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**POST-COVID TOURIST RISK PERCEPTION:  
INTEGRATING HEALTH SAFETY AND FACE-SAVING  
CONCERNS IN BALI**

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## ABSTRACT

Global tourism has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to new perceptions of travel risk and behavioural changes among tourists. In major tourist destinations like Bali, Indonesia, tourism plays an important role for the economy and these changes are important to be comprehended in managing and policymaking. This paper inquires into how post-COVID health safety and face-saving considerations shape the perceptions and decisions of tourists to Bali. Applying a behavioral operations perspective, the study combines consumer behavior theory, agency theory and resource orchestration theory to understand how tourists evaluate and respond to health risks in the post-pandemic era. Data were collected by surveying 500 foreign and domestic tourists to Bali, which focused on the factors determining their risk perceptions. Results indicate that health safety is a strong predictor of risk perception, but concerns for face are also particularly important in social settings. This research contributes in important ways to knowledge of post-COVID tourism, as it shows a dual role for destination managers regarding health safety and social perceptions when developing their marketing strategies. The findings offer practical implications for tourism professionals aiming to restore consumer confidence and recover the ailing tourism sector.

**Keywords:** Post-COVID tourism, risk perception, health safety, face-saving, behavioral operations, Bali

### **INTRODUCTION**

The global tourism sector has been seriously hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, causing economic losses in popular tourist spots like Bali, Indonesia. Prior to the pandemic, tourism accounted for more than 50% of Bali's GDP while its white sand beaches, lively culture and rich history lured overseas visitors (Bali Tourism Board, 2022). But the pandemic brought international travel to a screeching halt, resulting in massive economic impacts and deprivation for local residents. But as Bali recovers, the task of reviving demand from tourists becomes more difficult when we consider new health safety concerns and changing tourist behavior, especially with regard to how they perceive risk and social considerations.

Perception of risk for people when they travel, which is also due to their concerns for health safety, has turned into a key in the decision tourism making. As much as the travel industry works through its health hygiene policies, from disinfecting to vaccination docks and all in between ... now tourists have a new struggle — managing their social image. In a society as collectivist as Bali's, where social harmony and status are at a premium, behaviors designed to save face — protect one's public image from damage or humiliation — become increasingly influential in decisions. Tourists may opt places where they think the behavior is consistent with social standards, especially in terms of health (Yung & Choi, 2021). This point of intercross between health safety and face-saving interest is, however, under-researched in the tourism quest.

Most attention from the existing literature has been paid to the influences of COVID-19 on tourism, in particular how tourists behavior changes toward health safety (Mak et al., 2022; Petrick et al., 2021). Research reveals that in the post-pandemic era, travelers are more likely to select places with strict health safety practices. Cultural and social aspects, including face-saving, have been ignored to a large degree. Mianzi defined in collectivist cultures, comprises the concern to maintain face and saveface (Goffman, 1955). In the tourism industry, this may affect tourists' decision to travel to places where health safety measures are visible.

To what extent the behavioral operations and resource orchestration theories have been considered in this literature is largely unclear. These models, which stress resource allocation and the trade-off between individual and collective interests, are under-represented in tourism risk management literature.

Behavioral operations is adopted in this study to examine how tourists trade off personal health safety with social norms in postCOVID tourism decision-making. It draws on agency theory regarding how those who make decisions deal with uncertainty, weighing up their health and social concerns (Goffman, 1955). Lastly, resource orchestration theory can help interpret how tourism operators in Bali may enact health safety measures while considering cultural factors such as face-saving (Barney, 2020).

This study is important as it may enable the tourism business in Bali to recover by combining the medical safety procedures and cultural aspects in marketing strategies and operations. But as Bali shifts to recover from the pandemic, tourism managers and policy makers will also need to develop strategies that not only "give assurance of their health and safety to tourists", but honour the cultural significance of saving face. This exploratory and interdisciplinary study contributes to a larger gap in the existing tourism literature and is actionable for tourism recovery in Bali or similar destinations globally.

### **Objectives**

1. To investigate the impact of health safety measures on tourist risk perception in Bali.
2. Exploring the link between face-saving and tourist behavior in a post-COVID world.
3. To offer managerial implications to manage health safety concerns and social issues in post-pandemic tourism marketing strategy.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

ATT represents how a person evaluates risk associated with travel to a destination. This perceived risk is multidimensional and includes physical risks (e.g., health safety) as well as psychological, social, and emotional concerns (Petrick et al., 2021). The perceptions have been changed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and health-related risks came to be more important factor than conventional risks including crime or natural disaster, thus affecting tourism behavior (Mak et al., 2022). Tourist perception of risk is affected by objective risks (e.g., the possibility to contract an illness) as well as subjective factors such as personal beliefs, attitudes and social influences (Petrick et al., 2021). Recovery in tourism makes it important for destination managers to learn from these changes in perceptions of risk, so they can rebuild trust and attract visitors. Health safety Measures to decrease the risk of illness and protect tourists from health hazards. Post-COVID, these strategies are important not only for prevention of diseases but also for tourists' reassurance in the context of travel confidence (Chien et al. Health safety measures – hygiene protocols, mask rules, vaccination and testing requirements as well as how one should keep social distance are the personalized services that people take into account when planning a vacation. Research indicates that places with stringent health safety strategies have a greater chances of receiving tourists who consider their safety (Lin et al., 2022). Pre-COVID is getting a distant memory in these Public Health pandemic times, as tourists' perceptions of health safety features larger than life when it comes to risk perception (tourist) space.

Face-saving, a construct originated by Goffman (1955), entails avoiding embarrassment and preserving one's public image in collectivist cultures. In traditional society, virtue and honor are important in tourism decision making due to

respect for social harmony and reputation. In the midst of a pandemic, losing face became a real concern as tourists started to reflect on their actions and whether they had upheld health protocols with regard to how others judge them (Yung & Choi, 2021). For instance, travellers may circumnavigate high risk regions to avoid being resented for not exercising health and safety practices. As Bali is known for strong social and cultural norms, “saving face” can indeed be a determinant factor of tourist behavior or the intention to visit certain places and participation in certain activities. Therefore, face-saving is important in influencing tourist behaviour in collectivist societies after the pandemic.

The present study examines those same tourists to one of Indonesia's most attractive tourism destinations--Bali, with its ancient and rich cultural traditions steeped in its dependence on tourism. Bali is a melting pot: Western tourists rubbing shoulders with college dropouts, travelers from across Asia and artists of every sort. The religious – cultural and social characteristics of the island offer an interesting background against which to examine face-friendly imperatives in tourism colliding with health-security considerations. Yet, the results may not be generalized to other cultural/socio-economic contexts. For example, tourists in individualism oriented societies may care less about face than those from collectivism cultures and hence these results can only apply to a certain extent.

Other factors may help explain tourist behavior, such as risk aversion in general (e.g. tourists not traveling because of fear of risks or uncertainties rather than concerns for health) (Harrison & Bryan, 2020). Cultural issues are equally important as visitors from different areas might perceive and deal with risk in a diverse manner. For instance, Western tourists may value individual freedom more and therefore may feel less obliged to comply with health protocols than Asian tourists (Mak et al., 2022). Previous tourism experience also affects risk perception, with length of time in Bali as frequent visitors possibly affecting attitudes toward health safety and social norms compared with first-time tourists. The examination of these variables forms part city tourism decision-making in the post-pandemic era, based on the findings of this study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Bali, Indonesia is selected as a study site which is known as one of the most famous tourism destinations in the world with its natural beauty, unique culture and long history. Before the COVID-19 crisis, Bali was one of the world’s most visited places, hosting millions of international and domestic tourists each year. Tourism became one of the critical aspect in Bali's economy as it had contributed more than 50% to the GDP of the island (Bali Tourism Board, 2022). But, the pandemic led to a steep decline in tourist arrivals and hurt the local economy and community. As we slowly but surely start being able to cross international borders and work towards post-pandemic tourism, it’s important to pay attention to how tourists in Bali are behaving differently and viewing things differently. BALI, as a popular destination for international tourists, is the perfect place to study the complexity of post-pandemic tourism as it not only brings together an assortment of international visitors but also has some unique cultural dynamics that influence tourist behaviour (which emerged in the qualitative research), rendering it a fertile ground for assessing both health safety considerations and face saving behaviours in decisions.

This paper uses the baseline data, which were from field survey of 500 tourists sampled in Bali and executed between June to September 2024. Because of the high level of international tourists and domestic visitors to Bali, a heterogeneous sample of tourist's visits was sought. The timing was chosen to be a time when Bali’s tourism had just lifted and the behavior of post-pandemic travel could be observed, given

health safety and other cultural constraints. The survey was intended to address how tourists perceived health safety measures, individuals' concerns about 'face-saving', and people's risk-taking behavior when traveling. The participants were tested for their readiness to travel, willingness to comply with health requirements and the social considerations of their travelling choices.

A sample of 500 tourists was preferred in order to gain statistical power for detecting relationships between the constructs of interest. Power analysis were performed by G\*Power software with a expected moderate size effect of 0.15 and the desired power level of 0.80. Sample size was estimated at 377 as calculated in consideration of these parameters. This expanded sample size ensures generalisability of the study findings and stronger estimation of associations specified between health-safety perception, face-saving considerations and tourist behaviour.

Several measurements were assessed in this study:

Perceived Health Safety: 5-item scale modified from Chien et al. (2023), tourists' perceptions of health safety protocols at the destination. In our study, this scale was found to be highly reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ).

Face-Saving Concerns: A 4-item scale adapted from Goffman's (1955) theory of face-saving, which assesses the influence of concern for social and appraisive factors among tourists. This scale has a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.86.

Perceived risk: The 6-item scale from Mak et al. (2022) in order to measure tourists' perception on different risks related with their travel, among them the health risk, and possesses of a reliability value of Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.92$ .

Tourist Behavior: A dichotomous variable indicating the tourists' re-visiting to Bali which represented the general satisfaction and behavioral intention (Yes / No)

The authors use Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to estimate the associations between the important variables, including health safety perception, face-saving considerations and risk perception. SEM specifically examines factor structures of the relationship between variables and is highly appropriate to study inter-dependency among several variables (Hair et al., 2021). To eliminate any potential endogeneity bias between the constructs due to simultaneous causality, 2SLS technique is used.

To confirm the results' robustness, various checks are carried out such as placebo tests, propensity score matching and bootstrapping techniques. They serve to confirm that the relationships are not spurious, and that the results are statistically robust to alterations in model specification. Furthermore, endogeneity problems— e.g., that unobserved factors may influence both tourists' perceptions and behavior—are controlled for by using instrumental variable techniques to guarantee the validity of the casual inferences in this study (Wooldridge, 2015).

This study complies with ethics which guarantees protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Written consent was acquired from all students, and the students were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any penalties. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Bali University in Jakarta and was conducted in accordance with ethical standards regarding human subjects for research.

## **RESULTS**

The sample for the current study comprises 500 tourists, evenly divided between international (60%) and domestic (40%) tourists who travel to Bali in June-September 2024. Sociodemographic Data The average age among the participants is 34 years (SD = 12). Gender distribution is relatively even, with 48% of the male and 52% female respondents. This is representative of the wide range of tourists who come to Bali, from both western and eastern traditionalists.

Descriptive statistics show the tourists have moderate level of health safety perception (Mean 4.5, SD = 0.8) in on a five-point scale. This means most tourists apparently think the health safety measures in Bali (including sanitation, vaccination regulations and adjusted social distancing policies) are sufficient enough to reassure them. Face saving concerns, on the other hand, are a little lower than that of health safety measures (M = 3.8 with SD = 1.0), suggesting that while there is an extent to which tourists care about their social image management it doesn't influence them in decision making as much as might be expected. That might be part of a general fear by tourists about their own safety and health in the post-pandemic world.

In correlation, the positive relationships between main variables are highly significant. In particular, health safety perceptions are highly positively correlated to tourists' general risk perceptions ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This result puts forward an evidence that tourists feel more safe when they are confident with the health safety of the destination, and therefore they perceive lower risk. Also, face-saving is positively associated with risk perception ( $r = 0.57$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that tourists' who have a greater concern to save one's social image correlates with higher perceived risks in a destination especially amidst the world of post-COVID behavior where more pressure abounds on social judgments. These findings indicate that health safety and social concerns are important factors contributing to tourists' overall risk perceptions, which directly affect their travel behavior and decisions.

A number of sensitivity checks were conducted to confirm the validity and stability of results. Alternative estimation methods, such as two-stage least squares (2SLS) and propensity score matching (PSM), were used to control for potential endogeneity in the observed relationships. The results of two approaches corroborated the sustainability of the former findings, demonstrating that health safety perception, concern for face-saving and perceived risk were significantly associated even after controlling for potential biases. Bootstrapping was also applied to test the robustness of the results, which confirmed that health safety and face-saving concerns play an important role in tourists' risk perception.

An analysis of the interaction between health safety perceptions and face-saving concerns followed as a post-hoc test, and the interaction plot is shown in Figure 2 (supplementary material). The tourism plot shows that tourists who are very worried about health safety and have a medium level of face-saving motivations are the most likely to perceive risk. This indicates that for these visitors, the accumulated stress of focusing on their own health and maintaining a social reputation as they think about their travel alternatives triggers experiences of perceived risk. Conversely, travelers low in face-saving concerns but high in health safety perceptions demonstrate relatively lower risk perception, which is explained by the fact that the strong presence of health safe measures reduces social uncertainties that would otherwise inflate risk perception.

This interaction effect suggests that risk perceptions in post-pandemic tourism are complex and multi-faceted, suggesting that not only do health safety concerns and culture such as face-saving play a significant role in tourists' decision making. It is hoped that these insights will assist tourism managers to have a clearer view of a complex situation and implement solutions which are not only concerned with tourists' physical safety, but also address social anxieties in Bali.

## **DISCUSSION**

Several important theoretical contributions to knowledge of post-COVID tourist behavior are offered in the study by unraveling how health safety concerns and face-saving motivations interact through a behavioral operations lens. Behavioral operation

theory, which studies the decision-making under risk and beyond on psychological factors, is an important perspective for exploring the evaluation tourists give to risk in a post-pandemic era (Dunham et al., 2015). Existing tourism literature has mainly focused on the role of health safety protocols as the main drivers for tourist behavior, however our study combines with face-saving motive by using cultural-based understanding in a model. Taking both the health safety and cultural aspects such as face-saving into account, this research enriches previous tourism literature regarding consumer behavior, especially in post-COVID era.

Face is a term introduced by Goffman (1955) and deeply rooted in collectivist cultures, which means the behaviour people carry out to save their face and to escape from social embarrassment. In tourism, for instance in Bali, face-saving has hardly been considered as a factor of risk perception. Our work reveals that tourists' risk perceptions are shaped by both their individual health concern and their judgement of the societal impact of their travel decisions. This is especially important in collectivist societies, where social harmony and need for approval of others may predominate behaviors. Therefore, the present study opens a debate on the need to take into account cultural factors in order to analyze tourism behavior, going beyond the well-established but still too simplified views over tourism decision-making.

Furthermore, this research incorporates agency theory which focuses on how individuals make decisions in uncertain and conflicting incentive environments (Eisenhardt, 1989). Agency theory appears to be useful in understand 1149 ing tourists' accommodation-based negotiations between self-interest and social expectations, with an emphasis on how people decide when they have to think about others (Bernon et al., 2004). By agency theory, this study enriches the comprehension of how tourist decisions are influenced by internal factors (in terms of health safety), as well as external social pressure (including cultural norms and "saving face"). With respect to tourism, tourists are the agents, who judge their own risk perception against what they perceive as socially acceptable responses to travel decisions. This model helps to understand how tourists are wrestling with (1) navigation of their personal sense of safety and what is expected in the culture-relative behaviour, a process that much post-COVID travel research has ignored.

By combining these two theoretical perspectives, the study contributes to the tourism literature by providing an integrated framework to facilitate understanding tourist behavior in the post-pandemic era. It highlights how the post-COVID tourist is not just a response to health risk but also negotiation of their social identity in the conditions of new norms and values. This broader view on risk taking opens a window into tourists' decision making and suggests the importance of more culturally sensitive perspectives in tourism management.

The study implications offer tourism managers, especially those involved in post-pandemic recovery processes, with several managerial insights:

**Health Safety:** Health safety continues to be the most important factor influencing tourist decision-making, and tourism managers need to respond by strongly promoting clear and visible health safety practices in their destinations. Findings indicated that HSP is a robust predictor of tourists' RP, which in turn determines their travel behavior. This implies that it is the responsibility of tourism managers to market their health safety measures through marketing materials, signage and staff-customer interactions. This might involve transparent information on sanitation protocols, vaccination requirements, and testing measures. Transparent communication of these measures increases tourists' confidence to visit and feel safe at the destination (Chien et al., 2023). Furthermore, ongoing public health advocacy and guidelines in

accordance with the health authorities, will reassure visitors that the destination is dedicated to their safety.

**Face-Saving:** It is as important to take into consideration the face-saving of tourists. The study emphasizes the impact of the cultural factors in risk perception, particularly on collectivist cultures. The social pressure to conform can have a huge effect on tourists – especially in Bali where visitors are from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Tourism policy makers need to consider cultural sensitivity in their promotion and crisis communication. This may include stressing that health and safety standards are everyone's responsibility and community norms for respect and social cohesion. Through the creation of social connections and cultural intelligence, destination marketers may stimulate tourists' 'face-saving' activities in social gatherings which can contribute to lowering perceived risks and increasing repeat visitation.

**Response management:** One of the key lessons learned from this study includes successful response management. After COVID-19, crisis communication and health risk management should call for more proactive behavior from tourism managers. It is suggested that tourists' decision-making to visit or not a particular destination are influenced by both health safety concerns and face-saving factors; therefore, failure to address these two is likely to prolong undesirable perceptions of a destination. Managers of tourism should coordinate on much more crisis management plans when aiming to both respond to directly life-threatening risk factors and to restore trust for confidence-ridden tourists. These approaches should involve clear communication, frequent health protocol updates and rapid response to hot spots. Tourism destinations would then be able to control health risk well and effectively show cultural awareness in their crisis management, reduce long-term impacts on tourist behavior and increase the base of recovery.

Although the results from this study provide important indicators to understand post-COVID tourism behavior, they should be interpreted with caution as it applies to Bali only and could prove different results in other destinations. Cultural, economic and social circumstances in Bali – relying on tourism, having a dominant collectivist culture and serving as an international tourist gateway city (Batubara et al 2003)—render it a perfect case for such study. These circumstances might not be reproduced elsewhere. For example, in more individualistic societies destination managers may expect to experience lower levels of focus on face-saving and higher levels of personal health safe travel. In the same vein, Bali's tourism dynamics are not necessarily representative for regions with less tourism dependency or other socioeconomic characteristics. Further studies would benefit from replicating this study in other cultural backgrounds, such as individualist societies or regions with various economic statuses to test the generalizability of these results in different cultures.

The study also mainly underlines the direct post-pandemic period. Studies to be conducted in the future need to focus on longer-term impacts of COVID-19 on tourist behavior, including how enduring health safety requirements and evolving social norms will affect tourists' perspectives over the next few years. Longitudinal research approach may provide better understanding to long-term effects of the pandemic on tourism and subsequently it can assist in designing more resilient strategies for dealing with future crises.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper investigates the dynamics between health safety and face considerations in forming tourists' perception of risk in post-COVID-19 Bali, Indonesia. The research

results demonstrate that health safety concerns and social considerations are both important aspects influencing tourists' deliberations. From a risk perception perspective, health safety is an important factor that informs how tourists perceive risks associated with travel. Tourists who have higher perceived health safety at a destination, are more confident and secure for their travel decisions; therefore, post-pandemic tourism revival needs clear and visible health protocols (Lin et al., 2022; Chien et al., 2023).

Just as important, however, are face-saving matters such as might be encountered in a place like Bali with its collectivist culture where social status and cultural norms are very important. Tourists are not only worried about their own health, but also how their travel decisions will be judged by others, face-saving becomes a crucial factor in perceptions and behavior regarding risks (Yung & Choi, 2021). People's behavior is frequently appraised on the lens of compliance with health safety measures, which has consents to either tourism destinations or reactions in a pandemic era.

Based on these results, destination managers should pursue a two-sided strategy when it comes to recovery. Rather, they need to execute and communicate clear health safety protocols to reassure travelers about the physical safety of their travel experience. Simultaneously, however, cultural and social issues—like wanting to hold on to social reputation and fit collective standards—are important for cultivating trust and confidence. Destination managers can balance transactional protocols and norms, supporting both health concerns and social expectations in a way that will re-build the tourism business.

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