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The cautious nature of Canadians: Different market segments' perceptions during COVID-19

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The cautious nature of Canadians:
Different market segments' perceptions during COVID-19

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Introduction

Fifteen months into the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, domestic travel in the United States has returned to – and at times exceeded – pre-pandemic levels, while Canadian expenditures are less than half of what they were in 2019. This reluctance to travel by Canadians is partly due to their greater belief in the severity of the pandemic and their own vulnerability to it, and partly the result of a mistrust in their own and governments' efficacy. To better understand Canadians' attitudes and perceptions during COVID-19, this research investigated several important factors that may influence tourists' visit intention, such as perceived severity, perceived vulnerability, subjective knowledge, resilient coping, and country image. The differences between the market segments based on gender, age, income, and educational levels were compared to identify the potential marketing strategies and to attract potential tourists accordingly.

Literature

First discussed in Nagashma's (1970) research on customer attitudes about a foreign product, country image is associated with people's perception of multifaceted elements of a country, including history, economy, traditions, technology, politics, culture, business, and society (Chaulagain et al., 2019; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). A favourable country image has been shown to enhance tourists' intention to visit the destination (Chaulagain et al., 2019). Conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct, it includes both cognitive measures related to beliefs and affective measures related to emotional responses (Martínez & Alvarez, 2010; Yu & Zhang, 2020). Eighteen measurement items drawn from the literature to evaluate the country image of Canada.

Researchers have proposed three types of consumer knowledge, including usage experience, objective knowledge, and subjective knowledge (Brucks, 1985; Hem & Iversen, 2009). The latter was found to play a more important role in decision making (Ellen, 1994; House et al., 2004; Raju et al., 1993) than either of the other and is defined as "a consumer's perception of the amount of information they have stored in their memory" (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999, p. 59). Five items to measure subjective knowledge are taken from Flynn and Goldsmith (1999).

Tourism researchers conceptualize destination trust as "a visitor's willingness to rely on the ability of a destination to perform its advertised functions" (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016, p.194) or the confidence and certainty perceived by tourists toward the tourism services or offerings (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019). The 6-item scale of destination trust was adapted from the studies of Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) and Nguyen and Pham (2018). Finally, risk appraisal including perceived severity and perceived vulnerability; coping appraisal including self-efficacy, response efficacy, response cost; and maladaptive perceptions can all influence tourists' attitude towards a destination and visit intention (Wang et al., 2019).

The relationship between travel attitude and visit intention has been intensively discussed in previous literature. Generally, tourists with positive travel attitudes a destination will be more likely to visit that destination (Huang & van der Veen, 2019). Travel attitude is deemed a strong predictor to visit intention and a large number of studies have confirmed this effect in empirical studies (Lam & Hsu, 2006; Letheren et al., 2017). Travel attitude was measured by five items (Huang & van der Veen, 2019). Visit intention was probed using different time horizons, ranging from as soon as possible to 2 years.

Method
To reach a wide range of participants, data were collected through the online panel Dynata in early August 2020. Respondents had to be 18 years of age or older and had to have taken a trip in the preceding two years. 500 surveys were collected from Canadians about domestic travel, evenly divided among men and women. Cronbach's alpha was tested for data reliability and analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare and identify the differences among groups.

Findings/Results
As the constructs have good reliability (Table 1), the mean value was adopted to represent each construct and to conduct the ANOVA analysis. There were no significant differences based on educational levels, but gender, age and income showed some significant differences for several items. Women perceived the severity of the pandemic and their own vulnerability higher than men which resulted in a lower intention to travel within six to 12 months (Table 2).

Older generations also perceived the severity of the pandemic and their own vulnerability higher than younger ones (Table 3). In addition, they felt that response cost was higher and the response efficacy as lower than younger cohorts. Their maladaptive perception was the lowest, which means they did not believe that a miracle cure would occur if they got sick by coronavirus during trips. As a result, they were most likely to travel only after two years. Subjective knowledge about COVID-19 was the lowest for those aged 18-24 and highest for those in the 45-64 age group. Country image, affective image and destination trust are all statistically significant and increase steadily with age.

Income only played a role with regards to resilient coping, which is lowest for the highest income groups. These groups were also less likely to believe they can keep themselves safe when travelling during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they didn't think they could grow in positive ways by dealing with the difficult situations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion
This research set out to investigate the country image of Canada during the COVID-19 outbreak and perceived risks associated with the pandemic in traveling within Canada by domestic residents. Country image is known to be an important evaluating factor in tourists' destination choice (Chaulagain et al., 2019). Even when restrictions are eased, the fear of spreading the virus will impact intention to travel in the longer term. The uncertainty of travel safety and security within Canada can be reviewed by tourists' perceived risk (Crouch et al., 2016). Together, perceived Canada's abilities in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak and perceived risks can influence how slowly/quickly Canadian tourism can recover. Furthermore, women and older age groups are more concerned about safety and security. Therefore, the right messaging strategies

that address the negative and reinforce the positive perceptions can assist Canada tourism to recover sooner and ensure that the country is better prepared to minimize the impacts from potential future COVID-19 waves.

Table 1. Constructs and reliability

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Items
Perceived severity	0.781	4
Perceived vulnerability	0.843	4
Self-efficacy	0.756	3
Response efficacy	0.796	4
Response cost	0.765	4
Maladaptive Perceptions	0.844	6
Subjective Knowledge	0.795	4
Resilient Coping	0.804	4
Country Image	0.962	18
Affective Image	0.958	6
Destination Trust	0.984	6
Travel Attitude	0.983	5
Visit Intention (6 months)	0.956	3
Visit Intention (1 year)	0.948	3
Visit Intention (2 years)	0.930	3

Table 2. Differences between women and men

Constructs	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	F
Perceived Severity**	Women	5.79	1.023	6.527
	Men	5.53	1.295	
Perceived Vulnerability**	Women	5.58	0.979	8.756
	Men	5.28	1.228	
Self Efficacy	Women	4.49	1.125	1.210
	Men	4.61	1.272	
Response Efficacy	Women	4.85	1.090	0.217
	Men	4.90	1.170	
Response Cost	Women	5.15	1.101	1.522
	Men	5.03	1.104	
Maladaptive Perceptions**	Women	3.09	1.192	11.288
	Men	3.46	1.274	
Subjective Knowledge	Women	4.89	1.130	1.164
	Men	4.77	1.253	
Resilient Coping	Women	4.66	0.967	0.141
	Men	4.69	0.993	
Country Image	Women	5.73	0.883	0.386
	Men	5.79	0.963	
Affective Image	Women	6.47	1.687	0.029
	Men	6.44	1.695	
Destination Trust	Women	5.32	1.226	0.014
	Men	5.33	1.220	
Travel Attitude	Women	4.57	1.460	3.044
	Men	4.79	1.433	
Visit Intention (6 months)	Women	3.86	1.914	3.827
	Men	4.20	1.881	
Visit Intention* (1 year)	Women	4.03	1.903	4.756
	Men	4.54	1.685	
Visit Intention (2 years)	Women	4.86	1.593	2.483
	Men	4.71	1.644	

Note: * $p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

Table 3. Differences between different age groups

Constructs	Ages	Mean	Std. Deviation	F
Perceived Severity***	18 - 24	5.16	1.350	
	25 - 44	5.40	1.285	12.799
	45 - 64	5.96	1.043	
	65 or older	5.95	0.761	
Perceived Vulnerability*	18 - 24	5.22	1.246	
	25 - 44	5.28	1.160	2.891
	45 - 64	5.55	1.076	
	65 or older	5.58	1.007	
Self Efficacy	18 - 24	4.70	1.179	
	25 - 44	4.50	1.201	0.436
	45 - 64	4.52	1.282	
	65 or older	4.55	1.005	
Response Efficacy*	18 - 24	5.23	1.211	
	25 - 44	4.88	1.139	2.942
	45 - 64	4.80	1.152	
	65 or older	4.69	0.925	
Response Cost*	18 - 24	4.79	1.226	
	25 - 44	5.00	1.100	3.346
	45 - 64	5.26	1.064	
	65 or older	5.11	1.055	
Maladaptive Perceptions***	18 - 24	3.62	1.304	
	25 - 44	3.58	1.328	10.567
	45 - 64	3.01	1.145	
	65 or older	2.90	1.012	
Subjective Knowledge**	18 - 24	4.40	1.141	
	25 - 44	4.72	1.233	5.909
	45 - 64	5.08	1.127	
	65 or older	4.79	1.193	
Resilient Coping	18 - 24	4.77	1.186	
	25 - 44	4.71	0.929	0.736
	45 - 64	4.65	0.992	
	65 or older	4.54	0.844	
Country Image***	18 - 24	5.54	0.971	
	25 - 44	5.55	1.026	8.515
	45 - 64	5.91	0.815	
	65 or older	6.04	0.720	
Affective Image**	18 - 24	5.95	1.392	
	25 - 44	6.22	1.751	5.813
	45 - 64	6.72	1.719	
	65 or older	6.84	1.560	
Destination Trust***	18 - 24	5.11	1.232	
	25 - 44	5.04	1.287	7.442
	45 - 64	5.51	1.161	
	65 or older	5.67	1.019	
Travel Attitude	18 - 24	4.70	1.484	
	25 - 44	4.62	1.384	0.441
	45 - 64	4.67	1.513	
	65 or older	4.85	1.444	
Visit Intention (6 months)	18 - 24	4.21	1.697	
	25 - 44	4.21	1.780	1.766
	45 - 64	3.78	2.050	
	65 or older	4.00	1.911	
Visit Intention (1 year)	18 - 24	4.02	1.896	
	25 - 44	4.55	1.515	2.177
	45 - 64	4.89	1.524	
	65 or older	4.50	1.794	

Visit Intention* (2 years)	18 - 24	4.90	1.602	
	25 - 44	4.71	1.644	3.624
	45 - 64	5.04	1.265	
	65 or older	5.33	1.373	

Note: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

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