Hospitality & Tourism
Systems

Crisis Communication and Destination Image Management during COVID-19: A Case of Top Ten International Tourist Arrival Countries

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Abstract *The outbreak of COVID-19 has come as a disastrous blow on the tourism industry worldwide. Incidentally, several developed economies that are highly popular destinations and feature in the top rankings of international tourist arrivals, have been severely hit by the virus. Consequently the image of these countries has been adversely affected, creating a negative public perception about prevailing health and safety risks therein. There is deep concern for these destinations about 'when' and 'how' things will return to normalcy and if image recovery would be possible. As the pandemic lingers on indefinitely and tourism continues to suffer, tourism destinations cannot withdraw into complacency, but need to engage more actively with tourists through crisis communication. Communicating up-to-date credible information, combating developing negative images and continuous perception management through convincing outreach becomes increasingly vital in times of a disaster in order to allay the fears of tourists and reassure them. This qualitative study investigates whether or not, the global top ranking tourism destinations are engaged in any focused crisis communication and destination image management during the ongoing pandemic. The findings reveal that Spain has remained most proactive in image management and regular crisis communicating with tourists, with use of continuous, frequently changing creative messages and up-to-date comprehensive covid information. Spain's communication signifies that 'it is not the end all' of travel and tourism. While most other countries also continue to engage with tourists at some level, the tourism website of France stands out as conspicuously outdated and silent on the pandemic.*

Keywords: *Covid-19, Crisis Management, Destination Image, Recovery Marketing*

INTRODUCTION

In the year 2020, the outbreak of Novel Coronavirus, i.e. COVID-19 has struck a strong blow on the tourism industry. The infectious disease has caused strong tremors across nations paralyzing functioning of lives, thereby bringing the world to a screeching halt. The situation is 'unprecedented', 'unexpected', 'uncontrollable' and seems 'indefinitely lasting'. Starting in a remote corner in China, the virus has swiftly spread around the world, taking the shape of a 'pandemic'. International travel is attributed to be the prime carrier of the disease which has transcended national boundaries and has spread its tentacles far and wide. The exceptionally well performing tourism industry that crossed soaring statistics of 1.5 billion international tourist arrivals in

2019, is now suddenly in a reverse, estimated to go into 60-80% decline, as predicted by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020).

All though disaster like earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfires, infectious diseases, hurricanes, etc, have struck the tourism industry repeatedly over time, the Novel Coronavirus has proved to be an unprecedented, uncontrollable disaster. As disasters can have serious consequences for tourism destinations, the manner in which disaster management and recovery responses are carried out has intrigued researchers for long (Carlsen and Hughes, 2008; Faulkner, 2001; Faulkner and Vikulov, 2001; Huang and Min, 2002; Pearlman and Melnik, 2008; Pine and McKercher, 2004; Pottorff and Neal, 1994; Rindrasih, Witte, Spit, and Zoomers, 2019; Ritchie, 2008). However, no disaster till date has been of

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the magnitude of the current 'Covid-19', a 'colossal disaster' that has swiftly evolved into a major 'crisis'. It is an irony that some of the most developed economies that are the top ranking tourism destinations of the world, have easily succumbed to the virus and have entered into top ranks of the most affected nations as well. 'Seven', of the top ten ranking tourist arrival countries viz. France, Spain, U.S., China, Italy, Germany and UK, are seriously hit by the virus. Only Turkey, Mexico and Thailand have managed to remain relatively safe. On account of increasing health and safety concerns, the pandemic has cast a dark shadow on the tourism industry of these prime destinations which have long held a highly positive tourism image and remained favorites on the itinerary of global tourists. The pandemic has sounded a loud alarm bell raising the concern that henceforth, future travel decisions and choices of tourists will be significantly determined by their 'risk perception' of health and safety concerns, perhaps shying away tourists and adversely affecting tourism in these countries. In such a time, one can only take solace in the fact that disaster research in tourism over the last few decades is nonetheless 'reassuring', as it documents that time and again tourism has proven to be 'highly resilient' and has invariably 'bounced back' rather quickly, after each disasters (Filimonau and DeCoteau, 2020; Pearlman and Melnik, 2008; Pforr and Hosie, 2008; Pine and McKercher, 2004; Ritchie, 2008).

As the situation eases, no doubt tourism may bounce back, but the reality is that the scenario will change remarkably. Extra effort would be needed by every country's Destination Management Organization (DMO) to allay the fears of tourists and re-image the destination, through innovative marketing messages that can bring back the anxious and reluctant tourists. Hence 'image management' and 'image recovery' from the pandemic, will be the prime agenda of every destination that has long relied upon tourism as a major revenue earner.

The general trend is that whenever a disaster strikes, as an immediate response, all efforts get aggressively channelized towards dealing with the immediate situation. Only once the situation is brought under control, it is 'post disaster' that DMOs start engaging in 'image recovery'. Questioning this approach, research carried out by Beirman (2003) suggests that there is nothing wrong in destinations continuing their image management and marketing activities 'during disaster' than 'wait to resume post-disaster'. Addressing the context of continuing marketing activities for tourists during disaster, this exploratory study aims to investigate 'if at all', 'how' and 'what kind' of 'innovative marketing messages' (taglines/slogans/messages) and 'COVID-19 information' are being communicated on the official tourism websites of the top ten tourist arrival countries for crisis communication and image management 'during' the ongoing crisis.

BACKGROUND

Disasters have attracted keen attention of researchers as they tend to have serious implications on economies. In the last two decades major disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, wildfires, terror attacks, wars and outbreak of contagious disease like Swine flu, Zika and Ebola, among others, have created sensations in different parts around the world. While localized disasters (restricted in physical space) are relatively easy to mange, regional and national disasters tend to create mammoth challenges of management and recovery. Unmanageable disasters often snowball into a 'crisis' situation and may destroy the tourism image of any destination. A negative image results in adversely influencing travel intentions of tourists. If tourists stop travelling due to safety concerns, the tourism industry takes the direct hit. Such has been the result of several disasters that have from time to time crippled the tourism industry (Carlsen, and Hughes, 2008; Cayhanto et al., 2016; Faulkner and Vikulov, 2001; Henderson, 2003; Law, 2006; Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005; Ryu, Bordelon and Pearlman, 2013).

Disaster and Crisis

Several studies have addressed disaster and crisis management in tourism (Filimonau and De Coteau, 2019; Hall, 2010; Pforr and Hosie, 2008; Poimiroo, 2001; Ritchie, 2008; Rindrasih et al., 2019; Sonmez, Apostolopoulos and Tarlow, 1999). However, no clear distinction is apparent between 'disaster' and 'crisis', as both these words are invariably used 'interchangeably' as synonyms. An elaboration is required to distinguish between the two. A 'disaster' can be described as a catastrophic or cataclysmic event that has severe adverse effects on physical, social and economic environment of a business, on lives and society, and on operations, often paralyzing or screwing up things. Scholars put forth differing views on the term disaster. Faulkner (2001) limits his explanation of a disaster with respect to 'functioning of enterprises', suggesting that disasters are sudden, difficult to deal with situations that effect an enterprise. Nevertheless, the implications of disasters cannot be restricted to an enterprises alone, as a disaster can have a wider context and it can impact a broader socio-economic and physical environment (Hall, 2010; Huang, Tseng, and Petrick, 2008; Ritchie, 2008). With respect to 'cause/origin', two broad classifications are made, of disasters, i.e. 'natural' (God created) or 'man made' (human created). Natural disasters include earthquakes, volcanic bursts, droughts, wildfires, floods, etc., while man-made disasters are usually in the form of terror attacks, criminal acts and careless human behavior. In tourism, instead of disasters, some scholars have termed these situations as 'tourism crisis' that are attributed

to similar two broad causes, i.e. a). Mother nature, i.e. natural, and b) Human nature i.e. man made (Poimiroo, 2001; Sausmarez, 2007).

A disaster can 'germinate' into a 'crisis'. This happens when the system fails to deal with it due to 'inept management structures and practices' or due to a 'failure to adapt to change' (Faulkner, 2001:136). As suggested by Law and Prideaux (2005), a disaster can 'culminate' into a crisis when it comes as an 'unprepared shock' that creates an adverse situation. In the personal view of the author, a disaster 'precedes', a crisis and depending upon its magnitude and management, it 'may' or 'may not' develop/crystallize into a crisis. A disaster is a negative incident/occurrence, which if not managed, may lead to developing of a crisis (situation).

How quickly a disaster turns into a crisis depends upon 'preparedness'. While certain disasters 'instantly' cause a crisis, others 'take time' to build into a crisis. With respect to 'evolution time' of a crisis, Seymour and Moore (2000) identify crisis as 'Cobra' (sudden) or 'Python' (gradually developing). Similarly, observing the gestation period of a crisis, Parson (1996) has classified crisis as, a) 'Immediate' (sudden, without warning and unprepared), b). 'Emerging' (slow to develop), and c) 'Sustained' (long lasting).

With regard to tourism crisis, the most comprehensive definition has been coined by Sonmez, Backman and Allen (1994), who say that it is 'any occurrence which can threaten the normal operation and conduct of tourism related business; damage a tourist destination's overall reputation for safety, attractiveness and comfort, by negatively affecting visitors' perceptions of that destination; and, in turn, cause a downturn in the local travel and tourism economy and interrupt the continuity of business operations for the local travel and tourism industry by the reduction in tourist arrivals and expenditures' (p.22).

COVID-19 Pandemic as a Tourism Crisis

A simple influenza can build into an epidemic or pandemic. In the last three decades, the world has been witness to the outbreak of serious diseases like Ebola, Swine Flu, (H1N1) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Like other disasters, infectious diseases become a cause of serious concern for an individual's health safety. Contagious diseases pose the maximum threat as they are not easily detected and hence cannot be controlled due to their ability of swift transmission, which is difficult to monitor. While other disasters are largely limited to geographical space, pandemics have the widest far flung reach as they easily transcend national boundaries.

Similar has been the case of Novel Coronavirus, i.e. Covid-19. It has invaded the globe within a short span of time. The spread of the disease has been attributed to movement and contact of people (through travel). Of the travelers, tourists form large segments that unknowingly and unintentionally become carriers of microbes. Therefore pandemics raise heightened concerns about international travel (Cayhanto et al., 2016; Kuo et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2012; Pine and McKercher, 2000; Reisinger and Movando, 2008). Hence on the outbreak of Coronavirus, as an instant safety response, countries around the world immediately banned all domestic and international travel and went into lockdown, to discourage people from moving outdoors. Citizens were strictly advised to avoid all 'non essential' travel. Travel for leisure has halted since the outbreak and is expected to pick up gradually as the situation eases. It is feared that tourists may not resume travel for leisure for quite some time. Besides, the restrictions on all tourist movement have strongly hit the tourism industry worldwide, causing huge losses for tourism destinations. Ironically, some of the top ranking countries in international tourist arrivals, which have long held a highly positive tourism destination image, have become the major casualties of Covid-19. Their image has been tarnished, posing new challenges for 'image management' and 'image recovery'.

Destination Image, Media and Crisis

Destination image, i.e. 'organic' and 'induced', plays a crucial role in attracting tourists (Armstrong and Ritchie, 2008; Baloglu and McCleary; 1999; Chon 1991; Dolnicar and Huybers, 2007; Tasci and Gartner, 2007). The 'organic' image reflects the existing unmodified genuine attributes of a destination, while the 'induced image' is a consciously and creatively tailored image to attract tourists. Images are created through 'personal experiences' and through 'media propaganda'. Media can play a vital role in destination image formation. The global news media has the ability to 'make' or 'break' a destination. The nature of coverage given by media to any disaster or crisis situation can significantly influence the image of a destination. The present 'Information and Communication Technology' (ICT) era provides instant global reach of information/news dissemination that contributes to perception and image creation. Media can 'underplay' any happening, or can create a 'mountain out of a molehill'. Beirman (2003) believes that crises have a high probability of being 'reported' by media than 'recovery and restoration'. Quarantelli (1996) and Faulkner (2001) concur that all though media is a valuable primary source of information, it can become instrumental in 'creating a crisis' of a minor incident. In the present Coronavirus disaster, media has played an important role by 24/7 reporting of the gloomy picture worldwide, which has cast a shadow even on the brightly shining image of perfect tourism destinations which have helplessly succumbed to the deadly virus. Media reporting can trigger deep fear amongst tourists, enhancing 'risk perceptions' related to travel (Chew and Jahari, 2014).

Risk perceptions, however, may differ from country to country (Carter, 1998; Clayton, Mustelier, and Korstanje, 2014; Law, 2006; Pearlman and Melnik, 2008; Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009; Sharifpour, Walters and Ritchie, 2014). In the current crisis, it is now being observed that developed countries, though the hardest hit by the virus, have responded most quickly and effectively to manage their tourism image. They have initiated prompt crisis communication and recovery marketing that is geared at erasing the dark blot cast by the virus upon on their flawless destination image.

Ongoing Crisis Communication and Image Management during Crisis

Getting back tourists after a major disaster can be a daunting task for any DMO (Pearlman and Melnik, 2008; Pforr and Hosie, 2008; Ritchie, 2008) because tourists consider 'safety' a priority and tend to be motivated to travel only during safe circumstances (Hajibaba, Boztug and Dolnicar, 2016; Kozak, Crotts and Law, 2007; Law, 2006). As travel for tourism is 'non-essential' travel, fear and uncertainty about safety is likely to discourage immediate movement of tourists right after a disaster, due to increased perceived risks (Clayton, Mustelier, and Korstanje, 2014; Law, 2006). In the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, that has created deep fear, it is difficult to foretell 'if', 'when', and 'how', tourism will resume at certain destinations.

In wake of such looming uncertainty it is important for DMOs to engage in concerted image management efforts. Scott, Laws and Prideaux (2008) have addressed response strategies to deal with a crisis situation at a destination. They suggest that the core of recovery approaches should be the 'acknowledgement' of the need to change travellers' '(mis) perceptions' of the destination. 'Regular information updates' can be helpful to avoid mis-perception of any disaster or crisis situation (Avraham and Ketter, 2017a; Hajibaba, Boztug and Dolnicar, 2016; Mair, Ritchie and Walters, 2016) and can also help in changing risk perception (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011; Sonmez and Graefe, 1998). In this context Letho, Douglas and Park (2008) have emphasized the vital role of 'marketing communication' for restoring visitation to a destination. Ample research suggests that constant communication (to allay the fears of tourists) along with creative marketing messages, is an important part of a recovery strategy (Frisby, 2002; Ryu et al, 2013; Scott, Laws and Prideaux, 2008; Walters and Mair, 2012). Hence DMOs need to continuously and proactively engage in keeping up their marketing efforts regardless of changing situations.

In order to mitigate constant fears of tourists, 'ongoing crisis communication' and marketing during disaster, can keep the destination 'breathing and alive' through continuous 'gentle and convincing messages', which can convey that the crisis situation setback is temporary, not the 'end all' of a tourism destination. Despite marketing, though tourists may be unlikely to return to travel 'during' disaster stricken times, research suggests that tourists are certainly 'not opposed to' and 'do not find it inappropriate' for destinations to continue their marketing and promotional activities 'during' and 'post disaster' (Beirman, 2003; Walters and Mair, 2012).

However, in crisis communication, what remains important is the 'nature of messages' being sent out (Lehto, Douglas and Park, 2008). Research has identified the importance of marketing messages 'during' and 'post disaster' recovery marketing (Mair, Ritchie and Walters, 2016; Walters and Mair, 2012). A number of dominant recovery marketing have emerged, that include 'persuasive advertising', 'restoring confidence', 'communicating community readiness', 'projecting business as usual', 'endorsing destination with testimonials', 'countering negative publicity/correcting misperceptions', 'communicating solidarity', and 'enticing tourists to visit', through employing tactics of 'curiosity enhancement', 'product diversification', 'invitation to reconnect' with the known place and make offers of 'reduced pricing' (Armstrong and Ritchie, 2008; Avraham and Ketter, 2008; Avraham and Ketter, 2017b; Carlsen and Hughes, 2008; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray and Thapa, 2004; Rittichainuwat, 2008; Scott, Laws and Prideaux, 2007). In view of the importance of continuous engagement with tourist especially for recovery marketing, this study elaborates upon the nature of crisis communication adopted by various countries 'during' the ongoing COVID 19 disaster, turned crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This study was based on qualitative content analysis as it helps to interpret and evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication (Arnett, 2007; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The research aimed at identifying, 'if or not' the DMOs of the various countries are engaging in focused crisis communication through new and innovative marketing messages to maintain a their contact with tourists during the current pandemic.

The world's 'top ten ranking' international tourist arrival countries (2019) were taken for the study. The 'official tourism website' of each country was identified and used for data collection. The home page of each of the website was accessed to find out the nature of crisis communication adopted by various DMOs. The study was carried out over a period of 2.5 months period i.e. 1st June to 15th August, 2020. For the purpose of regularly monitoring updates and marketing changes, if any, the websites were accessed fortnightly in 5 quarters, i.e. 1-15 June, 16-30 June, 1-15 July, 16-31 July and 1-15 August, 2020).

Note: *In 2017 China launched a new travel website (travelchina.gov.cn). However the website did not download throughout the study period. Hence through google search the closest relevant website china.org.cn/travel was consulted for data.*

The following two research questions (RQs) were addressed in the study.

RQ 1.   Have the countries designed any new creative message/slogan for recovery marketing during the COVID crisis? If yes, what is the theme/s addressed in the message/slogan?

RQ 2. What is the nature of Covid-19 information and updates (if any), being communicated to tourists through the official tourism website of various countries?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ensuing discussion presents the findings of the investigation to ascertain whether and how, marketing activities and crisis communication are being kept continuously and creatively alive by country DMOs, during the continuing crisis.

Messages/Slogans used for Recovery Marketing during the Ongoing Crisis

Based on disaster recovery marketing themes proposed by Walters and Mair (2012) and other advertising themes identified through additional marketing recovery literature, a comprehensive inventory was drawn out of the most commonly used advertising message themes in recovery marketing, 'during' and 'post disaster'. The themes were assigned separate alphabetic codes, from, A-J (Table 1.).

Table 1: Coding of Marketing Message Theme

Code	Theme
A	Solidarity, Empathy, Compassion and Patience (we are in at together)
B	Restore confidence (i.e. destination is safe)
C	Hope and reassurance (things will be fine again soon)

Code	Theme
D	Community readiness (we are ready to welcome you again)
E	Seek support (your visit can help us)
F	Curiosity enhancement / Product diversification (something new in store)
G	Price reduction (competitive low priced offers)
H	Testimonials (reassurance through celebrities or tourists)
I	Persuasive advertising (ready to welcome, waiting)
J	Open for business (again) / Back in business

The recovery marketing message/s (if any), communicated by each country website were monitored over the study period and listed in Table 2. Each message was decoded to identify the underlying theme projected in the communication.

Table 2, reveals that countries viz. France, U.S, China and Mexico have not designed any special slogan/message for tourists during the crisis. The websites of these countries remained unchanged and simply continued to display their regular country slogan/tagline during the ongoing pandemic. Though France is the top ranking country in international tourist arrivals, surprisingly it has 'not communicated at all' with tourists during this crisis. Perhaps this is because the country has always enjoyed huge popularity amongst tourists and on account of her highly positive destination image it remains over confident, that 'message' or no 'message', during the crisis, tourists will return to the country whenever travel resumes. The same is indicated for United States where the official tourism website visittheusa.com (that leads to gousa.com), simply conveys the country tagline, 'United Stories: Discover the People and Places of the USA'. As for China, the country has become stigmatised and has attracted the wrath of nations for sparking off the virus. In January 2019, the Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism launched a new tourism slogan for the country '*Come and you'll never be able to Leave.*' However, since the outbreak of covid-19 the country has chosen to remain silent and not engage in any new marketing activities during the crisis. Mexico, a relatively new entrant in the top ten international arrivals, too, has not created any innovative slogan in view of the crisis. The website continues to host its usual promotional slogan of 'Welcome to Mexico, discover your next adventure'.

Table 2: Innovative Slogans / Message/s used during the Pandemic

Country (Website)	Message/s	Theme Codes & (words)
France ee.france.fr	(none)	-

Country (Website)	Message/s	Theme Codes & (words)
Spain Spain.info	1.'Spain is giving everything it's got in a united, responsible fight against the spread of the #COVID19 virus. We will soon be able to welcome you again with open arms. You'll soon be able to marvel at our landscapes, feel our sun on your face and share in our lifestyle. Until then, look after yourselves and those around you. Thank you for your support'. 2. 'You've been with us all this time. We've shared great moments and have enjoyed reminiscing about unforgettable times, magical places and unique feelings on your trips to Spain. Now's the time to dream together once more. We'll see each other soon'. 3. 'It's time to plan your trip' #SpainAwaitsYou 4. #SpainWillWait (Top 10 reasons to visit Spain)	**A,C, D, I, J** We Soon Welcome Dream Together Wait
U.S Visittheusa.com	**(none)**	`
China China.org.cn/travel	(none)	`
Italy Italia.it	no slogan during crisis 1.'Tourism Restarts in Italy' (Slogan created on re-opening of Italy for tourism) 'Italy's tourism is ready to start again and to welcome tourists – Italians and foreigners – for the summer season. It is now again possible to move freely within the whole country and use any normal service: museums and cultural centers, hotels, bars and restaurants have opened their doors; airports, railway stations and transport services are operational; campsites, mountain huts and beach resorts have made arrangements to safely welcome travellers'.	**B, D, J** Ready Move Freely Welcome
Turkey Goturkey.com	1.'There is hope after despair and many suns after darkness'. 2. 'Turkey is ready for you and your loved ones' 3. #Together Today	**A, C, D** Hope Together Ready
Mexico Visitmexcio.com	(none)	
Thailand Tourismthailand.org	'Cheer up the world. We fight COVID 19'.	**A, C** Cheer We

Country (Website)	Message/s	Theme Codes & (words)
Germany Germany.travel	1.#DiscoverGermanyFromHome. 'Stay home, Stay healthy'. 'Let us take you on a trip to Germany! Even though you are unable to visit us at the moment, we would like to bring Germany as a virtual travel experience home to you! Now is the time to experience and enjoy the very best of Germany. While travel is on hold, why not indulge yourself with all things German – from the comfort of your own home. Let us take you on a virtual trip of your favourite towns & cities, those concerts you always promised yourself, the museums and attractions you always had on your wish-list. gear: from testing your knowledge to tasting the results of our easy to follow German recipes. For a quieter minute, you can also sit back while listening to our music and lose yourself in the sounds of Beethoven and Co. Who says you can't "dream now and visit later"?' 'While you can´t visit, we are bringing Germany home to you'. 'Dream Now Visit Later'. **2.**With the reopening of the borders 'Germany – Dreams Become Reality' campaign. 'In recent months, what were you most looking forward to? Meeting your friends again, enjoying a meal out or to experience new adventures?' 'Your patience paid off, now you can make your dreams come true and venture into places familiar or those still undiscovered by you. Whether you are looking for solitude and the calming stillness of nature or maybe seek to challenge your fitness, we offer you a little bit of everything. Here we want to share our top tips with you on places to see, fairy-tale castles to visit and spectacular natural landscapes to explore - on foot or by bike. Whichever activities you choose, we look forward to your visit'. 'Welcome to Germany!'	**A, D, J** We Virtual Germany from Home Dream Welcome
U.K Visitbritain.com	'We know it's a difficult time, and at the moment we can't welcome you to enjoy our afternoon teas, explore our rolling green countryside, or ramble around our stately homes. So, for now, we're bringing Britain to you, with <u>traditional recipes, interactive maps and boredom-busting articles</u>, from the best British TV shows to binge watch to a round-up of London's musical hotspots (with a special playlist to match). Hop on over to our social channels and you'll find more tips and trivia – there's even a pub quiz each week, so you can enjoy a true taste of Britain. So sit back, relax and discover Great Britain from home. When we're all able to travel again, we'll be ready and waiting to welcome you'. 2. 'Find Your Great Britain: Life may have been on pause recently, but that doesn't mean you can't start dreaming of exploring our beautiful countryside, wandering our sandy shores and discovering our historic landmarks once more'. Our traditional pubs and stately homes are getting ready to give you a warm British welcome once again, and in the meantime you can still delve into our heritage, revel in our culture, and dig into our foodie delights from afar. Check out our latest articles or hop on over to our social channels for more tips and trivia – it's all you need to imagine a true taste of Britain'.	**A, C, F** We Ready Waiting Welcome Dream

Table 2 indicates that regardless of the crisis, most other countries have chosen to actively and ingeniously engage in continuous communication with tourists through coining creative slogans/messages.

Spain: A favourite sought after destination, with over 83 million tourists, Spain is the only country that has remained continuously active in communicating with the tourists throughout the crisis. Spain has shown commendable creativity to coin frequently changing new messages for tourists, parallel to the changing virus situation, proving that it is continuously gauging the situation closely. Spain initially started with sending out the empathetic messages to tourists, acknowledging that the situation has affected everyone and that '*We*' are in it together. It further shows concern and advice through the words '*look after yourselves*'. The words depict the close bond maintained with tourists. 'Hope and patience' is signified through the words '*we will soon be able to welcome you again with open arms*'. The second message sent out by Spain again uses the word '*We*' and reiterates the hope that things will get back to normal and '*we'll see each other soon*'. The emphasis is on 'solidarity' through the repeated use of the word '*We*'. The messages on the website continue to encourage tourists to '*dream together once more*' (of travel to Spain).

In later messages (once the country has opened its borders to international travel), Spain uses the hash tag '#SpainAwaitsYou' (with the video-'Never Stop Dreaming') and '#SpainWillWait' both of which suggest that the

country is 'back in business' and eagerly waiting for tourist to return. The continued efforts of Spain for recovery marketing have been ongoing and indicate 'persuasive advertising'. The engagement with tourists is seemingly comforting, reassuring and a catalyst in reposing confidence. Such 'proactive commitment' to carry out innovate crisis communication indicates that the country regards tourism as highly important for the Spanish economy. No doubt Spain is racing fast, following closely on the heels of France, at 2nd rank in international tourist arrivals.

Italy: In the present crisis, Italy has been one country where the virus spread like wildfire and caused a National calamity. The country became the 'epicentre' of the virus in Europe. While it remained completely focused on handling the situation, Italy did not engage in any communication with tourists through slogans or messages. Only a link 'Virtual Italy' has been on the page throughout, through which tourists could enjoy the county's attractions sitting at home. Italy was one of the first countries to open its borders in early June. Only 'after re-opening its borders', the county has communicated with tourists sending out the message, '*Tourism restarts in Italy*' and it that it is 'back in business'. This message communicates that Italy is 'safe and waiting' with its local community 'ready' to welcome tourists.

Turkey: Turkey has proved its promising performance in global tourism by entering into the top ranks of international tourist arrivals. The country is an ideal kaleidoscope of best of East and West, endowed with rich history and natural attractions, but yet relatively unexplored. A gateway to the 'Orient, Turkey has succeeded in capturing the interest of tourists who have already explored the Occident. During the crisis, the country has used three different messages to communicate with tourists. The most appealing one is '*There is hope after despair and many suns after darkness*'. The words 'despair' and 'darkness' signify the ongoing crisis and words 'hope' and 'suns', signify light and something to look forward to. Once international travel has started resuming in Turkey, the readiness to 'welcome' tourists is communicated in the words, '*Turkey is ready for you and your loved ones*'. Besides, '*#Together Today*' clearly indicates 'solidarity' in tough times.

*Mexico***:** The country is fast becoming an increasingly popular destination for international tourists. With easy accessibility from tourist generating markets of North America and Latin America, Mexico remains relatively unexplored for tourists from Europe. Hence it holds fascination on account of its rich Aztec and Mayan history and culture, besides being blessed with beautiful tropical beaches, all of which have facilitated the country to enter the top 10 ranks of global tourist arrivals. However, while travel has been on hold during the pandemic, Mexico has not made a concerted effort to engage in any creative marketing or communication with tourists. The tourism website shows that the country is resting on its old slogan 'Mexico, your next adventure'. It is noted in the last quarter of data collection that 'visitmexico' conveys that it is soon to launch a new tourism website.

Germany: Germany has managed the present crisis exceptionally well, by responding promptly to the outbreak and even succeeded in containing it. The country has won international acclaim for the same and has emerged as a 'model' for others to learn from. Not alone managing the Covid crisis, Germany has also remained active on all other fronts, including tourism. It has continuously communicated with tourists, regardless of the prevalent crisis. For long, Germany has remained in the top ten ranks of international arrivals and now accounts for more than 39 million tourists. Tourism remains a priority with the government. Soon after borders closed for international travel, the country too endorsed the message of the Who Health Organization (WHO), requesting people to '*Stay home, Stay healthy*'. Germany continued to encourage tourists to '*DiscoverGermanyFromHome*' with the message '*while travel is on hold, why not indulge yourself with all things German – from the comfort of your own home.*' In addition, '*While you can't visit, we are bringing Germany home to you*' is the message that communicates a proactive attempt made by the DMO to keep the connection alive between Germany and its tourists. With the understanding that people cannot temporarily travel, Germany uses the tagline, '*Dream Now Visit Later*', motivating tourists that at least they can 'dream' of travel for the time being.

In the latter part of June, with the reopening of the borders, the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) has launched its fresh tagline '*Germany-Dreams become Reality*' indicating that the travel which tourists have been dreaming of during lockdown, is now possible again and can become reality. A convincing message of relief and invitation goes out to the tourists saying '*your patience paid off, now you can make your dreams come true and venture into places familiar or those still undiscovered by you.*' The German tourism website currently hosts the message '*We look forward to your visit*', conveying that the country is 'back in business' and 'waiting' for tourists.

*Thailand***:** Thailand is one country from South East Asia that has made a giant leap into top ranks of international arrivals. The country has continuously and dedicatedly endeavoured to enrich her tourism. With crisp innovative marketing it has successfully captured the interest of the global tourists. An inexpensive destination, a melting pot of cultures, with state-of-the-art tourism infrastructure and a variety of tourism product, the country has performed astoundingly under the banner of 'Amazing Thailand!' Thailand has been active all along, providing all Covid information updates through the Thailand Authority of Tourism (TAT) News link, reached via tourismthailand.org website. In terms of the message for tourists, the country has conveyed only a single simple

message during all of the crisis time, i.e. '*Cheer up the World, Together we fight Covid*'. The message conveys 'solidarity', 'compassion and hope', indicating that we can fight it out and the situation is not dismal. We need to 'cheer up' and be hopeful.

United Kingdom (U.K.): U.K., a well established destination has remained a prime attraction for tourists since the beginning of travel history. Over the years the country has successfully managed mis-happenings and disasters through proper image management and kept an uninterrupted inflow of tourists. Perhaps on account of its highly positive tourism image, the country has never needed to be on her toes to aggressively revamp her marketing.

As for the current crisis, the country has extended 'solidarity', 'compassion' and 'empathy' with tourists using the word '*We*'. It uses the message 'We *know it's a difficult time*', and then goes ahead to invite tourists to '*sit back, relax and enjoy Great Britain from Home*', via online mode and social networking websites. 'Patience' and 'hope' are conveyed in the message '*When were all able to travel again, we'll be ready and waiting to welcome you*'. As the country resumes tourism, a new message directed at tourists, motivating them to plan to travel is sent out saying '*start dreaming*', further lifting spirits and cheeringly letting people know that '*traditional pubs and stately homes are getting ready to give you a warm British welcome once again*'.

The above discussion on persistence of countries to keep alive the communication with tourists during the pandemic reveals that 'six' out of ten countries, have been rather active in maintaining contact with tourists through empathetic, convincing and motivating messages/slogans on the their official tourism website. Most communication has revolved around the themes of solidarity, empathy and reassurance, persuasive messages, and readiness to welcome tourists, once the countries are back in business.

The findings reveal that one of the strikingly dominant words used by most countries during the ongoing crisis is '*Dream*', or the tagline, '*Dream Now and Visit Later*', which has turned into a universal slogan used by countries worldwide. In essence, all messages during the crisis have been focused on '*Stay Home and Say Safe*', but continue to dream of visiting.

COVID-19 Information Communication by Country DMOs

Regular and updated communication on the status of the virus, it's spread or containment, status of cross border travel, restrictions in place and guidelines to be adopted to stay safe, is all vital information for prospective tourists. It provides clarity about the magnitude of the calamity, regions affected, fatalities, nature of preventive measures to be adopted and the government rules and regulations in force to contain and combat the pandemic crisis. Though global news media has been providing regular information on the spread of virus and statistics of highly affected countries, detailed information on a country's measures can be found on a country's independent website. The official tourism websites of various countries also host such information which is relevant for tourists.

In this research, the tourism websites of the countries under study were accessed to identify the 'nature of information on Coronavirus', being communicated. On detailed initial browsing, an exhaustive inventory was drawn out of the broad categories of information hosted on different websites. Thereby codes (in numbers) from 0-7, were assigned to different information types (Table 3).

Table 3: Coding of Nature of COVID Information

Code	Nature of COVID Information provided
0	General awareness information on COVID
1	Covid Statistics (infected, cured, casualties, etc)
2	Precautionary measures to be adopted
3	Guidelines for use of public space (distancing, masking, etc)
4	Travel guidelines (health checks, permissions, registration, quarantine)
5	Information for travel to/from other countries
6	Border status information (Intra and International), open/closed
7	Tourism and Hospitality enterprises operation guidelines

The results in table 4 indicate that Spain, Italy, Germany and U.K started providing regular COVID-19 information soon after the onset of the crisis, while other countries started the crisis communication slightly late (i.e. from 2nd or 3rd quarter of the study period). As for nature of communication, most countries are providing a link to corona virus (covid19) information on their website. Through table 4, it is conspicuously and surprisingly evident that France (the top arrival country) stands out as only country which has not communicated any information about the crisis on its tourism website. The last update of the website (ee.france.fr) is not mentioned anywhere and the website content is outdated, evident from the home page, that it continues to call out to tourists, inviting them to visit France in 2019.

Table 4. COVID-19 Information Communicated during the Crisis

Country	Website	Quarter (Q) (1st June-15thAugust) (- No Information) (√ information available)					Nature of COVID Information
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	
France	ee.france.fr	-	-	-	-	-	-no information
Spain	Spain.info	√	√	√	√	√	0, 2,3,4,5,6,7
U.S	Visittheusa.com	-	√	√	√	√	2,3,4,5,6,7
China	China.org.cn/travel	-	√	√	√	√	0,2,4,5,6.
Italy	Italia.it	√	√	√	√	√	2,3,4,5,6,7
Turkey	Goturkey.com	-	√	√	√	√	7
Mexico	Visitmexico.com	-	-	√	√	√	0
Thailand	Tourismthailand.org	-	√	√	√	√	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
Germany	Germany.travel	√	√	√	√	√	2,3,4,5,6
U.K	Visitbritain.com	√	√	√	√	√	0,4,5

Spain, Italy, Thailand and Germany, all famous and gravely affected tourism destinations are noted to be on common ground providing all comprehensive and valuable information about the virus 'throughout the period of the study', on aspects like, communicating personal hygiene and precautionary measures, guidelines for use of public space, information on travel guidelines, travel permissions, health care checks at entry ports, medical certification required if any, quarantine rules and information of 'to and fro travel' to certain countries (codes 2,3,4,5,6).

The World Health Organization's guidelines regarding precautions to be taken worldwide by people have been adopted by most countries. Most countries are communicating information (through text or pictures), advising personal hygiene and regular disinfection of self, belongings and surrounding spaces. Rules for facial masking, physical distancing of 'One to Two' meters apart, and required behaviour in public spaces are also communicated. Guidelines for re-opening of the 'Tourism and Hospitality' services have been made special mention of by some countries on their tourism websites.

The 'nature of communication' carried out during the crisis by various countries independently, is elaborated upon in the ensuing discussion.

Spain: For Spain, the results indicate that 'except for statistics' on Covid-19, the country provides all other significant information on the crisis (0,2,3,4,5,6,7). Spain has been reopening in phases. Hence the Spanish tourism website has been hosting specific information on reopening of its external border and internal regions specifying '*What is open, allowed, or not*'. There is warning of penalty to be imposed in case minimum '1.5 meters of distancing' and 'mandatory masking' is not adhered to. For travellers it is

conveyed that they need to fill up a '*public health form*' online from the site *www.spth.gob.es*, or use the free app '*Spain Travel Health*' (SpTH) for the same. The website also conveys under '*Special Health Protection Measures*' that the government has approved a '*Royal Decree Law*' on containment and coordination measures to deal with Covid, outlining regulations to be followed from June 21.

U.S.: The U.S. tourism website provides a link to '*Coronavirus Travel Updates*' that leads to '*US Covid-19 travel guidelines*'. In addition, it is clearly stated on the website that U.S. Government has temporarily suspended entry for certain travellers. Specific countries are listed, stating that people who have been in the mentioned list of countries in the last 14 days are '*not to enter the US*'. For other up-to-date public health and travel guidance, the website leads to the link of '*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention'*.

China: As the tourism website, Travelchina.gov.cn did not download, 'China.org.cn' was identified through google search for accessing information on tourism. The website provides information on tourism and ongoing Covid crisis. However the information is difficult to sift through from the overload of other general information. On the home page, under 'Key Topics', a link to 'Covid-19' is found that leads to the page '*The Battle Against COVID-19 Outbreak*'. This page provides all detailed news and information on the current crisis under separate links. '*Latest Updates*' provide a glimpse of situation of cases both in China and around the world. '*China Mosaic*' link provides further links and news items on response adopted by the country to fight against Covid under the banner '*Battling the Novel Coronavirus: United We Stand*'. There is a link to State Council Information Office (SCIO) of China, which provides information on

latest press conferences related to the virus. In the '*Tips and Advice*' link there is relevant '*Entry and Exit information for Foreigners*', Q (question) and A (answer) 'entry and exit information for foreigners during pandemic', and other 'health declaration, medical examination and quarantine information'. In addition, there is '*Hotline for Foreigners amid Novel Cornonavirus Outbreak*' listing calling numbers in various cities of various regions of the country. Specific travel related information is found through the 'Travel' link on the Home page that leads to 'China.org.cn/travel'. Other than tourism product information this page provides some information relevant to covid. Scrolling way down, a link is found on '*Tourism Related Laws*', that further provide details of '*implementation rules for law on control of entry and exit of aliens*' and rules for implementation of '*Frontier Health and Quarantine Law*'.

Italy: On restarting of tourism in Italy, the news item link '*Tourism restarts in Italy*' is hosted on the Italian tourism website. It leads to information on the 'four regions' for where pre arrival registration is required through a given link. Besides, there is additional information on precautionary measures; use of public spaces; travel guidelines; checks and permissions; information for travel for people of other countries; and border opening information (2,3,4,5,6). An interesting observation is that there are special instructions for '*people travelleing by car*', specifying 'number, relations, seating pattern in front and rear' and 'masking rules'. The website also provides a separate link for '*Guidance Standards for Hospitality Reopening*' (7), detailing guidelines for each component business of the industry through separate links.

Turkey and Mexico, that rank 6th and 7th respectively, in the international tourist arrival list, are two countries that do not provide much information on the crisis. The website of Goturkey.com leads to some '*Guidelines for Tourism and Hospitality*' (7) and information about health and medical infrastructure available in the country to fight against Covid 19. Mexico provides a rather insignificant link on 'General awareness on covid' (0) and lists '*Frequently Asked Questions*' (FAQs) for answering concerns of tourists about the virus.

Thailand: Thailand has managed the crisis well. Though on account of stalled international travel, tourism has remained suspended, Thailand is the only country that has been providing regular updates on 'daily statistics of coronavirus' in the country, through a link that leads to a Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) News, i.e. tatnews.org link, giving the breakdown of virus statistics, in terms of infections, recoveries, receiving medical attention and deaths. Beginning 1st July, the website communicates the five phases of relaxing restrictions and protocol that travellers must pass in Thailand. However, this information is difficult to find as several links lead to it. In the instructions of TAT

on safety and protective measures, people are advised to stay away from 'Hugging', to rather greet each other via a '*Wai*' (Thai greeting) from a distance of '*1-2 metres*' and use '*personal utensils*' or eat '*A la Carte*'. Hence the Thailand website provides the widest information on aspects of the crisis (1,2,3,4,5,6,7) except for general information (0) which apparently does not require a separate mention as it is included in the other details. However, the website is rather difficult to manoeuvre through to reach the information through several inside links.

Germany: The Germany tourism website provides for tourists, a link on '*Information on travel to Germany*', besides providing all other information on restrictions in public places and guidelines for slow spread of coronavirus (2,3,4,5,6)**.** However there is no general information, covid numbers, or any specification of rules for Tourism and Hospitality services (0,1and 7)

U.K.: U.K. 'visitbritain.com' website communicates government advice saying that residents or visitors need to provide 'all their travel information'. From time to time the latest quarantine or self isolation rules in place are elaborated on the site. Tourists are advised to check for the timelines of reopening of the various regions of Great Britain and links are provided on travel corridors, self isolation and border control. There is a link to '*Know before you Go*', which highlights the requirement for visitors to fill up an online '*Public Health Passenger Locator Form*' with information on contact, travel and passport details of the visitor. Details about '*how to travel responsibly*' are outlined, mentioning mandatory masking and distancing rules and advise on sanitization and cashless payments, among others. For businesses planning to restart, a 'self assessment form' is provided through a link '*We are ready to Go*'. There is further advice telling people to '*keep up to date latest travel and guidance from the UK Foreign Office*'. Hence communication on the crisis is rather detailed on general information, travel guidelines and required permissions (0,4,5).

In summary, the above discussion on recovery marketing crisis communication and nature of covid information communicated through official tourism websites during the continuing pandemic reveals that among the top 10 international tourist arrivals countries, Spain stands out as the only county that has communicated most proactively with tourists, throughout the crisis. It has used frequently changing, creative, motivating messages, directed at tourists and has been providing all comprehensive covid-19 updates. The efforts of the Spanish DMO reflect that tourism is indeed a priority for the government and it has been highly conscious to maintain its destination image, fiercely combating the negative publicity gained due to the crisis. No wonder, the country remains in a persistent race to aspire for securing the top rank in international arrivals.

CONCLUSION

Time and again tourism destinations suffer different types of mis-happenings like disasters, some of which take the form of crisis situations. However, history has proven that rarely do tourism destinations get completely erased from the tourism map due to a disaster; but instead, invariably bounce back to business, sooner or later. The continuous efforts of the DMOs to allay the fears of tourists through constant crisis management communication play a vital role in sustaining tourist inflow. Hence crisis communication can become the 'key' to sail through difficult situations (Carlsen and Liburd, 2008; Ritchie et al., 2004). However, 'what' and 'when' to communicate has always been an issue of contention. Research has investigated if it is appropriate and ethical to continue destination marketing activities, or to stall communication temporarily during an ongoing crisis and resume recovery marketing only after the crisis situation is over. This study concludes that in order to maintain a bond with the market and for the purpose of image management during a tough time, most countries have been regularly communicating with tourists during the pandemic. This continuous communication confirms that there is no harm in communicating with tourists during a crisis (Beirman, 2003).

The analysis of the core content in marketing recovery messages of the DMOs during the present crisis reveals that the focus is on themes of 'solidarity', 'restoring confidence' and emphasising 'community readiness' to welcome the tourists once tourism starts to reopen. These findings corroborate the research of Walters and Mair (2012) who have identified nine main themes which are usually addressed by marketing messages. The messages put forth by DMOs during the present crisis, fit well into one or the other theme. The use of dominant words like 'We', 'Together', 'Dream', 'Waiting', 'Ready' and 'Welcome', echoes the message of 'standing united with hope'. The tagline '*Stay Home, Stay Safe*' and the word '*Dream*' is manifest in all communication.

Though most countries remain active in attempting to manage and maintain their destination image during the ongoing pandemic, only time will tell if these continuing efforts will be effective and successful in bringing back tourists. Close monitoring of 'if', 'when' and in 'what numbers', tourists will resume travel, will eventually determine the success or failure of crisis communication adopted by each country.

Finally, the researcher acknowledges the limitation that the study is concentrated only on the top ten ranking international tourist arrival countries (of 2019), over a short period of study of 2.5 months. Though the crisis remains ongoing and indefinitely lasting, countries have gradually started opening international borders for tourism. Hence, there is scope for future research to monitor the rate of tourism revival in the affected countries and also investigate to ascertain if there is any correlation between the constant crisis communication and tourism recovery.

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