

MOVING TOWARDS WELLNESS IN POST COVID-19 WORLD: AN ANALYSIS OF TRAVEL INTENTIONS OF MILLENNIALS WORKING FROM HOME

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Abstract

The millennials are one of the most auspicious consumer segments in the tourism industry and the fast pace of development and emergence of newer trends has led to a drastic change in their behavior. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose extraordinary challenges to both the physical and mental health of people and is serious impacts on the various industries worldwide including the tourism industry. Considering this, the current research aims to understand the intentions of the millennials who are currently working from home towards wellness tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic is over. The research is qualitative. The interviews were conducted through various online platforms with respondents belonging to various countries and professions. Only those respondents who have been working from home for at least 6 months or more have been targeted through purposive and snowball sampling. The data was analyzed by adopting a thematic analysis technique with the help of Nvivo (12) to attain the objective of the study. The study revealed that COVID-19 has significant impacts on millennials who are working from home, like emotional disturbance, depression, stress, irritability, etc., which upsurges their inclinations towards wellness tourism.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Millennials, Tourist Intentions, Wellness Tourism, Work from Home*

Introduction

The influence of the current pandemic called COVID-19 can not only be seen at the economic level of the society (UNCTAD, 2020) but has been observed to influence the physical and mental health of people (Salt, 2020; WHO, 2020). Lack of social interaction and high pressure from organizations caused immense mental stress on people (Alradhawi, Shubber, Sheppard & Ali, 2020; Ma, Zhao, Gong & Wengel, 2020, WHO, 2020) especially millennials (Aon Hewitt, 2017; Deloitte Millennial Survey, 2020). According to the report NRC health, 2020 about 48% of millennials represented psychological issues including anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 crisis. In this, psychological development is a demand of the hour (Zohar, Tzischinsky, Epstein & Lavie, 2005; Manhas & Kour, 2014). Timms (2015), further posited that “increased awareness for work-related stress is encouraging tourists to consider more closely the prospect of wellness tourism”. Accordingly, Iwasaki and Mannell’s (2000) study defined leisure activities as a buffer against the stress that creates negative impacts on the physical and mental health of employees.

The relationship between human wellness and activities in natural surroundings have continuously been discussed and appreciated by numerous authors like Maller et al., (2006) Brymer, Cuddihy and Sharma-Brymer (2010); Russel et al. (2013); Shanahan, Franco, Lin, Gaston and Fuller (2016); Craig (2018); Chowdhury (2019). Further, Norman (2011); UNWTO (2015); and Marmion and Hindley (2020) have realized the benefits of tourism as a pathway for human well-being. Forbes (2020) and Deloitte (2020) reported that the scenario of work from home has decreased resilience and increased stress and anxiety among people (Murphy, 2020). Millennials are frequent travellers who crave for new experiences (Richards, 2007), in such situation taking travel away from domicile may provide them with invigorating experiences that serve them as a source of rejuvenation, social connection and overall well-being (Uysal et al., 2016; Hanna et al., 2019). Thus, shifting preference among millennials for wellness activities for relaxation and overall well-being (Princewire.com, 2020), is giving thrust amongst them to shift towards adopting wellness tourism activities (McGroarty, 2020). According to Global Industry Analysts (2020), amid the COVID-19 crisis, the global market for Wellness Tourism estimated at US\$735.8 Billion in the year 2020, is projected to reach a revised size of US\$1.2 Trillion by 2027, growing at a rate of 6.6% over the period 2020-2027. Instead of this, the current study is undertaken to analyze the intentions of the millennials who are currently working from home towards wellness tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic is over. Following this, qualitative methods were adopted like conducting

an interview with suitable respondents and analyzing their experiences to reflect upon the status and research objectives. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: in the next section, the paper reviews the existing literature concerning the objectives of the current study. Following the literature review, the paper outlines the research methodology, means of analysis, and subsequent results. Having presented the results of this study, findings are discussed before concluding. Along with the conclusion, the theoretical and practical implications of the study are outlined.

Literature Review

Work-related stress has created numerous psychological issues among employees (DeVries & Wilkerson, 2003) which contribute to poor mental health thereby create problems in their performance at a job (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006; Khamisa, Oldenburg, Peltzer & Ilic, 2015; Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden, & Gisle, 2017). Taking a vacation has been examined to induce creativity and increase their well-being among employees (Etzion, 2003; Kawakubo, Kasuga & Oguchi, 2017; Kawakubo & Oguchi, 2019) and helps in reducing negative effects on health created due to stress and anxiety (Iwasaki & Schneider, 2003). According to Iwasaki and Schneider (2003); Tsaor and Tang (2012), “leisure is an emotion-focused concept that reflects the coping approach adopted by a human being”. Adopting such stress recovery practices are supposed to drive the individuals towards their pre stressor positions (Korpela & Kinnunen, 2010). Increased self-awareness and consciousness of individuals towards a healthy lifestyle lead them to adopt more health-conscious practices (Schumacher, Zehrer & Schobersberger, 2011). In place of this, academicians and experts are continuously trying to define tourism practices and its link with nature and ecology aspects that endorse positive psychology and mental health among tourists (Azara, Michopoulou, Niccolini, Taff & Clarke, 2018; Buckley, 2020; Farki et al., 2020). Moreover, in Eco-psychology or nature-guided therapy, various aspects of the relationship between humans and nature have significantly been considered (Manhas & Kour, 2014; Fleur, Azara & Michopoulou, 2018).

People are now more focused on finding new ways for a healthy lifestyle and have become conscious of their psychological and physical health (Fosarelli, 2002). Accordingly, the Self-determination theory of the Planned-Breather Leisure Coping Style (PBLCS) characterizes intentional temporary distraction adopted by individuals against stressful affairs (Patry Blanchard & Mask, 2007). In other words, the PBLC is a premeditated temporary distraction, adopted to reduce stress using leisure time to regain vigor (Tsaor & Tang, 2012). Accordingly, Lehto (2013) has discussed the “therapeutic

effect of vacations on mentally stressed individuals” with attention restoration theory given by Kaplan 1995 where taking a break and having vacations at different place/destination is examined to have a restorative effect on people having fatigue, stress with the regular work environment. Moreover, many researchers like Fritz and Sonnentag (2006); de Bloom et al. (2009); Cropley and Millward (2009); Nawijn et al. (2010; 2011); and Sirgy et al. (2011) posited the positive influence of vacation adoptions on personal well-being, and work performance among employees.

According to Coghlan (2015), traveling therefore instills optimism, confidence, resilience, vigor, and positivity among individuals (Kirillova, Lehto & Cai, 2017; Aleksijevits, 2019). Further, Karn, Amarkantak and Swain (2017) in this respect explained that tourism activity which is directly or indirectly related to enhancing and improving the well-being of an individual is taken under the framework of wellness tourism. Moreover, researchers like Manuel Robertico and Seung (2016); Knobloch, Robertson and Aitken (2017); Norman and Pokorny (2017); Knobloch, Robertson and Aitken (2017); Liu (2018); Lengieza, Hunt and Swim (2019); Medeiros, Gonçalves, Veiga, and Caraciolo (2020) illustrated the positive influence of “eudaemonia-based tourism on individuals’ happiness well-being and happiness” which explains the positive influence of enjoyment of various moments on the psychological well-being of people (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Huta & Ryan, 2010; Huta, 2013).

All these studies have employed stress as a stimulus for traveling among people for restoration and rejuvenation practices thereby related tourism experiences with human wellness. All this thereby somehow motivate the people to take escapes from daily routine (Lehto, 2012; Yang & Wong, 2020; Hartig, Kaiser & Bowler, 1997) and intention to adopt wellness tourism practices (Koncul, 2012; Manhas & Kour, 2014). Considering the psychological aspects of people have been observed to adopt travel either for seeking and escaping a certain environment (Jang, Bai, Hu & Wu, 2009). In this, intentions to travel are driven by wellness and health concerns (Etzion 2003; Nawijn et al., 2013; Smith & Puczko, 2009). Also, Jang et al. (2009); Konu and Laukkanen (2009); Yoon and Uysal (2005) explained travel intention as an outcome of a psychological process that directs towards action and determines the final behavior of an individual. Alegre and Cladera (2009) in their study pointed numerous factors that of intentions among tourists to visit a destination, where stress and anxiety are included in that list for wellness tourism more specifically (Smith & Puczko, 2009). According to Van Hooff et al. (2007) and de Bloom et al. (2009) “longer off-job time provide individuals more opportunities for recovery over stressful situations”. In other words, such psychological variables act as factors for drafting behavioral intentions

among tourists to travel (Baloglu, 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Moreover, Shim, Gehrt and Siek (2005) have added that young travellers are more self-analytical especially those who are frequent travelers who generally have stronger intentions for future travel.

Thus, the intentions among tourists more specifically among youngsters and working millennials are driven by benefits of well-being (McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015; Hwang & Lyu, 2015; Su, Swanson & Chen, 2016; Kim, Chiang & Tang, 2017). Accordingly, in Post COVID-19 scenario (Majeed & Ramkissoon, 2020) increasing and maintaining favorable behavioral intentions among tourists (Oliver, 2010; TaghiPourian & Bakhsh, 2015; Gibson, 2020) for the destination is becoming crucial for destination practitioners and researchers (Chen et al., 2016; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Ashton, 2018). To this seeking, health and wellness have been reported to drive the tourism market in the future (Sinha & Nair, 2020; Türközer & Öngür, 2020; Sigala, 2020). Given this conceptualization, Han et al. (2020) in their study has reported a high revisit intention of taking wellness tourism by the international tourists to Thailand persuaded by the health benefits they (tourists) seek with their visitation to the destination.

In summary, numerous theories and researches have been and are developed that reflect the positive influence of tourism on health and wellness (Nawijn et al., 2013; Patry Blanchard & Mask, 2007; Sigala, 2020; Medeiros, Gonçalves et al., 2020). However, the underlying psychological crisis of COVID-19 that contributes to the effects on the current employees' wellness and overall lifestyle needs to be discussed. Arguably, it is imperative to analyze the underlying process for the destination authorities so that they could utilize the information to enhance the required potential tourists' demands. Therefore, current research endeavors to analyze how the current scenario of the work system is influencing the health and daily lives of the employees, and all this can contribute to individuals' intention to take vacations for sake of wellness, particularly highlighting the psychological progression associated with revival and health improvement.

Methodology

The preliminary analysis examined the intentions of the millennials working from home towards wellness tourism post COVID-19. Qualitative research was adopted to achieve the objective of the study. The qualitative research is suitable to gain a rich understanding of the information like beliefs, values, feelings, emotions, behaviors, and motivations that which cannot be conveyed in the form of numbers (Berkwits & Inui, 1998; Abdelhadi, Foster,

Whysall & Rawwas, 2013). The justification for using a qualitative approach can be vindicated in terms of ontology and the purpose of the study. The semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted with the respondents through several online platforms as it was not suitable to personally meet the respondents due to lockdown. The semi-structured interviews were preferred for this study as they allow the researchers to collect “rich” data regarding particular research to illuminate and examine the concept being studied (Bebbie, 1990). While allowing the scope for a more detailed explanation in case the responses are short or not precise (Carey, 2013). The data was collected from a sample of 25 respondents, out of which 15 were males and 10 females. All of the 25 respondents belonging to various professions were interviewed one by one virtually. According to Hennink et al. (2017), to evolve a “richly textured” contemplation of a problem, it is recommended that at least 24 interviews should be conducted. However, during the data collection sample size depends on the saturation point; at which nothing new is obtained (pattern or information) from the data. The interviews were conducted in the English language with all of the respondents. The interviews were conducted over a period of time between May to August 2020. All the ethical practices were considered, before taking the interviews. Purposive and snowball sampling technique was used to choose the respondents which belonged to various countries of the world. Only those respondents who have been working from home for at least 6 months or more were targeted.

A questionnaire-based on available literature was prepared to get accurate and relevant information from different respondents. The questionnaire consisted of various open-ended questions. The questionnaire focused on understanding respondents’ intentions towards wellness derived from their experiences due to the lockdown situation created by COVID-19, including their willingness to travel in the future for indulging in wellness tourism. The recorded interviews were later converted into transcripts. Transcribing is the process of putting down the interviews in written form and involves decisions about what level of details to choose, data interpretation, and data representation (Bailey, 2008). In the end, thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcripts. The thematic analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning or themes within qualitative data collected by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts were analyzed with the help of Nvivo (12) to attain the objective of the study. The secondary data for the study was gathered from various research publications, studies, and reports related to the study area.

Findings and Discussion

The data analysis revealed that COVID-19 pandemic situation has deeply impacted the millennials, and it further influences the travel decision-making or travel intentions. The study revealed that COVID-19 has significant impacts on millennials who are working from home, like emotional disturbance, depression, stress, irritability, etc., which upsurges their inclinations towards wellness tourism. Further, the study identifies that respondents expressed interest and curiosity in various wellness activities like meditation, ayurveda retreats, yoga, spas, mountain retreats, therapy, etc. to recover from current lockdown situations and restrictions. This indicates the shift towards the new era of wellness tourism which can be supported by the findings mentioned below where R stands for the respondent. The Respondents R2, R8, R14, R4, R16, R20, R23 and R18 mentioned that:

The situation got tense when he had to stay at home and work on a salary cut. Since he lived alone, isolation, loss of income, and fear of losing his job triggered various mental health conditions. He felt lost, lonely, and stressed over some time. Moreover, He was not able to meet his friends and family, and as time passed the things got harder. Somehow, he managed to keep himself sane in these times. [. . .] He is planning to go to Rishikesh at the beginning of next year because a lot of wellness options are available. He wants to participate in yoga and meditation sessions and will probably take a full course while He is there. (R2)

Being a teacher, she is someone who loves to be immersed in classroom teaching and interacting with the students face to face. She has been teaching online since April 2020. It was a struggle for her to adapt to virtual teaching and being on a computer and smartphone all the time created irritation, fatigue, and stress for her. When the fear of corona started escalating slowly, the interactions with people also reduced. [. . .] She switched to an online meditation service provided by a Yoga teacher from India and connected with many new people from across the world. She participated in a 90-minute yoga and meditation session daily, twice a day. After this pandemic is over, she would love to visit India and indulge in more personalized sessions. (R8)

One of the facets of travel is that you always end up feeling transformed both physically and mentally. After such a long period of being under lockdown, it's necessary for him to plan for a detoxifying trip, to eat better and get fit. He thinks wellness retreats with their various mind and body programs will be perfect for him. [. . .] He wishes to travel to places that can offer health

and wellness-focused travel opportunities. He is fortunate that being a citizen of India he has the access to holistic streams of medicine such as Ayurveda, Homeopathy, and many more. (R14).

I didn't get to see all those places I was planning to visit this year. After COVID-19 is over, I would like to travel to places that offer health and wellness enhancing opportunities. I have Canada and Japan on my mind currently. I might enjoy the services of a simple spa. After a long period of self-isolation, a trip to the mountains will be a perfect way to banish the thoughts of coronavirus from my mind. [. . .] I also think that wellness tourism will boom as people need some rejuvenation & relaxation to recover from the stress of the COVID-19. Whenever I think about my next trip, I feel like wellness could be my savior. (R4)

The pandemic situation made her feel more agitated, stressed, and sad, as she is struggling with mental health for the last few years. [. . .] Last year she traveled to various hill stations, participated in treks, camping, and yoga retreats. All these activities helped her in facing the mental health problems and uplifted her mood. [. . .] This year has been tough and the sudden lockdowns pushed her towards alcoholism, smoking, and other unhealthy practices. She is a writer and traveling has been an important part of her life. Currently, she is taking therapy online but the spa and spiritual therapy services are going to be her prime reasons for traveling during the next year. (R16)

He has personally felt a significant shift towards traveling for mental peace and wellness recently. Earlier he used to travel for fun but now he is increasingly seeking refuge in nature. Especially after being cooped up within his home for months. He wishes to wake up with gorgeous scenery, breathe in deeply, and explore the outdoors more than ever before. [.] He hasn't been able to travel or hang out with his friends lately as he is currently working in Singapore. Therefore, he and his friends are planning to break the monotony and go on a trip to Germany. He has heard a lot about the spas, vineyards, and natural beauty of Southwest Germany. He is seeking options for mountain camping, trekking, and staying in mountain resorts to explore the wilderness and experience remote destinations. (R20)

When the isolation restrictions are lifted, what comes to his mind is a picnic outdoors, having organic food, having access to a yoga spa and meditation in the outdoors. The room, beddings, and surroundings should be comfortable, minimalistic and peaceful. [. . .] Also, as he goes to the gym regularly, he would like to take fitness classes while traveling in the future. He hasn't been able to follow a fitness routine, due to the closure of gyms and

busy work schedule. Work from home puts more mental pressure as he has to take care of both his home and work at the same time. [. . .] He simply wishes to reset his life and unwind. He wants to indulge in experiences and learning to feel good for mental, emotional, and of course, physical health. (R23)

Although she didn't face much problem during the panic situation created because of coronavirus, all thanks to the social media and access to technology which kept her engaged at home. She feels the desire to travel, meet new people and interact with them. Travel has always allowed her to do so. [. . .] She will be delighted to visit a destination like Thailand or Malaysia after this pandemic is over and engage in social interactions along with leisure activities to get the steam off her mind. A peaceful destination rich with natural beauty and relaxation opportunities will be a big relief for her. (R18)

The data revealed that the pandemic situation and various mental and physical impacts of it on the millennials stuck at home has changed their perception/behavior towards wellness tourism (McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015; Hwang & Lyu, 2015; Su, Swanson & Chen, 2016; Kim, Chiang & Tang, 2017). This ultimately leads to the generation of positive emotions in their mind and may lead to frequent visits for wellness tourism in the future. With the various insights and findings from the respondents, it is clear that in this difficult and challenging time they hope to leave behind the negative emotions and impacts of this pandemic and work on rejuvenation and revival of both mind and body in the future. There is also inquisitiveness amongst the millennials to travel not only domestically, but also to visit new countries which they have been planning to see for a while. There is a demand for spas, meditations, ayurvedic treatments, leisure, relaxation, and many more activities rooting from the ill effects of a pandemic like stress, depression, fatigue, anxiety, and various health problems (Alegre & Cladera, 2009; Smith & Puczkó, 2009). People are looking for wellness opportunities, especially when many businesses have repositioned themselves as wellness retreats. There has been a rise in the awareness of physical, emotional, mental health and the word immunity has become a buzzword. The tourism and hospitality sector needs to grab this opportunity, while offering assurance to visitors through safety protocols and bio-bubbles. In addition to this, there are also significant salary cuts and fear of job loss which has added more fuel to the ongoing stress caused by COVID-19 pandemic amongst people.

Despite the negative experiences that the millennials have been facing while being stuck at homes while COVID-19 pandemic is going on, the respondents showcased that they have understood the current situation and now hope to be treated by the wellness tourism professionals with efficiency,

care, and professionalism. People have beginning to seek several ways to improve their physical health and their mental health as well, leading to the rising demand for the wellness tourism and health-focused vacations. As a result of COVID-19, people now believe that, health is the first line of defense. The pandemic has led us to understand the value of good mental and physical health and the significance of being concerned about self-care. Tourism destinations need to develop marketing campaigns that present them as a global wellness tourism destination in the post-COVID world. This stresses how significant is the role of wellness tourism is going to be in shaping the perception and experiences of wellness seekers, especially at this challenging time. Moreover, it also gives insight as to how tourism industry professionals can add to the better management and improved experiences of the wellness tourists in the future and signifies how critical is the role of efficiency, new strategies, and professionalism for the tourist experience and their destination choices in future. With the current pause in tourist arrivals in the current times, the industry professionals have the opportunity to think on how to adopt a more sustainable approach to tourist's well-being. Hence, it is evident that countries which will proactively enhance their tourism infrastructure to promote wellness tourism will relish a sharp boost in tourist inflow post COVID-19. Tourism may not revive all at once and the people looking forward to see the world may not be able to do so soon. But, one thing is for sure is that, the needs of tourists are evolving, and health and well-being are going to be the top priority for many people who are planning to travel in future.

Conclusion and Future Implications

Although the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the growth of various industries across the globe, the immediate impact of the outbreak on the tourism industry has been adverse. According to researchers, while some sectors in the tourism industry will notice a drop in demand, plentiful others will witness quick recovery and promising growth opportunities in the future. However, wellness tourism has been perceived as luxury travel by many people and this has hampered the growth of the market for a long time. Growth in personal wellness awareness has been instrumental in driving the growth of the wellness tourism market lately. Moreover, the work-related stress in COVID-19 creates problems for millennials (Fritz & Sonnentag 2006; Khamisa et al., 2015; Levecque et al., 2017) and this has ultimately increased their inclination towards wellness.

COVID-19 has impacted the travel and tourism industry like no other industry. According to researchers around 50 million jobs in the travel and

tourism industry are at risk from the COVID-19 pandemic. With the lack of tourists and international travel suspended, many jobs could be lost in the future. It will have a dangerous economic impact on the world. This COVID-19 outbreak, therefore, poses a substantial threat to the industry as a whole, to the industry professionals working within it, and also to travelers wishing to travel in the future. This leads to the need for introspection and formulation of new strategies towards those key sectors within the tourism industry which can lead to a revival of the tourism industry in the future. The travel industry cannot be expected to be fully restored in the future but not for the fast-growing wellness tourism industry. Wellness retreats will prove to be a game changer in the future when it comes to offering holidays that are safe while being enjoyable. Undoubtedly, wellness tourism will boom as people need some rejuvenation & relaxation to recover from the stress of the COVID-19. After a long period of self-isolation, an escape for wellness will be a perfect way to expel any negative thoughts of coronavirus. Post pandemic, wellness travel will be especially on the wish list of millennials stressed out by work as well as this pandemic (Sinha & Nair, 2020; Türközer & Öngür, 2020; Sigala, 2020).

This scenario presents an ideal opportunity for key players in the wellness tourism business to provide excellent services to the consumers and assist in reviving the industry. In February 2020, the Global Wellness Institute projected that the wellness travel market will reach \$919 billion by 2022. This makes it clear that the wellness facilities like spas, yoga, and alternative medicine, etc. will witness a rise in customer visits, predicting the rise in demand for wellness services after the pandemic is over. The hotels and resorts across the globe need to adopt new growth strategies and build new business models to capture the opportunities in wellness tourism and to meet this growing demand for wellness. Hotels can incorporate spa experiences, fitness sessions, yoga classes to allow the guests to relax. Moreover, considering the global acceptance of herbal/alternative medicines and Ayurveda, travel destinations like China, Japan and India will witness a rise in demand for these wellness services. The current study also indicates that travelers will seek such wellness activities that involve boosting mental, spiritual, and physical health. These will be the key drivers of the surge in the tourism industry in the coming years. In essence, the pandemic will lead to a paradigm shift in good tourism. In the wake of the pandemic, people (especially millennials) have become more health-conscious, and are accepting the narrative that health is wealth. Consequently, in the post-pandemic era, the need to maintain one's physical and mental well-being will motivate people to look for holistic methods for maintaining health, thereby boosting the global wellness tourism market.

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