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**MARKETING AND OPERATIONS IMPACTS OF THE CORONA VIRUS ERA IN
TOURISM AND LEISURE RELATED INDUSTRIES**

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism, leisure, entertainment, sports, hospitality, and related industries. It focuses mostly on long-lasting impacts of the pandemic and has numerous ideas regarding the management and marketing of these interrelated industries in the wake of the crisis. It also looks at preparation for future crises in these industries.

Keywords: tourism, leisure, hospitality, entertainment, sports, COVID-19, marketing, management, safety, crisis management.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes crisis has left us with legacies, and the era of the COVID-19 virus is no exception and will be one of the greatest legacy producers of all times. Countries will be more on guard for at least the next ten years regarding the spread of such viruses. Unfortunately, if we are fortunate enough to go without a health crisis for more than ten years, it is likely people will start to forget what we went through. It is important to note that with all safety management crises, society has a bad habit of forgetting over a period of about ten years or more. One only needs to recall the

airline hijackings in the 70s and how we more or less forgot about them until 9/11 came around. We may also recall the Who concert tragedy of 1979 and the banning of blanket seating after it, but then in the early 90s, we had the AC/DC concert tragedy in Salt Lake City. In that incident, they found that SLC had passed an ordinance against festival seating after the Who concert incident, but all had apparently forgotten about it except the law books.

It is with certainty that the United States and other governments will be monitoring such possibilities much more carefully in the future. Since almost all catastrophic safety issues will impact these industries greatly, it is advisable for all such industries to band together to better monitor developments that may impact such industries. Besides government regulation, we must continue to be proactive in regards to all safety management regulations, standards, and so on that have an impact on all aspects of the tourism and leisure related industries.

We will discuss several areas of industry impacts in this article, including general health and safety procedures and creative new ideas on how to operate, as well as lasting marketing and management implications.

GLOBAL IMPACTS

There is no doubt that the global impact on the tourism and leisure industries have been greatly altered or impacted by the COVID-19 virus. Ten percent of global GDP was attributable to the tourism industry in 2019 and was worth almost \$9 trillion (Constantin, Saxon, & Yu, 2020). Constantin, Saxon, and Yu (2020) write: “COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented crisis for the tourism industry. International tourist arrivals are projected to plunge by 60 to 80 percent in 2020, and tourism spending is not likely to return to pre-crisis levels until 2024. This puts as many as 120 million jobs at risk.” It is always difficult to fully quantify all activity in the tourism and leisure sectors because not all leisure activity is countable as “tourism” activity. In spite of all of downward pressure, the U.S. Department of Labor still shows a rosy outlook for many of the industries that come under the tourism and leisure umbrella. For example, meeting and events planners are predicted to have a growth rate of 8% from 2019 to 2029 (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2020), which is double the average rate for job growth in all fields. Other sub-sectors also show growth on the Department of Labor site, but as always, so many jobs in the leisure and tourism industry are not adequately tracked (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2020).

The following are general impacts of COVID-19 on the industry and some examples of these impacts:

1. Hesitation of the public to engage in activities due to the perceived risks of catching the virus. Sometimes these risks are perceived to be much greater than they are in reality. This goes along with a less-than-adequate amount of research on how the virus is actually

transmitted. The fear of air travel appears, for example, to be largely unfounded. The CDC's website (2020) states: "Most viruses and other germs do not spread easily on flights because of how air circulates and is filtered on airplanes. However, social distancing is difficult on crowded flights, and sitting within 6 feet of others, sometimes for hours, may increase your risk of getting COVID-19." Studies have confirmed that there is virtually no chance that you will contract COVID-19 on an airplane if you are properly masked (Reuters, 2020).

2. **Conflicting information:** For example, the World Health Organization (WHO; 2020) states that we should not wear masks while exercising. This may conflict with other recommendations made by organizations, but WHO states: "People should NOT wear masks when exercising, as masks may reduce the ability to breathe comfortably. Sweat can make the mask become wet more quickly which makes it difficult to breathe and promotes the growth of microorganisms. The important preventive measure during exercise is to maintain physical distance of at least one meter from others." (WHO, 2020).

Another excellent example of misleading information is the general feeling that airline travel is unsafe (as earlier mentioned in #1 above), where perhaps it is the safest environment you can currently be in. One study illustrates that you have less than a one in a million chance of contracting COVID-19 on a plane (Reuters, 2020). It is probable that many restrictions and fears are basically untrue or misconceptions placed on us mostly by politically motivated statements. This has been most unfortunate for the tourism and leisure related industries, and hopefully will not be repeated in such future situations.

3. The entire COVID-19 situation has been politicized to an unprecedented extent. Can we remember any other general public safety hazard such as 9/11 or other viruses that have impacted the population, becoming this type of political storm? The political storm appears to cause more confusion amongst the public because they are really not sure who to believe, and when history is recorded, they may have been misled or misdirected by some public officials.
4. Severe changes in the competitive environment have occurred. When all is done with COVID-19, it appears that it will have continual impacts on the competitive environment for many entities in the tourism and leisure industries. Some of these include:
 - a. The substitution of home-based activities for those that were previously done out of the household and the addition of more home-based activities to make the new "COVID life" more pleasant. For example, Netflix saw a global increase of ten million subscribers after the COVID-19 lockdowns began, after seeing a more lackluster period of subscriber growth (Epstein, 2020).

- b. Major shifts in tourism markets are occurring. Lake George, New York, based on three visits by the authors in August, September, and October 2020, indicated that the largely “outdoor-oriented” tourism destination has succeeded amazingly well during the summer of 2020. For example, people went to boat rental centers and begged for boats, even though the average three-day rental cost over \$1,000. Even though the local area cancelled several special events, people showed up in droves for them and basically put them on themselves.

The American Dream Entertainment Complex, originally scheduled to be 45% retail space and 55% entertainment space, announced that it would now be 75% entertainment. Given the retrenchment of brick and mortar retailing which was accelerated by the COVID crisis, this comes as no surprise and possibly provides a sigh of relief for the seven predominately shopping malls in northern New Jersey. Recently the American Dream lost several major retail tenants including Lord and Taylor and Century 21 department stores due to bankruptcy of these companies and decisions to go out of business. This development may be a real blessing for the ill-fated complex because at the same time, New York City has lost a lot of its glow as a tourism destination. With crime increasing, restaurants closing, and the theater still shut down, the door is wide open for the American Dream to become a major place for New York/New Jersey metro area tourists to go for some safe family fun. It is further recommended that the “Dream” develop convention space in the vacated department store areas, which, when coupled with a reopening of the former “Izod” arena, would provide an amazing home run economic development for Northern, New Jersey. Such development would also ensure the success of the now predominantly entertainment complex.

- c. The restaurant business has been changed drastically by COVID-19. It is a known fact that large numbers of brick and mortar restaurants have had to close their doors. They will be permanently affected by the proliferation of delivery services of all types. It is also apparent that chain restaurants will benefit greatly from COVID. As many mom and pop restaurants go out of business, the chain restaurants will benefit greatly when all is back to normal. In the long run, however, we will probably see many of these businesses come back, but of course there will be many failures of upstarts as they scramble to get market share.
5. Destruction of the employment market, particularly in the tourism and leisure related industries, and the destruction of many businesses. At least one-third or more of all jobs and over 8 million jobs were lost during the COVID in the leisure and tourism industries. For example, the pluralities of these jobs were lost in the restaurant industry. Nearly three million employees are still out of work. With a large number of restaurants closed permanently or long-term, the industry will to lose \$240 billion in sales by the end of 2020 (The National Restaurant Association, 2020).

6. Unequal treatment of businesses will cost lasting recovery problems. The tourism and leisure industries have been the biggest victims by far of the pandemic. The unequal treatment of such businesses may lead to continual lawsuits and difficulties in surviving. Gymnasiums have been one of the most blatant examples of unequal treatment. When gyms were finally allowed to reopen in New Jersey after harassment of at least one gym owner in Bellmawr, we have seen what is a safer environment in the local gym than there is in the local Costco, with the density of people in the Costco many times denser than in the gym. Further most gym-goers take the masking and other safety advisories seemingly more seriously than shoppers do in a Costco. Failure to offer adequate emergency funding to such industries as movie theaters and cruise lines is clearly unconscionable. To their credit, we believe that these industries will ultimately survive due to our next point.
7. Tourism and leisure businesses will see a huge surge in business once the COVID era ends. Activities like going to the movies and going on cruises do indeed influence our psychological well-being. As Wolz says: “Cinema therapy can be a powerful catalyst for healing and growth for anybody who is open to learning how movies affect us and to watching certain films with conscious awareness. Cinema therapy allows us to use the effect of imagery, plot, music, etc. in films on our psyche for insight, inspiration, emotional release or relief and natural change” (Singer, 2018). In short, the severe leisure and entertainment shortage during COVID should add up to a huge surge in activity after the pandemic is happily history.
8. The customer service of impacts of COVID-19 can and should be long-lasting in the competitive landscape. Some companies such as Marriott and Delta Airlines have made significant accommodations to keep customers happy during COVID. They have extended benefits of their frequent traveler plans and offered no-cost refunds and changes of itinerary. The same companies have apparently dropped change fees even after the pandemic is over. A number of airlines have dropped change fees on domestic tickets including Delta, American, and United, even after COVID is no longer with us (Kennedy, 2020). One large snow sports area operator (Vail Associates, purveyor of the Epic Ski Passes) has offered credits for the upcoming years lift tickets and included insurance at no extra charge for all circumstances (COVID and non-COVID) on their 2020-2021 lift ticket passes. Policies do vary from company to company. For example, Aero Mexico has much more restrictive rebooking policies than Delta, even though they are both members of the Skyteam Alliance. Companies that have not treated customers nicely during the COVID-19 period may see a continual weakness in the market, even after the pandemic, as customers remember their less-than-satisfactory experiences during COVID.

RESULTING AND POSSIBLE LASTING INFLUENCES OF THE COVID-19 ERA

New Types of Channels/Delivery

Changes in delivery channels have been largely promulgated by restrictions on attendance during the closedown periods. As this material was being compiled, WHO (2020) stated that lockdowns may not be beneficial or desirable.

There has been a variety of alternative delivery channels opened up during these times. Some facilities such as zoos, aquariums, and museums have reported virtual programs being made available, especially for kids' birthday parties, but can be used for other meetings as well. These virtual sessions provide the buyer with exclusive access to animal shows and demonstrations that are interactive via Zoom or other platforms. This concept could be applied to almost any facility that can do show and tell demonstrations or provide some other entertainment with an interactive and customized element. Although there are no examples of this that we know of, this type of activity can have endless creative ideas attached to it, including food, birthday cakes, favors, et cetera being sent to the place that the entertainment is being virtually delivered.

Another development in the area of delivery methods is the proliferation of delivery services of all kinds. Most of this has impacted the restaurant industry. Here we have seen a forced proliferation of outdoor dining places and services such as Uber Eats. Of particular note is a trend toward the establishment of "ghost kitchens." A ghost kitchen is a restaurant without on-premises dining space. They have full culinary kitchens and usually produce more upscale dining experiences.

Both examples show a customized model of direct distribution, removing the personal/consumer presence requirement from the traditional service delivery model. While the new models are popular, it also poses challenges since social interaction and atmosphere are no longer part of the marketing/service mix.

Virus Pandemic Planning

As a result of the worldwide lack of awareness and knowledge about COVID-19, it is obvious that the government and all businesses must develop plans to get through such medical and public health crises. When COVID-19 is no longer with us, what will happen with the face masks, other PPE, and hospital equipment that will no longer be needed in the short-term? The proliferation of face masks have in part become a fad item, which tend to die out quickly. This may happen when COVID is no longer a current event.

It will be incumbent, perhaps on government, to plan to ensure all PPE and other required equipment are put in storage, so we will be ready if another COVID-19 type virus is to be endured in society. We should not be taken off guard again. It will clearly be the role of all businesses to have definitive plans to endure another COVID-19 style epidemic. Hopefully, that day will not come for a while, but given the history of viruses that are brought upon us, it is likely we will see another one again. Business plans must include:

1. Alternative methods for delivering and marketing the service. Facilities now being built should include structural alterations to easily accommodate modifications in operations. (See section on Changes in Facilities and Facility Planning.)
2. Safety precaution plans.
3. Insurance and reserve funds to endure periods of restricted business.
4. Agility or adaptability training sessions (on demand and regularly scheduled) for employees.

New Sanitation and Health Standards

The heightened awareness of disease spread will stay on with us even after COVID-19 is history. In Asia, it is commonplace to see people wearing a face mask, whether they feel the slightest bit sick or they feel perfectly fine. Many individuals wear them all the time, especially when they are in crowded places. There will not be too many face masks in the USA once COVID passes, but perhaps they will appear with greater frequency than prior to COVID-19, as it may be a part of the new social norms. It is likely that people partaking in tourist attractions, hotels, airlines, facilities, and other businesses in the leisure and tourism industry will be more conscious of health and sanitation concerns, and we may see more consumer complaints and sightings of potential health and safety hazards.

It is particularly likely that cruise ships will engage in many of the standards they are now setting for their industry because they tend to be more sensitive toward outbreaks of disease, and the

keeping in place of such procedures will certainly help promote consumer confidence. There will be people on the ships stopping you from going into dining halls without sanitizing, coupled with such features as service-only buffets.

Things that restrict capacity in the cruise and other industries will likely be removed, but the easier and less annoying sanitation procedures are likely to stay in place. It will take creative minds to keep sanitary procedures in place without hurting revenues or the guest experience throughout the various facilities in our industry. There may be more alliances between companies such as the one formed by Norwegian Cruise Lines and Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines to promote health safety. Industry associations will likely maintain and publish standards for various operations such as hotels, arenas, stadiums, attractions, airplanes, cruise ships, and all other types of businesses in the leisure and tourism associated industries.

Changes in Facilities and Facility Planning

COVID-19 has sparked a lot of outdoor facilities at businesses that used to operate only indoors. The greatest proliferation of this has been in the restaurant and food service industries. The proliferation of tents and sidewalk eating areas has been significant. The food truck business, which delivers food into open-air locations, has also thrived in this environment. Creativity in producing new eating facilities is particularly noteworthy in the snow sports industry. Here are some of the ideas from that industry:

1. California's Big Bear Mountain Resort is repurposing shipping containers as outdoor dining venues.
2. In Telluride village in Colorado, small heated glass houses will allow for the service of private meals for groups that know each other, and used gondolas are being retrofitted to allow for dining experiences from restaurants around the town. Maybe amusement parks can repurpose old ride vehicles or Ferris wheel gondolas in the same way.
3. Beer gardens and bars are being reimagined at Jackson Hole's popular après spot "Bodega." It is unveiling a beer garden with appropriate food and brews.
4. In Park City, Utah at the High West Saloon, snowsporters can slide into an outdoor ice bar and try many of the distillery's whiskeys or a heated whiskey cider.
5. Some places are offering "après ski packages to go." Maybe an after-the-amusement-park package that is priced at local more than "at the park" prices might be a big hit. Just locate it outside the gate by the parking lot shuttles and don't have it open until 1 hour before park closing!
6. Colorado's Cimarron Club ski resort has staff members dropping off picnic packages at strategically-placed tables around the mountain. Staff members will also carve out an "ice bar" for participants if so desired. Perhaps "in-park delivery" to those group picnic

areas might be a good service for theme parks, water parks, and other outdoor attractions (Holland, 2020).

7.

COVID-19 has also sparked an amazing amount of interest in individual sports and recreation opportunities, especially in regards to outdoor and isolated travel opportunities. A thirty percent increase in boat sales was seen in May 2020 (Woodyard, 2020), and after a strong dip in sales, the travel trailer market came back and then increased with a noteworthy “estimate that anywhere between 50 to 80 percent of buyers, depending on location, were first-time purchasers of RVs when a year ago, that number was between 25 and 35 percent” (Travel and Leisure, 2020).

Changes in Marketing and Operations

In the June 2020 issue of *Park World Magazine*, Samuels discussed several ways in which the industry could continue to operate or reopen during COVID-19 restrictions. One of these ideas suggested segmented time operations during the course of a day. For example, a theme park or attraction could sell tickets for an operational period that ran from 9 AM to 2 PM that would be geared toward families and children. Perhaps such an event would include breakfast or a souvenir perk. Then later in the day (9 PM to 2 AM), a theme park could offer an adult-oriented event with beer and just have roller coasters or other bigger thrill rides open. This idea was actually used by the Busch Gardens Williamsburg theme park, as depicted in the article. The park has utilized the idea successfully, fully selling out numerous twice-a-day, 1,000 person sessions by deploying this operational pattern. At the time of writing, this has enabled them to reopen the park, due to Virginia restricting gatherings to 1,000 people.

What is perhaps most significant is how things that were adopted for the pandemic may continue to impact and be used in the future. Here are a few ideas:

1. The offering of virtual programs, as mentioned earlier, can produce revenues continuously down the road. If the cost of such programs is competitive (which they should be) in comparison to live, on-site remote programming, then they should find a market niche well into the future.
2. Snowsports and other activities are engaging in the “communal packaging” of activities. Groups of people that all know each other (or people self-select or self-identify as a group) will be placed in the same chair lifts and gondolas. Those not knowing each other will enjoy limited occupancy on chairlifts and gondolas. For example, a six-passenger gondola or a four-passenger chairlift may only be allowed to have 2 people in it (Katz, 2020). Whitewater rafting companies in the Adirondacks were only selling their space by

the raft when we visited this summer; guests had to buy an entire raft to go on a trip. This was economical for those that could fill a raft, but not such a great deal for those that could not. It is likely such “small group” practices might continue. Similar communal packaging might occur in theme parks and other attractions. Perhaps people will be tested and then assigned “COVID-free” buddies for the day. In effect, the cruise lines may be practicing this on a grand scale, as they might test everyone who is about to go on a cruise.

3. Lines and line waiting will have the greatest changes since the advent of the fast/speed pass. We may see the complete or close to complete elimination of lines by increasing reservation systems and applying them to all guests everywhere for all attractions. It may no longer be possible to go to an attraction at times without planning out your day in advance with a complex reservations system. Assigned check-in times are going to be used by the cruise industry, and other industries are also eliminating waiting on long lines.
4. Redesign the layout of the park entrance to control the crowd size and improve guest experience. Hershey’s Chocolatetown, a \$150 million investment, includes a new arrival plaza, front gate, and themed region, which aim to create a unique guest arrival experience, nostalgic and fast (William, 2020).
5. The programs mentioned in Park World Magazine should be adaptable to many situations. That idea was a piggyback off of the fact that Disney and Universal have actually done many of these types of parties for groups and even for the general public with such things as Halloween Horror Nights, Mickey’s Merry Christmas Celebrations, Mickey’s Not-So-Scary Halloween Celebration, and Disney’s Graduation Night Parties. Even Sea World’s Discovery Cove in Orlando could be viewed as a continual daily operation utilizing some of this philosophy. All of these, of course, could accommodate much larger amounts of people. The idea, however, can be used for more specialized events. Here are just a few ideas:
 - a. Events late at night for smaller amounts of people that feature special activities and features. For example, for Halloween, offer a “special session” that includes free face painting, make-up sessions, costume design and idea specialists, special contests, and entertainments. Food and drink specials can also be added on.
 - b. Turning one theme park or facility into two or more facilities each offering a different theme or operation with a restricted attendance for each situation.
 - c. Reducing attendance overall on certain days of regular operation with a higher admission price allowing a premium experience which affords no lines at all for attractions. This could be called a “fast pass for all” day or evening.
 - d. Offering super early admission hour for older adults, such as grandparents with young kids on weekends and holidays. Special orders for character breakfasts can be reserved. Plan themed activities, such as intergenerational fun activities and activities that bring them back to the good old times and being young again. Ultimately the park experience should be “timeless,” where the presence meets the past.

In total, the four above frameworks could not only help during COVID-19 or other times of restricted operations, but can also help increase revenues throughout operational

periods and increase customer satisfaction and experience. The ideas that could be conjured up by these writers in this area are indeed expansive, and this is only a sampling.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

It is clear that in the future, the tourism, leisure, and related industries will have to:

1. Be prepared to provide additional situation procedures for any health-related emergencies in the future.
2. Be resistant to governmental restrictions placed on the industry that are not well-founded.
3. Alter facilities to accommodate any such health emergencies in the future.
4. Have plans to alter operations and marketing to deal with any such health emergencies in the future.

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