

# EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING TRAVEL INTENTIONS IN THE POST-COVID-19

**Tianqi Chen**

*Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau*

**Chen Kuo Pai**

*Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau*

**Timothy J. Lee**

*Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau*

**Haoran Chen**

*Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau*

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept the world in the short period of time since the first cases were reported in late 2019 (Aiello, Bonanno, & Foglia, 2022). Meanwhile, the tourism industry is bearing the brunt of it. In the past two years though, the severity of diseases caused by the novel coronavirus has decreased over time as the virus continues to mutate and human immunity has been enhanced by vaccination or infection with the virus (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016). Due to the new normal (post-pandemic period) brought about by COVID-19, health risks and travel restrictions at destinations may become new barriers affecting travelers' international travel decisions (Sun, Zhang, Zhang, Ong, & Ito, 2022). In the post-pandemic period, it is first priorities to think about health and safety when people traveling, and destination trust can reduce the fear of infection (Chen, You, Lee, & Li, 2021). The effectiveness of protective measures will also affect tourists' travel intentions (Breakey, Ding, & Lee, 2008; Yoo, Park, Lee, & Park, 2022). Therefore, as more and more destinations relax relevant restrictions, it is necessary to study the changes in tourists' perceptions of destinations and factors affecting travel intentions caused by COVID-19 (Liang, Xue, Pinsonneault, & Wu, 2019).

The previous literature also argued that the protective effectiveness of destination affects tourists' behavioral intention during post-COVID-19 (Bae & Chang, 2021). At the same time, although there have been studies on the impact of destination trust and perceived effectiveness of COVID-19

protective measures on travel intentions (Kim, Hall, & Bonn, 2021; Yoo et al., 2022). However, when reviewing these studies, we see that there are none exploring the relationship between tourists' perception of destination, the effectiveness of perceived COVID-19 protection measures, destination trust and travel intention during the post-epidemic period (Chaulagain, Wiitala, & Fu, 2019). Therefore, such studies in the post-pandemic period are necessary and constructive for the recovery of tourism in the post-pandemic period.

## METHOD

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship among Chinese tourists' perception of destination in the Post-pandemic, destination trust, perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures and post-pandemic travel intention situation. In summary, five hypotheses were established:

- H1: Perception of destination in the post- pandemic has a positive impact on perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures;
- H2: Perception of destination in the post-pandemic period has a positive impact on destination trust;
- H3: The perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures has a positive impact on post-pandemic travel intention;
- H4: The perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures has a positive impact on destination trust;
- H5: Destination trust has a positive impact on

post-pandemic travel intentions.

This study collected research data by sending paper questionnaires to respondents. Our participants are residents of mainland China who are willing to travel abroad in the post-pandemic period. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part contains questions related to the perception of destinations from different dimensions (hospitality, impression, effective pandemic information, travel restrictions, refuting rumors) during the pandemic period, as well as the questions related to destination trust (DT) and perception of the effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures (PEPM) and post-pandemic travel intentions (PTI). The questions in this part are referenced from the tourism related literature and modified by experts in the tourism industry. The demographic information of the participants was collected in the second part.

This study adopted a pilot study before the formal survey. A simple random sampling method was conducted in the formal survey; all respondents were Chinese tourists who were eager to travel abroad after COVID-19 pandemic. The result shows that the scale in this study has high reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The relationship between variables was tested through SPSS 23.0 and Smart PLS 4.0 data analysis software.

## FINDINGS

Based on the Path Analysis of the First Order Variables, the perception of destination in the post-pandemic (PDP) is composed of five variables: hospitality (H), impression (I), effective pandemic information (EPI), travel restriction (TR), and rumor refutation (RR). Besides, the results of path coefficient, T-value, and P-value in the path analysis of each hypothesis in the model are both meet the requirement. According to the results of the analysis, all hypothesis in this research were supported and H1 is assumed to have the most significant influence. In a conclusion, the perception of destinations in the post-pandemic will positively affect tourists' destinations trust and perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures. In addition, tourists' destination trust and perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures will positively affect tourists' travel intentions in the

post-pandemic. The perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures will positively affect tourists' destination trust.

## IMPLICATIONS and CONCLUSIONS

This study provides theoretical knowledge on tourists' perceptions of destinations under the new normal (post-pandemic) to relevant tourism service providers in destinations. The results provide targeted management some suggestions for destination service providers to do better for tourists after the change of pandemic. Timely and effective adjustments to marketing strategies can be made by the relevant service providers in the post-pandemic period, especially during the recovery of the tourism industry. It enables the relevant service providers of the destination to better establish a good connection between the destination and tourists. Moreover, it provides very useful advice for the destination service provider. A theoretical contribution created on tourists' perception in the post-pandemic period. Especially, this study will provide the theoretical basis for explaining tourist perception and behavior under the an epidemic public health crisis in the future.

The findings suggest that destinations should do all they can to enhance tourists' perception of destinations in the post-pandemic period, in order to increase tourists' trust in destinations and their willingness to travel. Therefore, destination choice is based on the five dimensions of tourists' perception of the destination in the post-epidemic period, so as to gain their trust in the destination by enhancing their perception of it. Besides, another strategy to enhance travel intentions in the post-pandemic period is to improve the perceived effectiveness of COVID-19 protective measures. Destination governments should develop related guidelines so as to provide advice on preventing COVID-19 infection while traveling to a destination and how to respond if infected while traveling. At the destination, promote necessary protective measures, such as advising tourists to maintain social distancing at the destination and to wear masks in indoor spaces. From the hotel industry point of view, hotels should pay attention to and implement effective measures to protect against COVID-19 in the post-COVID-19 period.

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