

Opportunities and Threats of Perceived Knowledge among Travelers in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, travelers have accumulated a wealth of perceived knowledge through vaccination, preventive measures, and personal experiences, encouraging them to bravely embark on journeys and learn to coexist peacefully with the virus. However, this perceived knowledge originates from diverse sources, including official websites, online information, and individual preventive experiences, encompassing both accurate and misleading content. This has a significant impact on travelers' behavioral intentions, presenting new opportunities and threats for the tourism industry. To adapt to market changes in the post-pandemic era, tourism practitioners must provide accurate and timely information, enhance traveler confidence through effective communication strategies, and design travel products and services that meet emerging needs.

Keywords: Perceived Knowledge; Behavioral Intentions; Post Pandemic Era; Opportunities; Threat

Introduction

After three years of the pandemic, the world began to enter the post- COVID-19 era in 2023, signifying that the pandemic has not disappeared. Through various measures, people globally have learned to coexist peacefully with the virus, now regarded similarly to the common cold. Concurrently, airplanes have taken to the skies once more, and travel activities have resumed. Research has found that travelers' perceived knowledge significantly influences their choice of travel destinations, participation in travel activities, and adherence to preventive measures [1]. Accurate perceived knowledge can boost travelers' confidence, prompting safer and more responsible travel decisions. Conversely, misleading perceived knowledge may lead to excessive fear or reckless actions, affecting behavioral intentions. This includes choosing to stay home or generating negative word-of-mouth, thereby influencing others' behavioral intentions and causing unnecessary panic or avoidance of certain destinations [2]. This also slows the recovery of the tourism industry [3]. Tourism operators need to understand travelers' perceived knowledge to cater to their needs for safety and health more effectively.

The Construction and Assessment of Travelers' Perceived Knowledge

What is perceived knowledge? It refers to an individual's self-assessment of their knowledge in a specific domain, which may not align with their actual level of knowledge due to different experiences and interpretations [4]. Perceived knowledge is an individual's subjective evaluation of their knowledge extent, affecting not only their behavioral decisions but also related to learning motivation, information processing, and risk assessment [5]. Although this concept is applied in various fields, including psychology, education, and marketing, it has not been thoroughly discussed in tourism management. In the realm of tourism, travelers' perceived knowledge what travelers think they know about a destination or activity—significantly impacts their behavioral intentions. When travelers feel they possess a high level of knowledge about a destination or activity, their willingness and confidence to travel usually increase [6]. This enhanced perceived knowledge can be acquired through various channels, such as online searches, social media, word-of-mouth recommendations, or official travel guides.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, travelers' perceived knowledge has become even more influential on their travel behavioral intentions. When considering factors that might affect their health and safety, individuals may choose to refuse or cease traveling, as travel activities are often viewed as non-essential consumption. The decision-making process for travelers is more susceptible to external influences compared to other consumption activities [7]. In making travel decisions, travelers assess the expected benefits against potential risks [8]. These risk assessments are derived from both the travelers' own perceived knowledge and that of significant others [9]. Previously, the focus in the tourism field was on perceived risk, but following the rapid accumulation of perceived knowledge during the pandemic, it has become a significant factor affecting travel behavioral intentions and critical decisions. Hence, this topic warrants further attention.

The Threats of Perceived Knowledge

As the internet becomes increasingly pervasive, travelers are more reliant on quick online searches for information gathering. However, this convenience also exacerbates the discrepancy between perceived knowledge and actual knowledge [10]. The greatest challenge of perceived knowledge is the vast and continuously growing body of it that travelers have established. Given the internet is replete with both positive and negative, correct and incorrect information, and coupled with the trend towards rapid and fragmented information consumption via smartphones, travelers are building up a massive amount of fragmented perceived knowledge. This may lead to an overconfidence in their self-assessment, mistakenly believing they have a deeper understanding of the subject [11]. Overconfident perceived knowledge can lead to various negative consequences. Travelers may rely too heavily on online searches, neglecting the importance of deeper understanding and critical thinking regarding the accuracy of information [12]. Furthermore, overconfident perceived knowledge can also influence the behavioral intentions of others.

In the post-pandemic context, the three major threats facing travelers' perceived knowledge are incorrect online information, overconfidence in their perceived knowledge, and the accumulation of fragmented perceived knowledge. This leads to incomplete and incorrect perceived knowledge impacting travelers, and as misinformation continues to circulate, its effects deepen over time, influencing travelers' behavioral intentions and decisions. Therefore, how to correct travelers' perceived knowledge in a short period has become a crucial issue and challenge.

The Opportunities of Perceived Knowledge

However, the continuous increase and overconfidence in travelers' perceived knowledge demand that the tourism industry provide safety quality and services that match their perceptions to avoid expectation gaps [13]. This presents an opportunity

for tourism operators. They need to recognize the impact of perceived knowledge on travelers' behavioral intentions and leverage it. By utilizing the internet and the channels and methods through which travelers receive information, the industry can re-educate travelers, establishing correct perceived knowledge and developing more advanced search methods to teach travelers how to discern the accuracy of information [14]. This includes the use of word-of-mouth marketing, social media, official announcements, and the dissemination of accurate information. By disseminating through the internet, this can enhance and correct travelers' perceived knowledge. Once it becomes information trusted by travelers, it can increase their intention to travel [15].

Conclusion

In the post-pandemic era, the impact of travelers' perceived knowledge on the tourism industry has become increasingly significant. By deeply understanding this knowledge and its effects on travel behavioral intentions, the tourism industry can better adapt to market changes, offering products and services that meet travelers' needs and promoting sustainable development within the sector. The recovery of the tourism industry in the post-pandemic era depends on understanding and addressing travelers' perceived knowledge. By providing accurate and timely information, the tourism industry can enhance travelers' confidence and promote the recovery of travel activities [16]. At the same time, effective communication strategies and customized travel products are key to meeting travelers' needs and fostering business development. While quick online searches offer unprecedented convenience in accessing information, they also create a disconnect between perceived and actual knowledge. Understanding this phenomenon allows tourism operators to rethink how to gain travelers' trust and increase their behavioral intentions. This is crucial for regaining the past glory of the travel market post-pandemic, encouraging travelers to pack their bags once again. By overcoming threats and leveraging opportunities, the tourism industry can confidently expect travelers to return.

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