

Pre- and during COVID-19 pandemic travelling choices: What changed?

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Objectives | The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered the travel landscape, prompting the industry and travellers to adapt and rethink their choices. The pandemic motivated the implementation of policies and practices that transformed the day-to-day lives of individuals and influenced consumption habits, personal interactions, and business logistics (Sheth, 2020), leading to a rapid and notorious change in behaviour patterns. Therefore, it has become essential to adapt to the new consumers and their preferences (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020).

One of the areas most affected by the pandemic was the tourism industry, characterized by a complex network of millions of suppliers and consumers who exchange experiences and services. The industrial development of this area is sensitive to external events and crises (Sengel, 2021), even more so when mobility is restricted worldwide. The pandemic's severity and economic and social implications were not initially anticipated, and, despite technological advances, it was impossible to contain its repercussions (Hussain, 2021).

Tourism behaviour summarizes the decision and purchase of tourism products and experiences in order to meet needs. This process encompasses the formation of needs before the trip, the choice, the consumption in the tourist spots, and the evaluation of the experience (Caber & Albayrak, 2016). It is a continuous process which encompasses cycles and multiple interrelated concepts, which implies that they cannot always be analysed individually (Cohen et al., 2014). It is also necessary to weigh internal factors and external stimuli (Elliot, 2014); and even within the main tourist segments, it is possible to find sub-segments based on motivations and preferences (Tiago et al., 2016).

The tourism and hospitality industries have experienced uncertain times and confidence in travel has declined, shaken by the feeling of insecurity in travel (Hussain, 2021; Li et al., 2020), which has led to a shift in tourists' spending behaviour, with many opting for shorter, lower-cost trips (Li et al., 2020). It also confirms the tendency of tourists to avoid diseases, assessing their vulnerability and limiting the risk of infection (Kock et al., 2020).

According to Sheth (2020), four factors influence the formation or elimination of habits: changes in the social context, technological advances, rules and regulations, and natural disasters. Applying to the COVID-19 pandemic, government policy will encourage or not consumption and may shape

future consumption. Consumers have adopted new technologies and applications, which have transformed wants into needs, denoting a positive impact on developing new habits. Still, demographic change will trigger a shift to new interests and trends (Sheth, 2020).

The long-term effects will likely shape travel behaviours and preferences for years (Van Wee & Witlox, 2021). Thus, the present research attempts to map the behavioural changes that occurred by comparing travelling habits before and immediately after the pandemic, drawing a profile of future tourists. The survey focuses on the factors that most influenced the travel behaviour and consumption habits and patterns of tourists in their holiday options in 2019, 2020, and 2021, noticing that in 2020, the travelling that occurred was quite limited.

Methodology | This study used data retrieved from an online survey, conducted in late 2020, early 2021 (December-February) (LimeSurvey platform) targeting academics. The final sample excluded those who were planning to travel soon, ending with 82 valid responses. This segment was considered interesting for the nature of the study, since they typically do leisure and business travels, and therefore were considered to reflect different consumer segments. This data was subject to a multivariate statistical treatment through the SPSS platform to segment consumers according to their behavioural profiles. The questionnaire had 3 main sections: the first concerns travel patterns, such as frequency, follow-up, and scope before and after the pandemic; the second focuses on the reasons for travelling, preferences, and the impact of COVID-19 (De Vos, 2020; Li et al., 2020); and the third reviews the importance of technology and information sources in the travelling preparation and during the travel.

Main Results and Contributions | There was a general decrease in the frequency of trips, except for caravan, road, and GAP year trips, which correspond to models that allow for an adapted isolated space. Thus, companies in the sector must adapt and develop activities enabling social distancing. Trips take place to visit family/friends, nature, culture, and sun/beach, which means promoting a tourism destination should enhance these elements. Factors such as natural features and the level of safety are relevant in loyalty to the destination. As safety is important when choosing to travel, all related measures should be highlighted to reduce the feeling of risk. As for the sources of information, the recommendations of friends and family and online media stand out; therefore, optimizing the online presence is essential for the success of tourism companies. It is also interesting to mention that it was realized that the implementation of digital menus or QR Codes in restaurants was considered more important than the use of security robots for hotels and airports. This work also has implications for the study of the Portuguese tourism consumer due to the sample being mostly of this nationality. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see that the outcomes found are quite similar to those reported by Lebrun et al. (2022).

Limitations | The sample is relatively small with little diversity among sociodemographic characteristics. The data from the survey applied corresponds to 2020-2021, and there may be some outdated and mismatches about current behaviour.

Conclusions | The main purpose of this work was to understand the behaviour of post-COVID-19 tourists, considering that in the context of the pandemic, there had been changes in consumer behaviour in the most diverse areas of consumption. Different travel motivations were found within this group, highlighting individuals' uniqueness and consequent behaviour.

The findings of tourist behaviours highlight several psychological implications of COVID-19, mainly linked to risk factors. The outbreak created anxiety in potential tourists and the tendency of tourists to avoid diseases is confirmed. Since COVID-19 was just the tip point of the iceberg in terms of future health issues, these insights can assist tourism managers in implementing proximity marketing tactics by leveraging local and digital services amid worldwide health emergencies.

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