

Chapter 20

The Psychological Impact of the COVID–19 Pandemic on Tourism: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an extensive deterioration of many industries including the global tourism industry. There has been a strong need for psychology-informed research on tourism that investigates the impact and implications of the pandemic. This chapter is based on a qualitative study that included 60 individuals, recruited through snowball sampling method, 10 females and 10 males from three age groups. Participants were sent an online survey, querying their feelings and thoughts regarding tourism during and after the pandemic, to investigate the psychosocial impact of the pandemic on the population's tourism-related representations, decisions, and emotions. The data was subjected to thematic analysis that would reflect the social representations of the participants and the effects of the pandemic on these representations. Findings were discussed from social and clinical psychology perspectives, particularly via Maslow's and Fiske's theories and the discursive psychology perspective that aim to unfold decision-making processes and motivation underlying human actions.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, as one of the most impactful crises, has affected people of all nations, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds all around the world (Shanafelt, Ripp, & Trockel, 2020). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it all started with cases of pneumonia that were detected in

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Wuhan City in December 2019 and in a couple of days, WHO was informed of a total of 44 patients with the same diagnosis. Authorities traced the virus back to a seafood market in Wuhan City and China made critical information public regarding the genetic sequence of the novel coronavirus as well as a series of protocols in January. The outbreak that erupted from China unfolded quickly as several other countries reported their first cases of novel coronavirus in January 2020 (WHO, 2020a). WHO declared that the world was facing a pandemic on 11 March 2020, noting that this was the very first pandemic that a coronavirus has led to. Some were satisfied with this clarification while others complained that the declaration came later than expected and that this delay increased the public confusion and aggravated angst across the world. Hall, Scott, and Gossling (2020, p.578) noted that “unfortunately, controversy over the definition of a pandemic and previous national and international responses and criticisms is arguably why there was possibly a delay in the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring COVID-19 as a pandemic” (Buranyi, 2020 as cited in Hall et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in January 2021, WHO reported over 93 million COVID-19 cases and over 2 million deaths across the globe in one year (WHO, 2021).

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 Pandemic and Tourism

As cases soared all over the world, authorities published warnings and informed the public of the measures that should be taken in an effort to contain the outbreak. WHO launched a global campaign called “#Healthyathome” which emphasized the magnitude of the situation and the essentialness of staying inside and away from masses as much as possible (WHO, 2020b). Accordingly, some artists generously offered free online concerts, some colleges made their most popular classes online and open to public, and numerous summits and conferences were held virtual for the very first time to support the campaign. Those who had the privilege to be quarantined and work from home started to do so to contain the outbreak while others heroically continued to provide essential services and serve those in need.

As experts focused on developing tests, vaccines, and treatments for the COVID-19, authorities called for several unprecedented measures, including asking public to avoid public places and to postpone or cancel their travelling plans. In some countries, there were even stricter measures, lockdowns were declared, borders were closed, travel restrictions were enforced, and flights were suspended to contain the spread caused by travel and trade.

As a result of the outbreak, outside became “ominous” and being in close proximity to others, even the loved ones, became “unsafe.” The notion of social distancing was declared as vitally important, “a notion that is the very antithesis of our expectations of the experience of hospitality and tourism” (Baum & Hai, 2020, p. 2398). While the external world became significantly anxiety provoking, travelling to other countries and even cities became unimaginable for many people. Consequently, cities that were welcoming a high number of tourists every year were deserted.

Many industries were hit by the pandemic related dread and the resulting chaos and uncertainty. The most significantly devastated industries include the global tourism industry and every related sector including airlines, travel agencies, transportation, hotels, and restaurants. According to Niewiadomski (2020) “the outbreak of COVID-19 stopped the whole travel and tourism sector” (as cited in Roman et al., 2020, p. 5). One of the reasons behind the fact that the tourism industry is plunging is that the situation hurts both the demand and supply as a result of all the measures taken including shelter-in-

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