Research Article

Demographic differences and tourist preferences. Utilising the theory of planned behaviour during COVID-19

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Abstract
This study assesses potential gender differences relating to tourist preferences (i.e. intention and frequency for travelling), knowledge, and the three variables of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Following descriptive analysis, cross-tabulation, and independent t-tests, the results revealed that the respondents were more likely to stay at home. Cross-tabulation findings, in particular, depicted no differences for the demographic variables and respondent travel preferences. Contrarily, subjective norms and knowledge were the only two variables yielding significant mean scores with gender upon a comparison for the parameter between gender and the four major variables tested. Henceforth, the research findings are expected to serve as guidance for policymakers and industry practitioners in developing the best tourism strategies geared for gaining public trust and making travel safer and less risky for everyone.

Keywords:
Tourist, gender, marital status, knowledge, Theory of Planned Behaviour, COVID-19 pandemic

1 Introduction
Travel and tourism are well-known as fun and enjoyable activities that one could ever experience. The latter is highly beneficial to the host destinations in terms of employment, economic growth, and more. International tourism, in particular, has been depicting continuous growth over time, of which international tourist arrivals recorded a whopping 1.5 billion in 2019 and denoted the tenth year of consecutive growth (UNWTO, 2020). According to UN News

(2017), around 1.8 billion people are forecasted to be travelling internationally by 2030. Therefore, the tourism industry is undeniably one of the most economically important industries worldwide, but it is also the most susceptible and vulnerable sector in times of crises and disasters (Pforr and Hosie, 2008). This is echoed in Faulkner's (2001) article, which underlines the increasing number of disasters and crises affecting tourism-related industries, ranging from natural to human-influenced incidents. Research has shown that COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdown, quarantine, and border closures specifically pose a significant influence on many industries (Goodell, 2020). Due to reduced human mobility as a result of government actions (De Vos, 2020; Klein et al., 2020; Warren and Skillman, 2020), low travel demand occurred and multiple tourism enterprises have gone out of business or suffered significant losses (Wen et al., 2020).

Over the last decade, the tourism industry has encountered various crises and disasters, including terrorist attacks, political instability, economic recession, biosecurity threats, and natural disasters. Previously known as the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), the virus causes the COVID-19 disease and pandemic marked first by an outbreak of respiratory illness manifested in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province in the Republic of China. As of 22 March 2021, it has recorded more than 122 million confirmed cases worldwide and a death toll of 2.7 million (WHO, 2021b). Meanwhile, Malaysia has reported 333,040 confirmed cases and 1,233 deaths as of 21 March 2021 (WHO, 2021a).

To reduce the pandemic spread, World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) has recommended a physical distancing policy, requiring communities to maintain physical distancing when outdoors, avoid crowded places, and forgo gathering activities. Furthermore, some countries have implemented lockdown or movement control policies in which only food and health-related businesses and industries are allowed to operate during such a tense period. As a result of these government-mandated precautionary efforts, practically every industry has been affected by lockdowns, quarantines, and border closures (Goodell, 2020). The impact is especially exhibited for the tourism sector specifically, whereby the tourism and hospitality industries are particularly crippled due to this crisis (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Closed borders have limited flights ferrying passengers to and from destinations, while quarantine measures minimise the opportunities to travel altogether (Nicola et al., 2020).

Immediately post-COVID-19 outbreak, many publications have emerged to explore the novel phenomenon and depict the pandemic's impact on the overall life on earth and the travel and tourism industries (Brouder et al., 2020). Most of the available sources are fundamentally focused on its current effects and negative consequences towards a multitude of economic sectors (Goodell, 2020; Nicola et al., 2020), including tourism. Meanwhile, some studies have tailored their examinations in the context of supply-side perspective, estimating the damage caused and forecasting the consequences of tourist offer changes and remodelling (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Contrary to this, demand-side studies have remained somewhat scarce (Zencker and Kock, 2020), possibly due to its novelty and uncertainty in terms of the economic aspect and the ongoing risk of infection. Thus far, only a few papers have investigated the emerging signs of consumer recovery and the readiness to renew vacations (Ivanova et al., 2020; Enger et al., 2020; Collins, 2020).

Theoretically, gender has been underlined as one of the most commonly investigated variables showing differences across individuals (Kim, 2016; Kwun, 2011; Venkatesh et al., 2009) similar to marital status (Lee and Bhargava, 2004). It is assumed that individuals of different socio-economic statuses may exhibit dissimilar preferences or potentially choose the same activities, thereby necessitating further investigation. Therefore, those of different genders and marital statuses may be inclined to various types of tourism activities and intentions, rendering demographics an essential consideration that should not be neglected.

As time trickles, nations worldwide have recorded a declining infection curve, allowing the respective governments to commence strategic planning for travel resumption and economic growth restoration (Fakhruddin et al. 2020; Collins, 2020). Accordingly, some consumers or tourists may possibly alter their perceptions, preferences, and attitudes to travel (Peters et al. 2020), mainly due to the immense impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human health and the global economy. As such, this work aims to evaluate the impact of 2019-nCoV on individual travelling preferences in the context of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) corresponding to two demographic factors (i.e. gender and marital status) upon the allowance of travel during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it is designed to answer three questions as follows: 1) Does the intention to travel differ among respondents in terms of their gender and marital status?; 2) Does the frequency to travel differ among respondents in terms of their gender and marital status?; and 3) To what extent does the mean score of major variables differ according to gender?. The third research question necessitates the adoption of the TPB by Ajzen (1991) in understanding the travel intention among individuals of different genders during the COVID-19 pandemic based on the variables of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in view of their knowledge of the pandemic.

2 Literature Review

Definition-wise, the intention to visit refers to the willingness of a potential visitor to visit a destination (Chen, Shang, & Li, 2014), denoting the rational assessment undertaken by the individual and incorporating a cost and benefit analysis for such destination. A review of available literature has illustrated that the study of gender differences is largely unnoticed in much of the tourism behaviour studies published (Carr, 1999). In theory, gender is biologically identified and socially and culturally constructed (Okazaki & Hirose, 2009). Traditionally, males show a tendency for seeking action and adventure and dare to take risks, whereas females are more likely to search for cultural and educational experiences with their security as a point of priority (Mieczkowski, 1990). Therefore, individual gender inevitably impacts leisure demands (Mieczkowski, 1990; Collin and Tisdell, 2002).

For example, Nasra and Kezia (2020) have investigated Tanzanian visitors' demographic characteristics and travel motivations and identified the significant role played by gender. This renders a better understanding of future travelling intentions held by tourists with respect to gender as highly necessary. Meanwhile, Firestone and Shelton (1994) have revealed distinct differences between the leisure patterns of men and women in the United States, arguing that the former would spend more time than the latter on social entertainment (e.g. attending sports

activities, eating out, and going to movies and plays). Contrarily, the work of Yoo and Zhao (2010) has illustrated that convention travel decisions do not differ between both genders. This is echoed by Fang and Muzaffer's (2008) study, which has also reported that no significant gender differences are seen in the perceived importance of motivation (i.e. attitude).

With respect to marital status, Lee and Bhargava (2004) have indicated that married couples spend less time enjoying leisure activities than single individuals. This tendency is attributable to their social and familial obligations, which restrain them from going on holiday vacations (Henderson, 1990). When juxtaposing marital status in the context of other social activities, single individuals prefer those such as music, dance, radio, and television-based activities or interacting with friends as opposed to married couples (Lee & Bhargava, 2004). However, Nasra and Kezia (2020) have found that married leisure visitors opt to visit Tanzania for social reasons. This is contrary to the scholarly opinion that singles have more time and freedom to experience new and exciting things (Passias et al., 2017). Regardless, Fan et al. (2015) have expressed that this population shows higher mean values for travel objectives, including discovering and exploring nature, compared to married people.

In general, TPB (Ajzen, 1991) is a psychology theory delineating the psychological phenomenon of human behavioural intention, encompassing three variables: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. In particular, an individual's intention or the repetition of one's intention is the driving force behind human behaviour (Abbasi et al., 2020a, 2020b). Personal attitude is a structured collection of values, emotions, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events, or symbols that last for a long time (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005). Alternatively, attitude towards a behaviour is a psychological phenomenon underlining an individual's positive or negative assessment of a specific object or behaviour under consideration (Icek, 1991). It is thought that if one maintains an optimistic and upbeat attitude, positive results will follow. Numerous research efforts undertaken in the field of travel and tourism have thus discovered a considerably positive association between attitudes for visiting a destination and the plans to visit or undertake a vacation at such location (Bianchi et al., 2017; Hasan et al., 2017; Hasan et al., 2019).

Next, subjective norm refers to the perceived social pressure to either perform or not perform for a behaviour. By definition, it describes one's perception of other people's force of influence (i.e. social pressure of some sort) to either commence such behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This echoes Ramdhani's (2011) explanation in which the element of social influence or subjective norms is a feature of an individual's values, which are derived from other people's perspectives on the topic of their attitudes (i.e. normative beliefs). In general, subjective norms are well-known in the marketing and tourism literature as a motivator of behavioural intentions (Hasan et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, perceived behavioural control or simply behavioural control is one's perceived ease or difficulty in performing a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). It encompasses two components: the availability of resources needed to engage and self-confidence in their ability to conduct the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Taylor & Todd, 1995). Besides, the variable refers to the individual perception of the fact that personal and situational impediments exist towards performing such behaviour. Theoretically, a higher perceived behavioural control is associated

with a greater tendency of acting out the behaviour, whereby ability, time, and resources are core drivers in anticipating behavioural intentions (Abbasi et al., 2020c).

Similarly, knowledge is a critical construct in behavioural research and plays a crucial role in individual decision-making processes. According to Kaplan (1991), one's knowledge of an issue significantly affects their decision; evidence has shown that an understanding of conservation can influence such behaviour in their daily routine. Here, knowing how to conduct the intended action, determining the liability for such intended action, and evaluating the perceived success of the behavioural action are all examples of behaviour-related awareness (Park, 1994). When a person can effectively interpret the characteristics and attributes of a subject, they would improve the accuracy in decision-making and reduce the risk of bad decision-making. Le (2021) has previously studied the intention to visit among European tourists in Vietnam and revealed that visitor satisfaction and intention to visit are positively influenced by knowledge.

3 Methodology

The sample for this preliminary study was acquired through convenient sampling in December 2020, whereby respondents were contacted via WhatsApp group. A link to the online survey was attached in the call for a response. The sample size was calculated based on the working-age group (i.e. 16-64 years old) documented for Malaysia in 2020, wherein the population was approximately 22.3 million in total (DOSM, 2020). Here, the G*Power 3.1 software (Faul et al. 2009) was employed to determine the sample size, yielding a minimum number of respondents of 45 required for the study. This value was obtained based on a medium effect size of 0.15, significance level of 0.05, and statistical power of 0.8 with four predicting factors. After screening for blank and straight-lining responses, none of the responses received was omitted, resulting in a final accepted total of 114. The sample size was justified as per Roscoe's (1975) rule of thumb stating that most studies should have those greater than 30 respondents but fewer than 500.

The distributed questionnaire consisted of three sections: Section A on demographics, Section B on respondents' travel preferences, and Section C on TPB variables (i.e. attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) and knowledge. Two questions were included in Section B: 1) will you travel again after travelling is allowed, and 2) what is your frequency of travelling after it is allowed? The respective questions necessitated answers as follows: 'Yes vs No' options for the first question and 'less vs more' for the second question. Meanwhile, Section C incorporated a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The overall questionnaires incorporated in the survey were adapted and adopted from Bults et al (2011); Li, et al. (2021); Chen and Tung (2014); Wang and Ritchie (2012); Sung-Bum Kim and Ki-Joon Kwon (2018); and Luo and Lam (2016). Table 1 below depicts the survey instruments implemented in the study accordingly.

Table 1: Survey instruments

No	Items
C1	I believe it is still a good idea to go for a holiday to the city I have planned on visiting when travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

C2	I will be excited to go for a holiday to the city I have planned on visiting when travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
C3	I find that going for a holiday to my dream destinations is as fun as before when travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
C4	I am motivated to travel for relaxation and leisure when travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
C5	I am motivated to travel to seek diversion and entertainment when travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
C6	I am motivated to travel for intellectual improvement when travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
C7	When travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, most people close to me think that I should go for a holiday to the destination I have planned to visit initially.
C8	When travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, my relatives recommend to go on a holiday to the destination I have planned to visit initially.
C9	The people I know expect me to go for a holiday to the destination I have planned to visit after travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
C10	I will go to travel whenever I wish to after travelling is allowed during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
C11	I will travel to wherever destinations I wish to after travelling is allowed during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
C12	When travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I will be financially stable to go for a holiday to the city I intend on visiting.
C13	When travelling is allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I will spare my time going for a holiday to the destinations I intend to visit originally.
C14	A vaccine is available against the COVID-19 disease.
C18	Symptoms of COVID-19 disease are visible.

First, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) test was conducted to check the suitability for factor analysis. As the outcomes were found to be significant, factor analysis was thus carried out. Theoretically, it is one of the most useful methods known for studying and validating the internal structure of research instruments (Nunnally, 1978; Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991; Kieffer, 1999; Henson & Roberts, 2006). Next, principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was implemented to investigate the instruments; upon their confirmation, the data were subjected to reliability and normality tests using kurtosis and skewness.

Following factor analysis, a Chi-square assessment was conducted to explore the relationship between two demographic variables (i.e. gender and marital status), which was then cross-tabulated with two items, namely 1) intention to travel and 2) frequency of travel. Furthermore, a test of independence was performed to check whether the two-gender subgroups (i.e. male and female) were rated differently for the mean scores associated with the major variables (i.e. attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and knowledge). The latter analysis was carried out using an independent t-test, followed by measuring the effect size via eta squared. Eta squared represents the proportion of variance for the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable (Pallant, 2001). The current study utilised Cohen's (1988) guidelines to interpret the strength of the effect size.

4 Findings

This section explains the demographic profile of the respondents and offers a discussion on the analytical techniques performed accordingly, namely factor analysis, descriptive analysis, reliability tests, cross-tabulations, and independent t-test.

Table 2: Profile and Preferences of Respondents

	Frequency	percentage
Age		
<=20	28	24.6
21-30	73	64.0
31-40	6	5.3
41-50	4	3.5
51-60	3	2.6
Gender		
Male	31	27.2
Female	83	72.8
Marital status		
Single	94	82.5
Married	20	17.5
Education		
Secondary level	2	1.8
Certification	9	7.9
Diploma	56	49.1
Bachelor's degree	40	35.1
Master's degree	7	6.1
Ethnicity		
Malay	108	94.7
Chinese	4	3.5
Indian	2	1.8
Employment status		
Student	65	57.0
Government	12	10.5
Private	21	18.4
Self-Employed	8	7.0
Unemployed	3	2.6
Retiree	1	0.9
Others	4	3.5
Monthly income (MYR)		
<=2000	89	78.1
2001-5000	15	13.2
5001-8000	4	3.5
11001-14000	3	2.6
14001-17000	1	0.9
17001-20000	2	1.8
Intention to travel		

Yes	53	46.5
No	61	53.5
Frequency of travel		
Less frequent	93	81.6
More frequent	21	18.4

Table 2 above summarises the demographic profile of the respondents. In brief, the sample size was female-dominated at 73% (83), while most of the participants (64%, 73) were aged between 21-30 years. Furthermore, more than half of them (57%, 65) were students and most earned less than RM2000 at 78.1% (89). Regardless, 46.5% (53) of the respondents expressed the wish to travel again once allowed during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, 81.6% (93) or a majority of them would prefer to travel less compared to pre-pandemic outbreak.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis and Normality Test for Major Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Attitude	4.82	1.373	-.622	.365
Subjective norms	4.39	1.491	-.379	-.122
Perceived behavioural control	4.78	1.338	-.397	-.040
Knowledge	5.51	.882	-.592	.582

In Table 3, the outcomes of descriptive analysis for the study are displayed in detail. For example, the values obtained for Attitude (M = 4.82, SD = 1.373), Subjective Norm (M = 4.39, SD = 1.491), and Perceived Behavioural Control (M = 4.78, SD = 1.338) suggested that the participants were slightly more than undecided to travel when allowed amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, they depicted good knowledge when tested about their understanding of the pandemic.

Moreover, the normality test was conducted on all major variables in which the rule of thumb dictated values of skewness and kurtosis as ±1 and ±7, respectively. Accordingly, Table 3 shows the univariate skewness and kurtosis results, whereby the values of attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and knowledge for both aspects were within 1 and 7. Thus, all four major variables in the current study were deemed normally distributed.

Table 4: Reliability Coefficients for the Major Variables

Variable	Number of items	Items dropped	Cronbach's Alpha
Attitude	5	-	0.932
Subjective norms	4	-	0.927
Perceived behavioural control	4	-	0.892
Knowledge	5	3	0.711

Next, reliability testing was done for Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioural Control, and Knowledge, which were then assessed according to Nunnally's (1978) suggested for established scales, namely at a value of 0.8-0.9. As shown in Table 4, Cronbach's alpha values

obtained for all four variables are greater than 0.7, namely 0.932, 0.927, 0.892, and 0.711, respectively. Thus, no items were deleted, except for the three items of the Knowledge variable.

Meanwhile, the outcomes of factor analysis are as follows: first, the KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy is applied to determine the data suitability for factor analysis and the results are exhibited in Table 5 accordingly. Here, the KMO value generated was 0.911; it exceeded the threshold value of 0.50 and indicated a meritorious index that the study's KMO outcomes met the requirement. Concurrently, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a value of 1553.33 at a significance of <0.001, thereby suggesting that no correlation was present between the variables. Thus, factor analysis could be conducted in full confidence as per the results of both tests.

Table 5: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.911
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1553.332
	df	105
	Sig.	.000

Next, a calculation of the anti-image correlation was performed using the Measures of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) in which the value was obtained by looking at the diagonal value with the 'a' alphabet next to each value seen in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Of all 18 tested items, 15 successfully met the MSA requirement of above 0.5, whereas the remaining three items were smaller than 0.5. Thus, these three low factor value items were eliminated from the list, while all 15 were deemed feasible for further factor analysis.

Table 6: Factor Analysis Results

Items	1	2	3	4	Communalities	Anti-image correlation
C1	0.768				0.752	0.945
C2	0.762				0.842	0.913
C3		0.574			0.683	0.966
C4	0.845				0.849	0.895
C5	0.668				0.837	0.967
C6	0.783				0.734	0.940
C7		0.848			0.869	0.875
C8		0.841			0.918	0.861
C9		0.771			0.839	0.885
C10			0.550		0.747	0.916
C11			0.622		0.784	0.914
C12			0.783		0.832	0.891
C13			0.710		0.857	0.920
C14				0.780	0.764	0.892
C18				0.852	0.801	0.861
Cronbach's alpha	0.932	0.927	0.892	0.711		

Eigenvalue	0.9183	1.229	0.986	0.709
% of variance	61.22	8.192	6.575	4.729

Communalities are the variance in observed variables accounted for by a common factor, which are more relevant for the purpose of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Based on Table 6 above, 15 tested items successfully meet the commonality requirement with extraction values of more than 0.5. A higher communality value indicates a tighter relationship between the variable and the established factors. For instance, C1 yielded a value of 0.752, which revealed that it could explain the factor at a frequency of 75.2%. Likewise, all other items were above 0.5 in value, suggesting that all could explain the factor very well. Similarly, the total variance explained showed four factors were formed in the study based on the Eigenvalue (> 1). The percentage of variance was explained by reducing it from 15 items to four factors. The study was able to retain 80.72% of the original of 100% and recorded a loss of only 19.28%.

Meanwhile, the final step in factor loading was factor determination. A rotated component matrix was utilised to check on the loadings (i.e. show the correlation between items and construct) to determine which item would go to which factor. In view of the absence of independent and dependent variables in the data set, principal component extraction and varimax rotation were applied. The results obtained indicated that the loading and cross-loading values were greater than 0.5 (refer to Table 6).

Corresponding to the Rotated Component Matrix, the loading factor coefficients of all 15 tested items in Factors 1, 2, 3, and 4 are depicted in Table 6. Here, items C1, C2, C4, C5, and C6 were correlated with Factor 1, with values ranging from 0.668 to 0.845. Meanwhile, the values correlated with Factor 2 were denoted by items C3, C7, C8, and C9 at 0.574, 0.848, 0.841, and 0.771, respectively. Alternatively, items C10, C11, C12, and C13 were correlated with Factor 3 at values of 0.550, 0.622, 0.783, and 0.710, respectively. The last two items (i.e. C14 and C18) were correlated with Factor 4 at the values of 0.780 and 0.852, respectively. By looking at the item loading for each factor, Factors 1, 2, 3, and 4 could then be identified and suggested to be assigned to factor labels, namely Attitude, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioural Control, and Knowledge, respectively.

Next, cross-tabulation analysis was performed in line with the study intention of assessing gender and marital status as two demographic factors against respondent preferences and frequency to travel amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 7: Cross-tabulation and respondent intention to travel

Variable				N	Chi-Square
		Yes	No		
Gender	Male	35.5	64.5	31	1.1511
	Female	50.6	49.4	83	
Marital status	Single	44.7	55.3	94	
	Married	55.0	45.0	20	0.352

A comparison of the genders and respondent intention to travel is revealed in Table 7, whereby 35.5% of the male respondents answered "yes" compared to 50.6% of the females. However, the Chi-square value of 1.1511 suggested that no differences were present for respondent's intention to travel amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and gender. Similar outcomes were seen in terms of marital status and respondent intention to travel, whereby 44.7% of the single respondents answered "yes" compared to 55% of the married. Here, the Chi-square value of 0.352 suggested that no differences were seen for the respondent's intention to travel amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and marital status.

Table 8: Cross-tabulation and respondent frequency to travel

Variable				N	Chi-Square
		Less	More		
Gender	Male	87.1	12.9	31	0.432
	Female	79.5	20.5	83	
Marital status	Single	79.8	20.2	94	0.566
	Married	90.0	10.0	20	

The demographic profiles and respondent frequency of travelling once allowed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic are depicted in Table 8 in which 87.1% of the males opt for less travel frequency compared to 79.5% for the females. This was confirmed by the insignificant Chi-square value of 0.432, suggesting no differences present for respondent travel frequency and gender. This study is consistent with the outcomes of Ramirez, Laing, and Mair (2013). An identical outcome has been found in terms of marital status. In particular, 79.8% of the single people answered for less travel frequency than 90% of the married people. Nevertheless, the Chi-square value of 0.566 suggested that no differences could be seen in the frequency of travelling and marital status.

The final analysis undertaken in this study was by running the test of differences (i.e. comparing the mean scores). This was done to determine the presence of any differences between the male and female genders for the mean scores across all four major variables, namely attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and knowledge.

Table 9: Differences in the major variables by gender

Variables	Male	Female	t-value	p-value
Attitude	5.01	4.75	0.920	0.360
Subjective norms	4.83	4.22	1.958	0.053*
Perceived behavioural control	5.06	4.67	1.401	0.164
Knowledge	5.81	5.39	2.708	0.008**

Note: **<0.01%, *<0.10%

Here, an independent sample t-test is conducted to compare the mean scores for all major variables according to gender, wherein the outcomes are depicted in Table 9. For Subjective

Norm, significant differences were seen in the scores for males (M = 4.83, SD = 1.424) and females [M = 4.22, SD = 1.490; t(112) = 1.958, p = 0.053]. However, the magnitude of such differences was relatively small (eta squared = 0.033), indicating that only 3.3% of the variance in attitude could be explained by gender. For Knowledge, meanwhile, significant differences were also seen in the mean scores for males (M = 5.81, SD = 0.649) and females [M = 5.39, SD = 0.933; t(112) = 2.708, p = 0.008]. Here, the magnitude of the differences was moderate (eta squared = 0.063), implying that 8% of the variance in knowledge could be explained by gender. Contrarily, no significant differences were seen for the mean scores of gender and the two remaining major variables, namely Attitude and Perceived Behavioural Control.

5 Conclusion

The current study successfully contributed to the literature by investigating the interaction between demographic profile (i.e. gender and marital status) and respondent travel preferences (i.e. intention to travel and frequency of travelling) during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of the respondents (53.5%) did not intend to travel based on descriptive analysis. They were more likely to stay at home and less likely to travel even when it was allowed during the pandemic. Meanwhile, 81.6% of the respondents chose to travel less frequently compared to pre-pandemic. It seemed that when the respondent's risk perception increased, their tendency for the intention to travel and frequency of travelling was lower. Thus, it may take some time for the tourism sector to rebound as the population requires time to regain their confidence for travelling again.

This study demonstrated the demographic characteristics and travelling preferences for the cross-tabulation analysis to achieve the second objective. Firstly, the intention to travel and frequency of travelling were cross-tabulated with gender, revealing that males and females were both likely to yield similar intention for travelling and frequency of travelling during the COVID-19 pandemic. The same finding was also found for the cross-tabulation between marital status and intention to travel and frequency of travelling, depicting no differences. As the pandemic affected people around the world regardless of gender, marital status, and other demographic factors, all respondents had no choice but to stay safe at home. In fact, this pandemic has impacted everyone globally to the extent that normal travel behaviour should be modified, thereby resulting in an unusual alternation in the daily activities and travel lifestyle throughout the history of travel.

Lastly, the study compared the mean scores generated by four major variables (i.e. three from TPB and knowledge) with gender. The test of differences revealed significant differences in gender for subjective norms and knowledge. As mentioned by Kaplan (1991), knowledge is an important construct for behavioural decision-making. Here, males and females both depicted significant differences in knowledge, but the mean scores were equally high, which were above 5 points, thus implying that both genders were equipped with good knowledge about COVID-19. In terms of subjective norms, the respondent's intention to travel was based on perceived social pressure by the people they knew (Ramdhani, 2011), depicting significant differences between males and females. However, no significant differences were found between both genders

according to travelling attitude and perceived behavioural control. This may indicate that travelling is no longer perceived as fun and safe in times of a pandemic compared to before and the current situation has shifted tourist perceptions towards becoming more cautious about individual health safety and cleanliness.

Meanwhile, the findings also showed that males had higher mean scores compared to females for all four major variables. This is possibly attributable to the latter having set their priority for family commitment and limiting their social and physical activities such as travelling and leisure as a result (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Firestone & Shelton, 1994; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Henderson et al., 1998). Moreover, females are perceived to be more cautious about potential risks than their male counterparts (Mieczkowski, 1990). The male respondents in the study were mostly single and did not have any familial commitment, rendering the finding consistent with that of Lee and Bhargava (2004), Fan et al. (2015), and Passias et al. (2017), namely singles tend to participate more in social activities.

One may anticipate a lower likelihood for travel demands during the COVID-19 pandemic in line with stringent SOP, social distancing, and travel restrictions. This is reflected in a particular impact, namely consumers shifting their perceptions, preferences, and attitudes to travel (Peters, Peters, & Peters, 2020). Therefore, boosting the tourism sector may necessitate companies to undertake strategies that consider such a shift in tourism behaviour and demand (Brouder, 2020). They should be suited to the current needs of potential tourists across all types of demographic characteristics, encompassing single individuals and married couples of male and female genders alike as the pandemic is anticipated to reflect a durable effect.

Moreover, governments should prepare for recommencing travel, which would require considerable transformation within the tourism sector, namely reorganisation and integration of new protocols and standards (Lew et. al., 2020). Thus, scholars need to study and understand respondent preferences for travelling and their behavioural characteristics for such activity in association with gender and marital status. It is hoped that the findings of the current study could shed light for policymakers and industry practitioners towards developing the best tourism strategies in gaining public trust and making travelling more secure and less risky to all. For example, researchers interested in extending this study could look into the effects of different income groups and occupations on respondent travel plans. Besides, future research could investigate the respective relationship between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and knowledge with the intention to travel during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic when tourism is allowed.

6 About the author

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