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Choosing the Right Recovery Marketing Strategies for Future Tourism Crises: Re-Attracting Tourists in the Post-COVID-19 Era

Abstract

Over the years 2020-2022, as more and more countries recover gradually from the COVID-19 pandemic, the question arises as to which image repair strategy marketers will choose to re-attract tourists anew. Choosing the right image repair strategy is a topic that has been neglected so far. The COVID-19 tourism crisis is an opportunity to bridge this theoretical gap, as several surveys in assorted countries asked potential consumers about their future travel plans. Analyzing these surveys provided a valuable look into the selection process of recovery marketing strategies. Combining twenty recovery marketing strategies used in past crises with recent surveys examining planned consumer behavior in the post-COVID-19 era will allow us to recommend the most valuable strategies to be adopted by DMOs. Out of the twenty recovery marketing strategies, we discovered six image repair strategies for the post-COVID-19 era. These strategies were found suitable according to three criteria: the practicality of implementing the strategy considering the COVID-19 crisis' characteristics, proof of the strategy's effectiveness in previous crises, and the results of surveys regarding future tourism consumption in the post-COVID-19 era. In addition to the study's theoretical contributions, its findings can also be helpful for practitioners.

Keywords: COVID-19, tourism crisis, recovery strategies, destination marketing, tourist behavior surveys

1. Introduction

Combating destinations' negative images following crises is not new for tourism marketers and decision-makers. Previous studies on image repair and recovery marketing strategies, most of them under the theoretical fields of "recovery marketing" and "image repair", offer various strategies for destinations that have experienced a crisis (Mair et al., 2016; Ketter, 2016; Beirman & Van Walbeek, 2011; Avraham & Ketter, 2008). As many NTBs (National Tourism Boards) and DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations) worldwide are eager to be attractive to tourists again, they will presumably seek recovery marketing and image repair strategies that can help them soon. The natural step for marketers is to rely on twenty recovery marketing strategies used during previous tourism crises (Orchiston & Higham, 2016; Mair et al., 2016; Walters & Mair, 2012; Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Armstrong & Ritchie, 2008; Carlsen & Hughes, 2008; Johnson Tew et al., 2008; Ritchie et al., 2004; Beirman, 2003). However, the question arises: which image repair strategies should marketers choose to bring back tourists? The literature dealing with the issue of selecting an image repair strategy after a crisis is weak. Therefore, marketers do not have much data to rely on (Avraham, 2015). However, it seems that a collection of surveys conducted by academics around the world in 2020-2022 to identify the concerns of potential tourists and predict their travel behavior presents a rare opportunity that can help marketers decide which strategy to choose to bring back tourists (Ram et al., 2022; Terzić et al., 2022; Ivanova et al.,

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2021; Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020, 2022; Shamshiripour et al., 2020; Chebli & Ben Said, 2020; Madubuike, 2020).

By relying on current tourism behavior surveys conducted in 2020-2022, this study aims to discuss possible future recovery marketing strategies that NTBs and DMOs can adopt to bring back tourists in the post-COVID-19 era. Six strategies appear to be the best fit for what potential tourists want. These are engaging celebrities, addressing tourist concerns and fears, using patriotic and national feelings, initiating events, devising niche tourism, and creating affinities with foreign audiences. The theoretical contribution of this paper is found in developing criteria for better selection of the right image repair strategy for future crises. As mentioned above, this theoretical underpinning stems from the rare combination of consumer research concerning tourist behavior and studies dealing with destination recovery marketing that this study offers. In addition, there is also an essential contribution for practitioners.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Tourism and crises

While the concept of crisis in the tourism industry is well known, crisis management research is generally considered to have started in the 1980s (Novelli et al., 2018). Since then, researchers have analyzed the economic and financial impacts of crises, the risk perception of various audiences (Duan et al., 2022; Wut et al., 2021), possible recovery marketing (Wut et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Mair et al., 2016; Chacko & Marcell, 2013; Beirman, 2003), as well as resilience, vulnerability (Liu & Pratt, 2017), and coping strategies (Beirman, 2003; Mansfeld, 1999). In the field of coping strategies, previous research dealt mainly with the responses of officials and marketers to tourism crises. These responses have included activities related to the running and managing of the crisis (Beirman & Van Walbeek, 2011; Beirman, 2003), as well as the management of the destination image and recovery marketing (Avraham, 2021a; Avraham, 2021b; Chen et al., 2021; Avraham, 2020; Chacko & Marcell, 2013; Walters & Mair, 2012; Beirman, 2003).

Chacko and Marcell (2013) divide the studies on disasters and tourism crisis management into two groups. In the first group, studies specialize in case studies of certain crisis events and their effect on destinations or tourist behaviors. The second group comprises more generalized studies that deal with broader perspectives, such as policy development and crisis management modelling (Chacko & Marcell, 2013). This division can also be applied to crisis communication and image repair. On the one hand, we can find studies dealing with how a specific destination combated and repaired its image during a tourism crisis and how potential consumers reacted to the crisis (Duan et al., 2022; Wut et al., 2021; Rittichainuwat et al., 2020; Chacko & Marcell, 2013; Walters, & Mair, 2012; Avraham, 2009). There are also studies which analyze many case studies more broadly and attempt to construct models and theories concerning the behavior of destination officials as they combat the image crisis (Avraham, 2021a; Avraham, 2020; Mair et al., 2016; Beirman & Van Walbeek, 2011; Beirman, 2003)

2.2. Destination recovery marketing and image repair strategies

Bad press from a crisis often damages the destination's public image and causes potential tourists to reconsider. A prime example is a place associated with risk and lack of safety in the public's mind (Mair et al., 2016; Walters & Mair, 2012). After the crisis has passed, it is often difficult for the destination's officials and marketers to correct the negative image of the place created among the public (Walters & Mair, 2012). This challenge has been addressed over the past two decades by studies in the fields of "image repair theory" and "recovery marketing" research that mainly focus on strategies to correct a destination's image during or after a crisis (Avraham, 2021b; Avraham, 2020). The theory of image repair includes several models (Coombs & Holladay, 2010), and according to Benoit (2015), it centers "exclusively on messages designed to improve

images tarnished by criticism and suspicion” (p. 3). Stocker (1997), for example, proposes a basic response strategy containing the following steps: expression of regret, action to resolve the situation, ensuring that the problem will not recur, and, if necessary, an offer of restitution to the injured parties. Walters and Mair (2012) present nine frequently used strategies for recovery marketing: curiosity enhancement, solidarity messages, celebrity endorsements, confidence restoration, misperception change, community readiness, short-term discounts, guest/visitor testimonials, business as usual, as well as the spin of unsafe images into assets.

Beirman and Van Walbeek (2011) describe a ten-step recovery process involving marketing strategies. Among the examples they elucidate are “being open for business,” presenting the facts, creating complementary alliances (e.g., cooperation between hotels and airlines), restoring confidence, publicizing the positive, and reimagining both businesses and the destination. In any event, most of the strategies presented in the literature are more suitable for sudden image crises (such as a single earthquake or terror attack) and less for prolonged image crises (such as extended violent conflict or a high crime rate) (Rittichainuwat et al., 2020; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). According to Chen et al. (2021) and Gretzel et al. (2020), most of the existing models for combating tourism crises in general are less relevant to the prolonged crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. The multi-step model for altering place image

Avraham and Ketter (2008) offer a model called “The multi-step model for altering place image” (Figure 1) to deal with negative place images. The model provides twenty image repair strategies divided into three groups, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
List of existing image repair strategies

Source-focused strategies	Message strategies	Audience-focused strategies
1. Media cooperation and media relations Cooperation with the free foreign media by conducting press conferences, sending press releases, and responding to journalists during a crisis.	4. Ignoring the crisis Here, destination marketers behave as if there had been no crisis or damage.	17. Association with well-known brands and celebrities Associate the destination with familiar brands, celebrities, or cultural symbols familiar to the target audiences.
2. Complaining, threatening, and applying pressure on the media Pressure on certain media outlets to adjust what they perceive to be negative coverage. Arrested journalists, closed “unsympathetic” media outlets, blocked the media, blamed the media for distorted coverage, and questioned the media’s credibility.	5. “Business as usual” Destination managers claim that nothing serious has occurred or that the crisis is over and “we are back to the old routine”.	18. Emphasis on similarities, resemblances, and relevance to specific audiences Connect a place and its values to a specific, appreciative target audience.
3. Replacing the traditional media and finding alternatives The main idea of the third type of source strategy is the quest for alternatives to traditional media. Using this strategy, decision-makers aim to bypass the conventional foreign media to reach their target audience directly. The other options can be personal testimony, prompting films and TV series in the destination, hosting public opinion leaders, and using the Internet as an alternative source.	6. Mitigating, limiting, or reducing the scale of the crisis Place marketers pretend that the crisis’s damage was minor, limited, or irrelevant to the target audience.	19. Changing the target audience / finding new niches/ niche tourism There are potential audiences that know less about a crisis and are less afraid of it or less concerned by the events reported.
	7. Acknowledging the negative image Acknowledging the negative image and assuring a better future and the beginning of “the new era”.	20. Using patriotic sentiment and personal/national heritage In times of major crises, many local citizens are suddenly flooded with feelings of patriotism and nationalism, and marketers can use these feelings to encourage them to travel and “save the tourism industry”.
	8. Sending an opposite message Countering the negative message by sending opposite messages.	

Table 1 (continued)

	9. Tackling the crisis Sending information dealing with handling the crisis's cause or giving information on corrections made to prevent similar crises.	
	10. Expanding the place image beyond the crisis causes	
	11. Hosting spotlight sports and cultural events	
	12. Ridicule the stereotype The strategy behind ridiculing the stereotype is to nullify the negative stereotype toward a place by showing how ridiculous it is, presenting the stereotype, and then knocking it down.	
	13. Spinning liabilities into assets This strategy involves repositioning an adverse event or a negative characteristic of a destination into something more positive.	
	14. Geographic disassociation in advertising campaigns Differentiate the country or destination from the conflict or other problematic region zones.	
	15. Changing a destination's name, logo, or slogan The goal is to get rid of the negative image.	
	16. Turning the crisis into an opportunity Such as Dark Tourism low-cost packages.	

Source: Avraham & Ketter (2008).

The model includes three groups of strategies — source-focused, message-focused, and audience-focused — and twenty strategies. Source-focused strategies are used when officials want to influence the place's coverage during a crisis by organizing media familiarization tours, questioning the media's credibility, threatening journalists, and blocking media access. Message strategies tackle the destination's negative image regarding safety, lack of cultural events, or tourism services. In contrast, audience-focused strategies are concerned with a specific audience and can emphasize the similarity of the destination's values, history, or culture to those of the target audience.

4. Combating health crises before COVID-19

Several studies examine how destination officials combated the image crises that followed pandemics in the past, such as SARS-2003, H1N1 Swine flu 2009-10, and Zika 2016-17. Walters and Mair (2012) claim that one of the popular strategies to use in such a crisis, "Business as usual", applies to two situations. The first sends the message that the pandemic has not become a significant crisis, inferring that the tourism industry is carrying on as usual. The second sends the message that the destination is open for business and the situation is over. An excellent example of the latter was the president of "Tourism Toronto" who said, "Toronto is open for business" (Avraham & Beirman, 2022).

Another strategy is "Narrowing the geographical area of the virus", in which marketers try to limit the geographical borders where the virus exists, as in the case of the UK during the "foot and mouth" (Hopper, 2003). Here, the marketers claim that the virus is limited to specific locations, while other places in the country, such as London, remain safe to visit. Another strategy is "Using patriotism and nationalism" to revive local tourism. One example is the "Step Out! Singapore" promotion to convince local citizens to travel in and around the island and to shop and consume culture to help the country's economy recover (Henderson, 2004).

As we saw in the theoretical background, there is quite a lot of knowledge regarding the possible image repair strategies during a crisis. However, there is almost no information regarding selecting the right strategy, which has resulted in a theoretical gap. As mentioned, the surveys conducted during COVID-19 and their results can help us close the theoretical gap.

5. Methodology

This study offers future recovery marketing strategies that NTBs and DMOs can adopt to bring back tourists in the post-COVID-19 era. To locate the surveys, we searched the Google search engine and Google Scholar for the words “COVID-19”, “tourist behavior”, “travel behavior”, “COVID-19 effect on tourism”, “travel intentions”, and “surveys”. These searches helped us find nine surveys conducted around the world relating to these issues during 2020-2022 (Ivanova et al., 2021; Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020, 2022; Shamshiripour et al., 2020; Chebli & Ben Said, 2020; Madubuike, 2020; Madani et al., 2020; MMGY Travel Intelligence, 2020). In these surveys, potential tourists worldwide were asked about their travel intentions and behavior after the COVID-19 era. They contained questions designed to identify tourism consumption patterns, such as which countries the tourists intended to travel to, for how many days, in what period, what means of transportation will be used, what is the size of the budget to be allocated for the vacation, what are their primary considerations in choosing the destination for travel, and others in this vein.

In choosing the appropriate strategy for use in the post-COVID-19 era, three criteria were determined:

1. the practicality of implementing the approach considering the unique characteristics of the COVID-19 crisis,
2. proof of the effectiveness of the use of the strategies in previous tourism crises, and
3. tourist behavior survey results during and after COVID-19.

6. Tourism behavior surveys during and after COVID-19

Some common changes related to tourist behaviour and travel preferences were identified in surveys conducted in different countries and other continents during the pandemic, especially in 2020. These surveys have shown that travellers prefer shorter travels (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020-2022) within their country to closer destinations (Ivanova et al., 2021; Madubuike, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020-2022), or to destinations which are not so crowded (Chebli & Ben Said, 2020). Another common travel characteristic which was identified is the more frequent use of cars for travel (Ivanova et al., 2021; Shamshiripour et al., 2020; MMGY Travel Intelligence, 2020) because the perceived risk is lower than with other means of transport (such as planes, boats, etc.), where it is difficult to avoid contact with strangers. Leisure (Madani et al., 2020; Madubuike, 2020; MMGY Travel Intelligence, 2020) and visiting friends and relatives (Madubuike, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020, 2022) are the primary motivators for travel in this period, and the destination choice depends very often on the safety, security, and hygiene standards of the destination (Ivanova et al., 2021; Madubuike, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020, 2022; Madani et al., 2020), as well as on a reliable health system and disinfection systems in the destination's accommodation establishments (Ivanova et al., 2021). The price level or affordability of the travel and destination (Ivanova et al., 2021; Madubuike, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020, 2022; Chebli & Ben Said, 2020; Madani et al., 2020; Shamshiripour et al., 2020) is also very important, because the pandemic had some negative economic impacts, especially on the budget for travelling; therefore, travellers would like to reduce travel costs (Chebli & Ben Said, 2020).

7. Findings

In analyzing many possible recovery marketing strategies to be used by destinations after the COVID-19 crisis, we offer six strategies from the current recovery marketing literature that would be highly appropriate for NTBs and DMOs to adopt. We believe the source-focused strategy is irrelevant in the present case since the fear of the pandemic did not come from a specific source or media outlet, which could be combated. The potential tourists' fear of the pandemic arose from information from various sources, including reliable sources, such as friends, family, and personal. Therefore, source-focused strategies are not relevant in this case. In the case of the current pandemic, it is also challenging to use message strategies. After all, it is impossible to "ignore the crisis" or claim "business as usual" because tourists are still afraid to travel. The same goes for "reducing the intensity of the crisis" or "recognizing the negative image of the place" since all tourist destinations currently have a problematic image. The "tackling the crisis" strategy is also impractical since many countries have fought the pandemic, and morbidity still exists, so the crisis is not over. The "expanding the image of the destination" strategy is also impractical because there is still a great fear of the virus. The options for a practical strategy choice in such an extreme crisis are audience focused.

Avraham (2021c) brings a list of empirical studies that show the effectiveness of audience strategies during a severe crisis (Nes, 2019; Souiden et al., 2017; Asseraf & Shoham, 2017; Walters & Mair, 2012; Avraham & Ketter, 2008). As a result, using these strategies as effective recovery marketing has proven itself, and it is recommended to use them in the post-COVID-19 era. There are six audience-focused strategies to be used: association with well-known brands and celebrities, emphasis on similarities, initiating events, resemblances and relevance to specific audiences, niche tourism, patriotism, and nationalism. In the following lines, we will present the six possible image repair strategies that fit our three criteria:

1. Engaging celebrities

Musicians, film/TV actors, and athletes are well-known tools in brand marketing. Destination managers have also realized the importance of celebrities and have recruited them to promote a destination, both in good times and in times of crisis (Kim et al., 2019; Ong & Ito, 2019; Gretzel, 2017; Mair et al., 2016; Chacko & Marcell, 2013). Destinations use celebrities to take advantage of their admirers perceived emotional connections, fans' tendency to imitate celebrities' activities, and constant monitoring of celebrities in social and traditional media (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). When a destination uses celebrities, it has a chance to enjoy the same aura, extensive exposure in the new media, and positive coverage in the traditional media; the implication is that if a place is "consumed" by a celebrity, the fans can also come and visit the destination (Zhu et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019; Avraham & Ketter, 2008). As mentioned above, a study conducted in Australia has found that using celebrities is the most effective strategy to rebuild the image of tourism destinations that have experienced a crisis (Mair et al., 2016). Other studies worldwide have come up with similar findings regarding the effectiveness of this strategy in destination marketing and re-attracting tourism after a crisis (Kim et al., 2019; Chacko & Marcell, 2013).

Since using celebrities as a recovery marketing strategy has proven itself (Walters & Mair, 2012), there is no reason not to use them in the post-COVID-19 era. As in the case of initiating events, the choice of celebrity depends on the target audience. Celebrities less known to tourists worldwide will be suitable for attracting domestic tourists, and those globally known are important for attracting foreign tourists. In January 2021, the Kenyan Ministry of Tourism signed an agreement with Naomi Campbell, a well-known supermodel, to serve as tourism ambassador for the country. Campbell visited Kenya to sign the contract and posted photos from that visit on Instagram, where she has ten million followers (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2021). Naomi Campbell was chosen because of her familiarity with the American market, which Kenya wants to attract.

2. Initiating events

Initiating cultural, sports, and music events in a destination that has just experienced a crisis is also a key strategy in recovery marketing efforts and the return of tourists. Depending on their size, these events are called spotlight events, hallmark events, or mega-events. The importance of these events is in their ability to attract a diverse audience, even those who had never intended to tour that destination. These events attract journalists and other opinion leaders who might spread the news that the destination is safe both in new and traditional media (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004). For example, Belfast in Northern Ireland organized cultural events to bring tourists back and deal with the negative image after prolonged inter-religious tension. Jerusalem also used this strategy during the second intifada, when the municipality held secure events in the city center to bring visitors back and create a sense of security. Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, China hosted the Asian Games and used media attention to improve its image and present a more positive image of the country (Arnegger & Herz, 2016).

Organizing spotlight events has another advantage as they recruit residents to help run the events (by being traffic guides, ushers, and crowd control workers.) These events also encourage residents to take pride in their city, reinforce their commitment to their city's positive image, especially after a prolonged crisis, and act as its ambassadors. Furthermore, those who attend the event often consume the tourism and hospitality services the destination offers, such as tourist attractions, restaurants, cafés, and hotels; in that way, they support the local economy in general and the tourism industry in particular (Arnegger & Herz, 2016; Avraham & Ketter, 2008). It is essential to mention that attracting big conventions and conferences has the same effect on a location's economy and image repair (Chacko & Marcell, 2013). Finally, it is essential to emphasize that this strategy can be used by hosting significant events, such as the Olympics or a major sports competition, and for music festivals and other relatively small cultural events. For example, Israel hosted the Tel Aviv Grand Slam International Judo competition in February 2021 to prove that it can host international sports competitions toward the end of the pandemic due to its citizens' rapid immunization (Katzir, 2021).

Initiating events during the post-COVID-19 era as a recovery marketing strategy matches the data from surveys of expected tourist behavior who preferred short 1 to 4-day trips to domestic destinations or neighboring countries. The scope of the event, the period in which it will be held, the nature of the event, and its marketing should be done according to the intended audiences DMOs and NTBs want to attract. In addition, as many Europeans are anxious about rising travel costs (European Travel Commission, 2022), a free-cost event could be an incentive to visit a destination. Initiating an event strategy is a message strategy. Still, we believe it can be converted into an audience-focused strategy if the marketers correct it to a specific audience they want to attract.

3. Use of patriotic and national feelings to encourage domestic tourism

During a national crisis, citizens experience patriotic and national feelings. Tourism marketers exploit these feelings to encourage local tourism until global tourists return. For example, immediately after 9/11, American citizens were addressed with calls for patriotism as New York City and Washington, DC, ran campaigns aimed at restoring domestic tourism: "Come show your love for New York State," and "Paint the town red, white, and blue" where the American flag and other national symbols were used (Avraham, 2020). This strategy was also used after the wave of terror that struck Europe in 2014 (Avraham, 2021a). In these cases, local tourism was a lifeline until international tourism recovered.

During the COVID-19 tourism crisis, several countries have taken a similar step. For example, the "Visit England" Tourist Office organized "English Tourism Week" to support the tourism industry's recovery and increase awareness of tourism's importance, quality, and significant contribution to the British economy. New York also ran the "All in NYC" campaign to convey how locals feel about their city (Jainshill, 2020). Florida

initiated the “Keep Florida Open” campaign, and California instituted its “Calling All Californians” campaign (Avraham, 2020). In January 2021, New Zealand initiated a similar patriotic campaign, “Do something new” (Appendix, #2), to convince locals to travel in their own country until foreign tourists return (Frost, 2021).

The findings of these surveys clearly express the desire of tourists to travel in their own country. Due to the proven success of the patriotism strategy during previous crises, it is, of course, advisable to continue to use it to encourage domestic tourism. Here, marketers can use various aspects of the national narrative as a promotion tool. Some countries also might use this opportunity to attract local tourists to the periphery and lower-demand areas that are naturally less crowded, as in the case of New Zealand (Appendix, #2).

4. Niche tourism

When promoting “niche tourism”, marketers invest in promoting and developing new niche markets, such as golf, extreme sports, cycling, hiking, religion, and MICE tourism (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions). Here, the focus is on specific target audiences interested in unique and specific tourist activities (Novelli, 2018). In times of crisis, this kind of tourism, unlike “regular” tourism, has proven to be more resilient and is “immune” to crises (Avraham, 2015). For example, several studies have found that backpackers and religious tourists are less concerned about safety issues (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Mansfeld, 1999). One example is Israel, which managed to attract religious tourism during terror attacks at the beginning of the 2000s (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006). This country targeted Jews and Evangelical Christians with the campaign: “Don’t let your soul wait any longer. Come visit Israel” (Avraham, 2009).

During the Arab Spring tourism crisis, Egypt developed Christian tourism based on the Christian biblical belief of the flight into Egypt by Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism developed a program that would allow pilgrims to follow the journey of the Holy Family; in addition, MICE was also generated by the Egyptian Tourism Board (Avraham, 2015). Other destinations that relied on niche tourism during a crisis were Thailand (Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009) and post-flood New Orleans (Chacko & Marcell, 2013). Tourists of niche tourism are less afraid to travel after a crisis or safety issues because they usually come to sites that offer the tourism they seek, which also generally tends to be less crowded. During the COVID-19 crisis, several countries used this strategy as well; for example, Turkey opened its borders for “Medical Tourism” mainly by tourists from Arab countries.

Marketers of each destination must decide how to avail themselves of this resilient niche tourism. According to the findings of the surveys we mentioned, there are preferences for specific types of niches that will meet the needs of tourists while also satisfying their desire to visit clean, uncrowded places where social distancing is possible (Sun & Guo, 2022). According to Ivanova et al. (2021), the most popular niche tourist activities in the post-pandemic period will be camping, nature activities, surfing, recreational vehicles, and hiking.

5. Addressing tourists’ concerns and fears

When a crisis occurs in a destination, the media tend to concentrate on the characteristics, causes, and consequences. For example, in the case of a terrorist attack, the media tends to deal with the characteristics of the event, the number of casualties, and questions about safety levels at the destination. These coverage patterns greatly intensify the fear of potential visitors. To deal with this negative media image that also affects the public image of the destination, marketers, through various media, must convey opposing messages regarding the reality of the destination (Kwok et al., 2022; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Mansfeld, 1999). Due to the length of the COVID-19 crisis and the global media pandemic’s obsession and preoccupation with it, there is a sense that the extent of infections and morbidity is high in most countries.

Visitors who want to travel after COVID-19 dissipates will still be bothered by whether a trip is the right thing to do during that time and whether their chosen destination is safe. Therefore, marketers must not ignore these concerns and should try to convince potential visitors that their destination is safe (Rasoolimanesh et

al., 2021; Bhati et al., 2020). After previous tourism crises were over, marketers tended to use direct messages such as “We are safe”, “X is open for business”, or “Business as usual” (Avraham, 2020; Walters & Mair, 2012). Because COVID-19 has been so traumatic, it seems that these short messages will not suffice and that there is a need to “upgrade” them as one acknowledges and addresses more specific concerns. Therefore, since countries in the world were affected differently by the pandemic, there is no reason why a country with very low morbidity would not use this data as a message strategy to reduce tourists' potential fears.

As a result of these fears, COVID-19 seems to have brought new safety standards to the tourism industry concerning face masks, sanitation, frequent body temperature measurements, and social distancing. Therefore, it would be wise to convince potential tourists that these measurements have been adopted in the destination and not merely claim that the destination “is safe or open”. Egyptian image recovery efforts after previous crises are an excellent example of this needed change. After the Arab Spring of 2010, one of the primary recovery slogans was “Egypt is safe” (Avraham, 2015). In June 2020, however, Egypt posted a YouTube video following a trip by a couple to the country (Appendix, #1). As the camera accompanies them, what can be seen in the background is that tourism industry employees frequently clean airplanes, airports, and hotel facilities, signs of safety regulations are omnipresent, and hand sanitizer gel facilities can be found everywhere. The exciting thing is that the terminal bus, airport, hotel, beach, restaurants, and other tourist sites look empty; it seems that the marketers want to hint to potential visitors that they should not be afraid to visit since social distancing can be easily implemented, sanitary conditions have been imposed, and even, more importantly, there is no danger of infection. So far, this video has garnered over 52 million views on YouTube (January 2022). Croatia (Appendix, #6) and Turkey (Appendix, #7) had similar videos and messages during the spring of 2021.

The surveys' findings show that the health and hygiene issues of services and tourism spaces will be central to tourists' decision-making as they decide which places to visit (Chua et al., 2021; Chebli & Ben Said, 2020). Hence, marketers must convince these potential visitors that their destination meets consumer concerns. Several studies have found that many of these concerns have already been addressed by the hotels, which have started emphasizing characteristics such as cleanliness and hygiene, artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, and health care (Šerić & Vernuccio, 2022; Hang et al., 2020; Jiang & Wen, 2020).

6. Creating affinity with foreign audiences

Apart from targeting a local audience, another option is to focus on marketing to a specific target audience outside the country. When marketers use this strategy, they usually try to create an affinity with this foreign audience by convincing its members to visit despite the crisis. In their ads, marketers emphasize previous acquaintance, closeness and similarity in values, history, and cultural symbols with certain target audience members. Some findings show that when this affinity is successfully created, there is a better chance of generating positive feelings regarding a location among foreign audiences (Asseraf & Shoham, 2017).

Creating an affinity with specific target audiences is even more crucial during a crisis. This strategy was rarely used in previous situations, and related messages were minimalized. Tunisia, for example, ran the campaign “Free to Live It All” to invite Western tourists to visit post-revolution Tunisia (2013), hinting that the country now shared common values (freedom) with these tourists (Avraham, 2015). Marketers can also concentrate on regional tourism if the affinity stems from geographical proximity. This strategy was used by Egypt to attract tourists from the Gulf countries during the Arab Spring with the campaign “Egypt is near”, as well as by several European countries concerning terror attacks that started in 2014. These campaigns attracted close, neighboring audiences (Šerić & Vernuccio, 2022; Avraham, 2021a; Avraham, 2015). In other words, geographical and often cultural connections were the base for the affinity created in the campaigns.

Like the previous strategy, marketers needed to expand the messages used in this strategy compared to their reactions in previous crises. For example, before COVID-19, Mexico was marketed in the US and Canada

under the slogan: “Mexico, The Place You Thought You Knew”, hinting at previous familiarity (Appendix, #3). Mexico produced a new campaign for the Canadian market to create affinity during the global closure following the COVID-19 crisis. A link was made between Mexico and well-known Canadian cultural brands and symbols (Appendix, #4). Unlike the previous campaign, which only focused on nominal familiarity, this campaign used several characteristics and brands to create a stronger affinity between the two countries, not just previous acquaintances, as seen in earlier crises. The purpose of these Canadian cultural symbols was to illustrate the connection, similarity, proximity, and previous acquaintance between the two countries. The advertisement’s goal appears to be positioning Mexico as a top choice among Canadian audiences when they begin making travel plans in the future. Thailand produced a similar ad that addressed the Chinese market with messages such as “Thailand-China, the same family” and expressed love, support, and encouragement for China and its people following the crisis (Appendix, #5).

Creating affinity with foreign audiences can be beneficial in the post-COVID-19 era. Considering the current surveys, marketers should emphasize previous acquaintance, closeness, similarity in values, history, and cultural symbols with the target audience. Since it seems that the primary visitors to a country will soon be from geographically close countries, NTBs and DMOs need to find characteristics that will generate affinity for the residents of close or other “preferred” countries to increase the flow of tourists.

The focus on “preferred”, neighboring, foreign audiences was also adopted during COVID-19. For example, the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have re-opened their internal borders and have allowed their citizens to mingle freely. The preference of foreign tourists in a geographically close country can be based not only on common borders but also on the number of vaccinated citizens. For example, Israel, Cyprus, and Greece have signed an agreement to allow mutual tourism and to permit entrance only to vaccinated citizens (Meltz, 2021). Regarding the last example, if Greece and Cyprus allow reciprocal visits, the marketers of these two countries should try to emphasize their affinity. To do so, marketers can emphasize the two nation’s common ethnicity, heritage, language, and religion to increase the flow of visitors.

8. Discussion and summary

By relying on twenty existing image repair and recovery marketing strategies, various case studies, and recent consumer behavior surveys, this paper aims to suggest six recovery marketing strategies that NTBs and DMOs could adopt to re-attract tourists in the post-COVID-19 era: engaging celebrities, initiating events, addressing tourist concerns and fears, using patriotic and national feelings, devising niche tourism, and creating affinities with foreign audiences. These strategies were used in previous crises and have been found suitable for combating the COVID-19 tourism crisis as well, according to three criteria: 1. the practicality of implementing the strategy in light of the characteristics of the COVID-19 crisis; 2. proof of the effectiveness of the use of the strategies in previous crises; and 3. surveys results – regarding tourist behavior during and after COVID-19. Combining previous recovery marketing strategies with many surveys examining consumer behavior in the post-COVID-19 era, we have filled a gap in the literature that merges recovery marketing with consumer behavior. This combination allowed us to indicate the recovery marketing strategies and recommend potentially the most useful ones to be adopted during the post-COVID-19 era.

The intensity of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inconceivable damage has caused destination managers to rethink the nature of the destination drastically, their preferred target audiences, the destination's vision, and strategic plans, as well as the role of the local community and the narrative best suited for it (Zenker & Kock, 2020; Gretzel et al., 2020; He & Harris, 2020). At the same time, in the field of destination image management, marketers will be forced to make many decisions regarding the location’s branding, such as its uniqueness, central values, primary target audience, and the recovery marketing strategies that will need to be adopted during the short and long term (Currie, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, recovery marketing strategies used in previous crises can be classified into source-focused, message-focused, and audience-focused (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). As seen from the list of possible strategies proposed in this study, most are audience-focused for recovery in the post-COVID-19 era. The question arises - do these findings make source-focused and message strategies unnecessary during foreseeable future crises? The answer is negative. This is because the audience-focused strategies offered here were found to be suitable only for the post-COVID era. Hence, other types of image repair strategies, such as source-focused and message strategies, will be ideal for other crises that will undoubtedly occur. We can assume that marketers during COVID-19, more than ever before, have been attentive to the changing feelings and concerns of potential visitors during the pandemic. Hang et al. (2020) mention that it is essential to address the target audiences' needs, concerns, and demands to combat the effect of the pandemic crisis on tourism.

As we saw from the surveys, tourists prefer domestic destinations (Ivanova et al., 2021; Madubuike, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020, 2022), which enables them to travel to nearby locations by car (Ivanova et al., 2021; Shamshiripour et al., 2020; MMGY Travel Intelligence, 2020), or take a trip for a short period (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020; European Travel Commission, 2020, 2022). Along with the desires ranging from minimal cost to more open spaces, the data suggests adopting a patriotism strategy for domestic tourism. At the same time, since the surveys also show a willingness to visit geographically close countries, campaigns to attract residents of neighboring countries should also be established. To succeed in this task, it is advisable to use messages that create affinity with this audience - whether focusing on physical or cultural proximity, similarity, or familiarity (Asseraf & Shoham, 2017). Creating this affinity can also be achieved through invitations to special events and niche tourism because these might be best suited to ease the concerns of visitors regarding open spaces, social distancing, and cleanliness.

The study's limitations stem from the research method and search for the surveys conducted worldwide during COVID-19. As a result of the searching method through the Google search engine, the sample we used may not include surveys not shown in the English language, as well as those whose results did not appear online or surveys in which the keywords we chose were not used. Future research should also focus on monitoring the effectiveness of the recovery marketing strategies used by various destinations worldwide. This follow-up can be done while examining which tourist destinations succeeded in bringing back tourists and at what pace, and why a particular tourist destination was more successful in this mission than others. At the same time, it is necessary to continue monitoring the consumption habits of tourists to use them with the right choice of recovery marketing strategies.

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Appendix

Links to the videos analyzed

Link No (#)	Destination	Link
1	Egypt	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msJ_JJB8q3s
2	New Zealand	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trs-isdu4eE&t=6s
3	Mexico	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nmRCMtyndg&t=13s
4	Mexico	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qf4KS9nEq8
5	Thailand	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kO88C6J8dDc
6	Croatia	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQ_1pn_JOTU
7	Turkey	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7LNSYTKnqA

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