



Editorial

Reflections on Tourism Research During Covid-19 Pandemic Period

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The last three years marked a significant transformation in the history of travel and tourism industry. The industry experienced a chaotic situation with plummeting businesses, losing millions of jobs, downfall across the global economy, threatening tourism-related business operations, dwindling destination reputation, and diminishing traveler confidence (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). As the unfamiliar situation hit the door, the industry was left staggered and was striving hard for survival. Though this unparalleled impact tested the global tourism industry on one side, it resulted in a new wave of academic research that focused on analyzing the effect on the tourism industry. A plethora of research on Covid-19 and tourism covering the multifarious aspects bloomed between the years 2020 and 2022. Although a distinct perspective arose in this period of time that urged the tourism industry to think out of the box and devise novel strategies to combat the crisis, many researchers continue to engage in studies to provide solutions to issues that are pertinent and go beyond the discourse set by the Covid-19.

It is certain that the pandemic altered tourism knowledge, tourism research, and the industry as a whole (Sigala, 2020). During the outbreak of the pandemic, we witnessed an abundance of articles describing the pandemic and the impact associated with it. Many authors have contributed works related to health concerns such as psychological disorders, anxiety, depression rate, isolation, post-traumatic disorders, and short-term solutions to the pandemic (Sharma et al., 2021). The research also focused on people's behavior, attitude and responsive behavior towards the pandemic (Van Bavel et al., 2020), and how their behavior adversely affects the tourism business, its operations, and the industry as a whole.

The research has identified a major shift in the consumer behavior related to tourism products and services. A new trend has been observed among travelers “Travel for vengeance” to take revenge for the period locked up during the pandemic. A new phenomenon called “Revenge tourism” led to a surge in domestic tourism and started benefitting the tourism industry from the pent up demand during lockdown (Bundhun, 2022). Revenge tourism has instigated the tourists to visit the tourist destinations which were forbidden during the pandemic. Furthermore, workcations, micro-holiday emerges as a new trend among the people. Experts also found out that people prefer domestic travel rather than exorbitant destinations abroad. This paves way for DMOs to emphasize on enhancing the rich beauty of the country through heritage and cultural tourism. Heritage tourism marks a significant strategy by promoting tourism products enriched in cultural divine in the post-pandemic period (Lamba & Mohan, 2021). On the other hand, experiential tourism, which is a big area covering culinary, luxury, adventure and cultural tourism has been found to be more engaging and are welcomed by the new tourists. Post-pandemic, the expectations of the tourists have altered with respect to creating memorable experiences (Wahwa, 2023). Tourism industry should take this as a golden opportunity to promote more destinations, enable experiential economy and focus on devising marketing strategies that cater the needs of the diverse customers.

The key behind the success of any organization and business is the successful implementation of marketing strategies (Wahyuningsih et al., 2022). Tourism marketing strategies were revamped to adjust to the new normal and the new tourists. The industry cannot implement the same strategy to cater the needs of all. The customized marketing is required to meet the requirements of new tourists. Many marketing strategies have been proposed, such as implementing healthy, safe and environmentally friendly principles focusing on domestic tourists, market segmentation targeting individual tourists, digital marketing, re-positioning and green marketing (Wahyuningsih et al., 2022). Sustainability had gained the limelight as it was considered a significant aspect of working towards industrial resilience in the post-pandemic period. When we compare the sustainable practices in the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods, a balanced and holistic approach is observed in

the post-pandemic period. Covid-19 at some point is believed to have vanished some unsustainable practices to a considerable extent. Virtual tourism emerged as an alternative sustainable way of travel during the lockdown and travel restrictions. Virtual travel started to boom and reach its peak during this period of time. Virtual Reality aids in improving sustainable tourism (Dewailly, 1999; Guttentag, 2010; Kask, 2018; Barrado-Timón & Hidalgo-Giralt, 2019) and proves to be a suitable one for environmentally sustainable travel. The virtual tours to vulnerable tourist destinations mitigated the threatening situation by allowing the tourist destinations to rejuvenate and thus contribute towards its sustainability.

Enormous amount of work emerged along the lines of technology in the post-pandemic period. The incorporation of artificial intelligence, immersive technologies such as Virtual Reality, and augmented reality bolstered tourism research insights. The technological paradigm shift is considered to be one of the effective long-term solutions against the pandemic. Many tourism and hospitality businesses started to pivot their operations and adopted technology practices to respond back to the crisis. The various segments of the hospitality industry such as hotels, restaurants, homestays, other accommodation facilities, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) were highly affected as they are highly dependent on tourists. During the high tide of the pandemic, the MICE industry pivoted their path and reinvented itself with a new technological dimension (Gill, 2022). The revamped MICE industry focused on creating a strong relationship between various allied businesses, organizations and industries (Wahyuningsih et al., 2022).

The gradual growth over in-person meetings and destinations marked a first step in the MICE after the pandemic. MICE events were projected to grow in India during the year 2022 and the outbound travel for MICE events commenced from mid of the year. The outbound MICE events were expected to reach a milestone in the first quarter of 2023 as the majority of the events were planned. Another strategy is planning events to short-haul destinations from India. Countries like Bhutan, Dubai, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Turkey, Thailand which are few hours flying time were in high demand for MICE events. The

MICE is likely to grow tremendously on such short haul destinations and is going to be benefited through this. Though short haul destinations have an advantage, the medium and long-haul destinations are still in the spotlight. Countries like South Africa, Monaco were among the fore runners by strategically initiating outreach programs, road shows, corporate meetings, luxury events, cultural events, and other engaging activities after the pandemic (Gill, 2022).

Concurrently, India is showing positive signs in the field of medical tourism. After the two year hiatus, the medical tourism had revived its state by 50 percent in the 2021-2022 and crossed the pre-pandemic levels in the first half of 2022-2023 respectively. The country received a good number of patients from Bangladesh, Iran, Kenya, Uzbekistan post-pandemic. Flattening of covid-19 wave, ease of travel restrictions and abolishment of government quota treatment on private hospitals contributed to the rise of medical tourism in India (“After 2 Years of Pandemic”, 2022).

It is high time for the tourism companies to invest in niche marketing focusing on varied but diverse tourists. The union budget 2023 identifies tourism as a potential sector and emphasizes on promoting tourism through the holistic active participation of state bodies and public-private partnerships. The Government of India planned to conduct a global tourism investors summit in the second quarter of 2023 to support capital investment. The prime outcome of this summit is to highlight India as an “Investment Destination” by establishing a common forum for government bodies and investors to foster investment in Indian tourism (Wahwa, 2023). The Government is also showing abundant interest towards technology related investments to bolster the industry. Though the pandemic spiked the technology adoption in the tourism industry, an in-depth research is expected to be conducted on the lines of emerging technologies, dynamic impacts, and resilient capabilities in various unpredictable scenarios. Incorporating new strategies (Pham et al., 2021) and technologies, rethinking tourism from a different perspective, bringing in new SOPs, educating various impacts of travel, fostering responsible travel behavior, and implementing effective sustainable practices works towards strengthening a better tourism future irrespective of any uncertainties. The pandemic

indeed gave a new chance to transform the tourism industry to reform itself into a sustainable and imperishable one (Sigala, 2020).

The current issue of Atna: Journal of Tourism studies presents the pool of research articles covering diverse aspects of the tourism industry and studies relevant in the pre- and post-pandemic era.

D'Souza & Pinto emphasized the importance of medical tourism and the potential benefits it bestows on the tourism industry. They tried to examine the scope of medical tourism in India and the challenges associated with it. Their work tries to analyze and bridge the gap for the successful implementation of medical tourism at the tourism destination. The case of the Indian city of Mangalore has been examined to understand the feasible economic benefits they could provide to the tourism industry. A generic strategy has been derived for Indian cities that could emerge as successful medical tourism destinations.

Thanikkad and Kumar analyzes the satisfaction level of the various cultural tourism products in the Indian state of Kerala. Their works highlight the significance of two major elements, cultural tourism products and customer satisfaction associated with it. Authors examine various factors of cultural tourism products that greatly affect the satisfaction of the customers. Authors also put forward the need for revamping the tangible cultural tourism products to elevate their value and in turn, increase the visitor satisfaction level.

Shandilya et al. explores the moderating role of demographic variables on customer satisfaction with respect to quick-service restaurants. They emphasized the importance of service quality expectations of customers in this competitive business environment. The authors in their research predominantly focus on understanding a deeper relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

Rajkamal et al. conducted a conclusive study on understanding the MICE industry and tried to establish a relationship between influencing variables and customer relationship management. They critically examine the challenges and limitations of the Indian MICE industry which limits the benefits to the tourism industry and the economy of the country as a whole. The factors affecting the Indian

MICE tourism industry is analyzed through the lens of customer relationship management.

Sibi and Ali work closely with the tourism and hospitality companies in the Indian Stock Market and analyze their performance with respect to post-pandemic. A sectoral analysis has been conducted for the whole tourism industry categorizing them into Airlines, Amusement parks, Hotels, and Travel agencies. They have evaluated the performance of these companies and drawn a comparison with respect to their performance in the Indian share market. The study helps to gain a clear picture of the tourism and hospitality company's performance in the post-pandemic period and enlightens people who wish to invest in the tourism and hospitality industry.

This brief note on works included in the present issue of *Atna* engage the readers in a productive aspect and would provide them with a glimpse of the broader study of tourism during and after the pandemic. Their works indeed alter the perspectives of tourism research and also encourage other researchers to present outbreking insights to the industry with respect to the post-pandemic period. This issue of *Atna* tries to reflect the paradigm shift in tourism research and addresses the major concerns enclosed within the industry from a renewed perspective provided by the pandemic space.

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