Hotels and multi-sided platforms: Coopetition and platform integration

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore how hotels work with multi-sided platforms. Drawing on the relational perspective of resource based theory, this thesis first investigates how hotels simultaneously cooperate and compete (coopetition) with platforms, and subsequently explores cooperation with platforms (platform integration) in greater detail. Using a grounded theory approach, insights from 46 managerial interviews were collected and analyzed. The findings from these analyses are presented as three inter-linked studies.

The first study focuses on the concept of coopetition, the ability to blend cooperation and competition in business relationships. This study is amongst the first to illustrate how hotels can balance cooperation and competition when working with platforms so that neither force dominates the other. A novel conceptual framework is presented to highlight the resources and managerial activities required to attain coopetition balance.

The second study examines how hotels pursue coopetition with platforms close to the customer interface in areas such as marketing and sales. While prior research focuses on coopetition far from the customers (e.g., in procurement), this study is among the first to investigate coopetition near the customer. A novel conceptual framework is developed showing how coopetition patterns vary depending on the level of tension between hotels and platforms. The findings show that, contrary to current views, coopetition patterns are not competition dominant close to the customer. Rather coopetition patterns range between cooperation and competition-dominant approaches based on tension levels.

The third study introduces a new concept coined "platform integration," defined as the ability of hotels to enact coordinating and learning capabilities to align their operations with platforms. While prior research primarily focuses on channel integration capabilities to manage

channels, this study shows that those capabilities are inadequate for hotels to deal with platforms. Instead, this study proposes platform integration as a specialized capability to effectively work with platforms.

This thesis is practically relevant and timely. As we witness a proliferation of platforms in the hospitality industry, this thesis offers practical recommendations to hotels, platform firms, and policymakers on strategies for successful hotel-platform relationships. Finally, the limitations of the research are explained, and important future research themes are presented.

This thesis is dedicated to my loving wife Nazanin Shahidi.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Multi-sided platforms are hubs that allow different stakeholders to connect with each other in ways that would have been difficult without the presence of platforms (Rangaswamy et al., 2020; Tian, Vanderstraeten, Matthyssens, & Shen, 2021). When considered as a whole, multi-sided platforms create a scalable marketplace bringing together millions of firms and customers in one place. For example, in the hospitality sector, Expedia facilitates interaction between a network of firms (hotels, airlines, and car rentals) and customers. Similarly, Airbnb connects hosts and guests and plays a significant role in the sharing economy. Platforms have also been introduced to other industries, including retailing (Amazon, AliExpress), gaming (Xbox, PlayStation), and social media (Clubhouse). These innovative platforms have created shakeouts in their respective industries (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). For example, in hospitality, platforms are replacing the use of traditional travel agents. As a result, more than 50% of hotel sales are now transacted through platforms (Rossini, 2015). The importance of these new intermediaries means that hotels need to plan and implement appropriate strategies to work with platforms successfully.

To date, limited empirical work has considered business relationships with platforms (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Rolland, Mathiassen, & Rai, 2018). Prior research falls short of taking a broader systemic perspective of platform ecosystems, resource integration, the collaboration between stakeholders, and value creation (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Fehrer, Woratschek, & Brodie, 2018). As a result, more research is needed in this area because platforms have several unique properties. Platforms foster network effects: as the number of firms (hotels) and customers (tourists) using the platform increases, it creates a bigger, more competitive and valuable marketplace (Reinartz, Wiegand, & Imschloss, 2019; Wirtz, Fung, Amrish, Liu, & Chun, 2019). In addition, platforms have high matchmaking competencies, with the ability to connect hotels and customers based on key variables such as location, price,

and customer ratings (Benoit, Baker, Bolton, Gruber, & Kandampully, 2017; Perren & Kozinets, 2018). Moreover, platforms hold a central position in the business network through which interactions between hotels and customers take place (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Perks, Kowalkowski, Witell, & Gustafsson, 2017). Therefore, because platforms have characteristics that are distinctively different than conventional firms and channels, it appears likely that hotels will require specialized capabilities to work with platforms successfully.

Based on the above argument, the purpose of this thesis is *to explore how hotels work with multi-sided platforms.* This thesis draws on the relational view of resource based theory (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Dyer, Singh, & Hesterly, 2018) to investigate the processes in hotel-platform relationships. In particular, the resources, activities, and capabilities that hotels apply to deal with platforms are examined. Three studies were conducted for this thesis: the first and second studies explore the interplay of cooperation and competition (coopetition), while the third study focuses on cooperation with platforms (platform integration) in more detail. These three inter-linked studies provide deeper multidimensional insights into how hotels can manage their relationships with platforms successfully.

The first study focuses on the blend of cooperation and competition (coopetition) (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Dowling, Roering, Carlin, & Wisnieski, 1996). An example of coopetition is the joint venture between Sony and Samsung. These two giant firms jointly develop television panels, even though they compete against one another to attract and retain customers (Gnyawali & Park, 2011). In hospitality, hotels cooperate with platforms to access large customer audiences but compete with them by attracting customers through direct hotel channels. However, prior research consistently explores coopetition between conventional firms that do not operate a platform (Crick & Crick, 2020b; Mathias, Huyghe, Frid, & Galloway, 2018). These firms usually occupy the same stage in the value chain, such as pharmaceuticals (Cui, Yang, & Vertinsky, 2018). However, coopetition with platforms such as

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the relationship between hotels and Expedia.com, who are placed in different stages of the value chain, has received less scholarly attention.

In addition, a critical managerial challenge in pursuit of coopetition is the maintenance of a balanced relationship so that neither cooperation nor competition becomes a dominant force (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Peng & Bourne, 2009). However, existing coopetition research provides limited insight into how this balance can be attained (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Raza-ullah, 2021). Based on the above rationale, the first study addresses this research question: *How do hotels maintain coopetition balance when working with platforms?*

The second study also explores coopetition but focuses on the interplay of cooperation and competition close to the customer interface, such as in marketing and sales (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Rusko, 2011). Prior coopetition research mainly emphasizes business activities that are far from the customer interface, such as research and development (e.g., Park, Srivastava, & Gnyawali, 2014; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2013). As a result, there are limited studies on coopetition close to the customer. Moreover, current literature suggests that coopetition far from the customer is cooperation-dominant, whereas coopetition near the customer is competition-dominant (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Walley, 2007). For example, two firms may collaborate in new product development to come up with innovative solutions (far from the customer) but compete in distribution and sales (close to the customer). However, coopetition may not always be competition dominant close to the customer. For instance, hotels work with platforms entirely near the customers and collaborate with platforms to connect with a broad customer network (Ling, Guo, & Yang, 2014; Yang & Leung, 2018). Therefore, prior research does not offer insight on coopetition in close customer proximity that also includes collaboration. As a result, this study addresses the following research question: *How do hotels pursue coopetition in close customer proximity when working with platforms?*

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The third study focuses on the notion of cooperation (platform integration) and argues that channel integration capabilities are inadequate when hotels have to collaborate with platforms. Channel integration is defined as the ability of firms to manage their online, offline, and mobile channels as one unit to offer customers a seamless service experience across these channels (Banerjee, 2014; Sousa & Voss, 2006). For example, many retailers now offer customers the buy online and pick-up in-store service (Gallino & Moreno, 2014). Banks provide customers the choice to complete a transaction in the channel that they are most comfortable using (Hossain, Akter, Kattiyapornpong, & Dwivedi, 2019).

However, existing research explores channel integration in relation to marketing channels only and does not investigate whether it is applicable when firms engage with platforms (e.g., Goraya et al., 2020; Herhausen, Binder, Schoegel, & Herrmann, 2015). It is unlikely that insights about channel integration can be applied directly to platforms because marketing channels (wholesalers, traditional travel agents) and platforms (Amazon, Expedia) function very differently. For instance, firms manage channels to attain high levels of economies of scale (Palmatier, Stern, & El-Ansary, 2015; Watson, Worm, Palmatier, & Ganesan, 2015), whereas the goal of platforms is to create network effects (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; Kapoor et al., 2021). Therefore, because channels and platforms differ substantially, it is unlikely that insights into channel integration can offer the competencies required for firms to work in platform environments. Therefore, firms need to develop platform-specific capabilities, coined as platform integration. Hence, the following research questions are explored in this study: *What are the capabilities required for platform integration? How are platform integration capabilities similar to and different from channel integration capabilities?*

To summarize, this thesis investigates how hotels work with multi-sided platforms in a rapidly evolving technology enabled environment. Three studies are designed to explore

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different aspects of this complex relationship. The first study considers how hotels maintain balance in their coopetitive relationships with platforms. The second study considers how coopetition is managed in areas close to the customer, an area which has had little prior research attention. The third study considers how hotels pursue cooperative arrangements with platforms, termed platform integration. Taken together, these three studies explore key existing concepts from the coopetition literature — cooperation and competition — and considers the new idea of platform integration and the ways in which it is different from channel integration. The overarching research aim of the thesis and the specific research questions are illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Thesis aim and research questions

| **Aim of the thesis** |
| To explore how hotels work with multi-sided platforms |

Study 1	How do hotels maintain coopetition balance when working with platforms?
Study 2	How do hotels pursue coopetition in close customer proximity when working with platforms?
Study 3	What are the capabilities required for platform integration? How are platform integration capabilities similar to and different from channel integration capabilities?

The rest of the thesis is organized in the following way. In the remaining portions of Chapter 1, the relational view of resource based theory is discussed as the anchor to explore coopetition and platform integration. A critical review of the literature on multi-sided platforms

is provided, followed by a discussion on channels, intermediaries, and platforms. Subsequently, the literature on coopetition, channel integration, and revenue management is discussed, and the limitations of prior empirical work are highlighted. Moreover, the research design is outlined, including the philosophical positions taken in this thesis, the research methodology, and methods.

In Chapter 2, the first study of this thesis is presented, titled *"Coopetition with platforms: Balancing the interplay of cooperation and competition in hospitality."* Chapter 3 includes the second study titled *"Coopetition between hotels and platforms in close customer proximity."* Chapter 4 presents the third study titled *"From channel integration to platform integration: Capabilities required in hospitality."*

Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by providing a summary of the findings and explaining the theoretical and practical implications. The limitations of this thesis are also outlined, and fresh suggestions for future research inquiry are offered. Figure 1.2 illustrates the outline of this thesis.

Figure 1.2: *Thesis outline*
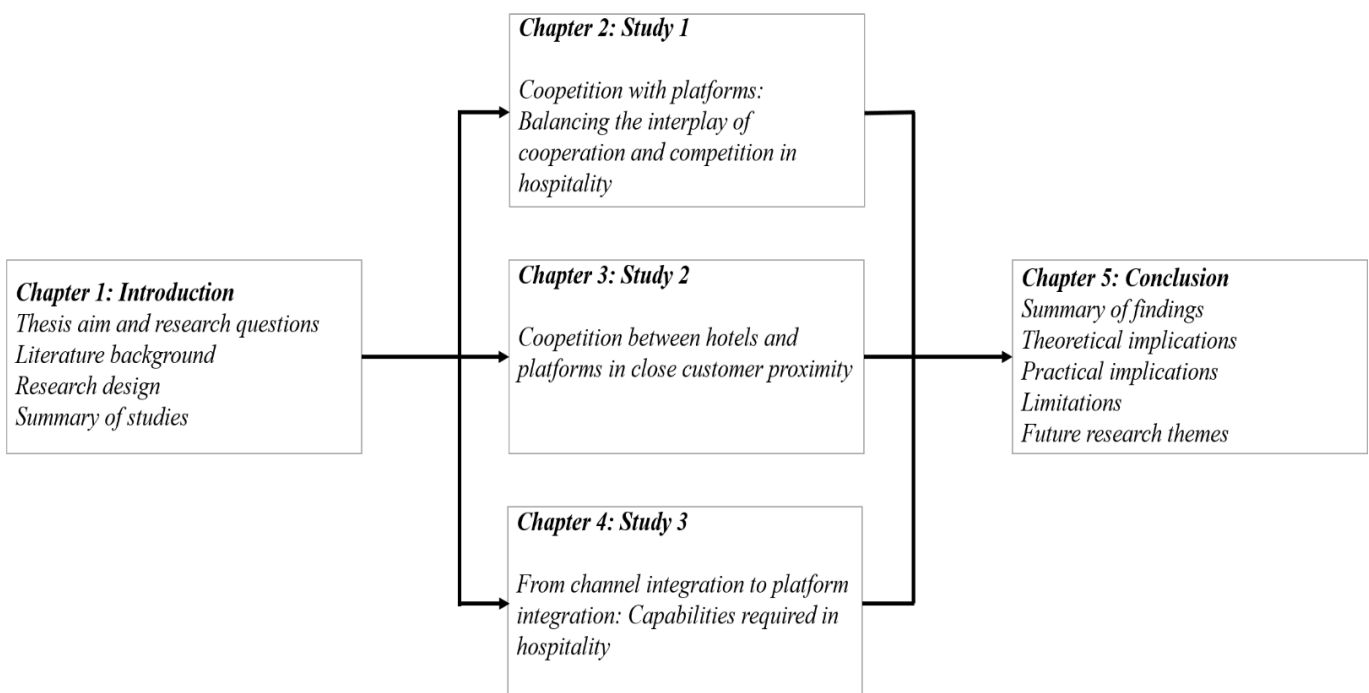
1.1 Literature background

In this section, the relational perspective of resource based theory is discussed as the overarching theoretical lens of this thesis. Subsequently, a literature review on multi-sided platforms is conducted, followed by an analysis of channels, intermediaries and platforms. Later, the literature on coopetition, channel integration, and revenue management is critical analyzed. Finally, a synthesis of the literature is presented, and the limitations of prior research are summarized.

1.1.1 Theoretical lens: Relational perspective of resource based theory

To explore how hotels pursue coopetition and platform integration when dealing with platforms, this thesis uses the relational perspective of resource based theory. This view suggests that inter-firm processes and routines are a source of competitive advantage (Dyer et al., 2018; Mesquita, Anand, & Brush, 2008). Firms that are open to and effective at combining their resources with other firms are likely to be in an advantageous position compared to firms that are reluctant or ineffective in this process (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

This general theoretical lens is used because it can facilitate the theorizing process by offering a "metalevel conceptual system" to refine middle range theories (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, & Jaakkola, 2021, p. A2). Middle range theories are related to a particular context and thus "provides frameworks that can be used to undertake empirical observation and models to guide managerial practices" (Brodie & Peters, 2020, p. 416). General and middle range theories can be differentiated depending on the degree of scope (Brodie, Saren, & Pels, 2011). While general theories are wider in scope and can explain overall aspects of a phenomenon, middle range theories are narrow in scope and can only describe specific facets of an area in marketing (Nenonen, Brodie, Storbacka, & Peters, 2017).

In this thesis, the relational perspective of resource based theory (general theory) offers a robust foundation to adjust, improve and expand the middle range theories under investigation: coopetition and platform integration. By drawing on relational perspective of resource based theory, this thesis applies the understanding of resources and capabilities to coopetition and platform integration. By doing so, the general theory is connected to the empirical findings of this thesis (Brodie et al., 2011).

In practice, this research comes up with "alternative frames of reference" (MacInnis, 2011, p. 143) to suggest fresh perspectives about coopetition and channel integration. To be precise, this thesis argues that existing explanations on coopetition and channel integration do not provide appropriate insight for firms that deal with platforms. Therefore, in order to revise current knowledge (Jaakkola, 2020), the relational view of resource based theory is utilized as a lens to guide the empirical inquiry.

This theoretical lens is used to explore two constructs: resources and capabilities. Some scholars do not differentiate between resources and capabilities (e.g., Barney, 1991; Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier, 2014; Peteraf, 1993). However, consistent with prior studies (e.g., Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Gruber, Heinemann, Brettel, & Hungeling, 2010), this thesis considers them as distinct constructs. Resources comprise a collection of assets (tangible and intangible) to utilize in firm processes (Grant, 1991). Whereas capabilities are the "firm's ability to combine, develop, and use […] resources in order to create competitive advantage" (Kaleka, 2002, p. 275). Therefore, resources are the "inputs" (e.g., finance, staff, customer data) required in business activities. In contrast, capabilities are a series of coordinated activities (e.g., platform integration, multichannel management, new product development) allowing a firm to utilize those inputs efficiently.

A related concept in resource based theory is inter-firm resource alignment which refers to "the pattern, whereby the resources of partner firms are matched and integrated" (Das & Teng, 2000a, p. 48). Prior research offers insight on the types of inter-firm resource alignments: supplementary, surplus, complementary, and wasteful (Das & Teng, 2000a, 2003). Supplementary resource alignments refer to firms contributing similar resources that are valuable for the partnership (Das & Teng, 2000a). In contrast, surplus resource alignment occurs when firms contribute similar resources that are under-utilized in a business relationship (Nohria & Gulati, 1996). Complementary resource alignment occurs when firms offer unique resources to the relationship that help them achieve synergies (Brouthers, Brouthers, & Wilkinson, 1995; Das & Teng, 2003). In contrast, wasteful resource alignment relates to firms contributing non-compatible resources that are not valuable to the partnership (Das & Teng, 2000a). In addition, previous empirical work also examines the effects of resource alignment on firm performance predominantly in joint ventures and strategic alliances (Das & Teng, 2003; Lunnan & Haugland, 2008). However, although prior research offers insight into the types of resource alignment and investigates its impact on firm performance, there is limited empirical work on the antecedent capabilities of resource alignment.

Overall, in a complex business environment, it is impossible for firms to be self-sufficient and possess all the resources and capabilities to operate successfully. For example, many hotels lack the skills, technology know-how, and finance to promote their brand in different parts of the world. Therefore, hotels take on a relational view and work with other businesses (in this case, platforms) to achieve their goals (Dyer et al., 2018). As a result, the relational perspective of resource based theory is particularly useful for investigating coopetition and platform integration. This is further elaborated in the following sub-sections.

1.1.1.1 Relational perspective of resource based theory to understand coopetition

The relational perspective of resource based theory provides an appropriate lens to explore coopetition (Crick & Crick, 2020a; Lechner, Soppe, & Dowling, 2016). This approach is supported by Barney (2018), who suggests the critical role of stakeholders – such as competitors – in supporting firms to be profitable in business. In addition, Lado et al. (1997) also support this notion and suggest that coopetition between competitors leads to competitive advantage. Prior empirical research has utilized the relational perspective of resource based theory to examine the concept of coopetition (Crick & Crick, 2021d; Peng & Bourne, 2009). For instance, Crick and Crick (2021c) tested how coopetition between wine firms enhances their financial performance. As wine firms access new resources and capabilities from their competitors, they can improve their economic profits. In another study, Park et al. (2014) show how coopetition leads to superior innovation performance. They argue that under dynamic business environments, it is increasingly difficult for firms to foster innovation internally on a continuous basis. As a result, firms decide to collaborate with their competitors to innovate by pooling their resources.

In this thesis, coopetition between hotels and platforms is explored. Hotels consider platforms both as partners as well as rivals to attract and retain customers (Bilbil, 2019; Sharma & Nicolau, 2019). Hotels utilize their resources and capabilities and that of platforms to pursue coopetition. For instance, hotels leverage the extensive customer network of platforms to sell their room inventory (cooperation) but decide to invest high levels of financial resources in promoting the hotel website on Google.com (competition). The first study of this thesis explores the relational resources (inputs) and activities that hotels apply to attain coopetition balance with platforms, while the second study focuses specifically on the activities which hotels enact to pursue coopetition with platforms in close customer proximity.

1.1.1.2 Relational perspective of resource based theory to understand platform integration

The relational perspective of resource based theory has also been previously used to explore cooperation between firms (Dyer & Hatch, 2006; Mesquita et al., 2008; Zollo, Reuer, & Singh, 2002). For instance, Dyer and Hatch (2006) found that when manufacturers share more knowledge with their suppliers, the defection rate of supplier materials reduces significantly. As a result, suppliers can produce high quality materials while at the same time reduce their costs. In another study, Zollo et al. (2002) explain that inter-firm routines foster knowledge creation, facilitate growth opportunities, and help firms attain their strategic goals.

In the context of hospitality, hotels, even the larger ones with a strong base of loyal customers, do not have the necessary resources to attain high occupancy levels throughout the year without the help of various platforms (e.g., Booking.com). In other words, hotels are under-resourced to achieve desired sales themselves. As a result, hotels need to develop appropriate platform integration capabilities to collaborate with platforms, attract new customers and enhance their economic performance. This perspective is consistent with the relational perspective of resource based theory that beneficial relationships with different stakeholders (in this case, platforms) are vital for business success (Barney, 2018; Crick & Crick, 2021a; Dyer et al., 2018). Therefore, the third study of this thesis specifically investigates hotel capabilities, defined as the inter-firm activities to utilize resources for optimal business outcomes (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Kaleka, 2002).

1.1.2 Multi-sided platforms: definition and key characteristics

Multi-sided platforms are website or mobile based interfaces that connect many firms and customers, who would find it difficult, if not impossible, to find each other (Hänninen & Smedlund, 2021; Tian et al., 2021). The multi-sidedness of platforms refers to the different types of stakeholders (or sides) that platforms connect with (Helfat & Raubitschek, 2018; Loux,

Aubry, Tran, & Baudoin, 2020). For example, Uber connects two sides with each other: drivers and riders via a mobile application. Platforms have proliferated across various industries. For instance, in the retailing sector, platforms such as AliExpress.com connect a wide range of producers (clothing, gadgets, makeup) with customers worldwide. In the tourism and hospitality industry, platforms such as Expedia.com and Booking.com enable interactions between firms (hotels, airlines, car rentals) and customers (tourists). Platforms are also utilized in the sharing economy: Airbnb.com connects hosts and guests for the benefit of both parties. Nascent industries (e.g., car parking) have also benefitted from platforms. For instance, Parkable.com helps people who have spare parking and people who need parking find each other.

Platforms have three central properties which make them unique: (i) network effects, (ii) network centrality, and (iii) matchmaking. Network effects relate to how the benefit of a platform depends on the number of participating firms and/or customers (Afuah, 2013; Stremersch, Tellis, Franses, & Binken, 2007). Network effects can be direct or indirect (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013). Direct network effects emphasize that users put a greater value on platforms when they can engage with a vast network of other users who are part of the same side of the platform (Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018; Wirtz et al., 2019). For example, users of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram consider these platforms very valuable because a large number of their friends and family members they want to connect with are also present on the platform.

On the contrary, indirect network effects highlight that the value of platforms for one side (firms) depends on the network size of the other side (customers) (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Rietveld & Eggers, 2018). For example, airlines put a greater value on Skyscanner.com if there is an extensive network of customers using that platform to make travel bookings. In

this thesis, because the focus is on the relationship between hotels and platforms, indirect network effects are more relevant than direct network effects.

Network centrality is defined as having platforms at the center of the business network (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Perks et al., 2017). As a result, interactions between different sides occur via the platform. Hotels on one side interact with tourists on the other side via platforms. Network centrality also depends on the number of connections platforms have with different stakeholders (Adner, 2017; Gnyawali, He & Madhavan, 2006). In other words, the higher the number of connections, the more likely that the platform becomes a center point in the business network. For example, Expedia.com has attained network centrality by connecting with a large number of hotels, customers, airlines, and car rentals.

Moreover, matchmaking relates to the ability of platforms to effectively match different users based on specific variables (Benoit et al., 2017; Perren & Kozinets, 2018). For example, Trivago.com instantaneously matches hotels and tourists depending on key factors such as location, price, and guest ratings.

All in all, multi-sided platforms have unique characteristics compared to conventional firms and channels. It appears likely that firms will need to develop specialized strategies to effectively deal with platforms to achieve better business outcomes, such as higher profits. However, the marketing literature related to coopetition and channel integration offers limited insight into how firms can develop profitable business relationships with platforms. The coopetition literature focuses on the relationship between conventional firms (e.g., Fernandez, Le Roy, & Gnyawali, 2014; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018), such as craft beer producers (Mathias et al., 2018), leaving coopetition with platforms to lesser attention. At the same time, the channel integration literature mainly focuses on marketing channels such as online and offline banking channels (e.g., Hossain, Akter, Kattiyapornpong, & Dwivedi, 2020; Hossain et al.,

2019), but does not provide any empirical understanding of working with platforms. These gaps suggest a need for further research to better understand interactions between firms and multi-sided platforms.

1.1.3 Channels, intermediaries and platforms

In both marketing and tourism literature, the conceptualization of marketing channels and intermediaries are similar and consistent. Channels are a means or a "pathway" through which firms offer products or services to customers (Kozlenkova, Hult, Lund, Mena, & Kekec, 2015; Mehta, Dubinsky, & Anderson, 2002; Watson et al., 2015). Firms can use direct and indirect channels (Nicolau, 2013; Tsai, Huang, & Lin, 2005; Vinhas & Anderson, 2005). Direct channels relate to firms distributing their products or offering their service directly to the customers by using channels that are part of the firm, i.e., owned and operated by them (Díaz, Martín-Consuegra, & Esteban, 2015). For example, hotels/airlines directly sell their inventory via their own website channel. Therefore, direct channels follow a linear way of distribution comprising firm-to-customer pathways (Mody, Wirtz, Fung So, Chun, & Liu, 2020; Wirtz et al., 2019).

In contrast, indirect channels refer to firms selling their products or services to customers via marketing intermediaries such as tour operators, wholesalers, and distributors that are not part of the firm, i.e., not owned or operated by them (Lim & Hall, 2008; Meidan & Lee, 1982). For example, hotels sell their inventory to traditional travel agencies who add value (e.g., by creating a holiday package) and resell to the customers. As a result, indirect channels also relate to a linear pathway of distribution consisting of firm-to-intermediary-to-customer flows (Mody et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2019).

Intermediaries are agents/independent organizations that sit in between the firm and its target customers and play a key role in bringing the firm's product/service closer to the

customers for use and consumption (Abdullah, Van Cauwenberge, Vander Bauwhede, & O'Connor, 2021; Hui, Law, & Ye, 2009; Vinhas & Anderson, 2005). Examples of marketing intermediaries include wholesalers, distributors, retailers, and travel agents. These intermediaries (i) act as "resellers" of products or services (Bitner & Booms, 1982; Hui et al., 2009; Rosenberg & Stern, 1971) and (ii) do not have the properties of consociality, defined as the "copresence of social actors in a network, which provides an opportunity for social interaction between them" (Perren & Kozinets, 2018, p. 23). For example, hotels do not have any social interaction with customers who book their stay via Helloworld travel agent in New Zealand. Based on the above discussion, these traditional intermediaries are part of indirect channels, not direct channels.

The conceptualization of platforms is distinct in marketing and tourism literature. The marketing literature define platforms as website or mobile-based interfaces that facilitate engagements between a network of firms and customers for value creation (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Fehrer et al., 2018), which may not have been possible otherwise (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). Drawing on engagement platforms literature, this research considers platforms a special type of intermediary (Storbacka, Brodie, Böhmann, Maglio, & Nenonen, 2016). Platforms such as Amazon.com, Booking.com, AliExpress.com, and Expedia.com do not consider themselves as traditional intermediaries or resellers that sell products but as platform ecosystems that integrate the resources of a diverse set of stakeholders (Fehrer et al., 2018). In addition, platforms have consociality properties and enable social interaction between different stakeholders (Perren & Kozinets, 2018). As a result, platforms have open network characteristics and facilitate the creation of platform-based markets where a diverse set of stakeholders work in partnership with each other to exchange products, services, and knowledge (Fehrer et al., 2018). Hence, platforms do not follow a "linear" way of distribution that are relevant to marketing channels (Mody et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2019)

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but enable direct interaction and engagement between stakeholders for value creation in a "multi-sided" business network (Breidbach, Brodie, & Hollebeek, 2014; Breidbach & Brodie, 2017).

In addition, the marketing discipline suggests that engagement platforms have different degrees of involvement in resource integration and value creation (Perren & Kozinets, 2018). Some platforms have low involvement and simply offer the basic function of connecting people. For example, Carpool World connects people to share a ride together only. Everything else, including cost-sharing arrangements and scheduling of the ride, is negotiated between the users without the involvement of Carpool World. In contrast, platforms such as Booking.com and Expedia.com are highly involved in value creation as they perform matchmaking, take care of payment, offer 24/7 customer support in different languages, and provide marketing analytics insight for hotels to make data-driven decisions. In this research, the platforms in the hospitality industry are highly involved in value creation and take an active role in resource integration. Please refer to chapter 4 of this thesis for a comprehensive analysis of the similarities and differences between channels and platforms and an in-depth discussion about the unique properties of platforms.

In contrast, the tourism literature considers platforms as "resellers"; for example, the likes of Expedia.com and Ctrip.com are regarded as "online travel agents" or "OTAs" in short (Bigne, Nicolau, & William, 2021; Lei, Nicolau, & Wang, 2019; Yang & Leung, 2018). As a result, by conceptualizing Booking.com and Expedia.com as OTAs, the tourism literature only considers them as "resellers" of room inventory possessing characteristics of traditional intermediaries (see, e.g., Chang, Hsu, & Lan, 2019; Ling et al., 2014). However, it falls short of taking a broader systemic perspective of platform ecosystems, resource integration, the collaboration between stakeholders, value creation, the multi-sidedness of platforms, and its

consociality properties (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Fehrer et al., 2018; Perren & Kozinets, 2018).

As a result, in this thesis, the conceptualization of channels and (traditional) intermediaries is taken from marketing and tourism literature (Bigne et al., 2021; Kozlenkova et al., 2015). In contrast, the concept of platforms is drawn from the marketing literature (Chakravarty, Kumar, & Grewal, 2014; Fehrer et al., 2018; Perren & Kozinets, 2018; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018; Rangaswamy et al., 2020; Storbacka et al., 2016), not the tourism discourse. Table 1.1 summarizes the definitions of channels, intermediaries, and platforms and outlines key research work on these concepts in marketing and tourism disciplines.

Table 1.1

Channels, intermediaries and platforms: Definitions and key research works

	Channels	(Traditional) intermediaries	Platforms
Definitions	*Channels* are a means or a "pathway" through which firms offer products or services to customers. *Direct channels* relate to firms distributing their products or offering their service directly to the customers by using channels that are part of the firm, i.e., owned and operated by them. *Indirect channels* refer to firms selling their products or services to customers via marketing intermediaries such as tour operators, wholesalers, and distributors that are not part of the firm, i.e., not owned or operated by them.	*Intermediaries* are agents/independent organizations that sit in between the firm and its target customers and play a key role in bringing the firm's product/service closer to the customers for use and consumption.	*Platforms* are a special type of intermediary. They are website or mobile-based interfaces that facilitate engagements between a network of firms and customers for value creation, which may not have been possible otherwise.
Key research work in marketing	Watson et al. (2015) offer a comprehensive analysis of how the concept of marketing channels has evolved by discussing the (i) theories used to explore channels, (ii) strategies applied to manage channels, (iii) unit of analysis to examine channels and (iv) key topics in channel research. Vinhas and Anderson (2005) discuss how channel conflict occurs between direct and indirect channels. In addition, they clarify	Rosenberg and Stern (1971) measure the intensity of conflict between manufacturers and intermediaries, such as distributors and dealers. In addition, the authors suggest strategies for how conflict can be reduced. Lusch (1976) examines the impact of coercive and non-coercive power on the degree of conflict between auto manufacturers are dealers (intermediaries).	Fehrer et al. (2018) discuss the characteristics of platform business models and clarify how value cocreation unfolds in a platform network from a systemic viewpoint. Perren and Kozinets (2018) develop a typology of the different types of platforms based on two dimensions (i) level of involvement of the platform and (ii) degree of cosociality.

	the conditions under which firms would continue to use both direct and indirect channels and the strategies they use to reduce channel conflict and competition. Kozlenkova et al. (2015) discuss marketing channels in relation to supply chain management.	El-Ansary & Stern (1972) measure power relationships in marketing channels involving (i) sources or power, (ii) self-perceived power, (iii) attributed power, and (iv) dependence.	Breidbach and Brodie (2017) discuss the role of engagement platforms in the sharing economy and develop an integrative conceptual framework that illustrates how engagement platforms relate to actor engagement and service ecosystems.
Key research work in tourism	Thakran & Verma (2013) discuss how tourism marketing channel landscape has evolved. The authors explain the changes of distribution channels based on four eras: (i) global distribution system, (ii) internet, (iii) solomo (social, location, and mobile), and (iv) hybrid (involving multiple screens). Kracht & Wang (2010) examine the changes in tourism distribution channels due to the disruptions caused by the internet. Pearce and Taniguchi (2008) evaluate channel performance in tourism and offer recommendations to enhance channel performance in tourism distribution systems comprising direct and indirect channels.	Heung and Chu (2000) identify the factors customers consider when choosing a travel agency to purchase tourism packages. Some of these critical factors include the (i) attitude of staff members and (ii) reputation of the travel agency. Bitner & Booms (1982) offer a conceptual framework of the travel distribution system and clarify intermediaries' role (e.g., retail travel agents and tour packagers) in the system. Romero and Tejada (2020) discuss the influence of different types of tourism intermediaries on hotels for innovation.	Ling et al. (2014) recommend optimal pricing tactics for hotels when dealing with OTAs [platforms] to enhance economic profits. Chang et al. (2019) discuss how hotels and OTAs [platforms] cooperate and compete with each other. Yang and Leung (2018) Explore hotel price disparity across different OTAs [platforms] and examine whether and how factors such as online reputation and market power influence price disparity.

Next, a literature review on coopetition, channel integration and revenue management are conducted, and the need for more exploratory work on business relationships involving platforms is presented.

1.1.4 Coopetition in marketing literature

Coopetition is defined as the ability to concurrently blend cooperation and competition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996). In practice, firms may implement horizontal coopetition and/or vertical coopetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Tidström & Rajala, 2016). In horizontal coopetition, direct competitors combine their resources through partnerships like strategic alliances and joint ventures (Dowling et al., 1996; Soppe et al., 2014). For example, competing computer manufacturers may jointly develop new operating

systems. Therefore, in horizontal coopetition, the firms are in a similar stage of the value chain and compete in the same market.

In vertical coopetition, however, firms exchange resources because they are involved in buyer-seller relationships (Lacoste, 2012; Lechner et al., 2016). As such, firms do not compete directly in the same market but indirectly in other avenues (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dowling et al., 1996). For example, while television manufacturers cooperate with retailers to sell their products, they also compete with them by bypassing retailers using their direct channels. In this case, television manufacturers do not compete directly with retailers in the television market but indirectly in the distribution avenue. Overall, horizontal coopetition is different from vertical coopetition based on who a firm pursues coopetition with (e.g., a direct competitor, buyer, or seller); in which market/avenue coopetition occurs (e.g., same market or distribution avenue), and how they use their resources (e.g., resource combination or resource exchange). In this thesis, the relationship between hotels and platforms represents vertical coopetition.

The existing coopetition literature focuses on three broad research streams: drivers, management, and outcomes of coopetition (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dorn, Schweiger, & Albers, 2016). The drivers of coopetition comprise (i) internal, (ii) inter-firm, and (iii) external factors that foster coopetition (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). Internal drivers focus on the firm's internal characteristics that encourage them to enact coopetition (Dorn et al., 2016). For instance, when firms lack specific resources and competencies, they are open to partner with competitors (Gnyawali & Park, 2009). Moreover, when firms have previous experience in coopetition, they have the confidence and drive to pursue coopetition in the future (Gnyawali & Park, 2011). Inter-firm drivers are relational factors that foster coopetition formation (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). For example, when firms have similar goals and complementary resources, they are motivated to practice coopetition (Gnyawali & Park, 2009;

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Luo, Shenkar, & Gurnani, 2008). External drivers include the environmental characteristics that influence coopetition engagements (Dorn et al., 2016). For instance, when there exists technological uncertainty in the business environment, firms pursue coopetition (Bouncken & Kraus, 2013; Hung & Chang, 2012).

The management of coopetition focuses on (i) balancing cooperation and competition, (iii) choosing between cooperation and competition based on customer proximity, and (iii) managing tensions. Coopetition balance refers to how firms can handle cooperation and competition, such that neither force dominates the business relationship (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018). Firms pursue either cooperation or competition depending on whether a business activity is far from (emphasizing cooperation) or near the customer (emphasizing competition) (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Rusko, 2011; Walley, 2007). At the core of managing coopetition is the ability to operate in tension-filled environments (Seran, Pellegrin-Boucher, & Gurau, 2016; Tidström, 2014). Tension management relates to implementing strategies to handle the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition (Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Fernandez et al., 2014). These tension management approaches include separating cooperation and competition over time and in different places (e.g., departments) and integrating the two forces at the same time and place (Hoffmann, Lavie, Reuer, & Shipilov, 2018; Joseph, Borland, Orlitzky, & Lindgreen, 2020).

The outcomes of coopetition are linked to business performance, innovation, and knowledge related benefits. Coopetition enhances financial performance (Crick & Crick, 2021b; Lechner et al., 2016) and enables firms to achieve competitive advantage (Gnyawali et al., 2006; Lado et al., 1997). In addition, coopetition leads to innovation (Bouncken & Kraus, 2013; Erzurumlu, 2010), such as radical and incremental innovation (Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2013; Ritala & Sainio, 2014). Besides, coopetition helps firms acquire, create and share knowledge (Ho & Ganesan, 2013; Zhang, Shu, Jiang, & Malter, 2010).

1.1.4.1 Coopetition balance

Coopetition balance ensures that neither cooperation nor competition dominates a relationship, enabling firms to successfully create and capture value from those relationships (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Hoffmann et al., 2018). For example, (Das and Teng (2000b) argue that balancing the tensions of cooperation and competition facilitates long-term strategic alliances. Furthermore, Zhang, Deng, Hwang, and Niu (2020) suggest that coopetition balance leads to superior business performance. As a result, cooperation and competition are separate yet interconnected dimensions, and firms that concurrently balance both are likely to achieve competitive advantage over firms that focus on either cooperation or competition alone (Lado et al., 1997).

However, existing literature offers limited explanations into how this balanced relationship involving cooperation and competition can be maintained (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Raza-ullah, 2021). In addition, existing literature has predominantly focused on coopetition between conventional firms that do not own or operate a platform (Crick & Crick, 2020b; Mathias et al., 2018). These firms are mostly placed in a similar stage of the value chain, such as pharmaceuticals (Cui et al., 2018). Therefore, prior research offers limited insight into coopetitive relationships involving platforms, such as the relationship between hotels and platforms who are in different stages of the value chain. Platforms are unique as they create a large marketplace where millions of hotels and customers can join and find each other (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Wirtz et al., 2019). This is why platforms hold significant market power, charge high fees from hotels, and enforce rate parity rules (Sharma & Nicolau, 2019; Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019). Hence, hotel-platform relationships are filled with tensions that need to be managed carefully. This calls for more exploratory work on coopetition balance to investigate how hotels can maintain profitable relationships with platforms. Table 1.2

summarizes insights on coopetition, illustrating limited findings on (i) coopetition balance and (ii) coopetition with platforms.

Table 1.2

Existing insights on coopetition

	Coopetition with conventional firms	**Coopetition with platforms**
Scope	Firm-firm relationships	Firm-platform relationships
Examples	• Coopetition between equipment producers • Coopetition between television producers • Coopetition between pharmaceutical firms	• Coopetition between book publishers and Amazon.com • Coopetition between hotels and Expedia.com • Coopetition between T-shirt producers and AliExpress.com
Empirical work	• Drivers of coopetition • Management of coopetition • Outcomes of coopetition • *Limited studies on coopetition balance*	• *Limited studies on coopetition with platforms*

1.1.4.2 Coopetition based on customer proximity

Coopetition can take place either far from the customer or near the customer (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Ritala & Tidström, 2014). Coopetition far from the customer consists of upstream activities such as research and development, production, and procurement (Kock, Nisuls, & Söderqvist, 2010), whereas coopetition near the customer comprises downstream activities, for instance, marketing, distribution, and after-sales support (Walley, 2007). Therefore, coopetition manifests from upstream to downstream activities from a value chain perspective (Rusko, 2011).

Prior research focuses mainly on coopetition far from the customer (Park et al., 2014; Santos, 2021) and suggests that firms cooperate in upstream activities and compete in downstream activities (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). For example, Samsung Electronics and Sony Corporation collaborated to develop LCD television

panels but competed against each other to acquire and retain customers (Gnyawali & Park, 2011). However, the above insight (competition in downstream activities) does not hold true if we explore business relationships close to the customer. In fact, business partnerships that take place entirely in close customer proximity focus on cooperation as well. For example, in tourism, hotels and airline companies collaborate with various booking platforms (e.g., Skyscanner.com, Hotels.com). In the fashion industry, brands such as Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger sell via premier departmental stores. Whereas, book publishers sell their collections on physical (Barnes & Noble) and online (Amazon) stores. Therefore, existing coopetition insights are not relevant for business relationships that occur close to the customer. As a result, exploratory research is required to understand how coopetition unfolds in close customer proximity. Table 1.3 illustrates the existing insights on coopetition based on customer proximity, showing limited findings on coopetition close to the customer.

Table 1.3

Existing insights on coopetition based on customer proximity

	Coopetition far from the customer	**Coopetition close to the customer**
Scope	Upstream activities	Downstream activities
Examples	• Coopetition between firms in manufacturing • Coopetition between firms in research and development. • Coopetition between firms in procurement.	• Coopetition between fast moving consumer product (FMCG) firms and retailers • Coopetition between car rental firms and Rentalcars.com • Coopetition between hotels and Expedia.com
Empirical work	• Drivers of coopetition • Management of coopetition • Outcomes of coopetition	*• Limited studies on coopetition close to the customer interface*

1.1.5   Coopetition in tourism literature

Coopetition in the tourism discipline is relatively under-researched (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017b; Fong, Hong, & Wong, 2021) and mainly focuses on tourism destinations (Chim-Miki, Medina-Brito, & Batista-Canino, 2020; Damayanti, Scott, &

Ruhanen, 2017; Fong, Wong, & Hong, 2018; Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021; Mariani, 2016) and to a lesser extent on hotel consortia (Almeida, Campos, Costa, & Simões, 2021; Carlbäck, 2012; Dundjerovic, 2000; Tinoco & Sherman, 2014) as the unit of analysis. This section of the thesis (i) introduces tourism destinations and hotel consortia, (ii) provides a synthesis of coopetition research in both tourism destinations and hotel consortia, and (iii) illustrates the literature limitations of coopetition research in tourism.

A tourism destination is "a geographical region, political jurisdiction, or major attraction, which seeks to provide visitors with a range of satisfying to memorable visitation experiences." (Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010, p. 572). In another study, Buhalis (2000, p. 97) suggests that tourism destinations are "amalgams of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to consumers". Therefore, coopetition in tourism destination involves cooperation and competition between tourism firms in a destination that offer experiences to customers (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). It can also involve simultaneous cooperation and competition between two or more destinations (Mariani, 2016). In contrast, a hotel consortium in the is defined as "an organization of hotels, usually but not necessarily owned autonomously, which combine resources in order to establish joint purchasing/trading arrangements and operate marketing services. These aims will often be achieved through the setting up of a centralized office, whose activities will be financed through levy/subscription of the member hotel units" (Litteljohn, 1982, p. 79). In a similar vein, Sigala (2002, p. 271) suggests that "hotel consortia are groupings of hotels, most of which are single, independently owned hotels, which share corporate costs such as marketing and distribution while retaining the independence of ownership and operation of the individual hotel members." Therefore, coopetition in tourism consortia offers its members an important means to access a range of strategic benefits (e.g., increased distribution, greater visibility, and reduced operation costs) that may not have been possible without the consortia.

There are different types of consortia in tourism including (i) marketing, (ii) marketing and purchasing, (iii) referral, (iv) personnel and training and (v) reservations systems (Chen, 2013; Dundjerovic, 2000; Slattery, Roper, & Boer, 1985). The marketing consortia contributes to promotions, distribution, and sales in a specific region or at a national and international level (Imrie & Fyall, 2001; Slattery et al., 1985). This service allows the members of the consortia to reach out to more customers and generate sales. The marketing and purchasing consortia however is an extension of the marketing consortia and includes access to reduced prices of supplies such as toiletries and food (Dundjerovic, 2000). This in turn reduces operations cost for the members of the consortia. The referral consortia create an affiliation to complementary tourism services (Dundjerovic, 2000). For example, Emirates Airline suggests its customers to book a hotel room with Marriot on their online website. The personnel and training consortia focus on pooling resources to facilitate joint human resource development programmes (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). For instance, hotels can organize workshops on upskilling their employees on the latest revenue management practices. Finally, reservations systems consortia relate to developing a common central reservations system that connects all members to travel agents around the world (Hales & Mecrate-Butcher, 1994). In fact, local tourist offices also fall under this type of consortia as they keep track of local hotels in the region and recommend tourists of the available hotels (Slattery et al., 1985). Next, this thesis categorizes coopetition research in tourism destinations and hotel consortia into three areas: (i) drivers, (ii) outcomes and (iii) management of coopetition.

The *drivers of coopetition in tourism destinations* includes coopetitive mindset and strategic rationale to engage in simultaneous cooperation and competition (Czakon & Czernek-Marszałek, 2021; Czakon, Klimas, & Mariani, 2020). Coopetitive mindset relates to cooperative orientation, past experience in coopetition and trust towards partners (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017a; Köseoglu, Yick, & Okumus, 2021). Cooperative orientation involves

firms being proactive in entering into partnerships with other firms (including competitors) in a tourism destination (Della Corte & Aria, 2016; Luo, 2007). It explains the propensity to engage in collaborative actions and attain shared goals (Czakon et al., 2020). Such mindsets enable firms to share their resources and capabilities to more effectively increase the attractiveness of a tourism destination through joint marketing activities (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012).

Furthermore, tourism firms with previous experience in coopetition are likely to participate in similar relationships in the future (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017a; Gnyawali & Park, 2011). As such, the more widespread coopetition is in a tourism destination, the more likely firms are willing to form partnerships with competitors (Wang & Krakover, 2008). In fact, empirical insights suggest that previous coopetition experience improves the effectiveness of coordination between firms in tourism destinations in the future (Mariani, 2016). However, a necessary pre-requisite of coopetition is trust, as it is crucial for firms to commit to the partnership (Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Czernek & Czakon, 2016).

That being said, tourism firms have a strategic rationale to enter into coopetition (Dambiski Gomes de Carvalho, Alisson Westarb Cruz, Gomes de Carvalho, Carlos Duclós, & Oliveira Corrêa, 2020; Della Corte & Aria, 2016). These rationales include strategic fit and strategic benefits of coopetition. Strategic fit refers to firms being compatible to each other due to common elements such as goals, vision, and mission (Czakon et al., 2020; Kallmuenzer, Zach, Wachter, Kraus, & Salner, 2021). For instance, empirical insight in tourism research suggests that goal compatibility leads to higher efficiency of coopetition in a business network (Van Der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). Hence, the stronger the strategic fit, the more likely firms are willing to engage in coopetition in tourism destinations.

In addition, strategic benefits relate to perceived outcomes of coopetition that motivate firms to participate in tourism coopetition (Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Kallmuenzer et al., 2021). These beneficial outcomes include: improving tourism experience, enhancing destination brand image, and attaining economies of scale (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017a; Damayanti et al., 2017). As a result, firms see the benefits of combining their resources to engage in marketing activities that creates value for tourists, the individual firms, and the overall destination.

The drivers of coopetition in hotel consortia relate to five distinct strategic rationales: (i) high bargaining power of suppliers and buyers (ii) market power of competing hotel chains (iii) weak human resources (iv) low financial resources and (v) weak marketing capabilities (Hales & Mecrate-Butcher, 1994; Morrison, 1998; Roper, 1992). Hotels, particularly the independent ones who are not part of a chain, do not have the luxury of enjoying economies of scale, cannot order supplies in large quantities nor have high number of inventories to sell (Dundjerovic, 2000; Morrison, 1998). As a result, hotel suppliers (food materials, toiletries) and buyers (travel agents) have a higher bargaining power which affects hotel profitability. However, by joining a consortium, individual hotels as a "collective" can address these issues and enjoy full economies of scale that would not have been possible otherwise (Roper, 1992). This is evident as suppliers offer discounted rates to consortia members which reduces costs and improves profits for individual hotels.

In addition, individual hotels (e.g., Kiwi International Hotel) have low brand awareness, brand equity, and customer loyalty compared to hotel chains (e.g., Accor hotels) (Almeida, Sheppard, Costa, Simões, & Costa, 2020; Moriarty, Jones, Rowley, & Kupiec-Teahan, 2008). This makes hotel chains have greater market power and customer demand (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). To address this problem, individual hotels are motivated to join a consortium (e.g., Best Western) that customers are aware of and exhibit loyalty towards (Fyall & Garrod, 2005).

Moreover, small hotels may lack the necessary human resource management capabilities to perform specific functions (Morrison, 1998) such as revenue management, digital marketing and multi-channel management. These hotels are motivated to join a consortium for training and development and up-skill their staff (Chen, 2013; Dundjerovic, 2000). Finally, individual hotels may not have the financial resources and marketing capabilities to promote themselves in new markets (Almeida et al., 2020; Morrison, 1998). But by joining a consortium, individual hotels can pool their resources to promote themselves in new markets (cities, countries) and increase customer bookings (Slattery et al., 1985).

In terms of *coopetition outcomes in tourism destinations*, research shows that coopetition enhances knowledge sharing, increases financial performance, improves cost efficiencies, fosters competitive advantage, facilitates value co-creation and enhances destination brand image (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017b; Crick, 2018; Della Corte & Aria, 2016; Köseoglu et al., 2021; Webb, Beldona, Schwartz, & Bianco, 2021). In particular, research examines how coopetition benefits both the destination and the individual firms (Della Corte & Aria, 2016; Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). For instance, coopetition enhances the image of the destination and improves the financial performance of the firms.

Similarly, the *outcomes of entering a consortium* can be categorized into marketing, operational, education & training and financial benefits (Dundjerovic, 2000; Sigala, 2002). Hotels leverage marketing benefits by tapping into new market segments (e.g., corporate market), increasing distribution, enhancing brand visibility (e.g., referrals by airlines) and leveraging brand image of the consortium (e.g., of Best Western Hotels) (Slattery et al., 1985). Moreover, hotels benefit from training and education of their employees to learn fresh perspective in hotel management (Dundjerovic, 2000). Finally, hotels benefit operationally due to economies of scale attained by working as a collective, while they benefit financially because of increased customer bookings and reduced costs of supplies (Roper, 1992).

Regarding *management of coopetition in tourism destinations*, research shows that coopetition involves both intentional and unintentional approaches to handle simultaneous cooperation and competition (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; Mariani, 2007). In addition, empirical insights reveal how coopetition unfolds over time (Damayanti et al., 2017; Mariani, 2016). For instance, firms first cooperate to promote the destination but later compete once tourists arrive at the destination (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011). Furthermore, tourism firms collaborate during low demand seasons (e.g., summer) but compete during low demand seasons (e.g., winter) (Kylanen & Mariani, 2012).

Management of tourism coopetition also involves isolating cooperation and competition at different levels (Köseoglu et al., 2021; Werner, Dickson, & Hyde, 2015). For example, tourism destinations cooperate together at the international stage to attract tourists to the country; but then compete against each other at a destination level. In addition, research insights show how coopetition management depends on relational and contextual factors such as the role of trust, governance mechanisms, and institutional logics during coopetition (Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Fong et al., 2018). However, in terms of *coopetition management in hotel consortia*, there is a lack of empirical research of how coopetition unfolds in this context, the tensions involved in the process and management of these tensions.

Overall, the tourism discipline offers knowledge on the drivers, outcomes and management of coopetition (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2018; Dambiski Gomes de Carvalho et al., 2020; Fong et al., 2018; Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021; Wang & Krakover, 2008). However, prior empirical work considers tourism destinations and hotel consortia as the unit of analysis to explore coopetition (Carlbäck, 2012; Dundjerovic, 2000; Kirillova, Park, Zhu, Dioko, & Zeng, 2020; Van Der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). Although this approach offers essential insight into the phenomenon, it takes on a broad network perspective that falls short of explicating the nuances within dyadic business relationships (Bengtsson, Eriksson, &

Wincent, 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), such as the role of tensions (Hahn, Pinkse, Preuss, & Figge, 2015; Ritala & Stefan, 2021). Furthermore, it has not examined how firms balance the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition and the tension management actions required to uphold the balance (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Hoffmann et al., 2018). Finally, empirical studies on how coopetition unfolds in hotel consortia is still very limited. In particular, knowledge on the coopetitive tensions and tension management (Fernandez et al., 2014; Joseph et al., 2020) in hotel consortia is an under-researched area. Table 1.4 summarizes the existing research insight related to coopetition in the tourism discipline.

Table 1.4

Existing insights on coopetition in the tourism literature

	Business network	**Dyadic relationships**
Scope	Tourism destination, hotel consortia	Firm-to-firm relationships
Examples	• Frederikshavn Municipality (Denmark) • Pyha-Luosto (Finland) • Theme parks • Best Western Hotels	• Hotels and Ctrip.com relationship • Airlines and Booking.com relationship • Car rentals and Expedia.com relationship
Empirical work	• Drivers of coopetition • Management of coopetition • Outcomes of coopetition *• Limited studies on coopetitive tensions and tension management in hotel consortia.*	*• Limited studies on coopetition in dyadic business relationships.* *• Limited insight on coopetition balance and tension management.*

1.1.6 Channel integration

In today's age, information and communication technologies are changing the business landscape (Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patrício, & Voss, 2015). The proliferation of new channels and the progression from single to multiple channels challenge firms to create effective channel combinations to deliver seamless customer experiences (Banerjee, 2014; Lee,

Chan, Chong, & Thadani, 2019). As firms utilize various channels to serve their customers, they need to identify new ways to make customers' lives simpler while also reaping channel synergies (Grewal, Roggeveen, & Nordfalt, 2017; Zhang et al., 2010). Delivering excellent channel integration across channels is a strategy to address this challenge. Channel integration is the synergetic management of all the channels to provide customers a flawless experience (Sousa & Voss, 2006; Verhoef et al., 2015). It suggests that multiple channels need to weave together and function as one channel system to realize channel synergies and achieve competitive advantage (Ailawadi & Farris, 2017; Verhoef, Neslin, & Vroomen, 2007). This positions channel integration as an essential strategy to converge the offline and online worlds to serve customers throughout the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Ponsignon, Smith, & Smart, 2021).

Channel integration does not only relate to the integration of technology but takes into consideration a socio-technical perspective requiring integration of human resources, culture, technology, and process (Buhalis & Leung, 2018; Finnegan & Currie, 2010; Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2015; Tlili, Altinay, Altinay, & Zhang, 2021). For instance, the research by Oh et al. (2012) shows that the effect of technology-enabled channel integration on firm performance is enhanced when firms have capable staff members to implement the business activities across channels. As a result, technology and human resources need to complement each other to attain high levels of channel integration. In another study, Payne & Frow (2004) suggests that channel integration involves a cross-functional process involving marketing and sales, finance, human resources, information technology, and operations. A cross-functional process ensures customers have a positive experience within and across channels (Payne & Frow, 2006). As a result, channel integration cannot be viewed from a narrow and technical lens but needs to be taken as a holistic and strategic approach to manage customer experience during the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Payne & Frow, 2005).

Firms pursue channel integration by managing customer data from one location to have a unified view of each customer regardless of the channels they utilize in their shopping journey (Ganesh, 2004; Payne & Frow, 2005). Firms also have a centralized hub to share consistent information (price, inventory, promotions, and product descriptions) and brand elements (brand logo and slogan) across channels (Oh & Teo, 2010; Saghiri, Wilding, Mena, & Bourlakis, 2017). For example, firms ensure that their promotional offers are not for specific channels only (online) but are the same across all their channels (online, mobile, and offline). In addition, firms also enable each channel to support each other in fulfilling an order or providing after-sales support (Wu & Chang, 2016; Zhang, Ren, Wang, & He, 2018). For instance, retailers offer customers the option to buy online and pick up in-store for completing an order and develop an online chat functionality to provide after-sales assistance for purchases made on any of their channels (Gao & Su, 2017; Oh, Teo, & Sambamurthy, 2012). However, for effective channel integration, customers must be familiar with different channels and understand how each channel can serve their best interest (Shen, Li, Sun, & Wang, 2018; Sousa & Voss, 2006). As a result, firms invest in marketing communications to familiarize customers with their channels and encourage them to adopt these channels (Banerjee, 2014). Furthermore, firms ensure that, regardless of the channel customers use, security and privacy measures are in place to protect customer data from misuse and fraud (Hossain et al., 2020, 2019).

Channel integration benefits both the firm and the customer. Empirical studies substantiate that channel integration improves the firm's financial performance (Cao & Li, 2015; Tagashira & Minami, 2019), increases customer retention, and reduces their interest in alternative firms (Hsieh et al., 2012; Li et al., 2018). In addition, channel integration enhances physical store traffic (Gallino & Moreno, 2014) and improves synergy between the channels (Herhausen et al., 2015). However, empirical research also suggests the dark side of channel integration. For instance, Gallino and Moreno (2014) reveal that although channel integration

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increases physical store sales, it reduces online sales. Besides, the study by Van Baal (2014) suggests that channel integration increases the cannibalization of sales across channels.

In terms of channel integration benefitting customers, Gao, Fan, Li, and Wang (2021) suggest that it makes customers' shopping experiences across channels both efficient and enjoyable. These positive experiences increase customer satisfaction, loyalty (Frasquet & Miquel, 2017), customer engagement (Lee et al., 2019), and behavioral intentions to make a purchase (Emrich, Paul, & Rudolph, 2015; Emrich & Verhoef, 2015). However, studies by Herhausen et al. (2015) and Shen et al. (2018) show that even though channel integration creates favorable customer experiences, its effect is weakened by the customer's degree of experience (number of years) in using online channels.

Therefore, the establishment of channel integration provides reciprocal advantages to firms and customers (Payne & Frow, 2004; Sousa & Voss, 2006). This viewpoint is also supported by Zhang and colleagues (2010), who state that the ability of firms to provide customers a seamless experience across different channels is a tacit knowledge that is difficult for competitors to imitate and thus, is a source of competitive advantage and greater financial returns. Hence, as the number of channels proliferates, the importance of channel integration becomes unequivocal for firms as well as customers.

Channel integration also poses potential challenges and costs for firms. Gallino and Moreno (2014) indicate that channel integration increases the complexity in physical store execution. This is because physical stores are predominantly designed to sell merchandise within the store, and thus, the increase in responsibility of swift delivery and shipment of products ordered online becomes challenging (Gallino & Moreno, 2014). Furthermore, Neslin et al. (2006) state that the costs of channel integration include the significant expenditure in capital and the increase in fixed costs. For instance, firms must invest in appropriate data

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management systems to centrally manage their supply chain, inventory, distribution, price, and promotions (Mirzabeiki & Saghiri, 2020). Moreover, firms must develop marketing expertise to handle multiple channels at the same time yet have the strategic flexibility to utilize new emerging channels (Neslin et al., 2006). Therefore, achieving channel integration is essential for firms to improve efficiency in their operations. However, it requires changes in the organization, which needs careful planning and implementation.

Overall, existing channel integration research has offered in-depth insight into how firms can manage their channels in a unified approach to enhance firm performance and ensure positive customer experiences (Tagashira & Minami, 2019; Trenz, Veit, & Tan, 2020). However, empirical work has focused mainly on handling channels (e.g., Bendoly, Blocher, Bretthauer, Shanker, & Venkataramanan, 2005; Seck & Philippe, 2013), leaving multi-sided platforms to lesser attention. This thesis suggests that channels (wholesalers, traditional travel agents, company websites) differ from multi-sided platforms (AliExpress, Amazon, Expedia). For instance, marketing channels are selected to pursue economies of scale (Palmatier et al., 2015; Watson et al., 2015) whereas platforms focus on network effects – attracting a large number of firms (hotels) and customers (tourists) to join the platform and find each other (Kapoor et al., 2021; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017).

In addition, platforms have higher matchmaking ability than channels, allowing firms and customers to find each other more efficiently (Halaburda, Jan Piskorski, & Yıldırım, 2018; Perren & Kozinets, 2018). As a result, if channels and platforms differ in their characteristics, channel integration may not be fully effective when firms must deal with platforms. Instead, firms need to pursue platform integration – a specialized ability to work with platforms successfully. Table 1.5 illustrates the existing insights on channel integration and platform integration. While channel integration has been explored for over 15 years, platform integration has not been subject to empirical inquiry.

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Table 1.5

Existing insights on channel integration and platform integration

	Channel integration	**Platform integration**
Scope	Channels	Platforms
Examples	• Wholesalers • Traditional travel agents • Company websites	• Amazon.com • AliExpress.com • Expedia.com
Empirical work	• Dimensions of channel integration • Challenges of channel integration • Impact of channel integration on firm performance • Impact of channel integration on customer behaviors	• *No studies on platform integration*

1.1.7 Revenue management and channel integration

Revenue management is defined as the ability of firms to attain optimal revenues and profits by offering "the right inventory unit to the right type of customer, at the right time, and for the right price" (Kimes, 1989, p. 348). Therefore, revenue management is crucial for channel integration to maintain high levels of service and ensure optimal economic profits across channels (Abrate & Viglia, 2016; Banerjee, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2015). In fact, revenue management can offer insight and complement the literature on channel integration to manage multiple channels in harmony, particularly in areas such as pricing and inventory management. Revenue management is highly important in industries where there are limitations in terms of capacity, such as car rental, restaurant, hotel, and airline industries (Ivanov, Del Chiappa, & Heyes, 2021). The hotel industry, in particular, has witnessed the application of revenue management as highly valuable (Abrate & Viglia, 2016; Bigne et al., 2021; Saito, Takahashi, Koide, & Ichifuji, 2019). The reason is that hotels not only have capacity restrictions, but incur high fixed costs, low variable costs, and offer perishable services that cannot be stored (Guadix, Cortés, Onieva, & Muñuzuri, 2010; Ivanov et al., 2021). As a result, hotels will not be able to maximize revenues and profits without effective revenue management.

Hospitality research in revenue management has gained a lot of momentum, leading to diverse literature streams including price management (Abrate, Fraquelli, & Viglia, 2012; Riasi, Schwartz, Liu, & Li, 2017), inventory management (Toh & Dekay, 2002; Wang, Heo, Schwartz, Legohérel, & Specklin, 2015), forecasting (Chen & Kachani, 2007; Huang & Zheng, 2021), synthesis of revenue management with customer relationship management (Peco-Torres, Polo-Peña, & Frías-Jamilena, 2021; Wang, 2012), information technology in revenue management (Siguaw & Enz, 1999; Xu, Zhang, Baker, Harrington, & Marlowe, 2019) and the influence of social media on revenue management (Noone, McGuire, & Rohlfs, 2011). In addition, due to the advancement of digital technologies, research on revenue management has explored the application of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data analytics (Sánchez-Lozano, Pereira, & Chávez-Miranda, 2021; Sánchez-Medina & C-Sánchez, 2020).

As a result, revenue management literature offers hotels a wide range of knowledge to optimize revenues and economic profits. However, this area of research does not provide insight at the intersection of coopetition and revenue management. In other words, there exists little empirical work that unpacks how the forces of cooperation and competition play a key role in hotel revenue management. This thesis focuses on two specific aspects of revenue management: price and inventory management. Next, a literature synthesis of price and inventory management is provided, and the limitations regarding the application of coopetition in these areas are explained. It should be noted here that revenue managers pursue price and inventory management simultaneously, rather than separately (Xu et al., 2019). In other words, these two managerial decisions are taken jointly.

1.1.7.1 Price management

The revenue management literature offers a wide range of insights on how hotels manage their prices. Some of the most crucial pricing techniques applied by hotels are (i) price

differentiation, (ii) rate parity, (iii) dynamic pricing, (iv) early bird deals, (v) last-minute deals, and (vi) competition-based pricing (Bigne et al., 2021; Ivanov et al., 2021; Viglia, Mauri, & Carricano, 2016).

One of the basic pricing approaches that hotels apply is price differentiation (Gao, Guillet, & Wang, 2021; Riasi et al., 2017). In this case, hotels offer different prices based on factors such as length of stay, day of the week (weekdays vs. weekends), room view (ocean view vs. garden view), and room type (single, twin, family) (Ivanov et al., 2021). Furthermore, rate parity refers to offering the same room rate across different channels and platforms, e.g., Booking.com, Expedia.com, and the hotel website (Nicolau & Sharma, 2019; Sharma & Nicolau, 2019). In contrast, dynamic pricing relates to adjusting room rates depending on the degree of customer demand in the market (Abrate et al., 2012; Yang & Leung, 2018). For example, managers lowered their room rates when international tourists could not enter a country leading to low customer demand.

In addition, early bird deals focus on offering lower prices/discounts to customers who book their stay in advance, for example, three months prior to their visit (Bigne et al., 2021; Seo, Go, & Kim, 2020). Whereas last-minute deals emphasize charging a low price for room bookings made 1-3 days prior to check-in (Carroll & Siguaw, 2003; Jang, Chen, & Miao, 2019). Some hotels nowadays offer the best price guarantee to their customers by agreeing to match the price customers find at a competing hotel that offers the same room, similar service, during the same duration and that contains the same reservation policies, e.g., cancellation policies (Carvell & Quan, 2008). In addition, empirical research also shares insight into how hotels can apply competition-based pricing by adjusting their price below, above, or equal to their rival's price (Viglia et al., 2016).

Overall, the existing revenue management literature offers insight into the different pricing techniques that hotels use to optimize revenues and profits (Abrate et al., 2012; Riasi et al., 2017). However, limited research exists on how hotels apply coopetition during the pricing process. In particular, it is not clear how managers can use pricing as a tool to cooperate with platforms, but at the same, be able to compete with them. For example, while providing early bird or last-minute deals on Booking.com, how can hotels pursue coopetition with Booking.com? How can hotels enact coopetition with Expedia.com even though they must maintain rate parity? Answering these questions is vital for hotels because identifying the right price that upholds the balance of cooperation and competition can significantly impact economic profits.

1.1.7.2 Inventory management

Inventory management is the ability of hotels to manage and distribute their room inventory across different channels and platforms based on the forecasted demand (Toh & Dekay, 2002; Wang et al., 2015; Wu, Song, & Shen, 2017). The key here is to recognize the customer demand for a particular day, week, and month during a given year (Xu et al., 2019). In addition, demand estimation must take into consideration different contextual factors, including customer segments (e.g., tourists and corporate groups), seasonality (summer vs. winter), location of the hotel (city center vs. suburbs), and events (concerts, sports) among others (Pereira, 2016; Wu et al., 2017).

Inventory management literature also offers insight into the phenomenon of overbooking, which refers to generating more customer reservations compared to the current capacity of the hotel (Klophaus & Pölt, 2007; Koide & Ishii, 2005; Riasi, Schwartz, & Beldona, 2019). Related literature on over-contracting suggests that hotels sometimes sign contractual agreements (e.g., with corporate clients) for a greater number of room nights than their capacity

and availability (Ivanov et al., 2021; Nair, 2019). These approaches, however, have raised questions on the ethics of inventory management (Haynes & Egan, 2020) and is outside the scope of this thesis.

Overall, while inventory management is a core component of revenue management (Guadix et al., 2010; Ling, Dong, Guo, & Liang, 2015), prior research does not shed light on how revenue managers can apply coopetition during the process when dealing with platforms. For instance, how can managers allocate room inventory on Hotels.com and Ctrip.com by integrating the forces of cooperation and competition with these platforms? Such questions are important for revenue managers to understand how their decision-making can incorporate coopetition to optimize inventory allocation on platforms and maximize profits.

In summary, revenue management literature in general (Altin, Schwartz, & Uysal, 2017; Kimes, 1989), and price and inventory management in particular (Pimentel, Aizezikali, & Baker, 2019; Yang & Leung, 2018) provide knowledge on how hotels can optimize revenues and profits but fall short of explicating how coopetition unfolds in this process and the tension management practices required to deal with platforms such as Booking.com and Expedia.com. Traditional revenue management research focuses on competition (Grauberger & Kimms, 2016; Netessine & Shumsky, 2005) for example, between hotels. Thus, the notion of simultaneous cooperation and competition (coopetition) has received less empirical attention. Since hotels pursue coopetition with platforms (Bilbil, 2019; Chang et al., 2019), revenue management research needs to unpack how coopetition takes place in the process. In addition, revenue management literature in the context of platforms is an emerging field of work (Webb, 2016; Yang & Leung, 2018). Therefore, more research is required at the intersection coopetition and revenue management as firms in a platform business network engage in cooperation and competition. Table 1.6 summarizes the existing research insight related to revenue management.

Table 1.6

Existing insights on revenue management in the tourism literature

	Revenue management in general	Price management	Inventory management
Empirical work	• Price management. • Inventory management. • Forecasting. • Synthesis of revenue management with customer relationship management. • Information technology in revenue management. • Social media on revenue management. • Influence of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data analytics on revenue management. *Limited studies on coopetition and revenue management, especially in the context of platforms.*	• Price differentiation • Rate parity • Dynamic pricing • Early bird deals • Last-minute deals • Competition-based pricing *Limited insight on coopetition and price management, especially in the context of platforms.*	• Managing inventory based on demand. • Overbooking and over-contracting. *Limited insight on coopetition and inventory management, especially in the context of platforms.*

1.1.8   Literature synthesis and summary

In this sub-section, literature streams related to coopetition, platform integration and revenue management are synthesized and connected to each other. Subsequently, the prior research insights are summarized, and their limitations are outlined.

In terms of how coopetition relates to platform integration, hotels pursue coopetition with platforms (cooperation and competition) where platform integration is associated with the cooperation aspect of coopetition. Based on this perspective, this thesis first explores the interplay of cooperation and competition (coopetition) and subsequently zooms into the cooperation aspect of the relationship (platform integration). Further, revenue management comprising price management and inventory management relates to channel integration. Figure 1.3 shows a framework that synthesizes the literature related to coopetition and platform

integration and illustrates how they are linked to each other. The framework also points out the

research gaps and research questions.

Figure 1.3

Literature synthesis, research gaps and research questions
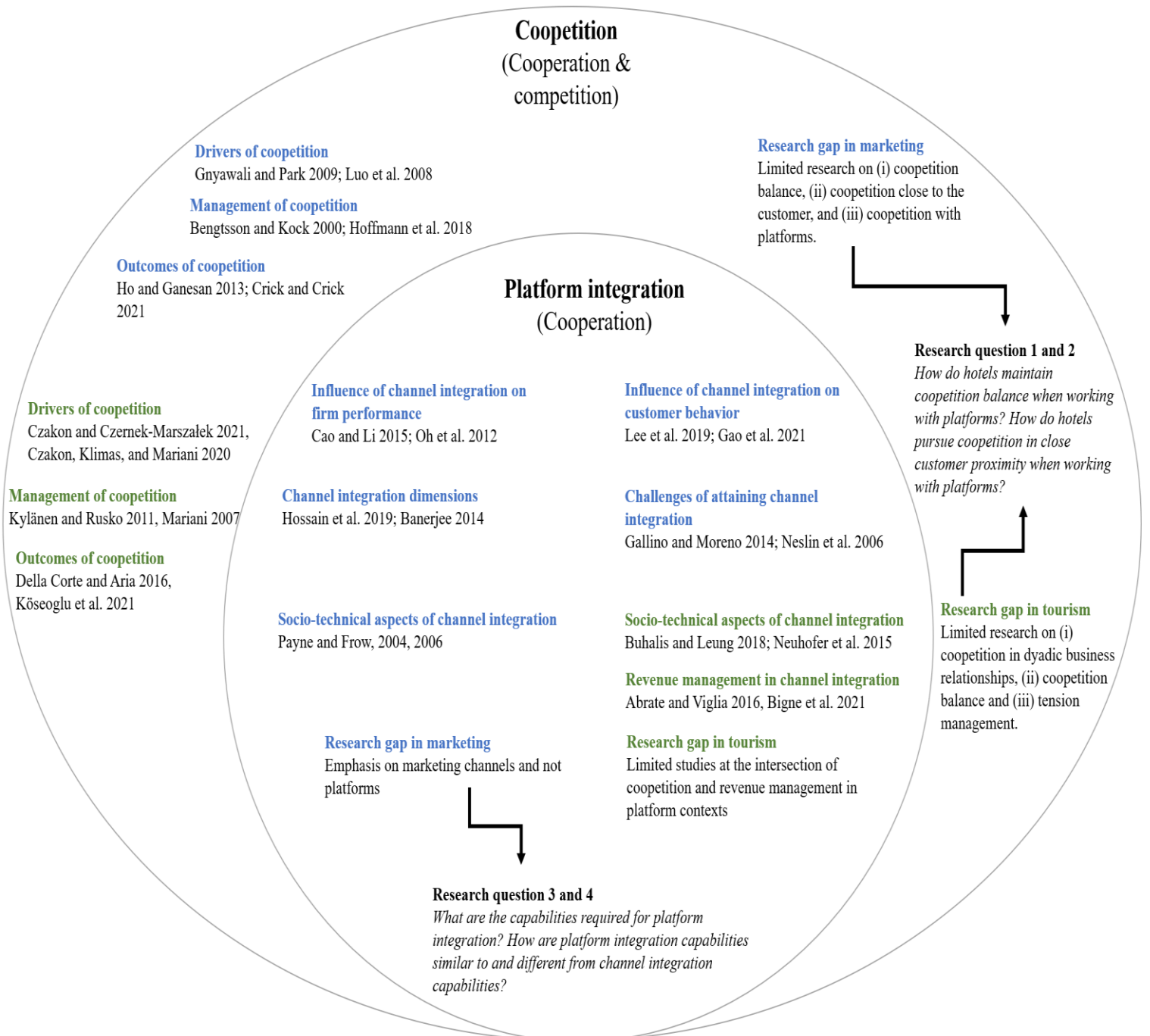
Note: **Blue** color represents marketing discipline, while **green** represents tourism discipline.

Prior coopetition literature in marketing provides in-depth knowledge on the drivers, management, and outcomes of simultaneous cooperation and competition (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dorn et al., 2016). However, there are three limitations in the coopetition literature in the marketing discipline. First, the literature offers little insight on how firms can balance the forces of cooperation and competition so that neither of the two forces becomes dominant in a business relationship (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Raza-ullah, 2021). Second, prior research has mostly focused on coopetition far from the customer (Gnyawali & Park, 2009; Park et al., 2014), while coopetition close to the customer has received less empirical attention. Finally, coopetition research focuses heavily on business relationships between conventional firms that belong to the same stage of the value chain (Cui et al., 2018; Mathias et al., 2018), whereas coopetition with platforms, such as the relationship between hotels and Agoda.com, who belong to different stages of the value chain, have been subject to limited empirical examination.

In parallel, prior coopetition literature in the tourism discipline focuses on tourism destinations as the unit of analysis (Fong et al., 2018; Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021), whereas, little research focuses on the dyadic business relationships and the tension management approaches required to balance the forces of cooperation and competition within the dyad (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). In addition, managerial implications on tension management practices in hotel consortia to pursue coopetition remains an under-researched area of study.

Furthermore, revenue management literature comprising price and inventory management offers insight on how hotels can optimize revenues and profits (Altin et al., 2017; Yang & Leung, 2018). However, the integration of coopetition with revenue management, price management and inventory management remain an under-explored field of study, particularly in the context of platforms.

In addition, this thesis investigates the collaborative aspect of hotel-platform relationships coined as "platform integration." To explore platform integration, this thesis reviews the channel integration literature. Research on channel integration offers key insight into its dimensions and the underlying challenges of achieving high integration levels across channels (Hossain et al., 2020; Sousa & Voss, 2006). Moreover, empirical studies have also examined the downstream effects of channel integration on customer behaviors (Goraya et al., 2020; Herhausen et al., 2015) and firm performance (Cao & Li, 2015; Tagashira & Minami, 2019). However, the fundamental limitation of channel integration literature is its focus on channels (Gao et al., 2021; Hsieh et al., 2012) and not platforms. Therefore, existing channel integration capabilities may not be adequate to deal with platforms, which points to the need for platform specialized capabilities.

To address the above-mentioned literature limitations, the next section explains the research design of this thesis.

1.2 Research design

A research design explains the research plan starting with the ontological and epistemological positions taken in the study and then moves onto detailed assessments of research methodology and methods (Creswell, 2013). Table 1.7 provides an overview of the research design approaches undertaken in this research, which are explained next.

Table 1.7

Research design approaches

Research design components	Selected approaches
Ontological position	Realism
Epistemological position	Positivism
Research methodology	Grounded theory
Research methods	Interviews (theoretical sampling), secondary documents Data analysis with constant comparison; open, axial, selective coding Trustworthiness assessment

1.2.1 Ontological and epistemological positions

Ontology relates to understanding the nature and presence of reality (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). It is concerned with "whether the social world is regarded as something external to social actors or as something that people are in the process of constructing" (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 19). Broadly, there are two ontological approaches in marketing research: realism and relativism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Realism considers reality to be an independent social phenomenon that remains exclusive of the understandings of social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This external reality exists even if it cannot or has not been experienced or understood (Levers, 2013), and is often perceived only through glimpses or in fragments (Letourneau & Allen, 2006). Relativism regards reality as a subjective experience based on the views and perceptions of social actors (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It is not possible to distinguish between reality and an observer's experience of reality because they are one and the same (Levers, 2013). The inherently subjective nature of relativism, therefore, challenges the perspective of an external reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

This research takes an ontological position of realism, considering business relationships between hotels and platforms as comprised of processes and structures with consistent properties that can be similarly assessed by different observers. In other words,

business relationships are external to and largely independent of individual thoughts and understandings (Ryan, Tähtinen, Vanharanta, & Mainela, 2012).

Epistemology relates to the nature of knowledge and describes the means to understand a particular social phenomenon or reality (Easton, 2002; Peters, Pressey, Vanharanta, & Johnston, 2013). Broadly, there are two epistemological assumptions: positivism (or objectivism) and interpretivism (or subjectivism) (Crotty, 1998). A positivist/objectivist stance suggests that "truth and meaning reside within an object and is independent of human subjectivity" (Levers, 2013, p. 3). Knowledge about reality can be accessed objectively by utilizing tools belonging to the natural sciences to determine "how things really are" and "how things really work" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). An interpretivist/subjectivist stance holds that reality is always filtered by the observer, and is only understood based on social constructions such as language, symbols, meanings and explanations provided by social actors (Myers, 2013).

In this thesis, the epistemological position of positivism is taken as, knowledge about hotel-platform relationships is objectively derived from insights shared by managers who are involved in the process. In other words, this research explores the objective truth about the business activities that hotels enact to work with multi-sided platforms. However, the knowledge derived in this research is only a portion or fragment of reality. Other contextual factors (e.g., COVID-19) can influence this reality but have not been taken into consideration. Therefore, this thesis is among a stream of empirical work to develop a better understanding about hotel-platform relationships.

1.2.2 Summary of research methodology and methods

This thesis utilizes grounded theory to address the research questions (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998). Grounded theory is a suitable methodology because prior

research has not investigated how coopetition unfolds when firms deal with platforms nor has it explored the concept of platform integration. Therefore, there is a need to develop more fundamental insights into this new area. Grounded theory is appropriate as it allows the development of theory derived from the explanations of managers. It is also a suitable approach for exploring complex processes such as coopetition and platform integration. Previous marketing studies have also adopted grounded theory based on the justifications mentioned above (e.g., Johnson & Sohi, 2016; Malshe & Sohi, 2009).

Theoretical sampling methods were employed in this thesis, which is a central tenet of grounded theory (Lau & Li, 2019; Mello & Flint, 2009). In practice, different profiles of managers were sampled to develop the widest possible understanding of how hotels work with multi-sided platforms. Initially, managers from the reservations team at hotels were recruited. However, based on the emergent findings, managers from other teams were also sampled, including revenue management, hotel management, and marketing and sales. As a result, sampling was an ongoing procedure because the emergent findings played a crucial role in the subsequent recruitment of participants. Therefore, the data collection and data analysis stages were intertwined until theoretical saturation was attained (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017; Suddaby, 2006). In other words, there was no clear division between the data collection and analysis stages.

Data was collected through a qualitative interviewing process. Interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis in the respondent's office, cafes, or meeting rooms at a university. During this time, 41 managers from 23 hotels and five managers from two platform firms were interviewed. The details of the interviewees are provided in Appendix A of this thesis. The interview questioning started with broad general questions (e.g., Can you describe the relationship between Hotel X and various booking platforms?). However, based on their response, specific questions were asked (e.g., you stated the importance of maintaining a

balance in inventory levels. How do you decide on the right inventory levels?). This style of questioning generated in-depth insight into how hotels deal with platforms. Appendix B of this thesis provides a sample of the interview guide. Secondary documents were also gathered (e.g., online brochures on payment procedures) related to how hotels work with multi-sided platforms.

To analyze the qualitative data, Gioia methodology was applied to ensure rigor in theory development during data analysis to enhance the transparency of the findings (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). Many qualitative studies have little transparency in how their research has been conducted, such as the emergent of themes during data analysis (Denk, Kaufmann, & Carter, 2012). To tackle this issue, Gioia methodology shows a logical flow of how from the raw data, this research systematically identified the concepts, themes, and aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012). As a result, this research offers high levels of transparency and traceability in the research process. For example, in study 3, data structures were developed to show first-order concepts (activities hotels engaged in), second-order themes (capabilities), and aggregate dimensions (capability sets). These three levels in data analysis provide simultaneously (i) nuanced/specific and (ii) abstract/high level understanding of coopetition and platform integration.

In practice, established coding procedures involving open, axial, and selective coding were used (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998). Open coding generated first-order concepts, axial coding revealed second-order themes, while selective coding produced aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012). During open coding, a long list of concepts comprising of over 200 codes (e.g., adjusting inventory levels to strike the right balance) was developed. At this stage, none of the codes were "abstracted" to ensure that the nuances in the raw data were not lost. In other words, these open codes were entirely "grounded" and provided a solid foundation to develop novel theoretical patterns. Next, during axial coding, common patterns across the open codes

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were identified to develop second order themes (e.g., adjusting inventory). Finally, during selective coding, the axial codes were synthesized into aggregate dimensions (e.g., adjusting information). During data analysis, the three coding phases were not performed in a linear "open to axial to selective" way. Instead, coding was done in an iterative "back and forth" manner (Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehnl, 2017). Constant comparison was at the core of the data analysis (Beverland, Kates, Lindgreen, & Chung, 2010; Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). In other words, it involved a systematic comparison of the managerial insights across the respondents. Furthermore, although primacy was given to the managerial insights, those insights were constantly compared with the literature (Nenonen, Storbacka, & Windahl, 2019). This practice played a crucial role in developing novel theoretical contributions.

This thesis maintained high levels of trustworthiness in conducting research. The following trustworthiness criteria were followed: credibility, generalizability, dependability, confirmability, integrity, fit, generality, and control. This collection of criteria is drawn from grounded theory and interpretive research (Flint, Woodruff, & Gardial, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McGinley, Wei, Zhang, & Zheng, 2021; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

1.3 Summary of studies

This thesis investigates how hotels can effectively work with multi-sided platforms. As shown in Table 1.8, this thesis is comprised of three studies: the first and second studies examine how hotels blend cooperation and competition (coopetition) with platforms, while the third study explores cooperation with platforms (platform integration) in more detail.

The first study focuses on the coopetition phenomenon and argues that hotels only cooperating or only competing with platforms are not viable strategies. Instead, a balance of cooperation and competition needs to be maintained for optimal business outcomes. As a result, this study shows how hotels can simultaneously blend cooperation and competition in a

balanced way by (i) using heuristics to separate cooperation and competition, (ii) applying sensemaking to synthesize cooperation and competition, and (iii) depending on information technology (IT) tools to concurrently separate and synthesize cooperation and competition. This study illustrates a conceptual framework highlighting the different resources (e.g., customer demand data) and the managerial activities (e.g., establishing key performance indicators) required to balance cooperation and competition. The findings show that, contrary to existing views of isolating cooperation and competition in different departments, separation takes place at an individual level, as hotel managers internally separate cooperation and competition. Moreover, while existing literature emphasizes managerial activities to handle coopetitive tensions, this study also delineates the resources required to conduct those activities.

The second study examines how hotels pursue coopetition with platforms in close customer proximity. This study proposes a novel conceptual framework illustrating distinct coopetition patterns depending on the degree of tensions. The findings show that coopetition patterns are not competition dominant close to the customer. Rather coopetition patterns range between cooperation and competition-dominant approaches based on tension levels. Furthermore, although prior research suggests how tensions are managed by separating cooperation and competition over time, this study finds that this is impossible when the timeframes between cooperation and competition are short. Instead, hotels separate the two forces in different spaces: platforms, physical hotels, and direct channels. Finally, contrary to current views, separation or integration of cooperation and competition are not appropriate strategies when tensions are very high. Rather, hotels decide to stop sales on platforms temporarily.

The third study explores the capabilities of platform integration and examines how these capabilities are similar to and different from channel integration capabilities. This study

shows that channel integration capabilities are not adequate when hotels must deal with platforms. Instead, hotels develop platform integration capabilities, which are specialized competencies to work in platform environments. Based on the findings, platform integration is defined as the ability of hotels to pursue coordinating and learning capabilities to align their operations with and across platforms. The theoretical contribution of this study is an explanation of the similarities and differences between channel integration and platform integration: (i) one set of integration capabilities is similar across channels and platforms – they manifest similarly and serve similar objectives. However, in platform contexts (ii) some integration capabilities satisfy different objectives, (iii) some are wider in scope to achieve a broader set of objectives, and (iv) some are unique and attain new objectives. Therefore, this study suggests hotel managers adjust the integration capabilities depending on whether they are dealing with channels or platforms.

In the subsequent chapters of this thesis, the three studies are presented.

Table 1.8

Summary of studies, methods, and findings

Study number	Title	Journal status	Research Methodology	Data	Overarching findings
1	Coopetition with platforms: Balancing the interplay of cooperation and competition in hospitality	**Published:** *Tourism Management*	Grounded theory	- N = 46 interviews - Company reports - Press releases - Online brochures - Online product descriptions of IT systems that hotels use - Online forums of hoteliers discussing platform features - Q & A pages on platforms dedicated for hotels	Explicates the managerial activities required to attain optimal balance of cooperation and competition: (i) using heuristics to separate cooperation and competition, (ii) applying sensemaking to synthesize cooperation and competition, and (iii) using information technology (IT) tools to concurrently separate and synthesize cooperation and competition. The study also identifies the resources required to conduct the above-mentioned activities (e.g., customer data, communication tools).
2	Coopetition between hotels and platforms in close customer proximity	**Under review:** *Industrial Marketing Management*	"	"	Presents distinct coopetition patterns depending on the degree of tensions: (i) cooperation-dominant under low tensions, (ii) integration of cooperation and competition under moderate tensions, (iii) spatial separation of cooperation and competition under moderately high tensions, and (iv) competition-dominant under very high tensions.

| 3 | From channel integration to platform integration: Capabilities required in hospitality | **Published:** *Industrial Marketing Management* | " | " | Describes how the integration capabilities differ depending on whether hotels work with channels or platforms: (i) one set of integration capabilities are similar across channels and platforms – they manifest similarly and serve similar objectives. However, in platform contexts (ii) some integration capabilities satisfy different objectives, (iii) some are wider in scope to achieve a broader set of objectives, and (iv) some are unique and attain new objectives. |

Chapter 2. Coopetition with platforms: Balancing the interplay of cooperation and competition in hospitality

2.1. Introduction

Within the hospitality industry, platforms are interfaces that facilitate interactions between actors such as hotels and their customers who find it difficult, sometimes even impossible, to connect with one another without recourse to a platform (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). Examples of these platforms include Hotels.com and Booking.com. As a dominant feature of today's hospitality industry (Dogru, Mody, & Suess, 2019; Vinogradov, Leick, & Kivedal, 2020), platforms have changed the industry's business landscape by, for example, disrupting the use of traditional travel agents (Abrate, Bruno, Erbetta, & Fraquelli, 2020; Verhoef et al., 2015). Research shows that platforms account for nearly half of all hotel bookings (Rossini, 2015). As a result, these hospitality platforms, generally referred to as online travel agents (OTAs), have high market power, charge high commissions, and enact policies that significantly affect hotel profits (Toh, Raven, & DeKay, 2011; Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019). Understanding how hotels can optimize performance outcomes from their relationship with platforms in practice is therefore vital.

Hotels consider platforms as both allies and rivals in attracting and retaining customers (Guo, Zheng, Ling, & Yang, 2014; Sharma & Nicolau, 2019). This form of business relationship, wherein hotels concurrently cooperate and compete with platforms, is termed "coopetition" in the extant literature (Bilbil, 2019; Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Chang et al., 2019; Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Della Corte & Aria, 2016; Fong et al., 2021). Empirical work shows that, compared to cooperation or to competition alone, coopetition can lead to greater business performance (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Lado et al., 1997).

Existing literature in the marketing and management domain provides an in-depth understanding about coopetition in dyadic relationships and business networks. This stream of work investigates the drivers, consequences and management of coopetition (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dorn et al., 2016). Empirical work examining the drivers of coopetition encompasses internal, relational, and environmental conditions (Bouncken & Kraus, 2013; Gnyawali & Park, 2009; Ritala & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2013). For instance, when firms lack specific resources and competencies, they are open to partner with competitors (Gnyawali & Park, 2009). Existing research work also examines the consequences of coopetition, notably fostering innovation, developing knowledge, improving financial performance, developing business strategies, and enhancing competitive advantage (Chai, Li, Tangpong, & Clauss, 2020; Crick, 2019; Gnyawali et al., 2006; Ho & Ganesan, 2013; Liu, Chang, Horng, & Chou, 2020). For instance, Liu et al. (2020) empirically show that when firms have a strong learning orientation, coopetition with rivals helps them develop superior business strategies. Management of coopetition focuses on coopetition balance, the contextual nature of that balance based on customer proximity, the tensions arising out of the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition, and the activities needed to manage these tensions (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Bengtsson, Raza-Ullah, & Srivastava, 2020; Fernandez et al., 2014; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Jakobsen, 2020; N. Zhang et al., 2020).

Comparatively, coopetition in tourism and hospitality is under-researched (Fong, Hong, & Wong, 2021) and mainly focus on tourism destinations (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2017b; Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021). This stream of work explores how coopetition unfolds over time (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; Mariani, 2016). For example, firms first cooperate to promote the destination but later compete once tourists arrive at the destination (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011). Research also examines how coopetition benefits the destination and the individual firms (Della Corte & Aria, 2016; Kylanen & Mariani, 2012). For instance,

coopetition enhances the image of the destination and improves the financial performance of the firms. Furthermore, existing studies investigate the relational and contextual factors, such as the role of trust, governance mechanisms, and institutional logics during coopetition (Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Fong et al., 2018).

However, there are deficiencies in understanding coopetition in both (i) marketing and management and (ii) tourism and hospitality literature streams. Research in marketing and management focuses heavily on coopetition between conventional firms that do not own or operate a platform, such as pharmaceuticals or beer producers (e.g., Cui, Yang, & Vertinsky, 2018; Mathias, Huyghe, Frid, & Galloway, 2018). Previous research, therefore, offers a limited understanding of coopetition with platforms, such as the relationship between hotels and platforms (Expedia.com and Hotels.com). Platforms differ from conventional firms in two ways. First, conventional firms focus on enhancing economies of scale, whereas platforms emphasize increasing network effects, that is, attracting a large number of customers and hotels on the different sides of the platform and thereby creating value for both parties (Constantinides, Henfridsson, & Parker, 2018; Rolland et al., 2018). Second, because platforms, unlike conventional firms, are a digital hub that connects hotels and customers, they are at the center of the business network (Perks et al., 2017; Perren & Kozinets, 2018). Due to these differences between platforms and conventional firms, platforms are highly influential and have greater market power than conventional firms (Parker, Van Alstyne, & Choudary, 2016; Van Alstyne, Parker, & Choudary, 2016). Hence, coopetition with platforms is likely to differ in various ways from coopetition with conventional firms.

Furthermore, prior empirical work in tourism and hospitality considers tourism destinations as the unit of analysis to explore coopetition (Kirillova et al., 2020; Van Der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). Although this approach offers essential insight into the phenomenon, it takes on a broad network perspective that falls short of explicating the nuances within dyadic

business relationships (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), such as the role of tensions (Hahn et al., 2015; Ritala & Stefan, 2021). Furthermore, it has not examined how tourism firms balance the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition and the tension management practices required to uphold the balance.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of our research was to explore ***how do hotels maintain coopetition balance when working with platforms***. This study adds value to the coopetition literature in marketing and management by examining coopetition with platforms. Furthermore, it enriches the coopetition literature in tourism and hospitality by exploring fine-grained insights in dyadic business relationships related to balancing the forces of cooperation and competition and the tension management approaches involved in the process.

We used the relational view of resources-based theory to investigate coopetition (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Dyer et al., 2018) for two reasons. First, most research on coopetition has traditionally utilized resource-based theory (Bengtsson, Kock, Lundgren-Henriksson, & Näsholm, 2016; Crick & Crick, 2020a; Lechner et al., 2016). Second, it is an appropriate theoretical lens to address our research question, as it is better equipped to illuminate the nuances of how coopetition unfolds in the presence of more-or-less stable industry structures and institutions (Kozlenkova et al., 2014; Peteraf & Barney, 2003). In practice, we explored the relational resources (inputs) and activities that hotels apply to attain coopetition balance with platforms.

Our findings contribute to the coopetition literature by illustrating that, contrary to existing views of isolating cooperation and competition in different departments (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Dowling et al., 1996), separation occurs at the individual level because employees internally establish a boundary between the two contradictory forces. Employees also simultaneously integrate cooperation and competition without the need to confine them.

Moreover, while existing literature emphasizes activities to manage coopetitive tensions (Fernandez et al., 2014; Tidström, Ritala, & Lainema, 2018), our study delineates the inputs (e.g., resources) required to conduct those activities.

Our research also provides practical guidance for hotels, platforms, and policymakers. To be precise, we offer hotels detailed information into the activities, inputs, and staffing requirements by which they can achieve coopetition balance. We then offer platform owners exact insight on how they can share information with hotels without risking opportunistic hotel behaviors. Finally, we recommend useful rules for policymakers that will serve the interests of both hotels and platforms in the long run.

The article proceeds as follows. First, we describe the theoretical underpinnings of our study, drawing as we do so on understandings from current research on coopetition balance and related tension-management approaches. We also justify the need for more exploratory research on coopetition balance with platforms. Second, we describe our research methods, which rely on grounded theory. Third, we reflect on our findings and illustrate our theoretical framework. Fourth, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings. Finally, we explain the limitations associated with our research and outline future research opportunities.

2.2 Theoretical background

2.2.1 Coopetition balance

Coopetition is defined as concurrent cooperation and competition between two firms (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Della Corte & Aria, 2016; Fong et al., 2021). Coopetition balance is the ability to manage business relationships such that neither cooperation nor competition dominates the relationship (Chen, Luo, & Wang, 2019; Dorn, Schweiger, & Albers, 2016; Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Luo, 2007). The concept of

coopetition balance does not imply equal levels of cooperation and competition, as that can rarely be attained in business relationships (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018). For example, in oligopolistic contexts, such as the hospitality sector, there are fewer online booking platforms than hotels. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for hotels to attain an equilibrium of cooperation and competition with platforms. Therefore, coopetition balance relates to managing business relationships in a way that takes into account both cooperation and competition rather than focusing predominantly on either one of the forces.

If cooperation dominates a business relationship, it may result in core expertise being shared irresponsibly (Das & Teng, 2000b). For example, firms without an effective information management policy may end up sharing how they have been innovating new services. Conversely, when competition dominates a partnership, the focus will be on maximizing self-interest, which means the working relationship may be short-lived (Khanna, Gulati, & Nohria, 1998). Thus, for instance, firms that focus only on private goals and not on common goals will experience high levels of conflict and be unable to sustain the relationship.

Furthermore, if cooperation or competition dominates a partnership, profitability will not be optimal (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Luo, Rindfleisch, & Tse, 2007). Consider, for example, hotels that rely solely on platforms to attract customers. While these hotels might meet their occupancy targets, their profits will diminish due to the high commission they have to pay to platforms. In contrast, hotels that rely solely on their direct channels (e.g., the hotel website) to attract customers and choose not to list their property on platforms will also see their profits decrease. The reason is that these hotels miss out on the high number of customers who book via platforms and thus have low occupancy levels. Therefore, firms that can maintain coopetition balance have a competitive advantage over those that foster cooperation or competition alone (Lado et al., 1997; N. Zhang et al., 2020). Park, Srivastava, and Gnyawali (2014) empirically support this notion by showing that the effect of coopetition balance on

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innovation performance is superior to any other form of business relationship. In short, coopetition balance enables firms to create higher levels of potential benefits in a business partnership (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018).

Coopetition balance recognizes the tensions between cooperation and competition and embraces the harmony of these opposing forces (Chen, 2008; Das & Teng, 2000; Tidström, 2014). Tension is defined as a conflict that arises out of the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition (Tidström, 2014). Empirical work has explored how managing tensions leads to coopetition balance (Gast, Gundolf, Harms, & Matos Collado, 2019; Gnyawali & Park, 2011; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018). Gast et al. (2019), for example, show that in order to balance knowledge-sharing and knowledge-protection tensions, firms implement appropriate knowledge-management practices by sharing task-specific information but not disclosing any core information. Gnyawali and Park (2011) describe how two high-technology firms balanced tensions by cross-licensing one set of patents to foster product development (cooperation) but excluded unique patents from the licensing contract to safeguard their core resource base (competition).

In our case, high levels of coopetitive tension exist when hotels work with platforms. The source of this tension relates to two attributes of platforms—network effects and network centrality. Hotels cooperate with platforms due to high network effects but compete with platforms because of network centrality features. In regard to network effects, platforms attract a large number of customers and hotels on their different sides (Constantinides et al., 2018; Rolland et al., 2018). As a result, hotels on one side of the platform will find it more desirable when they can interact with a large number of customers on the other side of the platform (Cennamo, 2018; Dushnitsky, Piva, & Rossi-Lamastra, 2020). However, conflicts arise because platforms have network centrality attributes, that is, they are at the center of the network (Perks et al., 2017). Because platforms are a hub that connects a broad network of

hotels and customers, all interactions occur through the platform (Adner, 2017; Perren & Kozinets, 2018). Hence, platforms are highly influential, have high bargaining power, charge high commissions, and implement rate parity policies, all of which create disputes between hotels and platforms (H. A. Lee, Guillet, & Law, 2013; Sharma & Nicolau, 2019; Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019). As a result, coopetitive tensions emerge because the business relationship provides hotels with opportunities (access to more customers) but at high risk (reduced profitability). Hotels therefore need to develop appropriate tension-management practices to balance the interplay of cooperation and competition that feature in platform contexts. Given that coopetition balance maintains tensions, the next section reviews the literature on tension management.

2.2.2 Tension management in coopetition

The literature suggests two contrasting tension-management activities—separation and integration (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016). With respect to separation, cooperation and competition occur in parallel but in separate functional and/or temporal domains (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Poole & de Ven, 1989). Functional separation occurs when firms isolate cooperation and competition in different departments (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). For example, firms may cooperate during manufacturing but compete with one another when it comes to retailing. However, functional separation may foster internal conflicts across the different departments (Fernandez et al., 2014). In line with the previous example, disputes may arise between the manufacturing department and the retailing department because the former focuses on cooperation and the latter emphasizes competition. Temporal separation occurs when firms isolate cooperation and competition over time (Poole & de Ven, 1989). In other words, firms pursue cooperation one time and competition another time. However, the shorter the episodes of cooperation and competition are, the higher the felt tensions will be (Hoffmann et al., 2018). Thus, separation enables firms to emphasize either cooperation or

competition in specific departments or during particular time periods (Dowling et al., 1996; Seran et al., 2016). Separation is typically accomplished by employees at lower organizational hierarchy levels because they can deal with only cooperation or competition, not both (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016).

Integration occurs when individuals simultaneously manage cooperation and competition in the same functional domain and at the same time (Farjoun, 2010; Liu et al., 2020; Luo, Slotegraaf, & Pan, 2006; Tidström et al., 2018). For example, Fernandez et al. (2014) give an account of two firms that conducted a joint project, during which they established a joint team that gave the project managers from both firms responsibility for handling the tensions in the team. In an instance such as this, integration is accomplished by experienced managers at higher organizational positions who are able to deal with the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition and thereby manage tensions (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). However, the current literature explains little about how managers pursue integration in practice.

Finally, empirical work shows that firms pursue separation and integration simultaneously (Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Le Roy & Fernandez, 2015; Seran et al., 2016). Fernandez and Chiambaretto (2016), for example, highlight that successfully managing tensions associated with information relies on concurrent separation and integration approaches. A separation approach might see firms sharing information necessary for a joint project yet withholding information unrelated to the project but nevertheless important for enabling each firm to maintain its competitiveness in the market. However, because the risk of the shared information being utilized for opportunistic behaviors remains, managers pursue an integration approach by modifying the information into aggregate form so that it has no value outside the joint project.

All in all, pursuing coopetition balance with appropriate tension management approaches is key to optimizing the beneficial outcomes of business relationships. However, as we previously noted, prior research in marketing and management focuses on coopetition with conventional firms and not with platforms. Platforms have greater bargaining power and market influence than conventional firms (Parker et al., 2016; Van Alstyne et al., 2016). As a result, tensions between hotels and platforms will be higher, thus placing more pressure on individual hotel managers to manage those tensions. In addition, when hotels do not isolate cooperation and competition according to the degree of proximity to customers, the resultant strong tensions may require hotels to find a way of balancing cooperation and competition that differs according to whether they are near to or far from customers.

Furthermore, prior research in tourism and hospitality focuses on the overall business network (tourism destinations) to explore coopetition (Kirillova et al., 2020; Van Der Zee & Vanneste, 2015), leaving dyadic relationships to lesser attention. Also, empirical work in this field has not explored coopetition balance, and the tension management approaches required to maintain that balance.

This consideration calls for more exploratory research on how exactly hotels maintain coopetition balance when dealing with platforms. To address this knowledge gap, we take the perspective of hotels and focus on their coopetitive relationship with platforms (see Figure 2.1). This form of relationship represents vertical coopetition since hotels and platforms exchange resources and are involved in buyer-seller relationships (Lacoste, 2012; Lechner et al., 2016). Hotel-to-hotel and platform-to-platform coopetitive relationships are outside the scope of this research. To offer more in-depth insight into coopetition balance with respect to platforms, we now discuss the empirical section of our research.

Figure 2.1

Coopetitive relationships in the business network comprising hotels and platforms
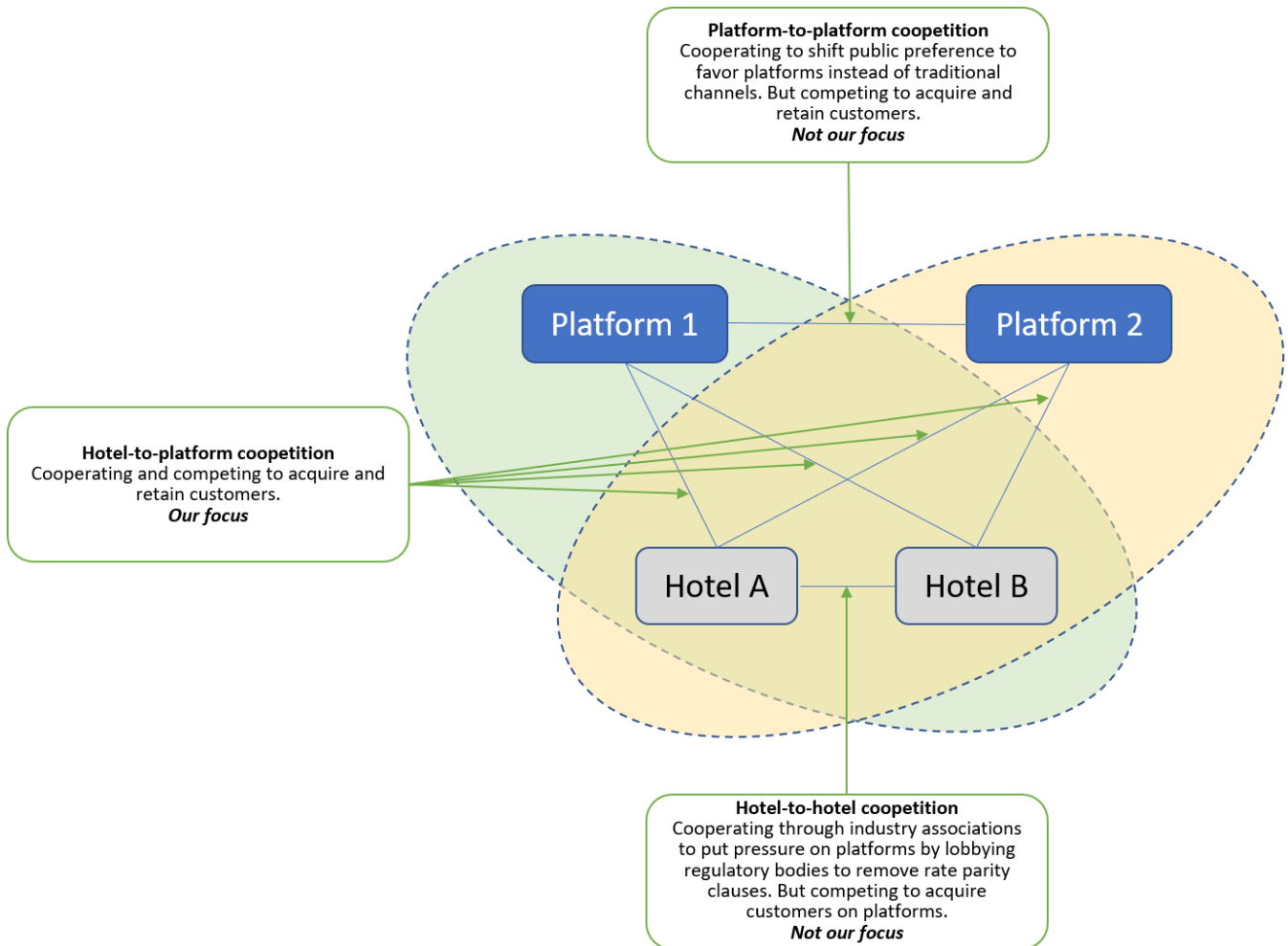
2.3 Methods

We chose grounded theory as our methodology (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998) due to four fundamental reasons. First, grounded theory is appropriate when there exists limited literature insight about a specific area of study. In our case, there exists a lack of information on how hotels pursue coopetition balance with platforms. Second, grounded theory is suitable when the research objective is to build theory. Our research objective was to build theory from qualitative data and explanations because of the lack of empirical insight on

coopetition balance with platforms. Third, grounded theory is the right methodology to explore a complex phenomenon. Coopetition balance is a complex phenomenon as it includes the paradox of simultaneous cooperation and competition, requiring inductive methods to uncover its intricate details. Finally, grounded theory focuses on the participants' perspectives and explanations to come up with novel findings and does not allow prior theoretical understandings to take precedence. This study seeks to understand coopetition balance based on the interpretations of the participants involved in the process. As a result, the participants' explanations shape the development of a novel theoretical framework. These rationales are similar to those of previous marketing-based studies employing grounded theory (Flint et al., 2002; Malshe & Sohi, 2009; Nenonen et al., 2019; Ulaga, 2003).

We believe that our research purpose could have also been addressed using case study methods. A single case study design involving one hotel would offer a depth of information on coopetition (Siggelkow, 2007). However, it would not enable the comparison of coopetition patterns across different hotels to develop a more robust theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Our choice of grounded theory ensures that we capture both depth and breadth of insight on coopetition and conduct constant comparison across participants' explanations from different hotels (Mello & Flint, 2009). However, a multiple case study design comprising 4 to 10 hotels (Eisenhardt & Eisenhardt, 1989) would most likely generate similar findings to ours.

Nevertheless, getting full access to relevant cases is difficult and time consuming. Furthermore, many qualitative studies have little transparency in how their research has been conducted, such as the emergent of themes (Denk et al., 2012). Our choice of grounded theory, however, offers high levels of transparency and traceability in the research process. For example, our data structures in tables 3 and 4 visually illustrate precisely how we moved from raw data to develop the themes and aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012).

Based on our experience, a core advantage of grounded theory is it provides a toolkit to come up with "alternative frames of reference" (MacInnis, 2011, p. 143) and develop novel theoretical contributions. In this research, we suggested alternative views on coopetition and developed fresh perspectives on the phenomenon. However, our study produced large volumes of qualitative data, which became difficult to manage. But we addressed this challenge with the use of theoretical memos, computer software, and established coding procedures. The following subsections cover our sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures and how we assessed the trustworthiness of the methods.

2.3.1 Sampling

We explored coopetition balance in the hospitality industry, where we focused on the perspectives of hotels participating in several platforms at the same time, such as Booking.com, Expedia.com, and Hotels.com. Therefore, hotels are the unit of analysis of this research. We used the theoretical sampling procedure to generate a wide-ranging understanding of coopetition balance (Homburg et al., 2017; Suddaby, 2006). Based on our understanding of coopetition balance from initial participants, we adjusted our subsequent sampling of participants so that we could pursue constant comparison (Beverland et al., 2010; Flint & Woodruff, 2001). In practice, we initially sampled participants from among those engaged in the functional areas of reservations management, sales management, and marketing. However, our emergent understandings lead us to consult participants in other functional areas such as revenue management, distribution management, operations management, and customer experience management. We stopped sampling for new participants after 46 respondents because at that point we reached data saturation. We relied on two signals to determine data saturation. Firstly, we realized that additional sampling would generate repetitive information (Gebhardt, Carpenter, & Sherry, 2006; Johnson & Sohi, 2016). Secondly, we had already

developed an in-depth description of the themes related to coopetition balance (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Our final sample included 41 participants from 23 hotels, and five participants from two platform firms. The sample showed diversity in several aspects, including job position, job experience, firm size, and firm ownership structure. This diversity enabled us to tap into a wide range of perspectives and experiences relevant to coopetition. Table 2.1 provides details of each participant and their respective characteristics. It is worth mentioning here that because we explored coopetition from the hotel perspective, it was not required to collect data from a vast number of platform firms. The rationale behind sampling these two platform firms was to attain data triangulation. We also point out that our sampled hotels engaged in coopetition not only with these two platforms but also with other ones.

2.3.2 Data collection

Data was gathered primarily through in-depth face-to-face interviews over a period of eight months. The interviews took place at locations the participants were comfortable with, such as their offices, meeting rooms, or cafes. The interviews lasted between 26 to 76 minutes, with an average completion time of approximately 45 minutes. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. Although the interview guide (see Appendix A) included broad discovery-oriented questions (K Charmaz, 2006), specific follow-up questions were asked to capture a thorough understanding of coopetition balance.

Secondary qualitative materials (e.g., documents on the IT systems the hotels were using to connect with platforms) were also collected to supplement our interview data. An open line of communication with the participants were kept via email and, when required, additional questions were asked on coopetition balance to gain more clarity on the phenomenon.

Throughout the data collection period, field notes were written containing emerging thoughts

on and understandings of coopetition (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Table 2.1

Sample characteristics

Partici- pant ID	Hotel ID	Participant job title	Job exp. (years)	# rooms at the hotel	# of employees at the hotel	Independent hotel/ part of a group
1	A	Hotel director	7	29	40	Independent
2	A	Director of sales and marketing	6	29	40	Independent
3	B	Assistant front office manager	10	78	40	Group
4	B	Reservations sales agent	1	78	40	Group
5	C	Reservations and yield manager	22	175	155	Group
6	D	Hotel manager	15	22	5	Independent
7	E	Hotel manager	15	153	85	Independent
8	E	National reservations and yield manager	16	650	300	Independent
9	F	Front office supervisor	5	122	40	Independent
10	F	Operations manager	10	122	40	Independent
11	F	Assistant manager	8	122	40	Independent
12	G	Reservations manager	8	260	30	Independent
13	G	Senior duty manager	7	260	30	Independent
14	H	Contact center supervisor	1	635	400	Group
15	H	Group revenue director	5	635	400	Group
16	H	Director of revenue management	17	635	400	Group
17	I	General manager	13	41	14	Group
18	J	General manager	14	80	26	Group
19	J	Assistant manager	5	80	26	Group
20	J	Head of strategy and business development	28	80	26	Group
21	K	Reservations agent	5	36	9	Group
22	K	Front office manager	6	36	9	Group
23	L	Hotel manager	15	76	19	Group
24	L	Franchise director	35	76	19	Group
25	M	Assistant revenue manager	4	347	200	Group
26	M	Reservations manager	7	347	200	Group
27	N	Reservations sales agent	1	352	200	Group
28	O	Channel manager	7	452	250	Group
29	P	General manager	12	25	10	Group
30	Q	Hotel manager	18	286	180	Group
31	Q	Hotel manager	10	286	180	Group
32	Q	Reservations manager	5	286	180	Group
33	Q	Revenue manager	6	286	180	Group
34	R	Director of revenue management	12	411	350	Group
35	S	General and area manager	10	100	50	Group
36	T	Hotel manager	27	41	12	Group
37	U	Director of revenue management	5	255	123	Group
38	U	E-commerce and digital manager	3	255	123	Group
39	V	General manager	20	141	66	Group
40	W	Director of revenue, Auckland region	17	*	*	Group
41	W	Director of revenue, New Zealand, Fiji, and French Polynesia	16	*	*	Group

Partici- pant ID	Platform firm ID	Participant job title	Job exp. (years)	Platforms operated (number)	Target geographical market
42	A	Area manager	6	4	Global and specific markets

43	A	Market manager	3	4	Global and specific markets
44	A	Assistant market manager	1	4	Global and specific markets
45	A	Account manager	9	4	Global and specific markets
46	B	Market executive	2	1	Specific geographic market

*The participant managed a group of hotels in a region.

2.3.3 Data analysis

Our data analysis involves four stages: (i) familiarization, (ii) coding, (iii) enfolding the literature, and (iv) developing a theoretical framework (Gioia et al., 2012; Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the familiarization stage, we made an effort to develop a strong understanding of the raw interview data (Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006). In practice, we listened to the audio recordings and read the interview transcripts. This process helped us generate initial ideas about coopetition and make notes about interesting patterns and themes. For example, we noted that some hotels partially follow rate parity. Although these hotels offer the same rate on different platforms (cooperation), they decide to offer a lower rate on the hotel website (competition). Based on this insight, we noted that a possible theme in our findings relates to rate parity.

To analyze the qualitative data, open, axial, and selective coding methods were used (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998). During open coding, the interview transcripts were carefully examined, and codes were assigned that reflected the vocabularies the participants used. At this stage, none of the codes were abstracted to ensure that the nuances in the raw data were not lost. In other words, these open codes were entirely grounded and provided a solid foundation to develop novel theoretical patterns. For example, based on the explanations of the managers around rate parity, we came up with two open codes "complying with rate parity policies across multiple platforms only" and "not complying with rate parity policies across platforms and hotel channels."

During axial coding, the open codes were grouped into themes that shared similar characteristics. In other words, we "lifted" the open codes to a higher-level theme that explains different facets of coopetition. For example, the above-mentioned two codes were synthesized into the theme "(non)compliance boundary" because they relate to how hotels simultaneously observe vs. do not observe rate parity. Finally, during selective coding, the themes were abstracted into aggregate dimensions that share similar properties. For example, we developed an aggregate dimension labeled "separation activities" comprising of themes that explain how hotels separate the forces of cooperation and competition. The three coding phases were not performed in a linear "open to axial to selective" way. Instead, coding was done in an iterative "back and forth" manner (Homburg et al., 2017). We used the Nvivo computer software to perform our coding in an organized way.

We clustered the themes and aggregate dimensions into two core categories: **activities** and **inputs**, based on their distinct (i) properties and (ii) dimensional range (Mello & Flint, 2009; Strauss, 1987). In terms of properties, the themes and aggregate dimensions under activities are actions (e.g., adjusting inventory). In contrast, the themes and aggregate dimensions under inputs are objects (e.g., communication and information exchange tools).

The dimensional range of the identified activities varies from "the hotel is highly capable in conducting the activity" to "the hotel is comparatively weak in conducting the activity." This range explains the degree of skill and capability and is qualitative in nature. For example, some hotels have a separate revenue management department and have advanced skills in adjusting inventory. Whereas some hotels do not have a revenue management department and so, their skills in adjusting inventory are relatively weaker. In contrast, the dimensional range of the identified inputs varies from "the input is present" to "the input is absent." This range is binary and quantitative in nature. For example, all hotels have access to

business performance and market data via platforms. In comparison, some hotels do not have appropriate information exchange tools.

Furthermore, although primacy was given to the managerial insights derived from the interviews, those insights were constantly compared to the literature (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). In other words, we analyzed how the themes and aggregate dimensions were similar to and different from the existing coopetition literature. This method of enfolding the literature played a crucial role in connecting the findings to the existing coopetition literature and developing novel theoretical contributions (Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006). For instance, contrary to the current literature insight of separating cooperation and competition in different departments, we found that separation occurs at an individual level as managers internally create a boundary between the two forces.

Finally, the themes and aggregate dimensions were synthesized into a novel theoretical framework that explains the process of coopetition balance (see Figure 2.2). In practice, we analyzed the inter-relationships between the aggregate dimensions to showcase how they relate to each other (Gioia et al., 2012).

Throughout data analysis, theoretical memos assisted our work (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007). We wrote comments on important theoretical insights on coopetition balance which helped us better understand the patterns in the data. For example, we wrote theoretical accounts of how hotels use different informational resources to pursue coopetition. Hence, theoretical memos supported the development of themes, aggregate dimensions, and the resultant theoretical framework.

2.3.4 Assessment of trustworthiness

To assess the trustworthiness of our methods and findings, we took into consideration a portfolio of criteria from grounded theory and interpretive research (Flint et al., 2002). These

criteria (see Table 2.2) were credibility, generalizability, dependability, confirmability, integrity, fit, generality, and control (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spiggle, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Table 2.2

Trustworthiness assessment

Trustworthiness criteria	Method of addressing
Credibility Findings accurately represent the data.	• Data was collected over eight months. • Three researchers were involved throughout the research process. • Findings were given to participants for their comments. *Result*: The findings were expanded and refined.
Generalizability Findings are generalizable to theory and are applicable to all hotels.	• Theoretical sampling was applied in order to consult those participants who had adequate knowledge of coopetition. *Result*: The findings (i) generated fresh theoretical statements for the coopetition literature, and (ii) can be generalized to hotels that practice coopetition with platforms.
Dependability Findings are consistent.	• Participants shared detailed accounts of their past and current experiences. • Constant comparison was conducted based on transcribed narratives arising out of the interviews with the different participants. *Result*: The participants' explanations were consistent.
Conformability Findings are grounded in participants' explanations instead of researchers' biases.	• Data was collected from a large number of participants. • Field notes were maintained based on participants' narratives. • Additional questions were asked from participants to gain extra clarity. • Findings were provided to participants for feedback. *Result*: The findings were expanded and refined.
Integrity Findings are not based on wrong facts and information.	• This research apprised participants of the university ethics practices, including the anonymity of their identity and of the firm that they represented. • Interviews were conducted in a professional, friendly manner. *Result*: Researchers confident the participants gave no wrong information.
Fit Findings fit the phenomenon under research.	• This study achieved this by utilizing the methods mentioned above to attain credibility, dependability, and confirmability. *Result*: Findings reflect the complex nature of coopetition, as observed in the raw data. Rich descriptions of themes and aggregate dimensions of coopetition balance were captured.
Generality Findings represent different facets of the phenomenon.	• On average, each interview lasted for 45 minutes, which was sufficient to gain a deep understanding of coopetition. • The interview guide consisted of broad open-ended questions designed to enhance the breadth of understanding of coopetition. • During interviews, follow up questions were asked to increase the depth of understanding of coopetition. *Result*: Interviews captured different facets of coopetition in terms of breadth and depth.
Control Participants determine the different facets of the theory.	• Participants provided explanations that drove theory development. *Result:* Participants influenced the discovery of the different facets of coopetition balance.

2.4 Findings

In this section, we first provide an overview of our findings and subsequently offer our reflections at a more granular level. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, we found that two core categories form the basis of how hotels attain coopetition balance with platforms: activities and inputs. Activities include (i) separation, (ii) integration, and (iii) simultaneous separation and integration actions. Separation activities create and maintain boundaries between cooperation and competition, while integration activities synthesize cooperation and competition by not creating any form of boundary between the two forces. Simultaneous separation and integration activities divide and synthesize cooperation and competition. However, to effectively pursue these activities, hotels draw on inputs such as rules, data, and IT tools. These inputs can be categorized under (i) separation, (ii) integration, and (iii) simultaneous separation and integration. Separation inputs are necessary requirements for separation activities and integration inputs for integration activities. Moreover, simultaneous separation and integration inputs are used for separation and integration activities. Table 5 in Appendix B supplies definitions of and illustrative quotes pertaining to all themes underlying coopetition balance. The next subsection of our paper presents an in-depth discussion of our findings.

2.4.1 Separation, integration and simultaneous separation and integration activities

Our analysis suggested 23 concepts, grouped into nine themes, which synthesized into three aggregate dimensions: separation activities, integration activities, and separation and integration activities (see Table 2.3).

Figure 2.2

Theoretical framework: Coopetition balance with platforms

ACTIVITIES

Separation activities
- (Non)confidentiality boundary
- (Non)compliance boundary
- Service boundary
- Interface boundary
- Temporal boundary

Separation and integration activities
- Exchanging customer information

Integration activities
- Adjusting inventory
- Regulating distribution costs
- Broadening target market

Coopetition balance

INPUTS

Separation inputs
- Directive rules
- Customer data
- Programs and offerings
- Pricing data
- Communication and information exchange tools

Separation and integration inputs
- Platform structure
- Hotel distribution structure

Integration inputs
- Holistic rules
- Business performance and market data
- Encryption tools

2.4.1.1 Separation activities

We identified five themes under separation activities: (i) (non)confidentiality boundary, (ii) (non)compliance boundary, (iii) service boundary, (iv) interface boundary, and (v) temporal boundary.

Table 2.3

Data structure: separation, integration and simultaneous separation and integration activities

Open code (concepts)	Axial code (themes)	Selective code (aggregate dimensions)
Consulting with platform managers about overall market trends and appropriate strategies. Not consulting with platform managers about internal hotel information, individual competitors, or other platform firms.	**(Non)confidentiality boundary**	**Separation activities**
Complying with rate parity policies across multiple platforms only. Not complying with rate parity policies across platforms and hotel channels.	**(Non)compliance boundary**	
Cooperating with platforms for service improvement. Competing with platforms by offering personalized service.	**Service boundary**	
Cooperating on the platform interface to attract new customers (e.g., by engaging in promotional campaigns and influencing ranking). Competing on the hotel channel interface to attract new customers (e.g., by offering more attractive offers and engaging customers with loyalty programs).	**Interface boundary**	
Communicating with customers pre-stay on platforms. Communicating with customers during the stay phase at the physical hotel. Replying to online customer reviews post-stay on platforms. Communicating with customers post-stay via email/telephone.	**Temporal boundary**	
Adjusting inventory on platforms based on market demand. Adjusting inventory on platforms based on occupancy levels. Adjusting inventory on platforms to strike the right balance.	**Adjusting inventory**	**Integration activities**
Evaluating returns of working with platforms. Prioritizing direct bookings over platform bookings. Establishing key performance indicators to control costs of platform bookings.	**Regulating distribution costs**	
Targeting a portfolio of customer groups (e.g., leisure, local corporate clients). Not relying too heavily on platforms, nor too strongly on direct hotel channels.	**Broadening the target market**	
Exchanging essential information (e.g., customer booking data). Protecting strategic information (e.g., customer likes and preferences). Accessing essential information that is also strategic in nature (e.g., customer email address).	**Exchanging customer information**	**Separation and integration activities**

In regard to the *(non)confidentiality boundary*, we found that hotels demarcate the topics they consult with platform managers. Particularly, managers decide to consult about the overall market trends and appropriate strategies but choose not to disclose any internal hotel information or to discuss individual competitors or other platform firms. Hotel R articulated this:

> *"Extreme level of confidentiality maintained with all [platform] market managers and vice versa. We only discuss the details and trends in the market and how it can be made more relevant to the host property."* [ID: 34]

In terms of the *(non)compliance boundary*, hotels observe rate parity policies across multiple platforms only; they do not adhere to the same policy across platforms and hotel channels. In practice, hotels offer the same rate on different platforms, but charge a lower rate on their own website or mobile application. As Hotel L stated:

> *"Well, they [platforms] demand rate parity. They think they should have the same rate as the next person and the next person. It is cheaper on our own website, so we do that. But all the other websites [platforms], it has the same rate parity."* [ID: 24]

Service boundary refers to hotels separating service activities, such that some activities focus on cooperating with platforms while others emphasize competing with platforms. In practice, hotels pursue service improvement based on authentic customer reviews present on platforms, and thus cooperate with platforms. However, they also provide personalized service so that next time customers decide to book directly with them and not via platforms, so enabling the hotels to compete with platforms. Hotel A offered the following reflection on service activities as a means of competing with platforms:

"For example, we had some guests who booked through Platform A, whom we catered to on an extra level. We prepared special breakfast menus based on their needs. Some guests fly out on a specific flight after check-out. So we always book the room for them for extra hours with no charge. Eighty to ninety percent of the time, they come back, and they come back through direct bookings." [ID: 2]

With respect to ***interface boundary***, the participating hotels cooperate with platforms on the platform interface but compete on the hotel channel interface (e.g., hotel website) to attract new customers. The platform interface enables hotels to connect to a large customer base, maintain their ranking in search results, and engage in promotional programs. The hotel channel interface allows hotels to offer more attractive offers (e.g., complimentary breakfast) and to engage customers with their loyalty programs. Hotel S, for example, cooperates with platforms on the platform interface by maintaining its ranking in search results:

"The basics are making sure that your profile [on platforms] is completely up to date. So, you have got great imagery, you have got all of the hotel contact details, address, all your facility's details are all accurate and really well put together. So, our marketing team maintains all of our room descriptions and everything like hotel facility descriptions, so it is all really cohesive, and it is done really professionally. That is like an entry-level of how to get good rankings." [ID: 35]

Finally, hotels maintain the ***temporal boundary*** through customer communication. They cooperate with platforms during customer communication pre-stay, compete with platforms during the stay phase, and then cooperate and later compete with platforms during the post-stay phase. For example, hotels reply to customer queries on platforms pre-stay

(cooperation) and prompt customers to decide if the hotel can book their next visit during the stay phase (competition). The hotels then reply to online customer reviews on platforms post-stay (cooperation) and later send post-stay emails to encourage customers to book directly (competition).

2.4.1.2 Integration activities

We identified three themes for integration activities: (i) adjusting inventory, (ii) regulating distribution costs, and (iii) broadening the target market.

Adjusting inventory is about deciding which inventory levels to sell on platforms. These decisions are based on market demand and occupancy levels, and the aim is to strike the right balance between cooperation and competition. Hotel W gave this explanation of this process:

> *"It comes down to really understanding and analysing the demand; that's where your full total revenue management kicks in. Then you really understand your business, your numbers, your trends. You know what your ideal mix is and how you are going to sell those rooms. Do you actually hold onto your guns and say I'm going to hold onto not selling these rooms on them [platforms]? [Instead, you] try to sell them on your channel and then use them [platforms] when you actually need them."* [ID: 40]

When ***regulating distribution costs***, hotels are not only mindful of the customer acquisition cost when dealing with platforms but also focus on optimizing profits. Managers regulate distribution costs by thinking about and applying both cooperation and competition in their decision-making process. Hence, managers integrate the forces of cooperation and competition at the same place and time. In practice, they evaluate the returns from working with platforms, prioritize direct

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bookings over platform bookings, and establish key performance indicators. Hotel E had this to say about the process:

> *"I would love to work with them [platforms] within my budget. But when I'm tracking revenue, then I would like to optimize my direct channel sales. So, acquisition cost is very important. Every booking that comes through, we make sure that it's not going to cost us. When you're actually sitting on your peak, you don't want to pay that top dollar to get that booking from them [platforms]. I can just get the booking anyway on my direct channels because there is a demand."* [ID: 8]

When ***broadening the target market***, hotels target a portfolio of customer groups (e.g., leisure, local corporate clients). This approach means that hotels do not have to rely too heavily on platforms (i.e., cooperation) or too strongly on their own channels (i.e., competition). Although each customer group may book on both platforms and hotel channels, a relatively higher percentage of leisure customers book on platforms (e.g., Agoda.com), whereas local corporate clients usually directly negotiate with hotels. As a result, broadening the target market allow hotels to attract diverse customer groups and optimize sales and profits, as Hotel C pointed out:

> *"Hotels here, especially in Auckland, we're not just leisure hotels. We're made up of so many different market segments. So it again relates back to having an expectation of the room nights and revenue that we need off them [platforms]. We can never be top heavy in any segment because what it means is we're displacing rooms that we've kind of put aside for another market segment. So there is always a management process when it comes to the room nights coming in with that. Yes, they're [platforms] a good tool*

when we're not making room night budget with any other segment, to kind of stimulate sales. But we will always restrict them to a certain extent when we know that we are needing room nights for other segments." [ID: 5]

2.4.1.3 Separation and integration activities

Our findings show that exchanging customer information reflects the properties of both separation and integration activities. ***Exchanging customer information*** refers to exchanging essential information with platforms (e.g., receiving customer booking details) but protecting strategic information (e.g., customer likes and preferences). Thus, hotels maintain a boundary in terms of the type of information exchanged. However, exchanging information includes accessing essential customer information that is also strategic in nature (e.g., customer's email address). In these cases, creating a boundary for this type of information is impossible, which means that integration is required. For example, hotels access temporary customer email addresses that are anonymized by the platforms (e.g., guest1234@platformB.com), as mentioned by Hotel N:

> *"The email addresses are generated by Platform C; it is not the guest's actual email address. Platform C creates an email address for the guest. They kind of cover the guest's contact email information."* [ID: 27]

2.4.2 Separation, integration and simultaneous separation and integration inputs

Our analysis generated 24 concepts, assembled into 10 themes, which we then distilled into three aggregate dimensions—separation inputs, integration inputs, and separation and integration inputs (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4

Data structure: separation, integration, and simultaneous separation and integration inputs

Open codes (concepts)	Axial codes (themes)	Selective codes (aggregate dimensions)
Rules for (non)confidentiality boundary. Rate parity rules for (non)compliance boundary—hotels need to offer the same rate across all platforms. Rate parity rules for (non)compliance boundary—hotels need to offer the same rate on platforms and hotel channels.	**Directive rules**	**Separation inputs**
Online customer reviews and real-time customer feedbacks for service improvement. Database of customer likes and preferences to offer personalized service.	**Customer data**	
Platform communication tools (e.g., chatbots, chat box, pre-arrival message function). Hotel communication tools (e.g., email function, telephone). IT tools to exchange essential information. IT tools to protect strategic information.	**Communication and information exchange tools**	
Pricing data of individual competitors. Pricing data of strategic group (average price).	**Pricing data**	
Promotional campaign programs on the platform interface. Loyalty programs on the hotel channel interface. Attractive offerings (e.g., accommodation packages) on the hotel channel interface.	**Programs and offerings**	
Rules to adjust inventory by prioritizing direct bookings over platform bookings. Rules to regulate distribution costs by prioritizing direct bookings over platform bookings.	**Holistic rules**	**Integration inputs**
Business performance and market data maintained by hotels for controlling inventory allocations, regulating distribution costs, and broadening the target market. Business performance and market data maintained by platforms, and used by hotels for controlling inventory allocations, regulating distribution costs, and broadening the target market.	**Business performance and market data**	
IT tools to develop anonymized information. IT tools to share information in an encrypted format.	**Encryption tools**	
Platform network centrality structure. Platform network effects structure.	**Platform structure**	**Separation and integration inputs**
Hotel multihoming structure. Hotel direct channel structure.	**Hotel distribution structure**	

2.4.2.1 Separation inputs

We identified five themes under separation inputs: (i) directive rules, (ii) customer data, (iii) communication and information exchange tools, (iv) pricing data, and (v) programs and offerings.

Directive rules are specific guidelines that encourage (non)confidentiality and (non)compliance boundaries. Directive rules are established for the topics that can(not) be discussed with platform managers because of the need to foster (non)confidentially boundaries. Rate parity rules also apply for (non)compliance boundaries, such that hotels must offer the same rate not only across multiple platforms but also across hotel channels and platforms.

Customer data are simple data about individual customers that are utilized to maintain the service boundary. Hotels use real-time customer feedback and online customer reviews on platforms for service improvement, but they also maintain a database of customer likes and preferences so that they can offer personalized service. Real-time customer feedbacks and online customer reviews thus provide hotels with a means of cooperating with platforms, while their databases of customer likes and preferences provide them with a way of competing with platforms.

Communication and information exchange tools are IT systems that are used to maintain a temporal boundary during customer communication. In practice, hotels use the platform communication tools (e.g., chatbots, chatbox, pre-arrival message function) and their own communication tools (e.g., email function, telephone) to maintain the temporal boundary during the entire customer journey. Hotels also use IT systems to exchange customer information. For instance, Hotel F uses IT systems to receive customer booking details from platforms:

> *"All customer details and things copied automatically into our system."* [ID:
> 9]

Pricing data consists of the price of each competitor and the mean price of the hotel's closest competitors. Hotels use pricing data not only so they can cooperate on the platform

interface, but also so they can develop competitive prices on the platform interface to attract new customers. Hotel B provided an example of this:

> *"Now, with Platform A, I can log on and I can select, I think it's about eight, different competitors, and I can see over a three-month period what their rates are for their entry level room and where we sit."* [ID: 4]

Finally, ***programs and offerings*** include promotional campaigns, loyalty programs, and attractive offerings to maintain the interface boundary. Hotels join promotional campaigns on the platform interface in order to cooperate with platforms, but utilize loyalty programs and attractive offerings (e.g., accommodation packages) on the hotel channel interface to compete with platforms. An example of joining promotional programs on platforms came from Hotel A:

> *"The other thing they [platforms] do is develop promotional programs like "flash sale", or they focus on specific markets like "China sale". So, for these promotional programs, they send me emails saying, "Do you want to participate?" To participate, I have to agree to some specific conditions. For example, they will tell me that I have to provide a minimum twenty-five percent discount for the Chinese market for the next ten days."* [ID: 1]

2.4.2.2 Integration inputs

We identified three themes for this group of inputs: (i) holistic rules, (ii) business performance and market data, and (iii) encryption tools. Hotels establish broad ***holistic rules*** to adjust inventory and regulate distribution costs. These rules relate to prioritizing direct bookings over platform bookings. Hotels also draw on aggregate ***business performance and market data*** to control inventory allocations, regulate distribution costs, and broaden the target market. Hotel

R explained how it used market data to control inventory allocations and regulate distribution costs:

> *"The data that they [platforms] provide us is more to do with the market, based on how the market is performing. What sort of demand is there in the market? How do they see the market fluctuating? For example, if I know there is an event happening in Auckland, I know the market demand will be extremely high. I know that people won't just go onto any of those platforms to look for hotels, but they will just go on Google. As long as they see a room available, they will book the room. So making sure that you identify those demand periods and making sure that you are then selling on your hotel website [is important]. Avoid the commission. But then again, for that one day, you're losing visibility. So maybe you want to look at instead of offering them [platforms] all the rooms; you offer them five rooms."* [ID: 34]

Platforms also utilize **encryption tools** to exchange customer information. Specifically, platforms use IT systems to develop and share anonymized data with hotels. As a result, hotels obtain access to essential, strategic information (e.g., customer email addresses) in an encrypted format.

2.4.2.3 Separation and integration inputs

We identified two themes relating to both separation and integration activities: (i) platform structure, and (ii) hotel distribution structure. **Platform structure** includes network centrality and network effects properties. **Hotel distribution structure** comprises multihoming structures (i.e., connection with multiple platforms) and direct channel structures (i.e., multiple hotel-owned channels). These structures enable hotels to maintain their interface boundary through their separation activities, and to broaden their target market through their integration

activities. In regard to the interface boundary, platform structure allows hotels to connect to the large customer base on the platform interface for cooperation, while the hotel distribution structure allows hotels to focus on the platform interface (multihoming structure) for cooperation, and the hotel channel interface (direct channel structure) for competition. In terms of broadening the target market, platform structural properties and the hotel distribution structure together allow hotels to establish contact with and serve different customer groups. At Hotel Q, the platform structure offers a bridge (network centrality) whereby it can reach that vast group of customers (network effects):

> *"They [platforms] are a bridge connecting us to the larger audiences that we may not have access to. The hotel Q brand is not present in the West, it is not present in Europe, it is not present in various countries around the world. But they [platforms] provide us the representation; they provide us the reach."* [ID: 33]

2.5 Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore one crucial question: how hotels maintain coopetition balance when working with platforms. We investigated this question using grounded theory and developed three aggregate activity dimensions and three aggregate input dimensions. Activities relate to hotel actions that foster coopetition balance; inputs are the requirements (e.g., rules, structures) needed to conduct these activities. In the following section, we discuss our theoretical contributions to the coopetition literature and consider the practical implications of our findings for hotels, platform firms, and policymakers.

2.5.1 Theoretical contributions to the coopetition literature

2.5.1.1 Separation activities: Individual or temporal separation, supported by boundary creation

Extant literature suggests two types of separation activities—functional and temporal (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Poole & de Ven, 1989). Functional separation focuses on isolating cooperation and competition in different departments, whereas temporal separation emphasizes keeping the two forces apart over time (Dowling et al., 1996; Seran et al., 2016). However, our findings show that although hotels pursue temporal separation, functional separation does not occur. Instead, whenever a temporal separation is not possible but separation is still needed, it happens at an individual level and not at a functional level.

In practice, individuals develop heuristics to separate cooperation and competition. Managers utilize heuristics to pursue *(non) confidentiality boundary* and separate matters pertaining to consultation during business meetings with platform representatives. Because hotels work with many platforms, and because a large number of competing hotels also work with those platforms (Constantinides et al., 2018; Rolland et al., 2018), matters of confidentiality need to be upheld. As a result, managers use heuristics to disclose only general market-related facts and not to converse about competing hotels or other platforms. This process supports managers to separate cooperation and competition in their thought process during business meetings.

Similarly, managers use heuristics to maintain *(non) compliance boundary* and determine which aspect of rate parity policy to observe and which part not to follow. Although platforms allow hotels to establish contact with a broad customer network (Cennamo, 2018; Dushnitsky et al., 2020), rate parity policies have the potential to reduce hotel profitability (Sharma & Nicolau, 2019). Managers therefore employ heuristics to observe rate parity

policies across platforms only (e.g., Expedia.com and Hotels.com) but not across platforms and hotel channels (e.g., Expedia.com and hotel mobile app). This process allows managers to internally separate the forces of cooperation and competition while managing hotel rates.

Additionally, individuals separate cooperation and competition through *service boundary*. In practice, individuals pursue service improvement through cooperation with platforms. But offer personalized customer service to compete with platforms. Therefore, individuals separate service activities to focus on cooperation and competition. Moreover, managers create an *interface boundary*, and decide to focus on cooperation on the platform interface, but on competition on the hotel channel interface. These separation activities are not possible through functional separation (e.g., Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Seran et al., 2016) but relies on managers to develop mental shortcuts and are described as "rules of thumb."

Finally, hotels maintain *temporal boundary* during customer communication. In this case, cooperation and competition are separated over time (Hoffmann et al., 2018; Poole & de Ven, 1989). For example, in the pre-stay stage of the customer journey, hotels send pre-arrival messages to customers on the platform message portal (cooperation). In the stay stage, hotels encourage customers to book their next visit via the hotel website (competition). Whereas, in the post-stay stage, hotels reply to customer reviews on the platform portal (cooperation), and later send direct emails to customers with a promotional offer to book direct (competition). Contrary to prior research showing lengthy episodes of cooperation and competition (de Rond & Bouchikhi, 2004; Navis & Glynn, 2010), this study finds that the timeframe of cooperation and competition are short, lasting for a few days and even hours.

2.5.1.2 Integration activities: Individuals applying sensemaking to synthesize cooperation and competition

The literature suggests that integration activities are an important means of enabling managers to synthesize cooperation and competition in the same functional domain and at the same time (Farjoun, 2010; Luo et al., 2006; Tidström et al., 2018). However, empirical work exploring how integration activities occur in practice is limited. Our findings show that hotel managers apply the process of sensemaking (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a, 2016b; Pattinson, Nicholson, & Lindgreen, 2018). Managers utilize data insights and rely on their past experience of working with platforms to synthesize cooperation and competition in their decision-making process. Managers endeavoring to find the right balance ***adjust inventory*** levels on platforms in accordance with market demand and occupancy rates. For example, from a pool of 100 available room inventory, they make sense of the situation and decide whether to offer 20, 40, or 50 of those inventories on platforms. In practice, drawing on data insights and past experience, managers decide not to provide all their available inventory on platforms (cooperation), nor do they decide to offer zero inventory (competition). Rather, they find the right balance of cooperation and competition (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018) to sell appropriate levels of room inventory on platforms. This process requires managers to simultaneously integrate cooperation and competition in their decision-making process (Luo et al., 2006; Tidström et al., 2018) by developing sensemaking capabilities to adjust inventory levels.

Furthermore, managers apply sensemaking to ***regulate distribution costs*** and decide on the appropriate expenditure for platform sales. Based on data insights and past experience, managers do not allocate high budgets for platform sales (cooperation) as it will affect hotel profitability due to high commissions charged by platforms. In contrast, managers do not put less budget for platform sales (competition) as it may prevent hotels from attracting sufficient customers. Instead, sensemaking allows managers to balance the forces of cooperation and

competition by allocating the right amount of funds for platform sales. As a result, this process involves the integration of cooperation and competition (Fernandez et al., 2014). Such actions are vital for hotel profitability, as they enable hotels to cope with the platforms' market dominance and commission levels (Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019).

Managers also enact sensemaking to **broaden the target market** and attract different customer segments: leisure customers via platforms, and corporate clients through direct channels. Sensemaking guides managers to not rely solely on platform sales (cooperation) or direct channels sales (competition). Instead, managers strive to find the right balance of cooperation and competition (Raza-ullah, 2021) by integrating the two forces (Liu et al., 2020). This results in managers targeting a portfolio of customer segments.

2.5.1.3 Simultaneous separation and integration activities: An IT enabled process

Simultaneous separation and integration activities are special types of tension management practices involving concurrent isolation and synthesis of cooperation and competition (Le Roy & Fernandez, 2015; Seran et al., 2016). The current literature explains that separation is conducted by dividing cooperation and competition in different departments (functional separation) or over time (temporal separation) (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016), whereas integration is pursued by individuals (Chen, 2008; Farjoun, 2010) through the process of sensemaking (Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidström, 2021; Pattinson et al., 2018). In contrast, this research shows that separation and integration is a process enabled by IT tools, rather than relying on departments, time, or even individuals. A notable exception is the research conducted by Fernandez and Chiambaretto (2016), who find that firms use IT tools to separate cooperation and competition. Nevertheless, their study show that firms still rely on individuals to integrate cooperation and competition. Conversely, this

research suggests that simultaneous separation and integration is a fully automated process performed by IT tools, without the intervention of individuals.

In practice, hotels use IT tools to exchange essential information with platforms (e.g., customer booking details) and protect strategic information (e.g., customer likes and preferences). This process of sharing (cooperation) and protecting (competition) information relates to the separation aspect of coopetition. However, when hotels need to access essential information that is also strategic in nature (e.g., customer email address), integration of cooperation and competition comes into play. In this case, hotels access temporary customer email addresses that are automatically anonymized by the platforms through the use of IT tools (e.g., guest1234@platformB.com).

2.5.1.4 Inputs for coopetition activities: Rules, data, and structure

Although coopetition literature focuses heavily on activities (Kim, Kim, Pae, & Yip, 2013; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016; Park et al., 2014), little research delineating the inputs required to pursue those activities exists. To be precise, hotels cannot implement coopetition activities without the right resources, rules, and structures that we coin as "inputs". Therefore, outlining the inputs is vital to understanding how hotels manage coopetition balance. Notably, for separating cooperation and competition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Hoffmann et al., 2018), individuals use directive rules (narrow guidelines allowing less tactical freedom) and simple data. For example, managers use directive rules to handle rate parity by offering consistent rates only across platforms but a lower rate on hotel channels. In addition, managers use individual customer reviews to improve their hotel's service quality (cooperation) and personal customer data to provide personalized service (competition).

Conversely, individuals integrating cooperation and competition (Luo et al., 2006; Tidström et al., 2018) use holistic rules (broad guidelines allowing more tactical freedom) and

aggregate data. For instance, to regulate distribution costs, managers adhere to the holistic rules of prioritizing direct bookings over platform bookings, and they utilize aggregate market and performance data in their decision-making processes.

Furthermore, to pursue separation and integration of cooperation and competition (Fernandez et al., 2014; Seran et al., 2016), hotels use platform structure and hotel distribution structure. For instance, the hotel distribution structure allows hotels to focus on platforms for cooperation, and the hotel channels for competition through their separation activities. Whereas the platform structure and hotel distribution structure allow hotels to establish contact with and attract diverse customer segments through their integration activities.

2.5.1.5 Separation and integration activities occurring at all organizational levels

Extant literature states that managers at lower organizational hierarchy levels pursue separation because they can only deal with cooperation or competition, not both (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). However, our study suggests that managers at all organizational hierarchy levels pursue separation. For instance, top managers (general managers) are responsible for separating cooperation and competition by maintaining confidentiality boundaries during business meetings with platform representatives. In contrast, entry-level and mid-level managers are responsible for separating service activities such that some activities focus on cooperation with platforms (e.g., improving hotel service), while others emphasize competition with platforms (e.g., providing personalized customer service).

The present literature also suggests that highly experienced top managers at higher organizational hierarchy levels pursue integration (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Fernandez et al., 2014). However, our study shows that managers with lesser experience (and who therefore do not belong to the upper echelons of the organization) also accomplish integration. For example, top managers (e.g., revenue directors) and mid-level managers (e.g., revenue

managers) conduct cost regulation. But then again, these mid-level managers need to have the analytical and decision-making skill sets to pursue integration effectively.

Overall, although the existing literature proposes that separation and integration activities need to be divided to employees at different organizational hierarchy levels (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), this research shows otherwise. We find that employees, regardless of the hierarchy level they belong to, can separate and integrate cooperation and competition.

2.5.2 Practical contributions for hotels, platform firms, and policymakers

Our study has several practical implications. First, our findings allow us to recommend that hotels form coopetition relationships with platforms in a balanced way. Here, we delineate the granular-level activities and inputs that enable hotels to pursue separation, integration, and simultaneous separation and integration. For example, we suggest managers (i) apply heuristics to create a boundary between cooperation and competition using directive rules (separation), (ii) develop sensemaking capabilities to synthesize cooperation and competition using holistic rules and aggregate data (integration), and (iii) rely on IT tools to pursue both separation and integration. We also recommend that hotels need not invest only in their own inputs to attain a coopetition balance. Instead, hotels can leverage the resources of platforms or co-develop them. For example, although hotels need to invest in IT resources to exchange information, they can utilize the market data provided by platforms to broaden their target market. At the same time, hotels can jointly develop (non)confidentiality rules with platform managers to protect the interests of both parties.

Second, in highlighting the role that individual hotel employees rather than hotels' functional departments play in maintaining coopetition balance with platforms, our findings have implications for staffing at hotels. We suggest hotels recruit employees who have the skill

sets to separate and integrate cooperation and competition simultaneously. For example, revenue managers need to have the ability not only to separate cooperation and competition while setting rates but also to synthesize the two forces so they can adjust inventory levels. In short, hotels need to focus on recruiting the right employees because they are critical to successfully pursuing coopetition with platforms.

Third, we offer practical guidelines on how platforms can share essential but strategic information with hotels (e.g., customer contact details) by minimizing the risk of opportunistic behaviors (e.g., hotels encouraging customers to cancel platform booking and book directly with them). Platforms can develop and share a unique anonymous alias customer email address with hotels. We recommend platforms establish automatic systems that check a hotel's message content for any misconduct before forwarding it to the guest. Investing in appropriate IT tools is one way that platforms can effectively manage coopetition tensions pertinent to information exchange.

Finally, we recommend policymakers develop industry rules that put a cap on the level of commissions charged by platforms, thus reducing the coopetitive tensions between hotels and platforms to a manageable level. Hotels can continue to leverage the benefits of the high network effects of platforms while simultaneously managing the conflicts arising out of the network centrality attributes of platforms. However, a further rise in commission levels might encourage hotels to rely less on or even disintermediate from those platforms. Disintermediation will reduce network effects and lower the attractiveness of a particular platform for both hotels and customers.

2.6 Conclusion

Extant marketing and management literature offers limited insights on coopetition with platforms. Whereas the tourism and hospitality literature provides little information on the

nuances in dyadic business relationships regarding how firms balance the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition and the tension management practices required to uphold the balance.

This research addresses the limitations in the marketing and management literature by offering a novel conceptual and empirical foundation from which to advance knowledge of the vital practice of coopetition for hotels dealing with platforms. Our theoretical framework provides a detailed account of the activities and inputs required in this process. Furthermore, this research provides vital insights for the tourism and hospitality field by sharing intricate details on the different tension management approaches: separation, integration, and simultaneous separation and integration. We show how hotels use these approaches to balance the forces of cooperation and competition when dealing with platforms involving dyadic business relationships.

Our study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, we focused on the perspective of hotels and explored their dyadic relationship with platforms. Exploring coopetition in the overall business network is beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, future research could widen the unit of analysis and discover how coopetition occurs in business networks comprising different actors, such as platforms, hotels, car rental agencies, airlines, and other service providers. Furthermore, hotel marketing and positioning policies in the travel market is also beyond our research scope. We encourage future researchers to investigate these policies.

Second, our study is exploratory in nature, as our intent has been to develop robust theoretical insights about the coopetition phenomenon. Based on our findings, we encourage researchers to devise a scale for coopetition balance and test its impact on hotel financial performance. Finally, our study focused solely on the hospitality industry. Platforms in other

industries such as retailing, gaming, and mobile application are likely to have different governance mechanisms, technology infrastructures, and degrees of openness to complementors and customers. Hence, future research could compare how coopetition with platforms unfolds (due to the platform properties stated above) in diverse industries.

2.7 Appendix

2.7.1 Appendix A: Interview guide utilized for hotel respondents

Broad discovery-oriented questions:

- "Can you describe the relationship between Hotel X and various booking platforms such as platform name A, platform name B?"
- "Can you explain how Hotel X works with various booking platforms/online travel agents (OTAs)? What are the key activities? What resources are required?"
- "What are the main benefits and challenges of working with platforms?"

Examples of specific questions:

- "You mentioned the rate parity clause. How does the rate parity clause affect your decision-making?"
- "You touched upon the importance of getting direct bookings. What does Hotel X do to receive direct bookings?"
- "You stated the importance of maintaining a balance in inventory levels. How do you decide on the right inventory levels?"
- "You mentioned the importance of hotel ranking on these platforms. How does Hotel X maintain a good ranking?"
- "You said that you meet with market managers every month. Could you state and explain what you discuss? How have these meetings been helpful?"
- "You mentioned that you have access to business analytics data. How and in what ways do you use such data?"
- "You touched upon using IT systems. Can you provide more details on how Hotel X utilizes these IT systems?"
- "You said you get access to online customer reviews. How and in what ways does Hotel X utilize these reviews?"

Closing question:

- "Are there any other ways Hotel X deals with various booking platforms that we have not touched on?"

2.7.2 Appendix B: Coopetition with platforms: Definitions and quotes

Table 2.5

Activities and inputs: Definitions and illustrative quotes

Aggregate dimensions	Definition of themes	Illustrative quotes
Separation activities	**(Non)confidentiality boundary** is the ability to demarcate confidential and non-confidential matters during consultations.	*"We have absolute confidentiality. They [platform market managers] are very careful not to overstep the confidentiality boundaries, and the same for us when we meet with other market managers, as we do not give away any information."* [ID: 16]
	(Non)compliance boundary relates to adhering to some rules but not observing some other rules.	*"We send one rate, which goes to all platforms. We have to be careful and have rate parity. However, we sometimes want to increase bookings through our website to increase direct sales, so we provide a lower rate on our website."* [ID: 29]
	Service boundary separates service activities, such that some activities focus on cooperation with platforms while others emphasize competition.	*"Good reviews on Platform B become word-of-mouth marketing in this fast-paced cyber world, but bad ones can give a direction to the hotel to improve service quality."* [ID: 46] *"We are very much competing with these OTAs, and I think the more direct bookings we can make—great! The best part about that, I suppose, is we are actually able to build that relationship directly with the guests. From a guest experience perspective, we know that the guest likes this particular room type or they have, you know, a flat white in the morning or they like their newspaper delivered at 6 am or whatever it may be; we try to cater to the guests' needs. So, that is what we are trying to do."* [ID: 35]
	Interface boundary focuses on cooperation with platforms on the platform interface, but competition with platforms on the hotel channel interface (e.g., hotel website) to attract customers.	*"We engage in promotions [on platforms] usually during the winter or during weekends, when the occupancy levels are low. You see, weekends in Auckland are quiet unless there is an event happening."* [ID: 20] *"So to get more direct bookings, we provide accommodation packages that are available only through our hotel website."* [ID: 39]
	Temporal boundary separates cooperation and competition in different stages of the customer journey.	*"Guest–hotel communication is essential. Platform A cannot answer all the questions, so we [Platform A] try to connect both parties. Hotels benefit from it, as they can directly request something from customers. For example, hotels can request arrival time or prepayment."* [ID: 43] *"So every single guest that has checked-in, when we realize that it is through Platform A or Platform C, we give them a card that explains a little bit more about the air points via our mobile app—so we try to push guests to move away from Platform A and book directly with us. The incentive is to get air points, or we can give cheaper rates."* [ID: 21]
Integration activities	**Adjusting inventory** controls inventory allocations on platforms.	*"They are such a big distributor of hotel inventory [...]. So it is about finding the right balance that, you know, a certain percentage of your booking needs to come through the OTA*

Aggregate dimensions	Definition of themes	Illustrative quotes
		websites because you will not be able to get everybody to come and book through your website. So you can't walk away, but you have to decide for your own business what is the right mix and how you can benefit." [ID: 15]
	Regulating distribution costs is the ability to manage the costs of working with platforms to optimize profits.	*"It's balancing out productivity across the year versus short-term. Sorry to say, but any hotel can flap with the business of OTAs because there is that level of demand. But it's how you actually manage OTAs to produce the best results. Again, the thing about these platforms is that there's obviously the cost association. So, fifteen percent off your price. If you're selling at four hundred dollars plus, fifteen percent is a lot to carry when you know that there will also be direct guests coming in from the hotel's website."* [ID: 5]
	Broadening the target market relates to targeting different customer groups.	*"We target tourists. But we have contracts with companies from the local market as well. So we try to, you know, have a bit of a mix between OTAs and the direct channels."* [ID: 36]
Separation and integration activities	**Exchanging customer information** refers to sharing/receiving essential information, protecting strategic information, and accessing information that is both essential and strategic in nature.	*"As you make a booking on Platform A, that booking data straight away enters our system in real-time."* [ID: 31] *"So, we [Platform A] do make some changes for customer security. So, for example, the email address is masked. So when the email address is sent to the property, we give them a temporary PlatformA.com email address because we want to keep the security of the customer. And the credit card information is securely transferred through the channel manager, which is encrypted."* [ID: 42]
Separation inputs	**Directive rules** are specific guidelines in business relationships.	*"When they [platforms] come and sign a contract with you [hotel], the contract is such that you have to offer them the rate parity. When you talk about rate parity, it's having the exact same rates available across all channels. That is your website, that is multiple OTA websites as such. So if you are selling a standard room on your hotel website at two hundred and ninety-nine dollars, that's the rate they want to have on their website as well. If you have two different rate plans, like one prepaid and one flexible, they also want to have the same rate."* [ID: 15]
	Customer data are specific data about individual customers.	*"Platform C has got the guest reviews, which is, when the guest leaves, they can leave a review. Then Platform C has real-time guest feedback. So, basically, the minute the guest has checked-in, right? The guest is sent an email that says, "Click happy face if you are happy and say why" or "sad face if you are unhappy, and say why". Then a notification is sent out to the hotel with the guest feedback."* [ID: 37] *"Customer data is very important, especially if guests want a roll-away bed in the room, or they have a preference, or if they're allergic to dust or feathers."* [ID: 26]
	Communication and information exchange tools are systems for customer communication and for exchanging information.	*"It's a two-way interface. So [a] booking comes in from Platform A into Tool B, which then pushes it back into our property management system. So it [the booking information] gets loaded straight away."* [ID: 7] *"The customer data are quite secure because it is on our management system. And only a few managers can access those data."* [ID: 25]

Aggregate dimensions	Definition of themes	Illustrative quotes
	Pricing data consists of the pricing data of individual competitors and also the average price of all competitors in a strategic group.	*"They [platforms] will also give us a comparison of the average rates of my competition hotels. And say that my rates are slightly lower than the average rates of competitive hotels. Every morning, we get an email where they tell us that for the next week—these are our rates, but our competitor's average rate is this."* [ID: 22]
	Programs and offerings comprise promotional campaigns, loyalty programs, and attractive service bundles (e.g., accommodation packages).	*"It [a platform] helps us to provide specific promotions for specific markets and geographic regions."* [ID: 10] *"We [Hotel L] have our own loyalty programs to attract other people. We have signed up with Air New Zealand for business—with Air New Zealand air points. So, we are trying to build loyalty with people directly. To get those loyalty points, people have to book directly with the property. So we are encouraging people to book direct."* [ID: 24]
Integration inputs	**Holistic rules** relate to broad guidelines on prioritizing direct bookings over platform bookings.	*"So it almost comes down to whether you can actually control it and then how far can you control it. At the end of the day, say on a daily basis, if I'm able to reduce ten rooms a day from them [platforms] to sell direct, I'm saving fifteen percent average commission out of that."* [ID: 40]
	Business performance and market data are aggregate data about the hotel's financial performance and the overall market.	*"Again what Platform A does is provides me with time-based analytics. For example, last year this time, it says that I had sold ten percent more rooms. That means somehow I am selling less now."* [ID: 1] *"We get holistic market intelligence. So both the Platform B analytics and our own explains the future trends in the Auckland market."* [ID: 41]
	Encryption tools are systems designed to anonymize and share data.	*"Platform A automatically generates an email address so we can communicate with the guest through that Platform A company email, not the guest's personal email."* [ID: 14]
Separation and integration inputs	**Platform structure** is the network centrality and network effect attributes of platforms.	*"We also rely on these OTAs because the guests are also coming from overseas. So they won't even know what is the Hotel G brand. The company also does not have enough budget to market itself everywhere around the world, so they are a really good platform which helps to promote us to customers overseas from around the world."* [ID: 13]
	Hotel distribution structure includes multihoming (i.e., connection with multiple platforms) and direct channel (i.e., multiple hotel-owned channels) distribution options.	*"So, before it was only Platform A, Platform C, or Platform D we sold on. But now it's getting more and more. We get updates from the revenue department, "Okay, this is a channel we just opened, so please keep an eye on it."* [ID: 14] *"We have our own channels—telephones, emails, and a grand hotel website. We've got a massive sales team. So that's one of our biggest assets—we've got a strong sales team who are constantly on the road, tapping into businesses, tapping into groups, tapping into different segments."* [ID: 34]

Chapter 3. Coopetition between hotels and platforms in close customer proximity

3.1 Introduction

Platforms are hubs that connect businesses and customers who otherwise would find it challenging to find each other (Hänninen & Smedlund, 2021; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). For instance, the Airbnb platform connects hosts and guests who would not be able to connect otherwise (D. Huang, Coghlan, & Jin, 2020; Volgger, Taplin, & Pforr, 2019). Such platforms have disrupted many industries. For example, in the hospitality sector, Expedia.com and Booking.com have displaced traditional travel agents (Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2015). In fact, hotels generate more than 50% of their revenue via platforms (Rossini, 2015). Further, Holidayhomes.com has shifted the public preference from staying at hotels to booking holiday homes. Platforms are also transforming other industries, including entertainment (e.g., Netflix, Amazon Prime Video), taxi services (e.g., Uber, Ola), and food services (e.g., Opentable, Foodpanda). Therefore, platforms are a vital interface enabling businesses to reach out to customers and earn revenue (Gao & Bi, 2021; Ling et al., 2014). However, businesses need to be mindful of the bargaining power of platforms, as they charge high fees, which reduces profits (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Sharma & Nicolau, 2019). Thus, effectively managing relationships with platforms is fundamental for business success.

Hotels regard platforms as partners in connecting with vast travel audiences, as well as competitors with direct bookings (Bilbil, 2019; Chang et al., 2019). This kind of working relationship consisting of simultaneous cooperative and competitive actions is commonly known as coopetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000, 2003; Fong et al., 2021). The coopetition literature provides key insights to effectively manage cooperation and competition (Oinonen, Ritala, Jalkala, & Blomqvist, 2018; Ritala & Stefan, 2021). Businesses can separate

cooperation and competition in different locations (e.g., different departments) or isolate the two forces over time (Hoffmann, Lavie, Reuer, & Shipilov, 2018; Joseph, Borland, Orlitzky, & Lindgreen, 2020). Businesses may even aim to enact cooperation and competition at the same place and time (Das & Teng, 2000b; Le Roy, Bez, & Gast, 2021).

Most coopetition research focuses heavily on business activities far from the customer interface; for instance, in research and development (Chen, Tang, Wu, & Wang, 2021; Gnyawali & Park, 2009; Jakobsen, 2020; Park, Srivastava, & Gnyawali, 2014; Yang, 2020). As a result, there is a limited empirical literature on coopetition close to the customer in areas such as distribution, pricing, promotions, branding, and customer service (e.g., Lindström & Polsa, 2016). In addition, although the coopetition literature explains the success factors and business activities near the customer (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Lindström & Polsa, 2016), it does not explicate whether and how the coopetition approach varies depending on the level of tension.

Further, research insights reveal that coopetition far from the customer is cooperation focused, whereas coopetition near the customer is an arena for competition (Basterretxea, Charterina, & Landeta, 2019; Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Walley, 2007). For example, competitors may collaborate in a joint research project to develop new products (far from the customer) and compete in marketing products and building a loyal customer base (close to the customer). However, coopetitive relationships may also include collaboration near the customer (Lindström & Polsa, 2016; Ritala & Tidström, 2014). For instance, in hotel–platform relationships, collaboration occurs entirely near the customer because platforms are a marketing interface for hotels to connect with customers. Therefore, the literature does not provide sufficient knowledge on coopetition close to the customer that also consists of collaborative actions.

Based on the above background, and in response to calls for more research on coopetition near the customer in dyadic business relationships (Lindström & Polsa, 2016) and coopetition between hotels and platforms (Chang et al., 2019), we developed the following research question: ***How do hotels pursue coopetition in close customer proximity when working with platforms?*** We used grounded theory to address our research question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We gathered primary data from the hospitality sector, with 23 hotels and two platform firms taking part in our study; we interviewed 46 managers.

Based on our findings, we contribute to the coopetition literature by showing that, contrary to the current understanding, coopetition is not always competition dominant in close customer proximity. Rather, coopetition patterns range between cooperation and competition-dominant approaches depending on tension levels. Further, although the literature suggests that tension is managed by separating cooperation and competition over time, we find that such an approach is impossible when the time frames between cooperation and competition are short. Instead, hotels separate the two forces into different spaces: platforms, physical hotels, and direct hotel channels. Finally, contrary to the current view, we find that integration or separation of cooperation and competition are not appropriate when tensions are very high. Instead, hotels choose to temporarily stop sales on platforms at an operational level, although they continue their relationship with platforms at a strategic level. Overall, we propose a novel conceptual framework illustrating coopetition approaches for hotels to work successfully with platforms.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: First, we provide the background to coopetition, and argue the need for more research on coopetition with platforms close to the customer. Second, we describe our research method based on grounded theory. We explain our sampling, data collection, and data analysis approaches, and showcase how we ensured

trustworthiness of our findings. Third, we present our findings and illustrate our conceptual framework. Fourth, we discuss the theoretical and managerial contributions of our study. Finally, we describe the limitations of our work and identify areas for future research.

3.2 Background literature

3.2.1 Coopetition: Classifications and approaches

Coopetition is defined as the ability of a firm to enact concurrent cooperation and competition with another firm (Bengtsson & Kock, 2003; Fong et al., 2021). It represents a "dyadic and paradoxical relationship that emerges when two firms cooperate in some activities, […] and at the same time compete with each other in other activities" (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000, p. 412). There are three categories of coopetition: (i) cooperation-dominant coopetition, (ii) competition-dominant coopetition, and (iii) balanced coopetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Lado et al., 1997). Cooperation-dominant coopetition refers to situations where firms focus more on cooperation and less on competition (Wilhelm & Sydow, 2018). In these situations, tension levels are low between firms (Bengtsson et al., 2010). In contrast, competition-dominant coopetition occurs when firms focus more on competition and less on cooperation (Akpinar & Vincze, 2016). Under such circumstances, tension levels are high (Park et al., 2014). Finally, balanced coopetition takes place when firms do not allow cooperation or competition to become the dominant force (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018). In this case, tension levels are held at an optimal point (neither too high nor too low) to leverage the benefits of both cooperation and competition (Chen, 2008; Das & Teng, 2000).

There are two distinct approaches to exploring coopetition: one focuses on a broad perspective (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996; Damayanti et al., 2017), while the other takes a narrow view (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Gnyawali & Park, 2011). The broad perspective takes into consideration all the actors in the business network, such as competitors, suppliers,

complementors, and distributors (Rusko, 2014). In this case, firms develop cooperative relationships with one set of actors, and competitive relationships with another set of actors (Hoffmann, 2007; Sytch & Tatarynowicz, 2014). However, this strand of work does not take into consideration the simultaneous cooperation and competition occurring within the same business relationship (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). Rather, its focus is on developing either cooperative or competitive relationships with each actor (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Pattinson et al., 2018). In contrast, the narrow perspective focuses on dyadic business relationships (Chang et al., 2019; Chen, Yao, Zan, & Carayannis, 2020). In this case, cooperation and competition take place simultaneously between firms (Bengtsson & Kock, 2014; Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018). The current research exploring hotel coopetition with platforms takes a narrow approach.

The coopetition phenomenon can also be examined from a strategic (Chen, Luo, & Wang, 2019) or relational perspective (Le Roy et al., 2021; Raza-ullah, 2021). These perspectives are distinct, yet complementary in nature. The strategic approach focuses on decisions about when, with which partners, and for how long to enter into coopetition (Fernandez, Chiambaretto, Chauvet, & Engsig, 2021; Kraus, Meier, Niemand, Bouncken, & Ritala, 2018). In contrast, the relational approach suggests how firms maintain concurrent cooperation and competition, and the tension management approaches needed to sustain business relationships (Gnyawali, Madhavan, He, & Bengtsson, 2016; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016). The current research primarily focuses on relational coopetition and explores how hotels manage an ongoing relationship with multiple platforms.

Coopetition occurs via one of two distinct relationship approaches: horizontal and vertical (Chai et al., 2020; Crick & Crick, 2021c). In horizontal coopetition, direct competitors combine their resources through partnerships (Dowling et al., 1996; Fong et al., 2018; Soppe et al., 2014). For example, competing destination management organizations may collaborate

to jointly organize an event (Mariani, 2016). Therefore, in horizontal coopetition, the firms are at a similar level of the value chain and compete in the same market.

In vertical coopetition, however, firms exchange resources because they are involved in supplier–seller relationships (Lacoste, 2012; Lechner et al., 2016; Rajala & Tidström, 2021). Such firms do not compete directly in the same market but indirectly in other avenues (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dowling et al., 1996). For example, while car rental firms cooperate with Expedia.com to sell their service, they also compete with them by bypassing Expedia.com using their direct channels. In this case, car rental firms do not compete with Expedia.com in the car rental market directly, but indirectly in the distribution avenue.

Therefore, horizontal coopetition is different from vertical coopetition, as it depends on with whom a firm pursues coopetition (e.g., a direct competitor, supplier, or seller); in which market/avenue coopetition occurs (e.g., same market or distribution avenue); and how firms use their resources (e.g., resource combination or resource exchange). In this study, the relationship between hotels and platforms represents vertical coopetition because hotels are the suppliers of room inventory, and platforms are the sellers.

3.2.2 Coopetition in close customer proximity

Firms can effectively pursue coopetition by separating the forces of cooperation and competition depending on the closeness of their business activities to customers (Gast, Gundolf, Harms, & Matos Collado, 2019; Hoffmann et al., 2018; Rusko, 2011; Tidström, Ritala, & Lainema, 2018; Walley, 2007). Business activities far from the customer include research and development, procurement, inbound logistics, and manufacturing. Business activities near the customer include marketing, distribution, sales, and customer service. Research shows that competitors cooperate in activities far from the customer but compete in activities near the customer (Basterretxea et al., 2019; Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Bengtsson &

Raza-Ullah, 2016; Tidström, 2009). For instance, in the study by Erzurumlu (2010) competing suppliers together developed innovative products but competed with each other in marketing the product. Nalebuff and Brandenburger (1997) found that in the media industry, two firms cooperated in printing newspapers to make full use of their production capacity, but competed for advertisers and customers. These studies focus on relationships between competitors who belong to the same level of the value chain (e.g., equipment manufacturing). In our case, however, hotels and platforms belong to different levels of the value chain: hotels are the suppliers of accommodation services, whereas platforms are the sellers/distributors of room inventory.

Empirical studies also provide evidence that competitive pressures increase as coopetition moves closer to the customer. For instance, Fernandez et al. (2014) explored coopetition between manufacturers of telecommunication satellites who pooled their resources to develop a new range of satellites. However, during the commercialization stage, tensions emerged between the manufacturers as the newly developed satellites competed with the existing range of satellites sold by the manufacturers independently. In another research, Tidström and Hagberg-Andersson (2012) explain how a relationship becomes competitive once suppliers begin to bypass the manufacturer to directly sell finished goods to customers. Therefore, coopetition close to the customer is considered a field of competition characterized by high tension (Basterretxea et al., 2019; Bengtsson & Kock, 2000).

Competitors may also cooperate near the customer in marketing and sales (Lindström & Polsa, 2016; Ritala & Tidström, 2014). For example, in the airline industry, competitors that are part of an alliance network collaborate to ensure connecting flights and expand their presence in more cities around the world (Chiambaretto & Dumez, 2016). Also, tourism competitors partner together to promote tourist destinations (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011). In our case, hotels cooperate with platforms to gain access to a broad customer base and sell their

room inventory (Ling et al., 2014; Yang & Leung, 2018). This is because the relationship between hotels and platforms reflects an agency model: platforms (agent) distribute inventory for the hotel (principal) for a commission fee (H. A. Lee et al., 2013). However, hotels also compete with platforms because they charge high fees, which considerably reduces hotel profits (Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019; Yang, Jiang, & Schwartz, 2019). Platforms also attract customers away from hotel websites, reducing the chance of hotels generating direct bookings. Thus, coopetition between hotels and platforms in close customer proximity will consist of a mix of cooperative and competitive actions (Chang et al., 2019; Sharma & Nicolau, 2019). We now review the different tension management approaches required to handle simultaneous cooperation and competition in business relationships.

3.2.3 Tension management approaches

The literature describes three tension management approaches: (i) integration, (ii) spatial separation, and (iii) temporal separation (Hahn et al., 2015; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidström, 2021). Integration is pursued by staff members who work at higher organizational hierarchy levels, whereas separation is implemented by their subordinates in lower hierarchy levels (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Das & Kumar, 2010).

Integration suggests that individuals pursue simultaneous cooperation and competition in the same space or location and at the same time (Das & Teng, 2000b; Gernsheimer, Kanbach, & Gast, 2021; Lado et al., 1997). In other words, no means exist to separate the two opposing forces. Instead, individuals synthesize cooperation and competition (Chen, 2008; Fernandez, Le Roy, & Chiambaretto, 2018; Luo, Slotegraaf, & Pan, 2006). For example, hotel managers are careful to share information with platforms that is relevant to their business relationship (cooperation) and withhold any information that may reveal their intellectual property (competition).

Spatial separation relates to isolating cooperation and competition in different domains or locations to reconcile the two opposing forces (Joseph et al., 2020; Poole & de Ven, 1989). Firms may separate the two forces into different value chain functions (Le Roy & Czakon, 2016; Oinonen et al., 2018). For example, firms tend to cooperate in upstream activities (e.g., new product development) but compete in downstream activities (e.g., sales) (Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; Ritala & Tidström, 2014). Alternatively, the two forces may be divided based on product/service areas or markets (Fernandez et al., 2014). For example, two tourism destinations may collaborate to jointly organize an event but compete in other areas such as accommodation. In the dairy industry, firm A may supply yogurt to firm B if firm B does not produce yogurt (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000), but the two firms may compete in other related product areas such as milk and cheese. Further, cooperation and competition can be split based on geographical proximity and location (Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2018). For instance, a tourism destination may collaborate with a nearby destination but compete with a faraway destination; or two firms may collaborate in Asia but compete in Europe.

Temporal separation refers to dividing cooperation and competition over time, which creates a sequential pattern (e.g., first cooperation, later competition) (Damayanti et al., 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011). In other words, temporal separation is achieved by eliminating overlap in cooperation and competition (Lavie, Kang, & Rosenkopf, 2011; Wilhelm & Sydow, 2018). For instance, Navis and Glynn (2010) found that in the satellite radio market, firms first pursued cooperation to build the legitimacy of the new market, but then competed against each other to attract more customers once the market was developed. Further, tourism destinations may separate cooperation and competition according to seasonality; for example by cooperating during the winter (when customer demand is low) and competing during the summer (when customer demand is high). Research in this area has focused mostly on longer episodes of

cooperation and competition (e.g., de Rond & Bouchikhi, 2004; Navis & Glynn, 2010); little research has examined how temporal separation is possible when the time frames for cooperation and competition are short.

Overall, developing appropriate tension management approaches is vital to successfully handle concurrent cooperation and competition. These approaches consist of integration, or separation of cooperation and competition. However, studies have mostly focused on how coopetition occurs far from the customer between firms who belong to the same level of the value chain. In contrast, few studies have examined coopetition close to the customer between firms that are in separate parts of the value chain. Our study addresses this knowledge gap by focusing on hotel–platform relationships that are always in close customer proximity and occupy distinct positions in the value chain. To provide in-depth information on coopetition between hotels and platforms, we now describe our empirical work.

3.3 Research methods

We used a qualitative, grounded theory approach to discover how coopetition occurs between hotels and platforms (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Our choice of grounded theory was based on three distinct rationales. Grounded theory is the right method to use when a phenomenon is relatively under explored. In the context of this study, there is limited knowledge of (i) coopetition in platform environments and (ii) coopetition in close customer proximity. Next, grounded theory is a suitable approach when the research aim is to develop theory. This study aims to develop novel theoretical insights on the coopetition phenomenon. Finally, grounded theory is well equipped to examine an area of study that is inherently complex. Coopetition involves concurrent cooperation and competition and, thus, is a complex phenomenon. These justifications for using grounded theory are consistent with

those for studies in marketing management applying this method (e.g., Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehnl, 2017; Nenonen, Storbacka, & Windahl, 2019).

3.3.1 Sampling

Theoretical sampling underpinned our research method because our aim is to build theory (Mello & Flint, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical sampling is an ongoing procedure for recruiting informants to "maximize opportunities to develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143). We recruited informants based on their expertise on coopetition with platforms. In the beginning, we sampled employees who worked in the reservations departments of hotels. However, based on our ongoing findings, we sampled informants in other roles, including customer service, hotel operations, revenue management, marketing, and sales. Thus, our sampling approach was a continuous process; based on the evolving findings, we recruited a new profile of informants (Flint & Woodruff, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This ongoing sampling procedure was fundamental for developing fresh theoretical insights. It also helped us develop both depth and breadth of knowledge on coopetition. In practice, the data collection and data analysis stages were intertwined until theoretical saturation was attained (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017; Suddaby, 2006). In other words, there was no clear division between the data collection and analysis stages.

We achieved theoretical saturation after interviewing 46 informants, at which point no new respondents were sampled. We relied on two separate indicators to make an informed decision on theoretical saturation. First, we considered that further sampling of informants would result in redundant information; and second, we had developed comprehensive explanations for each of the identified themes (Flint et al., 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Overall, we recruited 41 respondents from 23 hotels for our study. These hotels worked with multiple platforms simultaneously. We also recruited five employees from two platform firms. These platform firms worked with our sampled hotels. Although we investigate the hotels' perspective of coopetition, we sampled employees from platform firms to further enhance the credibility of our findings. Table 3.1 provides an overview of our respondents and the hotels/platform firms that participated in our study. As shown in Table 3.1, we attained high levels of diversity at both the respondent level (organizational hierarchy, role, job experience) and firm level (e.g., size, ownership structure). From the perspective of our research question, such diversity helped us capture both depth and breadth of information related to how hotels manage coopetition with platforms close to the customer interface. In Appendix A (Table 3.3), we provide a detailed list of our respondents.

3.3.2 Data collection

Consistent with grounded theory guidelines, we collected qualitative data in multiple waves (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). Data collection was conducted in New Zealand and ran for eight months from August 2018 to March 2019. Data collection involved primarily face-to-face interviews. The interviews began with broad questions; however, based on responses to those questions, we articulated specific questions to gather in-depth accounts of coopetition. In Appendix B, we share a sample of our interview questions. The length of the interviews ranged from 26 to 76 minutes, and averaged 45 minutes. The interviews were held in meeting rooms, offices, or cafes. We used an audio recorder to record the interviews, and the audio files were transcribed for the purpose of coding. We also gathered secondary documents (e.g., reports of the type of analytics information to which hotels have access on platforms). These documents provided background information on how the hotels worked with platforms.

Table 3.1

Sample characteristics

Sampling of respondents from hotels		
Organizational hierarchy	**# interviewees**	**# hotels**
Entry-level managers	9	
Mid-level managers	15	N/A
Directors, owners, general managers	17	
Role		
Reservations management, marketing, and sales	12	
Revenue management	8	N/A
Hotel operations, hotel customer service	21	
Job experience		
<10 years	20	
10–19 years	16	N/A
≥20 years	5	
Hotel size		
<100 rooms	15	9
100–199 rooms	8	5
≥200 rooms	18	9
Hotel ownership structure		
Independent hotel	10	6
Part of a group	31	17
Total	41	23

Sampling of respondents from platform firms		
Organizational hierarchy	**# interviewees**	**# platform firms**
Entry-level managers	2	N/A
Mid-level managers	3	
Role		
Marketing and sales	5	N/A
Job experience		
<5 years	3	N/A
5–10 years	2	
# platforms operated		
1	1	1
>1	4	1
Target geographic market		
Specific geographic markets	1	1
Global and specific markets	4	1
Total	5	2

3.3.3 Data analysis

To examine the interview transcripts and secondary documents, we applied open, axial,

and selective coding procedures recursively (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998). Open coding

generated the initial concepts, axial coding assembled those concepts into themes based on

their common properties, and selective coding synthesized the themes into higher-order coopetition dimensions. The constant comparison method was at the core of these three coding rounds (Kathy Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010). In other words, we compared the data from different participants, secondary documents, and the coopetition literature to develop common patterns. We used NVivo computer software to pursue data analysis efficiently.

To ensure rigor and transparency in our data analysis procedure, we utilized the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012) by creating a data structure (see Table 3.2). The data structure toolkit enables us to demonstrate how we first came up with concepts from the reflections of the informants, and subsequently assembled them into themes and dimensions of coopetition (Gehman et al., 2018).

3.3.4 Trustworthiness of the research

To ensure the trustworthiness of our inquiry, we satisfied four core criteria: credibility, generalizability, dependability, and conformability (Denk et al., 2012; Flint et al., 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McGinley et al., 2021; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). We assessed the credibility of findings via respondent check-in. In other words, the respondents were asked to offer their comments on our findings and conceptual framework. Further, three researchers were involved in the research process. We established generalizability through the use of theoretical sampling. The insights from this study are applicable for hotels pursuing coopetition with multiple platforms. To ensure dependability, we encouraged the respondents to share their thoughts and experiences covering both the past and present time. We regard our findings as dependable because of similarities across the respondents' reflections. The findings are also dependable because of the rigorous application of the constant comparison method to derive consistent patterns from the rich data. Finally, we

achieved conformability by gathering detailed descriptions from many respondents ($n = 46$) and sharing a summary of the findings with those respondents for feedback. These procedures ensured that the results reflect the respondents' perspectives and not the researchers' biases.

3.4 Findings

We find 31 concepts that coalesce to form 12 themes that synthesize into four dimensions of coopetition (see Table 3.2). These dimensions are optimization, integration, spatial separation, and temporal disintermediation. Optimization is a cooperation-dominant way to pursue coopetition. Integration and spatial separation relate to a balanced approach to enact simultaneous cooperation and competition. Temporal disintermediation focuses on a competition-dominant approach to conduct coopetition.

Figure 3.1 demonstrates our conceptual framework, illustrating how the coopetition approach varies depending on the level of tension. We offer definitions and quotes for the identified themes in Appendix C in Table 3.4. We next explain each coopetition approach in a more in-depth manner

3.4.1 Optimization

Optimization in this context is the ability of hotels to boost their ranking in search queries and establish an ideal room rate to increase sales in platform environments. Optimization is pursued under low levels of tension. The indicator of low tension is that hotels strongly rely on platforms and seek their support to attract more customers than other hotels in the market. In other words, the competitive aspects of the hotel–platform relationship are less salient during optimization activities. This is because competition is detrimental for optimization as it reduces hotel sales (e.g., through lower hotel visibility on Booking.com). Two themes relate to this dimension: optimizing visibility and optimizing price.

Figure 3.1

Conceptual framework
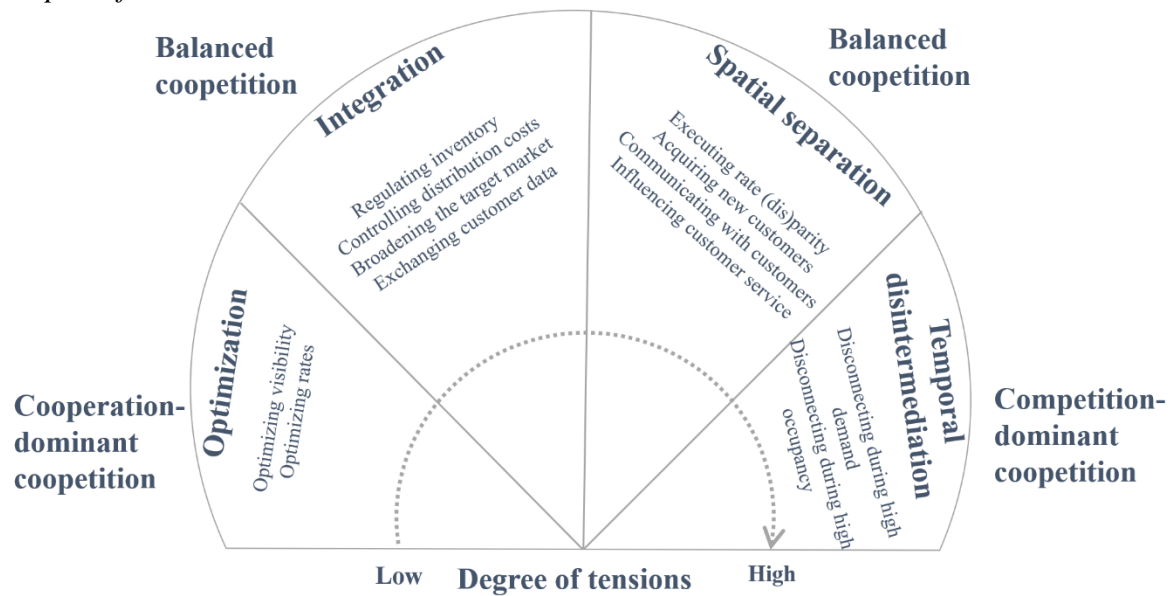
Regarding *optimizing visibility*, hotels cooperate with platforms to attract customer attention in platform contexts. Hotels work hard to receive positive reviews, ensure that their content (e.g., service details, pictures) is current and complete, reply to customer questions in a timely manner, and join promotional programs. These actions enhance hotels' ranking on platforms and improve the likelihood of customer conversion. Platform B offered insights into the crucial role of reviews for hotels to be prioritized in search results:

> *"To ensure our customer experience, hotels with review scores under 4 out of 5 cannot be chosen to be our [Platform B] first priority to recommend to our customers. But we will help and guide potential properties to increase their service quality based on the reviews." [ID: 46]*

Table 3.2

Data structure

Concepts	Themes	Dimensions
Receiving positive reviews.	*Optimizing visibility*	*Optimization*
Providing up-to-date and complete content information (e.g., pictures, service details).		
Replying to customer queries promptly.		
Participating in promotional programs.		
Developing rates based on rate information of strategic groups.	*Optimizing rates*	
Developing rates based on rate information of individual competitors.		
Regulating inventory based on market demand.	*Regulating inventory*	*Integration*
Regulating inventory based on occupancy levels.		
Regulating inventory to maintain the right balance.		
Developing key performance indicators (KPIs) to manage costs.	*Controlling distribution costs*	
Prioritizing direct sales over platform sales.		
Evaluating the returns of distributing via platforms.		
Targeting a portfolio of customer groups (e.g., business, leisure).	*Broadening the target market*	
Not relying too heavily on platforms or direct hotel channels.		
Accessing customer data (e.g., booking data).	*Exchanging customer data*	
Protecting customer data (e.g., customer likes and preferences).		
Adhering to rate parity in the platform space.	*Executing rate dis(parity)*	*Spatial separation*
Not adhering to rate parity in the hotel channel space.		
Cooperating in the platform space to attract new customers by connecting to a large customer base.	*Acquiring new customers*	
Competing in the hotel channel space to attract new customers (e.g., by engaging customers with loyalty programs and offering more attractive offers).		
Communicating with customers pre-stay in the platform space.	*Communicating with customers*	
Communicating with customers during the stay phase in the hotel space.		
Replying to online customer reviews post-stay in the platform space.		
Communicating with customers post-stay in the hotel channel space.		
Cooperating in the platform space to provide customer freedom to book on the platform of their choice.	*Influencing customer service*	
Cooperating in the platform space to alter customer bookings.		
Competing in the hotel space by providing personalized customer service.		
Disconnecting from platforms when there is a sporting event in the city.	*Disconnecting during high demand*	*Temporal disintermediation*
Disconnecting from platforms when there is a musical or cultural event in the city.		
Disconnecting from platforms when the forecasted occupancy levels are high.	*Disconnecting during high occupancy*	
Disconnecting from platforms when there are only a few rooms left to sell.		

For *optimizing rates*, hotels collaborate with platforms to learn about the rates of competing hotels. Platforms provide detailed rate information for hotels to develop an ideal rate, as explained by Hotel K:

> *"Every morning, we get an email where they [platforms] tell us that for the*
>
> *next week—these are our rates, but our competitors' average rate is this.*

They say my rates are slightly lower than the average rates of the competitor

hotels. So, I may want to increase my rate a little bit, or if my rates are too

high, then I want to decrease it a little bit." [ID: 22]

3.4.2 Integration

Integration, in the framework, relates to synthesizing cooperation and competition at the same place and time to attain coopetition balance. Integration is pursued at moderate tension levels. The indicator of moderate tension is when hotels rely on both platform sales (cooperation) and direct channel sales (competition) for optimal profits. Integration activities include regulating inventory, controlling distribution costs, broadening the target market, and exchanging customer information.

Regarding *regulating inventory*, hotels change the volume of rooms sold on platforms; that is, they either do not offer all their inventory (cooperation) or provide zero inventory (competition). Instead, they perform a balancing act and identify appropriate levels of inventory to be sold based on market demand and occupancy levels. This activity requires managers to maintain simultaneous cooperation and competition in their decision making. Hotel R performed this activity effectively:

"There are different strategies that the hotel can adopt based on the demand,

based on the supply, and based on the market. I strongly consider them

[platforms] as part of a revenue stream that definitely contributes to a

business but also as a competitor, because it's one of those things where you

have to maintain your inventory and be aware and mindful that you know, at

the end of the day there is a cost involved in it." [ID: 34]

In terms of *controlling distribution costs*, hotels pursue concurrent cooperation and competition to optimize the cost of working with platforms. In practice, hotels identify key

performance indicators (KPIs) to control expenses when dealing with platforms. These KPIs ensure that hotels do not allocate a high budget to sell via platforms (cooperation) or a low budget (competition), which may result in low occupancy levels. Further, hotels may prioritize direct sales (competition) over platform sales (cooperation) and assess returns of distributing via platforms. Such activities ensure that costs are kept in check to enhance profits. Hotel H described how they handled costs:

> *"Every room that you can sell through your own direct channel, you shouldn't sell it on Platform C. So, they [platforms] should only allow you to bring additional business, not anything of your own business and that's how you will benefit from them. When you start letting them [platforms] take over your own booking engine, that's when you lose money."* [ID: 15]

For *broadening the target market,* hotels attract a wide range of customer segments, such as leisure and business customers. Leisure customers predominantly book on platforms (e.g., Hotels.com), whereas business customers mainly book via direct channels (e.g., through a hotel sales team). Therefore, broadening the target market scope protects hotels from having to depend solely on platform sales (cooperation with platforms) or direct channel sales (competition with platforms). Instead, hotels pursue simultaneous cooperation and competition by targeting multiple customer groups to generate revenue.

In terms of *exchanging customer data*, hotels access and protect customer data from platforms. To be precise, hotels receive customer booking data (cooperation) from platforms but do not share customer likes and preferences (competition). To support this process of simultaneous cooperation and competition, hotels use IT systems to manage customer data from one central place.

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3.4.3 Spatial separation

Hotels use three distinct spaces to divide cooperation and competition, and balance the two forces: hotel direct channels (e.g., website, mobile application), the physical hotel, and the platform interface. Hotels use spatial separation under moderately high levels of tension. A key indicator of moderately high tension levels is that hotels find it impossible to pursue simultaneous cooperation and competition in the same place. Instead, hotels need to isolate the two forces in different areas to manage tension. We find four themes that explain how hotels achieve spatial separation: executing rate (dis)parity, acquiring new customers, communicating with customers, and influencing customer service.

When *executing rate dis(parity)*, hotels cooperate in one location (platform interfaces) as they follow rate parity but compete in another location (direct channels) by not observing rate parity. As a result, hotels provide similar rates on all platforms but decide to offer a lower rate via direct channels. Hotel G shared their view on this:

> *"You need to have the strategy wherein you are priced lower than them [platforms] just because you want more people to book through your own website. And I had heard this from one of the account managers about a study that 37% of people will go to the hotel's website and see if they can find a cheaper room." [ID: 12]*

Regarding *acquiring new customers*, hotels separate cooperation and competition in two spaces: the platform interface and direct channels. Cooperation occurs on the platform interface as hotels connect with a vast number of customers across the globe, which for most hotels is impossible without the support of platforms. Conversely, competition occurs via direct channels (e.g., hotel websites), as hotels involve customers in loyalty programs and provide them with additional incentives to book direct (e.g., free internet or complimentary breakfast).

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For *communicating with customers*, hotels use different spaces during the customer journey. They use the platform space at the pre-stay stage to answer customer questions or send pre-arrival messages, therefore collaborating with platforms. However, during the stay phase, staff members in the hotel space interact with customers face to face and suggest to them the value of booking direct, hence competing with platforms. Finally, post-stay, hotels use the platform space to reply to customer reviews (cooperation) and use direct channel spaces such as telephones and emails to entice customers to make a reservation directly with them for their next trip (competition). Hotel T suggested how in the stay phase, they convinced customers to book direct next time:

> *"So basically, when the guest checks in, if they have booked through them [platforms], we ask them, "why are you here? Have you booked yourself, or did someone else book for you? Do you come often? Are you coming next time? Here is a card—call us next time, book direct, we will give you a discount." We get them to start booking with us directly." [ID: 36]*

When *influencing customer service*, hotels cooperate with platforms in the platform space but compete in the hotel space to shape the customer experience. Specifically, in the platform space, hotels work with multiple platforms—a practice commonly known as multihoming—so that customers have the freedom to make a reservation on the platform of their choice. Hotels also collaborate with platforms to support customers when they want to make changes to their reservations. However, hotels compete with platforms in the hotel space by offering personalized service, which pleases customers and motivates them to book directly next time.

3.4.4 Temporal disintermediation

Temporal disintermediation refers to hotels disconnecting from platforms and deciding not to sell room inventory via them for a limited time. Instead, hotels focus more on direct channel sales at those times. Therefore, temporal disintermediation is a competition-dominant approach to coopetition. Despite this temporary stop in sales on platforms at an operational level (competition), hotels continue to have a business relationship with platforms at a strategic level (cooperation). The operational and strategic aspects of temporal disintermediation are not separated between departments or spaces. Rather, the same department (revenue management) conducts this activity. Further, temporal disintermediation is different from temporal separation. In the former, both cooperation and competition exist at the same time, albeit with competition being the dominant force; whereas, in the latter case, the two forces do not exist at the same time but are separated over time (Lavie et al., 2011; Wilhelm & Sydow, 2018).

Temporal disintermediation occurs under high levels of tension. Indicators of high tension are when market demand and hotel occupancy levels are high (e.g., when a sport or cultural event occurs in the city). Under such circumstances, hotels focus temporarily on generating direct sales only, avoiding the high commissions involved in selling their inventory via platforms. Two themes relate to temporal disintermediation: *disconnecting during high demand* and *disconnecting during high occupancy*. Hotel W reflected on this activity:

> *"On a particular day, week, or month, if we know that all our bookings are*
> *going to come through our direct channels, we will close them [platforms].*
> *So, you've also got to have that relationship to be able to do that as well."*
> *[ID: 41]*

3.5 Discussion

Research on coopetition has focused mainly on business activities that occur far from the customer and between firms in similar positions in the value chain (e.g., suppliers). As a result, empirical insight into coopetition between firms close to the customer at different value chain levels remains scant. Therefore, our study investigated how hotels and platforms—who are in different value chain positions—pursue coopetition in close customer proximity. Using grounded theory, we identified four distinct coopetition approaches: optimization, integration, spatial separation, and temporal disintermediation. Optimization and temporal disintermediation focus on cooperation- and competition-dominant approaches to coopetition, respectively, whereas integration and spatial separation emphasize both cooperation and competition in a balanced way, but with one key difference: the former occurs in the same place, while the latter divides the two forces between different areas. We developed a novel conceptual framework illustrating differences in coopetition approaches depending on the degree of tension. Based on our findings, we now describe the theoretical and practical implications of our work, explain the research limitations, and suggest avenues for future empirical work.

3.5.1 Theoretical implications

Our research contributes to the coopetition literature in five ways. First, although the literature indicates that coopetition is competition focused close to the customer (Basterretxea et al., 2019; Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2018; Tidström, 2009; Walley, 2007), our findings show that this is not always the case. We find that coopetition patterns range between cooperation- and competition-dominant approaches depending on the degree of tension.

Under low levels of tension, hotels collaborate with platforms and reduce competition to optimize their visibility in platform contexts and develop ideal rate (price) plans. In practice, hotels attain a strategic fit by aligning their activities with the platform environment. For example, hotels learn the importance of maintaining high-quality content (e.g., high-resolution pictures) and high review scores to be prioritized in search results. However, when tensions become moderate, hotels manage coopetition by synthesizing the forces of cooperation and competition at the same place and time (Das & Teng, 2000b; Gernsheimer et al., 2021; Lado et al., 1997). In practice, managers use sense-making by analyzing market insights to make decisions that are both cooperative and competitive (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016b, 2016a; Pattinson et al., 2018). For example, a revenue manager at a large hotel (that has 500 rooms) decides whether to sell 350, 319, or 200 room inventories on platforms depending on market demand data.

Moreover, when tensions become moderately strong, it becomes impossible to manage cooperation and competition in the same place. As a result, hotels separate the two forces into different spaces (platforms, physical hotel, direct channels). Hotels develop mastery of the spatial environment by designing appropriate actions for each space so that the benefit of working with all spaces is greater than working with one space alone. For example, hotels that use both platforms and direct channels to acquire new customers perform better than those that focus on either platforms or direct channels. However, when tensions become very high, hotels decide to disintermediate from platforms temporarily, although they continue to have a business relationship with them. In practice, hotels develop an opt-in/opt-out policy that enables them to become agile and temporarily halt sales on platforms when market demand and occupancy levels are high. We find temporal disintermediation to be different from temporal separation. In the case of temporal disintermediation, competition is the dominant force (at the operational level) but cooperation exists (at the strategic level) at the same time.

However, with temporal separation, cooperation and competition do not take place simultaneously (Damayanti et al., 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Second, the literature identifies locations at which cooperation and competition can be separated (Joseph et al., 2020; Poole & de Ven, 1989). These locations are related to different value chain functions, product areas, and geographical regions (Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Fernandez et al., 2014; Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016; Oinonen et al., 2018; Ritala & Tidström, 2014). We identify additional spaces to isolate cooperation and competition: platforms, physical hotel, and direct channels. These spaces are more relevant when coopetition is close to the customer and are not applicable for coopetition far from the customer. In fact, the identified spaces relate to channels to serve customers, which suggests that the field of channel management offers important insight to the coopetition literature (e.g., Ailawadi, 2021; Cui et al., 2021).

Third, the literature suggests the importance of temporal separation to divide cooperation and competition in different time frames (Damayanti et al., 2017; Lavie et al., 2011; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Wilhelm & Sydow, 2018). However, we argue that temporal separation is possible mostly when the episodes of cooperation and competition are of a longer duration. For example, such separation is relevant when firms first cooperate to develop a new market and later compete to attract more customers (Navis & Glynn, 2010). However, in the context of this research, brief episodes of cooperation and competition last for only weeks, days, or even hours. Under such circumstances, temporal separation is not sufficient to manage tensions. Instead, hotels must separate cooperation and competition into different spaces: platforms, physical hotels, and direct channels. For example, hotels communicate with customers about their policies three days before arrival using the chat function on platforms (cooperation); motivate customers to book direct when they are staying at the hotel (competition); reply to reviews on platforms within a few hours after the guest has left a review

(cooperation); and send emails directly to guests one month after check out to offer incentives to book on the hotel website (competition). Hence, temporal separation of cooperation and competition is impossible when hotels work with platforms. Instead, spatial separation plays a dominant role in dividing the two forces.

Fourth, the literature suggests that to manage high tension, firms can either integrate cooperation and competition in the same time and place, or separate the two forces over time and in different places (Hahn et al., 2015; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018; Lundgren-Henriksson & Tidström, 2021). However, our findings show that even though these are relevant activities under moderate (integration) and moderately high (separation) degrees of tension, they are not appropriate under very high tension levels. Instead, when tensions escalate to a high level, hotels use the temporary tactic of not selling their inventory on platforms for a limited time (temporal disintermediation), even though they have an ongoing relationship with platforms at the strategic level. The tactical and strategic aspects of temporal disintermediation are not separated between departments or spaces. Rather, the same department (revenue management) pursues this activity. Therefore, this research has mainly focused on relational coopetition (Gnyawali et al., 2016; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016; Raza-ullah, 2021) and explored how hotels manage their ongoing partnership with platforms at different degrees of tension. We have not focused on strategic coopetition as we did not examine hotel decisions about when, with which partners, and for how long to enter into coopetition (Fernandez et al., 2021; Kraus et al., 2018).

Finally, the literature provides information on organizational hierarchy levels that can better handle separation or integration of cooperation and competition (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Das & Kumar, 2010). However, there is limited insight regarding whether the ability to utilize specific coopetition approaches depends on firm size. Our analysis shows that hotels of all sizes can optimize visibility and price in platform environments. This is because platform firms inform all hotels about ways to improve their visibility. All hotels also have

access to rate information on platforms to decide on better rates. Moreover, all hotels, irrespective of their size, are capable of separating cooperation and competition in different locations because the focus is on only cooperation in the platform space and only competition in the physical hotel and direct channel space.

However, larger hotels are more capable of integrating cooperation and competition because they have revenue management teams and invest in cutting-edge IT technology to synthesize cooperation and competition effectively. For example, revenue departments adjust inventory levels and control costs to enhance profits. Additionally, larger hotels typically decide to stop working with platforms temporarily when market demand is high because they have a vast and loyal customer base and heavily promote through direct channels to sustain their business if they decide to stop working with some platforms for a short time.

3.5.2 Practical implications

We offer valuable practical insights for hotels and platform firms. First, we encourage hotels to implement a range of coopetition approaches to manage their relationships with platforms. Specifically, hotels must (i) attain a strategic fit to achieve a high ranking on platforms and optimize rates, (ii) become an expert in managing distinct spaces (platforms, direct channels, physical hotel) to leverage the benefits of cooperation and competition (iii), apply sense-making to integrate cooperation and competition during decision making, and (iv) create an opt-in/opt-out tactic to remain flexible and temporarily stop selling on platforms when they deem it necessary. Second, we observed that some hotels, especially smaller ones, are less capable of synthesizing cooperation and competition to enhance profits. We recommend that these hotels focus on upskilling their employees through training and development to optimally manage inventory, costs, and customer portfolios.

Third, we encourage platform firms to develop plans to reduce the number of hotels temporarily disintermediating from them. The primary reason for temporal disintermediation is that hotels can attain high occupancy levels without selling via platforms when market demand is high. At these times, we encourage platform firms to communicate with hotels about billboard effects, which occur when customers first gather information about prospective hotels on the platforms and later go to the hotel website and make a booking (Anderson, 2009). Therefore, if hotels sell a minimum level of inventory on platforms during high-demand periods, they will benefit from billboard effects, while platform firms will also generate sales and avoid temporal disintermediation.

3.5.3 Limitations and future research avenues

Our study has some limitations that have wider implications for future research on coopetition. Our findings are specific to the relationship between hotels and platforms (e.g., Hotels.com, Trip.com). Therefore, future research may explore coopetition approaches in close customer proximity between hotels and their partners that are not platforms. In particular, researchers may explore whether any differences in coopetition approaches exist when hotels work with partners that are platforms (e.g., Expedia.com) and those that are not (e.g., traditional travel agents, wholesalers).

Further, our research offers insights into how the ability to pursue coopetition differs depending on hotel size. We also point out how coopetition approaches change based on tension levels. Future research may take the field forward and explore other contextual factors influencing coopetition. For instance, we encourage researchers to conduct longitudinal studies and investigate whether and how the spread of the novel coronavirus is changing coopetition patterns between hotels and platforms over time.

3.6 Appendices

3.6.1 Appendix A: List of respondents

Table 3.3

Respondent details

Respondent ID	Hotel ID	Participant job title
1	A	Hotel director
2	A	Director of sales and marketing
3	B	Assistant front office manager
4	B	Reservations sales agent
5	C	Reservations and yield manager
6	D	Hotel manager
7	E	Hotel manager
8	E	National reservations and yield manager
9	F	Front office supervisor
10	F	Operations manager
11	F	Assistant manager
12	G	Reservations manager
13	G	Senior duty manager
14	H	Contact center supervisor
15	H	Group revenue director
16	H	Director of revenue management
17	I	General manager
18	J	General manager
19	J	Assistant manager
20	J	Head of strategy and business development
21	K	Reservations agent
22	K	Front office manager
23	L	Hotel manager
24	L	Franchise director
25	M	Assistant revenue manager
26	M	Reservations manager
27	N	Reservations sales agent
28	O	Channel manager
29	P	General manager
30	Q	Hotel manager
31	Q	Hotel manager
32	Q	Reservations manager
33	Q	Revenue manager
34	R	Director of revenue management
35	S	General and area manager
36	T	Hotel manager
37	U	Director of revenue management
38	U	E-commerce and digital manager
39	V	General manager
40	W	Director of revenue, Auckland region
41	W	Director of revenue, New Zealand, Fiji, and French Polynesia

Respondent ID	Platform firm ID	Participant job title
42	A	Area manager
43	A	Market manager
44	A	Assistant market manager

| 45 | A | Account manager |
| 46 | B | Market executive |

3.6.2 Appendix B: Sample interview questions

Broad questions:

- "Can you explain how Hotel X works with various booking platforms? What are the key activities? What resources are required?"
- "What are the main benefits and challenges of working with platforms?"

Specific questions:

- "You mentioned the importance of hotel ranking on these platforms. How does Hotel X maintain a good ranking?"
- "You mentioned that you have access to business analytics data. How and in what ways do you use such data?"
- "You stated the importance of maintaining a balance in inventory levels. How do you decide on the right inventory levels?"
- "You touched upon the importance of getting direct bookings. What does Hotel X do to receive direct bookings?"
- "What are some of the other ways hotels compete with these booking platforms?"
- "You mentioned the rate parity clause. How does the rate parity clause affect your decision making?"
- "You stated that sometimes you stop selling on these platforms. When and why do you make this decision?"

Final question:

- "Are there any other ways Hotel X deals with various booking platforms that we have not touched on?"

3.6.3 Appendix C: Definitions and quotes

Table 3.4

Definitions and quotes of coopetition dimensions and themes

Dimension	Themes	Quotes
Optimization is the ability to enhance hotel visibility in platform environments and develop ideal room rates.	**Optimizing visibility** is the ability of hotels to attract customer attention to platforms by prioritizing their position in search results.	*"The most important thing is when your customers are happy, your review scores are getting better and better. The platform algorithms work in a way that they push your rankings higher."* [ID: 12]
	Optimizing rates is the ability to come up with ideal rates (price) on platforms based on rate information reports provided by platforms.	*"The good thing about these analytics on Platform A is that I can set up competitive sets. For example, in this city, I feel that these 10 hotels are my competitors. I can actually see their prices, or at least the minimum price in the city, or the maximum price. So that helps me decide what I should do for my pricing."* [ID: 1]
Integration is the ability to apply sense-making during decision making to integrate cooperation and competition at the same time and place.	**Regulating inventory** relates to changing the volume of rooms made available on platforms to enhance profits.	*"We manage inventory at our end to maximize revenues. For example, when groups of guests are coming tomorrow, our occupancy levels are high. So, when I am still selling on these platforms for tomorrow, I start putting some restrictions where I am only accepting multiple night bookings. So that I can get better revenue out of those bookings, not just for one night."* [ID: 33]
	Controlling distribution costs relates to keeping costs in check when selling inventory via platforms.	*"So it almost comes down to, can you actually control them [platforms], and if you can, how far can you control them? I know some hotel companies that I have worked with have actually had KPIs in place to reduce the business [via platforms] by so much and replace that with the direct business that you get from your own website."* [ID: 40]
	Broadening the target market is the ability to focus on multiple customer segments to generate sales.	*"Part of our marketing strategy is to contact the corporates and schools. We let them know two years in advance what our rates are—just to maintain the relationship. So we do have long-term customers, and that is based on their contracts with us. We also target tourists and travelers."* [ID: 13]

Dimension	Themes	Quotes
	Exchanging customer data relates to accessing and protecting customer data from platforms.	*"The* [customer] *booking details from them automatically drop into our system."* [ID: 28] *"We maintain a profile of our customers, which is secured in our property management system."* [ID: 25]
Spatial separation is the ability to develop mastery in managing different spaces (platforms, direct channels, and physical hotels) and divide cooperation and competition in separate areas.	**Executing rate (dis)parity** refers to following rate parity in the platform space but not the direct channel space.	*"Usually we push one rate out to all platforms—this is called rate parity."* [ID: 36] *"Our channel is always 10, 5 dollars less, and we advertise that."* [ID: 6]
	Acquiring new customers is the ability to cooperate with platforms in the platform space but compete with them in the direct channel space to entice new customers.	*"They [platforms] are a bridge connecting you to the larger audiences that you may not have access to."* [ID: 34] *"Sometimes we will provide a better deal on our website. We will say, 'we will give you a discounted rate plus breakfast for one dollar.' So that's the benefit in itself. If you book direct, we'll give you breakfast at one dollar rather than paying 37 dollars."* [ID: 26]
	Communicating with customers is the ability to cooperate with platforms in the platform space but compete with them in the hotel and direct channel space through customer communication.	*"Platform A or Platform C, they have got a message section. So whenever a guest has some questions about the hotel, they send a message on their website to us. So we can directly communicate with the guest."* [ID: 14] *"It is really at the time of check-in, where you really engage and start speed dating. Selling your property—the benefit and the features—and telling them* [customers] *to next time book on your app, your website, by phone, or email."* [ID: 24]

Dimension	Themes	Quotes
	Influencing customer service refers to cooperating with platforms in the platform space but competing with them in the hotel space to shape the customer experience.	*"I think it's important that people have the freedom to book. The customer feels that they have more control in terms of seeking out the best deal even though it's the same property appearing on various booking websites. The customer feels in control, so that's obviously very helpful in terms of us serving our customers."* [ID: 11] *"We are very much competing with them, and I think the more direct bookings we can make—great! The best part about that, I suppose, is we are actually able to build that relationship directly with the guests. From a guest experience perspective, we know that the guest likes this particular room type or they have, you know, a flat white in the morning or they like their newspaper delivered at 6 am or whatever it may be; we try to cater to the guests' needs. So, that is what we are trying to do."* [ID: 35]
Temporal disintermediation is the ability to develop an opt-in/opt-out policy to remain agile and stop sales on platforms for a short time.	**Disconnecting during high demand** occurs when hotels stop selling their inventory on platforms when market demand is high (e.g., when there is a sporting event in the city). **Disconnecting during high occupancy** occurs when hotels stop selling their inventory on platforms when only a few rooms remain.	*"Some hotels prefer to close them [platforms] on big nights, like Valentine's Day, to avoid the commissions. During any big event nights, we can give them blackout dates. These are the dates that guests cannot book on them [platforms]. So, we block them out." [ID: 29]* *"We have the ability to stop sales [on platforms] when we want. If we have the last five rooms to sell, we know we can sell them directly, you know."* [ID: 31]

Chapter 4. From channel integration to platform integration: Capabilities required in hospitality

4.1 Introduction

Channel integration has gained considerable traction among researchers and practitioners (Beck & Rygl, 2015; Hajdas, Radomska, & Silva, 2020; Shi, Wang, Chen, & Zhang, 2020; Sun, Yang, Shen, & Wang, 2020; Trenz et al., 2020). Channel integration is defined as the ability of a firm to offer a harmonious service experience across multiple channels (Lee et al., 2019; Sousa & Voss, 2006). Some studies have focused on establishing its dimensions and articulating the challenges of attaining high levels of channel integration (e.g., Banerjee, 2014; Hossain et al., 2020). Others have explored the customer perceptions of channel integration and their subsequent personal behaviors (e.g., Emrich et al., 2015; Herhausen et al., 2015). Yet others have examined the influence of channel integration on firm performance (e.g., Cao & Li, 2015; Oh et al., 2012). These streams of empirical work on channel integration have developed valuable insights and deepened our understanding of managing multiple channels in harmony.

However, prior work on channel integration has primarily focused on direct or indirect channels, but not on platforms (e.g., Bendoly et al., 2005; Gallino & Moreno, 2014). Platforms are website or mobile-based interfaces that mediate interactions between a network of firms and customers, which may not have been possible otherwise (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). Platforms have had dramatic impacts in some industries, including taxi services (Uber), secondhand goods (eBay), and informal accommodation (AirBnB). In the hospitality industry, platforms such as Trivago.com, Booking.com, and Hotels.com have become dominant, generating more than 50% of all hotel bookings (Rossini, 2015) and strongly disrupting the usage patterns of channels (Verhoef et al., 2015). These

hospitality platforms hold high bargaining power and charge high commissions of approximately 25%, which can significantly affect hotel profitability (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019). Thus, even though these platforms enable hotels to access a vast customer network, they need to be handled strategically for hotels to ensure healthy profits. As a result, research is required to explore the specialized platform integration capabilities that hotels can apply to manage these novel and important relationships for optimal business outcomes.

In addition to this managerial challenge, there remain gaps in the theoretical approaches to channel integration. Because prior work on channel integration mostly focused on channels, it has not assessed whether the same capabilities for channel integration also apply, and suffice, when hotels work with and across platforms. However, there is accumulating evidence suggesting there are significant differences between channels and platforms (Constantinides et al., 2018; Rolland et al., 2018). For example, firms managing channels strive to achieve economies of scale, whereas platforms focus on increasing network effects by expanding the number of hotels and customers participating on the platform so that both parties benefit from a larger marketplace. Hence, it is plausible that the channel integration capabilities required to succeed in managing channels are not sufficient when working with and across platforms. Furthermore, prior research on channel integration has mainly emphasized the customer perspective, i.e., customers' experiences of integrated online and offline channels (e.g., Goraya et al., 2020; Patten, Ozuem, Howell, & Lancaster, 2020). However, although some studies have considered the firm perspective, i.e., firm practices and resource investments (e.g., Cao & Li, 2018; Tagashira & Minami, 2019), there is a limited understanding of the capabilities firms need for platform integration.

Based on this background, we develop the following research questions: *What are the capabilities required for platform integration? How are platform integration capabilities*

similar to and different from channel integration capabilities? To address our research questions, we used grounded theory principles (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998). We focused on the hospitality industry, comprising of both global and local brands. Our sample included 23 hotels and two platform firms, yielding 44 interviews. Drawing on the relational view of resource based theory (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Dyer et al., 2018), we specifically explored hotel capabilities, defined as activities to deploy resources for optimal business performance (Kozlenkova et al., 2014; Makadok, 2001).

Although many service industries have been disrupted by platforms, including car rentals (Rentalcars.com), airlines (Skyscanner.com), and food service (Opentable.com, Foodpanda.com), we specifically chose the hotel industry (Priceline.com, Expedia.com and others) for two reasons. First, the hotel industry is one of the earliest sectors to be introduced to platforms, and second, it is one of the industries most strongly disrupted by platforms. Platform integration capabilities are now highly developed in this industry, providing a rich context for gathering deep insights into the phenomena.

Our findings have led us to define platform integration as the ability to enact coordinating and learning capabilities to foster resource alignment with and across platforms. Our analysis distills two core categories of platform integration capabilities: coordinating and learning. Coordinating capabilities refer to orchestrating activities in an effective and efficient manner to foster resource alignment with and across platforms. Learning capabilities refer to activities for building a new knowledge base, to more effectively develop coordinating capabilities.

This research builds on the existing channel integration literature by suggesting that platform integration requires a different understanding of capabilities than those needed for channel integration. In particular, we show that for platform integration: (i) although some

previously known channel integration capabilities need to be applied to achieve similar objectives, some are applied for different objectives, (ii) the scope of some previously known channel integration capabilities need to be expanded to achieve a wider array of objectives, and (iii) some additional capabilities, including the new category of learning capabilities, need to be employed to achieve new objectives. This research reveals that the channel integration practices are insufficient to deal with the challenge of integrating with and across platforms. Thus, our findings offer clearer insights into the capabilities needed for platform integration in ways that can be useful both for future research and for managers in the hospitality sector.

We organize this paper as follows: First, the theoretical foundation presents a literature review on the capabilities for channel integration, articulates the properties of channels and platforms, and justifies why the understanding of capabilities needs to expand from channel integration to platform integration. Second, our research method is set out, including our sampling, data collection and data analysis methods. Third, the findings illustrate our conceptual framework and offer a detailed account of the capabilities for platform integration. Fourth, in the discussion, we compare our findings on platform integration against the literature insights on channel integration and platform properties. Finally, we set out our theoretical and managerial contributions and offer directions for future research.

4.2 Theoretical foundation

4.2.1 Channel integration and related capabilities

To explore the similarities and differences between platform integration and channel integration, we first review the capabilities of channel integration. Channels are a means through which firms offer products or services to customers (Kozlenkova et al., 2015; Mehta et al., 2002). For instance, banks use physical, online and mobile channels to address the customers' banking needs. Channel integration is defined as the ability of a firm to offer a

harmonious service experience across multiple channels (Lee et al., 2019; Sousa & Voss, 2006). It highlights the importance of designing and operating multiple channels as one single unit, rather than separately, to provide a seamless service experience to customers (Banerjee, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2015). For example, movie theaters sell tickets online and offline and manage the seating availability of different shows in real time to optimize sales and avoid overbooking. Thus, channel integration holds great potential to satisfy customers and enable firms to achieve competitive advantage (Herhausen et al., 2015; Oh et al., 2012; Sousa & Voss, 2006).

Based on extant literature, we summarize the channel integration capabilities, namely integrated: (i) promotions information, (ii) product and pricing information, (iii) transaction information, (iv) information access, (v) order fulfillment, (vi) customer service, and (vii) security and privacy (Bendoly et al., 2005; Gallino & Moreno, 2014; Hossain et al., 2020; Oh & Teo, 2010; Zhang et al., 2018). We now discuss these seven capabilities.

Integrated promotions information includes the advertising and marketing activities used to inform customers of the available channels and familiarize them with the service features of each channel (Banerjee, 2014; Seck & Philippe, 2013). For example, retailers educate customers about the benefits and features of shopping at their online or mobile stores. Such practices encourage customers to use different channels and turn them into multichannel users (Berman & Thelen, 2004) who are more valuable and profitable than single-channel users (Montaguti, Neslin, & Valentini, 2016; Neslin & Shankar, 2009). Furthermore, integrated promotions information involves using similar brand elements across channels to project a consistent brand image (Carlson, O'Cass, & Ahrholdt, 2015; Neslin & Shankar, 2009). Many retailers use consistent visual elements such as logos, symbols, slogans, and color palettes across their online and physical channels to foster a uniform brand image that leads to stronger

purchase intentions (Badrinarayanan, Becerra, Kim, & Madhavaram, 2012; Emrich & Verhoef, 2015; Hansen & Sia, 2015).

Integrated product and pricing information is the deployment of uniform product and pricing information across all channels (Oh et al., 2012; Shen et al., 2018). It ensures that customers do not receive conflicting information that may confuse and frustrate them (Payne & Frow, 2004; Rangaswamy & Van Bruggen, 2005). For instance, when firms share pricing information that is inconsistent across different channels, customers perceive the pricing to be unfair (Choi & Mattila, 2009; Vogel & Paul, 2015). Therefore, displaying consistent product and pricing information across all channels is key for satisfying customers.

Integrated transaction information is the synthesis of customer transaction information from all channels (Cassab & MacLachlan, 2009; Ganesh, 2004; Von Briel, 2018). Firms employ IT systems to pull and integrate transaction data to get a single, all-inclusive view of each customer (Payne & Frow, 2005; Zhang et al., 2010). For example, by using loyalty cards, retailers can track and synthesize customers' online and offline purchases over time and send personalized offers. This form of integrated transaction information enables firms to personalize customer service in any future interactions (Hossain et al., 2019). However, firms need to tackle the barriers to effective data integration, such as inefficient mechanisms for collecting and sharing data and the lack of centralized data storage systems (Neslin et al., 2006; Sousa & Voss, 2006).

Integrated information access refers to the ability to supply consistent real time inventory information on all channels from one centralized place (Gallino & Moreno, 2014; Wollenburg, Holzapfel, Hübner, & Kuhn, 2018). For instance, hotels may display real time room availability information on their online and mobile channels. Such practices prevent

fulfillment failures (e.g., overbooking a particular room) and reduce customer frustration, and thus, are crucial for satisfying customers (Emrich et al., 2015; J. Wu & Chang, 2016).

Integrated order fulfillment is the ability to offer customers multiple channel options for gathering information, accessing service, or making a purchase (Lee & Kim, 2010; Shen et al., 2018). It is the capacity to manage channels not only in a parallel mode but also in a complementary, supportive manner for order fulfillment (Berger et al., 2002; Sousa & Voss, 2006). For example, retailers may provide customers the option to buy online and pick up in-store (Gao & Su, 2017). Empirical findings suggest that integrated order fulfillment gives customers different choices to fulfill their needs through the channel they prefer and are comfortable with, which in turn fosters service convenience and flexibility (Cao & Li, 2018; J. Wu & Chang, 2016). To achieve this integration, firms need to ensure that the service levels across channels are reliable, efficient, and free from technical problems (Akter, Wamba, & D'Ambra, 2019; Hossain et al., 2020). However, firms also need to be vigilant, as not all channels are appropriate for all service types (Banerjee, 2014). For instance, call centers may not be suitable for firms selling customer relationship management (CRM) software as it is not possible to demonstrate the features of the software over the phone.

Integrated customer service is the ability to provide after-sales support through the channel customers are most comfortable with, for purchases made through any channel to satisfy customers in post-purchase phases (Li et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). For example, online and mobile channels may have live chat functionalities to offer after-sales assistance (Oh et al., 2012) and resolve any service related concerns through service recovery (Hossain et al., 2019). Empirical work shows that such cross-channel service provisions enhance customer perceived value (Oh & Teo, 2010).

Integrated security and privacy is the ability to protect customers from the dangers of fraud and the misuse of their personal information on all channels (Hossain et al., 2020; Montoya-Weiss, Voss, & Grewal, 2003; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005). For instance, hotels, retailers, and banks adhere to industry data security standards to protect customers' payment card details regardless of the channel they utilize to pay. Assurance of security and privacy provides customers with the confidence to use any of a firm's multiple channels, as they feel protected from financial and personal risks (Hossain et al., 2019).

4.2.2 Properties of channels and platforms in hospitality

The current literature offers in-depth insights into channel integration capabilities. But because there is limited research into how platform integration capabilities are similar to and different from channel integration capabilities, it is necessary to explore the properties of channels and platforms. Channels are a means through which firms offer products or services to customers (Kozlenkova et al., 2015; Mehta et al., 2002) whereas platforms are interfaces that mediate interactions between a network of firms and customers, which may not have been possible otherwise (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). Platforms are multi-sided in nature (Loux et al., 2020), as they connect customers with airlines, car rental companies, hotels, and other related services. Here we use the term two-sided platforms (Landsman & Stremersch, 2011; Muzellec, Ronteau, & Lambkin, 2015) to highlight how these platforms facilitate interactions between hotels and customers.

To illustrate the properties of channels and platforms, we contrast the ways hotels employ channels and platforms. Hotels often use direct channels (such as their own websites), indirect channels (traditional travel agencies), and platforms (Expedia.com) at the same time. We first detail the factors that can be compared across channels (both direct and indirect) and platforms, and subsequently explain the unique properties of platforms.

4.2.2.1 Comparing channels and platforms

There are four key factors that we use to compare channels and platforms: (i) stakeholder interaction (ii) degree of control (iii) degree of information asymmetry and (iv) matchmaking. These are summarized in Table 4.1 below. **Stakeholder interaction** explains with whom the hotels interact. Hotels may employ direct channels to directly interact with customers throughout the customer journey, and so, the stakeholder interaction is solely with customers (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Van Bruggen, Antia, Jap, Reinartz, & Pallas, 2010). For instance, during the pre-stay phase, hotels can use their own website to interact with customers directly. In the stay phase, hotels provide the core service, where direct customer interactions continue. Post-stay, hotels directly communicate with customers, send out membership schemes, and offer promotions.

In a different mode, hotels can employ indirect channels to interact with marketing intermediaries such as traditional travel agents (Nicolau, 2013; Vinhas & Anderson, 2005) with no direct interactions or transactions with customers. Instead, hotels supply room inventory, pricing, and other information to the marketing intermediaries, who then add value and resell the room inventory to customers. Therefore, in these indirect channels, the stakeholder interactions are with the marketing intermediaries and not the customers. However, hotels work with platforms to interact with both platform firms and customers. Hotels interact with platform firms to process payments, solve problems related to fraud bookings, or learn about market trends. Hotels also interact with customers via platforms, and these interactions are *partly* hotel driven. For example, hotels have the option of communicating directly with customers via platforms by sending pre-arrival messages pre-stay, responding to real time customer feedback in the stay phase, and replying to online customer reviews post-stay. All these interactions go via the platform, but without input from the platform firm. At other times, it is predominantly the platform firms that interact with customers. For instance, Hotels.com curates the

appropriate hotels that match individual customer needs based on a combination of factors important for each customer, such as location and price (Parker et al., 2016).

Degree of control relates to how much control the hotels have over the channel (Anand & Stern, 1985; Cespedes, 1988) or platform activities. The degree of control hotels have over the direct channel activities is high because hotels themselves design and operate these channels. In contrast, hotels have partial control over indirect channel activities even though marketing intermediaries design and operate these channels. For instance, because hotels sign up to global distribution systems to connect to traditional travel agents, they can control their inventory and prices. Similarly, hotels have partial control over platform activities even though platform firms design and operate these platforms (Laczko, Hullova, Needham, Rossiter, & Battisti, 2019). For example, hotels can change their content (pictures, hotel description), pricing, and inventory levels, but must adhere to platform policies of not advertising the hotel phone number on the platform.

Degree of information asymmetry, which is more relevant in the pre-stay phase of the customer journey, relates to whether one side (hotels or traditional travel agents) has more information about the hotel services offered than the other side (customers) (Mascarenhas, Kesavan, & Bernacchi, 2008; Tong & Crosno, 2016). Information asymmetry is high in direct channels, as hotels themselves create, control, and supply the information to customers and can strategically show or withhold information to facilitate beneficial outcomes for themselves (Caldieraro, Zhang, Marcus Cunha, & Shulman, 2018). For instance, the hotel website may show rich multimedia visuals (such as high definition photos or videos) to infer quality and facilitate conversion, but censor any negative customer reviews. Information asymmetry is also high in indirect channels as the marketing intermediaries have access to more information about different hotels (such as price and inventory) than customers (Mishra, Heide, & Cort, 1998). In contrast, information asymmetry is low in the case of platforms because customers have

access to information about a broad range of hotels and can compare them to make an informed decision. More particularly, customers can analyze other customers' experiences with hotels through detailed online customer reviews. Information about other customers' experiences on platforms is considered more trustworthy than the information provided by hotels or traditional travel agents (Chen & Xie, 2008) and thus, plays a crucial role in reducing information asymmetry (Manes & Tchetchik, 2018).

Matchmaking is the ability of an intermediary to efficiently enable connections between hotels and customers based on specific criteria such as location, price, and customer service levels (Benoit et al., 2017; Halaburda et al., 2018). Effective matchmaking helps customers find a list of hotels that closely match their needs, reducing search cost and simplifying decision-making (Perren & Kozinets, 2018; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018). Direct channels represent only a single hotel and offer no matchmaking properties. Indirect channels do have some matchmaking characteristics, but the number of options offered to the customer is totally controlled by the intermediary. Furthermore, getting comparable information may cause high levels of search cost and inefficiency for customers. For example, customers spend considerable time contacting traditional travel agents to gather more information about different hotels. Customers contact them either in person or via phone or fill out an online form to receive a quotation via email. Platforms offer the highest level of matchmaking properties combined with low levels of search cost and high efficiency. Platforms allow customers to search for, compare and refine their hotel options almost instantly.

Table 4.1

Comparing channels and platforms in the hospitality industry

Factors	Direct channels	Indirect channels	Platforms
Stakeholder interaction	Customers	Marketing intermediaries (e.g., traditional travel agents)	Platform firms and customers
Control	High	Partial	Partial
Information asymmetry	High	High	Low
Matchmaking	Absent	Present but create high search cost and low efficiency	Present and enable low search cost and high efficiency

4.2.2.2 Unique properties of platforms

Apart from the points of comparison discussed above, platforms have some unique structural and functional properties which are not comparable to channels. The structural properties refer to the composition of platforms and are based on network effects and network centrality. **Network effects** relate to the size of the hotel and customer networks for mutual benefit, whereby the larger the number of hotels and customers, the greater the mutual benefit (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Wirtz et al., 2019). Platforms offer hotels high levels of network effects, which is why hotels find the likes of Agoda.com and Trip.com highly appealing due to the accessibility to a high number of customers. In terms of **network centrality**, platforms hold a central position in the business network as it is a hub through which all interactions between hotels, platform firms, and customers take place (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Perks et al., 2017). Also, platforms obtain network centrality by maintaining connections with a vast number of hotels and customers (Adner, 2017; Gnyawali et al., 2006). Because platforms attain network centrality, they have high bargaining power and exert a considerable level of influence on hotels. The combination of network effects and network centrality offers hotels a unique level of access to a large potential customer base, allowing the platforms to charge very high commissions to participate in platform environments.

Furthermore, platforms have unique functional properties because they offer **market intelligence** based on big data, which enables hotels to have a deep understanding of customers, competitors and the overall industry (O'Connor, 2019; Raab, Berezan, Christodoulidou, Jiang, & Shoemaker, 2018). Hotels can leverage big data to develop better predictions of customer behaviors, take effective marketing decisions, and attain competitive advantage (Grewal et al., 2017; Wedel & Kannan, 2016).

Based on the discussion above, platforms have a unique set of properties that are not directly comparable to channels. This suggests that platform integration may require specialized capabilities compared to channel integration, which we discuss next.

4.2.3 From channel integration capabilities to platform integration capabilities

Although extant research has explored channel integration in direct and indirect channels, the primary focus has been on firms that operate these channels themselves. For example, studies in banking examine how well banks execute channel integration across their own online and offline direct channels (e.g., Hossain et al., 2020; Hsieh et al., 2012; Seck & Philippe, 2013). Similarly, studies in retailing which primarily uses indirect channels, explore how well retailers themselves apply channel integration across their channels, rather than the upstream manufacturers or suppliers (e.g., Goraya et al., 2020; Herhausen et al., 2015; Oh & Teo, 2010). To date, the existing literature has considered mainly channel integration capabilities that manifest *across* multiple channels that are part of the focal firms themselves (Frasquet & Miquel, 2017; Lee et al., 2019; Oh et al., 2012; Patten et al., 2020; Sousa & Voss, 2006). This research, focused on platforms, takes a different and complementary approach. We take the perspective of the suppliers themselves (in this case, hotels) and explore the ways in which they enact platform integration practices with and across platforms that are *not* part of the hotel. This form of integration is considered in two dimensions, both *with* individual platforms and *across* multiple platforms that are *external* to the hotel. As a result, we expect

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platform integration patterns to have differences from channel integration patterns. This is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Furthermore, because platforms and channels have different properties, the integration activities will most likely differ across the two. To offer deeper insights into platform integration capabilities and explore how they are similar to and different from channel integration capabilities, we will now discuss the empirical part of our research.

Figure 4.1

Integration patterns in channel integration and platform integration

Channel integration patterns

Platform integration patterns
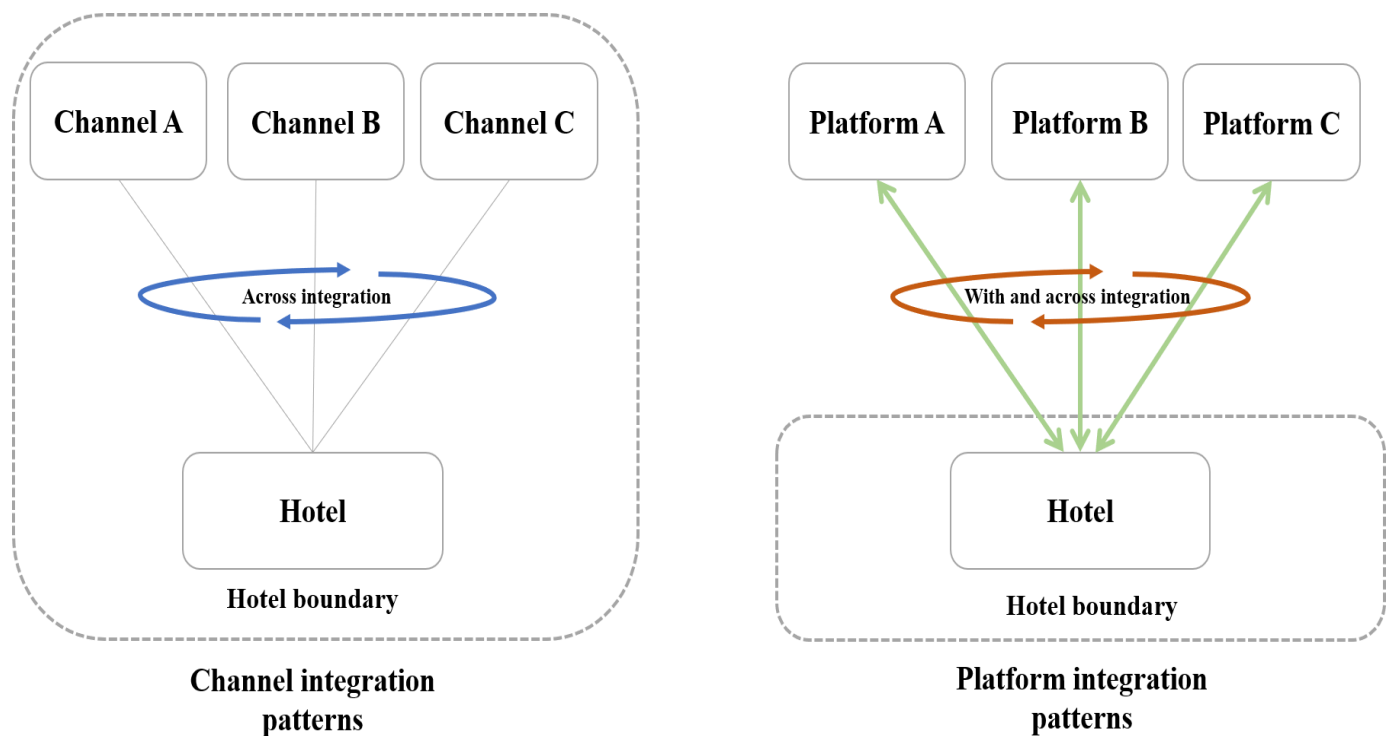
4.3 Research method

To explore the capabilities for platform integration, we used a grounded theory approach (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998) for three reasons. First, grounded theory is deemed suitable when existing literature offers little explanation regarding a specific phenomenon (Flint et al., 2002; Johnson & Sohi, 2016). In our case, the literature on channel

integration lacks sufficient explanation regarding the capabilities that hotels need to work with and across platforms successfully. Therefore, because the understanding of platform integration remains limited, there is a need for theory-building research. Second, grounded theory is suitable for exploring a complex phenomenon (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994; Homburg et al., 2017). In our case, platform integration is a complex phenomenon as it involves a unique relationship between hotels and technology interfaces (i.e., platforms) comprising both operational and strategic work patterns. Thus, grounded theory is suitable for developing clarity on this topic by gathering data from diverse participants who are directly involved in these work patterns. Finally, in grounded theory, it is the participants' views and explanations that lay the foundation for developing a conceptual framework (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Malshe & Sohi, 2009). By considering the participants as "knowledgeable agents" (Gioia et al., 2012), this approach ensures that the findings are not affected by researcher misunderstandings and prevents prior theoretical knowledge from taking primacy (Malshe & Sohi, 2009). Thus, grounded theory is suitable for this study to uncover deep insights into platform integration based on the views and explanations of the participants themselves, an approach that serves as the basis for configuring a generalized conceptual framework. Figure 4.2 summarizes our research process. We now describe our sampling, data collection, and data analysis methods. In addition, we demonstrate the trustworthiness assessment of our work.

4.3.1 Sampling and data collection

Our unit of analysis informed our sampling. To be precise, our unit of analysis is platform integration as a managerial practice, rather than individual hotels as cases. We used a theoretical sampling technique, which includes selecting participants based on their deep knowledge of platform integration (Beverland et al., 2010; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sampling was our preferred sampling approach as it helped us gather the widest

possible understanding of platform integration. Theoretical sampling is an ongoing process, as the constant comparison of data, existing literature, and the emergent theoretical concepts determine the subsequent selection of participants (Homburg et al., 2017; Nenonen et al., 2019).

Figure 4.2

Summary of the research process
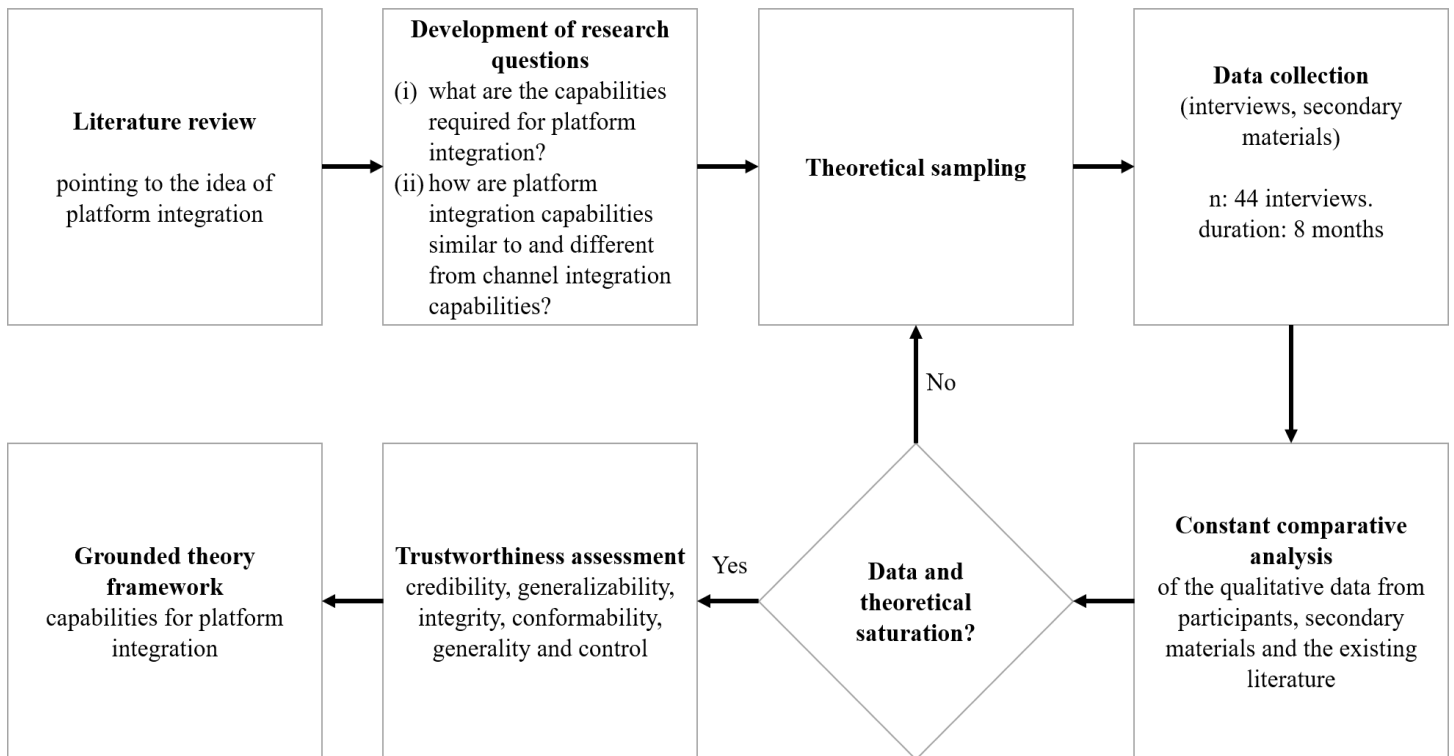
Regarding sampling of hotels, we strived to obtain diversity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in terms of hotel size and ownership structure. The 23 sampled hotels are in New Zealand and ranged from small hotels who have fewer than 30 rooms and 10 employees, to large hotels with more than 500 rooms and 300 employees. Also, the selected hotels were a mix of independent hotels and ones belonging to a group or chain at the national or global level. However, amidst their differences, all sampled hotels actively work with multiple platforms simultaneously.

We also sampled two platform firms that are distinct from each other. One of these firms owned multiple platforms that either cater to global markets or specific geographic markets, while the other owned a single platform that caters solely to a specific geographic market. Both of these platform firms actively work with our sampled hotels. Note that because our study focuses on the perspective of hotels, we did not sample a high number of platform firms. But we knowingly sampled these two to strengthen data triangulation. In fact, the hotels we sampled were working with not only these two platform firms but also others.

Regarding sampling of participants, we first selected participants with roles in reservations and sales. Subsequently, based on the emergent findings, we sampled additional participants with roles in customer experience management, revenue management, operations management, and distribution management. Participants' level of job experience was diverse, ranging from 1 to 35 years. This diversity of expertise ensured that we did not miss out on any valuable insights, as we were able to capture operational aspects of platform integration from participants in their early career (e.g., reservations sales agent) and strategic issues of platform integration from experienced managers (e.g., director of revenue). Table 4.2 profiles the individual participants and the participating hotels and platform firms. After 44 interviews, theoretical sampling was ended, as additional interviews would not generate any new knowledge about platform integration, indicating data and theoretical saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

We employed interview methods to gather our primary data, which yielded a sample of 40 interviewees from 23 hotels and 4 interviewees from 2 platform firms. The interviews were conducted face to face either at cafes or participants' offices, or in meeting rooms at a university. The data collection period ran for eight months, and we audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews. Interviews ranged from 26 to 76 minutes, averaging 44 minutes. After each interview, we wrote field notes to help us reflect on the key aspects of platform

integration. Also, when required, we asked further follow-up questions via email for extra clarity.

Table 4.2

Sample characteristics

Participant ID	Hotel ID	Participant job title	Job experience (years)	Rooms at the hotel (number)	Employees at the hotel (number)	Independent hotel/part of a group
1	A	Hotel director	7	29	40	Independent
2	A	Director of sales and marketing	6	29	40	Independent
3	B	Assistant front office manager	10	78	40	Group
4	B	Reservations sales agent	1	78	40	Group
5	C	Reservations and yield manager	22	175	155	Group
6	D	Hotel manager	15	22	5	Independent
7	E	Hotel manager	15	153	85	Independent
8	E	National reservations and yield manager	16	650	300	Independent
9	F	Front office supervisor	5	122	40	Independent
10	F	Operations manager	10	122	40	Independent
11	F	Assistant manager	8	122	40	Independent
12	G	Reservations manager	8	260	30	Independent
13	G	Senior duty manager	7	260	30	Independent
14	H	Contact centre supervisor	1	635	400	Group
15	H	Group revenue director	5	635	400	Group
16	H	Director of revenue management	17	635	400	Group
17	I	General manager	13	41	14	Group
18	J	General manager	14	80	26	Group
19	J	Assistant manager	5	80	26	Group
20	J	Head of strategy and business development	28	80	26	Group
21	K	Reservations agent	5	36	9	Group
22	K	Front office manager	6	36	9	Group
23	L	Hotel manager	15	76	19	Group
24	L	Franchise director	35	76	19	Group
25	M	Assistant revenue manager	4	347	200	Group
26	M	Reservations manager	7	347	200	Group
27	N	Reservations sales agent	1	352	200	Group
28	O	Channel manager	7	452	250	Group
29	P	General manager	12	25	10	Group
30	Q	Hotel manager	18	286	180	Group
31	Q	Hotel manager	10	286	180	Group
32	Q	Reservations manager	5	286	180	Group
33	Q	Revenue manager	6	286	180	Group
34	R	Director of revenue management	12	411	350	Group
35	S	General and area manager	10	100	50	Group
36	T	Hotel manager	27	41	12	Group
37	U	Director of revenue management	5	255	123	Group
38	V	General manager	20	141	66	Group

Participant ID	Platform firm ID	Participant job title	Job experience (years)	Platforms operated (number)	Target geographical market
39	W	Director of revenue, Auckland region	17	*	*	Group
40	W	Director of revenue, New Zealand, Fiji and French Polynesia	16	*	*	Group
41	A	Area Manager	6	4	Global and specific geographic markets
42	A	Market manager	3	4	Global and specific geographic markets
43	A	Assistant market manager	1	4	Global and specific geographic markets
44	B	Market Executive	2	1	Specific geographic market

The participant managed a group of hotels in a region.

During interviews, we asked general open-ended questions (K Charmaz, 2006), then based on participants' explanations, progressed to more specific questions. We concurrently practiced the principles of flexibility and mirroring (Myers, 2013; Myers & Newman, 2007). We remained flexible in the sense of openness to new knowledge. In addition, we practiced mirroring in our questioning by taking into consideration the vocabulary and comments of the participants to adjust the structure of our follow-up questions. Appendix A offers our interview guide.

We also gathered secondary data relevant to platform integration, specifically, public documents (e.g., press releases, online brochures). These documents complemented the interview data.

4.3.2 Data analysis

For data analysis, open, axial, and selective coding structures were employed (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, 1998). At first, we used open coding by rigorously reading every line of the interview transcripts to come up with first-order concepts, taking into consideration the vocabulary participants used. Next, we performed axial coding by comparing the first-order concepts, searching for similarities and differences between them, and subsequently categorizing them into second-order themes. Finally, by applying selective coding, we

classified the second-order themes into aggregate dimensions of platform integration. To conduct our coding structures, we employed NVivo software.

To classify the capabilities for platform integration, we applied the Gioia methodology to ensure rigor in theory development during our data analysis and enhance the transparency of our findings (Gioia et al., 2012). In practice, we came up with data structures to show first-order concepts (activities hotels engaged in), second-order themes (capabilities), and aggregate dimensions (capability sets). By doing so, we show a logical flow of how, from the raw data, we systematically identified the concepts and subsequently categorized them into themes and aggregate dimensions of platform integration. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 in the Findings section illustrate the data structures of our study.

4.3.3 Trustworthiness assessment

We took special care to ensure the trustworthiness of our research. Based on the trustworthiness standards advocated in interpretive research and grounded theory, we maintained credibility, generalizability, integrity, conformability, generality and control (Flint et al., 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As shown in Table 4.3, we ensured that our research successfully maintained these standards.

Table 4.3

Trustworthiness assessment

Trustworthiness standards	Method of addressing
Credibility Ensure the findings effectively represents the data.	•Interviews were conducted for eight months. •All three researchers provided input during the data collection and analysis phases. •Summaries of findings, including a conceptual framework, were sent to the participants, and we requested them to provide their feedback. ***Result***: The emergent conceptual framework was adjusted, expanded, and refined.

Generalizability Ensure the findings attain theoretical generalizability and are relevant for all hotels.	•Theoretical sampling method was applied until data and theoretical saturation was achieved. *Result*: Development of novel theoretical statements. Generalizability of findings for all hotels.
Integrity Ensure the participants do not provide false information or evade the issues being discussed.	•University ethics protocols were upheld. •The protocols were communicated prior to the interview via email and also during the interview. •The duration of the interviews were adjusted to suit the work schedule of the participants. *Result*: To the best of our knowledge, participants did not provide false information, nor evade issues being discussed.
Conformability Ensure the findings and the emergent conceptual framework are based on participants' views and not researcher biases.	•A large number of interviews were conducted. •Follow-up questions were asked when necessary. •The conceptual framework was shared with the participants, and we requested them to provide their feedback. *Result*: The findings and the emergent conceptual framework were adjusted, expanded, and refined.
Generality Ensure the discovery of multiple characteristics of a phenomenon.	•The interviews were of sufficient length to develop in-depth insights into the multiple aspects of platform integration. •Maintained non-directive conversations and kept an open mind for new knowledge. •Adjusted the interview guide to probe the emergent themes. *Result*: The many complex aspects of platform integration were identified.
Control Ensure firms have managerial control over the facets of the emergent theory.	•Hotels have the ability to influence the different facets of platform integration. *Result:* Hotels have managerial control on platform integration.

4.4 Findings

Beginning with our operational definition of platform integration as the ability of hotels to enact coordinating and learning capabilities to foster resource alignment with and across platforms, our findings suggest two categories of platform integration capabilities: coordinating and learning. Coordinating capabilities refer to orchestrating hotel activities in an effective and efficient manner to foster resource alignment with and across platforms. Resource alignment enables hotels to complement and match their resources and processes with those of platforms to attain optimal outcomes. Learning capabilities refer to hotels' activities for building a new knowledge base, to more effectively develop coordinating capabilities.

Together, these coordinating and learning capabilities lead to better resource alignment. We find strong conceptual support for coordinating, learning and resource alignment concepts in resource-based theory (Das & Teng, 2000a; D. Lei, Hitt, & Bettis, 1996; Sirmon, Hitt, & Ireland, 2007). Figure 4.3 illustrates our inductive conceptual framework and shows how the capabilities interrelate. Tables 4.8 and 4.9 in Appendix B supply definitions and illustrative quotes of all coordinating and learning capability sets. Next, we will discuss the two categories of platform integration.

Figure 4.3

Conceptual framework: Capabilities for platform integration
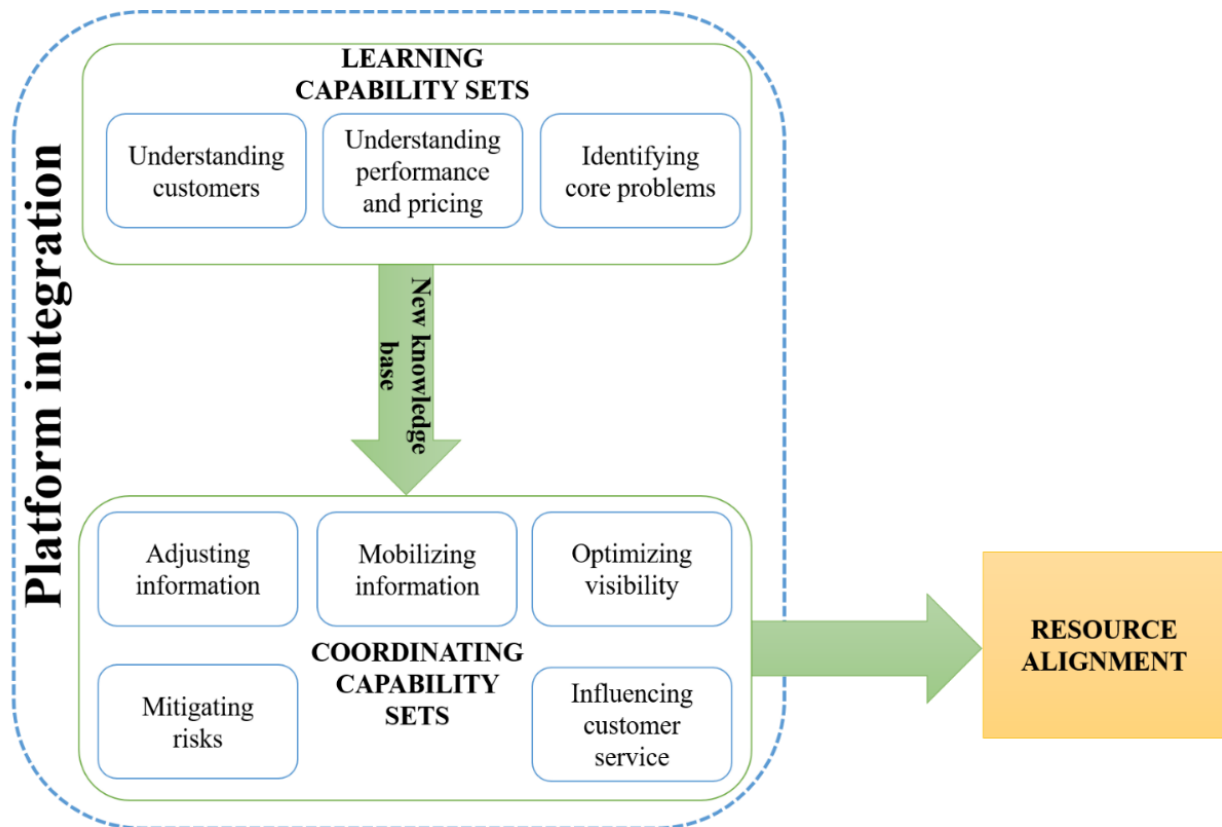
4.4.1 Coordinating capabilities: Fostering resource alignment

Hotels applied 54 coordinating activities that foster resource alignment with and across platforms. These activities merge into 16 coordinating capabilities, which combine to form 5

coordinating capability sets: adjusting information, mobilizing information, optimizing

visibility, mitigating risks, and influencing customer service (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Data structure: Coordinating capabilities

1st order concepts: Coordinating activities	2nd order themes: Coordinating capabilities	Aggregate dimensions: Coordinating capability sets
Auditing content information	**Adjusting content information**	**Adjusting information**
Matching content information		
Changing content information if necessary		
Adjusting price based on competitor's price (particularly strategic group)	**Adjusting price**	
Adjusting price based on customer demand (e.g., events, seasons)		
Adjusting price based on occupancy levels		
Adjusting price for different customer segments (e.g., leisure, corporate)		
Adjusting price to create a customer lock-in effect		
Adjusting price to provide customer flexibility		
Adjusting price based on price parity concept		
Adjusting price based on price differentiation		
Adjusting inventory to provide consistent availability on all platforms	**Adjusting inventory**	
Reducing inventory levels during high demand (e.g., events)		
Increasing inventory levels to compensate for the deficit in occupancy		
Adjusting inventory levels to strike the right balance		
Sharing inventory and pricing information in real time	**Facilitating information exchange**	**Mobilizing information**
Automating bookings in real time		
Collating customer data	**Synthesizing information**	
Collating sales data		
Collating online customer reviews		
Accessing customers from different markets	**Leveraging customer networks**	**Optimizing visibility**
Increasing brand visibility in different markets		
Influencing ranking by participating in promotions	**Influencing ranking**	
Influencing ranking by maintaining price parity		
Influencing ranking by providing competitive prices		
Influencing ranking by improving content score		
Influencing ranking by improving review score		
Influencing ranking by promptly communicating with customers		
Engaging in promotional campaigns during low demand periods	**Engaging in promotional campaigns**	
Engaging in promotional campaigns to capture long lead bookings		

Engaging in promotional campaigns to capture short lead bookings		
Engaging in promotional campaigns to increase sales in particular markets		
Reconciling no shows	**Reconciling**	**Mitigating risks**
Reconciling invalid credit cards		
Avoiding uncertainty in payment	**Avoiding**	
Avoiding the uncertainty of fraudulent online customer reviews		
Regulating changes in customer booking	**Regulating**	
Regulating the cost of working with platforms		
Establishing security systems	**Complying**	
Taking access control measures (e.g., ID & password)		
Complying with rules for viewing credit card details		
Complying with customer privacy protocols		
Maintaining confidentiality boundaries during information exchange		
Amending a booking	**Changing customer bookings**	**Influencing customer service**
Canceling a booking		
Enabling chatbots	**Communicating with customers**	
Replying to online customer reviews		
Sending pre-arrival messages		
Using instant messaging tools (e.g., chatbox)		
Providing the choice to book on any platform	**Providing freedom of choice**	
Providing the choice to pay online or at the hotel		
Providing personalized service at the hotel	**Influencing in-house customer service**	
Providing service recovery while the customer is in-house		
Improving areas of hotel service that requires a change		

4.4.1.1 Adjusting information

Adjusting information refers to hotels' ability to make appropriate informational changes on platforms. Underlying adjusting information are three capabilities: adjusting content information, adjusting price and adjusting inventory.

Hotels adjust their content information (e.g., pictures, or hotel description) by auditing the information, matching it with the actual hotel service, and making appropriate changes as deemed necessary. Such practices ensure that the content information provides an accurate and up-to-date representation of the hotel service, as suggested by platform firm A:

"So, it's really important that hotels look at their content to make sure that the information is being displayed in a true manner. The reason we put a lot of emphasis on content is because in the online world, the only way that I can understand what a hotel truly looks like is mostly through photos. And those photos need to be a true indication of what the room is, and not the best image of the property. So, we encourage hotels to show every element of the property, even if there is an element that they're not overly proud of. Say they might have older bathrooms; we encourage them to take photos of those bathrooms to set the guests' expectations on the front end." [ID: 41]

Adjusting price focuses on optimizing profits, and is based on several factors, namely competitor price, customer demand, occupancy levels, and the customer segment hotels serve on different platforms. Accordingly, hotels typically develop two price points for the same service – one to create a customer lock-in effect by charging a lower price for a non-refundable booking, and the other to enable customer flexibility by charging a higher price for a flexible booking that can be changed for a certain period. However, hotel pricing options are affected by legal clauses in the contracts between hotels and platform firms – which dictate whether hotels must maintain price parity or can offer different prices across platforms.

There are different approaches to adjusting inventory. Some hotels always list all available rooms on all platforms, but other hotels change the proportion of rooms they list on platforms based on customer demand. More specifically, hotels tend to reduce stated inventory levels or even stop selling on some platforms during high demand periods, as they can easily sell via their own channels (e.g., website) without incurring any commission fees. On the other hand, during low demand periods hotels tend to increase the proportion of rooms they list on platforms to rapidly stimulate bookings when occupancy levels are low. Using the larger customer networks of platforms gives hotels a greater chance of selling their excess inventory

than selling via their smaller direct customer networks. Thus, by adjusting inventory hotels can create an appropriate balance in the number and type of rooms sold on all platforms to optimize costs and maximize sales and profits.

We observe that adjusting content information is prominent in different hotels regardless of their size and ownership structure. This may be because most hotels have dedicated employees to manage their content on the platform interface. However, our findings show that larger independent hotels and those that are part of a chain (irrespective of the size of the individual hotels) tend to have superior capabilities to adjust price and inventory than smaller independent hotels. The reason for this may be that larger independent hotels and hotel chains often have dedicated revenue management departments and access to advanced revenue management tools.

4.4.1.2 Mobilizing information

Mobilizing information refers to the ability to facilitate information exchange with and across platforms and to pull and integrate data in one centralized place. We observe that larger independent hotels and hotel chains usually invest in more advanced IT tools to manage information than smaller independent hotels. Therefore, this capability may be more prominent among larger independent hotels and hotel chains comprising varying hotel sizes.

Mobilizing information enables hotels to personalize customer service and ensure customer satisfaction by reducing errors (e.g., overbooking a particular room). It also allows hotels to efficiently manage their online reputation and understand customer sentiments towards the hotel and their competitors. Mobilizing information consists of two capabilities: facilitating information exchange and synthesizing information.

To facilitate information exchange, hotels share inventory and pricing information in real time and enable bookings to be registered automatically. Hotel E shares information with and across platforms in real time using IT tools:

> *"So, revenue managers have a tool called Tool A, which updates all the pricing and all the inventory from Tool A up to the platforms. So that's in real time. So, let's say I don't have rooms available, I will go and close it on Tool A, which will close it on all the platforms out there."* [ID: 8]

To synthesize information, hotels collate customer data, sales data, as well as online customer reviews of the hotel and its competitors into one centralized place.

4.4.1.3 Optimizing visibility

Hotels undertake activities to optimize visibility to remain prominent, stand out, and get noticed on platforms. Such practices are deemed important, notably in two-sided market platforms with high network effects, as rival hotels are also striving to draw more customer attention on the same platforms. Our analysis suggests three capabilities for optimizing visibility: leveraging customer networks, influencing ranking and engaging in promotional campaigns.

For leveraging customer networks, hotels use platforms to reach out to customers in different markets and increase their brand visibility. For instance, Hotel F reaches out to and develops their Asian market by working in a strategically platform-targeted way with two distinct platforms:

> *"So, we find that Platform D is especially effective in the Asian market […]. However, it's more Southeast Asia and Indonesia that Platform D is stronger in […]. So, we like to work with them for that particular market. And then*

there's ones that are very country-specific such as Platform B. They're the strongest in China, and so we work with them quite heavily to develop our Chinese market." [ID: 11]

Additionally, hotels work to raise the ranking of their listing on platforms to improve their chances of getting noticed. Activities to influence ranking are engaging in promotional campaigns, maintaining price parity, providing competitive prices, attaining high content and review scores, and promptly communicating with customers. Such practices raise the chances the hotel's listing will appear early in search results.

Engaging in promotional campaigns not only influence rankings, but also optimizes visibility in other ways as well. Hotels participate in campaigns during low demand periods, when their occupancy levels are low. Furthermore, hotels engage in campaigns to capture short and long lead bookings and to increase sales in specific markets.

We did not find any variations in the hotels' ability to optimize visibility based on hotel size and/or ownership structure. This may be because most platform firms educate the hotels on how they can stay prominent in search results.

4.4.1.4 Mitigating risks

Two-sided market platforms pose risks of fraud, leakage of confidential information, financial loss, and damage to online reputation. Hotels have learned to effectively align their resources with and across platforms to alleviate such risks. Under mitigating risks, there are four capabilities: reconciling, avoiding, regulating and complying.

Reconciling means making financial accounts consistent between hotels and platforms, which is vital due to the high influx of fraudulent customer bookings from platforms. When customers do not show up at the hotel on the booked dates (commonly known as "no-shows"),

hotels run the risk of being charged commissions for a booking that did not generate any revenue. Similarly, invalid credit cards used by customers result in an increased financial risk for hotels due to the uncertainty of payment. To alleviate such risks, hotels reconcile no-shows and invalid credit cards on platforms.

Avoiding means proactively bypassing the uncertainty posed by a high number of fraudulent customer bookings on platforms. Hotels avoid uncertainty in payment by for example, opting to charge the platform for payment rather than the customer, which guarantees payment. In contrast, if the hotel decides to charge the customer, the uncertainty posed by fraudulent or invalid credit cards may increase. Furthermore, hotels avoid the uncertainty posed by fraudulent online customer reviews by timely reconciling no shows. This practice stops the platform from sending a secured link for writing a review to no show customers who did not actually stay at the hotel.

Regulating is the hotels' ability to monitor and control their actions – an ability without which the hotel profitability from dealing with platforms would be in jeopardy. Hotels regulate requests to change customer bookings to avoid losing out on revenues. Furthermore, hotels regulate costs by managing their business with platforms to maximize profits. This practice is well performed by Hotel C:

> *"It's balancing out productivity across the year versus short-term. Sorry to say but any hotel can flap with the business of platforms because there is that level of demand. But it's how you actually manage platforms to produce the best results. Again, the thing about these platforms is that there's obviously the cost association. So, 15% off your price - if you're selling at $400 plus, 15% is a lot to carry when you know that there will also be direct guests coming in from the hotel's website."* [ID: 5]

Additionally, hotels comply with security and privacy protocols set by industry bodies (e.g., payment card industry) and the platform firms. To comply with security protocols, hotels establish IT systems with encrypted vaults, use a secure identification and password system, and view the information during short set windows before the information self-erases. Hotels comply with privacy protocols by working with encrypted customer information. Hotels also maintain confidentiality boundaries during information exchange with platform firms, by keeping the scope of the conversation about the focal hotel and the market, rather than individual competitors.

We find that hotels of different sizes and ownership structures are equally proficient in relation to these three capabilities: reconciling, avoiding, and complying. The reason may be that most hotels have access to the required solutions (e.g., no-show reconciliation option) and observe well-defined protocols set by platform firms and industry regulatory bodies to address risks. However, larger independent hotels and ones that belong to a chain (consisting of different hotel sizes) are more capable of regulating costs than smaller independent hotels. This may be because larger independent hotels and hotel chains often have revenue management teams focusing heavily on optimizing profitability.

4.4.1.5 Influencing customer service

Hotels influence customer service to shape service experience at different phases of the customer journey. We find that hotels of varying sizes and ownership structures are capable to effectively influence customer service because they can use the necessary tools (e.g., instant messaging) and data (e.g., real time reviews) on the platform interface to offer service. Under influencing customer service, there are four capabilities: changing customer bookings, communicating with customers, providing freedom of choice, and influencing in-house customer service.

For changing customer bookings, hotels assist customers in case they want to amend or cancel bookings. Hotels either refer the customers to the platform or hotels make the requested changes themselves on the platform.

Hotels also communicate with customers through platforms to offer service. In practice, hotels often enable chatbots, which provide automatic replies to customers on the most commonly asked questions such as parking and check-in/check-out times. Other communication tasks include replying to online customer reviews, sending pre-arrival messages, and adopting instant messaging tools.

 Hotels offer customers a range of options during booking and payment to provide freedom of choice. Because most hotels use multiple platforms, customers have the flexibility to book on any platform they are comfortable with (e.g., Expedia.com or Hotels.com) and pay using their preferred method (e.g., online or later at the hotel).

Platforms also provide unique information that allows hotels to influence in-house customer service. Hotels gain access to specialized customer information on platforms including (i) customer wants and preferences, (ii) real time customer feedback while the customer is in-house, and (iii) authentic online customer reviews after the customer has left the hotel. Based on this information, hotels undertake activities to improve the service experience at the hotel. Such activities include personalizing customer service, providing service recovery if required while the customer is still in-house, and improving the areas of service that require change. For example, Hotel R uses online customer reviews on platforms to improve their service:

> *"We make sure that we take the reviews on board, not just for the sake of*
>
> *putting it in a folder but making sure that we are actually passing it on to the*
>
> *relevant department and making sure that they are actually taking them on*

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board, to keep further improving. We, as a hotel, call it CIP [...]. It's the

continuous improvement process, and the reviews from platforms, I

guess, are just one part of it." [ID: 34]

4.4.2 Learning capabilities: Developing new knowledge base

Our analysis suggests 15 learning activities, clustered into 6 learning capabilities that in turn unite to form 3 learning capability sets: understanding customers, understanding the hotel business performance and pricing competitiveness, and identifying core problems (see Table 4.5). We observe that learning is pursued by all hotel types irrespective of their size and ownership structure because they have access to platform data to gain new knowledge.

Table 4.5
Data structure: Learning capabilities

1st order concepts: Learning activities	2nd order themes: Learning capabilities	Aggregate dimensions: Learning capability sets
Understanding customer demand based on booking lead times	**Understanding customer demand**	**Understanding customers**
Understanding customer demand for room types		
Understanding future customer demand (e.g., on a particular day, month or year)		
Understanding customer segments (e.g., geo-mix, business or leisure segment)	**Understanding customer distinctions**	
Understanding individual customer wants before arrival at the hotel		
Understanding business performance based on historical data	**Understanding business performance**	**Understanding performance and pricing**
Understanding business performance compared to competitors		
Understanding future business performance		
Evaluating hotel price against the price of individual competitors	**Understanding price competitiveness**	
Evaluating hotel price against the average price of the strategic group		
Identifying imperfections in content information on platforms	**Identifying gaps in service quality**	**Identifying core problems**
Identifying shortcomings in customer service at the hotel		
Identifying service failure in real time at the hotel		
Understanding the risks of fraudulence (e.g., stolen or invalid credit cards)	**Understanding uncertainty in payment**	
Understanding the risks from providing flexibility (e.g., book now, pay on arrival)		

4.4.2.1 Understanding customers

Hotels gain access to big data on platforms and carry out analysis activities to learn about their customers. Understanding customers comprise of two capabilities: understanding customer demand and understanding customer distinctions.

To understand customer demand, hotels examine the booking lead times, and identify how far in advance customers are making a booking, and compare how their booking lead times fare compared against the rivals within their strategic group. Additionally, hotels can better understand customer demand for different room types and learn which ones receive more bookings than the others. Hotels also undertake activities to understand future customer demand, as done by Hotel S:

> *"We have got 18 hotels that are spread all around New Zealand, and everyone [customers] comes in via Auckland. So, we look at how the market is performing in Auckland and then predict how will that flow, how all of that ripple effect will have an impact on our other hotels throughout New Zealand. That means we are actually able to try and forecast how the market is going currently, what changes are going to affect the market in the next three to six months, and then further up for 12 months."* [ID: 35]

To understand customer distinctions, hotels broadly learn about different customer segments based on factors such as country of origin and the purpose of their visit. However, hotels also specifically learn about individual customer wants before they arrive at the hotel.

4.4.2.2 Understanding performance and pricing

Hotels gain access to big data on platforms, which allows them to learn about their business performance as well as the competitiveness of their pricing strategy. To understand business performance, hotels use platform data to compare their current and past performance of working with different platforms. For instance, hotels learn how they are performing on a platform in terms of revenues, compared to the previous year or compared to their competitors. In addition, hotels can estimate their future business performance by learning how many bookings they have secured for an imminent time.

To understand price competitiveness, hotels can compare their prices against the prices offered by individual competitors and the average price of their strategic group. Such activities allow hotels to learn whether their pricing is competitive on platforms.

4.4.2.3 Identifying core problems

Another important capability for hotels is identifying core problems that negatively influence service experience and revenue streams. The ability to identify core problems consists of two capabilities: identifying gaps in service quality and understanding uncertainty in payment.

To identify gaps in service quality, hotels identify imperfections in content information on platforms that may set unrealistic customer expectations. Furthermore, by monitoring authentic online customer reviews and real time customer feedback, hotels can discover shortcomings in customer service and service failures in real time. Hotel U identifies service failure in real time:

> *"When the review is a sad face, and based on the words that the guest has*
>
> *provided us, we try to get in touch with them while they are still in-house and*
>
> *say "Hey, I can see that you reviewed us on Platform C and you are not*

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really satisfied with your check-in, and with your room. Could you please let

us know what the issue is, and is there anything that we can do to make your

stay better?" [ID: 37]

Accepting online bookings through platforms does entail some financial risk. To understand uncertainty in payment, hotels identify the risks of fraudulent credit cards. Hotels also learn the dangers of providing flexibility to customers with the "book now, pay on arrival" option, which may lead to fraudulent bookings, cancellations, or no shows.

4.5 Discussion: Comparing platform integration against channel integration

Based on our findings, we define platform integration as the ability of hotels to enact coordinating and learning capabilities to foster resource alignment with and across platforms. Coordinating capabilities refer to orchestrating hotel practices to align their operations with and across platforms. Learning capabilities emphasize hotel activities for building new knowledge bases, to more effectively develop coordinating capabilities. In this section, we take three steps to connect our empirical findings to the existing literature. First, we compare our findings on platform integration against the current literature on channel integration. The purpose of this comparison is to examine how platform integration capabilities are similar to and different from channel integration capabilities. Second, we compare our findings on platform integration with the literature describing platform properties. The purpose of this comparison is to investigate the possible reasons behind the detected similarities and differences. Finally, we synthesize the insights from the previous two steps and provide a high-level explanation of why there are similarities and differences between platform integration and channel integration.

Our comparison distills to four key assessments: (i) one set of coordinating capabilities is fully present in channel integration and has similar objectives; (ii) a second set of

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coordinating capabilities is fully present in channel integration but has different objectives; (iii) a third set of coordinating capabilities is partially present in channel integration (i.e., some aspects are present, while others are not salient), and the objectives have both similarities and differences; and (iv) the remainder of the coordinating capabilities, and the complete category of learning capabilities, are important for platform integration, but not salient for channel integration. We provide an overview of these four assessments in Table 4.6 by connecting our findings to the literature on channel integration and platform properties. We now expand our discussion based on our assessments.

4.5.1 Capabilities fully present in channel integration with similar objectives

Five coordinating capabilities are fully present in channel integration, and the objectives are similar. These capabilities are adjusting content information, changing customer bookings, communicating with customers, providing freedom of choice, and influencing in-house customer service. First, **adjusting content information** is evident in channel integration under integrated promotions information and integrated product and pricing information, and serve similar objectives. These objectives are projecting an accurate brand image, setting the right customer expectations, and satisfying customers (Carlson et al., 2015; Neslin & Shankar, 2009). When comparing this capability with platform properties, adjusting content information is possible because platforms give hotels control over some activities (Laczko et al., 2019), which in this case is to alter hotel descriptions and pictures. Second, the capacity for **changing customer bookings** exists in channel integration for integrated customer service, and focus on the same objectives of solving customer problems and satisfying customers (Li et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). This capability is possible because platforms are the focal point of this activity (i.e., network centrality). To be precise, platforms work as a hub (Perren & Kozinets, 2018) through which hotels interact with customers as well as platform firms (i.e., stakeholder

interaction) to alter customer bookings. This capacity is also possible because platforms offer hotels partial control (Laczko et al., 2019) to make booking modifications.

Third, **communicating with customers** is present in channel integration allowing integrated customer service and addressing the same objectives of replying to customer queries, solving customer problems, and satisfying customers (Hossain et al., 2019; Oh et al., 2012). This process is viable because platforms offer a bridge through which hotels can communicate with customers either directly (through a chat function) or indirectly (through a chatbot). This requires hotels to interact with customers and platform firms simultaneously for effective communication. Such interaction with customers is possible because platforms give hotels control of features related to communicating with customers. Fourth, **providing freedom of choice** is evident in channel integration under integrated order fulfillment, to provide customer flexibility and convenience (Cao & Li, 2018; J. Wu & Chang, 2016). It is similarly present when hotels offer customers the choice to book on the platform they are most comfortable with (e.g., Trip.com or Booking.com) and the option to pay online or later at the hotel. These practices are possible because platforms have network effects and stakeholder interaction characteristics (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). To attain high network effects, platforms offer low barriers to hotels to participate on platforms, enabling hotels to sell room inventory on multiple platforms at the same time (Landsman & Stremersch, 2011), which provides customers the freedom to book on the platform of their choice. In addition, based on stakeholder interaction, hotels coordinate with customers and platform firms to offer flexible payment solutions.

Lastly, **influencing in-house customer service** manifests in channel integration pertaining to integrated customer service for increasing customer satisfaction and customer perceived value (Li et al., 2018; Oh & Teo, 2010). This capacity is similar, but enhanced even further in platforms, which have low information asymmetry and supply credible customer

reviews and feedback (Chen & Xie, 2008; Manes & Tchetchik, 2018). Based on these reviews, hotels can improve customer service and provide service recovery. It involves engagements with customers and platform firms for enhancing the service experience at the hotel.

4.5.2 Capabilities fully present in channel integration with different objectives

Three coordinating capabilities are fully present in channel integration, but the objectives are different in platform integration. These capabilities are adjusting price, adjusting inventory, and engaging in promotional campaigns. First, **adjusting price** is present in channel integration under integrated product and pricing information but serves distinct objectives. For channel integration, the objective is to ensure customer satisfaction by offering consistent price (Oh et al., 2012; Shen et al., 2018). For platform integration, however, the objective is to secure profits. Adjusting price can occur because platforms provide market intelligence (O'Connor, 2019) to support hotels in making data-driven decisions for setting their price. Furthermore, platforms offer control to hotels that allows the freedom to set their own pricing. However, because platforms hold a central position in the business network, they have high bargaining power and charge high commissions (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Sharma & Nicolau, 2019). As a result, hotels adjust prices by taking into perspective the cost of commissions and thus, have the objective of ensuring profits when dealing with platforms.

Second, **adjusting inventory** exists in channel integration in terms of integrated information access but addresses different objectives. In the case of channel integration, the objective is to satisfy customers by offering consistent inventory levels (Emrich et al., 2015; J. Wu & Chang, 2016). For platform integration, on the other hand, the focus is on attaining a different set of objectives: optimizing costs and maximizing sales and profits. As we analyze the capability with platform properties, adjusting inventory is effective because platforms provide market insights (Raab et al., 2018), which assists hotels in allocating appropriate levels

of room inventory on platforms. Also, as a result of platforms ceding control, hotels have the freedom to change inventory levels based on their business needs. As noted above, their decisions take into consideration the platform's network position and market power (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014) which underpins a high commission structure (Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019). Therefore, in the platform context, hotels strive to find the right balance of inventory levels to optimize costs and maximize sales and profits.

Lastly, **engaging in promotional campaigns** is salient in channel integration for integrated promotions information but accomplishes distinct objectives. While the objective in channel integration is to familiarize customers with the service features of different channels such as website or telephone (Banerjee, 2014; Seck & Philippe, 2013), the objective in platform integration is to increase sales. The capability is effective because platforms match hotels with customers (Rangaswamy et al., 2020; Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018) at a higher level during the promotional period. Platforms also allow hotels to opt-in and out of promotional campaigns, which offer hotels control over the activity. However, because platforms maintain a central position in the business network (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Perks et al., 2017), they implement strict rules to regulate promotions. For instance, platform rules may not permit hotels to promote their website or phone numbers on platforms. Hotels can take part in promotions, but must follow the protocols set by platform firms.

4.5.3 Capabilities partially present in channel integration with a mix of similar and different objectives

Two capability sets (mobilizing information and mitigating risks) are partially present in channel integration and serve both similar and different objectives. **Mobilizing information** is partially present in channel integration under integrated information access and integrated transaction information (Gallino & Moreno, 2014; Ganesh, 2004; Von Briel, 2018). It is present to mobilize information related to price, inventory, and customer data (Payne & Frow, 2004;

Wollenburg et al., 2018). But not salient for mobilizing other types of data such as online customer reviews of the hotel and its competitors. Therefore in both channel and platform integration, similar objectives of providing personalized customer service and satisfying customers are met (Hossain et al., 2019; Wu & Chang, 2016). However in platform integration, two different objectives related to managing online reputation and understanding customer sentiments towards the hotel and its competitors are also achieved. Mobilizing information is possible in the platform context because platforms provide control to hotels for sharing information (e.g., price and inventory) and collecting information (e.g., customer booking information, online customer reviews). Furthermore, it is possible due to network centrality and stakeholder interaction (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018), as platforms offer a central point through which hotels can effectively collect and share information with customers and the platform firms themselves.

Mitigating risks is partially present in channel integration for integrated security and privacy (Hossain et al., 2020, 2019) but not salient for addressing the additional risks that are present in platform environments. Mitigating risks has similar objectives for both channel and platform integration in terms of protecting customers against fraud and leakage of confidential information (Parasuraman et al., 2005). However, risk mitigation processes also serve different objectives of alleviating financial loss and protecting online reputation in platform contexts. Mitigating risks is possible because platform firms establish rules in relation to customer security and privacy. However, in platform environments, although high network effects allow hotels to connect to a vast number of customers (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013), they also raise financial and online reputational risks that come from a high influx of fraudulent customer bookings on platforms. Furthermore, the network position of platforms increases financial risks for hotels as platforms have high market power. As a result, due to network effects and network

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centrality attributes of platforms, hotels develop specialized capabilities to mitigate risks that are salient in platform environments.

4.5.4 Capabilities not salient in channel integration, but applied in platform integration

Two capabilities (leveraging customer networks and influencing raking) and one entire category (learning capabilities) are not salient in channel integration, but important for platform integration. **Leveraging customer networks** does not occur in channel integration, but is present in platform integration as a result of the unique structural properties of platforms to foster matchmaking. Platforms work as a central hub for hotels to reach out to a vast network of customers and facilitate matchmaking (Halaburda et al., 2018; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Perren & Kozinets, 2018). These structural properties are absent in the case of channels, and matchmaking is comparatively inefficient, and thus, this capability is not salient for channel integration.

Influencing ranking is not salient in channel integration because single-firm channels have no need to rank competing providers. However, ranking is ubiquitous in the platform environment, and efforts to influence rankings are essential to increase the effectiveness of matchmaking between hotels and customers. While platforms are useful for hotels to connect with a large audience of potential customers (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; Perren & Kozinets, 2018), these large networks also leads to many rival hotels competing for the same customers (Parker et al., 2016). As a result, hotels work hard to appear high in the platform search results when the hotel offer is suitable for customer requirements (e.g., location, price) during matchmaking. Structural attributes of network centrality and network effects are absent in channels, and the matchmaking characteristic is relatively inefficient, which is why influencing ranking is not salient for channel integration.

Finally, the entire **learning capability category** is not discussed in channel integration literature, and prior research in the field has not emphasized the role of learning. However, learning is present and important in platform integration because platforms have unique functional properties in terms of providing market intelligence, which is core to their service offering for hotels. As a result, hotels learn about customers, competitors, and the overall industry to gain knowledge (O'Connor, 2019; Raab et al., 2018). However, the level of market intelligence that channels (e.g., hotel website, traditional travel agent) provide is typically low, which is why the channel integration literature has paid little attention to learning capabilities. Furthermore, learning occurs in platform integration because platforms have low information asymmetry and capture in-depth, real time and authentic customer reviews to help hotels understand customer sentiments about themselves and their competitors (Chen & Xie, 2008; Manes & Tchetchik, 2018). These reviews are not available to the same extent in case of channels.

Table 4.7

Similarities and differences between platform integration and channel integration: high level assessment

	Platform integration capabilities present in channel integration with similar objectives	**Platform integration capabilities present in channel integration with different objectives**	**Platform integration capabilities partially present in channel integration with similar and different objectives**	**Platform integration capabilities not salient in channel integration**
Platform properties	Platform properties offer similar opportunities to hotels like channels – to provide a positive service experience for customers.	Platform properties offer similar opportunities to hotels like channels - to provide a positive service experience for customers. However, inherent tensions between hotels and platform firms make hotels focus on different objectives in platform contexts.	Platform properties offer broader opportunities and challenges for hotels compared to channels.	Platform properties offer new opportunities and challenges for hotels compared to channels.

Table 4.7 draws on existing literature and our empirical findings to suggest high-level explanations for the similarities and differences between platform integration and channel integration. We find that although platforms and channels differ considerably, both offer similar opportunities to hotels - to offer a positive service experience for customers. As a result, in both platform integration and channel integration, hotels develop similar capabilities to serve the same objectives of satisfying customers. However, platform properties create inherent tensions between hotels and platform firms. The power of platforms allows them to charge exceptionally high commissions while also restricting the ways that hotels can promote themselves on the platforms. As a result, for some platform integration capabilities, these inherent tensions can influence objectives and result in hotels focusing more on costs and profitability and less on satisfying customers.

Furthermore, platform properties offer broader opportunities and challenges for hotels than channels. For instance, while platforms and channels offer similar customer booking information, platforms provide large volumes of authentic online customer reviews about the hotel and its competitors that are not available to the same degree in channels. On the other hand, while customer security and privacy risks are common in both platforms and channels, platforms create additional challenges such as increased financial risks resulting from a higher influx of fraudulent customer bookings. As a result, platform integration requires an expanded array of capabilities that are not necessary to this extent in the case of channel integration.

Finally, platform properties offer new opportunities and challenges for hotels, which are not salient in the case of channels. For instance, platforms give hotels the opportunity to reach out to an extensive network of customers, which may not have been possible otherwise. But they also create challenges because they attract a vast network of rival hotels to compete directly, within the same platform, for the same customer bookings. Thus, platform integration

offers a mix of opportunities and challenges that require new capabilities that are not needed in the case of channel integration.

Table 4.6

Similarities and differences between platform integration and channel integration: detailed assessment

How are platform integration capabilities similar to and different from channel integration capabilities?	Platform integration capabilities	Comparison to the literature of channel integration capabilities	Comparison to the literature on platform properties						
			Stakeholder interaction	Partial control	Low information asymmetry	Matchmaking	Network effects	Network centrality	Market intelligence
Some coordinating capabilities are *fully present* in channel integration and have *similar* objectives.	Adjusting content information	Present in channel integration: integrated promotions information, integrated product and pricing information. Similar objectives: projecting an accurate brand image, setting the right customer expectations and satisfying customers. Key references: (Carlson et al., 2015; Neslin & Shankar, 2009)		✓					
	Changing customer bookings	Present in channel integration: integrated customer service. Similar objectives: solving customer problems and satisfying customers. Key references: (Li et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018)	✓	✓				✓	
	Communicating with customers	Present in channel integration: integrated customer service. Similar objectives: replying to customer queries, solving customer problems and satisfying customers. Key references: (Hossain et al., 2019; Oh et al., 2012)	✓	✓				✓	
	Providing freedom of choice	Present in channel integration: integrated order fulfillment. Similar objectives: providing customer flexibility and convenience. Key references: (Cao & Li, 2018; J. Wu & Chang, 2016)	✓				✓		
	Influencing in-house customer service	Present in channel integration: integrated customer service. Similar objectives: satisfying customers and increasing customer perceived value. Key references: (Li et al., 2018; Oh & Teo, 2010)	✓		✓				
Some coordinating capabilities are *fully present* in channel	Adjusting price	Present in channel integration: integrated product and pricing information. Different objectives: increase profits. Key references: (Oh et al., 2012; Shen et al., 2018)		✓				✓	✓
	Adjusting inventory	Present in channel integration: integrated information access. Different objectives: optimize costs and maximize sales and profits. Key references: (Emrich et al., 2015; J. Wu & Chang, 2016)		✓				✓	✓

			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
integration but have *different* objectives.	Engaging in promotional campaigns	Present in channel integration: integrated promotions information. Different objectives: increase sales. Key references: (Banerjee, 2014; Seck & Philippe, 2013)		✓		✓		✓		
Some coordinating capabilities are *partially present* in channel integration with a mix of *similar* and *different* objectives.	Mobilizing information comprising of (i) facilitating information exchange, and (ii) synthesizing information.	Present in channel integration: integrated information access and integrated transaction information. Not salient in channel integration: mobilizing online customer reviews. Similar objectives: personalizing customer service and satisfying customers. Different objectives: managing online reputation, understanding customer sentiment. Key references: (Gallino & Moreno, 2014; Ganesh, 2004; Payne & Frow, 2004; Von Briel, 2018; Wollenburg et al., 2018).	✓	✓				✓		
	Mitigating risks comprising of (i) reconciling, (ii) avoiding, (iii) regulating and (iv) complying.	Present in channel integration: integrated security and privacy. Not salient in channel integration: mitigating additional risks (financial and online reputational risk) that arise in two-sided platform markets. Similar objectives: protecting customers against fraud and leakage of confidential information. Different objectives: alleviating financial loss and protecting online reputation in two-sided platform markets. Key references: (Hossain et al., 2020, 2019; Montoya-Weiss et al., 2003; Parasuraman et al., 2005)					✓	✓		
Some coordinating and all learning capabilities are *not salient* in channel integration but are applied in platform integration.	Leveraging customer networks	Not salient in channel integration literature.				✓	✓	✓		
	Influencing ranking	Not salient in channel integration literature.				✓	✓	✓		
	Learning capability category comprising of (i) understanding customer demand, (ii) understanding customer distinctions, (iii) understanding business performance (iv) understanding price competitiveness, (v) identifying gaps in service quality, and (vi) understanding uncertainty in payment.	Not salient in channel integration literature.			✓					✓

4.6 Contributions, limitations and future research directions

4.6.1 Theoretical contributions

Based on the above discussion, we extend the channel integration literature by showing that some known channel integration practices apply to platform integration, but additional and new capabilities are needed for firms to effectively engage in platform integration. To adequately deal with platforms, firms need to develop platform-specific integration capabilities. We believe these findings make contributions to the existing work in channel integration and resource-based theory on inter-firm resource alignment literatures.

First, channel integration focuses on familiarizing customers with the available channels and channel features (Banerjee, 2014). However, in platform integration, the capability to optimize visibility is essential to enable hotels to remain prominent in platform environments. We find support in the digital marketing literature on online visibility in general, and its effect on firm performance (Drèze & Zufryden, 2004; Melo, Hernández-Maestro, & Muñoz-Gallego, 2017).

Second, channel integration literature explains the notion of mitigating risks to address customer security and privacy issues (Hossain et al., 2020). However, for platform integration, the capability to mitigate risks is vital to managing the potential liabilities typical of platform environments. Extant literature in the field of strategic management provides supporting insights on mitigating performance risk in inter-firm collaborations (Das & Teng, 1999, 2001). Also, online service quality literature offers knowledge on customer security and privacy measures (Montoya-Weiss et al., 2003; Parasuraman et al., 2005).

Third, the channel integration literature has not described the role of learning capabilities. In platform integration, learning capabilities are fundamental for hotels to more effectively develop coordinating capabilities, and any absence of learning capabilities will lead

to ineffective deployment of hotel resources. Resource-based theory in the domain of marketing strategy similarly advocates for the importance of learning capabilities for developing knowledge resources (Hult & Ketchen Jr., 2001; Kozlenkova et al., 2014).

Finally, we contribute to the resource-based theory on inter-firm resource alignment (Huang & Li, 2018; Lin, Yang, & Arya, 2009). Whereas prior research illustrates the types of inter-firm resource alignments (Das & Teng, 2000a) and examines their impact on performance outcomes predominantly in joint ventures and strategic alliances (Das & Teng, 2003; Lunnan & Haugland, 2008), it provides limited insights on the antecedent capabilities. Our findings propose the antecedent coordinating and learning capabilities for service providers to align their operations with platforms.

4.6.2 Managerial contributions

This research has developed a comprehensive list of the capabilities required for effective platform integration. These capabilities offer hotel managers concise insights into the best practices required to manage a vital new business relationship - with platforms - to optimize performance level outcomes, such as profitability. Our research does not displace the capabilities hotels need for channel integration. Many hotels use both channels and platforms as part of their overall strategy, and some of these capabilities are common to both channel and platform integration. We are also not trying to weigh the overall advantages and disadvantages of hotels engaging with platforms and compare them against direct and indirect channels. However, because platforms have distinctive properties compared to channels, and are creating significant disruption among traditional channels, we offer managers a detailed set of capabilities that is relevant to work with and across platforms successfully. Our data structures in Tables 4.4 and 4.5 delineate the granular activities that hotels can apply for effective platform

integration. Next, we discuss the managerial implications of the identified capability sets for platform integration.

First, when hotels effectively adjust content information, they can project an accurate brand image and set appropriate customer expectations. Effective price and inventory adjustments can boost sales and profitability. Second, hotels can mobilize information to improve efficiency in handling information, manage online reputation, and analyze customer sentiments. Without adequate information management, hotels cannot develop vital customer insights, are prone to making errors (e.g., overbooking, incorrect pricing), dissatisfying customers, and incurring higher costs. Third, hotels optimizing visibility can get more customer attention on platforms, by making the algorithms work in their favor, helping them to outperform their competitors. This is vital in markets with high network effects as many rival hotels are also participating on the same platforms.

Fourth, hotels influencing customer service can shape the service experience during the entire customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), which is vital to increase future bookings on platforms. This is because, on platforms, the degree of information asymmetry is low compared to channels and has created a greater degree of transparency for customers. More particularly, authentic reviews and ratings enable customers to gain a deep understanding of different hotels to make an informed decision (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Hotels can seize this opportunity by influencing customer service to satisfy customers and attain higher ratings and better reviews, which will boost future bookings on platforms. Furthermore, the vast reach of platforms means that these authentic reviews have significant communication value.

Fifth, hotels mitigating risks can more effectively alleviate risks posed in two-sided market platforms, including fraud, leakage of confidential information, financial loss, and negative online reputation. Finally, managers applying learning capabilities can build new

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knowledge bases, make sound data-driven decisions, and more effectively develop coordinating capabilities.

4.6.3 Limitations and future research directions

We now discuss the limitations of our research and offer new ideas for future research. First, our field data primarily included interviews, supplemented by relevant documents. If we spent more time in each hotel, observing the platform integration activities, we could have gained a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic process of platform integration. Future research could conduct a longitudinal study to explore how platform integration unfolds over time. Second, we identified some variations in platform integration capabilities based on hotel size and ownership structure. Future research should build on these nascent findings, as there may be additional contextual variations related to platform integration.

Third, because we focused on the perspective of hotels, we gathered extensive field data primarily from hotels, augmented by data from platform firms for data triangulation purposes. We did not need to collect data from other stakeholders in the platform ecosystem such as customers or other service providers (e.g., car rental, airline). Future research could widen the unit of analysis to a platform ecosystem level (Jacobides et al., 2018) and explore how and in what ways the interplay of activities between different stakeholders collectively influence platform integration.

Fourth, because our research is exploratory and qualitative and contributes to theory building, it provides a springboard for theory testing, quantitative analysis. Future research may develop a scale for platform integration and examine how much the capabilities increase hotels' financial performance. Fifth, we only focused on the hotel industry, where the impact of platforms has been highly disruptive. However, the degree of disruption caused by platforms varies in different industries. In food retailing, such as restaurants, it has proven less disruptive

(Verhoef et al., 2015). Thus, future research could explore the effects of platform integration on firm performance in diverse service industries under different levels of disruption triggered by platforms.

Sixth, although our findings show that platform integration improves existing hotel services, we did not detect any activity related to new service development. This may be because hotels have separate new service development processes that do not – at least currently – involve collaboration with platform firms. Furthermore, even though platform firms provide valuable data to hotels, these specialized data are more relevant to improving existing hotel services and coordinating with platforms. Hence, new service development appears currently to be outside the scope of platform integration. This may change in the future, as platforms, other technologies, and consumer behavior continue to develop. Should that happen, our findings provide future researchers a comprehensive conceptualization that can be adjusted as hospitality practices evolve.

Seventh, our literature review on channel integration shows that there are limited studies in business to business (B2B) marketing on channel integration. Future research could use a similar approach to ours to explore channel integration in B2B marketing contexts. Finally, the omnichannel marketing literature focuses heavily on managing channels (Ailawadi & Farris, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2015), but less emphasis has been given to social media platforms that facilitate customer engagement and online shopping. For the future, we encourage researchers to explore the capabilities to manage all social media platforms in a unified manner.

4.7 Appendices

4.7.1 Appendix A. Interview guide posed to hotel participants

Examples of general open-ended questions:

- "Could you please describe how and in what ways hotel X works with and across different booking platforms, e.g., platform name A, platform name B?"
- "Could you describe the key activities in this process?"

Examples of specific questions based on participants' explanations and responses:

- "You stated that you have access to analytics information on platforms. Could you explain in what ways do you use the analytics information?" How has it been useful?"
- "You stated about the ranking of hotel X on these platforms. Could you explain what hotel X can do to boost this ranking?"
- "You stated about receiving real time feedback from platforms. What does hotel X do with this feedback?"
- "You mentioned issues such as invalid credit cards, fraud bookings, and no shows. How do hotel X manage such issues?"
- "You mentioned about meeting market managers at least once a month. What conversations do you have with them? How have these meetings been beneficial?"
- "You mentioned about setting prices on different platforms. What factors do you take into consideration in setting the price?"
- "You mentioned about collating all online customer reviews in one place. Why does hotel X do this? How has it been beneficial?"
- "You mentioned about keeping a record of your customers in the property management system. What does hotel X do with this database?"

Typical closing question:

- "Are there any other ways in which hotel X works with and across booking platforms that we have not discussed today?"

4.7.2 Appendix B. Platform integration capabilities: Definitions and illustrative quotes

Table 4.8

Coordinating capabilities: Definitions and illustrative quotes

Coordinating capability sets	Definitions	Illustrative quotes to show each 2nd-order theme
Adjusting information	Ability to make appropriate informational changes on platforms by modifying the content, price, and inventory information.	***Adjusting content information*** *"We have our dedicated marketing team [...]. We can upload photos every day. If we want to, we can change the content every day. It really depends on hotels to monitor what they actually want to sell. Do they want to sell hotel? Do they want to sell experience? [...]. We need to use our wording, we need to draft our property descriptions, and it is really our choice how we want to do it, how we want to communicate our brand."* [ID: 7] ***Adjusting price*** *"So, you can see there is Pink coming, the singer, in September. There's a couple of days where the hotel is already full over those days. And so over that time, we kept an eye on our occupancy, and as it got fuller, we started moving the rate [price] up just on that day. But it's still selling because obviously people are looking for a place to stay on that day."* [ID: 4] ***Adjusting inventory*** *"If I know, there's an event happening in the city [...]. I know the market demand is extremely high, I know that people won't just go onto any platforms to look for hotels, but they would just go on Google. As long as they see a room available, they will book the room. So, making sure that you identify those demand periods and making sure that you are then selling on your hotel website. Avoid the bridge. Avoid the commission. But then again for that one day, you're losing visibility. So maybe you want to look at instead of offering them all the rooms, you offer them five rooms."* [ID: 34]
Mobilizing information	Ability to facilitate information exchange with and across platforms; and the ability to pull and integrate customer data, sales data, and online customer reviews in one centralized place.	***Facilitating information exchange*** *"So, most platforms link to our property management system, and it's in real time. As a customer makes a booking on Platform A, that booking straight away enters our system in real time."* [ID: 31] ***Synthesizing information*** *"The property management system integrates most of the data from all platforms, which allows the respective department to be able to view the data that's more relevant for each."* [ID: 34]
Optimizing visibility	Ability to remain prominent, stand out, and get noticed on	***Leveraging customer networks*** *"It's worldwide marketing. That's the best. Basically, they have a platform which can give you customers from the entire globe. That's, I think, the best way to put it."* [ID: 12]

	platforms by leveraging customer networks, influencing the ranking of the hotel listing, and engaging in promotional campaigns.	***Influencing ranking*** *"Each hotel has a score. You have to be 100% in your content score in order for your listing to appear on the first page."* [ID: 8] ***Engaging in promotional campaigns*** *"We [Platform A] have the ability to target specific countries with specific promotions. If a hotel wants to build a bigger base in the US or a bigger base in the UK, they have the tools available."* [ID: 41]
Mitigating risks	Ability to alleviate risks by reconciling inconsistencies in financial accounts, proactively avoiding uncertainty, regulating actions that are susceptible to financial loss, and complying with security and privacy protocols.	***Reconciling*** *"So, if I say, for example, "This guest has booked, and he didn't show up, and his credit card has also declined. So, we couldn't take payment from this guest, right? Why should we be paying commission to Platform C?" So, on the platform, we have one tab where we can reconcile the booking."* [ID: 22] ***Avoiding*** *"We get a virtual credit card on Platform C. It's much easier to be able to just charge the platform directly rather than the guest because it just cuts everything out of the way. You know you've got a secure payment. You've got that money. Whereas if you're charging a guest card, it can decline."* [ID: 26] ***Regulating*** *"For example, if guests pay the bill directly through Platform D, and they book three nights, 600 dollars, boom. And then they come back to us saying, "Oh, I want to shorten one-night stay". I won't do it. Platform D can't do it, because it's past the cancellation time."* [ID: 14] ***Complying*** *"Their [Platform A] managers are really good at it, and they will never discuss your business with somebody else. The same with me, say if I meet Platform A market manager and I want to know what my competitor is doing, they will never share that with me."* [ID: 39]
Influencing customer service	Ability to shape service experience during the entire customer journey by assisting customers in making booking changes if deemed necessary, communicating with customers, providing freedom of choice during booking and payment, and actively influencing	***Changing customer bookings*** *"So, if the guest calls us directly, normally, if they want to cancel the booking, they need to go through Platform C, but under certain circumstances, we can click a button and say, "request to cancel, the guest wanted to cancel."* [ID: 26] ***Communicating with customers*** *"Platform A has another system which is messaging. So, after completing the booking, the guest can send messages saying "I am coming at this particular time" and ask me questions, and we can reply."* [ID: 1] ***Providing freedom of choice*** *"I think it's important that people have the freedom to book. So not everyone wants to book directly with the property, and the customer feels that they have more control in terms of seeking out the best deal even though it's the same property appearing on various websites. The customer feels in control*

	customer service at the hotel.	so that's obviously very helpful in terms of us serving our customers." [ID: 11] **Influencing in-house customer service** "When a customer has a problem, the best thing to do is to fix it while the guest is in the hotel, not after they leave. After they leave, you cannot fix it if it is related to the service." [ID: 36]

Table 4.9

Learning capabilities: Definitions and illustrative quotes

Learning capability sets	Definitions	Illustrative quotes to show each 2nd-order theme
Understanding customers	Ability to understand customer demand; and the ability to sense distinctions among customer segments and between individual customers.	*Understanding customer demand* "The data analytics side on platforms is more about the future and the forecast. So, the analytics, it's more looking into the future and the trends in our particular market." [ID: 40] *Understanding customer distinctions* "The data analytics on these platforms are the main thing we look at to identify market segments, as it can tell us where our traffic has been driven from." [ID: 11]
Understanding performance and price	Ability to understand the hotel's business performance as well as the competitiveness of their pricing strategy.	*Understanding business performance* "So, the one thing that Platform A does is they've got an intelligence report, so you can actually set up your competitive-set, and you can get a report daily about where you are sitting in relation to your competitive set. So, it's an invaluable insight into, you know, how we're doing, whether we're getting a fair market share or not." [ID: 5] *Understanding price competitiveness* "Now, with Platform A, I can log on and I can select I think it's about eight different competitors, and I can see over a three-month period what their prices are for their entry-level room and where we sit." [ID: 4]
Identifying core problems	Ability to identify core problems by sensing gaps in service quality and understanding financial risks that may arise during payments.	*Identifying gaps in service quality* "Oh, now with real time feedback – if there is a problem, we immediately talk to the guest and say, "Hey, look we understand that there is something that you had a problem with…can you tell us more?" [ID: 36] *Understanding uncertainty in payment* "When a booking comes into our system, which is being made with a fraudulent credit card, an alert pops up to us. In the last night's case for example, the guest called us at the hotel and said: "Oh, it is my girlfriend's credit card - can you just charge that for the room, and I will be arriving at 2 in the morning" which is odd within itself." [ID: 35]

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis explored how hotels work with multi-sided platforms. Drawing on the relational perspective of resource based theory, it investigated how hotels simultaneously cooperate and compete with platforms (coopetition) and subsequently examined cooperation with platforms (platform integration) in greater detail. Using grounded theory methods, three inter-linked studies formed the basis of this thesis. The first study investigated how hotels can balance the forces of cooperation and competition when dealing with platforms so that neither force dominated the other. The second study explored how hotels pursue coopetition close to the customer interface. The third study explored platform integration capabilities and examined their similarities and differences from channel integration capabilities. This concluding chapter is organized in the following way: First, a summary of the research findings is presented. Second, the theoretical and practical implications of the thesis are synthesized and discussed. Finally, the research limitations are highlighted, and important future research themes discussed.

5.1 Summary of findings

The first study explored coopetition balance and found that managers (i) use heuristics to separate cooperation and competition, (ii) apply sensemaking to integrate cooperation and competition, and (iii) utilize IT tools to concurrently separate and integrate cooperation and competition. This study developed a conceptual framework highlighting the managerial activities (e.g., establishing KPIs) and resources (e.g., customer demand data) required to pursue cooperation and competition in a balanced way.

The second study explored coopetition in close customer proximity and identified four distinct coopetition patterns: (i) optimization relies predominantly on cooperation to enhance

sales, (ii) integration relies on the synthesis of cooperation and competition, (iii) spatial separation divides cooperation and competition in different spaces, and (iv) temporal disintermediation is a competition-dominant move to temporarily dissolve platform relationships. A novel conceptual framework was developed to illustrate how these coopetition patterns vary at different tension levels between hotels and platforms. It was found that hotels pursue (i) optimization when tensions are low, (ii) integration at moderate tension levels, (iii) spatial separation at moderately high tensions, and (iv) temporal disintermediation when tensions are very high.

The final study explored platform integration, defined as the ability of hotels to enact coordinating and learning capabilities to align their operations with and across platforms. This study identified five coordinating capabilities that orchestrate hotel activities effectively and efficiently to foster resource alignment with and across platforms; and three learning capabilities that enable hotels to build a new knowledge base to more effectively develop coordinating capabilities. This study suggested that the understanding of channel integration (i.e., managing multiple channels in a unified way) needs to expand to platform integration. To put it succinctly, this research explained that for platform integration: (i) although some previously known channel integration capabilities need to be applied to achieve similar objectives, some are applied for different objectives, (ii) the scope of some previously known channel integration capabilities need to be expanded to achieve a wider array of objectives, and (iii) some additional capabilities, including the new category of learning capabilities, need to be employed to achieve new objectives.

Overall, these three inter-linked studies provide in-depth insight into how hotels can work with multi-sided platforms successfully. Based on the findings, the theoretical implications of the thesis are explained next.

5.2 Theoretical implications

5.2.1 Theoretical implications to the marketing literature

The theoretical implications of this thesis to the marketing literature are grouped into four themes: (i) tension management, (ii) platform integration and resource alignment, (iii) the influence of contextual factors on hotel-platform relationships, and (iv) the influence of firm level factors on hotel-platform relationships. These themes are illustrated in Figure 5.1 and are discussed in detail next.
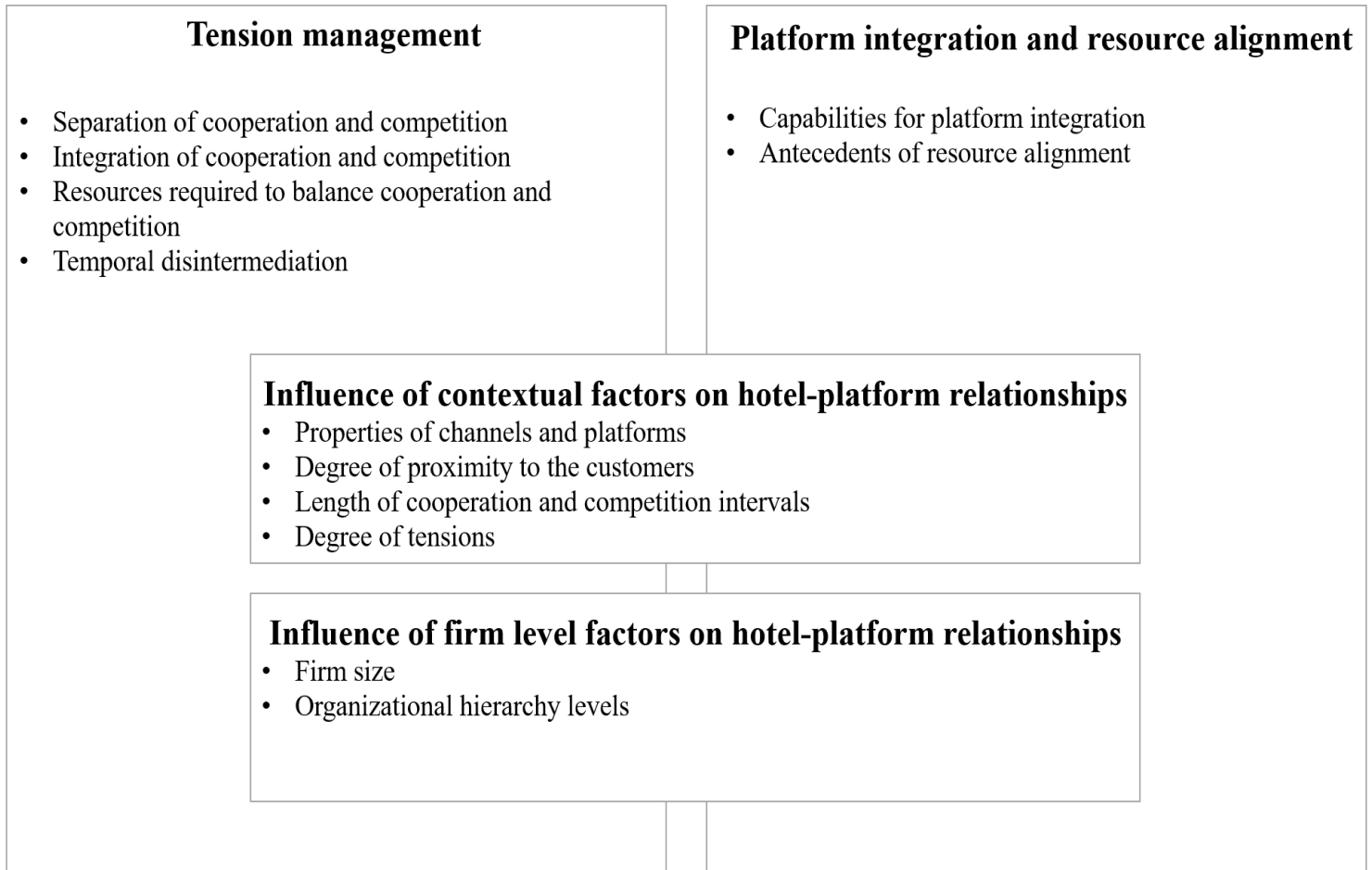
5.2.1.1 Tension management

The relationship between hotels and platforms is filled with tensions (Bilbil, 2019; Chang et al., 2019). This is because platforms have high levels of bargaining power, charge high commissions, and enforce rules that affect hotel profitability (Sharma & Nicolau, 2019; Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019). Therefore, hotels must devise effective practices to manage these tensions for optimal profits. This thesis contributed to the coopetition literature by (i) showing how hotels can manage these tensions by balancing cooperation and competition, (ii) clarifying how hotels separate and integrate cooperation and competition when dealing with platforms and (iii) explicating the resources required to balance these forces. Furthermore, this thesis (iv) introduced the concept of temporal disintermediation into the tension management field.

In terms of separation, contrary to existing literature insight about functional separation (Fernandez & Chiambaretto, 2016; Tidström, Ritala, & Lainema, 2018), this research found that hotels do not separate cooperation and competition in different departments. Instead, separation of cooperation and competition occurs at an individual level, as managers internally create a boundary between the two forces. For example, managers develop heuristics to separate cooperation and competition: they offer the same room rate on different platforms

(cooperation) but charge a lower rate on their own websites (competition). These decisions are based on mental shortcuts and are described by managers as "rules of thumb."

Figure 5.1

Themes related to theoretical implications to marketing literature

Tension management	**Platform integration and resource alignment**
• Separation of cooperation and competition • Integration of cooperation and competition • Resources required to balance cooperation and competition • Temporal disintermediation	• Capabilities for platform integration • Antecedents of resource alignment

Influence of contextual factors on hotel-platform relationships
- Properties of channels and platforms
- Degree of proximity to the customers
- Length of cooperation and competition intervals
- Degree of tensions

Influence of firm level factors on hotel-platform relationships
- Firm size
- Organizational hierarchy levels

The existing coopetition research offers limited understanding of integration, the way managers pursue cooperation and competition at the same time and place without separating the two forces (Fernandez et al., 2014; Le Roy & Czakon, 2016). This research finds that managers apply sensemaking to integrate cooperation and competition. For instance, revenue managers evaluate the market demand and occupancy levels to decide whether to sell an inventory of 40, 52, or 100 rooms on platforms at a given time.

Another contribution relates to the resources required to balance cooperation and competition. While existing studies focus heavily on managerial activities to pursue coopetition (Joseph et al., 2020; Wang & Miller, 2020), this thesis took a complementary approach showcasing the resources needed to pursue those activities. For example, hotels utilize market data and financial performance data to control inventory allocations and regulate distribution costs. Understanding the resources required to do this provides insight into the appropriate support system (e.g., data, IT tools, distribution structure) to pursue coopetition activities effectively.

Although prior research shows that separation or integration of cooperation and competition are appropriate approaches to manage high tensions (Hoffmann et al., 2018; Seran et al., 2016), this thesis showed that is not always the case. When tensions spiral to a very high level, the existing tension management approaches are not suitable to handle the situation. Rather, hotels decide to disintermediate from platforms temporarily. For instance, when the market demand is high, hotels decide to stop sales on platforms for a limited time and focus on generating direct sales via their own channels. Prior research has not considered the importance of ending coopetitive relationships temporarily. This thesis, however, opened a new research avenue on temporal disintermediation to manage high tensions and ensure economic profits.

5.2.1.2 Platform integration and resource alignment

This thesis contributes to the understanding of how hotels collaborate with platforms. To this end, a novel theoretical concept coined "platform integration" was proposed, and the antecedents of resource alignment for effective collaboration were established.

Platform integration was conceptualized as a specialized capability to deal with platforms. It is defined as the ability of hotels to enact coordinating and learning capabilities to align their operations with and across platforms. Coordinating capabilities refer to orchestrating

activities in an effective and efficient manner to foster resource alignment with and across platforms. Learning capabilities refer to activities for building new knowledge bases to more effectively develop coordinating capabilities. When used together, coordinating and learning capabilities enable hotels to more effectively collaborate with platforms.

This thesis offered a conceptual framework of platform integration, illustrating how it can be applied to collaborate with platforms successfully. The ability of hotels to get noticed and remain prominent in platform environments is central to platform integration. In practice, hotels maintain high content and review scores, offer competitive rates, respond to customer queries promptly and engage in promotional campaigns to optimize visibility. Another crucial capability relates to mitigating risks as the number of fraudulent customer bookings and reviews are high in platform environments. As a result, hotels collaborate with platforms to proactively address these issues. For example, hotels reconcile "no show" bookings in time to avoid the dangers of fraudulent customer reviews. This practice stops the platform from sending a secured link for writing a review to no show customers who did not stay at the hotel. Yet another critical platform integration capability is learning: hotels have access to market analytics data on the platform portal and thus, learn about customers, competitors and the overall industry to take data-driven decisions. As a result, this thesis expanded the channel integration concept (Cao & Li, 2018; Gao et al., 2021) to platform integration.

This thesis also contributed to resource based theory related to inter-firm resource alignment (Huang & Li, 2018; Lin et al., 2009). Resource alignment is defined as "the pattern, whereby the resources of partner firms are matched and integrated" (Das & Teng, 2000a, p. 48). Although previous empirical work has explored the impact of resource alignment on business performance in joint ventures or strategic alliances (Das & Teng, 2003; Lunnan & Haugland, 2008), there is a lack of empirical insight on the antecedent capabilities that drive resource alignment. This thesis suggested two distinct sets of capabilities (coordinating and

learning) that influence how well firms can attain resource alignment with and across platforms.

5.2.1.3 Influence of contextual factors on hotel-platform relationships

This thesis identified four different contextual factors that affect the business relationship between hotels and platforms: (i) properties of channels and platforms, (ii) degree of proximity to customers, (iii) length of cooperation and competition intervals, and (iv) degree of tension.

This thesis explicated the similarities and differences between marketing channels and platforms. In addition to arguing that channels and platforms have different characteristics, this thesis showed that firms cannot rely on channel integration (i.e., managing different channels in a cohesive manner) to work with platforms. Instead, firms need to develop platform specialized capabilities – namely platform integration – to work in platform environments successfully. This thesis presented the similarities and differences between channel integration and platform integration capabilities. To summarize, (i) one set of integration capabilities is similar across channels and platforms – they manifest similarly and serve similar objectives. However, in platform contexts, (ii) some integration capabilities satisfy different objectives, (iii) some are wider in scope to achieve a broader set of objectives, and (iv) some are unique and attain new objectives.

Another significant contribution relates to how the "spaces" in spatial separation differ depending on the degree of proximity to the customer interface. Spatial separation refers to isolating cooperation and competition in different spaces or locations (Oinonen et al., 2018; Poole & de Ven, 1989). While prior research suggests these spaces to be value chain domains or product areas (Fernandez et al., 2014; Hoffmann et al., 2018), this thesis suggested that such spaces are only relevant when firms pursue coopetition far from the customer interface. In other

words, these spaces are not appropriate when firms pursue coopetition near the customer. Instead, this thesis identified specialized spaces (both physical and virtual) to divide cooperation and competition in close customer proximity: the physical hotel, platforms, and direct channels. For example, hotels collaborate in the platform space to connect with large customer audiences and generate sales but compete in the hotel channel space (e.g., hotel website) to attract customers directly. These identified spaces do not come into play for coopetition far from the customer interface.

Furthermore, this thesis contributed to the understanding of temporal separation and how its application depends on long vs. short episodes of cooperation and competition. Temporal separation means that firms can isolate cooperation and competition in different time frames (Lavie, Stettner, & Tushman, 2010; Smith & Lewis, 2011). This thesis showed that temporal separation is possible only when the time span of cooperation and competition is lengthy. However, when the intervals of cooperation and competition are very short, temporal separation is not a viable approach to manage tensions. In hotel-platform relationships, the time span of cooperation or competition is short, which is why temporal separation is not appropriate. Rather, hotels enact spatial separation as the dominant approach to isolate cooperation and competition. For example, hotels send pre-arrival messages to customers in the platform space (cooperation), encourage customers to book direct when they meet them at the hotel space (competition), and reply to customer reviews in the platform space once they have left the hotel (cooperation). These cooperation and competition activities have short time lapses and are impossible to pursue without the presence of distinct spaces.

This thesis also showed how coopetition patterns vary depending on the degree of tensions. A novel conceptual framework was presented, showing how four distinct coopetition patterns manifest depending on the degree of tensions between hotels and platforms. To be precise, under low tension levels, hotels predominantly cooperate with platforms to optimize

their visibility in platform environments and come up with ideal rates (price). Under moderate tension levels, hotels synthesize cooperation and competition during their decision-making process. However, when tensions become moderately high, it becomes difficult for managers to synthesize cooperation and competition and thus, they decide to separate the two forces into different spaces (e.g., physical hotel, platforms, hotel website). But if tensions escalate to a high level, hotels pursue a competition-dominant strategy by deciding to stop sales on platforms temporarily. Therefore, unlike prior empirical insight (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000; Walley, 2007), coopetition patterns are not competition dominant close to the customer. Rather coopetition patterns range between cooperation and competition-dominant approaches based on tension levels.

5.2.1.4 Influence of firm level factors on hotel-platform relationships

This thesis identified different firm level factors that affect the relationship between hotels and platforms. It contributed to the ongoing discussion of firm related conditions on coopetition (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Gnyawali & Park, 2009) and platform integration. Specifically, this thesis shed light on the influence of firm size and organizational hierarchy levels.

Hotels of all sizes can enhance their visibility in search results and develop optimally competitive room rates in platform environments (optimization). Platforms inform all hotels about how they can appear higher in search results and provide 'rate intelligence' reports to help hotels develop competitive room rates. Furthermore, hotels of varying sizes can isolate cooperation and competition in different places (spatial separation). The reason is that spatial separation allows hotels to focus on either cooperation or competition in a specific location and thus removes the strain of handling both forces in the same place. Therefore, even the smaller hotels are capable of focusing on one type of action (cooperation or competition) in a particular

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domain or place. Furthermore, hotels of all sizes enact learning capabilities as they can access platform data to develop fresh insights. Also, hotels of different sizes can manage their content (pictures, hotel description) on platforms as most hotels have dedicated employees to do this task.

However, larger hotels are more capable of synthesizing cooperation and competition in the same place and time (integration) as they invest heavily in human and IT resources to develop their revenue management capabilities. On the contrary, smaller hotels do not usually have revenue management departments and thus, are less competent in integrating cooperation and competition. Also, larger hotels are more capable of discontinuing sales on platforms temporarily (temporal disintermediation). This is because, compared to smaller hotels, larger hotels have a broader loyal customer network and invest more in attracting and retaining customers through their direct channels. As a result, larger hotels rely less on platform sales than smaller hotels and can decide to stop sales on platforms when deemed necessary. Also, larger hotels are more capable of managing information than smaller hotels because they invest more in advanced IT tools.

This research also clarified how organizational hierarchy levels play an important role in the pursuit of coopetition. Contrary to existing perspectives (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), separation of cooperation and competition is not conducted only by managers at lower organizational hierarchy levels. Instead, managers from all organizational hierarchy levels are involved in the process. For instance, top managers (general managers) are responsible for separating cooperation and competition by maintaining confidentiality boundaries during business meetings with platform representatives. In contrast, entry-level and mid-level managers are responsible for separating service activities such that some activities focus on cooperation with platforms (e.g., improving hotel service), while others emphasize competition with platforms (e.g., providing personalized customer service).

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Furthermore, unlike current views (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016), integration of cooperation and competition is not pursued by managers at higher organizational hierarchy levels only. In fact, both top and mid-level managers are capable of synthesizing cooperation and competition at the same time and in the same place. For example, top managers (revenue directors) and mid-level managers (revenue managers) are responsible for managing inventory levels.

5.2.2 Theoretical implications to the tourism literature

5.2.2.1 Coopetition in dyadic business relationships

The tourism management literature takes a broad network perspective of tourism destinations to explore the drivers, management, and outcomes of coopetition (Chim-Miki & Batista-Canino, 2018; Dambiski Gomes de Carvalho et al., 2020; Fong et al., 2018; Grauslund & Hammershøy, 2021; Wang & Krakover, 2008). As a result, prior research in tourism offers limited insight on coopetition within dyadic business relationships (Bengtsson et al., 2010; Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016). In particular, it has not explained how tourism firms balance the contradictory demands of cooperation and competition and the tension management actions required in this process (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Hoffmann et al., 2018). In addition, there is limited research in tourism involving coopetition between hotels and platforms (Chang et al., 2019). Platforms are not "resellers" and do not follow a "linear" way of distribution that are relevant to marketing channels (Mody et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2019) but enable direct interaction and engagement between hotels and customers for value creation (Breidbach et al., 2014; Breidbach & Brodie, 2017). This calls for more research on how coopetition takes place when hotels work in platform environments.

To address the above research limitations, this thesis develops a typology of four distinct tension management patterns that can be applied depending on the degree of tensions

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in dyadic business relationships. These four patterns range from cooperation to competition-dominant approaches. When tensions are low, hotels pursue optimization by boosting their ranking on platforms and developing ideal room rates. Optimization predominantly occurs through collaboration with platforms and thus, is a cooperation-dominant approach to coopetition. However, during moderate tensions, hotels synthesize the forces of cooperation and competition to attain coopetition balance. When tensions are moderately high, hotels separate cooperation and competition in different locations to uphold balanced coopetition. Finally, during high tensions, hotels enact temporal disintermediation which is a competition-dominant approach to coopetition.

In addition, this thesis offers nuanced details of balancing the forces of cooperation and competition in dyadic business relationships (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Raza-ullah, 2021). In particular, hotels can (i) use heuristics to separate cooperation and competition, (ii) apply sensemaking to integrate the two forces, and (iii) leverage IT tools to simultaneously separate and integrate cooperation and competition. Finally, the resources required to uphold coopetition balance are also discussed in this thesis.

5.2.2.2 Integration of tension management into revenue management

Revenue management literature in general (Abrate & Viglia, 2016; Altin et al., 2017; Kimes, 1989; Saito et al., 2019), and price and inventory management in particular (Bigne et al., 2021; Ivanov et al., 2021; Pimentel et al., 2019; Yang & Leung, 2018) provide knowledge on how hotels can optimize revenues and profits. However, these fields of study do not explain how coopetition unfolds in this process and the tension management actions required to enact coopetition effectively. In addition, revenue management in platforms environments is an evolving field of research (Webb, 2016; Yang & Leung, 2018). Therefore, there is limited empirical insight the intersection coopetition and revenue management because firms in a

platform business network engage in simultaneous cooperation and competition. To this end, this thesis contributes to the revenue management literature by integrating insights from tension management. In particular, this research explains how managers can manage coopetitive tensions with platforms during price management and inventory management, which are explained next.

Revenue managers can manage their price on platforms by applying heuristics to pursue coopetition effectively. In particular, managers can employ heuristics by observing rate parity policies across platforms only (e.g., Expedia.com and Hotels.com) but not across platforms and hotel channels (e.g., Expedia.com and hotel mobile app). This process allows managers to cognitively separate the forces of cooperation and competition (by using heuristics) while managing hotel rates. It also involves separating cooperation and competition in different spaces (Joseph et al., 2020; Poole & de Ven, 1989). In particular, cooperation occurs in the platform space (rate parity) but competition in the hotel channel space (rate disparity).

However, during inventory management, revenue managers use sensemaking to integrate the forces of cooperation and competition in the same functional domain and at the same time (Lundgren-Henriksson & Kock, 2016a; Pattinson et al., 2018). In practice, managers draw insights from market data and use their previous experience in inventory management to make sense of the ideal number and type of inventories to sell via platforms. For example, revenue managers decide whether to sell 50, 60, or 100 room inventories on platforms from a total of 150 available inventories. Selling all 150 inventories would represent a cooperation-only relationship, whereas selling zero room inventory signifies competitive relationships. Instead, managers strive to find a balance of cooperation and competition depending on factors such as time of the week (weekdays vs. weekends), seasonality (summer vs. winter) to adjust their inventory levels and optimize economic profits.

5.3 Practical implications

This thesis offers important implications for three stakeholders: hotels and revenue managers, platform firms, and policymakers. Figure 5.2 illustrates the practical implications, which are described next.

5.3.1 Practical implications for hotels and revenue managers

While revenue managers have the skillsets to pursue revenue management, this thesis suggests managers integrate tension management into the practice of revenue management when dealing with platforms. During price management, although a range of pricing techniques are currently used, such as price differentiation, rate parity, dynamic pricing, and early bird deals (Bigne et al., 2021; Ivanov et al., 2021; Viglia et al., 2016), managers need to think separately about cooperation and competition. In practice, managers can use heuristics to charge the same price on all platforms (cooperation) but put a lower price on the hotel's direct channels (competition). As a result, by applying tension management into price management, optimal revenues and economic profits can be secured.
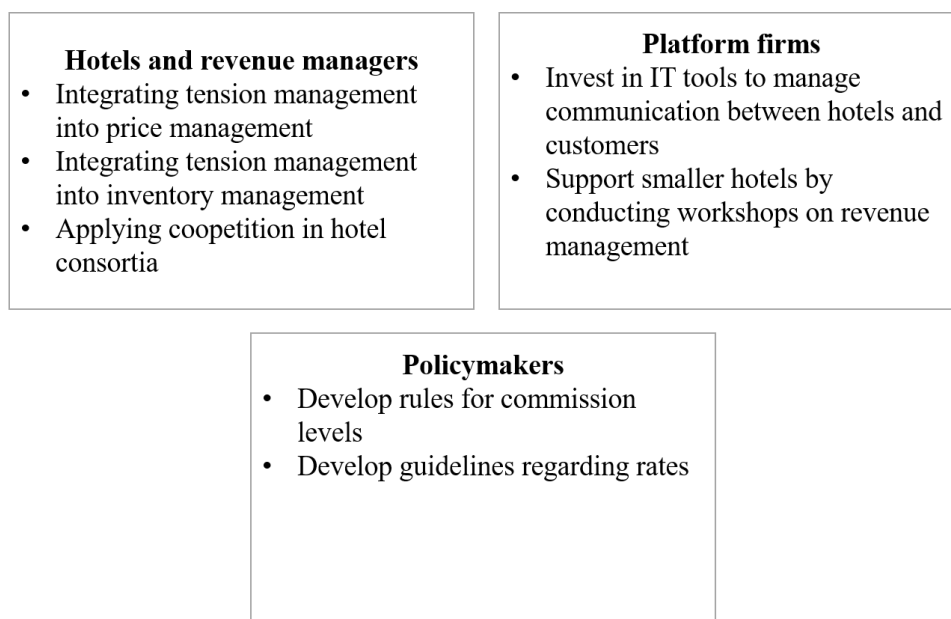
In addition, during inventory management, although the revenue management literature suggests allocating room inventory based on forecasted demand (Toh & Dekay, 2002; Wang et al., 2015; Wu, Song, & Shen, 2017), managers need to synthesize cooperation and competition in this process when dealing with platforms. In practice, managers need to apply sensemaking – by relying on past experience and market data - to decide on the appropriate levels of room inventory to allocate on platforms that blend cooperation and competition. For example, a revenue manager of a hotel that has 200 available room inventory needs to apply coopetition to judge whether to allocate 100, 120 or 150 inventories on Booking.com and Expedia.com. Relying too heavily on platforms by allocating all inventories (cooperation) will increase distribution costs. Not relying on them and providing zero inventory (competition)

will result in low or moderate occupancy levels. Therefore, managers need to blend coopetition with revenue management to find the right balance and optimize profits.

Moreover, this thesis suggests how hotels can engage in coopetition when participating in hotel consortia. Although this research focuses on dyadic business relationships and does not consider business networks as the unit of analysis, it may still provide key insights that are applicable for hotel consortia. In practice, hotels can collaborate with other hotels in activities within the hotel consortia (e.g., joint training and development) but compete with those hotels in business activities outside the consortia (e.g., marketing in a particular region to attract direct customer bookings). Further, hotels can apply simultaneous cooperation and competition with the consortia in marketing and sales. To be precise, hotels can generate sales by participating in the consortia (cooperation) and secure sales directly via hotel channels (competition). Finally, hotels need to be mindful of the consortium they join, as these consortia often compete with each other. Particularly, if a hotel wants to participate in a marketing consortium, joining a relatively weak one can impact the hotel performance because other competing consortia are better at customer acquisition.

Figure 5.2
Practical implications

Hotels and revenue managers	Platform firms
• Integrating tension management into price management • Integrating tension management into inventory management • Applying coopetition in hotel consortia	• Invest in IT tools to manage communication between hotels and customers • Support smaller hotels by conducting workshops on revenue management

Policymakers
• Develop rules for commission levels • Develop guidelines regarding rates

5.3.2 Practical implications for platform firms

This research suggests that platform firms would benefit from investing in appropriate IT tools to manage communication between hotels and customers. Investment in IT tools can enable platform firms to share a unique anonymous alias customer email with hotels (e.g., 1234@hotelbeds.com) so that both parties (hotels and customers) can communicate with each other. An anonymous alias email address is critical to protect the privacy of the customers. However, such practices open the possibility of opportunistic behaviours: hotels can motivate customers to cancel platform bookings and book directly on the hotel website to avoid paying commissions. Therefore, platform firms need to invest in automatic IT systems that screen hotel messages for opportunistic behaviours before forwarding them to the customer.

Furthermore, this thesis encourages platform firms to help smaller hotels in their endeavours to become more profitable. The findings show that smaller hotels do not have adequate revenue management capabilities, so they struggle to optimize profits compared to larger hotels. Therefore, this thesis suggests that platform firms invest in workshops to upskill managers at smaller hotels in inventory management, pricing, and forecasting. Such practices will play a vital role in fostering long term profitable relationships between platform firms and smaller hotels.

5.3.3 Practical implications for policymakers

This research implies that policymakers should devise rules to protect hotels and platforms from spiraling tension levels. Prior coopetition research has suggested that the involvement of a third party (in this case, policymakers) can assist in easing tensions (e.g., Fernandez et al., 2014). Two triggers escalate tension levels between hotels and platforms: high commissions and rate parity clauses. These triggers are considered below.

Platforms have high market power and charge high commissions (Verhoef & Bijmolt, 2019). Currently in New Zealand, platforms charge approximately 15% to 20% fees. A further increase in commissions will significantly affect hotel profits and escalate tension levels. Therefore, competition authorities (the Ministry of Economic Development and the Commerce Commission New Zealand) could place a limit or "cap" on commission levels to protect hotels from an abuse of market power. The findings show that some hotels withdraw their inventory from platforms that charge more than 20% commission. Such actions lower the network effects of platforms and thus, reduce the attractiveness of the platform for customers. Therefore, putting a commission cap will ensure the tension levels between hotels and platforms are at a manageable level. Hotels will continue working with different platforms to sell their inventory, which will play an important role in fostering network effects.

Furthermore, this research revealed that many hotels do not fully adhere to rate parity clauses. Therefore, there are legal matters that are not being taken into consideration. Hotels believe in their right and freedom to set a lower rate on their own website than what they charge on various platforms. Hence, from an ethical point of view, hotels believe that their actions are right, even though it is not legal. This shows that there exists a "legal-ethical" tension that needs to be resolved. Rate parity is a highly anti-competitive move, enforced by platforms who are dominating the market with more than 50% market share (Rossini, 2015; Sharma & Nicolau, 2019). Many countries such as Germany, Sweden and France have banned the use of the rate parity clause in hotel-platform contractual agreements (Nicolau & Sharma, 2019). However, in New Zealand, the rate parity clause still prevails. This research suggests legal intervention by competition authorities (the Ministry of Economic Development and the Commerce Commission New Zealand) to outlaw rate parity policy in the country to create a fair and competitive business environment.

5.4 Limitations

This thesis carefully adhered to the trustworthiness criteria in grounded theory and interpretive research (Flint et al., 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McGinley et al., 2021; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to minimize research limitations. Nevertheless, in each of the three studies presented in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the respective limitations are highlighted. In this section however, the limitations of the overall thesis are discussed, rather than the individual studies. Four limitations underpin this thesis: (i) generalizability to other industries, (iii) generalizability across the platform life cycle, (iii) generalizability across the relationship life cycle, and (iv) generalizability across different cultures.

In terms of generalizability to other industries, this thesis focused on the hospitality industry and thus, the findings are highly relevant to this sector only. However, as part of the trustworthiness assessment, the findings were presented to firms in two other industries: airline and car rental. It was encouraging to see that firms in these related service industries also apply some similar managerial practices to deal with platforms. Nevertheless, because this thesis did not collect data from different industries, the findings may not be generalizable to other sectors such as retailing (Amazon), informal accommodation (Airbnb) and taxi services (Uber).

In the same vein, in diverse industries, platforms are in different lifecycle stages. In the hospitality industry, platforms (Expedia) are in the maturity stage of their life cycle. However, for example, in the car parking market, platforms (Parkable) are in the introductory stage, while in the food services sector, platforms (Ubereats) are in the growth stage of their life cycle. Therefore, another limitation is that this thesis focused on the maturity stage of the platform life cycle and did not emphasize on the other stages. In other words, the findings of this thesis may not be generalizable for all phases of the platform life cycle.

Furthermore, this thesis did not focus on the relationship life cycle between hotels and platforms. The relationship life cycle is different from the platform life cycle because the former focuses on the life cycle of the business relationship, while the latter emphasizes the life cycle of the platform. Therefore, a limitation of this thesis is that it did not explore the variations in hotel management practices as they move through different phases of the relationship life cycle. As a result, the findings of this thesis may not be generalizable across all the relationship life cycle stages.

Finally, this thesis did not consider 'culture' as a contextual factor that might affect business relationships between hotels and platforms. The data collection was done in New Zealand, where the culture is more individualistic (Zhu, 2009). However, in other countries such as China and India, the cultural environment is collectivist (Shin, Ishman, & Sanders, 2007), which might influence hotel-platform relationships.

5.5 Future research themes

Based on the findings and limitations of this thesis, four themes for future research on coopetition and platform integration are suggested: (i) omnichannel marketing, (ii) customer experience, (iii) life cycle perspective, and (iv) context. These research themes go beyond the future research agendas offered in each study/chapter. Table 5.3 illustrates the research questions related to these research themes.

Table 5.1

Future research themes and questions

Future research themes	Future research questions
Omnichannel marketing	• What are the coopetition patterns as firms simultaneously work with various partners in an omnichannel environment? • What are the capabilities for omnichannel integration? How do these capabilities need to be adjusted across different customer touchpoints?

Customer experience	• What is the effect of different coopetition patterns on customer experience? • Which coopetition patterns have a stronger (weaker) effect on cognitive (emotional) customer experiences? • What is the impact of platform integration on customer experience? • Which platform integration dimensions have a stronger (weaker) effect on cognitive (emotional) customer experiences?
Life cycle perspective	• How do (i) coopetition and (ii) platform integration patterns unfold during the entire lifecycle of platforms? • How do (i) coopetition and (ii) platform integration patterns unfold at different stages of the relationship life cycle with platforms?
Context	• How do (i) coopetition and (ii) platform integration patterns vary in three temporal phases: pre COVID-19, during COVID-19, and post COVID-19 contexts? • What are the (i) coopetition and (ii) platform integration patterns in different industries involving platforms, such as retailing, gaming and food services? • How do cultural variations affect (i) coopetition and (ii) platform integration? • What are the (i) coopetition and (ii) platform integration patterns in blockchain enabled platform contexts?

5.5.1 Omnichannel marketing

The first theme relates to omnichannel marketing, defined as the ability of firms to manage different channels and customer touchpoints in a synergetic manner, rather than separately, to enhance service experience and profits (Ailawadi & Farris, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2015). The concept of coopetition has not been explored in omnichannel environments. Prior omnichannel research heavily focuses on collaboration (Cao & Li, 2015; Hossain et al., 2020) and does not consider the tensions that arise when firms manage channels and other customer touchpoints in an integrated manner. For example, omnichannel studies suggest that firms exchange information with their channel partners (Saghiri et al., 2017). However, such practices may create high tensions, particularly when that information is a basis of competitive advantage (Ailawadi, 2021). As a result, contrary to current views, full cooperation between

firms in an omnichannel environment is not a viable nor a practical strategy. Instead, a balance of cooperation and competition is an appropriate approach for firms to achieve higher performance outcomes, such as profits (Gnyawali & Charleton, 2018; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018). Therefore, future research can explore the coopetition patterns as firms simultaneously work with various partners in an omnichannel context.

Channel integration and platform integration are vital capabilities to pursue omnichannel marketing. While channel integration is effective in managing channels in a unified manner, platform integration is key to working with multiple platforms cohesively. Therefore, channel integration and platform integration take on a narrow view of channels and platforms, respectively. Future research could take on a broader perspective and explore integration capabilities across not only marketing channels or platforms but also other customer interfaces as well such as social media (Instagram) and search engines (Google). In other words, a theoretical framework illustrating omnichannel integration capabilities could suggest the common capabilities across all customer interfaces but also explain how the capabilities need to be adjusted across different interfaces. Such research would have profound implications for firms to manage the growing number of customer touchpoints effectively.

5.5.2 Customer experience

The second theme relates to customer experience, which captures how customers personally respond to their engagements with a firm across various touchpoints (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). In other words, customer experience is highly subjective and internal and comprises multiple dimensions such as cognitive and emotional experiences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Prior coopetition research has mostly examined its impact on economic performance, innovation performance, and knowledge creation (Bengtsson & Raza-Ullah, 2016; Dorn et al.,

2016). However, the influence of coopetition in shaping customer experience has not been subject to empirical examination. Therefore, future research could investigate the coopetition patterns that foster different types of customer experience, such as cognitive and emotional responses.

Furthermore, prior research has explored how channel integration affects customer experience (Gao et al., 2021; Shi et al., 2020). However, the impact of platform integration on customer experience has received less empirical attention. Based on the insights offered in Chapter 4 of this thesis, future research could explore which platform integration dimensions have a stronger (weaker) effect on cognitive (emotional) experiences.

5.5.3 Lifecycle perspective

The third future research theme could explore coopetition and platform integration from a platform life cycle perspective. The lifecycle of a platform comprises (i) introduction, (ii) growth, (iii) maturity, and (iv) decline stages (Eisenmann, 2007). In the introduction stage, few stakeholders are aware of the platform and thus, the network effects are low. The growth stage relates to the increasing participation of firms and customers on the platform interface who find the platform highly valuable. In the maturity stage, competing platforms enter the marketplace and thus, network effects peak but begin to fall. In the decline stage, firms and customer interest on the platform reduce, and there is a steady fall of network effects. In this thesis, hospitality platforms (e.g., Expedia, Booking) are in the maturity stage of platform life cycle. As a result, future research could explore coopetition and platform integration during the entire lifecycle of platforms.

In the same vein, there exist no studies exploring coopetition and platform integration based on the relationship life cycle with platforms. According to Jap and Ganesan (2000), the relationship life cycle comprises four phases: (i) exploration, (ii) build up (iii) maturity and (iv)

decline. In the exploration stage, firms evaluate the benefits and downsides of getting into a business relationship. At this stage, firms do not commit to the relationship; rather, they probe prospective partners (Hansen, Beitelspacher, & Deitz, 2013). In the build up stage, firms see the benefit of continuing a relationship and are satisfied with the outcomes of the partnership (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). In the maturity stage, firms commit high degrees of resources into the relationship and are highly committed to remaining in the partnership (Jap & Ganesan, 2000). Finally, in the decline stage, firms are disgruntled with the partnership, are on the verge of dissolving the relationship and thus, are evaluating other partners (Jap & Anderson, 2007). Future research could examine how coopetition and platform integration occur at different stages of the relationship life cycle with platforms.

5.5.4 Context

The fourth and final future research theme relates to context. Prior research on coopetition and platform integration does not explore how business relationships changed under the COVID-19 context. As a result, future research could conduct a longitudinal study investigating the variations in coopetition and platform integration practices in three temporal phases: (i) pre COVID-19, (ii) during COVID-19, and (iii) post COVID-19 contexts.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the limitations section, this thesis focused on the hospitality sector and thus, the findings may not be generalizable to other industries involving platforms such as food services and gaming. Therefore, future research may explore coopetition and platform integration in different industries involving platforms to develop a more generalizable conceptual framework.

Moreover, this thesis collects data from one country – New Zealand – which is an individualistic culture. Thus, the findings may not be generalizable to collectivist cultures (e.g.,

China and India). As a result, future research may investigate how cultural differences may influence coopetition and platform integration.

Finally, new and emerging blockchain enabled platforms have different characteristics than hospitality platforms such as Booking.com and Expedia.com. Blockchain relates to a ledger system that facilitates a transparent record of irreversible transactions (Iansiti & Lakhani, 2017). Blockchain removes the need for intermediaries and thus, decentralizes interactions between different stakeholders (Weking et al., 2020). Future researchers could explore coopetition and platform integration in blockchain enabled platform contexts.

5.6 An assessment of research aim

The aim of this thesis was to explore how hotels work with multi-sided platforms. This thesis has addressed the research aim based on three-interlinked studies. The first and second studies analyzed how hotels enact coopetition and competition with platforms (coopetition). The third study examined cooperation with platforms (platform integration) in more detail.

This thesis applied a theory adaptation process (Jaakkola, 2020) to come up with "alternative frames of reference" (MacInnis, 2011, p. 143) and develop novel conceptual frameworks on coopetition and platform integration. The overall contribution of this thesis relates to how hotels can (i) balance the forces of cooperation and competition when dealing with platforms, (ii) adjust coopetition patterns depending on tension levels, (iii) enact platform specialized capabilities, namely platform integration, to collaborate with platforms effectively, and (iv) adjust their capabilities depending on whether they are working with channels or platforms.

This thesis has made important theoretical and practical contributions and has offered directions for future researchers to take the field forward.

5.7 Epilogue

Multi-sided platforms have transformed various industries, including retailing (Amazon, AliExpress), taxi services (Uber, Ola), and hospitality (Trivago, Expedia). Platforms enable an extensive network of stakeholders to connect with each other, which would have been difficult without the existence of platforms. In the hospitality industry, platforms are crucial for hotels to reach new customers and generate sales. However, platforms have high market power, which they utilize to charge high commissions and enforce rules such as rate parity. In addition, because platforms are so dominant in the industry, they attract customers away from hotel websites, reducing the chances of hotels generating direct bookings. These factors significantly affect hotel profits. To address this strategic problem, this thesis offers a toolkit for managers and policymakers to deal with platforms successfully.

Furthermore, platforms have unique properties compared to conventional firms and channels. Platforms foster network effects, hold a central position in the business network and have high matchmaking capabilities. Therefore, this thesis argues that previous marketing strategies are not viable to work with platforms. Instead, this research suggests marketers develop a set of platform specialized strategies to deal with platforms effectively.

Appendix A: Profile of interviewees

Partici-pant ID	Hotel ID	Participant job title	Job exp. (years)	# rooms at the hotel	# of employees at the hotel	Independent hotel/ part of a group
1	A	Hotel director	7	29	40	Independent
2	A	Director of sales and marketing	6	29	40	Independent
3	B	Assistant front office manager	10	78	40	Group
4	B	Reservations sales agent	1	78	40	Group
5	C	Reservations and yield manager	22	175	155	Group
6	D	Hotel manager	15	22	5	Independent
7	E	Hotel manager	15	153	85	Independent
8	E	National reservations and yield manager	16	650	300	Independent
9	F	Front office supervisor	5	122	40	Independent
10	F	Operations manager	10	122	40	Independent
11	F	Assistant manager	8	122	40	Independent
12	G	Reservations manager	8	260	30	Independent
13	G	Senior duty manager	7	260	30	Independent
14	H	Contact center supervisor	1	635	400	Group
15	H	Group revenue director	5	635	400	Group
16	H	Director of revenue management	17	635	400	Group
17	I	General manager	13	41	14	Group
18	J	General manager	14	80	26	Group
19	J	Assistant manager	5	80	26	Group
20	J	Head of strategy and business development	28	80	26	Group
21	K	Reservations agent	5	36	9	Group
22	K	Front office manager	6	36	9	Group
23	L	Hotel manager	15	76	19	Group
24	L	Franchise director	35	76	19	Group
25	M	Assistant revenue manager	4	347	200	Group
26	M	Reservations manager	7	347	200	Group
27	N	Reservations sales agent	1	352	200	Group
28	O	Channel manager	7	452	250	Group
29	P	General manager	12	25	10	Group
30	Q	Hotel manager	18	286	180	Group
31	Q	Hotel manager	10	286	180	Group
32	Q	Reservations manager	5	286	180	Group
33	Q	Revenue manager	6	286	180	Group
34	R	Director of revenue management	12	411	350	Group
35	S	General and area manager	10	100	50	Group
36	T	Hotel manager	27	41	12	Group
37	U	Director of revenue management	5	255	123	Group
38	U	E-commerce and digital manager	3	255	123	Group
39	V	General manager	20	141	66	Group
40	W	Director of revenue, Auckland region	17	*	*	Group
41	W	Director of revenue, New Zealand, Fiji, and French Polynesia	16	*	*	Group

Partici-pant ID	Platform firm ID	Participant job title	Job exp. (years)	Platforms operated (number)	Target geographical market
42	A	Area manager	6	4	Global and specific markets
43	A	Market manager	3	4	Global and specific markets
44	A	Assistant market manager	1	4	Global and specific markets
45	A	Account manager	9	4	Global and specific markets
46	B	Market executive	2	1	Specific geographic market

*The participant managed a group of hotels in a region.

Appendix B: Interview guide utilized for hotel respondents

Broad discovery-oriented questions:

- "Can you describe the relationship between Hotel X and various booking platforms such as platform name A, platform name B?"
- "Can you explain how Hotel X works with various booking platforms/online travel agents (OTAs)? What are the key activities? What resources are required?"
- "What are the main benefits and challenges of working with platforms?"

Examples of specific questions:

- "You mentioned the rate parity clause. How does the rate parity clause affect your decision-making?"
- "You touched upon the importance of getting direct bookings. What does Hotel X do to receive direct bookings?"
- "You stated the importance of maintaining a balance in inventory levels. How do you decide on the right inventory levels?"
- "You mentioned the importance of hotel ranking on these platforms. How does Hotel X maintain a good ranking?"
- "You said that you meet with market managers every month. Could you state and explain what you discuss? How have these meetings been helpful?"
- "You mentioned that you have access to business analytics data. How and in what ways do you use such data?"
- "You touched upon using IT systems. Can you provide more details on how Hotel X utilizes these IT systems?"
- "You said you get access to online customer reviews. How and in what ways does Hotel X utilize these reviews?"

Closing question:

- "Are there any other ways Hotel X deals with various booking platforms that we have not touched on?"

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