



Impacts of COVID-19 on global tourism industry

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Abstract

Background: Particularly international travel has become one of the most well-liked pastimes worldwide. It's important to consider the risk of accidents and travel-related illnesses, including infectious and non-communicable diseases. We sought to learn more about passengers' attitudes, knowledge, and awareness of travel health insurance in order to give more thorough pre-trip counselling to international travellers.

Methods: Anonymous structured questionnaires were distributed among 120 individuals in the Indian population.

Results: In this study, a total of 120 subjects were randomly given the questionnaire and 100 visitors responded (response rate = 75%). There were 60 females and 40 males. The mean age of the respondents was 46.8 ± 15.1 years. There were 35% of respondents reported a medical history of chronic illness and 21% of respondents reported a previous experience of travel-associated illness. Furthermore, 40% of the respondents planned to join group tours and 55% planned a self-guide tour. A total of 24% of the respondents planned to participate in activities that may increase their risk of health problems, such as mountain backpacking or scuba diving during their travel. A statistically significant association was observed between the willingness to buy travel inconvenience insurance with educational level. The willingness of pre-travel consultation is associated with various travel insurances and travel-associated illness is associated with willing to buy 24 hours of emergency assistance. Furthermore, planned special activities during travel is associated with accidental death and disablement insurance.

Conclusion: A disproportionate number of respondents knew what travel health insurance covered, despite the fact that the majority of passengers would buy it. Most passengers said that the best resources for information on travel insurance were travel clinics. Therefore, it is advised that travel specialists give additional information about travel insurance during pre-trip consultation, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Coronavirus infectious disease (COVID-19), travel, health insurance, pre-travel consultation

Introduction

The COVID-19 (declared as a pandemic by WHO, 12 March 2020) of significantly impacts the global economic, political, socio-cultural systems. Health communication strategies and measures (e.g. social distancing, travel and mobility bans, community lockdowns, stay at home campaigns, self- or mandatory-quarantine, curbs on crowding) have halted global travel, tourism and leisure. Being a highly vulnerable industry to numerous environmental, political, socio-economic risks, tourism is used to and has become resilient in bouncing back from various crises and outbreaks (e.g. terrorism, earthquakes, Ebola, SARS, Zika).¹ However, the nature, the unprecedented circumstances and impacts of the COVID-19, demonstrate signs that this crisis is not only different, but it can have profound and long-term structural and transformational changes to tourism as socio-economic activity and industry. Indeed, the global and huge scale, the multidimensional and interconnected impacts challenging current values and systems and leading to a worldwide recession and depression are the most distinctive characteristics of this pandemic.

Within the burgeoning industry discussions and research about tourism and COVID-19, there is an unanimous call to see and use the pandemic as a transformative opportunity.² Industry should not only recover but also reimagine and reform the next normal and economic order³, while researchers should not solely use COVID-19 as another context to replicate existing knowledge for measuring and predicting tourism impacts.⁴

Hence, this study was conducted to evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 on global tourism industry.

Material and methods

This cross-sectional questionnaire survey was conducted among the community. The survey was anonymous and self-administered. Participants' agreement to the subject was demonstrated by their completion and return of the questionnaire. Age above 20 and willingness and ability to complete the questionnaire were the inclusion requirements. The four-part survey asked questions about sociodemographic traits, knowledge of diseases brought on by travel and vaccines, attitudes, awareness of and readiness to use travel clinics, and travel insurance. A group of ten doctors pretested the questionnaire for face validity. Sex, age, education, occupation, medical history, and unique travel activities were among the sociodemographic factors. The proportions of those wanting to purchase travel insurance among various socioeconomic characteristics were compared using the Chi-square test. To understand the relationship between knowledge of travel medicine and socioeconomic characteristics, one-way ANOVA and an independent t test were utilised. Statistical significance was defined as a p value 0.05. The statistical programme SPSS 19.0 was used to conduct the statistical analysis.

Results

A total of 120 subjects were randomly given the questionnaire and 100 visitors responded (response rate = 75%). There were 60 females and 40 males.

Table 1: gender-wise distribution of subjects.

Gender	Number of subjects	Percentage
Males	40	40%
Females	60	60%
Total	100	100%

The mean age of the respondents was 46.8 ± 15.1 years. There were 35% of respondents reported a medical history of chronic illness and 21% of respondents reported a previous experience of travel-associated illness. Furthermore, 40% of the respondents planned to join group tours and 55% planned a self-guide tour. A total of 24% of the respondents planned to participate in activities that may increase their risk of health problems, such as mountain backpacking or scuba diving during their travel.

Among the rated insurance, the top three importance were accidental death and disablement insurance (95%), accidental medical reimbursement (89%) and 24 hours of emergency assistance (86%). The insurance that the subjects were least aware of included accidental death and disablement insurance (34%), accidental medical reimbursement (39%) and overseas sickness coverage (42%). The least three willing to buy were overseas sickness coverage (72%), 24 hours of emergency assistance (58%) and travel inconvenience insurance (67%).

A statistically significant association was observed between the willingness to buy travel inconvenience insurance with educational level. The willingness of pre-travel consultation is associated with various travel insurances and travel-associated illness is associated with willing to buy 24 hours of emergency assistance. Furthermore, planned special activities during travel is associated with accidental death and disablement insurance.

Discussion

The appearance of the lethal disease COVID-19 has resulted in massive financial losses and caused global health and economic crises worldwide.^{5,6,7} The most frightening news of the seasonal influenza outbreaks, epidemics, pandemics, and catastrophes results in a steep decrease in the travel and tourism industry, a dominant contributor to the service industry.^{8,9,10} The pandemics adversely impact tourists' behaviors and their mental wellbeing.^{11,12,13} As a result, they drop their planned tour plans in fear of the disease infection, as it looks impossible to avoid transmission of the virus during travel.^{14,15,16} Besides, tourists travel increases infection risk to other air passengers in the absence of effective vaccines.¹⁷⁻²⁰ Travelers play a significant role in transferring viruses, epidemics', outbreaks, or pandemics between local communities' destinations.²¹⁻²⁴

In this study, a total of 120 subjects were randomly given the questionnaire and 100 visitors responded (response rate = 75%). There were 60 females and 40 males. The mean age of the respondents was 46.8 ± 15.1 years. There were 35% of respondents reported a medical history of chronic illness and 21% of respondents reported a previous experience of travel-associated

illness. Furthermore, 40% of the respondents planned to join group tours and 55% planned a self-guide tour. A total of 24% of the respondents planned to participate in activities that may increase their risk of health problems, such as mountain backpacking or scuba diving during their travel.

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Compared with previous studies, about 14.2-60% of travelers experienced health problems during travel.²⁵⁻²⁷

Christopher et al. revealed only 36% people sought pre-travel counselling.²⁸

Conclusion

Only 34–46.8% of respondents said they had a very good understanding of the contents of travel insurance, even though the majority of travellers would purchase accidental death and disablement insurance and accidental medical reimbursement. The majority of passengers believed that health professionals were the most trustworthy provider of travel insurance. Therefore, before the countries reopen for tourism, health professionals are urged to prepare themselves with knowledge of travel insurance so they can give additional information during pre-trip consultations.

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