

Personalities shaping travel behaviors: post-COVID scenario

Aleksandra Terzić, Biljana Petrevska and Dunja Demirović Bajrami

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to offer insights into a sounder understanding of tourist behavior and travel patterns by systematically identifying psychological manifestations reflected in the basic human value system in the pandemic-induced environment.

Design/methodology/approach – A large random sample (49,519 respondents from 29 European countries), generated from the core module Round 9 of the European Social Survey, was used. A post-COVID-19 psychological travel behavior model was constructed by using 12 variables within two opposing value structures (openness to change versus conservatism), shaping specific personalities.

Findings – Four types of tourists were identified by using K-means cluster analysis (risk-sensitive, risk-indifferent, risk-tolerant and risk-resistant). The risk-sensibility varied across the groups and was influenced by socio-demographic characteristics, economic status and even differed geographically among nations and traveling cultures.

Research limitations/implications – First, data were collected before the pandemic and did not include information on tourism participation. Second, the model was fully driven by internal factors – motivation. Investigation of additional variables, especially those related to socialization aspects, and some external factors of influence on travel behaviors during and after the crisis, will provide more precise scientific reasoning.

Originality/value – The model was upgraded to some current constructs of salient short-term post-COVID-19 travel behavior embedded in the core principles of universal human values. By separating specific segments of tourists who appreciate personal safety and conformity, from those sharing the extensive need for self-direction and adventure, the suggested model presents a strong background for predicting flows in the post-COVID-19 era.

Keywords Travel behavior, Human values, Personality types, COVID-19, Risk perception, Travel restriction and regulations

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

At specific points in time, various risks affect people's lives and behaviors, causing changes in consumer habits in line with the new situation. Tourism is highly sensitive to risks (natural hazards, wars, pandemics, terrorism, politics, environmental risks, etc.) that influence sudden changes in the tourist market (Lee *et al.*, 2021). Any severe risk that outbreaks promptly reduces the tourism flows due to the decision of tourists not to visit dangerous destinations, but also due to government restrictions that cause shifts in tourist demand and affect travelers' choices and behaviors (Fotiadis *et al.*, 2021). The recent global COVID-19 pandemic endangered people's health and lives, disturbed everyday life, disrupted the economy and brought tourism to a standstill. The COVID-19 outbreak followed by lasting travel bans and strict regulations changed almost every aspect of tourism. The whole tourism system went through profound negotiations on multiple levels. Underpinned by reasonable concerns among tourists and governments on travel risks, each country defined its own regulatory measures and entrance rules. A whole two years of COVID-19 frightening and fighting, along with lasting travel bans, brought a reasonable question of what to expect in the forthcoming tourist seasons. When dealing with uncertainties, the existing differences

Aleksandra Terzić is based at the Geographic Institute Jovan Cvijić of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, Serbia.

Biljana Petrevska is based at the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, Goce Delcev University Stip, Stip, Macedonia.

Dunja Demirović Bajrami is based at the Geographic Institute Jovan Cvijić of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, Serbia and Institute of Sport Tourism and Service, South Ural State University (National Research University), Celabinsk, Russia.

Received 4 February 2022

Revised 13 June 2022

14 July 2022

Accepted 17 August 2022

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behavioral patterns of Europeans may provide solutions to dealing with potential risks. Various measures defined by tourism policy regulators on the national level to control the pandemics strongly affect tourist decision-making, obstructing travel intentions more severely than health concerns. Providing some expectations on behavioral aspects among tourists, appropriate and timely responses in the risk management process can be provided. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic produced increased demand for personal safety and security grants during the travel planning process. Despite expectations of fast tourism recovery, the effects of pandemic on tourism industry, caused by deep psychological distress, will last for long time and will be less predictable. Destination policymakers are especially interested in ensuring destination safety, which can be accomplished by communicating destination trust to reduce fear and uncertainty among tourists. Addressing the most vulnerable groups and encouraging their travel participation by increasing destination trust, while identifying and managing potentially risky/unwanted behaviors, is regarded as beneficial in shaping future travel intentions.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The research has several limitations. First, ESS data were collected before the pandemic and do not include information on tourism participation nor risk perception measured during the pandemic. Therefore, it provides limited tourism-related predictions, while geographical distribution of clusters (potential tourism markets) must be taken into consideration with caution and with support of other more recent of future empirical findings. Second, the model is fully driven by internal factors – motivation. Investigation of additional variables, especially those related to social and economic aspects, and some external factors of influence on travel behaviors, can provide more precise scientific reasoning. Effects of political stability and confidence are also of great importance in this particular timeframe and current crises. The proposed basic model can be upgraded to create more complex theoretical construct with higher predictability potential and continuously replicated and tested. The next ESS Round 10 (2020/2021) will include COVID-19-related questions that open new research possibilities for testing the presented results. Exploring similarities and differences between European nations in terms of travel needs and cultures, as well as the formation of tourist stereotypes, are of future research interest. Comparing results to similar research in different cultural and geographical settings is also a challenge.

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Further reading

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Corresponding author

Dunja Demirović Bajrami can be contacted at: d.demirovic@gi.sanu.ac.rs

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