Managing Tourist Risk, Grief and Distrust Post COVID-19

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Abstract
Tourism is one of the most important sectors for many countries and is also one of the most vulnerable to the impact of disasters. However, while tourism has proved resilient to localized or regional crisis, COVID-19 has had a universal impact on tourists, with pervasive, profound, and enduring implications. Our main objective is to explore and elucidate how such recent changes to tourism, triggered by the pandemic, affected the future travel intentions of tourists. Our exploration of these issues through in-depth interviews, finds that tourists were emotionally and psychologically affected by the sudden curb to their lives and that these emotions broadly equate to stages of grief. Furthermore, we uncover not only a general reduction in trust, but, concomitantly, an elevation in distrust towards destinations, manifest at the level of government, healthcare and tourist institutions, activities, and risk mitigation practices. Finally, we offer a discussion of the contributions and implications of our study in terms of tourism and hospitality research and practice.

Keywords
COVID 19, grief, trust inventory, marketing and consumer behavior, hospitality and tourism operations, policy

Introduction
Tourism is crucial to the economy of many countries (Polyzos et al., 2020) but is extremely vulnerable to the impact of crisis and disaster (Santana, 2004; Ritchie and Jiang, 2019; Yang et al., 2020; Karabulut et al., 2021). From terrorist attacks to natural disasters, crisis typically have a negative influence on tourism in the area(s) affected (Mair et al., 2016), with a lag in the return of tourists, and lower tourism post-crisis (Fotiadis et al., 2021). A number of recent health-related crisis have been studied including SARS (McKercher and Chon 2004), influenza (Page, et al., 2006), bird-flu (Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009), swine flu (Page et al., 2012) and Ebola (Cahyanto, et al., 2016) and highlight that tourists avoid visiting destinations in the throes of crisis, either because they are afraid to travel or because of travel bans (Wen et al., 2005). In the aftermath, organizations and destinations invoke strategies that serve to repair the destination image (Chew and Jahari 2014) and develop crisis/disaster management plans to better prepare for the future.

Unlike other infectious disease outbreaks, few people or places are immune to the consequences of COVID-19, with millions around the world negatively impacted. Grief is widespread because of suffering, illness and death. ‘Alongside these acute sources of grief, many are mourning both missed lifecycle events and quotidian losses as a result of constrained mobilities and liberties: weddings, religious worship and festivals, employment, work, school, kith and kin,

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cultural events, travel and holidays, everyday convivialities and personal independence’ (Maddrell, 2020: 9). Acknowledged as ‘one of the most impactful events of the 21st Century’ (Zenker and Kock, 2020: 1), this pandemic has had a dramatic and deleterious impact on global tourism (Gössling et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Whether tourism can recover and what that recovery might look like are the subject of much speculation. Opinions have polarized (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Fotiadis et al., 2021), varying from the desire to return to ‘business as usual’ as quickly as possible (Butcher, 2020), to using the crisis as an opportunity to re-imagine tourism (Benjamin et al., 2020) in ways that emphasize sustainability, resilience and greater equity for tourism communities.

What the future holds, and where tourism fits in a post-pandemic world remains to be seen. In the meantime, people’s perceptions of the health risks associated with tourism have profoundly changed (Qu et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Several studies have addressed tourism behaviours related to this crisis, but many are conceptual (e.g. Dolnicar and Zare 2020), domestically focused (e.g., Li et al., 2020a), consider travel from one country (typically China, as the origin of the pandemic) to specific destination points (e.g. Polyzos et al., 2020) or are concerned with one aspect of travel, such as willingness to fly (Lamb et al., 2020). Interestingly, most studies are also quantitative. Further insight can be gained by in-depth analysis of tourist’s experiences and attitudes in the immediate aftermath of the governmental action in Spring (2020).

Tourist decisions and destination choices are influenced by personal and physical security perceptions (Fotiadis et al., 2021). These become elevated in importance when choosing destinations following a crisis (Mair et al., 2016; Lamb et al., 2020), and are strongly influenced by media coverage (Novelli et al., 2018). In the aftermath of a crisis, risk perceptions have the potential to reduce levels of trust in a destination and/or to increase distrust (Chew and Jahari, 2014).

Trust is a complex, multidimensional concept that relates to positive beliefs or perceptions that one party holds about another in relation to an outcome (Lewicki et al., 1998). Trust functions to reduce customer anxiety in decision-making contexts and is particularly important in tourism because it reduces uncertainty and vulnerability (Cho, 2006; Yang et al., 2020). In contrast, distrust, is an active concern that an individual or situation will lead to harmful outcomes; it is more than just the absence of trust. Distrust can lead to more dramatic effects on tourist decision-making than a simple reduction in trust would (Cho, 2006).

In most tourism crises situations, tourists can select alternative destinations (Santana, 2004), so the effect on their decision-making processes is, typically, limited. However, COVID-19 has had a more widespread impact on tourism (Karabulut et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2020; Fotiadis et al., 2021), creating a need to understand future tourism behaviours. This paper explores consumers’ narratives of the impact of COVID-19 on their travel plans both during and following the pandemic. It adds to current research on tourism and risk, crisis and disaster management (Ritchie and Jiang, 2019) by (i) focusing on risks associated with health/infectious disease and (ii) bringing insight from tourists rather than industry protagonists. The paper offers three main contributions. First, it explores the dimensions of risk that consumers consider in relation to future travel plans. Second, it foregrounds the importance of distrust in tourist’s future decision-making. Third, it offers a framework that captures a post-COVID 19 tourist trust inventory. Cumulatively these insights highlight the importance of tourists’ confidence in various ecosystem actors and discusses how this could inform future tourism behaviours.

Methodology
In order to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the future travel intentions of tourists, we adopted an exploratory research design. Gathering data was challenging, with additional practices imposed by the University’s ethics committee (including strict adherence to prevailing government COVID regulations centring on social distancing). We undertook multiple in-depth interviews with leisure tourists and business travellers during April-June 2020, interviewing informants online via two-way video conferencing with all interviews (with the permission of informants) recorded and subsequently transcribed. We developed an initial interview protocol based on industry and wider commentary, but periodically revised the interview schedule to incorporate emerging themes. This approach facilitated the exploration of deeper patterns of behaviour and/or interpretation and enabled the proposal of tentative links between concepts.

Data was collected via 44 in-depth interviews with UK tourists who had intended to travel during either the Summer or Autumn of 2020, with the sample divided into travellers who self-categorized their primary activity as one of either leisure or business travel. To enhance the trustworthiness of our data, our informants were broadly representative of key demographic traits in terms of age, ethnicity, gender and family size. Most business traveller informants were male (12 of 20) with ages ranging from 22 to 65, while most leisure tourists were female (14 of 24) between 19 and 63. All the interviews went over the planned 60 min, with three
interviews lasting just under 2 hours. The mean length of interview was just over 74 min (interviews with business tourists tended to last 10–20% longer than those with leisure tourists).

Analysis centred on the annotated transcriptions and was undertaken concurrently with data gathering. Verbatim transcripts were supplemented with observations and notes taken during interviews (including factors such as tone of voice, emotional state, facial expressions or body language). After each interview, these notes were checked, and any additional reflections noted and recorded. Open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) were used to generate the themes and categories identified below. These processes were designed to enhance the trustworthiness (including the subdimensions of transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability) of our data gathering and analysis approach.

Findings

Data analysis revealed a range of tourist responses to and reflections on how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting travel and tourism. First, largely triggered by governmental regulations and organizational responses to curb the spread of COVID-19, we present informant responses to changed (most often cancelled) travel arrangements. Second, in recognizing the fact that tourism occurs within a multi-level, complex, nested ecosystem, made up of macro-level (system-wide) factors, meso-level (organizational) factors and micro-level (individual) factors (Turner, 2005), we explore tourists’ confidence in different ecosystem actors.

Tourists’ reactions to changed planned arrangements

Interviews with tourists revealed that all informants had been required to change travel and tourism arrangements due to COVID-19. Such changes were largely enforced by Governments through travel bans, quarantine restrictions or mandated social isolation restrictions, by employers who imposed ‘no travel’ rules for business travellers or by venues who imposed social distancing rules). All informants were emotionally and psychologically affected by these changes (see also Maddrell, 2020), voicing an array of responses that attributed blame, expressed emotional responses and/or lamented lost opportunities. Significantly, these responses broadly equated to Kübler-Ross’s (1969) stages of grief. Originally conceived as stages experienced by the dying, the framework has since been used extensively to understand individuals’ responses to change (Graetz and Smith, 2010). This perspective holds that people undergo five stages of grieving: ‘Denial’, ‘Anger’, ‘Bargaining’, ‘Depression’ and, ultimately, ‘Acceptance’ (often referred to as the DABDA model). Our data suggests that informants’ responses can be mapped onto these stages. Table 1 presents narratives covering customers’ reactions to their changed tourist experiences against the DABDA stages.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected informants’ attitudes and beliefs. Denial, anger and bargaining are exhibited by informants who considered the cancellation of their travel plans to have been unnecessary. The loss of holidays is evidenced for one informant in depression because they live ‘for the holidays’. This captures the importance of travel and tourism in the lives of contemporary consumers, with, 11% of personal consumption globally spent on tourism (Goodwin, 2017). Finally, we see evidence of acceptance, where some informants showed that they were ready to wait it out, whereas others were accepting of their loss this year, but were planning bigger and better holidays for the future. The remainder of this paper is dedicated to explicating the changes in trust and distrust and how these impact tourists’ future travel plans.

Tourist’s reflections on future travel and tourism

Data analysis revealed that tourists’ trust inventory had undergone significant changes, which may, over time, constitute a fundamental shift in societal values. We observe a general reduction in trust, and, concomitantly, an elevation in distrust, towards several government, healthcare and tourist institutions, activities and risk mitigation practices.

Confidence in Governments and their institutions. Not surprisingly, informants talked about trust in various tourism ‘institutions’; referring to ‘beliefs about protective structures’ as opposed to people or organizations (McKnight and Chervany, 2001). When individuals trust institutions, they are fairly confident that the conditions and systems that afford them the necessary protection are in place. Thus, this institutional trust typically facilitates tourist trust in service providers, SMEs and travel companies. However, following the handling of COVID 19 by some countries, informants seem to be re-evaluating trust in government institutions, often based on the behaviour of their leaders. For some countries/
destinations this might equate to a reduction in trust, whereas, for other destinations informants articulated explicit distrust in current leaders or institutions that enforce law. For example:

- **Denial**
  
  I think it’s all a bunch of horse shit! At the moment it’s ‘panic’, ‘panic’, ‘panic’! Give it three months and it will be back to normal. There are even talking about it now they’re just calling it the [sarcastically] ‘new’ normal. for ‘new’ read ‘old’ - the good times are just a round the corner! [Business Traveller, Female, Aged 34, 1-2 business trips per month]

- **Anger**
  
  It makes my blood boil! So, a load of old people can’t go on cruises; what’s that got to do with us? We’d planned to go into inter-railing - we had it all organized and that was stopped for a bunch of old people. Don’t get me wrong I don’t want anyone to get sick but young people are not affected by this so why are we punished for something that is nothing to do with us? [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 19, 1 vacation per year]

- **Bargaining**
  
  I just think that they’re being over cautious. I can understand - if we said we’d wear masks all the time will sit separately is no reason why you know we can’t come to some arrangement. I just don’t see what the problem is if we balance risks. I’m sure those places want us to come - we want to come - so it’s just a matter of getting the governments to let us do it and I think that’s all about everyone being flexible and arrangement can surely be reached if we are prepared to be flexible. [Business Traveler, Female, Aged 61, 1 business trip per quarter]

- **Depression**
  
  It really gets me down I love my vacations - I live for the holidays and getting away and that’s just not gonna be possible. Do you know I look out the window and the sun is shining but you can’t vacation in your own backyard. It just makes me really sad. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 33, 3-4 vacations per year]

- **Acceptance**
  
  I guess I’ve just reached the point about vacationing where I’m accepting that the future is going to be different. Okay, it looks like we’ve lost a year. That doesn’t mean that in the future things can’t be revived and we can go on again. Yeah, it’s going to be different but I think we just have to accept that and move on. [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 44, 1 vacation per year]

Although specifically referring to the designation of some destinations as safe, the comments clearly relate to the government’s broader handling of the pandemic, which appears to have reduced trust in government communication. This situation was later exacerbated by countries being removed from safe travel lists while tourists were abroad. In terms of future travel, tourists repeatedly asserted that governments need to forward explicit guarantees and safeguards to support and foster future travel activities.

**Confidence in the healthcare infrastructure.** Data analysis also indicated that tourists’ confidence in key country level infrastructures had been affected by reporting of the COVID-19 pandemic. They focused on judgments of healthcare systems whose responses to the pressures encountered had been extensively scrutinized by local and international media. Possibly reflecting regional biases, one respondent expressed deep distrust and concern regarding other healthcare systems. For example, Albert (formerly a frequent leisure tourist to Asia) recalls:

- **Would you go anywhere today without a first-class healthcare system? Anywhere without an organized system? Europe maybe [nodding]. Africa? Asia? [shakes head vigorously] No sodding
way! [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 64, 4 vacations per year]

While concerns over healthcare systems have always been part of tourists decision-making processes, these were often a lesser issue (mitigated for through travel insurance). However, the pandemic appears to have elevated this factor in their decision-making, through changed perceptions of the risk of becoming ill and needing treatment and, thus, the fitness of regions', areas', states' or cities' for tourist travel; with leisure tourists especially sensitive to such factors.

Consistent with consumer reactions to lockdowns during SARS (Wen et al., 2005), many leisure tourists expressed the desire to travel in the future (often more lavishly than in the past, to compensate for missed 2020 vacations). Despite this, their focus was on safe luxury, rather than destinations that were perceived to be riskier. Andrew, whose past vacations typically included more exotic or less travelled locations, comments:

Sorry but the wild and wonderful exotic locations are a fond memory. I’ve loved our trips – the remotest the better for us. Now? I’m not going anywhere without a serious healthcare system. I want cities with major units – no hospital? No us. [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 32, 2 vacations per year]

Thus, even when people can travel more frequently again, they are likely to foreground ‘safety’ with regards to healthcare systems in decision-making processes.

Confidence in destinations. Informants also articulated changes in their levels of confidence regarding future travel to different destinations. For many, trust in previously favoured locations had been shattered by high-profile issues or perceived problems during the pandemic. Not only had such issues caused deep reputational harm but, in direct contrast to ‘normalization’ processes (Ananian-Welsh and Williams, 2014), tourists argued that their concerns about future travel plans could not be overcome simply or quickly. Fiona, a twice-a-year New York visitor for over 10 years, explains:

I do a pre-Christmas shopping trip to New York every year – we love it. After this? No. New York was a real hotspot. Too many news reports of hospitals in Central Park. They’re going to face an uphill struggle getting tourists back. Cut price deals are not going repair their reputation. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 32, 3 vacations per year]

Pre-COVID, informants claimed that previous destination experience was a key predictor of future (repeat) travel; leisure tourists often returning to favoured locations. However, post/mid-COVID, such past loyalty appeared to be a Damoclean sword for many destinations, with tourists claiming that their accrued location-specific knowledge and experience gave them insights into destinations that created distrust. For example:

Everyone’s off to the Costa del Sol when this over aren’t they? Would you trust them? Listen, I love it out there, but the Spanish are laid back and ‘mañana, mañana’. You’re gonna need to convince me that they are sterilizing every hotel room before you get me back! [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 58, 5-6 vacations per year]

Overall, tourists asserted that two factors appeared strongly related to their intentions to travel to locations or destinations. First, was the perceived absence of negative news regarding COVID-19 for a destination. Where no bad publicity was recalled, or (less commonly) positive reports remembered, this appeared to reduce distrust sufficiently for future travel to be considered. Josie comments:

I think that Sweden comes out of this smelling of roses – they were sensible and safe too. Ummm – maybe the island places – I’ve not heard much about the Caribbean or Cyprus or Madeira or the Balearics? No news is good news I suppose? [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 22, 1 vacation per year]

Second, informants suggested that to reduce distrust, destinations needed pandemic-free infection ratings (often linked to government travel lists or advice). Bob claims:

In the future, destinations will need to have health ratings – last case, number of cases – you know. Destinations will need a health certificate if they expect people to go back – if they don’t, people will look anyway. [Business Traveller, Male, Aged 53, 1-2 business trips per month]

In this way, many informants drew parallels between personal testing and destination safety; in short, just as individuals obtained tests to confirm their health status, they logically extrapolated that the same should be done for venues, destinations and even countries.

Confidence in the means of travel. While tourist’s confidence in destinations had been affected, so had their intentions regarding their mode of travel (see also Li et al., 2020b). Analysis revealed that pre-COVID, tourists had often preferred particular modes of travel, for a range of reasons, from economic, pragmatic (time-based), and psychological, to merely preferential, but
had often done so without a structured, risk-oriented focus (some exceptions including those with phobias or health concerns). However, the pandemic appears to have led tourists of all types to consider their future travel from a risk perspective. This process resulted in changed trust evaluations of the different options, affecting their propensity for adopting a particular means of travel in the future (see Table 2).

| Mode of transportation | Typical changes to trust or distrust | Illustrative narrative |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Airports               | •Largely Negative                   | I don’t trust airports now – I didn’t like them before. Their business model is based on getting us there early and ripping is off. Now? I trust them less – their job is to make money – everything else is a sham. [Business Traveller, Female, Aged 34, 1-2 business trips per month] |
|                        | •Strong distrust                    |                        |
| Airplanes              | •Largely negative levels of trust   | Do you remember cigarettes being ‘death tubes’? Well, that’s what we call airplanes now! All the crap they got about not changing the air filters enough no matter how much we complained? We didn’t like them to start with. Now we don’t trust them one tiny drop. They’ll need proper biological sterilizing filters before they can cram us like sardines again. [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 43, 2 vacations per year] |
|                        | •General distrust                   |                        |
| Airlines               | •Largely negative for low-cost airlines | I wouldn’t trust the low-cost airlines after this – they just took people’s money. [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 20, 1 vacation per year] |
|                        | •Broad distrust                     |                        |
|                        | •Largely positive trust for larger/national airlines | I would only travel with a scheduled airline after this. If something goes belly-up, I’d want the resources aa national carrier can bring – so Pegasus can go hang – Air Turkey all the way from here! [Business Traveller, Male, Aged 46, 1-2 business trips per quarter] |
|                        | •Low distrust                       |                        |
| Trains, Trams, Buses, and Coaches | •Largely negative levels of trust | They’re no prospect of us ever doing it again. We’ve done coach trips to Spain and France and Germany and all over. We’ve had rail vacations to Scotland and Switzerland – all via the Xxxxx Citizens Association [a local, retired people’s group which organizes three vacations per year for groups of 30-60]. We’ve too a risk now – it’s. a real shame but coaches and trains are just too crammed together. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 64, 3 vacations per year] |
|                        | •General distrust                   |                        |
| Cars                   | •Polarised. Taxis etc. strongly negative trust and active distrust | Would I fly? No – simples – no. I’d drive – myself, in my own car but planes, trains and auto...eerrr – other people’s automobiles are out! [Business Traveller, Male, Aged 56, 1-2 business trips per month] |
|                        | •Own cars strongly positive trust   |                        |

This data suggests that some options have been heavily hit; with informants overtly talking about distrust of trains, trams, taxis, buses and coaches; with a mixed picture for airplanes, showing higher levels of trust in larger/national airlines and distrust in low-cost or smaller airlines. Informants only articulated high trust in one option – their own vehicles. While such changes to tourists’ trust in means of transportation affects each sector idiosyncratically, the broader implications of such changes may be profound for the whole sector. In this regard, many informants referred to sustainability-oriented adaptations when talking about future travel and how the pandemic had affected their views on different means of travel in relation to environment. Sheena, a three overseas vacation a year leisure tourist, observes:

> How and if we travel needs to change. The environmental lobby have told us this for years. We knew it anyway, but we liked cheap vacations. The future needs to be safe for all of us and safe for the environment too. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 53, 3 vacations per year]

In this regard, the impact of COVID-19 on tourists and their travel intentions and behaviours merits very close attention with regards to staycations, and a switch away from high-risk options.
changes to tourists’ trust in accommodation providers and agents. Again, tourists’ trust in such organizations has been affected both positively and negatively by their experiences, by word-of-mouth, and via (almost exclusively) negative media reports. Table 3 depicts the changes in tourists’ trust-distrust in various forms of accommodation providers and agents.

| Travel organization type                      | Typical changes to trust and distrust                                      | Illustrative Narrative/s                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Large hotels                                  | • Largely negative when based on experience/WOM                           | They’ve been good – all cancelled and have up to 18 months to rebook. We were dead happy to get that – we thought we’d lose it all. Now, it’s just delayed. They were pretty good so I’d trust them to rebook. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 25, 2 vacations per year] |
|                                               | • Some distrust                                                           | If I travel there again, I’d be more choosey. The big chains of hotels will have plans and systems and they’ll be doing it right. The small and the boutique? Not so sure – yes, I prefer them but safety comes first now. [Business Traveller, Female, Aged 47, 2 business trips per quarter] |
|                                               | • Largely positive trust when based on media reports                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                               | • Limited distrust                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Smaller hotels                                | • Largely negative trust                                                 | In the past, we’d just book the night before – depending on how far we fancied cycling the next day. I’m pretty sure, that’s over now. You didn’t used to get much choice but after this it’ll be safety first. [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 53, 4-5 vacations per year] |
|                                               | • Broad distrust                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Cruise ships                                  | • Polarized but most strongly distrust                                    | It was like the Last Ship [a popular TV show where, ironically, a single ship remains uninfected after a global pandemic]. People were locked in there dying in their hundreds! We’re going to take some persuading before we step foot on a gangway again. Cruises are really expensive – even out of season – they’re luxury fortnight relaxing. You just couldn’t relax now. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 63, 3 vacations per year] |
| Self-catering accommodation (including for example, private villas) | • Largely positive levels of trust                                       | I’d book a cottage out in the country – not a hotel mind – a cottage. Just me and mine is safe. Not exactly the same as full board five star room service but that’s a price worth pay to be safe. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 46, 1-2 vacations per year] |
| Travel agencies                               | • Slightly negative when based on experience/WOM                         | It’s been cancelled and we’ll get our money back. Sometime. Sorry but I need that now. You start off being grateful that you haven’t lost it all but then you think about how much you paid to go through them [an accredited travel agency] and you get mad about how many loops you’ve got to jump through. Do I trust them now? Ummm. I guess - but am wary now. What they do doesn’t match up with what they sell. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 39, 2 vacations per year] |
|                                               | • Weak distrust                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                               | • Positive trust when based on past non-usage and/or media reports        | We booked independently – I’ve not lost it all but I have lost some. I’ll not go directly in the future. All those ‘book straight with us’ claims have lost their luster! [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 36, 2 vacations per year] |

Although some of the narratives above might be considered to be unfair, biased, prejudiced, or even, inaccurate, they typify informants’ views. As such, tourist perceptions may not be fair, but are their reality, and impact their trust or distrust in future travel choices. Commonly, informants highlighted the need for sweeping industry changes, from contact-less check-ins, changes in service arrangements, to money-back
assurances. Amelia argues that such changes to the industry are inevitable:

The travel industry will need to change – consumers will want solid guarantees and promises and assurances. I’m not sure they can do that. How can you guarantee that a flight is safe? Test us all before every flight? Their future is bleak. [Business Traveler, Female, Aged 29, 4-5 business trips per quarter]

Informants were particularly concerned about systemic failures that might leave them stranded. Several referred to situations in which tourists were prevented from going home. Cruise ships received a great deal of coverage during the initial outbreak, and, by the end of March 10 cruise ships remained at sea unable to find a port that would allow them to dock (Mallapaty, 2020). Although this contained infection, it increased the severity of contagion for those onboard and demonstrated that existing systems and structures were unable to respond effectively. Thus, it seems that COVID-19 created many unusual or abnormal situations – such that the situation itself became untrustworthy (see McKnight and Chervany, 2001) for tourists.

Confidence in travel insurance. A sector worthy of note is that of travel insurance that was almost universally deemed to be ‘untrustworthy’ in crisis situations.

Insurance firms are sneaky, lying, cheating bastards. Did you see them on the TV trying to claim that flights weren’t covered by a pandemic? They’ll do anything to slither out of paying. My husband works in insurance – he’ll tell you. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 41, 2 vacations per year]

However, while insurance companies were widely denigrated, informants claimed that they would take out more (rather than less) insurance for future travel. Indeed, even a business traveller who previously had accepted their employer’s travel insurance as adequate, claimed that they would also take out personal insurance for future trips. Katie notes:

I get covered by work but I’m not going until I’ve also covered myself – a few bucks on insurance is worth it from now on. [Business Traveller, Female, Aged 26, 1-2 business trips per quarter]

In this regard, while tourists’ trust in travel organizations has been affected significantly, such changes, even when very negative, do not necessarily denote non-adoption or non-use in the future. This makes sense, as perceptions of health risks escalate, travellers engage more in protective behaviours, such as buying travel insurance and getting vaccinated (Chien et al., 2017).

Confidence in people. While informants’ confidence in travel companies had been variously affected by COVID-19, their views regarding the people they might be in contact with in post-COVID travel also changed. In short, informants’ trust in front-line, customer contact employees had been severely reduced, to a point where such workers were not simply viewed in terms of low trust but were actively distrusted. For many informants, service personnel, even those favoured previously, were described not in terms of customer service efficiency but more in term of potential risk. John comments:

Social isolation will take a while to get over. I don’t want to shake hands with people. I don’t want anybody touching me or getting too close. The thought of people making me coffee, or drink, or food, or whatever, is scary. I know it will get back to normal but the new normal is going to involve a lot of mask and gloves for anybody serving the public. [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 37, 1-2 vacations per year]

Similarly, informants exhibited low levels of trust toward other tourists they might meet or be obliged to share facilities with (such as airline cabins, restaurants or other venues). All of those interviewed viewed unknown fellow tourists as potentially suspicious, while a minority even extended the possibility of this risk to friends and, in two cases, to other family members. Isabelle bemoans her lost summer trip to Zante with her close friends but indicates concern over meeting these ‘old’ friends:

We always do a big holiday together – all the old housemates from uni – now? I can’t see it happening. I’ll go by myself or maybe with my folks. Mixing with people is a risk now – seeing an old friend could literally kill you. If that doesn’t change your thinking, nothing will. [Leisure Tourist, Female, Aged 46, 1-2 vacations per year]

Whether and how the opinions of tourists regarding vacationing or traveling with friends or colleagues will change over time will prove interesting. However, it seems likely that tourists’ views regarding service personnel are likely to be more deeply entrenched in distrust. Furthermore, linked to cultural traits, jingoism, xenophobia and both direct and indirect racism, some informants held very strong views of distrust regarding service personnel. Rob comments:

How can you trust people paid the minimum wage or on zero-hour contracts to be safe? They’ll take risks because they have
too. I’m not being mean, just practical. I wouldn’t trust our local coffee shop let alone some schmuck working in a hotel in Mexico. We follow rules but they don’t. That’s not racist just cultural – they’re much more laid back than we are. [Business Traveller, Male, Aged 36, 2-3 business trips per year]

As Schaller and Murray (2008) outline, xenophobic responses can be amplified by contextual clues that appear to make the threat of transmission more salient. Thus, as we see above, the informant says he has become less open to foreign food and foreign travel to particular contexts that he links to cultural differences.

Trust in home. An underpinning factor to many changes in trust toward facets of travel and tourism were informants underlying strengthened levels of trust of their homes, where they felt safe and secure. The COVID-19 pandemic has boosted their trust in such contexts, in part, by differentially heightening their fear, anxiety, and distrust of places deemed ‘not home’. Chris, a frequent business traveller who often extended international work trips for leisure tourism reasons, explains:

*I’m afraid of leaving my house! What would it take to get me on a plane? On vacation? A million bucks? Naw, seriously – I’m afraid of being away from home for the first time in my life and it’s going to take time* [Business Traveller, Male, Aged 33, 1-2 business trip per month]

While not every informant viewed ‘home’ in sanguine or halcyon ways, all equated ‘home’ with ‘safe’. This is consistent with evidence that, when exposed to the threat of an infectious disease people become more collectivist in their orientation (Cashdan and Steele, 2013). Thus, unsurprisingly, post-lockdown many informants expressed views that extolled the benefits of home-vacationing. As such, many informants suggested that initially, a ‘staycation’ (in the US sense of the term) might be the best option. However, while some thought vacationing in their own residence (US staycationing) was ideal, more informants argued that, post-lockdown, they could extend their conception of ‘home’ to encompass ‘home country’ and, thus, commended staycationing in the European sense of the term (meaning, to vacation in one’s country of domicile). David discusses his family’s plans:

*I think we’ll staycation at most. Home is safe – boring after a while but safe! A few day trips to quiet places – back to nature from home. Not Disney, I know but I’d rather be quiet than coughing!* [Leisure Tourist, Male, Aged 36, 2-3 vacations per year]

Trust in such home-country staycations was particularly strongly directed to low-populated home-country locations and less strongly felt toward urban or densely populated locations. In this regard, many informants suggested that their post-COVID travel intentions might focus on more rural aspects of tourism, such as adventure tourism, glamping, or camping. Indeed, post-COVID travel plans of many tourists are summed up by Joanna, a frequent business traveller, who explained her orientation toward future business trips as:

“Stay at home, man! Local trips – only. Not exotic but safe!” [Business Traveller, Female, Aged 44, 8-10 business trips per year].

Discussion

COVID-19 has had an incredible impact on the global tourism industry, surpassing all previous events. For example, tourism numbers had been rising steadily between 2000 and 2019 with two exceptions – SARS, with a reduction of 3 million tourists globally in 2003, and the global economic crisis, with a reduction of 37 million in 2009. In contrast, the estimated reduction in international travellers in 2020 was 1.14 billion with a concomitant loss of 121 million tourism jobs globally (Aburumman, 2020). In many respects the future of tourism may seem bleak. Indeed, while there are hopes of a return to some sort of ‘new’ normality as vaccination programs continue to roll out, the ongoing threat of new variants and high numbers of unvaccinated individuals mean that is still some time away and the impact on tourists and communities is likely to be felt for some time (Fotiadis et al., 2021).

There has been limited academic consideration of travellers’ health concerns and what little exists either relates to risk perceptions in the immediate wake of a contagious outbreak (Karabulut et al., 2021) or to more general health concerns unrelated to destinations or regions (Chien et al., 2017). This is unsurprising as ‘it is not common to think about tourism and disaster/crisis in the same light. Enjoyment, pleasure, relaxation and safety are embodied in the concept of tourism, whereas crises/disasters bring distress, fear, anxiety, trauma and panic’ (Santana, 2004, 300). Nevertheless, COVID-19 vividly juxtaposes the two. We can dream about future travel, but it will be inevitably associated with higher levels of anxiety and worry. This paper builds on insights from recent studies by highlighting the prevalence of bereavement and grief, and heightened feelings of distrust amongst those whose travel plans had been cancelled.
Bereavement and grief are emotions that are strongly associated with COVID-19 and its impact on our lives and livelihoods (Maddrell, 2020). Interestingly, the DABDA model is usually used to show how individuals move through stages of grief in relation to change, towards acceptance and a commitment towards the future state. However, our data suggests that COVID-19 has polarized individuals, some of whom appear to be remaining firmly in Denial or Anger and some who are Depressed or even Accepting. Individuals that are more risk averse appear more likely to accept or to mitigate for the pandemic consequences versus those that do not perceive the risks to be as high, either generally, or in terms of travel. Those that do see the risks seem more prone to stay home, select ‘safer’ destinations, or looking for mitigations to reduce risk (e.g. picking trustworthy providers, drivable destinations and more extensive insurance packages).

This paper extends the pre-COVID insights of Chien et al. (2017) regarding the link between risk perceptions and protective behaviours. Indeed, perceptions of risk feature much more strongly in attitudes towards future travel, towards specific destinations and towards institutions relating to governance, health care and tourism. Figure 1 captures the key post-COVID-19 tourism decision-making factors identified from within our dataset. The figure looks to captures an overall picture of a tourist’s position along each of the seven dimensions that should help to predict why different tourists will or will not travel in the future.

Consistent with extant studies (e.g. Zhang et al., 2020), a key finding from our data is that these risk perceptions manifest themselves in changes to levels of confidence towards destinations, governance, health care, travel and leisure. For example, tourists’ concern over the physical presence of others is likely to make public transport less attractive (Li et al., 2020b) and render less crowded destinations more attractive (Séraphin and Dosquet, 2020). As such, the relationship between trust, distrust, and tourism is an increasingly important one. Trust has received more attention to date. However, increasing references to distrust – ‘the extent to which one believes, with feelings of relative certainty or confidence, that the other party does not have beneficial characteristics’ (McKnight and Chervany, 2001: 28) – are apparent in our data. Distrust can lead to more dramatic effects on decision-making processes of consumers than can a simple reduction in trust would (Cho, 2006) and it therefore merits further consideration. Indeed, McKnight and Chervany (2001: 29) suggest that distrust is ‘becoming more prevalent, which means that it may, to an extent, be displacing trust as a social mechanism for dealing with risk’.

In the case of distrust, consumers take rational, preventative actions – in trust, consumers make more emotional decisions, based on reducing uncertainty and vulnerability (Cho, 2006). Research also indicates that such effects are compounded where negative information is noticed more, is perceived as more credible and is more heavily weighted in consumer decision-making efforts than equivalent positive information (Cho, 2006). This is certainly predominately the case with regards to COVID-19, where the impact has been experienced as super-abnormal by tourists, such that the usual structural assurances failed on a rather grand scale. In this regard, the paper contributes by focusing attention on understanding issues that influence trusting and distrusting tourist behaviours.
An individual’s propensity to trust various destinations and tourist organizations based on personal experiences would have typically informed their tourist intentions pre-COVID. Post COVID-19, however, it seems that government, healthcare and tourism infrastructure factors are all elevated in importance (Yang et al., 2020). McKnight and Chervany (2001) highlight that such judgments are based on: (i) Structural Assurances (a belief that protective structures are in place, such as guarantees, that are conductive to positive outcomes); and (ii) Situational Normality (that the situation is normal, favourable or conducive to a positive outcome). However, COVID-19 appears to undermine any trust in ‘normality’ (Fotiadis et al., 2021).

Indeed, the converse is true, with tourists regarding the situation as abnormal. As a result, the structural assurances that would normally exist are no longer regarded as sufficient or acceptable, or even as fit for purpose. Thus, until normality is regained, or at least the ‘new’ normal better understood, greater attention needs to be given to developing and instigating appropriate structural assurances that will reduce distrust in travel and tourism.

Our data contributes evidence that trust and distrust co-exist. Distrust is more than simply the absence of trust, rather, trust relates to ‘confident positive expectations’ regarding another’s behaviour based on faith in that party, while distrust is ‘confident negative expectations’ based on suspicion or fear (McKnight and Chervany, 2001). For example, an absence of distrust does not automatically imply high trust; and low trust does not signify distrust; the concepts are distinct (Saunders et al., 2014). Our data suggests that there has been a decrease in trust towards some tourism ecosystem actors, including, macro-level institutions, meso-level tourism providers and a reduction in trust at a micro-level of analysis, including service personnel and specific venues and destinations. The data also evidences a concomitant increase in levels of distrust towards certain actors, including governments, smaller hotels, cruise ship operators and service personnel and toward some places/destinations.

This lowering of trust or explicit distrust in key ecosystem actors, appears to be rooted in suspicion; suspicion of others, of differences and even of humanity (McKnight and Chervany, 2001), particularly those that one perceives as ‘other’, foreign, migrant or poor. One consequence of this is that although tourism has historically been valorised as a way for individuals to broaden the mind, it might now be reframed as evidence of an incautious attitude, through which individuals ‘potentially put themselves at greater risk for disease transmission’ (Schaller and Murray, 2008:213). Indeed, at a time when we are already re-learning how many of our ordinary social practices have the potential to expose us to disease-causing pathogens, there are increasing challenges associated with interacting with unfamiliar places, people and practices.

Extant research demonstrates that people become more ethnocentric and xenophobic when there is a high risk of infectious disease (Cashdan and Steele 2013). Negative responses towards others were also manifest in attitudes towards service workers and other low paid activities. Thus, a pandemic, such as COVID-19, might make people less likely to travel to foreign destinations, particularly for leisure purposes, because they feel less safe. Furthermore, it might have longer term implications as it affects a new generation of travellers, as such tendencies tend to be expressed more strongly when understandings of the principles of disease transmission are widespread in a population and learned in childhood (Cashdan and Steele, 2013). These changes in tourist’s behaviour could have profound consequences for many tourism providers in terms of the value of their offerings, the importance of different factors in the choice of provider (e.g. hygiene/cleanliness), and the marketing of places post-COVID.

Finally, while governments and their agencies have long lauded the economic benefits and the merits of incoming tourism, commentators are noting ongoing concerns that COVID-19 heralds the end of traditional, warm and intimate tourist welcomes. Indeed, certainly mid-COVID, service providers and individual consumers appear less welcoming to tourists arriving to their own countries. For example, signs were put up to explicitly discourage English tourists from entering Wales (The Independent, 2020). This increases the potential for distrust between residents and tourists and is an example of in-group/out-group biases that is important but under researched in tourism (Chien et al., 2017).

Given this backdrop, our findings suggest that the usual strategies to encourage tourism, targeting less riskaverse groups, offering increased value for money (Mair et al., 2016) are less likely to work, not only because all other destinations might invoke similar strategies, but because there has been a much more fundamental shift in how individuals think about tourism and, indeed, how they think about life. Luhmann’s (1979) work on trust and power helps to shed light on how both trust and distrust might impact tourist intentions, through reducing complexity in social systems. Destination marketing is typically intended to reduce risk perceptions by engender trusting behaviours, essentially to make safety and wellbeing not something tourists need to be concerned about. Thus, thinking about ‘distrust’ and strategies to manage distrust may serve tourism ecosystem actors far better with regards to rebuilding...
global tourism, and could be a key part of how tourism may need to be reimaged in a post-COVID world. However, distrust does not operate in the same way (McKnight and Chervany, 2001) and, thus, requires another approach. Such strategies need to reduce distrust and concomitantly also reduce the need to trust. In that way, strategic approaches that operate from a distrusting stance are crucial in tourism activities where unconscious acceptance is helpful (from air travel to accommodation safety).

From a macro-level perspective, government policies (e.g. quarantine approach), testing strategies, and the publishing of statistics that allow for an assessment of destination risk, are likely to help tourists be more confident about their tourism choices. Encouraging staycations and micro-tourism (becoming a visitor in your own town) helps to boost the local economy while discouraging the mass movement of people. From a meso-level perspective, given that cars are seen as the only ‘safe’ option, it will be important for travel operators to improve their ‘safety’ image to persuade tourists to come back. This also has implications for tourist providers, depending on the choices of travel available to tourists in accessing their hotels or ships. As a first step in recovering destinations, friends and family should be targeted as their behaviours as less invasive than ‘normal’ tourists. This strategy is relatively inexpensive and has the added benefit of mobilizing communities at the grassroots level.

In conclusion, our study contributes insights into why and how tourists are more explicitly thinking about ‘risk’ in their tourism decision-making and, moreover, how tourists position distrust as an inhibitor to travel. COVID-19 has created pervasive, profound and enduring implications for travel; prominently foregrounding issues of health and safety in ways not previously conceived. Our exploration of these issues finds that tourists are emotionally and psychologically affected by the comparatively sudden curb to their lives and that these emotions broadly equate to stages of grief (see also Maddrell, 2020). Tourists exhibited polarized behaviour following the cancellation of their travel plans and were emotionally and psychologically affected. Two important implications result. The first is that their trust in actors within the tourism ecosystem has significantly reduced including in typical actors like airlines, hotels, and other service providers but also in governments and healthcare providers. At the same time, we note an elevation in distrust in institutions, destinations, and providers. Moreover, because trust and distrust impact tourists in different ways, tourism actors need to better understand and managed both conditions. We contribute to this agenda by identifying and elucidating seven key dimensions that appear to influence tourists’ confidence in different actors within the tourism ecosystem in the wake of COVID-19 that impact their future travel plans. In this regard we offer a framework that captures a Post-COVID tourism trust inventory.

Our articulation of these key dimensions should help to predict why different tourists will or will not travel in the future. Findings also suggest that post-COVID-19, distrust may be more important as a social mechanism for dealing with risk than trust, because distrust is focused on keeping tourists, service workers, and citizens safe. This is concordant with the insightful prophesying of Chien et al. (2017) who advocate communication strategies that heighten tourists’ risk perceptions in order to encourage them to take protective measures when traveling to certain destinations. This important advice may help to encourage communities, employees, and travellers re-engage in tourism while being vigilant about their health and safety. If travellers distrust a destination, service provider, or offering, they will explicitly seek out information to inform travel behaviour.

Our study suggests that tourists must have trust in key macro-level factors before they will consider a destination viable, including Government policies, health infrastructures and the travel options available. Tourists also describe a more personal element, around their own safety concerns, linked to ‘stay home to stay safe’ messages, which appear to have created a concern amongst consumers, even those who used to travel, that there are ‘dangers’ in doing so. Finally, decisions may be driven by more personal aspects, related to a traveller’s own financial background, including their ability to afford the safest providers, the safest destinations and the kind of comprehensive insurance cover that will lower their risk concerns. We offer a framework that can support future research in exploring the impact of these factors on the tourism ecosystem. Intentionally juxtaposing messages that simultaneously encourage travel to destinations with those that heighten risk perceptions, encourage protective behaviours and seek to reduce distrust may be necessary, at least in the short term to stimulate demand.

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