

CONSUMER PERCEPTION AND INTENTION TO TRAVEL DURING ENDEMIC COVID-19

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Abstract

A global outbreak of a devastating disease called coronavirus or COVID-19 is spreading worldwide. The government implemented a Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2019. However, since the number of COVID-19 cases are declining by 2021. The government has created a travel bubble as part of the strategy to reactivate the tourist economy after achieving the target population of individuals who have received the vaccine. Cross-state authorisation for a complete two-dose vaccination is now permitted effective Oct 11, 2021. Therefore, this research aims to measure tourists' intention to travel and their perception of purchasing travel packages. More specifically, the study adopted semi-structured interviews with ten youth respondents aged between 23-26 years old. This study is an exploratory study to understand the underlying reasons for consumer perception and intention to travel. The findings reveal that consumer intention can be shaped by their willingness to travel, purpose and motivation, and purchasing a travel package. The consumer has a diversity of perceptions of travel during the endemic, especially related to the price, cost, risk, and perception of the idea of travel bubble. The government decision to lift the movement control order (MCO) helps revive the tourism industry. Allowing and opening the tourism activities directly assists the small business, the local operators, and the communities affected by the total closure of the tourism industry in the past.

Keywords: Travel intention; Consumer perception; Consumer intention; Purchasing travel packages; COVID-19

Introduction

The current endemic situation has lenient the restriction to consumers to travel. Initially, the world was stunned by an epidemic of infectious illnesses that began at the end of 2019. The pandemic was discovered in China and was known as COVID-19. The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated the outbreak a crucial public health emergency due to its severity and rapid spread. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faces an unprecedented public health, social, and economic emergency. Many industries have been affected by the pandemic. Still, the travel and tourism sector has been the hardest hit, with a significant drop in

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international demand due to global travel restrictions, including completely closed borders to contain the virus.



Figure 1: Worldwide International Tourist Arrival 2020

The figure shows that the international tourist arrivals worldwide are decreasing terrifically. The most affected region is in Asia & The Pacific with -82 percent with the average of the declining number is -72 percent. The plummet of the tourism industry during the endemic COVID-19 indirectly affected the country's economy. When many sectors have to shut down temporarily or directly, it has impacted the economy and created more issues such as unemployment, unpaid leaves, and others. The COVID-19 endemic has seriously deficient banks, according to Roy (2020). Tourism is an essential source of revenue for all countries. From the beginning of the year 2020, the tourism sector has to face a significant loss due to the impact of COVID-19. That was the most challenging year for the worldwide tourism sector. Since the COVID-19 outbreak began in December 2019, although vaccination procedures have been initiated, the episode has not yet been fully resolved. As a result, travel overseas is still being postponed worldwide due to fears of infection from this virus.

Nevertheless, governments worldwide have attempted to solve this problem, particularly in the tourist industry. Thus the government is optimistic that tourism activities would help revitalise the tourism market and business possibilities (Tourism Business Council, 2020). However, according to Abdullah, Dias, Muley, and Shahin (2020), people's desire to participate in tourism activities remains low, causing the tourism industry to decline and suffer the impacts of the pandemic. According to the UNWTO Confidence Index, the tourist sector showed no signs of recovery from

January to April 2021. Despite vaccinations, tourism activities are not anticipated to return until at least 2024 (Yu, Lin, Lo, Tseng, & Hsu, 2021) fully. Short-distance tourist trips are currently more viable than long-distance tourism travel. Different new approaches and efforts that various parties have taken to restore the glory of the post-pandemic tourist sector. Malaysia's tourism sector has introduced the travel bubble known as Langkawi Travel Bubble. It is one of the initiatives to restore the tourism industry. This travel bubble was introduced after almost 70% of the Malaysian adult population got a complete vaccine. However, some Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been set, and one of the SOPs to travel to Langkawi is firstly tourists can travel by flight. The permission letter is not required, secondly by land via travel agency and lastly by ferry for those from Kedah or Perlis (MKN, 2020).

Recently, due to a 90 percent vaccination status, the government decided to lift a movement control order (MCO) and permitted an interstate cross. As a result, cross-state authorisation for a complete two-dose vaccination is now permitted effective Oct 11, 2021. Hence, this paper aims to measure tourist intention on travelling and their perception of purchasing the travel packages.

Literature Review

Consumer perception

Consumer perception of the product is a critical issue in the tourism industry because it can directly influence the profitability of tourism activities. According to Madichie (2015), perception is the act of selecting, organising, and interpreting sensations, i.e., the instantaneous reaction of sensory receptors (such as the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and fingers) to such fundamental inputs as light, colour, smell, texture, and sound. Meanwhile, Bahsin (2021) has mentioned that customer perception is a marketing concept that refers to how customers perceive a brand, a company, or its products. A customer's feelings, perceptions, inhibitions, predispositions, expectations, or experiences can be positive or negative. Customer perception is important because it can decide the success of a brand, product, or company. Customer perception can be influenced by many factors such as marketing communication, holistic marketing, personal experience, advertising, influencers, and social media platforms. There are three stages of perception: exposure, attention, and interpretation. Furthermore, perception is the process of choosing, arranging, and interpreting information inputs to generate meaning that aids in consumer decision-making (Madichie,2015).

Consumer intention

According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), intention can be defined as a person's commitment, plan, or choice to carry out an action or achieve a goal. The personal or

I-intention to pursue a goal or perform an action by oneself is the most prevalent sort of intention. Both goal and action intents can be articulated in a non-contingent manner (Bagozzi, 2010). Moreover, intentions can occasionally lead to action right away or after a short period. Furthermore, according to Bagozzi (2006), one of the most prevalent roles for intentions is to link wants and consequences in so-called goal-directed behaviour. This function of intents is captured by the consumer core, which may be stated as follows: goal desire → goal intention → action desire → action intention → action. Meanwhile, Zhang, Zhou, and Liu (2020) have defined consumer intention as a customer's attitude toward a particular purchase activity and the consumer's readiness to pay, referred to as purchasing intention. Attitudes, motivations, emotions, values, social pressure, self-efficacy, and perceived behavioural control have all been thought of as psychological determinants of behaviour that act via intentions to influence action (Bogazzi, 2010).

Methodology

This study aimed to determine the tourist intention on travelling and their perception of purchasing the travel packages. This research uses a qualitative approach. It is an intensive study by qualitative interviewing of individual intention and perception. Semi-structured interview questions were adapted and adopted from previous studies that consisted of 17 questions to which the respondents were asked to proffer answers. After that, the thematic method was used to ensure adequate analysis of the data collected. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasises pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within data. Consistent with thematic analysis, the data analysis process involves a few stages, including data gathering, transcribing raw data, generating code from raw data, and presenting the findings.

Findings

Demographic

Table 1 shows the profile of respondents. Again, the majority of respondents were female with a bachelor's degree education level.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

| Interview Participants | Age | Gender | Education Level |
|------------------------|--------------|--------|-------------------|
| A1 | 25 years old | Female | Bachelor's Degree |
| A2 | 23 years old | Female | Bachelor's Degree |
| A3 | 24 years old | Female | Bachelor's Degree |
| A4 | 24 years old | Female | Bachelor's Degree |
| A5 | 23 years old | Male | Bachelor's Degree |

Table 1 (continues)

| Interview Participants | Age | Gender | Education Level |
|------------------------|--------------|--------|-------------------|
| A6 | 26 years old | Male | Bachelor's Degree |
| A7 | 26 years old | Female | Bachelor's Degree |
| A8 | 24 years old | Female | Bachelor's Degree |
| A9 | 24 years old | Female | Bachelor's Degree |
| A10 | 23 years old | Female | Bachelor's Degree |

Table 1 above shows the profile of the interviewee. Ten participants are joining this interview session, and two out of ten participants are male. The age group of participants is around 23-26 years old. Furthermore, all the participants are studying at a bachelor's degree level.

Consumer intention

Table 2 show the code on the consumer intention. Again, the data was coded before the themes were identified.

Table 2: Codes and Supporting Evidence of Consumer Intention

| Codes | Supporting Evidence |
|-----------------------|---|
| Willingness to travel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Yes, I am willing to travel during the endemic COVID-19 as long as followed the SOPs.” (A1) • “No. I still feel the possibility getting COVID-19 is high.” (A2) • “Yes. We have to accept the new norm with this endemic that has no ending.” (A3) • “I would love to travel if there is no COVID-19, but for now, I would rather choose not to because health matters the most.” (A4) • “Yes, since our vaccination rate is getting higher, but everyone must adhere to all the strict SOPs set by the government.” (A5) • “No, some of Malaysia citizens are not following the SOP even though the government has already given the best effort for reaching herd immunity.” (A6) • “With a strict guided SOPs, fully vaccinated. yes, I'm willing to travel” (A7) • “No. We still have to avoid a crowded place. And of course, there are tourists from the red zone.” (A8) • “Yes, I am willing to travel since I have already finished my study and I have more free time.” (A9) • “I am willing to travel during the endemic COVID-19, but I'll always skip places that are packed with people. I prefer to do hotel staycation.” (A10) |

Table 2 (continues)

| Codes | Supporting Evidence |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Purpose and Motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Relaxation and visiting the interesting place. If the border is open to travel, I choose to go to Terengganu. I believe that everyone needs some space and time after almost two years of not travelling” (A1) • “For relaxation and be motivated by nature such as beaches.” (A3) • “If it’s my real opinion, I won’t go, but stress reliever should be the main purpose because we are not allowed to cross other states during MCO. Moreover, my motivation to travel is to escape from whatever I’m going through in life for a moment by enjoying my time in new places with family members or friends.” (A4) • “To help the economy, tourism industry and to have fun with my friends.” (A5) • “The main purpose for me to travel is to change of mood because I felt caged by stuck at home.” (A6) • “The main purpose is to seek calmness, and my motivation to travel is influence from social media” (A7) • “Main purpose is to release stress maybe after a long time not going anywhere, and I would like to visit new interesting places.” (A8) • “I would like to go for VFR purpose and leisure.” (A9) • “The main purpose is to support our tourism industry! And of course, to have a little escape from my daily life and want to heal from stress.” (A10) |
| Purchasing a travel package | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m not willing to purchase a travel package because I love to explore the place by myself, furthermore I’m also choosing to use public transport rather than driving especially for the long trip which is more than 200 miles from my place” (A1) • “No, even if not for a pandemic because I don’t like being in one time set by other as I want to enjoy the travel journey without a rush. If I go travel, I will prefer for personal travelling because I always go with family rather than friends” (A2) • “No, I preferred independent arrangement, and I wish to travel by personal car and willing to drive even the travel place is more than 200 miles for a leisure trip.” (A3) • “It depends on the place that I go for travelling if it’s something beyond my knowledge I think it would be best to buy a travel package from the travel agency and it also depends on the place. If it within Peninsular Malaysia, I would rather go with a personal car instead of public transport.” (A4) |

Table 2(continues)

| Codes | Supporting Evidence |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Purchasing a travel package | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Yes, I am willing to use travel packages if I can travel, and I rather use my personal car and willing to drive more than 200 miles just to have some relaxation.” (A5) • “I willing to purchase if they can guarantee my criteria on safety.” (A6) • “Yes, I am willing to buy a travel package.” (A7) • “Yes, I want to buy a travel package, and I prefer to use my personal car to travel even the place is more than 200 miles.” (A8) • “I do not like to buy travel packages since I am not a person who loves to follow schedules.” (A10) |

Consumer perception

Table 3 show the data consumer perception from the interview process.

Table 3: Codes and Supporting Evidence of Consumer Perception

| Codes | Supporting Evidence |
|---------------------------|---|
| Price from travel package | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I will look into & compare the price from various packages to make sure I invest the money in the correct way & able to utilise all of the services provided. Comments and feedback from other customers are really crucial. Moreover, in my opinion, the price is essential before choosing the packages because it can make me feel worthy of every penny that we spend” (A1) • “I will compare the price from various travel packages to look for promotion and the price that may be including souvenir, food, emergency, insurance, clothes if go to a different region. Besides, I also don’t want the price too high while I am being served with “tourist trap” place” (A2) • “A price plays an essential role to meet all of the holiday needs such as accommodation, transportation, etc. and in my opinion, the price should be more reasonable and worth it rather than the independent arrangement that why I need to make a comparison from different packages to make sure it worth for me.” (A3) • “It gives me the option to choose best travel package with affordable price. Furthermore, price is considered important in choosing a travel package for budgeting purpose.” (A4) • “I would like to choose affordable price so that I can save a lot of money.” (A5) |

Table 3 (continues)

| Codes | Supporting Evidence |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <p>Price from travel package</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Price is important because not everyone has a steady income, so need to check either the package is worth with their income.” (A6) • “I would like to compare the packages to find the affordable prices and good package, and I need to know the price before choosing the destination, and the price is important because I need to set my limit and budget.” (A7) • “The affordable price that is suitable with the packages offered is able to attract my interest to buy that package, and the price is important to ensure that the package is affordable, reduce the expenses that should be and also the smoothness during travel such as interesting places to visit.” (A8) • “Since I haven’t worked yet. Price is really important. I will find options to cut my travel expenses. Moreover, I would like to compare the price first to make sure I get the best price and cut my travel expenses.” (A9) • “I need to compare the price, and I need to count my travel budget because I have my budget and I will ensure that I’ll not spend more than planned.” (A10) |
| <p>Cost using travel package</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The cost of travelling on my own is more reasonable because I can plan on my own that depends on my budget. I also think that it can save more money when I can plan my own itineraries.” (A1) • “Yes, I think travelling on my own is more reasonable because there will have no service charge and I think people nowadays can do their own research and know more about tourism places on their own.” (A2) • “I think travel by my own arrangement can save money because I can choose hotels such as budget hotel and mode of transportation such as bike or motorcycle.” (A3) • “I think travel by my own maybe can save my money because I can limit myself from spending on unnecessary things or going to places that require high expenses.” (A4) • “I think that it is not really saving money if I travel on my own, but if someone can plan the vacation well, definitely it can help to save a little bit money better than pay for services by using travel packages.” (A5) • “Yes, travelling on my own can save a lot of money, but of course, there would be cons to it. I think it can save money because I can cut cost from the offered package such as insurance, transportation, including meal, etc.” (A6) |

Table 3 (continues)

| Codes | Supporting Evidence |
|--|--|
| <p>Cost using travel package</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Partially yes for the saving by doing own travelling and it depends on the destination.” (A7) • “Yes, I think travelling by own can reduce cost because we can arrange our own budget and can decide what we want and where to go. We don’t need to follow and be tied to the package provided.” (A8) • “Cost of travelling by own is reasonable because can cut the budget for the travel agency services. I did not have to pay for the guide, and also, the price is transparent without being markup by the travel agency.” (A9) • “Yes, I think travelling by own can reduce cost because on the package, sometimes there are places that I had like to skip and I might not enjoy the trip much, so rather than doing things that I don’t like, it is better for me to plan the trip by myself.” (A10) |
| <p>Risk of travelling during endemic</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In my opinion, yes, I think it is still risky to travel even the number of cases in certain areas is decreasing. We need to practice the SOPs. Make necessary preparation & consultation prior to the visit. However, because those who are only fully vaccinated are allowed to travel, hence this will decrease my uncertainty and feel protected.” (A1) • “Yes, it still risky to travel now, and I’m not sure about the uncertainty to travel during this endemic even have the affirmation from the government.” (A2) • “Yes. Too crowded people in one place would be risky because it is hard to practice social distancing. In addition, nowadays, the virus will spread by the wind, making it more dangerous and riskier if the place has crowded people. However, the affirmation from the government on travelling a little bit can decrease my uncertainty because I think it was quite safe when the government stated the limitation of people (3000 people a day) in Langkawi. It makes it safer because it is not too crowded.” (A3) • “Yes, it’s quite risky, honestly, considering we only live once, and if it is something that helps to decrease my uncertainty, it should be related to the fact if all Malaysian citizens are fully vaccinated.” (A4) • “Yes, for the time being, since we are still heading 90% of vaccinations rate for all adults in Malaysia. However, the affirmation from the government has really helped me by eliminating the fear and hesitation to travel.” (A5) |

Table 3 (continues)

| Codes | Supporting Evidence |
|--|--|
| <p>Risk of travelling during endemic</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think it would be a disaster for the future of Tourism industry if the number still increasing. Yeah, I would consider it as risky, and be honest, I am still uncertain about how Malaysian citizens behave.” (A6) • “Yes, because the cases at some areas are still in the red zone and increasing day by day. In my opinion, the risk is still higher to travel, especially to bring the kids who are not vaccinated yet.” (A8) • “I think the number of the cases controllable because one of the conditions for those who want to travel to Langkawi need to have two vaccination doses and 14 days after vaccinating. We know that vaccines will reduce the risk of getting infected with COVID-19 and infecting other people. I don’t think the travel bubble is risky as long as they follow the SOPs. Right now, the privilege of travel is given to those who are fully vaccinated. Other than that, the vaccination rate in Malaysia is high.” (A9) • “It is risky, but if the authorities have strict rules for the traveller to enter such locations, I think it is okay. The affirmation from the government related to being fully vaccinated is good, but I still have doubts about travelling to certain places, especially crowded places. As for now, the travel bubble is just only in Langkawi, so I think it can be crowded if most people go to the same place to travel. The risk is higher. But in the future, if there are some places open for travelling, maybe people will have a choice, and it can decrease my uncertainty also to choose the place to relax.” (A10) |
| <p>Perception about travel bubble</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The idea of travelling using travel package is good on helping to boost the economy & promoting the travel agency at the same time” (A1) • “In my opinion, the idea of travel bubble yes, it is good for the business and economy of the country, but I think if the perspective of consumer is not really good because of the cases are still higher.” (A2) • “The idea of travel bubble can help the economy especially by using the local travel agency because we can help their business due to the pandemic.” (A3) • “Obviously, it will help a lot to make the trip go smoothly if you have no knowledge of that place. Yes, it will help to boost our economy if you travel in your own country, but it doesn’t matter if it is in other countries because it’s your own money after all.” (A4) |

Table 3 (continues)

| Codes | Supporting Evidence |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Perception about travel bubble | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This idea is excellent, especially on helping the local operator after being affected by this pandemic. It is also the way to protect the risk on travelling because the agency will have the data on patient health. Yes, it slowly can also help the economy.” (A5) • “This idea definitely helps the economy of the country, and by going through a travel agent, I can feel a little bit safer.” (A6) • “Surely this idea of travel bubble does help to boost the economy.” (A7) • “I think the idea of using a travel package is good in helping the economy right now after effected by this pandemic. Most people will choose to use a travel agency because they want something that can ease their problems. So, the idea is really good.” (A8) • “It is a good idea since we can help to rejuvenate their business, but now, there are a lot of people who prefer to travel without them, especially among youngsters.” (A9) • “I love the idea because it will help the economy since a lot of people will get jobs that are related with the travel agency.” (A10) |

Table 2 and 3 above presents the consumer intention and perception findings from the interview session. The questions have been summarised into a few themes and coded into a few categories. All the supporting evidence is the details of the response from the respondents for the related question.

Discussion

Consumer intention

Willingness to travel

Willingness is the most significant personal factor affecting consumer intention to travel. From the findings, it was discovered that most of the respondents were willing to travel during this endemic. Most respondents see that this is a chance to revive tourist activities after being in the Movement Control Order (MCO) phase for so long. They are, nevertheless, attentive to ensuring that the wish to travel must adhere to the government's standard operating procedures (SOPs). For instance: (A1) “Yes, I am willing to travel during the endemic COVID-19 as long as followed the SOPs”. (A5) “Yes, since our vaccination rate is getting higher, but everyone must adhere to all the strict SOPs set by the government”. (A7) “With strict guided SOPs, fully vaccinated. Yes, I'm willing to travel.” Therefore, the responses from the consumers

show that there is willing to travel after the pandemic as long as the place is strictly following the SOPs. Most respondents see the SOPs as crucial in attracting their intention to travel during the endemic.

Although tourist activities are likely limited due to the requirement to adhere to the most recent regulations, there is still a strong desire to travel. Therefore, these SOPs are not seen as a barrier to pursuing travel plans; instead, they are seen as a proactive measure to halt the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic during the endemic phase. According to MOTAC (2021), the initiative is part of the Ministry's ongoing efforts to restore tourists' trust in a tourist destination's level of security. Consumers are aware that they must be exposed to this virus daily but must also practise self-care to maintain their health while participating in tourism activities.

Purpose and motivation

The findings discovered that most respondents had the same purpose and motivation to travel during this endemic. According to the consumers, they would like to relax to reduce their stress after being stuck at home for a long time. Due to consumers (A1), *“Relaxation and visiting the interesting place. If the border is open to travel, I choose to go to Terengganu. I believe that everyone needs some space and time after almost two years of not travelling.”* *“If it’s my real opinion, I won’t go, but stress reliever should be the main purpose because we are not allowed to cross other states during MCO. Moreover, my motivation to travel is to escape from whatever I’m going through in life for a moment by enjoying my time in new places with family members or friends.”* (A4). *“The main purpose for me to travel is to change of mood because I felt caged by stuck at home.”* (A6). *“Main purpose is to release stress maybe after a long time not going anywhere, and I would like to visit new interesting places.”* (A8). *“The main purpose is to support our tourism industry! And of course, to have a little escape from my daily life and want to heal from stress.”* (A10). Therefore, it suffices to say that purpose and motivation can be one of the push factors of consumer intention to travel. After facing a long time of MCO, it can be realistic for everyone to look for some relaxation. According to Yousaf, Amin and Jose Antonio (2018), the discussion about travel motivation is related to the psychology of travellers' behaviours is crucial in shaping their overall desire to visit particular areas.

Purchasing a travel package

According to the findings, it shows that most respondents intend to purchase a travel package if they have a chance to travel. However, the respondents also have mentioned a few things needed when choosing a travel package. For the current situation of COVID-19, the safety of themselves is one of the essential criteria that they are focusing on when selecting a travel package. Other than that, purchasing the

package also depends on the places they prefer to visit, and mostly, they also like to use their vehicle for travelling.

“It depends on the place that I go for travelling if it’s something beyond my knowledge I think it would be best to buy a travel package from the travel agency and it also depends on the place. If it within Peninsular Malaysia, I would rather go with a personal car instead of public transport.” (A4). “Yes, I am willing to use travel packages if I can travel, and I rather use my personal car and willing to drive more than 200 miles just to have some relaxation.” (A5). “I willing to purchase if they can guarantee my criteria on safety.” (A6). “Yes, I am willing to buy a travel package.” (A7). “Yes, I want to buy a travel package, and I prefer to use my personal car to travel even the place is more than 200 miles.” (A8).

Consumers' responses above show that a travel package also plays an essential role in attracting travellers, especially those who already have the intention to travel. Travel package is one of the popular ways to bring tourists to explore the place with various advantages. According to Dong, Ling, and Guo (2014), the travel package is more convenient because it will include all needed services such as flight, accommodation, and car rental; hence, visitors may buy services from a trip package provider instead of booking individual services from multiple suppliers.

Consumer perception

Price from travel package

The price of an item is significant to consumers. The seller's pricing makes it difficult for the buyer to decide whether or not to proceed with the transaction. In the context of travel agencies, each travel package's pricing must be worth the services provided to customers. This is because it was discovered through the interviews that consumers have a pricing perception in which they are apprehensive about packages that give a price that is both valuable and inexpensive and all of the critical needs when travelling. According to consumers, *“I will look into & compare the price from various packages to make sure I invest the money in the correct way & able to utilise all of the services provided” “Moreover, in my opinion, the price is essential before choosing the packages because it can make me feel worthy of every penny that we spend” (A1). “A price plays an essential role to meet all of the holiday needs such as accommodation, transportation, etc. and in my opinion, the price should be more reasonable and worth it rather than the independent arrangement that why I need to make a comparison from different packages to make sure it worth for me” (A3). “I would like to compare the packages to find the affordable prices and good package, and I need to know the price before choosing the destination, and the price is important because I need to set my limit and budget” (A7). “The affordable price that is suitable with the packages offered is able to attract my interest to buy that package,*

and the price is important to ensure that the package is affordable, reduce the expenses that should be and also the smoothness during travel such as interesting places to visit” (A8). It shows that consumers significantly perceive the price before purchasing a travel package. According to Wantara and Tambrin (2019), because consumers carefully consider getting the maximum value from the product for their investment, price is a crucial element in satisfaction and product loyalty. If the travel agency's price is affordable, the consumer's opinion of the travel agency's services given through the package can be influenced to some extent. The justice of the pricing will impact the customers' perception of the product and, eventually, their desire to become a customer (Razak, Nirwanto & Triatmanto, 2016). This is because consumers' perceptions of price are heavily based on measuring and comparing each travel agency.

Cost using travel package

Before starting on travelling, the first thing that everyone considers is the cost. Each person's perspective on the costs incurred on vacation is different. This is since some customers are prepared to pay a high price for the most satisfactory service, while others are more concerned with saving money when travelling. According to the interview session, most respondents believe that personal arrangement during travelling is more reasonable than using a travel package. They can arrange and plan their journey within their budget and reduce costs in terms of services when using a travel agency, choosing hotels such as budget hotels and transportation mode. *“The cost of travelling on my own is more reasonable because I can plan on my own that depends on my budget. I also think that it can save more money when I can plan my own itineraries” (A1).* *“Yes, I think travelling on my own is more reasonable because there will have no service charge and I think people nowadays can make own research and know more about tourism places on their own” (A2).”* *Yes, I think travelling by own can reduce cost because we can arrange our own budget and can decide what we want and where to go. We don't need to follow and be tied to the package provided” (A8).* *“Cost of travelling by own is reasonable because can cut the budget for the travel agency services. I did not have to pay for the guide, and also, the price is transparent without being markup by the travel agency” (A9).* The consumers' response shows that people, especially youths, perceive that travelling on their own is more reasonable.

Furthermore, they think that independent travelling can save more money than paying for the services by using a travel package. As Walewinder (2020) mentioned, independent travel entails avoiding travel agencies and, as a result, spending less money. When travelling independently, we decide when to go, where we want to stay, what we want to eat, and what activities we want to do. Therefore, it is typically a cheaper and more flexible choice because no one makes all of your reservations for you, and there are no additional fees.

Risk of travelling during endemic

Following COVID-19, people's attitudes toward travel have shifted dramatically. It is not realistic for everyone to avoid all travel for the foreseeable future. However, it is undeniable that most consumers are still sceptical of the level of safety and consider tourism activities too risky at the moment. The pandemic has already led to a significant increase in travel anxiety. Based on the findings, it can be seen that most respondents thought that it is still risky to do tourism activities, especially now, when there is so much uncertainty about how this pandemic will spread. Even though the government has established some SOPs standards that must be followed and over 90% of the population has gotten the vaccination, their fear of flying remains strong. Nevertheless, it is also undeniable that affirmations from the government regarding vaccinations and tourism give a slight drop in the uncertainty to undertake specific trips.

Therefore, according to respondents, *"I think it is still risky to travel even the number of cases in certain areas is decreasing. We need to practice the SOPs. Make necessary preparation & consultation prior to the visit. However, because those who are only fully vaccinated are allowed to travel, hence this will decrease my uncertainty and feel protected"* (A1). *"Yes. Too crowded people in one place would be risky because it is hard to practice social distancing. In addition, nowadays, the virus will spread by the wind, making it more dangerous and riskier if the place has crowded people. However, the affirmation from the government on travelling a little bit can decrease my uncertainty because I think it was quite safe when the government stated the limitation of people (3000 people a day) in Langkawi. It makes safer because it is not too crowded"* (A3). *"Yes, for the time being, since we are still heading 90% of vaccinations rate for all adults in Malaysia. However, the affirmation from the government has really helped me by eliminating the fear and hesitation to travel"* (A5). This shows that, even if people's immunity rises and their suspicion decreases, consumers still believe tourist activities are risky in this endemic period. This is most likely due to users' perceptions that they are not fully ready to implement the new SOPs. This tourism risk perception is a tourist's subjective estimate of the danger connected with travel, which can lead to travel postponement or cancellation, both of which are bad for tourism (Bratić, Radivojević, Stojiljković, Simović, Juvan, Lesjak, & Podovšovnik, 2021)

Perception about travel bubble

Pulau Langkawi in Kedah, which is the pilot project for the country's travel concept, has been a success, according to Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri, since it opened Sept 16 with a total of 9,500 visitor arrivals. Meanwhile, the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) claimed that visitor arrivals during the travel bubble produced RM15.97 million in income for the Langkawi tourism industry

till Sept 30. This travel bubble is part of the government's effort to resurrect the tourist business, severely harmed by the pandemic. Consumers have varied opinions on this wave in response to the government's request to enable tourism operations to resume. According to the findings of the interviews, the majority of consumers support the concept of a travel bubble, in which an agency serves as a starting point for a trip. They claim that the government's efforts can aid the country's economy, which the stoppage of tourism has severely harmed. Furthermore, using a travel agency is the ideal option since it may increase local business while also allowing the agency to re-engage in promoting travel packages.

This is evidenced by their belief that *"the idea of travelling using travel package is good on helping to boost the economy & promoting the travel agency at the same time"* (A1). *"The idea of travel bubble can help the economy especially by using the local travel agency because we can help their business due to the pandemic"* (A3). *"This idea is excellent, especially on helping the local operator after being affected by this pandemic. It is also the way to protect the risk on travelling because the agency will have the data on patient health Yes, it slowly can also help the economy"* (A5). *"I love the idea because it will help the economy since a lot of people will get jobs that are relating with the travel agency"* (A10).

As a result, it was evident that customers support the government's decision to allow tourism activities during this endemic period. Consumers also believe that this proposal can help the country's economy recover after nearly two years of travel disruptions. Furthermore, customers believe that utilising a travel agency might assist localities in rehiring individuals who may have been laid off due to the shutdown of the tourist industry.

Conclusion

This research summarises the consumer perception of the travel bubble and their intention to travel during the new phase of endemic. As a result, this research focuses on consumers' opinions about their intention and perception of travelling after the pandemic. According to the findings of this study, most of the respondents accept the idea of a travel bubble. However, they still think of the risk of travelling while the virus of COVID-19 is still there and a few places are still in the red zone.

Meanwhile, the findings also show that most respondents would like to have their independent travelling due to the cost and pricing and limitation of the budget on travelling. Consumers have an intention to travel, but they are still worried about the spreading of the virus of COVID-19. However, they still need to accept that we are now in the endemic, and we need to adapt to normalise the new life with this virus. Therefore, consumers prefer to travel, but they adhere to the standard operating procedure instructed by the government due to the current endemic situation.

The implications of this study are for the travel agency to cater to consumers preferences. Consumers are likely to travel during the endemic COVID-19, but they have to consider the price and number of cases at the places they travel.

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