Review

Research on Outsourcing by Hotel Firms: Current State and Future Directions

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Abstract: This article aims to analyse the current state of hotel outsourcing research and where it should go in the future. Research on outsourcing is increasingly present in the hospitality literature. This paper reviews published works on hotel outsourcing. However, the research still seems to be limited to traditional topics and aspects, and it is necessary to define a new concept of outsourcing that reflects the new trends in tourism company management. Outsourcing has to be more sustainable and, therefore, contribute to the sustainable performance of the hotel, and it has to be related to other current topics in the hospitality literature. This reflection builds on the research conducted to date and proposes topics for current and future research. The paper proposes where outsourcing research should be heading, based on current research. The outsourcing of the future should be sustainable, consider its impact on the quality of service for end customers, facilitate the development of Industry 4.0, support innovation, and contribute to making the hotel more resilient. This paper on the direction hotel outsourcing research should take is the first critical examination of outsourcing, and it incorporates novel factors related to the new environmental management

Keywords: hotel outsourcing; resilience; resilience; service quality; innovation; Industry 4.0

1. Introduction

Outsourcing is widespread in a growing number of sectors and activities, especially those related to services and specialised knowledge. Outsourcing is a strategic decision that involves contracting out certain non-strategic activities or business processes that are necessary for manufacturing goods or providing services. It takes place through agreements or contracts with companies that have a greater capacity to carry out these activities or business processes, with the aim of improving competitive advantage [1]. In other words, outsourcing strategies consist of transferring certain functions or activities to specialised private suppliers.

Outsourcing is particularly important in the tourism sector, where hotels are increasingly opting to outsource different non-core services and even some services that are more relevant to competitive advantage. The services offered by suppliers nowadays cover almost all the necessary activities for the production of the hotel service. The decision to outsource can allow the firm to free up the necessary resources to focus on the most important aspects and invest in new or increased return processes or new opportunities [2]. At the end of 2014, it was estimated that 30% of employees working in hotels in Spain were outsourced, and forecasts predicted that 60% would be outsourced by 2020. However, given the new circumstances the tourism sector has been going through due to COVID-19, we do not yet know how the levels of outsourcing have been affected, although their effects could be predicted based on different theories of management. Indeed, COVID-19 will change the way companies are managed, especially tourism companies hit hard by the pandemic. In addition, the threat of wars in Europe and the world will create even more uncertainty in the tourism landscape and in the management of tourism businesses. In one scenario, tourism would be affected and recovery would be slower, and tourism spending would be affected due to highly inflated prices for raw materials.

The wide variety of activities carried out in a hotel, many of which are labour-intensive, in addition to the high volatility of demand, makes outsourcing an appropriate strategy [3]. Lamminmaki [3] suggests that the special characteristics of the hotel sector provide it with a suitable space for outsourcing. This means that this strategy should be analysed from different perspectives in order to understand not only its possible advantages, but also its disadvantages. González et al. [4] suggest the need to increase research on hotel outsourcing, due to the importance this strategy has acquired in the hotel sector, and to study different perspectives from those previously analysed. The methodological approach of the paper is firstly to carry out a review of all the studies proposed in the hotel sector to date. Based on this, the gaps in the current research are identified, and it becomes possible to encourage future research on the relationship between outsourcing and the new trend topics.

First, the paper presents the background and current state of the research on hotel outsourcing. Second, it outlines the new conceptual framework that should guide research on outsourcing, focusing on more current perspectives. Finally, conclusions and practical and theoretical implications are presented, considering the new variables in the current environment.

2. Background and Current State of Research on Hotel Outsourcing

Empirical studies support outsourcing in hotels as a strategy that can achieve cost savings [5,6]. However, they do not seem to be able to affirm that outsourcing is an effective tool to achieve hotel success. Thus, despite cost savings, previous studies on hotel management warn of other potentially harmful effects of outsourcing, such as lower quality service for tourists, loss of organisational identity, deterioration in relations between staff and outsourced personnel, and a dangerous need for close supervision and control of specialised suppliers [6]. In relation to the loss of service quality, few studies to date have analysed outsourcing from a consumer perspective. Likewise, studies are analysed from the perspective of the resource-based view of the firm and transaction costs. In contrast, the institutional perspective has not been analysed, and it is likely that certain pressures can have an impact on outsourcing levels.

Liu et al. [7] suggest that the context where outsourcing is implemented and the different ways it is approached can have a significant influence on the likelihood of outsourcing being successful. Thus, Quélin and Duhamel [8] and Hoecht and Trott [9] note that the success of outsourcing processes can be reduced in service firms, especially when critical activities are outsourced. Given their obvious similarity, hotel service organisations seem to be a suitable starting point to guide further research to address the lack of conclusive results about the appropriateness of outsourcing.

Among the conclusions obtained, recent studies show that outsourcing influences financial performance, but not non-financial performance, and that cost savings are one of the main reasons for the use of outsourcing [10]. However, in the years before the periods of crisis, the main reason for outsourcing was not cost savings, but rather other strategic factors [11]. The positive effects that outsourcing can have in the hotel sector have also been demonstrated. The results of studies show that outsourcing leads to cost reduction and converts fixed costs into variable costs [5], reduces the volume of human resources required [12], and helps to minimise the complexity derived from the variety of activities and functions in the provision of services in an establishment [4]. However, research on outsourcing has not considered relevant variables, such as perceived customer quality, innovation, or the development of sustainable outsourcing. On many occasions, the use of outsourcing has created controversy due to the low cost of the labour employed in the sector, leading to the conclusion that outsourcing that is not very sustainable for society and the surrounding environment. The use of discriminatory outsourcing that represents a loss of employment and a threat to a company's workers is often criticised, and rightly so. Thus, the outsourcing of the future must be sustainable outsourcing.

The research and studies on hotel outsourcing presented in the Table 1 can be classified into five types, as follows:

1. Studies that analyse the advantages and risks of outsourcing, the reasons organisations choose to outsource, and how the managerial perception of outsourcing influences the intensity of managers' use of outsourcing and propensity to outsource;
2. Studies that determine the drivers of the outsourcing of a process in an organisation. The most studied approach is the core competency approach, where activities are classified into core competencies and peripheral competencies. Another suitable approach is the degree of activity specificity, where the relationship between asset specificity, operational output, and process outsourcing is analysed. The most commonly used perspectives in these studies are the resource-based view of the firm and transaction cost theory. Within this group of papers are some that analyse other determinants, such as competitive strategy, organisational strategy, size, and organisational culture;
3. Studies that analyse the impact of outsourcing decisions on operational performance, competitive priorities, and perceived tourism service quality, although the latter to a lesser extent. In addition, the impact of outsourcing on financial and non-financial performance is analysed;
4. Studies that analyse inter-organisational relationships and their success factors. These studies determine the extent to which the use of relational norms rather than contractual norms can improve the success of outsourcing. There is also work on the extent to which organisational justice improves cooperative behaviour and how this behaviour contributes to suppliers being more proactive. However, this type of work is scarce;
5. Studies that analyse the outsourcing of specific hotel service activities, ranging from cleaning to certain management aspects, such as revenue management or information systems.

Table 1. Research on hotel outsourcing.

Year	Authors	Topics Covered by the Authors
2000	Hemmington et al. [13]	These authors aim to identify and analyse the key dimensions of restaurant outsourcing in hotels. The complexity of the relationship and its effects on service delivery are analysed.
2002	Paraskevas et al. [14]	They study the perceptions of managers of small hotels (between 50 and 150 rooms) of the benefits and risks of outsourcing information systems/information technology.
2004	Espino Rodríguez et al. [15]	They analyse hotel managers' perceptions of the influence of outsourcing on the operations strategy and, in particular, on operations-related objectives, such as cost reduction, quality improvement, flexibility, and service improvement.
2005	Espino Rodríguez et al. [11]	From a strategic perspective and drawing on the resource-based view of the firm, the authors study the characteristics that hotel activities must have in order to be outsourced, as well as their influence on the organisational result. They classify hotel activities into core, non-core, and complementary activities.
2005	Espino Rodríguez et al. [16]	They analyse hotel managers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of using each strategy, in order to determine which strategies are related to the willingness to outsource.
2005	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [17]	They determine the factors that information systems/information technology (IS/IT) resources must fulfil in order to have strategic value according to the resource-based vision of the firm. The reasons, which are both strategic and tactical, are analysed.
2005	Lam et al. [18]	They investigate the perceived outsourcing strategy of Shanghai hotel managers, and they identify the relationship between the determinants of outsourcing adoption and the types of hotel ownership, as well as the compatibility between the supplier and the hotel culture.
2005	Lamminmaki [19]	This author applies Williamson's six-dimensional typology of asset specificity as a theoretical framework for assessing the nature of outsourcing in hotels. Place and capital specificity are the dimensions that best explain outsourcing.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Year	Authors	Topics Covered by the Authors
2006	Barrows et al. [20]	They investigate outsourcing practices in the food and beverage operations of three independent Canadian hotels by determining the following: the different outsourcing practices and the hotels' reasons for outsourcing; the perceived benefits of outsourcing; and the factors that determine the outsourcing.
2007	Lamminmaki [21]	The author studies outsourcing in a sample of Australian hotels from the perspective of transaction cost economics (TCE), agency theory, and other organisational factors.
2007	Burgess [22]	The author investigates whether the use of the outsourcing strategy by finance departments in hotels is likely to become widespread and, if so, the impact it will have on the organisational structure and the role of the hotel's CFO.
2007	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [23]	The authors analyse the information systems and information technology (IS/IT) outsourcing strategy, considering the different activities that make up the IS/IT area. They study the relationship with the different types of IS/IT capabilities and their strategic value.
2008	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [24]	They analyse the make-or-buy decisions of hotels in Scotland. Each hotel surveyed was asked for information about 13 hotel operations or processes. A comprehensive model is developed that establishes the relationship between asset specificity and operations and hotel or business performance, moderated by the form of governance (make or buy). In addition, the relationship between asset specificity and outsourcing in the hotel sector is also examined.
2008	Shang et al. [25]	It is the first study to apply a three-stage DEA model (data envelopment technique) to analyse the impact of outsourcing on hotel performance.
2009	Donada et al. [26]	They analyse the role of positive and negative emotions in decisions about changing suppliers in the hotel industry. The results are used to analyse the impact of outsourcing on hotel performance.
2009	Bolat et al. [27]	They empirically investigate the impact of outsourcing and organisational performance in hotels, considering variables, such as organisational effectiveness, productivity, profitability, quality, continuous improvement, quality of working life, and levels of social responsibility.
2009	Chatzoglou et al. [28]	They study the influence of outsourcing in Greek hotels on the achievement of the hotel's operational and financial objectives, improvements in flexibility, access to new management and supply methods, and quality improvement. In addition, the impact of outsourcing on hotel performance is also investigated.
2010	Wan et al. [29]	This paper examines the factors affecting outsourcing in Taiwan. Interviews with hotel managers were conducted to analyse the determinants of outsourcing in different services and the current and desired rates of outsourcing in hotels.
2011	González Ramírez et al. [4]	This paper uses a content analysis focusing on articles on hotel outsourcing to find out the level of development achieved in this area of research. To this end, the authors start with a review of the indexed articles dedicated to this topic, and then they suggest the most successful thematic areas and research methodologies.
2011	Lamminmaki [3]	The author analyses 20 outsourcing/internalisation motives based on transaction cost economics (TCE) theory, agency theory, and the literature on outsourcing.
2012	Leeman et al. [30]	They examine how outsourcing projects can be influenced by trust, and how perceptions of trust can influence supplier loyalty and retention.
2012	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [5]	This paper examines the use of outsourcing in hotel establishments in Scotland and Taiwan. It focuses on empirically identifying the role of the outsourcing strategy in hotels, and a comparison is made of these two regions.
2013	Hiamey et al. [31]	These authors examine how managers understand outsourcing and outsourced activities, the reasons for outsourcing, and the challenges faced by hotels that outsource.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Year	Authors	Topics Covered by the Authors
2014	Yıldız et al. [32]	It investigates whether the benefits, risks, and outcomes of outsourcing, as well as the departments outsourced, differ between 4- and 5-star coastal hotels and city hotels. It also compares the levels of outsourcing of certain hotel activities in the different groups of hotels.
2014	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [33]	The authors analyse hotel outsourcing in Taiwan from the perspective of competitive strategy and asset-specificity. They consider the impact of the influence of cost leadership and differentiation strategies on the degree of outsourcing of an activity and the effect of moderating asset specificity on the relationship between competitive strategy and the degree of outsourcing. These authors develop a specificity-outsourcing matrix.
2014	Hodari et al. [34]	They investigate the levels of two stress factors in hotel managers who have outsourced their spa facility versus those who have not outsourced it.
2015	DeVita et al. [35]	They study the performance of outsourcing in Tunisian hotels. Transaction cost theory is applied to examine possible hiring problems in outsourcing in the presence of specific assets.
2015	Promsivapallop et al. [36]	They examine the effects of variables on outsourcing decisions in the hotel industry in Thailand. They attempt to test and evaluate a theoretical framework that combines transaction cost theory with factors affecting the level of outsourcing.
2017	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [37]	They develop a model that studies the relationship between competitive advantage and outsourcing and whether the relationship between competitive advantage and activity performance is influenced by the outsourcing of the activity. They create a matrix they call "outsourcing and competitive advantage".
2017	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [38]	They investigate whether the form of governance of an activity (outsourcing or insourcing) moderates the relationship between asset specificity and performance. They propose different hypotheses based on transaction cost theory and the resource-based view of the firm. A specificity-performance matrix is developed.
2018	Zhang et al. [39]	They study outsourcing decisions based on the resource-based view of the firm and transaction cost theory. The paper analyses whether cost reduction and the degree of supplier specialisation impact overall efficiency and long-term commitment.
2018	Altin et al. [40]	This study analyses the inclination of hotels to outsource revenue management to an external company. This paper examines whether, in complex environments, such as revenue, firm capabilities moderate the impact of asset specificity on managers' inclination to outsource.
2018	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [6]	The study analyses which strategic benefits and risks determine whether an outsourcing strategy is accepted by managers.
2018	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [10]	The study analyses whether the strategic orientation of the firm, as measured by Venkatraman's six dimensions, influences the level of outsourcing. It also analyses whether outsourcing has an impact on the organisation's performance from a financial and non-financial point of view.
2018	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [41]	They analyse the determinants of outsourcing partnership quality, such as strategic benefits and the degree of outsourcing. The paper also focuses on the influence of the quality of the supplier–hotel partnership on relationships governed by trust, commitment, business understanding, shared benefits and risks, and conflict resolution.
2019	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [42]	This paper analyses the impact of fairness as a success factor in supplier relationships in outsourcing. It analyses the relationships between dimensions of fairness, such as attitudes, and behavioural elements, such as trust, cooperation, and long-term orientation, and how these elements influence proactive supplier improvement.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Year	Authors	Topics Covered by the Authors
2020	Elhoushy et al. [43]	They investigate the interactions between the perceived benefits and risks of outsourcing and the adoption of outsourcing from the perspective of Egyptian hoteliers.
2019	Chu-Lai et al. [44]	In two tourism destinations, this study analyses the impact of outsourcing benefits and competitive strategy on the use of relational norms in outsourcing relationships. In addition, it analyses the impact of relational norms on the success of outsourcing.
2020	Hiamey et al. [45]	The objective of this qualitative study is to analyse the selection of suppliers and the management of outsourcing relationships.
2020	Gebril Taha et al. [46]	They study the impact of organisational culture on the level of outsourcing and sustainable performance from the perspective of the competitive value framework (CVF).
2021	Altín [47]	It analyses the foundations of the outsourcing of the revenue management function from the perspective of the resource-based view of the firm.
2021	Espino-Rodríguez et al. [48]	They examine the impact of outsourcing hotel departments on service quality as measured by online customer reviews. Three models were developed, looking at three major online reputation websites, in order to establish the relationship between the outsourcing of hotel activities and service quality.

The studies suggest that the perspectives of transaction costs and the resource-based view of the firm explain outsourcing decisions. Supplier capabilities or the lack of resources and capabilities are the main determinants of whether the activity is outsourced [47]. There is also research indicating that processes based on specific assets may be outsourced [35]. Moreover, depending on the context of the study, the main reasons are related to costs or tactical aspects, whereas, in other studies, the strategic vision or strategic reasons prevail [5,6,16]. Studies also show that outsourcing has an influence on financial performance, although there is less evidence that it can improve non-financial performance or service quality [10,11]. However, Bolat and Yilmaz [27] suggest that managers think hotel performance has improved after outsourcing, and so the results in this regard are mixed. In addition, other contextual factors, such as strategy and culture, influence whether a hotel may have more outsourcing [10,33,46]. Other studies analyse the inter-organisational relationships of outsourcing, concluding that greater trust, cooperation, and long-term orientation, and quality in inter-organisational relationships and relational norms, favour outsourcing success, higher retention, and proactive supplier improvement [30,42,44].

In all types of research papers, outsourcing is analysed in isolation and independently as a structural operations decision rather than being integrated with the rest of the operations decisions. This means there is a need for studies that integrate outsourcing decisions with other decisions by analysing the impact of outsourcing on some operations decisions.

Therefore, future research should relate outsourcing to other more up-to-date variables and answer many questions that have not yet been analysed, based on the work in the literature and new trends in operations management, such as sustainability, resilience, innovation, Industry 4.0 technologies, and the integration of outsourcing in supply chain management. Table 2 shows the direction outsourcing studies should take and reveals parallels between the studies conducted to date and those proposed for the future.

Each type of research conducted on outsourcing will lead to other types of research that consider new trends. In addition, the institutional perspective is used when analysing supply chain or sustainability aspects; however, in outsourcing research, this approach has not been analysed and may be predominant due to the pressures of the current environment.

Table 2. Current and future trends in outsourcing research.

Types of Studies Undertaken to Date	Future Studies Required on Outsourcing
Studies that analyse the level of outsourcing, the reasons for outsourcing, and its advantages and risks.	Need for studies defining sustainable outsourcing and the benefits this strategy can have for sustainable development.
Determinants of outsourcing based on the resource-based view of the firm and transaction cost theory have been studied.	Determining factors based on the institutional perspective, given that stakeholders demand more sustainable outsourcing.
Outsourcing has been studied as an independent decision within the structural operations area rather than integrated with the rest of the operations decisions.	Studies that integrate outsourcing with other operations decisions are required.
The studies have covered different activities or processes that are necessary to provide the hotel service.	Outsourcing studies should focus on a broader spectrum of activities related to Industry 4.0 technologies.
The impact of outsourcing on the organisational performance and competitive priorities of the hotel has been studied.	Studies should consider the impact of outsourcing on the quality of service measured by customers and resilience to new crises.
Studies have examined trust, the quality of inter-organisational relationships, and relational norms as factors determining outsourcing success.	Studies are needed that assess outsourcing from the perspective of social exchange and consider the sustainable behaviour of suppliers as a key success factor in outsourcing.

3. A New Conceptual Framework

Based on the above, it is necessary to establish a new conceptual framework that allows us to consider all the aspects that have not been addressed in the research on hotel outsourcing, even though they are current issues in hotel management. Figure 1 shows how outsourcing can be the central axis of relevant aspects, such as Industry 4.0 and innovation, sustainability, resilience, and hotel reputation. Thus, outsourcing should be framed in the research that allows us to advance and relate outsourcing to other more up-to-date variables and answer many questions that have not yet been analysed, based on the works in the literature and the new trends in operations, anagement, such as sustainability, resilience, innovation, Industry 4.0 technologies, and the integration of outsourcing in supply chain management.
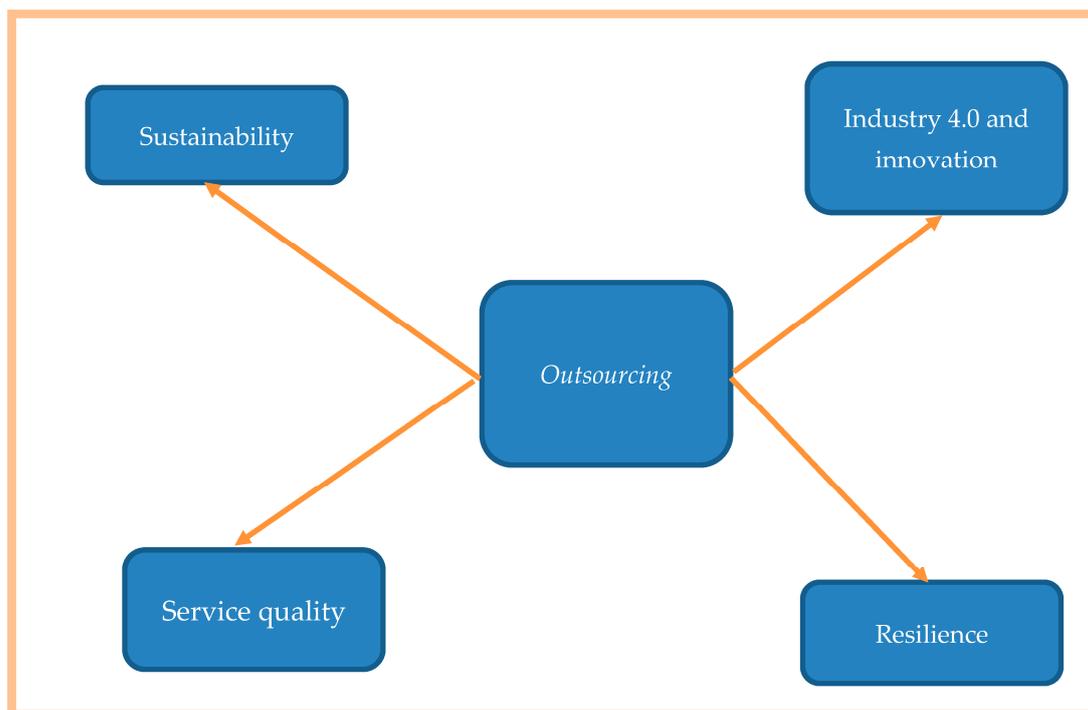

Figure 1. Outsourcing as a central focus of the new research.

3.1. Sustainable Outsourcing

The concept of sustainable outsourcing in tourism destinations must be based on the concept of sustainable tourism. Furthermore, the concept of sustainable tourism emerges as an extension of the concept of sustainable development, defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the Brundtland Report [49] as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Researchers apply a multidimensional approach, considering economic, social, and environmental dimensions [50]. According to Hult [51], sustainability could be a strategic resource that fosters a competitive advantage through superior organisational performance. The literature on sustainable tourism originally focused on the environmental dimension [52]. This dimension is related to natural capital and the condition of renewable and non-renewable resources. In contrast, the economic dimension of sustainability involves satisfying the economic needs of the population by producing the maximum return to achieve a high standard of living within the constraints of the existing capital, whereas the social-cultural dimension focuses on human–environment interactions and the protection of the socio-cultural resources of local communities and host areas [50]. The social dimension is conceived as organisations' ability to add value to the communities where they operate and the need to develop social resources by deciding what happens to their employees, customers, and other stakeholders, in addition to managing proactively to create a sustainable competitive advantage [53].

The hotel should foster sustainable management and apply sustainable outsourcing in order to contribute to sustainable development and a sustainable destination. Sustainable outsourcing favours the sustainable development of the tourist destination by considering social, economic, and environmental aspects in its execution. This means that outsourcing contributes to the development of the community, favouring cohesion with outsourced employees and internal employees. With regard to sustainability and outsourcing, no previous studies have analysed this relationship. Greater sustainability in outsourcing will contribute to greater perceived value and satisfaction with the services purchased from outside.

A sustainable approach to outsourcing should ensure that the hotel does not outsource activities that are part of its core competencies, and it should facilitate sustainable economic development. Issues, such as improved employee retention, customer satisfaction and retention, innovation, improved company image, and positive corporate performance are common strategic issues that need to be managed well and consistently [53,54]. These strategic issues are related to sustainability and should be taken into account when outsourcing, culminating in the development of a new concept of hotel outsourcing. The incorporation of outsourcing allows the organisation to have greater access to the voice of the external environment and pursue more sustainability-oriented strategies. Increased outsourcing allows hotels to focus on their core competencies, obtain lower costs, and increase productivity, which allows the business to focus on aspects related to improving sustainability, thus, being more responsive to aspects associated with social responsibility and ecological concerns. If outsourcing is carried out with sustainability criteria in mind, this impact could be greater.

Outsourcing can not only improve aspects related to the financial performance, as demonstrated so far, but it can also improve the social and environmental aspects of the hotel. Outsourcing can help the hotel to focus on developing the most sustainable processes by having external suppliers take over the activities that do not involve the hotel's core competencies. Outsourcing allows the hotel to devote more resources and time to aspects that contribute to improved sustainability. Therefore, the knowledge gained from outsourcing helps the organisation to meet not only its operational needs, but also environmental and social demands during the development and production of sustainable products and services [55]. In turn, outsourcing from an economic, social, and environmental perspective favours the development of more sustainable performance for the future with sustainable strategies and practices that satisfy the hotel's customers and stakeholders more.

Flexibility, the supplier's ability to adapt to a more sustainable approach, favours a better outsourcing outcome. Under this sustainability perspective, the selected suppliers should follow a more sustainable approach. The success and implementation of sustainable outsourcing may depend on having suppliers that use a sustainable approach when developing their activities and providing services to their customers and applying practices related to social and environmental sustainability.

3.2. Outsourcing and Its Relationship with Innovation, Industry 4.0 and Resilience

3.2.1. Innovation

Innovation is defined as the development of new services or new methods for the elaboration of products or services already existing on the market in a consistent and economically viable way, including generation, acceptance, adoption, or implementation [56,57]. Innovation offers an improvement in the quality of products and/or processes that can be implemented to obtain greater competitiveness or better financial and non-financial outcomes in certain dimensions, such as the quality of organisations. Innovation theory has mainly been applied in industrial sectors, and when carried out in the service sector, it is necessary to take the heterogeneity of these sectors into account. According to Hjalager [58] and Nagy [59], innovations in the tourism sector can take different forms, including new investments in making larger hotels with better facilities, removing structural bottlenecks through changes in technology, internal training of staff, obtaining faster service with more advantages for tourists, improving quality standards, and entering new markets with the same methods and products. Several studies related to hotel innovation have been found [60–63]. These papers analyse the antecedents of innovation and its influence on hotel occupancy, as well as the relationship between knowledge and innovation. However, the empirical literature does not analyse the influence that outsourcing might have on hotel innovation and other outcomes; nor does it consider the relationship between innovation and supply chain integration. Innovation has multiple dimensions and can be classified into different types [56,62,64].

Innovation can be perceived as something new, and it can be developed in different areas of organisations. Authors classify innovation into the following four types: product innovation, organisational innovation, process innovation, and market innovation [56,65]. Innovation can result from changes in organisational structure or from the introduction of new tourism markets that can lead to new ways of delivering services. Process innovation involves changes in the way tourism services are provided, such as the acquisition of new infrastructure and the implementation of technologies in the different processes or operations of establishments. Organisational innovation refers to changes in aspects of tourism marketing. Competitiveness in tourism depends largely on innovation, which must achieve low costs and high-quality services offered to tourists. The key to developing an effective innovation strategy lies in understanding how to create or add value for customers. In this regard, it is necessary to know whether the outsourcing of activities is harming or favouring the benefits offered by innovation.

The theoretical literature suggests that outsourcing can harm innovation. These possible negative effects can appear, for example, when critical activities have been outsourced and pose a great risk to competitive advantage [8,9]. In this respect, Espino-Rodríguez and Gil-Padilla [23] point out that the outsourcing of information systems in hotel establishments deprives them of the necessary skills and knowledge to obtain a competitive advantage. Therefore, outsourcing may erode the organisation's potential for learning, especially in activities that are necessary to develop its core business [66]. This implies that there may be indications of a negative influence on innovation. However, there are no empirical studies linking innovation to outsourcing. Thus, it is necessary to test whether the global outsourcing of all activities is detrimental to innovation, or whether innovation is diminished when one activity is outsourced. It is likely that some types of outsourcing may favour innovation and others may harm it. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research in this area and consider the degree of sustainability of outsourcing.

3.2.2. Industry 4.0

Industry 4.0 involves the digital transformation of existing businesses and processes [67]. It is characterised by the implementation of cyber–physical systems (CPS) and smart production, which will result in the organisation being able to produce products using decentralised decisions and autonomous systems. The main challenges for companies in the Industry 4.0 environment are mass customisation, an effective and efficient supply chain, obtaining timely information about customer needs and wants, a smart working environment, and the right mix of products and services [67]. Industry 4.0 requires flexible processes and highly efficient supply chain structures. Shamin et al. [68] consider that issues, such as supply chain efficiency, the Internet of Things (IoT), digital enhancement, smart working environments, and mass customisation of services, also arise in the services sector. In this regard, it is important to understand the role that outsourcing can play in the implementation of Industry 4.0-related technologies. In this scenario, Industry 4.0 is a key concept in the hotel sector, given that personalised service, supply chain efficiency, agility, a smart working environment, use of big data to obtain up-to-date information on customer preferences, highly personalised services at a lower cost, and digital enhancement can strongly affect satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived service quality. This industrialization changes the processes and brings the need to optimise processes in hotel services.

In an uncertain environment, such as Industry 4.0, the key to success is training, learning, and innovativeness [69]. Therefore, outsourcing plays a key role in this new environment. On the one hand, outsourcing can support the implementation of these technologies; on the other hand, sustainable outsourcing of other activities will free up resources and time to train employees in using these new technologies. It is also a challenge for employees to adapt to the pace of Industry 4.0, and so they need time for training and adaptation. Thus, outsourcing can be suitable for these types of activities that require specific skills and techniques in their application. Moreover, the use of Industry 4.0 can enhance the advantages of outsourcing by making the impact on organisational performance greater in hotels applying Industry 4.0-related technologies. In this regard, Lalic et al. [70] analysed the impact of outsourcing activities on aspects of organisational performance when Industry 4.0 technologies are present in medium and small companies in the industrial sector. However, this aspect has not been analysed in the hotel sector.

3.2.3. Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic is a major crisis that has transformed the hotel sector. It requires hotels to adapt their business to the conditions of the new normal and to redefine the pandemic crisis management model in the context of the hotel sector, based on the strategic responses of global hotels [71]. In this regard, studies are needed to explore the impact of operational decisions, such as outsourcing, on the influence of governance and stakeholder dynamics on hotel planning and management. One of the ways to address these or other crises is by developing resources and capabilities that enable organisations to become more resilient. Sustainable outsourcing could influence hotel resilience by creating a more agile and stronger structure that can respond to new crises and challenges of different types. There are different types or levels of resilience, but organisational resilience is especially discussed in studies on organisations and companies [72]. Organisational resilience is the ability to resist shocks and adapt when faced with challenges, and it can be defined as a firm's ability to effectively absorb disturbances, develop situation-specific responses, and subsequently engage in transformational activities, in order to capitalise on disruptive surprises that potentially threaten the firm's survival [73].

Marcucci et al. [74] point out that organisational resilience can be divided into internal and external resilience. Factors that can be associated with capabilities that strengthen internal resilience are strong financial liquidity, financial leverage, and solvency. These aspects were keys to building resilience during the 2008 crisis [75]. Marcucci et al. [74] indicate that organisational resilience, based on other studies, is associated with product and service diversification, brand position and a risk management culture, and strategic

human resource management, such as cross-training. The risk management culture is quite accepted in the literature and consists of different aspects, including prevention techniques, risk assessment, and reduction action plans to cope with sudden disturbances [76]. With regard to external resilience, it encompasses the company's ability to assess risks arising from demand and supply [74]. In this respect, flexible contracts with suppliers, multiple sourcing, and distribution strategies support the organisation in achieving a high level of resilience in case of a disruption in some part of the supply chain itself, such as interruption of material flow or loss of connections and infrastructure [77]. These factors could benefit from sustainable outsourcing.

For Niese et al. [72], in general terms, resilience represents a capacity to resist shocks and make changes when challenges arise. These authors apply resilience to the restaurant sector and show that experience, short-term responsiveness, a strong financial base with fewer burdens, and loans are factors that positively influence resilience. These factors and advantages of resilience are elements that have a certain parallel with the advantages of outsourcing, i.e., lower investments, liberalisation of both financial and strategic resources, expertise on the part of suppliers, and short-term response in case of need. In this regard, it is expected that sustainable outsourcing can have a positive impact on the resilience of hotels.

Future research in relation to outsourcing with innovation, Industry 4.0, and resilience will seek to answer the following questions: (a) how does outsourcing influence hotel innovation; (b) how do outsourcing of hotel activities and sustainable outsourcing favour the development of Industry 4.0 in the hotel sector; (c) how does sustainable outsourcing, together with the use of the Industry 4.0 concept, affect organisational performance measured from different perspectives; and (d) what impact does sustainable outsourcing have on hotel resilience in the face of possible crises?

3.2.4. Outsourcing and Service Quality

The impact of outsourcing on final service quality has hardly been analysed in the literature. Many benefits are attributed to outsourcing in the literature on the hotel sector. Multiple papers reveal positive effects of outsourcing in the hotel sector [10,11,27,39]. The studies that analyse the impact of outsourcing on organisational performance consider efficiency, costs, productivity, and financial and non-financial performance as performance measures [11,27,28]. These studies consider the opinion of the manager or employee, but few studies analyse the impact of outsourcing on the hotel's reputation. Only one recently published exploratory study by Espino-Rodríguez and Rodríguez [48] analyses the impact of outsourcing on the online reputation. Therefore, it is necessary to study this aspect in greater depth. Furthermore, this study considers the level of outsourcing rather than whether this strategy is applied with sustainability criteria. Outsourcing processes must be carefully selected so that they do not affect the perceived quality and value received by customers. Online reputation measured through customer reviews in databases is very useful information that gives us a measure of performance from the customer's point of view. Online reputation is generated through social media. Thus, more studies are needed to analyse the impact of sustainable outsourcing on the quality perceived by the end customer. This requires the use of direct customer ratings (from both primary and secondary sources) from each hotel in the tourism cluster where the study is analysed, in order to find out whether outsourcing improves the quality of service and what kinds of outsourced activities improve or worsen the quality of the final product offered to tourists.

4. Conclusions

Research should lead to further studies that analyse the relationship between outsourcing and other variables, with a focus on sustainable outsourcing, which considers social, economic, and environmental aspects, as well as the expected results and the impact and generation of knowledge. The development of new theories, such as institutional theories, will allow us to test the extent to which societal pressures influence the development of outsourcing, and new studies on hotel outsourcing should advance our understanding

of the way outsourcing should be conducted. Furthermore, the relationships between outsourcing, innovation, resilience, sustainability, and online reputation based on customer feedback have not been established in the academic literature. The study of these relationships will make it possible to develop empirically tested theoretical frameworks that will add value to outsourcing research.

The starting hypotheses are based precisely on the studies carried out on outsourcing, which will serve as a basis for proposing new research that will advance the topic, both in academic terms and for professionals. These starting hypotheses are as follows:

1. More sustainable outsourcing, considered from social, economic, and environmental perspectives, will contribute to a higher perceived value of outsourcing and greater satisfaction with outsourced services, as well as a more sustainable performance;

2. The outsourcing of the future is expected to be more sustainable by taking into account the triple bottom line (economic, social-cultural, and environmental). This type of outsourcing should have a positive impact on the sustainable performance of the hotel;

3. The use of outsourcing providers that have a more sustainable approach will have a positive impact on the success of outsourcing;

4. Both tactical and strategic outsourcing benefits will allow this strategy to be developed further. This will allow us to compare the results with those from other studies prior to COVID-19. An increase in outsourcing is also foreseeable, leading to savings in investment and fixed costs;

5. The benefits of outsourcing can have a positive impact on sustainable performance;

6. Coercive, mimetic, and regulatory pressures may have a positive influence on the development of sustainable outsourcing. However, there is no previous research to support these relationships;

7. Innovations related to product, process, organisation, or marketing can condition outsourcing decisions and the way they are carried out;

8. Sustainable outsourcing will favour the resilience of the hotel, making it better able to cope with future crises;

9. Thanks to outsourcing, the use of Industry 4.0-related technologies can be promoted and implemented in a more accessible and faster way in the hotel sector;

10. Sustainable outsourcing influences supply chain integration (supplier integration, internal integration, customer integration);

11. Supply chain integration can influence sustainable performance and contribute to or mediate the relationship between outsourcing and sustainable performance;

12. Outsourcing per se may have a negative impact on the hotel's online reputation. However, more sustainable outsourcing may have a positive impact on online reputation or a neutral effect.

Future research would need to test these hypotheses by developing certain structural models that show the relationships between variables defined based on the theoretical and empirical reviews of each of the aforementioned topics.

Studies on outsourcing should not only consider an internal analysis of outsourcing and its impact on other strategies, but also the impact of outsourcing on service quality, measured through online reviews of web platforms or directly through customer surveys. Outsourcing can boost the specialisation of hotel establishments by fostering the generation of knowledge in those areas that are not outsourced, eliminating inefficiencies associated with redundancy and activities that do not add value and are costly [78]. Outsourcing allows access to complementary capabilities from external suppliers [79], improving resilience, favouring the use of new technologies, and achieving true integration with the supply chain. However, the ultimate aim should be to improve the quality of hotel services and develop a more sustainable hotel. By considering these aspects, we can find out whether outsourcing is a strategy to be considered or nuanced, given that it has been increasing considerably and is expected to increase in the coming years.

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