



University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Bitola  
Faculty of Economics - Prilep

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FACULTY OF ECONOMICS – PRILEP**

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Economy, Business & Society in Digitalized Environment  
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GENERATION CLEAN: REDEFINING HOSPITALITY  
MARKETING PROMOTIONS

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**Cvetanka Ristova Maglovska<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

*The fast expansion of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the global hotel industry. Therefore, throughout COVID-19, hotel hygiene and cleanliness have become a main feature in the recovery plan. And this is simply because hotel guests expect higher hygienic standards, and hotels don't want to appear negligent by running out of supplies. What marketing strategies and promotions once worked for pre-COVID-19 hotel guests, won't work for post-COVID-19 hotel guests. Hospitality marketing and promotions cannot solely target groups like Baby Boomers, Millennials, or Gen Xers now and even in the future. New standards such as approved cleaning procedures and formal cleaning certifications gained with third-party regulators/entities represent the behavior, needs and expectations of the today's "Generation clean" hotel guests. At the same time, hotels that are paying attention to and adapting their marketing strategy to these shifts are the ones that will be able to best evolve to this new normal.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, generation clean, guests, hotel, marketing, promotion.

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## 1. Introduction

The travel industry has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ristova Maglovska & Durgutov, 2021). Travel even initially came to a near-complete halt due to the virus. But now, after more than 2 years, countries across the world are reopened, lifting the travel ban. Throughout it all, this represents quite a challenge for the hotel industry because it is more difficult than ever to build trust in the safety precautions used to protect guests' health and wellness.

Undoubtedly all these revolutionary changes occurring in the hotel industry as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have reshaped the guest behavior, with evolving guest needs and emphasis on hyper-focused health and safety expectations (Ongsakul *et al.*, 2022), therefore creating a new target group that will stand out between all hotel guests, welcoming “Generation Clean” (Pelletier, 2020).

While in the history of the hotel industry, there has never been a moment when guests were more concerned with their safety and health, even while the chance of getting sick at home is unsettling, falling sick when abroad adds a whole other level of stress and anxiety to the situation. Because of this, hotels need/already are concentrating their efforts on not just upholding the statutory, minimum standards for cleanliness but also going above and beyond and effectively informing guests of which.

Handling these elevated expectations of Generation Clean needs, will mean that hotels will need to redefine their marketing practices, imposing inherent need to communicate how they deal with the coronavirus to motivate guests to visit (Jimenez-Barreto *et al.*, 2021). In relation to the current situation, this paper is taking an approach to define “Generation Clean” hotel guests, discuss marketing actions that hotels should be employing and overview some of the already promoted campaigns by hotel brands.

## 2. Who is Generation Clean?

Hygiene and cleanliness have always been a priority and concern for hotel guests (Lewis & McCann, 2004; Lockyer, 2003), as well as a driver of income for hotels. However, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic it is fair to say that hotels haven't been that consistent in the implementation of practices including disinfection, handwashing, and hand sanitizer use. These often were activities that hotels performed maybe once a week or per month, depending of the hotel and brand respectively (Braff, 2022). Still when COVID-19 pandemic spread, hotels found themselves announcing new cleaning programs with protocols on how to even wash the hands properly, so that the contact among both staff and guests is minimized and the risk of virus spread is reduced (Rawal *et al.*, 2020).

Beginning in 2021, an increasing number of hotels began to welcome back previous guests. And despite global recovery among the hotels being unequal, there is a strong desire to get things back to normal, which is increasingly being reflected in current hospitality patterns. New guest behaviors have been developing at the same time, which will now influence how the hotels will handle the expectations of the guests in the future. Furthermore, the hotels that are paying

attention to and making these adjustments will be the ones that can best adapt to this new standard.

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, besides traditional determinants such as price and location, topics like safety, public health, hygiene, and cleanliness have been of every guests' mind when wanting to book in a hotel (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Booking reported that saw a dramatic increase use of the words "clean" and "hygiene" by over 60% when guests asked questions about a property (Booking.com, n.d.). Even now with the whole world reopened for travel, guests' concern for social distancing, COVID, hotel cleanliness, safety have made a profound influence on the guests' psyche, which is very similar when cleanliness and hygiene were essential for the successful hotel operations after the 2003 SARS outbreak (Kim *et al.*, 2005).

In such way, having demands from hotel guests for increased cleaning, safety, disinfection and infection prevention as an expectation when booking in a hotel formed the new guest behavior (Yu *et al.*, 2021) known as "Generation Clean" who is here to set out new standards in the hotel industry during the COVID-19 recovery or perhaps beyond. Introduced first by Pelletier (2020), Generation Clean represents the new target group in the hotel industry that has evolved as a result from COVID-19 pandemic.

Generation Clean represents a group of hotel guests who now more than ever are sensitive to hotel hygiene. For these guests it is important that they feel more at ease, knowing the hotel is doing all necessary to keep them safe with staff members dressed in face masks and disposable gloves (Kim & Han, 2022). One among the key factors that influences these guests into booking the hotel room is also the precaution that the hotel is taking to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Having educational signs with messages for health, safety, and hygiene instructions posted in hotel rooms and public spaces as well as consistent marketing messaging to the guests to ensure they're comfortable about their stay and promote the hotel brand's commitment to safety. Yet, nowadays, with COVID-19 measures and travel bans lifting, for Generation Clean it is more than essential that hotels won't simply forget of all the health and hygiene measures and therefore continue to value their guests' well-being. For instance, even though hotels now removed the mandatory masking requirement for most settings but still practice social distancing, there still can be some restrictions in place for in-restaurant dining e.g. to replace the buffet by an *a la carte* service (Hameed *et al.*, 2021) or to put coverings over meal plates that are removed tableside (Malbec, 2020), then for spa and wellness centers to be run by safety protocols, social distancing, deep cleaning and disinfecting during the day and overnight (Schweder, 2021) and for housekeeping to reduce the amount of time required in order to decrease guest contact (Jain, 2020).

With research done in 2021 by STR, CoStar's hospitality analytics firm, we are shown how guests' behavior has changed therefore leaving indelible mark on the hotel industry. COVID-19 restrictions on personal safety and the influence of the imminent development of contactless technology, now serve as a requirement for Generation Clean guests among other travelers as well. In the data presented in Fig. 1 we can see that 38% of surveyed travelers in the U.S. agree and strongly agree for their dining to be a "contactless" service (Klauda, 2021).

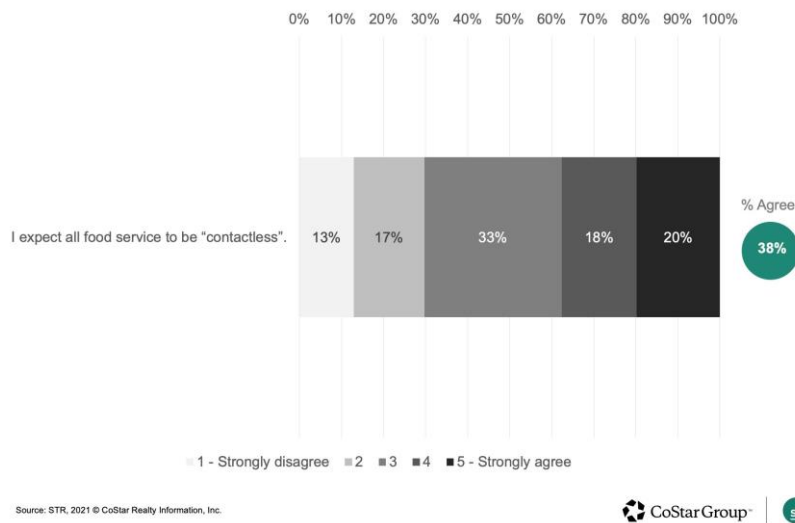


Figure 1. Alternative dining option

As a result of this, it can be confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it very clear: guests demand higher hygiene and cleanliness standards, and this trend is here to stay. Moving forward, as hotels try to meet guest expectations for hotels target groups such as Baby Boomers, Millennials, or Gen Xers, they have to realize that same marketing promotions will not work for post-COVID-19 guests, especially Generation Clean travelers (Hao *et al.*, 2020, Jiang & Wen, 2020), which leaves out hotels creating new proper targeted marketing promotions to ensure your guests that they will feel safe during their stay in the hotel.

### 3. Keeping it clean: hotel marketing recovery promotions

Hotels have reopened their doors to a more competitive market than ever before. Today's hotel guest arrives with high expectations, demanding one-of-a-kind experience (Pillai *et al.*, 2021) with more stringent safety and health protocols (Rawal *et al.*, 2020), because travel and accommodation, as we know, has been transformed perhaps forever because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With international borders reopened and travel bands lifted, hotels now play a more integral part in the travel experience than ever before.

The expectations of hotel guests in this post-pandemic period have changed significantly and have never been higher. The new essentials include higher standards for cleaning programs that emphasize current disinfection and sterilizing techniques. Therefore, for hotels to be adaptable and stay competitive they need to develop marketing campaigns that inspire confidence in their ability to provide what guests want and expect in terms of hygiene, cleanliness, and distancing and thus remain competitive (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Given that this situation is unprecedented, this calls for in-depth insights and creative understanding of guests' evolving requirements and behaviors, such as those of the Generation Clean target group (Pelletier, 2020).



Consequently, marketing recovery promotions are an important aspect of achieving the *new normal* (Jimenez-Barreto *et al.*, 2021) of how hotels deal with future guests especially Generation Clean travelers. These actions by the hotels for marketing promotions for the new normal are opted to communicate with a clear message about what they are doing to confront COVID-19 (Redjeki *et al.*, 2021). Which means, if hotels aim to target Generation Clean they should avoid to practice cases they try not to mention COVID-19 or Coronavirus but instead to promote the maximum hygiene measures that they are going to implement and thus remove any doubt in the future hotel guests' stay.

One among the most effective marketing messaging for recovery promotions that hotels practice/can practice is to maintain proactive communication on health and safety measures implemented, both pre-stay and during their stay via online content and in-property information for Generation Clean guests.

Generation Clean guests don't want to spend that much time on searching for information about the hotels' new cleaning procedures and how they are going to affect their safety and wellbeing. Here is where the hotel marketing promotions content should be clearly visible. That is why starting with the hotels' website it is more important than ever to keep every information up to date. Because with a research of over 1,000 hotel websites in 2021 done by Guestcentric, 97% of online visitors abandon a hotel website during the booking process, and a research study Fuel & Flip, 87% of people usually check a hotel's website before making a reservation (Palma, 2022). To generate more reservations, hotels need to put all information about the cleaning standards and protocols on their home page, and thus promote and highlight the key points of the cleaning procedures used during their stay, with additional link to the full list of processes. Such relevant information also needs to be provided on the website pages but on-site as well for all additional services as dining, spa & wellness and others. It is crucial for the marketing messaging on the hotels' website to inform guests whether the operating procedures have changed, what products and services are still offered, and are the reservation policies changed since visually this is how guests decide if they have the confidence to book and visit the property (Sarwari *et al.*, 2021).

Hotel marketing recovery promotions can also make use of the social networks to build trust. Hotel guests, moreover, Generation Clean guests rely on social media mainly due to social distancing, simply because with social distancing guests and travelers see social media platforms as a means of staying connected and informed. Given that this is also an information that the guests gather from the platforms before they initially make the booking, having all hotel's COVID-19 policies posted as organic posts or paid ads, social media channels can't be neglected as a part of the hotels' marketing recovery strategy. Social media channels represent a cost-effective marketing promotion that in the case of hospitality can fulfill a highly targeted reach. Posting content about the highly changing status of the pandemic in up-to-the-minute information that affect a great deal of the followers if having doubts about booking in the hotel, and ultimately create a stronger relationship (Kwok *et al.*, 2021).

It is also beneficial for the hotel marketing recovery promotions to be updated at the hotels' site on OTAs. Although, to nobody's surprise, OTAs have

significantly decreased during the peak of COVID-19, Expedia published a study in late 2020 that suggested “travelers are 57% more likely to book their travel through an OTA now than before COVID-19” (Green, 2021). Also, in a recent study on hotel websites, Google discovered that “almost 20% of direct bookings occurred after the guest found the hotel on an OTA” and that “52% of guests will visit the hotels’ website after seeing it promoted on an OTA” (Green, 2021). Having reassuring marketing messaging on the hotels’ OTA will have a significant impact throughout the booking process. Addressing that the hotel is taking the necessary efforts to keep Generation Clean guests safe and healthy during their stays can inspire confidence in their booking decision, giving them a sense of security that makes them feel confident to book. Along with the room description, hotels should include a brief comment regarding cleaning methods, updated rate information and promote flexible cancellation terms.

The use of email marketing, once the Generation Clean guest has booked can also be considered as a marketing promotion by the hotel, informing them with relevant and timely updates using empathetic language generating peacefulness and avoid cancellations.

In addition to all these actions, hotels should have mind that is not all about promoting cleaning procedures, but how is the messaging promoted. A recent study by P&G Professional states that 70% of guests say they would be more likely to choose a hotel room, and one in three diners would be willing to spend more for a meal if they knew the hotels was using a personally recognizable and trusted brand of cleaning products (Turner, 2020). Another vital action is for hotels to regain Generation Clean guests’ trust is to establish a formal cleaning certification with third-party certification from an accredited hygiene organization (Jimenez-Barreto *et al.*, 2021). Lastly, this type of guests doesn’t just want to know that the property has protocols, but they want a communication about those protocols.

When it comes to on-site marketing promotion during the stay of Generation Clean guests, when hotels become certificated with a cleaning protocol, the certification can be prominently displayed in the lobby. Aside from this, educational signs promotion can be posted in lobbies, public areas, bathrooms and guest rooms. Instructions about mask coverage, social distancing, handwashing and schedules about cleaning and disinfecting these areas can also make feel guests safe.

#### 4. Analysis of marketing campaigns from hotel brands

Discussing about the ways of how hotel marketing recovery strategies are being focused and targeted towards guests, moreover Generation Clean guests, we can see that many hotel brands (Table 1) started their marketing messaging with communication about their special cleaning programs to assure guests that they are effectively dealing with the virus (Jimenez-Barreto *et al.*, 2021).

Table 1. Selected examples of hotel brands cleaning programs

No.	Hotel brand	Cleaning program
1.	Marriott International	<i>Commitment to Cleanliness</i>

	Group	
2.	Hilton Hotels & Resorts	<i>CleanStay</i>
3.	Accor Hotels	<i>ALLSAFE Cleanliness &amp; Prevention</i>
4.	Best Western Hotels & Resorts	<i>We Care Clean</i>
5.	Choice Hotels International	<i>Commitment to Clean</i>

Source: Marriott Cleanliness Council (n.d.); Hilton Travel Flexibility and Health Standards (n.d.); Accor Allsafe (n.d.); We Care Clean (n.d.); Commitment to Clean (n.d.).

With thousands of hotels across the world improving their cleaning procedures and safety precautions over the past two year to keep guests healthy, some of the world’s biggest hotel brands have taken the lead in the very beginning of 2020. Next, some of the several marketing campaigns enacted by popular chains like Marriott, Hilton, Accor and more are going to be analyzed.

The largest hotel group in the world Marriott International in April 2020 has launched the “Commitment to Clean” program, which aims to elevate its cleanliness standards and hospitality norms. Aside from this, Marriott has created the Marriott Global Cleanliness Council, focused on developing the next level of hotel cleanliness. But Marriott’ council isn’t just on disinfection and cleanliness protocols, rather it is taking a holistic approach designed to take care of their guests. With this on mind, Marriott hotels promoted the new cleaning regimen on their website, their personal website dedicated to their cleaning program and social media, through promotional videos, photos and information with specific areas of focus such as importance of high-touch surface cleanliness, guest contact and food safety. Their promotional campaign it goes into detail about the new measures they have implemented, such as hand sanitizing stations at hotel entrances and other touch-point locations. Other measures include signage, check-in dividers, disinfectants in rooms, wipes for guests use in each room, electrostatic sprayers, and mobile devices to minimize touch-point chances. Since the “Commitment to Clean” program was first introduced, Marriott also practices email marketing, informing all their guests from their databases and loyalty program members first about the updated cleaning standards and now on about every new policy update on COVID-19.

Hilton Hotels & Resorts started their “Clean Stay” program in June 2020, partnering with RB (the maker of Lysol and Dettol) and consulting with Mayo Clinic. Their program is committed to providing a cleaner stay from check-in to checkout, with some very rigorous cleaning standards, starting from RB’ scientific approach to cleaning practices, and Mayo Clinic’ assistance to cleaning and disinfection protocols. To promote the program, Hilton Hotels have posted a video demonstrating the cleaning procedures along with the announcement about the initiative on its social media channels and website. According to Hilton Hotels, partnering with the trusted household cleaning brand Lysol had a significant impact on revenue and guest loyalty. Later in October 2020, Hilton announced another global marketing campaign “To New Memories” created to

reignite people's passion for travel during the pandemic by appealing to the emotions of their audience.

To ensure the guests' safety back in 2020, Accor Hotels introduced the "ALLSAFE" program with enhanced cleanliness protocols and standards. All Accor Hotels are certified with "ALLSAFE" label throughout a third-party review from professionals as Bureau Veritas, SGS, Clifton and Ecolab. Accor' marketing strategy is focused on creating informational posters, short videos that would highlight the programs' multi-level safety and hygiene measures covering each part of Accor hotels starting from lobby to the kitchen and then to the rooms. Their campaign on different social media channels launched in April 2020 using posts and dialogue. Prior to that, in all regions where Accor Hotels are located a press release was held to disseminate information about the safety protocols that the hotels are going to use.

The "We Care Clean" launched in 2020 is a program who is part from the "I Care Clean" program, that Best Western hotels have been working on since 2012. Best Western hotels consider them leaders with a reputation of providing clean accommodation, and that is why for the new "We Care Clean" program they have partner up with P&G Professional, where now more than ever their hotels are equipped with trusted and recognized brands of cleaning products. Best Westerns' marketing campaign focuses on five key areas: front desk and lobby, guest room and housekeeping, temporary breakfast offerings, public amenities and hotel employees and staff requirements.

Budget-friendly Choice hotels first introduced their "Commitment to Clean" initiative in 2020 as a part of their long-standing cleanliness protocols, partnering with Ecolab, industry leader in hygiene and infection prevention techniques. From the highlights of the "Commitment to Clean" plan, their marketing strategy is focused on flexible cancellation policies and superior levels of cleanliness. To promote health and safety each Choice hotel has a "Commitment to Clean Captain", who will complete the necessary cleanliness training and oversee the implementation of the new procedures into their hotel's operations.

Additionally, all the above-mentioned programs, plan and initiatives taken by one of the leading hotel brands is updated regularly upon the latest standards and recommendations by the Ministry of health and other governmental agencies, thus promoted by them.

## **5. Conclusion**

As the hotel industry adapts to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the better part of two years much has changes in the guest behavior resulting with a whole new target group called Generation Clean. With heightened expectations of health and hygiene, this group needs whole new measures when it comes to booking accommodation, which means hotels must ensure that their sanitization protocols are included in all their marketing promotions. Using empathetic language, reacting quickly and socially responsibly, all hotels must take thoughtful approach to their marketing plan and inform their guests what operating procedures have changed, what amenities and services are still available, and what booking

policies are available. Sharing the right marketing promotion is a powerful tool in the post COVID-19 era for Generation Clean guests, because after all it informs and empowers them to make a booking decision.

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