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Host-guest interaction in P2P accommodation under the epidemic: Motivations, behavior and influences

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has resulted in a huge impact on the hospitality industries, especially the P2P accommodations, which involves more frequent and intensive interactions between the guests and hosts (Zhang et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2022). While many P2P accommodations have closed due to the uncertainty of the external environment, those remaining in operation are facing increased epidemic prevention costs and potential conflicts in host-guest interaction (Xiang et al., 2022). However, "all coins have two sides". The "black swan" also stimulates new demands, providing new opportunities for P2P accommodations to transform. According to *Ctrip* Report, 60% of Chinese tourists booking P2P accommodations during the 2022 holiday season, increasing 35% comparing that before the COVID-19 pandemic (Ctrip 2022 Report, 2022). And the number of annual bookings for *Woodbird* P2P accommodation in 2021 is 2.2 times that in 2020 (Woodbird, 2022). Obviously, with the normalization of the epidemic and the recovery of the domestic tourism market, the P2P accommodation industry is booming.

On the one hand, the epidemic has reshaped tourists' consumption attitude and behavior(Jiang et al., 2022).With restrictions on outbound travel, tourists are more likely to take short-haul travel and seeking more personalized accommodations.P2P accommodations seem to grow into tourists' accommodation priority, and positive interaction with hosts is also an important way for tourists to get rid of the psychological depression and anxiety. On the other hand, to adapt the new epidemic prevention requirements, higher hygiene standards are taken by P2P accommodations, thus attracting more guests. A neat and tidy environment is a key prerequisite to improve guest satisfaction (Farmaki et al., 2020). Improved hygiene attributes of P2P accommodation can also reduce the infection risk perception among guests, which in turn encourages them to engage in interactions with others (Miao et al., 2022).

In addition, P2P accommodations, with distinctive interactive characteristics, host-guest contacts have changed significantly before and after COVID-19 (Xiang et al., 2022). Different from traditional commercial hotels, P2P accommodations emphasize that hosts take advantage of idle resources to provide guests with more interaction and colorful experience of local culture (Zhang et al., 2021). For tourists, P2P accommodations provide meaningful social interaction and unique local experiences, enabling tourists to "live like locals" (Farmaki et al., 2020). Nevertheless, during the COVID-19 pandemic, new interactions also emerged (Xiang et al., 2022). Information interaction (e.g., COVID-19 safety measures and epidemic prevention policies exchange) and service interaction (e.g., temperature checks and health code verification) between guests and hosts can ensure guests a safe and enjoyable stay. At the same time, the affective interaction between hosts and guests can also evoke the guests' emotions or feelings and generate a positive affective states, such as pleasure and enjoyment (Lee, 2022).

Before the pandemic, researches on host-guest interaction in P2P accommodations have mainly focused on social exchange, value co-creation, and host-guest relationships (Sainaghi, 2020). Although some studies explored new rituals of stuff and customer interactions during the pandemic (Xiang et al., 2022), it was conducted in the traditional hotel contexts and not clear in the P2P accommodation contexts. In the context of the epidemic, why and how tourists interact with hosts may vary from the past, which influences the outcomes of host-guest interaction as well. However,

up to now, current researches overlook these changes. As such, this study aims to explore the tourists' interactions in P2P accommodations, as well as its antecedents and consequences under the epidemic. Specifically, it will explore the following questions: (1) What motivates tourists interact with their hosts, what attributes of P2P accommodation motivates guests to interact with hosts? (2) How do the hosts and guests interact and the contents of their interaction (3) What consequences will the host-guest interaction result in?

Literature Review

Host-guest interaction in P2P accommodation

Host-guest interaction plays an important role in hospitality and can occur in different settings (Xiang et al., 2022). As an emerging form of accommodation, P2P accommodations are featured by substantial and increasing host-guest interaction (Lyu et al., 2019). Nowadays, many people are looking for the authentic interpersonal relationship and building meaningful social connections with others (Akarsu et al., 2020), and as a significant part of enhancing tourists' accommodation experiences, host-guest interaction has been becoming increasingly significant.

Previous studies have explored some explaining variables which could answer why tourists interact with hosts in P2P accommodations. Lin et al. (2019) found that demographic characteristics of tourists, cultural differences between the hosts and the guests and political sensitivity were the determinants of the host-guest interaction. In addition, the motivation of tourists is also a vital factor affecting interaction (Lu et al., 2021). It has also been found that an appropriate physical environment is also a factor that drives interaction (Siddiqi et al., 2022). Despite the findings of these studies, it remains unknown what motivates guests to engage in interactions with P2P hosts in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several studies have identified specific host-guest interaction practices in the P2P accommodations. Researchers suggested that welcoming, feeling expression and recommending were important forms of host-guest interaction (Camilleri & Neuhofer, 2017). Lin et al. (2019) used thematic analysis methods to further identify the content of host-guest interaction as inquiry, casual conversation, activity participation, etc. Besides, the host-guest interaction can also be divided into different types. For example, Moon et al. (2019) explored the different interaction of Airbnb hosts and guests, and divided the host-guest interaction into online interaction and face-to-face interaction. Based on an empirical research, Wang (2018) divided the host-guest interaction into three types: information interaction, commodity and service interaction, and interpersonal interaction. Meng & He (2019) advocated the interaction in the sharing economy could be divided into network interaction and service interaction. Although relevant studies have examined interaction contents in P2P accommodations, gaps still exist. For example, the practices of host-guest interaction changed because of the epidemic (Xiang et al., 2022). Xiang et al. (2022) used interaction ritual chain theory to explore the ritualized mechanisms of host-guest interaction during the epidemic from the perspective of hotel staff and customers, and found new interaction practices. However, the study was conducted in the traditional hotel context, ignoring the particularity of host-guest interaction in P2P accommodation settings. Therefore, more attention are needed to pay on new changes and new interactions between the hosts and guests in the settings of the pandemic.

The consequences of host-guest interaction have been widely explored in the literature. Shi et al., (2019) suggested that guests would gain a positive accommodation experience and enhance the

understanding of local cultural custom by interacting with hosts. What's more, many studies also indicated that the host-guest interaction was significantly related to guest's satisfaction, word-of-mouth intention and loyalty (Moon et al., 2019). However, studies have rarely investigated the outcomes such as guests' psychology and behavior brought about by host-guest interaction

Methodology

Research design

The current study follows an inductive paradigm. Given the nature and objective of the study, a qualitative grounded theory approach was adopted. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with tourists who once lived in a P2P accommodation after COVID-19 broke out. Interview questions included the driving factors of host-guest interaction, the contents of the host-guest interaction, as well as the impacts of the interaction. The interview questions were shown in table 1.

Table 1. Research questions and corresponding interview questions.

Research Questions	Interview Questions (umbrella questions only)	Reference
RQ1. In the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, what motivates guests to interact with the P2P accommodation hosts ?	What stimulates or constrains your interactions with the host? Can you describe what attributes of P2P accommodation motivate you to interact ?	Shin et al., (2022) Williams et al., (2022)
RQ2. What kind of interactions between guests and hosts in the P2P accommodation ?	What did you do with the host of the P2P accommodation? How you interact with the host before, during and after your stay? What is the biggest change in your interaction with the host before and after the epidemic?	Xiang et al., (2022) Miao et al., (2022)
RQ3.What are the consequences of host-guest interaction in the P2P accommodation?	How do you evaluate this stay experience? Why? What did you gain after interacting with the host of the P2P accommodation?	Lyu et al., (2019)

Access of informants and data collection

Tourists who acquired P2P accommodation experiences within the last 12 months (after COVID-19 pandemic) were selected as qualified informants. A purposive and snowball sampling approach was used to identify existing and potential informants. First, purposive sampling was used to determine qualified informants according to the research objects. Second, by using snowball sampling, informants were asked to invite people they know who were eligible for this research, including their friends and relatives. To ensure a diverse and balanced sample, the study did in-depth interviews with different social backgrounds tourists. The first phase, between April 2021 and July 2021, consisted of 15 face-to-face interviews and 8 telephone interviews. Moreover, 5 additional telephone interviews were conducted during the April 2022 to ensure the data was

saturated. A total of 28 informants were approached for interviews. The details of the interviewees were shown in table 2. It was worth noting that 60% of the respondents were under the age of 30, which is also consistent with the previous research finding that more than half of Chinese P2P accommodation users were under 35 (Lyu et al., 2019). Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. During the interview, an audio recording was taken with the consent of interviewees. Each recording was transcribed into texts by a professional software (*Fengyun Voice to Text*) shortly after the interview. The final transcripts were more than 100,000 words in total. The method triangulation, data triangulation and research triangulation were considered throughout research.

Data analysis

Transcriptions were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding suggested by Strauss and Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Nvivo 12 plus software was used to code.

Table 2. Demographic profiles of interviewees.

Interviewee No.	Gender	Age	Frequency of registering P2P per year	Month income (RMB)	Education	Occupation	With whom they travelled	The location of P2P accommodations
1	Female	20	5	2000	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Xiamen
2	Female	20	3	2000	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Lijiang
3	Male	37	5	8000	Postgraduate	Photographer	Family	Chongqing
4	Female	21	3	2000	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Jiujiang
5	Female	44	3	5000	High school	Sales clerk	Family	Puzhehei
6	Male	22	2	2000	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Dali
7	Female	46	1	4000	High school	Farmer	Family	Beijing
8	Female	24	4	2500	Postgraduate	Student	Friends	Dali
9	Female	34	3	6000	Undergraduate	Manager	Friends	Taiwan
10	Female	28	4	5000	Undergraduate	Civil servant	Friends	Lijiang
11	Female	56	2	4000	High school	Bank clerk	Friends	Dali
12	Male	22	2	2500	Undergraduate	Student	Alone	Lijiang
13	Male	44	1	3000	High school	Store clerk	Family	Dali
14	Male	25	3	6000	Postgraduate	Student	Friends	Qingdao
15	Female	32	4	5000	Undergraduate	Teacher	Family	Nangjing
16	Female	17	3	N/A	High school	Student	Family	Dali
17	Male	22	3	2000	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Jinan

| 18	Female	46	4	5000	Undergraduate	Nurse	Friends	Chengdu
19	Male	22	5	2300	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Hongkong
20	Female	22	3	2800	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Guilin
21	Female	42	5	7000	Undergraduate	Sales manager	Alone	Hangzhou
22	Male	22	3	2500	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Qingdao
23	Male	30	6	10000	Undergraduate	Businessman	Friends	Lijiang
24	Male	20	2	2000	Undergraduate	Student	Friends	Jinan
25	Female	25	3	6000	Postgraduate	Office clerk	Friends	Beihai
26	Male	48	4	10000	Postgraduate	Architect	Family	Tibet
27	Female	36	6	7000	Postgraduate	School teacher	Family	Quanzhou
28	Male	26	2	5000	High school	Insurance officer	Alone	Dali

Results

The findings revealed the mechanism of which guests checking in P2P accommodations with the host in the context of epidemic. Based on the perspective of tourists, a conceptual framework was proposed to clarify the driving factors, other external factors, the new content of the interaction between the hosts and the guests, and the outcomes of such interaction. The result was displayed in Fig 1.

As shown in Fig 1, we first describe the factors that motives the guests to interact with their hosts in the context of an epidemic. Then, we describe the different types of interactions that may occur between hosts and guests in the P2P accommodation and the content of the interactions. Finally, we analyze the outcomes of host-guest interactions.

Two factors were found to influence guests participate in interacting with the host: one is the guests' internal psychological motivations resulted from the epidemic (exploring interpersonal relationships and releasing depression and anxiety), and the other is the guests' perceived hygienic attributes of the P2P accommodation during the stay (transparency of disinfection and sterilization under epidemic, personal hygiene of the host and public space hygiene). The guests' perceived hygienic attributes of the P2P accommodation can directly affect their infection risk perception, and different risk perceptions can lead to different ways of interacting with the host. When guests are dissatisfied with the hygienic condition of the P2P accommodation during their stay, they will have a higher perception of infection risk and more likely to choose contactless or give up interaction with hosts, even though they have a strong psychological motivation. Conversely, when guests perceived improved P2P accommodation hygiene attributes, accompanied by their internal motivation, they are more inclined to engage in face-to-face interactions with the host. It can be seen that the host-guest interaction in P2P accommodation includes three types: contactless interaction, face-to-face interaction and no interaction. The contactless interaction between guests and hosts is mainly achieved through online information communication and exchange. Face-to-

face interaction includes four dimensions: social interaction, information interaction, service interaction and affective interaction. Both face-to-face and contactless interactions between hosts and guests can strengthen guests' psychological capital and lead to citizenship behaviors.
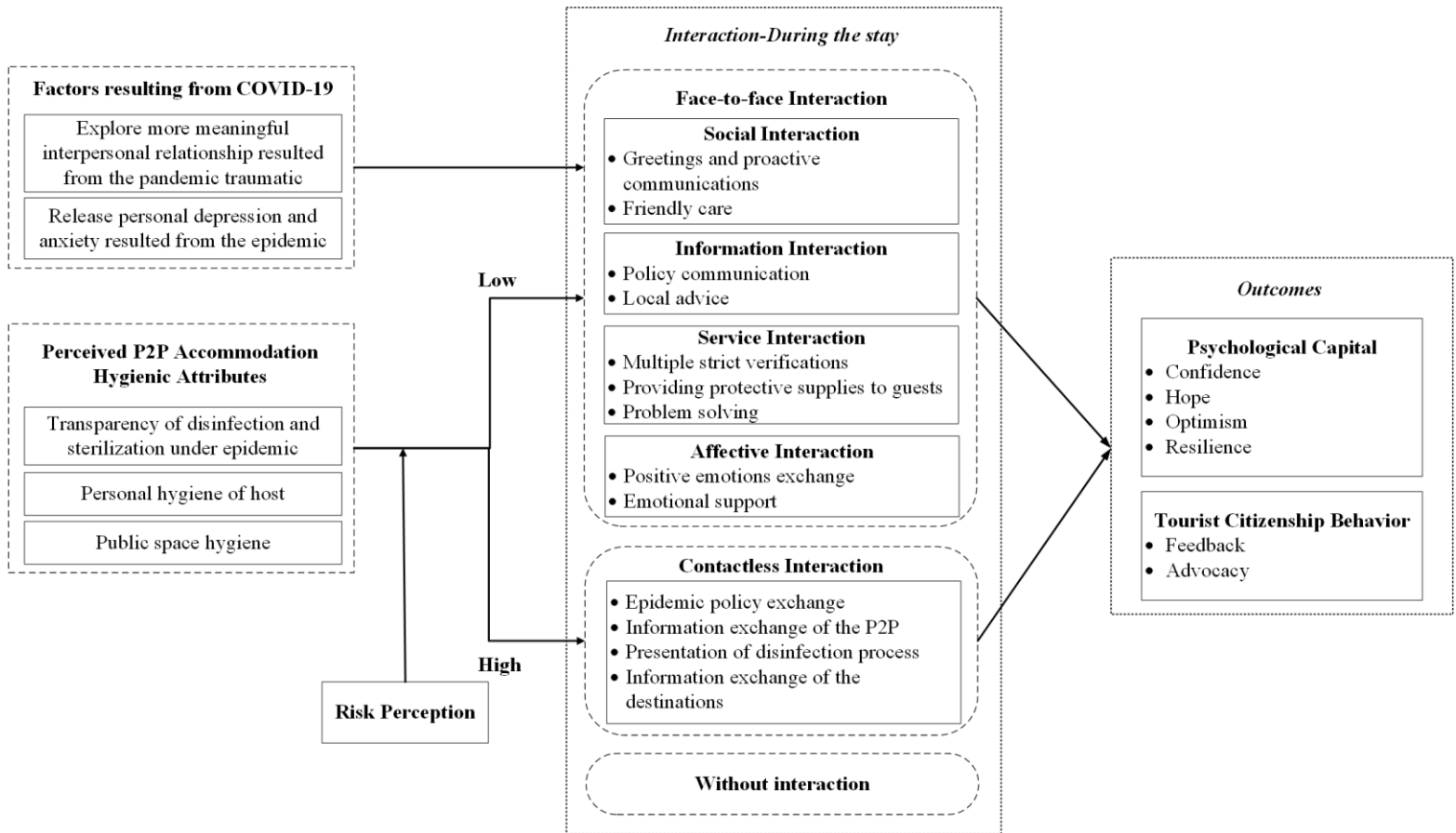
Fig.1. The framework of the interaction between guests and hosts in P2P accommodation

Factors resulting from COVID-19

Exploring meaningful interpersonal relationships and releasing psychological depression and anxiety resulting from epidemic were internal motivations for guests to interact with P2P hosts during their stay. On the one hand, the long-term prevention and control measures implemented by all level governments, such as restrictions on outbound travel, city block down, and "social distancing", have led to individual alienation and isolation (Wong et al., 2021). Such prolonged isolation has increased individuals' desire to seek more meaningful social interaction. On the other hand, unlike other traumatic events, the rapid spread and ease of infection of COVID-19 heightened public's fear of death and infection concerns (Cheng & Liu, 2022), in turn, negative

emotions emerged, such as anxiety and depression. When a lot of negative emotions keep accumulating, people are more eager to get rid of them, maintaining physical and mental well-being through travel and meaningful interaction with others.

Perceived hygienic attributes of P2P accommodations

Improved hygienic attributes in the P2P accommodation can greatly reduce guests' infection risk perception (Siddiqi et al., 2022) , and thus increase their willingness to interact with the host. Owing to the pandemic, guests become more cautious about the interaction and expected a safe and sanitary interaction environment (Xiang et al., 2022), the hygienic attributes of the P2P accommodation play critical roles in guest's risk perception and interactive decision-making process. Effective disinfection, neat hosts with a mask, and clean public space can reduce guests' fears of infection and indirectly promote interaction.

Interaction during the stay

Guests' interactions with hosts during their stay can be divided into three types: face-to-face interaction, contactless interaction and no interaction. When guests were dissatisfied with the hygiene of the P2P accommodation during their stay, they would have a higher level of perception of infection risk and more likely to choose contactless or give up interaction with hosts, so as to avoid the risk.

Contactless interaction refers to the online information exchange between guests and hosts, the host will only show up when the guest needs it. Due to unfamiliarity with the local COVID-19 policies and regulations, guests generally have concerns and fears when checking in, in this case, the host can inform the guests with the latest pandemic-related policies and requirements through the Wechat or other means in advance, sharing with them the adequate travel information about the destination, and if necessary, showing a video of the sterilization and disinfection process of the P2P accommodation. Thereby, it reduces guest's fear of being infected. As informants #24 stated: *"During the COVID-19, I would like to know the disinfection process of P2P accommodation, and the anti-epidemic protocols when checking in P2P accommodations, so that I can feel more at ease."* Online information exchange could help guests estimate the risk of epidemics in the P2P accommodation and the local area, alleviating their concerns to a certain extent. There were also a small number of interviews who were unwilling to interact with hosts in order to completely avoid the risk of infection. As mentioned by informants #24: *"I can give up the interaction with host, even we don't need face-to-face communication, so that we can avoid the risk of infection."*

However, the majority of guests we interviewed, having a strong psychological motivations, coupled with a safe, hygienic environment perceived during their stay, they would have a lower infection risk perception and would be more willing to engage in face-to-face interaction.

The face-to-face interaction between guests and hosts includes four dimensions: social interaction, information interaction, service interaction and affective interaction. Social interaction is related to warmth and friendliness shown by the host, including welcoming, warm greetings and friendly behavior, which plays an essential role in establishing and maintaining the host-guest relationship (Liu et al., 2021). Informants #5 said: *"When we checked in, the host had been waiting for us, and even though it was the first time we met, he was very friendly, warmly chatting with us and helping us with our suitcases."*

Information interaction refers to the process in which the host provides information to the guests during the entire stay. On one side, with the emergence of the epidemic, the host have taken on more responsibility in taking care of their guests (Xiang et al., 2022). Except for the mutual greetings between hosts and guests, guests usually communicate COVID-19 safety measures with hosts to ease their worries and fears. On the other, the guests also invite the hosts to share their experiences and suggestions for their trips in the destination. As informant # 26 mentioned: *"The host told us some details of the P2P accommodation, including local customs and interesting attractions. These suggestions not only facilitated our trip, but also brought us closer to her."*

Service interaction refers to a series of perceptible services provided by the host to the guest through a specific behavior, including verifying guests' identity/travel history/health codes, checking temperature, providing them with epidemic protection supplies (masks, sanitizer etc.), and helping guests with any problems during their stay. Service interaction can enhance the guests' interactional trust and ensure the smooth of subsequent interaction.

Affective interaction refers to the positive emotions that conveyed by the host in interaction with the guests, including emotional exchanges and supports. Gaining positive emotional energies is an intrinsic driver of guests' interactions with the host, and emotional exchanges with hosts can increase their emotional energy to obtain emotional fulfillment. As informant #26 put it: *"Under the epidemic, people are feeling depressed, if someone is friendly to me, I will be very happy."*

Interaction outcomes

Host-guest interaction in the P2P accommodation can strengthen guests' psychological capital in terms of hope, confidence, optimism and resilience, and alleviate depression and anxiety generated by the COVID-19. Although the epidemic has caused psychological distress among guests(Lin et al., 2021) , through positive interactions with the host, guests can experience positive psychological changes, have a positive mindset and feel confident about returning to a normal life. As informant # 8 said: *"After chatting with the host, I was very relaxed, enjoyable and satisfied, and I was full of hope for my future life."*

In addition to obtaining positive psychological changes, the guest-host interaction also lead to tourist citizenship behaviors. The guests will voluntarily engage in positive behaviors, because of interacting with hosts, such as feedback and advocacy. Based on the reciprocity principle of social exchange theory, in the process of interacting with the hosts, the relationship between the guests and the hosts is getting closer. In turn, tourists are willing to help the hosts to do some extra things. As informant # 9 mentioned: *"I felt that the host was very nice, he took us to the attractions by bike and welcomed us in advance, I wrote a long positive comment to him so that other guests could see it on the platform."* Furthermore, the guests will also share their stay experiences with others and actively recommend the P2P accommodation to relatives and friends. Informant # 6 said: *"I would recommend this P2P accommodation to my relatives and friends so that they would come and stay here next time."*

Conclusion and Discussion

Theoretical contributions

This study adopting grounded theory approach put forth a framework that explains why guests engage in interactions with the host in the context of pandemic, the content of host-guest interaction and its outcomes. Overall, this study offers several contributions. First, the study is one

of early studies which took guests' psychological motivation caused by the epidemic and the hygienic attributes of P2P accommodation as triggers for guests' engagement in interactive behaviors, extending the antecedents of host-guest interaction in the P2P accommodation, and providing new insights for the smooth interaction between hosts and guests during COVID-19. Second, the research identified new interactions between hosts and guests, enriching the content of the host-guest interaction in the P2P settings. Finally, the study extended the outcome variables of host-guest interaction by identifying guests' psychological capital and tourist citizenship behaviour that resulted from interacting with hosts, advanced the understanding about the outcomes of host-guest interaction in the P2P accommodations.

Practical implications

This research also has practical implications for the future development of P2P accommodation. First, according to the research results, the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic has enhanced tourists' awareness of self-protection, which also requires the host not only to strengthen online interaction with guests, informing them of epidemic prevention policies and the situation of P2P accommodation and destination, but also need to improve the hygiene management of the P2P accommodation, ensure the cleanliness and tidiness of the rooms and public spaces. It could reduce the risk perception of guests, and thus facilitate the face-to-face interaction. Second, to reduce guests' fear of infection, the host need to enhance service interaction with guests. On one hand, the host should cooperate with local epidemic prevention and control policies, and implement strict epidemic prevention measures, such as checking guest's health codes and providing disinfection supplies to ensure the health and safety of guests. On the other hand, the host should provide the guests with personalized, friendly and fast service, thereby stimulating the positive emotions and behaviour of guests. Finally and most importantly, the psychological needs of guests have changed after the epidemic, which requires the host to maintain a positive affective interaction with guests and pay more attention to their psychological well-being. The host can convey positive emotions to the guests to provide them with emotional support.

Like all researches, this study has its limitations. The study was mainly conducted in the context of Chinese culture, so the external validity needs to be considered. Besides, the guest-guest interactions were not taken into the consideration.

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