Revitalization of tourism and hospitality sector: preemiting pandemics through lessons learned

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Abstract

The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have left many repercussions for the tourism industry to preempt any future catastrophe of this nature. The research aims to propose recommendations for the post-COVID-19 business world to revitalize and reclaim their market space and win back their volumes without any fear of indefinite closures and continued lockdowns in the industry. Drawing from the literature, the study assumed revitalization through responsiveness, use of advanced technology, customers’ and employees’ willingness, enhanced skills, adherence to standard operating procedures and protective measures, and restructuring via a public–private partnership. For the purpose, survey method was employed to collect data from the industry. After confirmation of the reliability and validity, the regression analyses supported effective revitalization through government responsiveness, use of digital technology, psychological recouping of customers’ willingness, enhancing technical skills through training, strict adherence to protective measures, and destination restructuring and reorganization through a public–private partnership. The study proclaimed that Pakistan’s tourism and hospitality sector development has evolved through the COVID-19 situation, and is likely to revamp and revitalize into a sustainable business. Once achieving sustainability, the revamped industry will likely to increase revenue, generate employment, and alleviate poverty through thriving public–private partnerships, community involvement, and community well-being without compromising people’s health.

Keywords COVID-19 lessons · Tourism development · Revitalization of processes · Community involvement · Adoption of technology · Customer recouping · Adherence to SOPs · Quality service · And Business resilience

Introduction

COVID-19, a transmissible infection, started in China (Wuhan City) and soon became a pandemic with perplexing mayhem worldwide (Rodríguez Antón and Alonso-Almeida 2020). The pandemic became a contagious disease without any prescribed cure and unprecedented geographical spread against the insignificantly immune world (Bostan et al. 2020; Gursoy and Chi 2020). The pandemic has had a depressing effect across industries, and the tourism industry has been the hardest hit around the globe. World Health Organization (2020) proposed washing, sanitization, and personnel hygiene practices among hospitality workers as the most effective preventive measures against transmission of the virus. The widespread lockdowns and overextended restrictions on travel have seriously impacted the hospitality sector into a crisis. The longevity of the time and continuity of the spread of COVID-19 made the revival and revitalization of the hospitality business nearly impossible.
The tourism phenomenon that has been transformed into a mass level product from a leisure class notion encompassing the quality of modern living environment witnessed promising growth despite natural downturns due to natural or man-made tremors and market uncertainties around the world (Babu 2008). However, the travel restrictions of COVID have caused unparalleled loss to global tourism by plummeting international arrivals in 2020 by 74%, with an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion and risking amid 100 and 120 million tourism sector jobs (UNWTO 2021). Asia and the Pacific witnessed a drop of 300 million tourists inflow, making up 84% of 2019 arrivals. South Asia attained the fastest progress amid Asian sub-regions capitalizing on the upsurge in tourists from the Chinese and European markets. However, Pakistan’s tourism arrivals mismatched its tourism potential, which calls for national soul searching. Country-wise, international tourists’ arrival in South Asia for the year 2019, as reported by World Bank and World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), shows Pakistan’s tourism in a very marginal position in comparison to other South Asian Nations (see Graph 1 below):

The preventive measures like lockdown, stay-at-home syndromes, social distancing, ban on air travel and mass transport, and restrictions on marquees and restaurants have shut down hospitality businesses in Pakistan (Bartik et al. 2020). Instructions allowing restaurants and hotels for takeaway operation only led to severe decline in the food business and hotel occupancy, and hence resulted in degeneration of revenues inflow. The stretch out of the pandemic triggered an impulsive market crisis that the hospitality sector has never faced and forced substantial layoff of hotel employees. Thereby losing a skilled workforce and adding unemployment further into the already grimed economic scenario. The reopening process was prolonged and economically ineffective, and required a sustained industry revival because of the reduced capacity of dine-in, open-air areas, and stern social distancing.

The tourism and hospitality industry is known as a catalyst to the socio-economic well-being of the society and for its enormous contribution to the global economy on the one hand, and vulnerability (and predisposition) to natural exposures on the other hand (Dube et al. 2021). The diverse panorama of Pakistan’s characterized by rich cultural heritage enable it to be included in the running for all kinds of tourism motivations across the globe. The geographical and ethnically diverse landscape includes mountains, highest peaks, glaciers, deserts, long stretches of virgin beaches, lakes, lush green valleys, bio-diversity, an archeological treasure of ancient civilizations, Buddha’s and Sikhs relics, artifacts and shrines offer huge attraction for adventurers, nature lovers, and socio-cultural and religious tourists (Baloch 2007; Baloch and Rehman 2015; Khan et al. 2019). However, despite its astonishing tourism potential, Pakistan could not accumulate the commendable socio-economic benefits integral to the tourism sector (Baloch and Rehman 2015; Sumra and Alam 2021). Owing to the Pakistan’s incredible cultural hospitality, and successfully curbing the venom of terrorism from its soils, was placed as “Best Holiday Destination,” and ranked it as the third “highest potential adventure destination in the world” for the year 2020 (Eurasian Times 2020).

Pakistan’s persistent trade deficit dilemma with inadequate exports calls for an alternative source to advance its revenue and generate foreign reserves for neutralizing the balance of payment. The readily available promising alternative to the stagnant exports is Pakistan’s rich tourism potential which needs immediate attention for its competitive positioning. The incumbent government is presumed to promote and utilize Pakistan’s tourism potential and in order to improve its economy, and develop a soft national image across the globe. However, the political determination needs to be transformed

Graph 1 Source: UNWTO, International Tourism Highlights-2020
into reality implicate budgetary provision, public-private partnerships to improve infrastructure, community involvement, and timely release of national tourism strategy (Weiss et al. 2013; Alasttal and Burdey 2017; Arshad et al. 2018). There is also a dire need to learn from the challenges faced by the industry during COVID-19, and lessons learned thereof shall be incorporated into the post-COVID revival and revitalization of the tourism processes. The study will help to offer sound theoretical and practical implications to preempt any future pandemic of this nature and magnitude. The revitalized business processes in the hospitality sector are likely to ensure a caring environment, uninterrupted business operations, safe, hygienic environment, the well-being of the tourists, and the socio-economic well-being of the local community.

The shock and effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unparalleled crippling socio-economic and environmental setbacks for the tourism and hospitality industry around the world. In light of the COVID-19 predicament available in the literature, tourism and hospitality-related research studies have primarily focused on the socio-economic challenges amid the existing pandemic situation. However, the lessons learned from the pandemic left residual warnings threatening the revival of future business, concentrated world population, urbanization, and the industrialized food production, global transport networks, and the destinations’ business value chain (Gössling et al. 2020; Sharma et al. 2021). Drawing from resilience theory, the motivation for the present research study endeavors to explore the lessons learned during COVID-19 that can help the tourism and hospitality sector revive the tourism business and revitalize the processes to preempt and sustain any future pandemic such nature and magnitude. Lessons learned from COVID-19 by the Pakistan hospitality businesses have to be consciously adopted as a proactive business revival strategy.

**Literature review**

Coronavirus disease of 2019, abbreviated as “COVID-19,” is a contagious infection firstly discovered at the end of 2019 in China (Wuhan City), and soon, its epidemic state turned into a pandemic in early March 2020 (Rodríguez Antón and Alonso-Almeida 2020). The pandemic has had a depressing effect on all businesses, but the hospitality business has been one of the hardest-hit sectors around the globe. The reactive measures like lockdowns of the stay-at-home syndrome and social distancing, ban on air travel and mass transport, and restrictions on marquees and restaurants have resulted in the shutting down of hospitality businesses (Bartik et al. 2020). The situation continued for nearly 2 years or more, resulting in substantial layoffs of skilled hotel employees and unemployment in the already grimed economic scenario. The reopening and revival of business processes were halted due to the COVID wave’s one after another. The pandemic triggered an impulsive market crisis that the hospitality sector has never faced before. Pakistan, forced by its melting economy, was among few countries where tourism and hospitality businesses were allowed to be opened up well before other businesses. The literature cited below on the COVID-19 syndrome is mainly on its effects and reactive strategies aiming to minimize its further spread:

| Research title | Population context | Reference |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Mitigating the wider health effects of covid-19 pandemic response | Developed world | Douglas et al. (2020) |
| Hospitality and tourism industry amid COVID-19 pandemic: perspectives on challenges and learnings from India | India | Kaushal and Srivastava (2020) |
| Effects of COVID-19 on hotel marketing and management: a perspective from hospitality management | Europe | Jiang and Wen (2020) |
| Understanding the impact of COVID-19 intervention policies on the hospitality labor market | Mexico | Huang et al. (2020a, b) |
| COVID-19, aftermath, impacts, and hospitality firms: an international perspective | Developed World | Alonso et al. (2020) |
| The hospitality industry in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic: current topics and research methods | India | Davahli et al. (2020) |
| Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises operating in Pakistan | Pakistan | Shafi et al. (2020) |
| Consumer Adoption of Online Food Delivery Ordering (OFDO) services in Pakistan: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation | Pakistan | Ali (2020) |
| Disaster management framework for hotels of Pakistan | Pakistan | Kazmi et al. (2020) |
Most of the above-cited studies are found unanimous in reflecting warnings that pandemics posed a significant danger to society and tourism, more threatening to congested population traveling in mass transits or ceremonies, gatherings, and entertainment places such as hotel dining halls, cinema halls, dance floors, and music concerts (Hall and Brown 2006; Hall et al. 2020; Page and Yeoman 2007; Scott and Gössling 2015; Bloom and Cadarette 2019).

However, the literature cited above is silent in suggesting proactively conceptual and theoretical frameworks for a sustained revival of the hospitality business operation capable of preempting any future pandemic. Keeping in view this gap, there is a need for a study that suggests lessons learned from the pandemic facilitate the revival and revitalization of tourism and hospitality sectors, capable of preempting any future pandemic.

### Predicators of tourism revival

The literature suggests that hospitality and tourism, being part of the service industry, delivers multiple offerings to the customers along the continuum of intangibility and tangibility. The hospitality and tourism services include lodging, dining, concert or music galas, event organizing, theme parks, transportation, sea or desert safaris, restaurants, supermarkets, movie theaters, art exhibitions, or athletic or sports events. Since the issue around which the research evolved was a recent phenomenon, the relevant literature was found very scarce and mostly from developed regions. The limited number of research studies offered a set of predictors for the suggested revival of tourism and hospitality business as follows

**Government response and interventions**

All governments across the globe have struggled to contain and mitigate COVID-19, with varying degrees of success. The literature suggests that strategies succeeded in containing COVID-19 include early surveillance, large-scale testing, and strict quarantines. Issuing bail-out packages as incentives and reinforcing subsidies or tax rebates, etc., added to the businesses struggling for survival and productivity. German “Touristik Union International,” the world’s most extensive transnational travel and tourism company, is forced to inject the UK and German governments’ aid in its operation (Higgins-Desbiolles 2020). McCartney (2020) has observed that governments of Australia, Canada, and countries from the European Union, Latin America, Asia, and even Africa have responded to the recovery through “public–private partnership and cooperation.” Government incentives have included airline and railway relief packages, capital loans for industry, tax payment deferrals, liquidity support, fiscal relief, and customer credit coupons. The governments of Indonesia, Japan, South Africa, Switzerland, the USA, and Italy have set special funds worth billions of dollars to bail out their businesses, including the tourism and hospitality sector, improvement of tourist destinations, tourists friendly travel environment, and encouraging international tourists. Jain et al. (2021), using advanced econometrics across South Asian Nations, found cross-sectional dependency and a significant correlation between COVID-19 cases, deaths, meteorological factors, and air pollutants. COVID had multiplying damaging effects in South Asian countries with a substantial population below the poverty line, widespread malnutrition, and rudimentary public health systems. The partial reopening of the hospitality business was constrained by a lesser number of employees, enforced social distancing, and appropriate sanitization. This all affected the cost–benefit ratio negatively. Though the business losses were somewhat coup up through online supply orders and home delivery services, the survival of sustained hotel business was in critical need of financial assistance from the Government.

Dube et al. (2021) and Sardar et al. (2022) have suggested extraordinary financial and other support measures and safety and health protocols for the gradual reopening of the industry.

a. COVID-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs): Businesses were given SOPs for strict adherence as pre-conditions for the opening of the businesses, such as the following:

i. Under capacity utilization of space and social distancing for the customers in dining halls, airlines, railways, operas, musical and dancing halls, etc.

ii. Provision of vaccination facilities at entry points of tourism destinations.

iii. Use of face masks and other protective gear and observance of social distancing for a specific distance at all cost.

iv. Use dedicated task forces to monitor and evaluate all of the above SOPs for strict compliance through law enforcement agencies and in coordination with the management of hotels and destinations.

v. Creating public awareness about the SOPs.
b. Technological innovation: The planning, implementation, and coordination of large-scale national efforts in flattening COVID-19 incidence curves and conserving low mortality rates were directly dependent upon the adoption of digital technology. The countries that succeeded used digital technologies for pandemic surveillance, testing, contact tracing, quarantine, and other health care interventions to control and mitigate the COVID. Mobile applications have helped people provide real-time information about their destinations and route thereof. Robots substituted people, automation technologies, and artificial intelligence connect people without any physical contact (Hall et al. 2020; Stankov et al. 2020). China’s policy of using artificial intelligence and drone-based surveillance cameras, digital recorders, and quick response (QR) code systems monitors and controls public gatherings in volatile pandemic areas and potential cases (Whitelaw et al. 2020). Australia legislated the wearing of tracking devices by individuals in quarantine. Singapore, South Korea, Iceland, and the Government of Taiwan used the mobile app to trace out any default quarantine cases and successfully maintained one of the lowest per-capita COVID-19 mortality rates in the world (Whitelaw et al. 2020). According to Gursoy and Chi 2020 about 70.42% of hotel customers believe that using technologies in service delivery during COVID-19 minimizes human-to-human contact. These technologies include service robots, contactless bank cards, digital menus via QR codes, digital payments, touchless elevators, artificial intelligence (AI).

c. Building consumer and employee confidence: A service is an act or intangible performance offered by one party; therefore, a service marketer ensures positive interaction amongst its three mandatory players, i.e., the business firm, employees, and customers. To achieve success, the service marketing has to pass through a “Marketing Triangle,” having three steps, i.e., external marketing for making promises, interactive marketing for keeping promises, and internal marketing for enabling promises. The central role in all of the stages of service marketing revolves around the employees and customers. External marketing promises through its communication by offering its services, which sets the tone for client expectations. Interactive marketing attempts to keep the promises intact during the interactive session between the customer and the service delivery personnel. The process involved calls for practical training and willingness of the employees to the utmost standards to enable them to deliver during the COVID-19 environment as per the customers’ expectations. Finally, the marketing messages must cultivate confidence amongst the employees and customers to be effectively motivated to contribute to the revival of the business in befitting manners.

Employees’ and customers’ confidence is essential and a critical pathway to restart and revive tourism and hospitality, which has suffered closures of its businesses for two or more years. The revival of the hospitality and tourism industry will depend on advancing confidence in traveling and service delivery with subsiding risk perception involved because of the COVID threat (Assaf and Scuderi 2020).

d. Domestic tourism and community belongingness: Domestic tourism encompasses the activities of inhabitants of a country traveling to and residing in destinations located inside their country but away from their typical environment (Morupisi and Mokgalo 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused domestic and international tourism crises because of unparalleled travel warnings and constraints, including the closure of tourist services through borders, airlines, sea and land transport, hotels, motels, sports events, business conferences, socio-religious festivals. Besides the business firms, the most affected component amongst tourism beneficiaries is the local community that has suffered the most. The revival of international tourism will only be possible when the movement across national borders is allowed, and restrictions imposed on international flights are removed. However, domestic tourism can easily be regenerated by adhering to standing operating procedures such as wearing masks, ensuring personnel sanitization and social distancing, vaccinations, avoidance of crowding, and following health policy measures in this regard (Haywood 2020). The year 2021 has witnessed domestic tourists poised to dominate the destinations like Swat, Murree, and the Northern Areas of Pakistan. The surge in the tourists’ inflow reflects the people’s resilience and window of opportunity for revival that can be further multiplied through well-coordinated public–private sector tourism promotion for revival strategy. The feeling of belongingness amongst the local community to rejoice in meeting with their family and friends, explore the natural beauty, or seeking thrills of adventure tourism will thrive domestic tourism, thereby setting the terms for the revival of the tourism industry (Edensor 2020; Huang et al. 2020a, b; Gössling et al. 2020).

Inputs from the exploratory research

Themes suggested for the revival of tourism and hospitality business by the focus group were primarily found in line with the findings from the literature review exercise and reinforced through the following endorsements:

a. The revival of the tourism industry will depend on boosting confidence in traveling and lessening the perception
of the risk involved. This is possible via jointly agreed and willing response from the government, community, hospitality, destination management, and tourists.
b. The impacts of COVID-19 have brought noticeable changes in people’s living and traveling patterns and created new business models because the shopper prefers connecting virtually and shopping locally. The new business model during the COVID environment compels wastage of meaningful business capacity as unused/not-for-sale products.
c. The government and industry restrictions, in the shape of business closure, use of open space, and a ban on closed doors or in-house operation, imposed during the COVID-19 have seriously affected most industry-related businesses’ survivability. Therefore, to enable them to reopen and revive, the government shall develop a bail-out package that may help them resolve resilience.
d. The revival of the tourism industry is directly linked to the resilience-based coordinated networking amongst governments, market players, and local communities.
e. This pandemic allows all of the tourism and hospitality industry stakeholders to explore and consider better-suited technologies to reboot the industry and ease out accessibility with added flexibility for the tourists to regain consumers-employees confidence.
f. Governments may promote the local emboldens of tourism businesses to improve the element of belongingness. This may include sourcing more resources locally, be it food, raw materials, service providers, or workforce composition.

**Theoretical underpinning of resilience theory**

There is no second opinion that businesses under COVID-19 syndromes have passed through challenging times with a deepened sagacity of uncertainty and unpredictability. One lesson suggested as a remedy for dealing with such a state of fluidity is “resilience” (Davoudi 2012; Schmidt et al. 2013; Sharma et al. 2020). The word “resilience” is derived from the Latin verb “resilire” or “to leap back” and is defined as being “able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions” (Soanes and Stevenson 2006, p.1498). Psychologists describe resilience as elasticity demonstrated well in the progression of adaptation in the face of workplace stresses caused by hardships, trauma, catastrophe, disaster, pressures, or adversity. Resilience occurs when the individual uses “mental processes and behaviors in promoting personal assets and protecting self from the potential negative effects of stressors” (Greene et al. 2004; Zutshi et al. 2021). Resilience theory contends that it is not the misfortune or hardship that is vital, but rather how we cope with it. Resilience is a proactive crisis management tool that helps survive, mitigate the fallout of disasters, recover, revive the business growth, and even thrive in misfortune (Ledesma 2014). However, the practical realization of “resilience” schemes entails stakeholders’ coordination, correct and timely identification and appraisal of hazards and opportunities, and targeted intervention (Casmini and Supardi 2020; Fitriasari 2020; Sharma et al. 2020).

Learning from the COVID’s effects, Pakistan has no choice but to push domestic tourism resilience to recover and revive the tourism and hospitality sector. The resilience of a community or region is a function of its infrastructure, social coherence of society, economy, governance system, and the robustness of its supply and demand (Carlson et al. 2012; Garmestani et al. 2014; Ferro-Azcona et al. 2019). Drawing from the argument that “Resilience” pronounces the ability of a system to absorb variation and continue to persist, it is believed that sustained growth of tourism is deeply embedded in the interplay between the social, economic, institutional, and ecological variables, thereby resulting into destination resilience, sustainable tourism, or community-tourism resilience despite pressures emanating from political-economic and ecological discourses (Holladay 2018; Cheer et al. 2019). To enable tourism and hospitality to preempt future pandemics, Pakistan’s tourism and hospitality sector has to recource its resilience through community and destination resources, redraw employees’ confidence, and rebuild customers’ psychological acceptance.

**Theoretical framework**

The outcome of the literature review and the exploratory research helped to identify predicting variables necessitating dependable revival and revitalization of the business process of the tourism and hospitality sector to preempt any such pandemic in the future. The salient variables are summed up as follows:

a. The government response in preventive control, provision of health resources, enforcement mechanism for COVID-19 SOPs, bail-out support for the businesses having suffered from prolonged closure due to COVID restrictions, and cooperation/coordination with the private sector and the community consolidated response. Well-placed standing operating procedures (SOP) for prevention, protection, and combating COVID during the tourism process chain for the tourists and service providers.
b. Provision of timely Health Services for all of the stakeholders of tourism. The health department shall ensure timely positioning of the updated COVID testing and vaccination facilities along the route and at the tourists’ destination.
c. Managers of the hotels, restaurants, and destinations shall ensure quality service in line with the SOPs for combating the virus.

d. Since tourists repeat their experiences and promote a pleasant stay to their family and friends with worth praising condemning stay behavior with any hotel, the hotel management shall be extra careful about their image.

e. Cleanliness of service-related products and service experience multiplies the customer’s satisfaction level and vice versa; therefore, the variable stands significant in the process.

Research method

A total of 320 participants from Pakistan participated in the study, and 312 responded with duly filled instruments. The participants include 230 × tourists (74%), 50 × hotel managers (16%), and 32 × medical officers (10%). As far as the gender of the participants is concerned, 256 (82%) were male participants, while 56 (18%) were female participants. In the first stage, seven predictors of the business revival and revitalization were identified through a literature review. Later, a principal component analysis was done to establish the reliability of the scales. All the factors were perfectly loaded. The measures of the research study were as follows:

a. Government response and interventions: Government response and interventions were measured through a self-developed and validated 6 × items scale. The responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strong agree = 5. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was 0.93.

b. Technological innovation: Technological innovation was measured through a self-developed and validated 3 × items scale. The responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strong agree = 5. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was 0.91.

c. Rebuilding customer and employees’ confidence: It was measured through a self-developed and validated 3 × items scale. The responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strong agree = 5. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was 0.87.

d. Domestic tourism and community belongingness: We measured this variable through a self-developed and validated 3 × items scale. The responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strong agree = 5. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was 0.89.

e. Adherence to COVID-19 SOPs: Adherence to COVID-19 SOPs was measured through a self-developed and validated 5 × items scale. The responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strong agree = 5. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was 0.93.

f. Provision of service quality: We measured provision of service quality through a self-developed and validated 3 × items scale. The responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strong agree = 5. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was 0.94.

g. Hotel image for healthy and hygienic environment: We measured this variable through a self-developed and validated 3 × items scale. The responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strong agree = 5. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was 0.87.

h. Business revival: This variable was measured through a self-developed and validated 7 × items scale. The responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strong agree = 5. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of this scale was 0.87.

Results

The model was evaluated in four phases. First, the model’s reliability is believed to be sufficient if the outer loading of the corresponding item exceeds 0.60 (Hair et al. 2016). It is evident from the table that all the items have outer loading greater than the threshold of 0.60. In the second stage, we further examined the reliability through Cronbach’s alpha reliability and composite reliability (CR) measure. The table shows that all the constructs were reliable as their α-reliability and CR values exceed 0.7 (Bari and Fanchen 2017). Finally, the average variance extracted (AVE) measure helps determine the limit to which a variable converges on its indicators by evaluating the item variance (Hair et al. 2016). The table above explains that all AVE values are higher than the threshold level of 0.5 (Bari et al. 2016) (Table 1).

We applied Pearson’s correlation to establish a relationship between independent and outcome variables. Table 2 above shows a significant positive relationship between the study’s independent and dependent variables, the 0.01 level (2-tailed) of significance.

Results of linear regression analysis in Table 3 above suggest that government response and intervention predict
54.1% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.735^*, p<0.01$), and technological innovation predicts 6.5% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.256^*, p<0.01$), rebuilding the confidence of customers and employees predicts 59.3% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.770^*, p<0.01$), domestic tourism and community belongingness predicts 59.3% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.753^*, p<0.01$), provision of service quality 6.9% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.262^*, p<0.01$), and hotel image for healthy and hygienic environment predicts 70.7% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.841^*, p<0.01$).

### Discussion on results

Drawn on the resilience theory, this study explains the resilience-based lessons for revival and revitalizing hospitality and tourism business in Pakistan to preempt any COVID-like scenario. In addition, this study explains how certain factors, drawn as lessons from COVID-19, can help survive, recover, and even thrive in the face and wake of misfortune.

The study found that government response and intervention predict a 54.1% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.735^*, p<0.01$). The current study empirically confirms the role of government response and intervention in a resilience-based revival of business. Substantial research has supported these findings suggesting that subsidies, tax rebates, and bail-out packages were instrumental in business revival in the post-covid-19 scenario (Tsionas 2021; Higgins-Desbiolles 2020). Countries like Indonesia, Japan, South Africa, Switzerland, the USA, and Italy have effectively taken up the situation by setting up special funds for hospitality and tourism. Perret and Van Dender (2020) and Fakhoury and Fakih (2021) strongly support the government financial intervention and support continued fiscal and tax-related responses to stimulus to economic recovery once the crisis abates or restore public finances post-crisis are explored. However, rescue and bail-out packages need to be cautiously planned to maintain a healthy competitive environment, help in a faster recovery and build a more resilient and sustainable business economy. The support packages shall ensure financial and fiscal sustainability and avoid impending market distortions without encouraging predatory pricing and driving unsupported contestants out of the market.

The role of technology may prove instrumental in the resilience-based revival of the hospitality and tourism business. Digital technology has helped overcome severe socio-economic concerns associated with indiscriminate lockdowns in many countries (Hall et al. 2020; Stankov et al. 2020). For example, countries like China, Australia, Singapore, South Korea, Iceland, and Taiwan have used technology to detect and fix the spread of the coronavirus (Whitelaw et al. 2020). More recently, robots have been used to deliver groceries to houses to avoid human contact in the UK. However, our study reported that technological innovation predicts only a 6.5% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.256^*, p<0.01$). Such a lower predictive ability of technological innovation in Pakistan is the lack of a sound technological base, especially in the hospitality and tourism business. The post-COVID business world in general and the tourism and hospitality sector in particular, as it reopens, shall revitalize its operational processes with re-imagined use of technology in every aspect of their operations.

The research found that rebuilding the confidence of customers and employees predicts a 59.3% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.770^*, p<0.01$). Recent studies also suggest that the revival of the hospitality and tourism industry will depend on advancing confidence in traveling and service delivery with subsiding risk perception involved because of the COVID threat (Assaf and Scuderi 2020; Lu et al. 2020; Mao and Jin 2020).

This study revealed that domestic tourism and community belongingness predicts a 59.3% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.753^*, p<0.01$). National statistics also suggest that millions of Pakistanis will move to local destinations like Swat, Murree, and the Northern Areas of Pakistan in 2021. This window of opportunity for revival can be further multiplied through well-coordinated public–private sector tourism promotion for revival strategy. Furthermore, the feeling of belongingness amongst the local community to rejoice in meeting with their family and friends, explore the natural beauty, or seek thrills of adventure tourism may also thrive in domestic tourism, thereby setting the terms for the revival of the tourism industry (Edensor 2020; Huang et al. 2020a, b).

The present study reported that adherence to COVID-19 SOPs predicts a 56.7% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.753^*, p<0.01$). These findings suggest that adherence to SOPs devised by the state to fix the spread of COVID-19 may help the smooth functioning of the business. Furthermore, these findings confirm the previous studies that reported that domestic tourism could easily be regenerated with the adherence to standing operating procedures such as; wearing masks, ensuring personnel sanitization and social distancing, vaccinations, avoidance of crowding, and following health policy measures in this regard (Haywood 2020).

The study reported that the provision of service quality predicts only a 6.9% variance in business revival ($\beta=0.262^*, p<0.01$). The reason for lower predictive ability has been supported by customers’ experiences regarding the hotels’ unsatisfactory service quality during the wake of the pandemic of COVID-19 in the country. However, contrary to it, studies suggest that providing quality service in line with the SOPs for combating the coronavirus may prove instrumental for the revival of the hospitality and tourism industry (Assaf and Scuderi 2020).
Finally, the study results reported that a hotel image of a healthy and hygienic environment predicts a 70.7% variance in business revival (\( \beta = 0.841^* \), \( p < 0.01 \)). In line with these findings, previous studies reported that around one-third of restaurant customers and around 40% of hotel customers are willing to pay more for increased safety precautions. This suggests that hotel managers must implement more rigorous safety/cleaning procedures to meet the expectations of customers and tourists, as a portion of them are willing to pay for those added safety measures (Gursoy and Chi 2020).

### Research implications and limitations

Research findings of this study will help owners of tourism and hospitality businesses and policymakers revisit lessons learned from the pandemic and articulate befitting business policies and strategies. The resultant response would be reassuring to improve the prevailing business conditions and instead would enable the sector to preempt any pandemic onslaught in the future with much more preparedness.

### Theoretical implications:

The study conducted through mixed research suggests a set of variables as predictors for the revival of resilient-based tourism and hospitality businesses in the post-pandemic business environment. The theoretical framework containing predictors was the research product of the themes derived from qualitative research and input variables from past studies, followed by their validation through survey research. The predictors found include government interventions in business recovery and protocols monitoring.
and enforcement, technological innovations, building customers’ and employees’ confidence, boosting domestic tourism, community and people’s sense of belonging, adherence to standard operating procedures, and health provisions hygienic facilities. The set of predictors offers a rudimentary but crucial contribution to the existing literature for the revival of tourism and hospitality business in the backdrop of epidemiological catastrophe.

This research is a wake-up call for preparing the business to combat the after-effects of the pandemic. Still, it offers a perspective for future investigations by other service businesses in varying socio-geographical contexts. A detailed insight reviewing the COVID-19 predicament suggests post revival businesses phase out old and inefficient labor-intensive equipment, adopt the culture of working from home wherever possible, business meetings be arranged through video conferences, and a culture of social distancing and strict adherence to standard hygienic procedures. Furthermore, depreciation in energy-intensive equipment and brownfield practices would help in economic austerity and minimize carbon footprints considerably in the already shrinking green environment.

Managerial implications

Most prominent themes and variables call for the managerial implications concerning organizational restructuring through the adoption of advanced technology, arranging customers’ dining and recreation spaces with social distancing, advancing technological skills and hygienic discipline amongst employees, setting mechanisms for strict adherence to COVID-related SOPs and provision of quality service befitting for their health needs. The pandemic’s economic downturn, financial costs, and stock market concern the hospitality business, society’s well-being, policymakers, financial institutions, individual investors, and portfolio managers. Extraordinary coordination and collaboration at the national, regional, and local levels are needed among hotel managers, civil administration, public health organizations, community leadership, and tour operators to wrestle with any pandemic challenge posed to travel and tourism in the future.

The research implies that the evolving practices learned by the employees in their multiple service roles in the pandemic business environment shall qualify as the future norm in the tourism and hospitality sector. Regardless of the type and size of the hotel or tourism entity, the business survival shall govern through formulations of stark standards operating procedures, and practices, including mandatory wearing of masks, vaccination of employees and customers, temperature testing at entry and exit points, and maintaining a purpose-oriented task capable of handling health and hygiene issues and holding frequent training sessions for employees training and awareness. The research also expects large-scale tourism and hospitality business players to adopt relevant tools of artificial intelligence and robotics in service delivery value chains such as booking counters, supervision, dusting, kitchens, airports, hotels, provisions.

| Table 2 | Correlation matrix |
| --- | --- |
| Variables | BR | GRI | TI | BC | DTCB | ACS | PSQ |
| Business revival | 1 |
| Government response and interventions | 0.74** | 1 |
| Technological innovation | 0.26** | 0.29** | 1 |
| Rebuilding customer and employees’ confidence | 0.77** | 0.91** | 0.31** | 1 |
| Domestic tourism and community belongingness | 0.77** | 0.91** | 0.31** | 1.0** | 1 |
| Adherence to COVID-19 SOPs | 0.75** | 0.91** | 0.29** | 0.94** | 0.94** | 1 |
| Provision of service quality | 0.26** | 0.30** | 0.94** | 0.34** | 0.30** | 1 |
| Hotel image for healthy and hygienic environment | 0.84** | 0.68** | 0.23** | 0.73** | 0.73** | 0.70** | 0.25** |

Note: ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.10

| Table 3 | Linear regression analysis |
| --- | --- |
| Business Revival | β | ΔR² |
| Government response and intervention | 0.735* | 0.541 |
| Technological innovation | 0.256* | 0.065 |
| Rebuilding confidence of customers and employees | 0.770* | 0.593 |
| Domestic tourism and community belongingness | 0.770* | 0.593 |
| Adherence to COVID-19 SOPs | 0.753* | 0.567 |
| Provision of service quality | 0.262* | 0.069 |
| Hotel image for healthy and hygienic environment | 0.841* | 0.707 |

Note: ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.10
a. Limitations and future research: This study holds a few limitations that need to be addressed, with objectivity based on academic and corporate interests in future research. The foremost limitation is that the qualitative part of research uses online interview rejoinders from the selected focus group followed by the quantitative survey from the industry’s various stakeholders located in Northern Areas, including Gilgit Baltistan of Pakistan, and may not justifiably generalization of the results. Another limitation is that the mixed research generally took the respondents from the senior officials of public administration and health sector and senior managers of hotels of different categories operating in the area and did not consider all stakeholders in its actual perspective. Therefore, future research is expected to investigate the perspective of all stakeholders of the tourism and hospitality industry, including; airlines, travel intermediaries, mobile restaurants, and other accommodation providers on the destinations, different cadres of employees, and students/ academia of tourism and hospitality discipline. Another limitation of the study is that the research investigated the effects of a problem that is still persistently evolving with varied manifestations in diverse geographical settings. Therefore, a study in the later time frame and different geographical locations may contain other themes and predictors. The future research plan is proposed to investigate organizational, economic, environmental, social, and policy setbacks the tourism and hospitality industry faces due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research shall also explore ways and means to suggest transformative innovations for the tourism industry to challenge any such crises in the future successfully.

**Conclusion**

The tourism and hospitality business had been considered one of the carriers of the coronavirus; therefore, it was among the first few to shut down. The pandemic brought global tourism nearly to a halt. The prolonged closure of the industry threatened its operational survivability, and economic viability, thereby laying off most of its employees. Taking input from the past literature and the in-hand investigation, the research proposed a resilience-based framework to revive the industry’s business. It is believed that the resilient attitude of the governments, community, tourism and hospitality enterprises, industry employees, and customers will result in the evolving sustained revival of the tourism and hospitality sector. The reclamation of international tourism in Pakistan seems sluggish and slow-moving; however, nature-bound domestic tourism is rebounding and thriving back, especially towards the destinations located in Swat, Murree, Narran, Kaghan, and Northern Areas of Gilgit Baltistan. Though mass-scale vaccination exercise is expected to help restore consumer confidence, enabling normalized travel during the year ahead. The lessons learned from the pandemic catastrophe offer opening to rethink the revival and revitalization of the tourism and hospitality sector. Revitalizing business processes in line with the lessons learned would transform tourism into a more all-encompassing resilient tourism capable of preempting any such pandemic.

The revitalization of tourism and hospitality business processes shall guarantee the quality and well-being of the community life and assure the tourists are pretty paid back with a satisfying experience. However, it shall be noted by all the stakeholders that harmonization, coordination, and digitalization of COVID-19-related health and sanitary procedures, which include testing, locating, and inoculation certificates, are indispensable to encourage safe travel and prepare for the revival of tourism. Furthermore, with domestic tourism as a priority, persuasive marketing and promotions, product development initiatives, and different rebates for domestic travelers, tour operators, and travel agents shall be vigorously operationalized to stimulate demands.

The post-pandemic analyses warn about the susceptibility and sensitivity of low-paid jobs and the economic degradation in low-income countries during the crisis. COVID-19 delivers conspicuous lessons to be noticed by the tourism and hospitality industry, policymakers, and the destination’s value chain managers to be catered to in the post-pandemic business revival and revitalization processes. These lessons are to be taken as a collective challenge for the industry's stakeholders to accelerate the transformation of sustainable tourism and preempt any of such pandemics in the future. The learning from a pandemic offers an opportunity to analyze and invest in organizational capacity building critically and human capital through technological innovation, digital skills, and health protocols to build resilience in the sector with a roadmap to respond to the future shock. The revival phase of the tourism industry shall consciously reconstitute its readiness for a future pandemic, invest in research, health care infrastructure, and mend governance and communication arrangements, monitoring, and rapid response strategies.

**Author contribution** Nadeem Iqbal: conceptualization, data curation, methodology, writing — original draft, visualization, supervision, editing. Qadar Bakhsh Baloch: conceptualization, writing — original draft. Ms. Sourath Maher: data curation. Syed Naseeb Shah: methodology. Muhammad Sheeraz: writing — original draft. Nadeem Iqbal: visualization. Hassan Raza: supervision, editing.

**Data availability** The data that support the findings of this study are openly available on request.
Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate  We declared that we do not have human participants, human data, or human tissue.

Consent for publication  We do not have any person’s data in any form.

Competing interests  The authors declare no competing interests.

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