International's marketing theories and tactics during the Covid-19 crisis show how customer-centricity, adaptability, and brand strength allowed the company to successfully navigate through previously unheard-of difficulties in the travel and hospitality sector. In order to maintain brand relevance, customer loyalty, and stakeholder trust, Marriott had to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic's enormous disruptions quickly and strategically.

Customers, employees, local communities, and investors all benefited from Marriott's strategy, as did investors. Transparent communication increased confidence and gave stakeholders peace of mind regarding safety and health precautions. Flexible booking procedures and loyalty programme improvements are examples of customer-centric initiatives that promote loyalty and client pleasure. Marriott's CSR initiatives and community involvement shown its dedication to helping the neighbourhood through trying times.

Overall, Marriott International's marketing approaches throughout the Covid-19 problem served as a perfect example of the value of adjusting to unforeseen difficulties while keeping customers in mind. Marriott positioned itself for recovery and growth in the post-pandemic age by coordinating marketing activities with shifting market dynamics and exhibiting empathy towards stakeholders, further solidifying its status as a customer-focused and resilient industry leader.

RECOMMENDATION

Other than the above-mentioned recommendations, Marriott's strategies could be further improved:

- Internationalisation: While Marriott made adjustments to local variances in demand, more focused marketing initiatives in certain international areas may be investigated to take advantage of recovery potential.
- While Marriott's communication was generally open and clear, more proactive, and tailored updates might have improved client engagement.
- Sustainability: To appeal to environmentally sensitive travellers, Marriott could improve sustainability communication and eco-conscious experiences.

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