

EXPLORING THE FACTORS OF TRAVELERS' OUTBOUND TRAVEL INTENTIONS IN THE POST COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has undoubtedly had a devastating impact on tourism worldwide. As the largest source of the outbound tourism market in the world (Huang & Lu, 2017), China has imposed unprecedented travel restrictions since the outbreak of COVID-19, and its outbound tourism has ground to a halt. However, after January 8, 2023, China's exit and entry travel restrictions have been fully relaxed (Chinanews, 2023), and China's outbound tourism market will experience a recovery. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the outbound travel intentions of tourists during the post COVID-19, so as to understand and accelerate the recovery of tourism destinations, restore their image, and provide information that helps destinations and individuals regain their confidence in outbound tourism (Kim, Hall, & Bonn, 2021).

Previous studies on tourists' behavioral intentions were often combined with the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ahmad, Kim, Anwer, & Zhuang, 2020; Hwang, Kim, & Gulzar, 2020; Kim & Hwang, 2020), which does not fully explain the specific factors and processes that influence tourists' decision-making (Lee et al., 2023). In addition, At present, there are limited studies on Chinese tourists' intention to travel abroad in the post-COVID-19 era. In order to make up for the limitations of previous studies, this study believes that COVID-19 will have varying degrees of impact on society and economy, and greatly change people's perception of health and safety. And the image perception of the tourist destination is also related to the effectiveness

perception of the protective measures of the destination, thus affecting the tourists' intention to travel abroad.

In order to overcome the limitations of previous studies, this study combined the perceived risk theory to construct a model of Chinese tourists' outbound travel intention. Theoretically speaking, this study constructed a model applicable to tourists' outbound travel intention in post COVID-19, verified the specific factors affecting tourists' travel intention, and enriched literature in related fields. Practically, the results of this study can provide guidance for the transformation and upgrading of the tourism industry after COVID-19 and shed some light on how to enhance the intention of tourists to travel abroad, the improvement of tourism-related services, the recovery of the tourism market, and the development of tourism enterprises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, general impact, attitudes and preferences, hygiene and safety, and epidemic image of destination were used to explore the perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 and perceived risk in outbound tourism destinations (Sohn, Lee, & Yoon, 2016). The variable of familiarity with destination was used to moderate the relationship between the perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 and travel outbound intention.

The outbreak of COVID-19 is an unprecedented health crisis that affects all countries in the world. The impact and damage caused by COVID-19 will be long-term (Bae & Chang, 2021). With the rapid

spread of COVID-19 worldwide, most regions of the world have issued regional isolation, blockade, travel ban, border closure, and related prevention measures. Although such policies and measures are very effective, they also have negative effects, the domestic and international tourism industry was severely curbed and it stagnated (Aiello, Bonanno, & Foglia, 2022) for at least three years.

Previously, Wen, Huimin, and Kavanaugh (2005) defined tourist attitudes and preferences on the scale of the impact of SARS (COVID-19's direct precursor) on tourists' behavior, including tourism tendencies and travel style. Consumers' attitudes and preferences will affect their behavioral intentions in this situation. Similarly, tourists' visit intentions can also be affected by tourists' attitudes and preferences toward the destination (Huang & van der Veen, 2019). Recently, there has been more research on attitudes and preferences in the context of COVID-19 (Lebrun, Corbel, & Bouchet, 2022).

COVID-19 has greatly strengthened people's attention to safety and hygiene in a short period, and actively adopted appropriate and effective health measures to ensure their safety. At the same time, hygiene and safety requirements for the public environment are becoming more stringent in various regions. Research shows that hygiene and safety may be important factors in tourist perception of risk (Lindell, Sorensen, Baker, & Lehman, 2020).

In the field of tourism, the destination image is the core concept of brand building of tourism attractions (Lee, Riley, & Hampton, 2010), and is the major factor affecting tourists' perception of a place, their choice of destination, and their overall travel satisfaction (Mission, Pandelaere, & Kerckhove, 2014). The image of tourism destinations is easily affected by public crises such as natural disasters, health crises, and terrorist attacks (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). However, a positive destination image may be strengthened if tourists believe that the region is recovering quickly from that crisis (Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019).

Perceived effectiveness measure is understood as an individual's perception of the effectiveness of specific policies or measures. Previous studies have shown that individuals' attitudes or perceptions of protective measures significantly affect their behavior (Sohn et al., 2016). The higher the

perceived avoidability of people in the face of crisis, the higher the effective awareness of protective measures. Risk perception is mainly measured in terms of perceived severity, anxiety (worry, tension), and health and safety (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). During COVID-19, tourists' perceptions of risks and fears of tourism destinations will affect their attitudes (Bhati et al., 2021).

Familiarity refers to consumers' experience and knowledge of a product or brand, which may influence consumers' decision-making on the product or brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Research has shown that the more familiar travelers are with a destination, the more likely they are to travel. When tourists are more familiar with a destination than other places, the destination has a greater chance of being selected by tourists (Chen, You, Lee, & Li, 2021).

Travel behavioral intention can thus be seen as the result of the psychological process that leads to action and transforms motivation into behavior (Jang & Namkung, 2009), and is the expectation to travel in a certain way or to a specific destination (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). The impact of the crisis on tourist's travel intentions is obvious, and the relationship between crisis events and travel intentions has been widely discussed (Senbeto & Hon, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

In the context of COVID-19, this study constructs the relationship between the general impact of COVID-19, attitude and preference, hygiene and safety, epidemic destination image, perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures, risk perception, familiarity with destination, and travel behavior intentions. A seven-point Likert scale was used in this study. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part is the question design for the variables including eight variables with a total of 37 items, and the second part is the demographic analysis.

A Pilot test will be conducted in Macao to test the reliability of the questionnaire, formal questionnaire distribution locations will be business areas with large numbers of tourists in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area.

The convenience sampling method was adopted to investigate those tourists traveling abroad during the post COVID-19. Tourists in these areas tend to have a high level of economic income and are close to Hong Kong and Macau, two outbound tourism destinations, making them suitable for the study. Spss23 and SmartPLS3.0 will be used to analyze demographic characteristics, reliability, validity, and hypothesis testing.

EXPECTED IMPLICATIONS

This study will fill the gap of information on the variable of perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures in tourism research, and complement the literature related to the epidemic image of the destination. In addition, this study complements and improves the current domestic research on COVID-19 and tourism-related fields. Currently, China has made remarkable achievements in epidemic prevention and control and tourism recovery, and has entered the stage of regular COVID-19 prevention and control.

Therefore, in terms of the relationship between COVID-19 situation and changes in tourists' behavior, China may have some different situations from other countries and regions. Therefore, it is necessary to conceptualize and theorize the results of COVID-19 research in China. The conclusions drawn in this study will provide theoretical support for the management of COVID-19 and make certain theoretical contributions to the theoretical research of COVID-19 outbreak. In practice, according to the results, some suggestions can be made to improve tourists' outbound travel intention, improve the travel-related service system, restore the tourism market, and develop tourism enterprises.

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