CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM: VISIT INTENTION, DESTINATION IMAGE AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN TIMES OF COVID-19, THE GREEK CASE

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Abstract: The research objective is to analyze the factors influencing visit intention and destination image in Covid-19 crisis recovery. Mixed research methods were used on a random sample of 461 citizens/tourists within Greek territory and the findings were examined using correlation and regression analysis. The findings suggest that location affects the intention of the visitors with regard to choosing a place; that natural sights have the most profound influence on tourists' intention to visit a place and that the image of the destination on the social media changes significantly, based on physical factors and travel intention.

Key words: Crisis recovery, Destination image, Visit Intention, Travel motivation, Covid-19, Social Media

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INTRODUCTION

The attractiveness of each destination depends, to a great extent, on its natural landscape, attractions, culture, monuments, cultural activities, entertainment, hotel comfort and low prices. The purpose of this study is to analyze the determinants that affect the intention of tourists to visit a destination in times of Covid-19. Specifically, an appropriate action plan is under both consideration and investigation, aiming to contribute to the immediate restoration of the hospitality sector, in order to diversify tourism products and create a distinctive and unique identity for each destination. For this reason, the first step is a theoretical review of the core international literature, followed by a questionnaire, for an empirical analysis based on the theories formulated on the role of the brand (Branding) which is created in order to investigate the degree of tourist satisfaction derived from the set of main characteristics and services of the tourism product while also measuring the degree of importance that tourists place to these characteristics. At the same time interviews with hotel business executives were conducted, in order to have a more complete and holistic picture of the subject under study, as well as to enable the examination of the data from different methodological perspectives. Participants were asked to rate the destinations under examination (Ioannina and Chalkidiki in Greece), based on specific characteristics that define a place and make it attractive, as well as competitive. In this way, the results of the two research methods can be compared, while highlighting the new trends and challenges that shape tourism as a commercial good, after the outbreak of the pandemic. As a result, several determinants that have an impact on the intention of tourists to visit a destination will be taken into consideration, particularly in the post-Covid-19 era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Barton (1993), the crisis can be described as "a large, sudden event, which is likely to have negative consequences. The fact and its consequences can seriously damage an organization, its employees, products, services, financial situation and reputation". Rosenthal and Pijnenburg (1991) as well as Lai and Wong (2020) argued that the crisis as a concept refers to any situation which includes serious threat, uncertainty and a sense of urgency. Crisis management, or risk management, can be defined as the set of actions aimed at designing and organizing a plan to prevent or reduce the effects of a crisis. Fink (1986) linked crisis to illness and formulated its life cycle. Particularly, the perception that crises progress in a specific way, or that they follow a specific life cycle, is expressed through a four-stage process: a) Prodromal Stage, b) Acute Stage, c) Chronic Stage and d) Resolution Stage.The Prodromal Stage includes all the initial signs and indications of a possible crisis, which are difficult to detect, but whose detection is essential, as it is much easier to attempt to manage the crisis at its early stages. This stage may include a Crisis Management Plan (CMP) properly preparing those involved on anything they might not be aware of, even points that are "invisible" or unpredictable. Acute stage is the acute period during which a crisis actually manifests itself and peaks, thus, unfortunately, losses are inevitable. The damage has already been done and it is up to the organization to determine

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how to deal with it. At this stage it is difficult to control the situation due to the rapid unfolding of events. Chronic Stage is the third phase in the life cycle, where the effects are obvious and the consequences are evident, thus prolonging the critical period. At the same time, an effort is being made to restore things and analyze the current situation.

In addition, it is a period in which economic changes, strategies for dealing with future crises, as well as administrative reshuffling are taking place. The stage of resolution starts when it is observed that the response measures begin to work and at the same time, the causes that led to the crisis as well as its effects are weakened. Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which presupposes the transportation to new locations, different from or beyond the boundaries of the place of residence, primarily motivated by enjoyment (Glaesser, 2006). According to Cooper (1993) and Mtapuri and Giampiccoli (2019), tourism is a holistically structured system that combines the human factor, organizations, businesses and a specific location in order to create a unique travel experience.

Moreover, a tourism product is a combination of services and activities, in a variety of prices that an area "produces" and offers and whose characteristics it incorporates (Morrison, 2013). In the context of the tourism industry, the concept of "destination image" was analyzed by several academics (e.g.Chatzigeorgiou and Christou, 2016; Fotiadis et al., 2017; Séraphin et al., 2019; Stylidis, 2020; Lee and Xue, 2020). According to Ritchie et al. (1998) and Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020), a destination image is defined as a name, symbol, logo, word, or whatever makes it recognizable and differentiates a destination from others. In addition, it conveys the promise of an unforgettable travel experience uniquely and exclusively related to the destination and also serves to establish and enhance the recollection of pleasant memories associated to the destination (Casali et al., 2021). Hunt (1975) and Kim (2018) mentioned the importance of the creation of a destination image as a tool used to increase the number of tourists visiting an area and noted that this factor is very important since it affects the process of choosing a destination, tourist satisfaction, tourist loyalty, the intention to visit and individual tourist decisions. The destination image could be measured by the consumer movement in perspective (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). According to Crompton's (1992) theory, decision-making bytourists is a gradual process that leads to them choosing a specific destination when they realize that the characteristics of the respective destination meet their needs and requirements. This is due to the tendency of tourists to categorize their potential options based on criteria such as images and personal incentives, factors affecting motivation as well as the availability of time and money (Goodall, 1991; Maghrifani, 2018).

Social media now play an instrumental role in the tourism and the hospitality sectors, resulting in reduced cost, increased business efficiency, improved services and satisfied customers (Paul et al., 2019). Nowadays, the digital approachand tourist service basically startbefore the trip, in order for them to decideon a destination and get all the necessary information about it (accommodation, transport, tourist services, activities, security issues and locals' hospitality), and then check whether the options offered by the destination product meet their needs (Djeri et al., 2007). Also, there is the option for online bookings for means of transport and hotel accommodation. Finally, the perks of a digital approach e.g. with the use of social media stay with the tourist even after their trip, through the memories they have collected and stored in digital form and which they will share with relatives and friends on social networks (Yuan et al., 2019). In addition, travelers experiencing satisfactory travel services can serve as a source of motivation for their families and friends through persuasive word-of-mouth advertising. Additionally, they themselves will be more likely to return to the same destination (San Martin et al., 2013). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a "conventional" mode of promotion that continues to be very powerful even in the digital age, are the potential recommendations from relatives and friends, the most inexpensive means of promotion, which is still dominant among the reasons for choosing a destination (Buhalis and Law, 2008). A key condition for revisiting is the redesigning of the product through a careful management strategy, emphasizing on the creation of additional value and enhancing the dynamics of tourism development (Rup et al., 2021). A pandemic can occur at any time and has a significant impact on public health, while affecting important social and economic aspects of everyday life (Abodunrin et al., 2020).

In the last 20 years, humanity has been confronted with new, previously unknown, pathogens (e.g. SARS, MERS, Zika, Ebola), which have led to severe disease outbreaks (Gossling et al., 2020). One of the peculiarities of the tourism industry is that it is exposed to adverse events more than any other sector of the economy (Wut et al., 2021). Despite its importance, tourism is one of the most vulnerable sectors because it can be affected by wars or political instability, terrorist attacks, economic crises, natural disasters and health concerns (Skare et al., 2021). Tourism demand can be negatively affected by a wide range of problems, particularly safety and health issues that, while taking place locally, have a global impact (Wut et al., 2021; Sharma and Nicolau, 2020). According to the official data of the World Health Organization, Covid-19 turned into a pandemic in March 2020. Gradually, all destinations around the world introduced travel restrictions, signaling a conjuncture that had not occurred at any other time in the past. The Covid-19 pandemic, apart from being the cause of a huge health issue, has also affected tourism and especially countries dependent on it, such as Greece (Papanikos, 2020).

Research methodology

The specificity and complexity of the factors that arise in the present study render a multi-method analysis as the more appropriate. For this purpose, the research tools selected are the interviews in combination with the use of a questionnaire. To ensure the validity of the data, the triangulation method was used in order to combine data from different sources. According to Ghauri and Firth (2009), the main advantage of triangulation method is that it can create a more complete, holistic and relevant picture on the topic and contribute decisively to the data examination from different points of view. Based on a systematic review of the literature involved in published research papers from 2003 to 2020 on crisis management in tourism, as well as on studies that compile the characteristics of a destination and the

effect they have on the intention of tourists to visit it after a crisis, specific determinants that make up a destination after the Covid-19 pandemic were selected. The variables under investigation in this study consist of the physical features and financial factors that compose a destination, the destination image after the Covid-19 crisis and the intention to visit, based on the study conducted by Ahmad et al. (2021). The fifth variable concerns the image of the destination on social media and is based on the study of Govers et al. (2007), who showed that the media play an important role in shaping the image of the destination and consequently, the intentions of tourists to visit it.

All variables were adjusted and modified according to the research questions asked. The research was conducted between December 2020 and January 2021, on a random sample of 461 citizens/tourists of the Greek territory and the relevant descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Moreover, in the context of the case study, the areas examined were those of Ioannina and Chalkidiki in Greece, where hotel executives identified and evaluated the respective destination, based on specific characteristics that compose the tourist identity of the location. According to Yin (2003), Cakmak and Akgun (2018), case study is a widely used and supportive method of scientific research. In this way, the research highlights new trends and challenges that shape the tourism product after the outbreak of the pandemic. Figure 1 below shows the conceptualization of the current research and the overall research process.

Table 1. Demographics (Authors' survey and analysis)

	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	186	40.30
Female	275	59.70
Age Group		
18-25	39	8.50
26-35	180	39
36-45	167	36.20
46-55	49	10.60
56 and above	26	5.60
Education		
High School	77	16.70
Bachelor's Degree	171	37.10
Master's Degree	157	34.10
PhD	11	2.40
Other	45	9.80
Marital Status		
Unmarried	213	46.20
Married	192	41.60
Other	56	12.10
Work Status		
Unemployed	53	11.50
Seasonal Employment	29	5
Part time job	33	7.20
Full time	324	70.30
Other	28	6.10
Monthly Earnings		
0-500	94	20.40
501-1000	171	37.10
1001-1500	141	30.60
1501-2000	29	6.30
2001 and above	26	5.60

Table 2. Means of main variables

|	**M**	**SD**
Physical features of destination		
Adequate accommodation	4.01	0.947
Climate	3.99	1.030
Accessibility to destination information	4.06	0.953
Availability of public transport	3.47	1.280
Infrastructure	4.22	0.891
Financial factors of destination		
Affordable accommodation costs	4.50	0.721
Affordable cost in local markets	3.89	1.010
Affordable public transportation	3.12	1.250
Quality of services provided	4.28	0.793
Cost of services provided	4.21	0.819
Post - crisis destination image		
The location as a safe destination	4.50	0.770
Crises are isolated and temporary	3.48	1.360
Actions to prevent future crises	3.22	1.000
Recommend to my friends/family	4.51	0.781
Intention to visit		
Sufficient accommodation facilities	4.36	0.769
Diverseand quality leisure facilities	3.73	1.090
Clean and hygienic environment	4.81	0.503
Branding location	3.58	1.110
Well-planned tourism	3.93	0.951
Historical and cultural attractiveness	3.93	0.986
Gastronomy	3.78	1.080
Hospitality rate	3.82	1.050
Safe and secure	4.30	0.874
Destination image on social media		
Search on social media	3.71	1.140
Promotion on social media	3.37	1.180
Criticism/Negative feedback/ reviews on social media	3.63	1.160
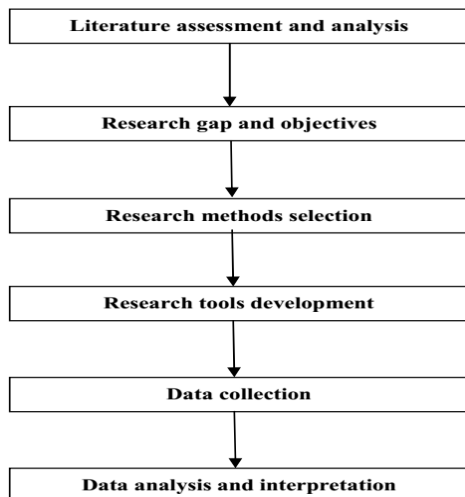
Figure 1. Research topic development
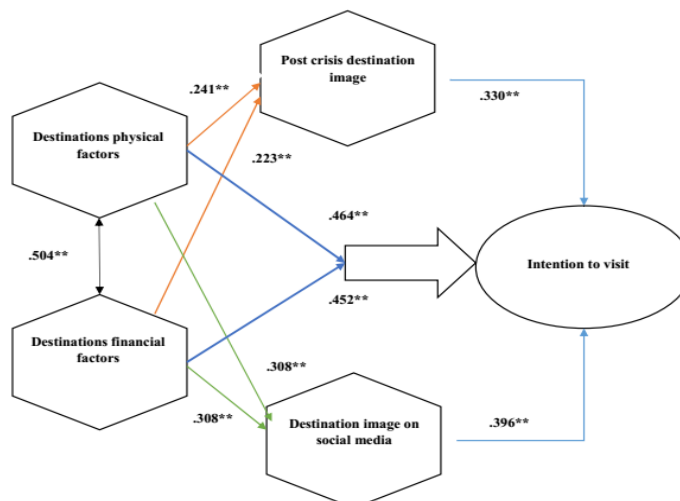
Figure 2. Correlations between the variables

Findings and analysis

A total of N = 461 participants from the 500 who were initially approached responded to the data collection (92.2% participation rate). The majority of the respondents were female, representing 59.7%; 40.3% were male; the predominant age group was between 26-35years old (39%) followed by the group between 36 and 45(36.2%); the majority of the sample participants had completed their bachelor's degree studies (37.1%);the largest percentage were unmarried (46.2%); likewise in the work status category, full employment had the highest percentage (70.3%). Regarding the monthly earnings, most of the participants' wages (37.1%) ranged between 501 and 1000 euro's (Table 1).

Analyzing the data in the Table 2, it can be observed that:

a) In the category "Physical features of destination" the infrastructure of the place is the factor that contributes the most to the choice of visitors while the second most important factor, for this category, is the ease of access to information about the place. Infrastructures include awell-established road network, accessibility (by sea or air) and tourist accommodation. Ease of access to information includes the proper organization and display of information, so that the prospective visitors can easily find a place that they are interested in.

b) In the category "Financial factors of destination", the most important factor is the one related to the affordable prices of accommodation, followed, by a small margin, by the quality of services provided and the price of services provided

c) In the "Post-crisis destination image" category, the greatest impact on potential visitors will be the combination of positive views about an area, coming from their friendly environment and the reassurance that a destination has been classified as safe.

d) In the category "Intention to visit", the deciding factor is, judging by the participants' responses, the clean and healthy environment that the place and the accommodation should have, followed immediately by the adequacy of accommodation facilities and the reputation of the place as a safe destination.

Table 3. Correlations between the variables

| Hypothesistesting	Relatedvariables	P	Strength of Correlation	Case Verification
H1: In the post-Covid-19 era the "intention to visit" of a location is positively related to its "special features (Physical factors of destination)"	Physical factors of destination VS Intention to visit	0.464	Moderate	Verified
H2: In the post-Covid-19 era, the "intention to visit" of a location is positively related to the "financial factors of destination"	Financial factors of destination VS Intention to visit	0.452	Moderate	Verified
H3: In the post-Covid-19 era, the "intention to visit" of a location is positively related to the "Post - crises destination image"	Post - crises destination image VS Intention to visit	0.330	Low	Verified
H4: In the post-Covid-19 era, the "physical factors of destination" are positively related to the "financial factors of destination"	Physical factors of destination VS Financial factors of destination	0.504	Moderate	Verified
H5: The "destination image on social media'' is positively related to the "Intention to visit"	Intention to visit VS Destination image on social media	0.396	Low	Verified
H6: The "destination image on social media'' is positively related to "the physical factors of destination"	Destination image on social media VS Physical factors of destination	0.308	Low	Verified
H7: The "destination image on social media'' is positively related to the "financial factors of destination"	Destination image on social media VS Financial factors of destination	0.308	Low	Verified
H8: In the post-Covid-19 era, the "physical factors of destination" are positively related to the "Post - crises destination image"	Physical factors of destination VS Post - crises destination image	0.241	Low	Verified
H9: In the post-Covid-19 era the "financial factors of destination" are positively related to the "Post - crises destination image"	Financial factors of destinationVS Post - crises destination image	0.223	Low	Verified
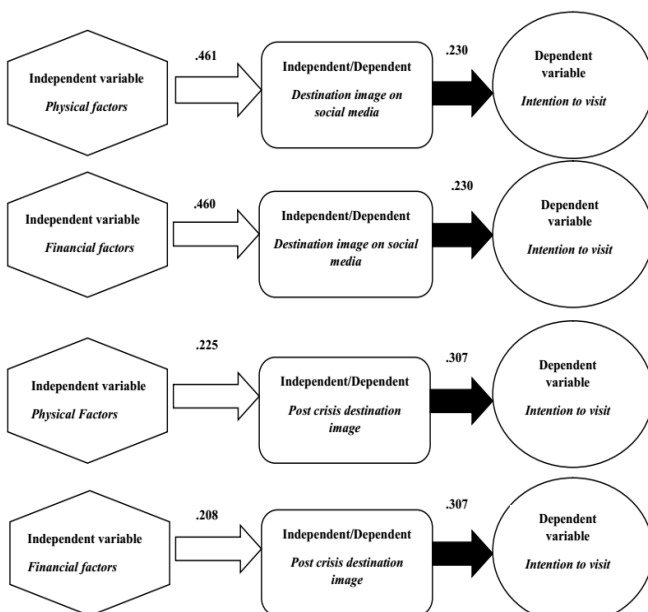
Figure 3. Moderator effects (authors' data collection and analysis)

e) Finally, in the category "Destination image on social media" their effect on visitors choosing a place is deemed positive, with their most important contribution being the ease of searching for a destination. Table 3 contains the results of the correlations between the variables, which verify the research hypotheses. These hypotheses are characterized by low to moderate positive correlations. The strongest influence on the final decision of the visitors on choosing a destination was found to concern physical features (r =.464), followed by financial factors (r =.452). Additionally, physical factors found be positively related with financial factors (r = .504). The effect of the destination image on social media (r =.396) on intention to visit is also remarkable, while the destination image after the crisis has the least impact (r =.330) (Figure 2).

According to Figure 3, the findingsindicate that the variables "Post crisis destination image" and "Destination image on social media" have a mediating role. In all cases it was shown that there is a positive correlation of the dependent variable "Intention to visit" with these two variables. In addition, the variables "Post crisis destination

image" and "Destination image on social media" were found to have a dual role which is supported by their dependence on the variables "physical features" and "financial factors". The findings suggest that the location image affects the intention of the visitors to choose a place, that the natural features have the most prominent influence on visiting intention and that the image of the destination on the social media changes significantly in relation to physical features and travel intention. The results show that promoting the physical features of a destination on the social media, especially those related to the infrastructure of a region, in combination with financial factors, such as affordable prices (value for money), constitute the most efficient way to ensure recovery of the industry as they will bring about the greatest possible increase in consumer arrivals. Additionally, the image of a destination was found to be affected by natural features and financial factors which also show an indirect relationship with travel intention. Finally, qualitative analysis (Table 4) shows that financial measures within the governmental policy can be helpful and supportive for the industry; should be included in an overall strategic plan, focusing on the product differentiation of each destination.

Table 4. Interviews' findings

Topics	Convergence of views	Difference of views
Quality and Adequacy of infrastructure	Quality of services provided regarding accommodation and adequacy of comforts	Road network & accessibility
Cost of services provided		High cost in Chalkidiki, compared to affordable prices in Ioannina
Priorities of tourists for choosingaccommodation in the post Covid-19 era	The clean and healthy environment	
Attitude and contribution of local authorities	The actions of the local authorities are important, with participation in exhibitions and promotion of the place.	
Specific characteristics of the location		Ioannina is known for its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and local gastronomy Chalkidiki is popular for the beaches and its natural beauty
Hospitality and Security	The reputation of the place, regarding the hospitality, safety and protection to the tourists, are the motivation for choosing these locations	
SocialMedia	Promoting the location through social media is considered the most effective way of advertising and should be further strengthened	
Pandemic, obstaclesandactions	Restrictive measures as an obstacle affecting the visit intention Stagnation and lack of actions to avoid future crises	
Challenges and financial measures in the hotel industry	Financial measures to support companies and employees. Alternative actions such as the strengthening of social tourism by the state as well as the promotion of the country as an attractive tourist destination	
Change in visitor behavior in the post-Covid-19 era	The change in the behavior of tourists will be mainly related to the hygienic conditions in the accommodation, which will be more demanding	
MassMedia	Maintaining a more rational attitude on the part of the media, so that they do not focus only on negative news, terrorizing visitors	
Maintaining the value of the brand and contact with customers	Maintaining contacts with customers via the Internet (receiving e-mails or sharing on social media various useful information); Customer loyalty: offers or reduced prices to regularcustomers	
Changes in the hotel industry		Differences of opinion: Regarding the expected changes in the hospitality service and the hotel of the future.

DISCUSSION

The tourism industry has been hit hard by the pandemic crisis, compared to any other. As it is characterized as the "heavy industry" of the country, with a significant contribution to other sectors such as catering and transport, it is considered of paramount importance to support the industry, in order to maintain its viability.Financial support measures from the government, as suggested by industry executives, could revitalize the tourism industry, until is fully restarted. However, these measures, apart from being temporary, are considered insufficient if they are not accompanied by astrategic action plan, which will aim to promote the destination in such a way as leading to a competitive advantage.

Testing how the image of a destination affects the intention of the visitors to choose a place, showed that the correct promotion of the country by using all the available means and especially the social media is the most efficient way for a faster recovery of the industry. In this way, there should be a strategic national action plan, coordinated by all stakeholders, to highlight the positive features that make up the image of a tempting tourist destination. However, as in any crisis, companies in the industry are called upon to adapt to the new reality and create the appropriate conditions for a health and safe environment by adhering to all health protocols and enhancing the sense of trust and security of

potential visitors. Here, the media also play an important role, by the way of addressing the events, focusing only on negative news and magnifying the issue, ending up to negatively affect potential visitors.

CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, Greece has the opportunity to review its production model in order to render its economy more resilient and less vulnerable to crisis. The new model of tourism development that is now emerging should be based on quality tourism and a new tourist identity, where potential visitors have the opportunity for quality tourism services at affordable prices (value for money). In addition, there is a growing trend (which tourism businesses should respond to immediately) on the part of consumers and potential tourists to opt for more environmentally friendly products and services, so they choose destinations under such specific criteria. Furthermore, the pandemic has dramatically changed the relationship of businesses, employees and consumers with digital technology in just a few weeks. All businesses are gradually required to improve their customers' digital access and move forward to the spectrumof e-commerce, as in the coming years this element will be transformed from a potential choice into a necessary condition.

The acceleration of investments in the fields of digitization and robotic process automation is also considered certain. The current international trend in tourism, which will be accelerated by the crisis caused by the pandemic, is that of the experiential connection of tourists with local communities in the destinations they visit. Modern "experience tourism" is associated with the "localhood", culture and way of life of the inhabitants of a place. "Experience tourism" is one of the largest and fastest growing branches of tourism activity. It is worth mentioning that Greece meets all the conditions and possesses all the advantages to be included in the list of alternative tourism destinations. Each of its geographical areas is famous for its special local characteristics, which constitute competitive advantages.

As tourism is a complex phenomenon highly susceptible to changes taking place in the external environment, the state should invest in a model that will enrich the tourism product and improve its competitiveness. Moreover, it should extend the tourist season all year round, substantially alleviating the seasonality of the Greek tourist industry during the summer months (repositioning of the tourist product). Generally, adaptability in each unique situation is a key element for the tourism sector. Planning, in the post-Covid-19 era, should prioritize new trends since, after the pandemic, there will be no return to regularity, but rather a transition to a new reality. The findings will provide managers with knowledge on factors affecting consumer behavior and, based on that, they can create a better tourist package proposal, making the image of a destination far more attractive. Future research should broaden its spectrum by analyzing the factors that influence the intention to visit a destination and the image of the specific destination in terms of the recovery from the health crisis. Even though, the aforementioned analysis provides essential results and clarifications for the management of tourism destination in the framework of Covid-19, research limitations still exist. A future research could expand the size of the sample in order to evade the overgeneralization of the findings.

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