

**BOOKING MODES AMONG TRAVELERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the transition booking preferences among travelers during the Covid-19 Pandemic and its relationship to travel agencies' business performance. Using a researcher-made questionnaire and document analysis, the researcher described the status and the reasons for the booking modes by the travelers in terms of Traditional Travel Agency (TTA), Online Travel Agency (OTA), and Do-It-Yourself (DIY). He also described the business performance of the three booking modes. Moreover, the study identified the issues of the travelers on the different booking modes. The respondents include 700 travelers who have traveled for domestic flights in the Philippines within 2019-2020. The period of study was from March 2020 to March 2021.

The results showed that the travelers used the do-it-yourself booking modes most often compared to the traditional travel agency and online travel agent—the travelers' highly considered variables including convenience, confirmation, price, equipment, and availability of options. A significant difference exists between the reasons for the preferred booking modes by the travelers in terms of booking, price, availability of options, collection of information, cyber risks, and data privacy, but no significant difference in terms of convenience and equipment. There was a decline in the business performance of the online travel agency and the traditional travel agency due to the do-it-yourself booking mode as the primary booking option of most travelers.

A significant relationship exists between the booking modes by the travelers and the business performance of the three booking modes.

The study recommends (1) to encourage travelers to utilize the booking modes they found comfortable and safe to use, especially during times of adversaries and they may look into the factors that affect the travelers' preferred booking modes, such as convenience, confirmation, price, equipment, and availability of options; (2) to try out possibilities to strengthen areas that they find weak and on the reasons for the preferred booking modes by the travelers in terms of booking, price, availability of options, collection of information, and cyber risks and data privacy, no significant difference exists in terms of convenience, and equipment, and consider the present adversaries to improve the business performance of the booking mode preferences; and (3) to deliberate the preferred booking modes by the travelers as it affects the business performance and considers the implications brought about by the traveler shifters drawn to the tourism industry.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

Introduction

Travel is a significant aspect of our lives. Over the past decades, travel has continuously evolved as technology emerges (Taylor, 2019). Today, the way of booking travel has three popular modes known as Traditional Travel Agency (T.T.A.), Online Travel Agency (OTA), and Do-it-Yourself (D.I.Y. Booking). To simplify these booking modes, Traditional Travel Agency refers to the brick-and-mortar type, available in-person or physically. On the other hand, Online Travel Agency provides its services exclusively online. It has headquarters but is not available for physical visit. It is only virtually accessible. While Do-It-Yourself, could be a combination of the first 2 mentioned booking modes. This booking is known to be very flexible and easy to modify according to the likings of a traveler. Further, these travel booking modes are all vital components of tourism distribution channels. Thus, each method has its pros and cons.

During pre-pandemic times, the tourism industry was booming. However, it has been highly cataclysmic with the virus outbreak (Liew, 2020). Inarguably, the recent episode of the COVID-19 pandemic caused lockdowns to businesses and has instantly dampened the world economy (Liew, 2020); some also have permanently shut down. It has unveiled the uncertainty of over-reliance on tourism, brutally demonstrating what

happens when the industry supports a whole community, at the cost of any other more sustainable activity, falls (de Bellaigue, 2020).

According to UNWTO (2020), since the COVID-19 outbreak, one of the most affected sectors is the travel and tourism industry. Thus, the postponement and cancellations of major conferences, events, festivals, airline, cruise, and hotel bookings highly affected the global tourism activities that instantly affected the host destination's local economy (Neuburger & Egger, 2021; Skift, 2020). The crisis ensued various measures recommended and imposed by the governments to control the spread of the virus.

Liew (2020) stated, various countries obeyed restrictions to contain the virus outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic with limitations on intercity and international travel. Domestically, there were shutdowns of education institutions and public offices and facilities until further notice. Also, government employees were required to work from home.

Private entities and business establishments were encouraged to implement work from home as well. Also, it is eminent that different countries set different levels of travel restrictions that influenced travel behaviors. It varies from how a region or a country is badly affected. Such travel policies and regulations had grown fear among the majority of the traveling public (Liew, 2020) during the outbreak when there were no sufficient studies about the identified virus.

For example, government authorities at the early stage imposed immediate lockdowns on their borders, allowing only Authorized Persons Outside Residence

(APOR) can travel. Later on, they lowered the restrictions by allowing certain groups of people to travel when there were recent studies made about the COVID-19. This has utilized ideas for rescheduling public transport operations (airline, trains, and buses), taxi operators, and ride-sharing firms to better plan their services. Fallows, Wadhwa, Iyer, Potts, Becker, Crabtree and de Juniac (2020) said, "The easing of travel restrictions has started. Restricted for several months, airlines are reinforcing their summer schedules.

Few countries like Singapore and China have begun allowing essential travel among them, but only for travelers who test negative for Covid-19, utilize a contact-tracing app, and do not stray from their itinerary. Likewise, Iceland will permit travelers, though it plans to test them for the virus at the airport".

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, Sec. Bernadette Romulo-Puyat called shots for a stricter observance of health and safety protocols while conducting leisure travels. She clarified that, "Individuals of all ages may still pursue their travel plans, but needless to say, travelers must practice extra caution and strictly adhere to the rules and guidelines of the LGU of destination" (Department of Tourism-Philippines, 2021).

Nevertheless, despite the strict measures enforced by the authorities, people still have various travel needs ranging from work trips, wellness to pleasure trips. Not to mention trips for buying groceries, medicines, and household necessities. Though pleasure trips are unlikely during a pandemic.

Background of the Study