Marco Robledo / Snigdha Kainthola / Nimit R Chowdhary

Spiritual Tourism and its Contribution to Psychological Wellness in the Post-Pandemic Era

Abstract

The ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic have manifested adversities not just to the physical health of the people but have severe consequences on their psychological well-being. The earlier research bespeaks the ministration of spirituality and religion in the life of a psychologically troubling human as an efficient way of adding to their coping mechanism. In the same vein, the restorative powers of tourism have been widely recognised. The research aims to examine the psychological and emotional consequences of the pandemic and its associated measures, such as confinement, social distance, and mobility restrictions, on the people. Further explores the effect of the pandemic on travel intentions and motivations, with particular attention to tourism for spiritual purposes. The ontology of critical realism was effectively adopted for this qualitative study. Thirty-six travellers were interviewed through purposive sampling to understand the nature of the destination the tourists will opt for after the pandemic and their motivation behind the travel. The authors created a phenomenological connection between a person's well-being and spiritual tours. A gap is filled in the literature on the inclination of tourists towards spirituality and will further lay premises for the discussion on the rise of spiritual travel after calamities.

Keywords: spirituality, pandemic, spiritual tourism, well-being, Covid-19

1. Introduction

We live in liquid times. That is a fundamental characteristic of modern global societies as identified by Zygmunt Baumann (2007, as cited in Palese, 2013). There is nothing solid and secure anymore. Experts and scholars use the acronym VUCA to describe the current environment's volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Heraclitus's river drags us with the violence of a tsunami. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most prominent examples we can draw upon, as it has shown us how unpredictable, complex, and deeply interconnected the world we live in is. A person sneezes in Wuhan, causing a pandemic of planetary proportions—that's chaos theory for dummies.

And it takes its toll. Even before the pandemic, many people suffered escalating levels of stress and depression due to our fast-paced and competitive lifestyle (Balakrishnan Nair & Solanki, 2022). The situation has significantly worsened with the outburst of the COVID-19 disease. The ramifications of the calamity are evident not only in the lives of those directly infected with the disease but are also conspicuously ravaging almost the entire world in one way or another. The mental and emotional damage caused by the situation has not been sufficiently acknowledged. The lock-down, fear of the unknown, loss of loved ones, and the prospects of a devastating crisis of unparalleled magnitude have sparked stress, anxiety, and fear and surely will result in behavioural, social and cultural adjustments not only in the short term but also in the long run that might affect even our travel behaviour.

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Research has shown that attention to spirituality positively affects people and is a powerful way of coping with psychological problems (Kim & Seidlitz, 2002). In the same vein, the restorative powers of tourism have been widely recognised by both the spiritual tourists and the host community (Kainthola et al., 2022; McIntosh & Mansfeld, 2006). Thus, increasing number of tourists opt for health, wellness, transformational, and spiritual tourism to attain balance, escape the monotony, and achieve peace of mind (Batle & Robledo, 2018). This paper wants to study the relationship between tourism and spirituality in the context of the current pandemic according to two broad objectives: (1) Analysing the psychological and emotional consequences of the pandemic and its associated measures, such as confinement, social distance, mobility restrictions, etc. (2) Exploring the effect of the pandemic on travel intentions and motivations, with particular attention to tourism for spiritual purposes.

The ontology of critical realism was adopted for this qualitative study. Thirty-six travellers were interviewed through purposive sampling to inquire about how the pandemic has affected them and their perceptions of a future holiday. The research deconstructs the motivations of travellers after a pandemic like COVID-19. The authors want to study if there is a connection between a catastrophe like this and spiritual tourism. Thus, a gap will be filled in the literature on the inclination of tourists towards spirituality. The research will add value to the current work on the understanding of spirituality and further lay premises for discussing the rise of spiritual travel after calamities.

2. Covid-19 and its impacts

The rapid spread of the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV) has exponentially affected the entire functioning of the world. This highly contagious virus (Gretzel et al., 2020) was first reported on December 31st, 2019, by the Chinese government to the World Health Organization (WHO), which subsequentially declared Co-vid-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Williams & Kayaoglu, 2020). Ever since, it has brought the world to a standstill due to its rapid, unprecedented spread (Shuja et al., 2020). Paradoxically, ease of movement, which was considered a significant asset before the outburst of the coronavirus, turned out to be a primary facilitator of the spread of the disease, resulting in measures employed worldwide to impose restrictions on mobility across territories (Niewiadomski, 2020). Without a vaccine to control the illness and limited medical knowledge to cure it, almost all the countries resorted to a plethora of nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPI) (Hall et al., 2020) like lockdown (home isolation, voluntary/required quarantine), closing the national borders, suspending international transportation and implementing social distancing (Lippi et al., 2020).

There is a scarcity of studies on the psychological impact of the pandemics as the focus tends to lie on the economic, political and sociocultural effects (Harchandani & Shome, 2021; Lončarić et al., 2022; Shuja et al., 2020). However, previous research bespeaks of various psychological morbidities in the directly infected, the frontline professionals and the general public (Bo et al., 2020), like an increase in negative thoughts and poor psychosocial coping responses (Mak et al., 2009; Maunder, 2009). The rapid increase in infected cases has created an atmosphere of uncertainty, resulting in psychological problems such as anxiety, fear, depression, and insomnia (Xiang et al., 2020). Scholars have noted that patients suffering from Covid-19 or who have recovered from the disease experience psychological pressure since they face post-traumatic syndrome, stress, seclusion, and stigma (Wu et al., 2005; Xiang et al., 2020). This may eventually lead to poor response to the treatment. The patients can develop several other mental illnesses like obsessive-compulsive disorder resulting in repeated temperature checks, sanitisation or, in extreme cases, aggression and suicidal tendencies (Li et al., 2020; Shuja et al., 2020).

The relentless and overwhelming flood of the news, sometimes even contradictory, the limited knowledge of the pandemic and the lockdown also lead to the proliferation of apprehensions amongst the general public along with erratic behaviour, feeling of boredom and irritability (Ho et al., 2020). The loss of routine and

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isolation because of social distancing can precipitate psychiatric symptoms in people without mental illness or aggravate the condition of those with pre-existing mental illness. The seriousness of the crisis in contributing towards stress is visible in the series of messages by the World Health Organisation aimed at supporting mental and psychosocial well-being during the outbreak (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). The National Health Commission of China identified the psychological crisis and laid guidelines to educate the public and help the distressed combat the challenging time (Xiang et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the impact of the pandemic on the economy and, in particular, on the tourism and hospitality industry, one of the biggest in the world, has been tremendous. In their press release on March 6th, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) projected a decline in international tourist arrivals of 2 to 3% as compared to the 3-4% growth forecasted earlier (UNWTO, 2020a). On March 26th, the forecast was updated to 22 per cent. The unprecedented nature of the virus has hindered predictions (Romagosa, 2020), and the UNWTO acknowledges that the volatility of the situation makes it difficult to estimate the trend with precision, so any predictions must be interpreted with caution (UNWTO, 2020b). As the tourism and hospitality industry stopped, deliberations on rebooting the system have become the centre of the discussions. Governments and operators are designing measures and crisis management strategies to recover the sector after the pandemic. Together with the desire to "go back to normal" as soon as possible (Brouder et al., 2020), there are environmentally and socially conscious scholars and segments of society that are persuasive towards using this situation as an opportunity to redefine tourism (Strielkowski, 2020). They argue that the ramifications of the crisis are very far-reaching and that there are other even more severe crises on the horizon, starting with the environmental concerns, that could be even more devastating, so it is imperative to change our socio-economic structure, reduce the patterns of consumption, and alter other multiple dimensions of our lives, including tourism.

3. Spirituality and the pandemic

There is considerable support for the argument that spirituality, religion, and faith succour many people to go through trauma (Boswell et al., 2006; Perry et al., 2007; Weaver et al., 2003). Spirituality helps to find answers to questions that logic and science cannot reckon with (Weaver et al., 1996) and is believed to render psychological benefits by inculcating positive emotions like hope, courage, and peace.

While spirituality is a subjective and complex construct (Zahra, 2006), the literature lists its prominent characteristics (Kainthola et al., 2021). Spirituality is characterised by a continuous search for meaning (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Willson et al., 2013), interconnectedness (Eckersley, 2002), and identity formation (Aghazadeh, 2018; Norman, 2012). Spirituality is also believed to be a way to connect with a higher being (Little & Schmidt, 2006). Delgado (2005)considered spirituality a quality acquired through cultural and societal conditioning intermingled with faith in the quest for self-actualisation, existential awareness, and connection with others, consequently providing inner peace and well-being. Furthermore, spiritual benefits are multifaceted and are not only confined to the change in emotions and psyche of a person. Also, spirituality and knowledge combined work as a deterrent in the spread of diseases collaborating with religious and spiritual values to guard oneself against unsolicited comportment coherently reducing the risk of contamination (Rohman et al., 2019).

The complementary triangular relationship between mental stress, spirituality, and tourism is implied by the benefits they render to each other. Several studies have demonstrated the rewards spirituality bestows upon the psychological and physical health of the people (Daniel, 2015; McClintock et al., 2019), and several pieces of research have successfully exhibited the benefits of tourism in aiding the pursuit of spirituality (Ambrož & Ovsenik, 2011). Tourism provides opportunities to effectively search for existential meaning (Robledo & Batle, 2015; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005) and constructively support the drive of humans to fulfil their

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material and spiritual needs (Aghazadeh, 2018) and strive towards spiritual betterment (Singleton, 2017). Tourism is strongly linked to spirituality (Ambrož & Ovsenik, 2011) because of its innate quality to provide an interlude of time, and a spatial break from everyday life helps the quest for spirituality (Cheer et al., 2017).

Several scholars support that spiritual tourism can lead to self-development (Desforges, 2000; Noy, 2004), transformation (Robledo, 2015; Voigt et al., 2011), purgative and exorcising experiences (Caton, 2015; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007), and fighting against self-doubt, emptiness, grief, and trauma (Boswell et al., 2006; Carlozzi et al., 2010). Thus, spiritual tourism is a conscious attempt of a tourist to use a destination other than his home to strive for spiritual growth (Norman, 2004) and improved quality of life (Nicolaides & Grobler, 2017).

Therefore, it is no surprise that many people travel for spiritual reasons (Sharpley, 2016). The motivation to travel to a destination often involves a person's search for peace and purpose and escape the stress of life in pursuit of balance (Norman, 2012). This is doubly mirrored during times of crisis when the cloud of uncertainty results in an increased level of stress, depression, and anxiety, and a growing emotion of "weltschmerz"[1] due to the dissatisfaction with the situation, and an ever-increasing feeling of the injustice of life (Batle & Robledo, 2018) that urges people to want to break with it all.

It is a plausible assumption that the pandemic might trigger the need for spiritual and religious travel. The feeling of gratitude for surviving the catastrophe, the urge to escape the monotony of life, and the need to change the environment and pursue happiness will work in favour of spiritual travel.

4. Methodology

A qualitative research method based on semi-structured interviews was employed to study the connection between a catastrophe like this and spiritual tourism. The ontology of critical realism was adopted in the process of interviewing and analysis. Critical realism acknowledges multiple perspectives of both the respondents and the researchers and demands that the researcher conduct the research process with a 'critical' approach (Platenkamp & Botterill, 2013). It embraces the view that humans reside in a social context where environmental factors impact their experiences and understandings, which require the researcher to analyse the 'real' in the data (Downward & Mearman, 2004).

4.1. Data collection

The participants in this study were all members of the Art of Living (AOL) community. Founded in 1981 by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Art of Living is a non-profit and humanitarian organisation in over 155 countries. AOL's discourse is about spiritual well-being (Jacobs, 2015). As stated on the official website of Art of Living, it is more of a movement, a philosophy of living that encourages individuals to live life to the fullest. It proudly aims to promote a stress-free mind and a society void of violence to pave the way for increasing world peace. Its diverse community embraces people from different backgrounds and religious beliefs. The organisation's foundation is cemented in the work of its volunteers, which account for most of the staff. The organisation offers many humanitarian, social service, and training programs to eliminate stress and provide self-development based on breathing techniques called Sudarshan Kriya, yoga, and meditation (Pandya, 2016). Sudarshan Kriya forms an integral part of AOL courses.

AOL was chosen because its members have a deep interest in spirituality, and the dedication towards spiritual well-being is deeply engrained in their lifestyle. Thus, they might be more inclined towards spiritual tourism.

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[1] Weltschmerz is a German word that can be literally translated as world-pain. Originally it was coined by the German Romantic writer Jean Paul (1763-1825), and can be defined as the psychological pain caused by the sadness that can be suffered when it is understood that own suffering is caused by the cruelty of the world and its circumstances.

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A total of 36 people were interviewed through purposive and further snowball sampling (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) from May to August 2020. Initially, six members of the Art of Living (AOL) were identified, and they referred to other members for the interview. The sampling structure provided the authors with a homogenous data set of respondents from India of different age groups suitable for a practical analysis (Guest et al., 2006). There were 16 female and 20 male interviewees, with four respondents from the age group of 16 to 24, 20 from the age group of 25 to 40, 8 from 41 to 64, and the remaining 4 were 65 years and above. The small sample size is appropriate for the qualitative study and aided data collection (Byrne, 2001).

Twenty-two semi-structured questions were asked to the respondents via video and phone calls. The interview questions were open-ended (Saunders et al., 2009) in a discussion-like realistic manner (Griffee, 2005), allowing nuanced significant responses. The interviews stopped when the saturation was achieved and lasted, on average, around 40 minutes. The interviews, primarily in English, were recorded with the due permission of the respondents. Subsequently, they were translated verbatim. The research methodology included a complete member check, in which participants provided feedback by reviewing and confirming the accuracy of the transcripts, with the possibility of adding comments wherever necessary (Birt et al., 2016).

The respondents were asked questions about their current psychological state and the pandemic's effect on them. The questions aimed to understand if the surge in emotional imbalance amongst people during the challenging times of COVID-19 resulted in a burgeoning number of tourists seeking well-being in spirituality. The second part of the questionnaire focused on understanding the nature of the destination the tourists will opt for after the pandemic and their motivation behind the travel.

4.2. Data analysis

The authors adopted thematic analysis to examine the data as it provided an objective set for investigating idiosyncratic experiences (Percy et al., 2015). Thematic analysis is considered the most efficient tool in interpreting written texts, especially interview transcripts (Hannam & Knox, 2005; Walters, 2016). The process helps unravel the respondents' innate cultural meanings and encounters (Walters, 2016). It provides meaning to the interviewees' words and helps efficiently study the data set. Scholars like Holloway and Todres (2003) explained that the 'thematising meanings' are among the few shared generic skills across the qualitative analysis.

The text was coded after collecting and transcribing the data with multiple readings. The data analysis was done with the help of Nvivo software 12. Despite being laborious (Sotiriadou et al., 2014), the application's use positively contributes to the efficiency of the analyses by increasing precision and thoroughness (Alhojailan, 2012). Using qualitative data analysis tools adds to the veracity of the process. During the thematic analysis, themes were identified, and sub-themes were coded. The potential meanings were explored and compared with each other. The relationships between the codes were evaluated, patterns recognised, commonalities studied, and more prominent themes identified (Alhojailan, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017; Walters, 2016) on both semantic and latent levels (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The developed themes were then studied and evaluated regarding the existing knowledge of spirituality, spiritual tourism and spiritual well-being before formalising any proposed constructs (Schutt & Chambliss, 2013). The authors created a phenomenological connection between a person's well-being and spiritual tours.

5. Findings

The qualitative data analysis software NVivo was used for analysing the data. Queries like word frequency, word tree, text search, cloud tags, and a thematic and mind map were generated and thoroughly researched. The interviews were phenomenologically analysed, acknowledging that individuals are bound to have different experiences and consciousness on the subject. Though the respondents are nationals from India, some of the findings can be suggestive of a global trend.

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5.1. Mental state

The paper's first objective was to analyse the mental state of the respondents and the factors triggering their psychological reactions. The thematic analysis revealed that the sudden announcement of the initial lockdown rendered people confused and anxious. This unprecedented event brought people into unfamiliar territory, and they found it difficult to cope with the abrupt inescapable change in lifestyle. Besides, the uncertainty on the professional front and loss of touch with people due to social distancing and the fear of the disease triggered several negative emotions. The people already suffering from physical and psychological diseases found the situation even more challenging. To understand the mental state of the respondents, the most prominent question asked was, 'If you have to define your mental state in five words during lockdown, what would they be?' The most used word was bored, followed by confused, tired, worried, fearful, anxious, and stressed. Approximately 94.4 per cent of the terms had a negative connotation attached to them. However, the use of positive comments was not completely missing. Words like grateful (in the 8th position), content, hopeful and blessed were used by around 5.5% of the interviewees, and at least one negative word. These respondents reflected the feeling of gratitude towards their faith, God, and destiny for blessing them with a roof over their heads, an incoming salary in their bank account, and the support of their families.

Figure 1
The word cloud for the mental state of the respondents

The top reasons for stress among the respondents were the loss of a job or fear of losing their livelihood, pending EMIs and rents, domestic violence, and uncertainty. Further, the constant use of social media and browsing through stories of others' alleged productive routines developed a sense of self-created pressure on the respondents. Approximately 44.4 per cent of the interviewees experienced a virtual competition in the initial days of the lockdown. They felt unsaid coercion to bring valuable something out of their day. Around 61.1 per cent of the respondents talked about their struggles to find purpose in life. The thrust from the pandemic left a large number of people evaluating their lifestyle, their life choices, and their career path. The pandemic persuaded them towards introspection. Additionally, the monotonous lifestyle resulted in an existential crisis.

> *"The stress is real, and it is here to stay for a considerable time. Anyone who says they are finding the 'new normal' normal is a blessed soul; unfortunately, I am not. I am struggling. I am*

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extensively cooking and not eating. I am compulsively shopping and not using the products. On some days, the lows are very low, and the highs come from small little things that did not matter much."

(Respondent 19)

Nonetheless, 100% of the respondents supported the lockdown, which, in their view, is the most appropriate action that can break the chain of infection and slow down the spread of the virus. There is no doubt that the psychology of a person is so complex that they find it hard to explain, express and understand. However, during the interview, the authors felt that the interviewees liked sharing about their current mental state and wanted to reply at length, and their tone revealed a sense of excitement throughout the interview. Around 77.7 per cent of the respondents repeatedly mentioned that the discussion changed their routine and that they were helping bring joy to their lives.

The data set revealed that stress and anxiety led them, at times, towards overeating, erratic sleeping patterns, nail-biting, excessive shopping, and overthinking. People with a history of mental ailments found it challenging to connect with a doctor or find help and witnessed a deterioration in their condition. This rise in psychological morbidities, like increased negative thoughts, results from poor psychosocial coping responses (Mak et al., 2009; Maunder, 2009; Rajkumar, 2020).

"Spirituality has helped me plenty with my negative thoughts. But I could not accept in front of my friends that I had trouble sleeping or was suffering from clinical anxiety. They will not take me seriously and dismiss me as a crybaby. Trust me; I have tried."

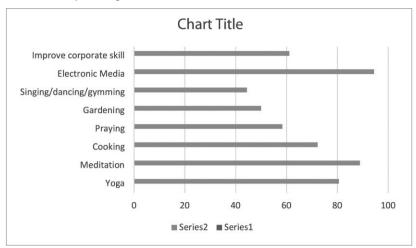*(Respondent 27)*

5.2. Coping mechanism

The effects of Covid-19 on a person's psyche can be unpleasant and long-lasting, which requires effective coping techniques and, in severe cases, immediate psychiatric help to avoid a life-threatening situation for the affected person. The analysis demonstrated that though the respondents had strong feelings of boredom and stress, they were continuously striving to find ways to accept their new reality. The data set revealed that, during the pandemic, the most significant challenges were monotony, boredom, and economic pressure. It was difficult to keep themselves calm and de-stressed. The shift from the previous hectic dynamic routines to the mandatory sedentary lifestyle with limited ways of destressing was irrefragable and unbidden.

"The current state of mind is confused. Though I am grateful to God that I still have my job, I also fear many things. I am scared I might catch the disease and, even worse, lose my job. No doubt I am overthinking on these lines, but you see, I have much spare time in my hand now that I am losing sleep and appetite."

(Respondent 14)

One hundred per cent of the respondents looked for ways to keep themselves occupied and increasingly engaged in constructive activities. The respondents revealed that over the past few months of the lockdown, they experimented with several hobbies, worked on enhancing their professional skills and also tried to find perspective in life. The desire to keep a busy schedule often came from the necessity of steering away from negative thoughts and avoiding "feeling the feelings". The coping mechanism to find a way to escape from negative thoughts and work towards better mental health involves multiple activities in the process (Liang et al., 2020). Seventy-five per cent of the respondents searched for purpose and happiness through their actions.

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Figure 2
Activities to cope during lockdown

Around 91.6 per cent said they spend most of their time on electronic media like Instagram, TikTok, Youtube, and Netflix. The trend was even more acute in the respondents below the age of 65 years. It provided them with a different reality and gave them a much-required break. Undoubtedly excess of everything is terrible, and the binging of online shows proved for some to be more disturbing than soothing. Approximately 88.8 per cent of the interviewees found meditation effective in destressing, allowing them a fresh perspective on life. Around 12 per cent of the 89 per cent felt it brought them close to nature and the Almighty. Along similar lines, approximately 80.5 per cent engaged in yoga. Not only did it clear their mind, but it was also preferred for physical fitness. It is important to remark that in most cases, these kinds of activities were already a part of their daily routines, and, with the pandemic, they had more time and energy to devote to the cause of spirituality, self-development, and introspection. Around 58.3 per cent worked towards adding skills to their resume to gain a competitive edge in their career.

> *"Engaging in meditation and yoga helped me gain perspective in life. My thoughts were clearer, and it felt as if I was more aware of my surroundings. It's like a medication without any side effects, which must be taught in school. It renders strength and vision."*
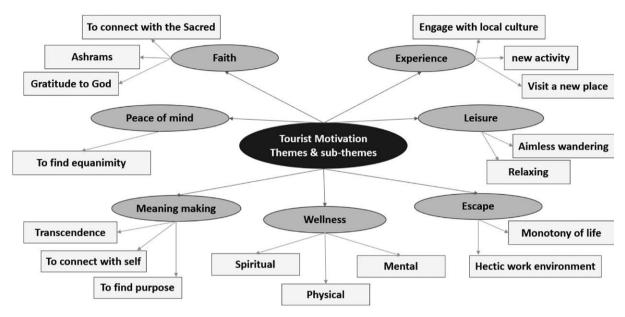>
> *(Respondent 31)*

The nature of the coping activities employed by the interviewees suggests a combination of entertainment and spiritual activities. Therefore, the data both support the hedonic viewpoint that highlights the elements of happiness, positivity, low negative affect, and content with life as primary factors for well-being (Dodge et al., 2012) and the eudemonic tradition of describing wellbeing in lines of positive psychological functioning and human growth so that problematic yet rewarding events can help people to attain psychological wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012). The authors find that the activities engaged by the respondents during the lockdown period were in sync with the six determining factors of well-being recognised by Ryff and Keyes, (1995), namely self-acceptance, autonomy, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relationships and personal growth.

5.3. Tourist motivation

The examination of the data revealed seven themes of motivation for travel: escape, experience, leisure, meaning-making projects, the pursuit of happiness, wellness, and faith. These seven themes can be grouped into two general categories: The first one, which we have labelled spiritual, includes three themes, namely confidence,

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peace and meaning-making. The second category includes more mundane and material motivations referring to the themes of experience, leisure, and escape. The remaining wellness can be classified between the broad spiritual and hedonic motivations categories. Escape was identified unanimously as the main objective of travel after Covid-19 for all respondents. While escaping is an intrinsic motivation for nearly all types of tourism (Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987), it often has other intentions. Often, multiple aims in a traveller's head cannot be categorised into just one objective (Rinschede, 1992).

Figure 3
Thematic map for tourist motivations post Covid-19

Nearly 66.6 per cent of the respondents wanted to travel for experience. Some interviewees felt that "you only live once" and were concerned about spending the good years of their life confined at home while there is so much out there that they have not yet witnessed.

> "I'll travel to get perspective. I'll travel for my peace of mind, surely. I am tired of staying in the same room in front of my laptop, working and simultaneously listening to the news. I want rejuvenation and escape."

> *(Respondent 5)*

The lockdown allowed much time for reflection. Several people indulged in conscious or unconscious retrospection and introspection. As a result, approximately 61.1 per cent and 58.3 per cent of the respondents said they desire to travel to find meaning in life and look for happiness, respectively. Nearly 44.4 per cent of the respondents said they would travel for faith and to express gratitude towards God for letting them survive this life-threatening disease. Mostly per Hindu tradition, around 22.2 per cent of the interviewees has vowed to take a pilgrimage to a holy land if they and their family come through the hale and hearty pandemic. Since the lockdown has affected the psychological and physical health of the people, approximately 66.6 per cent of the respondents displayed a desire to travel for wellness. They perceive spa resorts as a safe place to detox and stay rather than wandering around amidst crowds. While having a solid objective for the trip is a fruitful idea, around 72.2 per cent of the travellers said they would travel without any aim. Just wander, relax and enjoy the moment without thinking about anything else.

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"The current situation is exhausting. I would love to see a beautiful sunset near a quiet beach sipping on my coconut water. I crave a worry-free time amidst the beauty of Mother Earth."

(Respondent 3)

It was clear that psychological stress profoundly influenced the motivations to travel participants went through during the pandemic. The emotional imbalance they experienced urged them to make choices that contributed to their overall well-being. Figure 5 shows the Likert scale of the kind of tourism the respondents are most likely to engage in. The respondents popularly selected travel driven by the search for peace, tranquillity, the pursuit of happiness and meaning-making projects. Around 72.2 per cent strongly agree, and an additional 8.3 per cent agree to travel after Covid-19 for spirituality. A strong desire to travel away from the city, amidst nature, to an available land was visible in the data set. Around 50 per cent of respondents strongly agree, and 22.22 per cent agree to most likely be travelling to their hometown. An inclination towards travelling for religious purposes was also expressed by around 58 per cent of interviewees. The respondents that demonstrated a slant towards business tours were the ones whose livelihood depends significantly on travelling, and Covid-19 has just disrupted that flow.
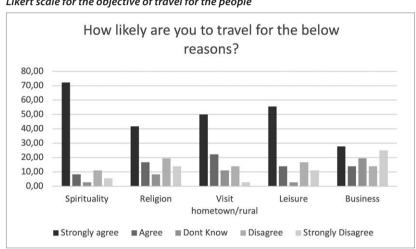
Figure 4
Likert scale for the objective of travel for the people

The phenomenological analysis revealed that the respondents are likely to travel for spiritual purposes to alleviate the effects of the pandemic on their psyches. The interviewees acknowledged spiritual travel as an ideal way to enable overall well-being, which is the need of the hour. This complies with the definition of well-being proposed by Dodge et al. in 2012. The study argues that well-being is attained when people have the "psychological, social and physical resources" required to deal with the "psychological, social and/or physical challenge". The equilibrium is disrupted when the challenges are more than the resources of the individual. Therefore, people delve into ways to achieve overall well-being, and spiritual tourism is one example (Ashton, 2018; Fisher et al., 2000; Gomez & Fisher, 2003). The challenging yet rewarding life events help people, often in the long run, to attain psychological well-being.

"Wellbeing is about the overall fitness of a person. A sound mind and body lead to the good spiritual health of a person. Spirituality is one of the most effective platforms to achieve a good quality of life and comprehensive development. Being with self, meditating and praying has given me the medication to fight my ailing thoughts."

(Respondent 33)

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6. Implications for destination and tourism organizations

The outcomes of any pandemic are bound to leave changes in the psychology of the people and might even culminate in a significant difference in lifestyle (Prideaux et al., 2020; Thombs et al., 2020). The coronavirus and the resultant measures to restrict its spread have brought the whole world into a mandatory new normal.

> *"It is like one minute our lives were normal, and suddenly a gigantic storm destroyed the basic pillars of our existence. I am clueless. Sitting around the house all day often gets depressing just relying on video calls to connect with family and friends."*

> *(Respondent 8)*

Changes in the psyche of the people bring changes in their choices. The Covid-19 crisis is causing far-reaching transformations in people of all ages. In fact, "pandemia" is a term beginning to be used by sociologists, anthropologists and consultants. It does not refer to the generation that has been or will be born in this phase of social transition and economic crisis triggered by the pandemic (for which Generation C -C for Covid- seems to be the most used). Instead, it refers to the generation living the current pandemic, facing the complex situations that it has provoked and transforming their lives, work, relationships, priorities, and philosophy of life to adapt to a new reality they did not imagine. Pandemia is a trans-generational label because it is not just one generation experiencing the pandemic and the transformations it causes; it is people of all ages living this historical moment, this unknown situation that might represent a turning point in history.

In the face of these circumstances, it is imperative to form sound management policies and marketing strategies that comply with the needs and wants of these pandemics. Service quality literature has long established that consumers evaluate service providers along dimensions, which are groupings of criteria, and those dimensions differ in importance (Robledo, 2001). In this study, broadly, eight factors were identified that the tourists would consider while selecting a destination, the most important being security. Safety is a dimension that, usually, is not among the most critical determinants of perceived quality (Berry et al., 1985) because it works as a hygiene factor, meaning that when it is present, it does not increase the perception of quality. However, when it is absent, there is a perception of bad quality. Under the current circumstances, safety is the most critical dimension of selecting and evaluating a destination. Words like sanitisers, sanitation, hygiene, and cleanliness were repeatedly used in the interviews as necessary criteria for around 89 per cent of the respondents while opting for a place. Besides, maintaining sanitation and hygiene is expected to be tangible; that is, it must be visible to the people. Destinations know that and include "safe corridors" in their marketing messages.

The problem is that, in many cases, those terms were not coupled with enough measures. Increasing the population density in the middle of a pandemic needs to be done carefully, and many destinations rushed to do that without providing the necessary security mechanisms. In the final analysis, that is one of the reasons the second wave of the pandemic has started earlier and more acutely in some destinations than in others. We can, for example, compare the case of Italy, which demanded security measures for incoming travellers and had necessary restrictions for bars and restaurants, such as PCRs, or Spain, which did not. Even in the latter's case, when stricter measures, such as the mandatory use of masks, were imposed to curb the rapid increase in contagion, the hospitality sector openly opposed them. The result is that Spain went to lead the coronavirus statistics in Europe and that the tourism season ended abruptly at the beginning of September when most countries imposed restrictions on travelling to Spain. One of the lessons of this pandemic is that you cannot put the economy before health. When this is done, the health problems cause even worse economic consequences.

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Also, nearly 78 and 75 per cent of the respondents paid attention to the number of active corona cases and destination management. Naturally, goals with minimum previous and present Corona cases were preferred. Also, effective management was considered a sound way of protecting tourists from diseases and providing them with enhanced experiences.

Other data reflect the preference of the interviewees for nature destinations that allow them to be outdoors as much as possible after a challenging period of lockdown and feel safe from contagion. Around 89 per cent of the respondents divulged the importance of natural beauty for the destination, and nearly 86 per cent and 81 per cent of them said it must be away from the city and amidst greenery, respectively. Around 69 per cent of respondents said they would conduct thorough research before their travel. Finally, nearly 58 per cent of the people considered the budget a critical concern.
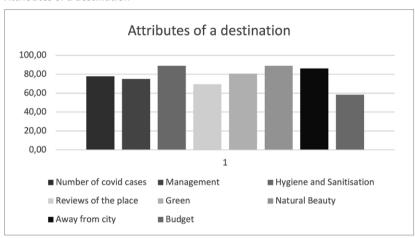
Figure 5
Attributes of a destination

7. Conclusions

Although tourism has been one of the industries most affected by the pandemic, and the numbers of travellers are immensely lower than those of a regular season, it is no less surprising that there have been so many tourists willing to enjoy their summer holidays as soon as the borders opened. The unbridled urge to travel seems to be one of the consequences of the coronavirus after such a long period of confinement. The trend is supported by different authors that refer to it as "revenge travel" (Handu, 2020; Shadel, 2020). It is a psychological phenomenon like compulsive shopping, a form of self-indulgence after so much sacrifice. China has pioneered the phenomenon (Kuo, 2020), with a 1,500% increase in hotel reservations. However, by the results obtained in this article, one of the prerequisites is that these places are safe and have been able to deal positively with the pandemic.

It is undoubtedly, good news for an industry so threatened by this crisis that tourism has become such a resilient and firmly established activity that it is an inescapable part of the lifestyle of affluent people. But why such a solid motivation to go on holiday? One might have expected greater caution and reluctance to travel with a dangerous virus still in circulation and no straightforward remedy to fight against it. The needs met by tourism are very varied, but they are all behind safety in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. There is no doubt that the safety messages in destination advertising have helped to reassure consumers. But, as has been shown since then, the promises of security of many leading destinations were more propaganda than reality, so the effectiveness of these messages has been due more to a predisposition to believe in them than to the guarantees they offered. As Cohen (1979) points out, tourism is one of the more critical escape mechanisms

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society offers from our lives pressures. After the confinement, people strongly desire to return to normality and need to forget about the lockdown and enjoy the pleasures of life again. The irresponsible behaviour of many tourists (and locals) who broke all the safety rules imposed by the authorities, especially in their nightlife, is a sign of this desire for escapism. Nor should we forget that there is a marginal, but by no means negligible, part of the population that opposes the control measures imposed by the authorities and believes that we are not in a pandemic.

But people cannot escape eternally, and the most conscious and inquiring individuals can use tourism to address existential problems to seek and eventually discover their true selves and find liberation. According to Eliade, humans must journey to the centre to experience renewal and regeneration. As Moore accurately points out, when the Muslim walks this pilgrimage to Mecca and circumvallates the Ka'ba, he is going on a journey to the centre. That happened until the modern era, but then we lost those journeys to the centre. They were substituted for trips to the outside, journeys designed just to escape. But those substitutes are insufficient, and we need journeys to locate our centre, especially in these difficult times. Existential emptiness, nihilism, and even despair, understood as a structural crisis of meaning, can be emotional and mental reactions to a situation as extreme and unknown as the pandemic we are experiencing. As this paper has proven, spiritual tourism is very present in the list of activities that the persons interviewed wish to undertake after the confinement to help them alleviate or overcome some of the consequences of this crisis.

On the other hand, we should not forget that tourism has been one of the leading agents responsible for spreading the virus. "Zero patients" in every single country initially. Tourism plays a significant role in the spread of the virus. For this reason, it takes a new mindset to think about tourism in the post-coronavirus era.

It is only clear that the tourism industry is in for a shock as a result of the pandemic that will condemn it to a profound transformation. It is urgent to rescue a sector synonymous with human development in the last 70 years (one in ten people on the planet, according to UN data, live from tourism), but it is also urgent to rescue the earth and its inhabitants. To design it in a (more) The pandemic that we are suffering can be understood as a symptom of the excesses of globalization and of everything that we are doing wrong in our relationship with the planet, the people and the animals, and tourism is not an exception. Mass tourism and over-tourism have become a severe problems for many destinations, such as Machu Picchu, Venice, New Orleans, and the Balearic. WTO admitted that more than 5% of global CO_2 emissions are generated by tourist transport and are expected to continue to increase. The UN environmental offices say that if tourism had followed the path truncated by Covid, by 2050, it would spend 154% more energy, generate 131% more emissions, spend 152% more water and carry 251% more solid waste.

Several authors believe this parenthesis opened by Covid to be an excellent opportunity for rebooting the industry in a (more) sustainable, responsible, and equitable way (Muhammad, et al., 2020; Seraphin & Seraphin, 2020; Wu & McGoogan, 2020). In sum, we need more responsible and thoughtful forms of tourism. The innate characteristic of a pandemic to simultaneously work as a destroyer and a teacher (Tomes, 2010) might be a catalyst to address these changes before it is too late.

> *"Are you looking at the positives happening in the world with humans confined in their houses?*
> *Karma tells us we must be more cautious and respect nature while using our natural resources."*
>
> *(Respondent 21)*

Spiritual tourism considers every place and person sacred and envisages the experience of travelling with mindfulness and reverence. We are not saying that spiritual tourism should be the only kind of tourism in the future, but the new mindset and values that it embraces should be those of the tourism of the future. A new consciousness is the only thing that can prevent this species from amusing itself to death.

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