

REVENGE TRAVEL OR TRAVEL AVOIDING? CHINESE CROSS-BORDER LEISURE TRAVEL INTENTIONS POST-PANDEMIC

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2022, the Chinese government began winding down its three-year prevention and control against COVID-19 in China and, by January 2023 had achieved full domestic liberalization. The Chinese Ministry of Transport announced the removal of restrictions during spring festival travel season, such as the check of nucleic acid tests (NAT), QR codes to track and trace, and even temperature measurement. In the meantime, the Chinese National Health Commission stopped reporting the number of COVID-19 cases on a daily basis and advocated that the public improve self-prevention due to the high probability of exposure to the novel coronavirus. Part of Chinese people has already planned their next trip or on the way to destination. Ctrip.com reported that the booking quantity of cross-border flights and overseas hotels booking from mainland Chinese tourists increased more than four times year-on-year during the spring festival holiday. Meanwhile, a survey published by VISA emphasized that Macau had the most visitor arrivals (over 451,000) since the COVID-19 pandemic (GGRASIA, 2023). In contrast, another group of people perceive this new endemic environment as a higher risk of infection and avoid travelling to protect themselves from COVID-19. It is worth noting that China Tourism Academy predicts the number of domestic tourists will recover to 76% of 2019, while the number of cross-border tourists could only to 31.5% of pre-pandemic level (China Tourism Economy Blue Book NO.15, 2023).

These post-COVID-19 tourists' behaviors have been highlighted by prior scholars (Miao et al., 2022). On the whole, the results are seemingly

contrasting behaviors: revenge travel (Wang, & Xia, L. 2021; Panzer-Krause., 2022) and travel avoiding (Turnšek, Brumen, B. et al., 2020). Previous literatures explore the psychological roots of these double-side tendencies (Miao et al., 2022; Vogler., 2022) and mainly around the post-trauma effect of COVID-19 on tourists' travel intention and behaviors in post-pandemic in two main directions. On the one hand, several studies indicate the quarantine and lockdown of pandemic may cause negative effects, namely post-traumatic stress symptomatology (PTSS) or even Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Wathelet et al., 2021). Which leads to subsequent stimuli avoidance (Fawaz, & Samaha, A., 2020; Zheng, Luo, Q., & Ritchie, B. W., 2022). On the other hand, re-expose to post-trauma in the post and after pandemic era may also bring about post-trauma growth (PTG) (Hamam et al., 2021; Cohen-Louck., 2022; Finstad et al., 2021). These salutogenic outcomes arouse people's desire toward travel and tourism behaviors, namely "revenge travel" (Wang, & Xia, L., 2021; Panzer-Krause., 2022) or more correctly "catch-up travel" (Fawaz, & Samaha, A., 2020). However, rare studies theorize and summarize the two behavioral trends in seemingly opposite directions simultaneously to explain tourists' behavior in one framework. There is scant research examine the double-side effects, or "Double-edged sword" effect of post-trauma, which is theoretically in one psychological model.

Accordingly, this study addresses the gaps of constructing COVID-19 post-traumas "Double-edged sword" effect model. For this purpose, the objectives are evaluating the Chinese potential tourists perceived risk level toward COVID-19, examining the post-trauma direction (PTSS vs.

PTG) of Chinese potential tourists' COVID-19 experience, and determining the moderating effect of post-trauma (PTSS vs. PTG) on their cross-border leisure travel intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

If the perception on risk of a particular destination is higher than acceptable level, an individual may decide not to or cancel his/her travel. The perceived risk factor is an essential determinant in traveler's or tourists' decision-making process (Khan et al., 2017). Under the tourism context, Sharifpour et al. (2014) summarize and classify perceived risks as financial risk, physical risk, destination-specific risk, and psychological risk. Prior research identifies the physical risk with physical harm from terrorism, war and political instability, health concerns, crime, and food safety during travel (Long, & Aziz, 2022). Currently, the most severe travel risk is COVID-19 belonging to health concern. The level of perception on travel risk between during pandemic and post-pandemic are emphasized by scholars be different (Li et al., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the perceived travel risk level under current recovery era, particularly without governmental prevention and control. Thus, the first two hypotheses are proposed in this study:

- *H1: The perceived travel risk level of Chinese potential tourists is high in China during current post-pandemic era.*
- *H2: The perceived travel risk of potential tourists negatively influences their cross-border leisure travel intention.*

The avoidance coping style seems helpful in relieving stress and averting anxiety from more severe conditions. In contrast, the approach strategies allow proper behaviors and utilize a situation as an opportunity to obtain higher well-being (Roth, & Cohen, L. J., 1986). In the tourism context, Wang, & Xia, L. (2021) also describe some tourists pursuing remarkable travel experiences to gain a sense of control over COVID-19, while others intend to reduce stress from pandemic by leisure travel. The mediating role

of approach and avoidance motivations between psychological are examined by the prior scholar (Wang, & Xia, L., 2021), and find that nostalgia as an antecedent motive indirectly influences leisure travel intention through approach motivation. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- *H3: Approach-avoidance motivation mediates the effect of perceived travel risk level and cross-border leisure travel intention.*

Previous research explores the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on post-trauma, PTSS and PTG are the “Double-edged sword” consequences that lead to the two apparently contrasting trends of potential tourists' travel intention and behaviors (Boals, & Schuettler, D., 2011). From the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, it has brought stress, anxiety, and depression to general populations worldwide (Tyra et al., 2021). Coloma-Carmona, & Carballo, J. L. (2021) point out that PTSS can be more prevalent during disease epidemic such as COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, psychological research investigates the high avoidance symptoms with COVID-19 of Chinese residents through PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (Wang et al., 2022). In contrast with the adverse effects, the positive effects of post-trauma are also explored in some psychological research, which mainly focuses on PTG. Based on the posttraumatic theory, many scholars explored the positive changes of COVID-19 to potential tourists (Cheng, & Liu, L., 2022). Therefore, the following hypotheses will be proposed:

- *H4: Post-trauma moderates the relationship between perceived travel risk level and approach-avoidance approach motivation.*
- *H4a: Post-traumatic stress symptomatology (PTSS) negatively moderates the relationship between perceived travel risk level and approach-avoidance approach motivation.*
- *H4b: Post-traumatic growth (PTG) positively moderates the relationship between perceived travel risk level and approach-avoidance approach motivation.*

Adopting Wang, & Xia, L. (2021)'s model, the proposed framework of this study is presented in Figure 1.

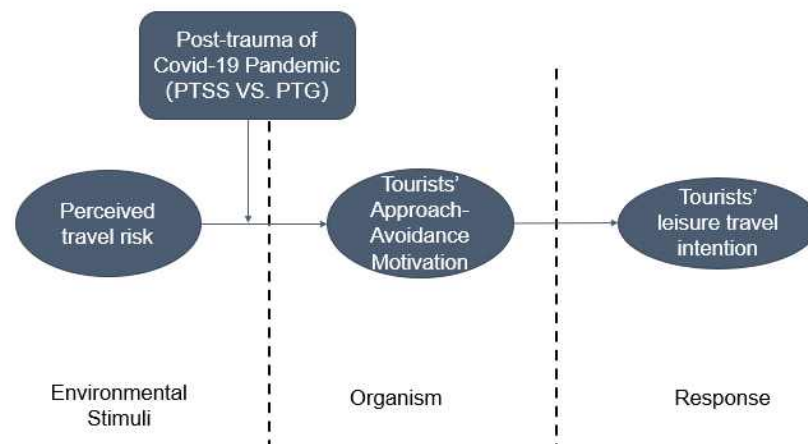


Figure 1. Proposed framework

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

To ensure the reliability and validity of the survey, this study proposes to apply measurement items from previous research. The questionnaire will be designed with six parts. The first part includes six items of perceived travel risk adopted from Desivilya et al. (2015) and are adjusted to accord with the COVID-19 recovery era situations in China. The second part applies the new DSM-5 developed by Prins et al. (2016) to assess post-trauma stress symptoms (PTSS), which contains five items with binary answer(yes/no) and a score of ≥ 3 is considered as positive. Part three, to evaluate Post-traumatic growth (PTG), this study utilizes Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996)'s Posttraumatic Growth Inventory(PTGI) which includes 21 Likert 5-point items. Part four adapts behavioral activation-inhibition system (BAS/BIS) developed by Carver and White (1994), which includes 11 items and is a Likert 7-point scale. In the last part, cross-border leisure travel intention contains three items combined from Lee et al (2012) and Wang and Xia (2021), using a 7-point Likert scale. Furthermore, this study proposes to investigate the destination region and demographic factors, such as gender, age, income level, leisure travel frequency before COVID-19 outbreak, marital status, and children number. The cross-border destination region includes Macao, Hong Kong, Asia, and outside of Asia. The target sample of this study is the potential Chinese tourists who live in China and experienced three years COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire will be

conducted online through Credamo (Chinese version Mturk) platform and is expected to receive around 500 completed results.

Following, this study intends to employ appropriate analysis methods to test the hypotheses. To compare the inter-class differences of main determinants in demographic factors, the T-test, ANOVA and MANOVA will be utilized. This study will adopt the linear-regression method to verify the effect of potential tourists' perceived travel risk level, approach and avoidance motivation on their leisure travel intention. The Bootstrapping will be used to verify the mediating role of approach-avoidance motivation, and PSL-SEM will be employed to test the mediating moderator role of PTSS and PTG. All of the analysis will be conducted on SPSS 23.0 and SmartPLS 3.0.

IMPLICATIONS

This empirical study of taking into account the COVID-19 post-trauma's effect on Chinese potential tourists travel intention from the "Double-edged sword" effect perspective is among the first attempting to construct a model of it in tourism. Academically, it is a reference for future hospitality industry recovery studies on similar disease outbreak situations, which more comprehensively explain the effects of post-trauma on travel related decision-making. Practically, it provides a deeper understanding of the psychological origins of potential tourists' behaviors, thus design targeted and attractive marketing strategies.

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