

The Effects of COVID-19 on Future Domestic Travel Intentions in South Africa: A Stakeholder Perspective

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Abstract

This study seeks to unpack the implications that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on the South African domestic tourism market. In particular, the study considers how, given the negative impacts that have been felt with international travel being largely restricted, many destinations who traditionally rely on tourism will approach domestic tourism post the restrictions. Given South Africa's previous aggressive campaigns which sought to promote domestic tourism in the country, the value of this focus area cannot be overlooked. The need for empirical research that assesses the attitudes of people regarding travel and tourism beyond the pandemic in a country that has been one of the hardest-hit on the African continent is equally important in this respect. Data for the study was sourced from interviews with key informant personnel in the domain of tourism coupled with an online questionnaire survey that was collected from respondents through the Google Forms Application. The key findings from the study reveal that a majority of the respondents were generally satisfied with the management of the pandemic in the country and were willing to wait until all restrictions were lifted before travelling again. Moreover, many of the respondents felt that they would likely travel more domestically in order to assist the tourism industry recover post-COVID-19 and would actively help market the country to friends and relatives in assisting with the recovery marketing initiatives. However, major concerns were raised about the financial possibilities of the domestic tourists as well as the lack of effective communication and cooperation between the private sector and the government regarding tourism's recovery plan.

Keywords: South Africa Domestic tourism; South Africa; COVID-19; Travel intentions; Sustainable tourism development

Introduction

This study seeks to unpack the impact and implications that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on the South African domestic tourism market. In particular, the study considers how, given the negative impacts that have been felt with international travel being largely restricted, many destinations who traditionally rely on tourism will approach domestic tourism post the restrictions. The COVID-19 pandemic which emerged in the latter part of 2019 has, in the first quarter of 2020 spread rapidly across most of the global community. In an effort to combat the spread of the pandemic, countries began implementing drastic measures ranging from extreme hygiene conditions, social and physical distancing regulations, wearing of masks, international travel being largely restricted, to the total shutting down of entire countries and their economies. Consequently, certain sectors within these economies which rely on the movement

of people from place to place such as tourism have been adversely affected. Tourism in South Africa is one of such sectors, and is touted to be among the hardest-hit. Contextually, the tourism industry, which is considered as a non-essential service is completely grounded. As a country, South Africa has traditionally relied on tourism for the promotion of local economic development, job creation, and the uplifting of the standards of lives of communities (Dlomo & Ezeuduji, 2020; Nyikana & Sigxashe, 2017; Nengovhela, Tshipala & Nyikana, 2017). Given South Africa's previous aggressive campaigns which sought to promote domestic tourism in the country, the value of this focus area cannot be overlooked. Since the overall impact of the pandemic on the tourism economy will only be fully brought to light in the aftermath of the pandemic, the need for empirical research that assesses the attitudes of people regarding travel and tourism beyond the pandemic becomes critical. This study therefore provides the basis for developing an understanding of the effects of the pandemic on South Africa's domestic travel market.

South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) on the 5th of March 2020 confirmed that a suspected case of COVID-19 had indeed tested positive, making it the first official case to be declared in the country (le Roux, 2020). Between then and the 15th of March 2020, South Africa had registered sixty-one cases of the virus, a situation which prompted the country's president Cyril Ramaphosa as head of the National Command Council (NCC) for the Coronavirus to declare a state of disaster over COVID-19 (Wendell, 2020). Under the state of disaster, a range of measures were put in place including travel bans to high risk countries, the prohibition of gatherings of over a hundred people, and the cancellations of large gatherings and celebrations (Wendell, 2020). On March 23rd 2020 however, with confirmed infections sitting at four hundred and two, the president announced a country-wide lockdown which was to commence on the 26th of March 2020 and last until the 16th of April 2020 with the intention of flattening the curve of infections (Mahlati, 2020). The national lockdown entailed that all South Africans would stay at home during the lockdown period except for those providing essential services (Mahlati, 2020). Subsequently, the lockdown was extended to the 30th of April 2020 (Haffajee, 2020). With the lockdown drawing to a close, the president again on the 24th of April 2020 promulgated new regulations extending the lockdown indefinitely, but in this case, established a risk-adjusted strategy for resumption of economic activity with different alert levels under which the lockdown regulations could either be tightened or eased (Cilliers, 2020). Under these levels (Alert Levels 1-5), tourism is only allowed to resume operations under alert Level 2 (Cilliers, 2020).

Tourism in South Africa is not considered an essential service and therefore fell within the category of services that had to remain closed down. With the country's tourism minister indicating that domestic tourism is most likely to only resume around December 2020 (Smith, 2020), South Africa's tourism industry, widely regarded as the country's 'new gold' would be one of those to feel the shockwaves of the COVID-19 global economic shutdown (Joubert, 2020). Since that time, there has been an implementation of a risk-adjusted strategy, wherein economic activity, including tourism have been opened (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020a; 2020b). Such a move has gone some way in relaunching the tourism industry, although the losses during the lockdown are still being felt. Unlike in other business sectors, tourism revenues are permanently lost as unsold capacity cannot be marketed subsequently and the implications have already been felt within the sector with employment taking a massive knock-on effect (Joubert, 2020; Smith, 2020). This study therefore focuses on the dominant thematic aspects of COVID-19 debates specifically relating to the potential impacts of the pandemic on tourism from the socio-economic perspective, spanning the period of the pandemic, while post-Covid recovery projections are also considered. The next section presents an overview of domestic tourism and the impacts of COVID-19 on the South African domestic tourism sector broadly, in the form

of a literature review. This is followed by an explanation of the research methodology that was employed in carrying out this research as well as the ensuing findings, results and discussions. Later, a conclusion is provided, whilst the limitations that are applicable to the research are also outlined.

Literature review

A general sense of trepidation engulfed the global community in the early part of the year 2020 after it was established that a new flu-like virus (that has come to be known as the novel Coronavirus or COVID-19) that was declared in the city of Wuhan, situated in the Hubei Province of China in December 2019 had subsequently spread globally (Gössling, Scott & Hall 2020; Jamal & Budke, 2020; World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020a). Concerned by the slow reaction to the potential effects of the virus by many national governments, the WHO, witnessing the increasing death toll and recognising the human-to-human transmission potential of the virus in China declared it as a public health emergency of international concern by the end of January 2020 (WHO, 2020a). As the situation evolved, and with worldwide cases skyrocketing, the WHO on the 12th of March 2020 further declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic (Ducharme, 2020). This declaration jolted most of the global community into action and resulted in countries seeking to implement strategies aimed at limiting the spread of the virus to their countries or to curb the extent of the spread for those countries that already had cases reported. Across the world therefore, restrictions were declared by national governments ranging from travel bans, prohibition of large gatherings, suspension, and in some cases cancellations of crowd-prone activities and events as well as the implementation of ‘lockdowns’ (Ducharme, 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Hall, Scott & Gossling., 2020; Jamal & Budke, 2020; Joubert, 2020; WHO, 2020b; Worldometer, 2020). Such measures were bound to have an adverse effect on the global socio-economic ecosystem, and one of the major sectors that were going to be massively affected was tourism, which, by its very nature revolves around the ability of people moving between geographies which in the current context has been handicapped by the restrictions imposed by governments globally.

Modern tourism history is filled with a plethora of well-known and lesser-known instances and examples of natural disasters, economic downturns, political turmoil, health scares, terrorist activity and other events that have impacted negatively on the volume and direction of tourism flows (Speakman & Sharpley, 2012). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the COVID-19 pandemic is a defining global health crisis of our time, and, the greatest challenge since the end of World War 2 (UNDP, 2020). Craven, Liu, Mysore and Wilson (2020) refer to COVID-19 as the “first humanitarian challenge on a global scale” due to the fact that its global footprint has been felt in close to two hundred countries, including South Africa (Worldometer, 2020). With international travel bans affecting over 90% of the world population and widespread restrictions on public gatherings and community mobility, tourism largely ceased in the early months of 2020 (Gössling et al., 2020; Qiu, Park, Li, & Song, 2020). Accordingly, and beyond being a global health crisis, the disruptive nature of the COVID-19 crisis has the potential to create devastating social, economic, environmental and socio-political conundrums within the respective countries’ landscapes, as well as globally (Smith-Bingham & Hariharan, 2020; UNDP, 2020). One of the major sectors which have been affected by the pandemic is the tourism sector, consequent to the fact that people cannot travel in the present circumstances, and communities in destinations cannot host tourists for fear of infection risks (Ateino, 2020; Gaffney & Eeckels, 2020; Gossling et al., 2020; Zheng, Goh & Wen, 2020). For example, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that as a result of COVID-19, 25 million jobs could be lost globally within the tourism sector. Undoubtedly, the tourism industry is one of the most

economically important industries worldwide; yet it is also one of the most susceptible and vulnerable to crises and disasters (Hall et al., 2020; Pforr & Hosie, 2008). Early evidence and projections from the UNWTO indicate that international arrivals could contract by between 20% and 30% relative to 2019 numbers (UNWTO, 2020).

Global tourism has continued to flourish over the last few years with the UNWTO reporting that in 2019, 1.5 billion people travelled around the globe, with a projected 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO, 2020). However, these projections vary from destination to destination based on the unique dynamics of each region. In the context of this current study, tourism in South Africa is big business (Harilal & Nyikana, 2019). According to the Department of Tourism, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reported that in 2018, tourism contributed some R425 billion to South Africa's economy (Smith, 2020). In addition, during the same period, South Africa's local tourism industry generated direct foreign spend of R139 billion, directly accounting for 2.8% of real gross domestic product (GDP) which was projected to grow to R145,3 billion in 2019 (Smith, 2020). In terms of employment figures, the total of 722 013 people, or one in every twenty-two working South Africans was employed in the tourism sector (Smith, 2020), which accounted for 4.2% of total employment in the South African economy while tourism's indirect contribution to total employment stood at 9.2% in 2018 (Smith, 2020). Suddenly, these projections are looking highly unlikely, given the outbreak of COVID-19 which has been touted to have an even greater negative impact than that of the Great Depression (Bansh, 2020). Faulkner (2001) affirms the impact of such effects by noting that an increasing number of disasters and crises affect tourism related industries, ranging from natural to human influenced incidents.

Extant research in the area of health pandemic outbreaks and their potential impact on tourism have been carried out (Blake, Sinclair & Sugiyarto, 2003; Cooper, 2006; Gössling et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2020; McAleer, Huang, Kou, Chen & Chang, 2010; Speakman & Sharpley, 2012; Zeng, Carter & de Lacy, 2005). Generally, these studies have looked at the linkages between health disasters and tourism in the specific countries or regions where they occur. For instance, Cooper (2006) analysed the reactions of the Japanese tourist industry towards the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), while Zeng et al. (2005) explored its impact for China. Even in cases where these pandemics spread to other regions, the scope and nature of the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented in its coverage, impact and implications (Joubert, 2020). It is against this backdrop that in this study, we look at the impacts and implications of the pandemic from a domestic tourism setting, using South Africa as a case study. Keyser (2009) defines the concept of domestic tourism as that which is generally used when referring to all tourism activities of a resident of a country travelling to a main destination within their country of residence. This form of tourism therefore is a combination of all tourism activities that are undertaken by people in their own country of permanent residence (Acha-Anyi, 2020). This type of tourism is seen as playing a very important role in many destinations where socio-economic development is still a challenge, and where tourism is seen as one of the vehicles to increase revenue possibilities (Acha-Anyi, 2020; Harilal & Nyikana, 2019; Nyikana & Sigxashe, 2017; Nengovhela Tshipala, & Nyikana, 2017). Unfortunately, this type of tourism, despite its importance in socio-economic contributions to economies, has tended to receive less attention from researchers as compared to international travel and tourism (Qiu et al., 2020; Tsui, 2017; Morupisi & Mokgalo, 2017; Nengovhela et al., 2017). South Africa has traditionally adopted an aggressive marketing approach in promoting its domestic tourism offering and this sector has been witnessing tremendous growth in contemporary times (Bama & Tichaawa, 2015). According to the National Department of Tourism in South Africa, the country was poised for positive growth, and as early as February 2020, 40% of responding firms within the tourism ecosystem noted that they were growing, with a further 32% stating



that they performing at a constant level (South Africa, 2020). Judging by 2019 levels as previously highlighted, such data indicated a positive trajectory (Smith, 2020). These signs of optimism have since been consumed by the debilitating impact of the hard lockdowns imposed on the tourism sector in the country. The Covid-19 crisis should therefore be viewed as an opportunity to critically reconsider domestic tourism’s growth trajectory within the country, especially in the light of the potential post-pandemic reconsideration of global flows for reasons such as the inherent risks incurred in global travel (Gossling et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). In the context of such discourse therefore, this study considers the impacts and implications of the pandemic from a South African domestic tourism perspective.

Methodology

In terms of research approach, this study adopted a mixed-method research paradigm consisting of both the qualitative and quantitative research methods. According to Fink (2014), a research design describes the way in which the study’s subjects and participants are organised and more importantly, how their behaviour is measured within the study. In this regard, the mixed-method research design was seen as being most appropriate for achieving the study’s objective. In terms of sampling methods, the study employed two sampling approaches to target the relevant participant groupings. Firstly, a purposive approach was used for the key informant interviews. Then for the residents, a simple random sampling method was used in administering the questionnaire survey.

For the qualitative data, in-depth interviews were conducted (telephonically) with the key informant personnel who were purposefully chosen based on their knowledge, experience, interest and involvement in the tourism and hospitality sector in South Africa. In total, ten (10) individuals who have a solid presence in the South African domestic tourism environment were selected. Table 1 below provides a summary of the respondents in this respect.

Table 1: List of stakeholders interviewed (n=10)

Sector (roles)	Number of interviews
Tour operator (Owners)	2
Accommodation (Front office employees)	2
Accommodation (Owner/manager)	1
Local government (Municipal officer-LED)	1
Accommodation (Hotel manager)	1
Tourism and Hospitality Consultation (Senior Business Consultant)	1
Senior Academic (Senior Lecturer and Industry Board Member)	1
Destination Management Company (Founder)	1

These interviews were conducted based on an interview schedule which assisted in facilitating the discussions, mainly focusing on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry and the strategies that can be used to kick-start the industry post-COVID-19 restrictions upliftment. Responses from these were then analysed and categorised into themes that provide meaning and context to the quantitative survey results.

For its part, the quantitative survey instrument was developed based on an extensive literature review and other similar studies that have been recently conducted on the same issue in other destinations. The survey, was then randomly distributed online using the Google Docs Application. The application allows for real-time capturing of data and its subsequent analysis. The survey was made available online for three (3) months (i.e. April, May and June 2020) for the target population. The main variables measured by the survey included socio-demographic profiles, travel experience, perceptions of the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism, as well as future travel intentions and behaviours especially linked to domestic tourism practices. Once data collection was completed, the responses were checked in order to ensure that only South

African residents had participated in the survey. In total, two hundred and forty-one (n=241) valid questionnaire surveys were collected and the findings of these are discussed below.

Results and discussion

Demographic profiles of respondents

The demographic analysis of the study participants reveals a relatively young domestic tourism market whose collective majority fall within the age range of 18 to 36 years of age (87.6%) as can be seen in the table below. In terms of gender representation, a majority of the respondents (61.4) were female as opposed to those who are males (36.9%). An overwhelming majority of the respondents (88.4%) were black, single (72.6%) and were relatively well educated. This is on the basis that those with at least a post-graduate degree (38.2%), had completed matric (27.4%) and were in possession of a Diploma or undergraduate degree (26.6%) made up the vast majority of those surveyed. Resultantly, it came as no surprise to find that more than half of the respondents were either in full-time, part-time and self-employment. Besides these, there were also those who indicated that they were currently busy with their studies and those who are retired. In terms of provincial distribution, a majority of those who took part in the study were from Gauteng province (59.3%).

Table 2: Demographic profiles of respondents (n=241)

Characteristics	Category	Total (in %)
Gender	Female	61.4
	Male	36.9
	Other	1.7
Age	18-24 years	39
	25-30 years	26.8
	31-36 years	21.8
	41 and above	6.6
Ethnicity	Black	88.4
	White	3.3
	Coloured	3.3
	Indian	2.5
	Prefer not to say	2.5
Marital status	Single	72.6
	Married	23.7
	Prefer not to say	3.3
Highest qualification obtained	Post-graduate degree	38.2
	High School completed (Matric/Grade 12)	27.4
	Undergraduate degree/Diploma	26.6
	Higher Certificate	5
	Other	2.8
Employment status	Full-time	41.5
	Student	36.9
	Part-time	7.1
	Self-employed	7.1
	Unemployed	6.2
	Retired	1.2
Province of residence	Gauteng	59.3
	Eastern Cape	12.9
	Western Cape	12
	KwaZulu-Natal	5.8
	Limpopo	4.6
	Mpumalanga	3.7
	North-West	1.7

Travel experience and behaviour

The respondents were required to indicate their experience of travelling both nationally and internationally, in an effort to better understand their overall relationship with travel and tourism, and thus, putting the study findings into context. In this respect, a large majority of

the participants (60.2%) indicated having no international travelling experience as opposed to those who had travelled beyond the South African borders (39.8%). Those who had some international travel experience (n=96) were further comprised of those who typically indicated travelling once a year (74%), between two and three times a year (23%) and four or more times (3%). With regards to domestic travel to different provinces to that of residence, and the frequency of such travel, the results showed a lot more activity amongst those who participated in the study. A majority of the respondents (41.9%) took between two and three trips per year. They were closely followed by those who typically took one domestic trip per year (24.9%), four to seven domestic trips (17.4%) and those who took eight or more trips (7.1%). The remaining number indicated not having taken any domestic trips in recent times, implying that they had never left their province of residence for any trip previously.

General awareness about COVID-19

The respondents were next required to indicate their awareness levels regarding certain aspects about the pandemic, including their interest and overall trusted sources of information. Pertaining to their preferred source of information about the COVID-19, a majority of the respondents (53.9%) indicated that they trusted Television (TV) and radio as their source of information. These were followed by those who trusted online news channels and sources (29.5%), social media (12.8%) and print media like newspapers (2.5%). The remaining minority of the respondents indicated having their trust placed on the official Presidential announcements as well as information from friends and relatives. In terms of the frequency that they kept an eye out for news and information about the pandemic, the results show that an overwhelming majority of respondents were very alert for these news. In fact, 46.9% and 31.5% had looked out for these news and information “very frequently” and “frequently” respectively. Those who indicated an “occasional” (17.8%), “rarely” (12.5%) and “very rarely” made up the rest of the sample. This implied that, true to the general heightened state of interest and panic around the pandemic, the respondents in this study too were concerned about the situation and were thus keeping a close eye on the developments in this regard.

A follow-up question was posed to the respondents requiring them to indicate which province, besides the one they were resident in, they had followed the most regarding news and information on the COVID-19 pandemic. Unsurprisingly, South Africa’s biggest economic hubs were the subject of interest for the respondents with Gauteng (36.5%), and the Western Cape (34.4%) leaders in this respect. Besides these, other provinces of major interest included the Eastern Cape (12.4%), KwaZulu-Natal (7.5%) and Limpopo (4.1%). In addition to this, a vast majority of the respondents (69.8%) indicated that they would characterise the information on the pandemic in South Africa as trustworthy as compared to those who either took a neutral stance on this (26.1%) or felt that the information was not trustworthy (4.1%). Interestingly, many of the key informant interviewees had reservations about the reliability of the information sources. Many felt that some key information was often left out, especially by the government and thus left many questions in their view. As one respondent who works in a hotel suggested:

To an extent yes, but this largely depends on what each person considers as a source of credible news. We consume differently and as trustworthy as our national news is, it often leaves out information seen as secondary but still valuable which is found through other sources of media and research. National News is also narrow, such as the daily increase of cases, I’ve not heard it stipulated that the count is affected by delays testing as the systems are backlogged and the time frame for tests. The recovery case recording can also only account for admitted patients. Basically facts are shared but not necessarily explained.

Thus, the general feeling from the key informants, and their own personal practice has been to consult different information sources and try and draw their own conclusions based on their findings. They indicated consulting the official communication channels of government, online sources, social media, traditional print media and friends and associates amongst other sources that they used.

Perceptions of the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism in South Africa

The next section of the study sought to measure their perceptions of the impacts that COVID-19 has had on the tourism industry in South Africa. To achieve this, a series of statements regarding the potential impacts were given to the respondents to respond to. In the questionnaire survey, this was done through a 5 point Likert scale that ranges from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. These were then grouped in certain instances of the analysis to represent either just Agree (strongly agree + agree) or Disagree (strongly disagree + disagree) in order to paint a better picture of such perceptions.

The first statement sought to gauge whether the respondents thought that the tourism industry in South Africa reacted swiftly and decisively in effectively managing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings reveal that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (69.8%) felt that swift action was taken to manage the effects of the pandemic. However, there were some who were unsure of this and thus took a neutral stance (26.1%) and disagreed (4.1%) altogether with this notion. Interestingly, a majority of the participants (67.2%) indicated that, if an opportunity were to arise for them, they would be willing to travel to other provinces immediately when the restrictions are lifted. In fact, many (76%) made it clear that they would wait until all restrictions are lifted before making any trip to different provinces. All of the respondents in this study suggested that they were actually planning a trip to different provinces in the near future, once the necessary permission is given in terms of the existing restrictions. This bodes well for the immediate recovery activities of the local domestic tourism sector as there seems to be a willingness to travel post-pandemic restriction upliftment amongst the residents. Such travel activity would assist in ensuring the kick-starting of the industry in the absence of international tourist arrivals. Besides, just over half of the study participants (51.4%) rated their likelihood of travelling in the next few months quite highly, pending the lifting of the travel restrictions imposed by the lockdown. This was backed by the key informant interviewees who suggested that there would likely be some travel beyond the pandemic lockdown restrictions being lifted, depending on how people felt, especially if a feeling of frustration with being in lockdown kicked in. As someone in the hotel industry suggested:

Domestic tourism is fairly strong in South Africa, especially the visiting friends and relatives sector. The people will therefore travel immediately once restrictions are lifted but this depends on how people perceive this pandemic which can't be guaranteed, there could be a wave of fear, there could also be a wave of eagerness to catch a break from the mundane lockdown restrictions.

Another one supported this by specifically highlighting the uncertainty that will likely come up:

I think that once the restrictions have been lifted, there might be a slight hesitation from some sceptics to travel “wait and see what happens”. However, those that have the means (a handful) are keen to hit the road and we have seen it at our property with bookings from Bookings.com

A stakeholder within the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) sector argued that the government was failing the industry in not having concrete plans and failing to effectively communicate aspects of the recovery plan:

It is difficult to know what steps can assist the industry recover because nothing is communicated, it seems that there is a lack of a recovery plan at the moment. Consequently, international travellers are avoiding South Africa as a destination. There is no clarity of when borders will open, how they will open, so it is better for the prospective tourists to either cancel bookings previously made or not come at all. The authorities should communicate a recovery plan; allow domestic tourism (leisure and business); provide a date for opening international borders in 2020.

Another interviewee, who falls within the Destination Management Organisation field added:

Provide a date for international travel to be allowed into SA again, albeit under strict conditions, but travel must resume in order to regain confidence in our destination. Business events are the easiest to control as we know who delegates are and how to track them, as well as being well-versed in crisis management. Events up to 500 delegates can easily be managed and should be allowed swiftly.

This shows that the industry in itself is unsure of what the initial reaction may be once the restrictions are lifted as they feel it is highly dependent on how the people feel. If the people feel confident in the procedures in place, and are tired of being indoors or limited to localised areas, then they will definitely travel. However, if the trust in the safety procedures is low, and the finances especially the disposable income (which has been compromised by the pandemic) is not permitting, there will be little travel anyway. One official from a local municipality argued that there may be a shift in the type of tourism that becomes dominant post-pandemic. In this regard, they argued that there may be less mass tourism activity, but rather special interest tourists who avoided crowded areas. This would augur well for the less visited areas in the country.

People would be skeptical about travelling more often into crowded areas like mosques, stadiums, exhibitions, beaches and concerts just to mention but a few. They would likely go to less crowded attractions and destinations especially in the short-term once restrictions have been lifted.

According to Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2018), in recent times, word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing is poised to play a very crucial part in tourism and hospitality globally. They argue that, in particular, electronic WOM plays a very crucial role in the decision-making process of the tourists. Against this background, the next section sought to gauge whether the respondents felt the need to promote and spread positive tourism information about South Africa. The findings suggest that an overwhelming majority of the participants (80%) were actually already saying good things about South Africa as a tourist destination on their social media platforms. In addition to this, they indicated a strong willingness (91.3%) to promote the country as a tourist destination if this meant that it would assist the overall tourism recovery process beyond the COVID-19 restrictions. In any case, there were many people (74.3%) who indicated having already been actively motivating and encouraging friends and relatives to consider travelling nationally once the lockdown period comes to an end. This type of willingness to travel and to

encourage others to travel presents an opportunity for those who are in charge of marketing activities to constantly remind these keen travellers such that the interest is not lost and practically translates to real trips post-pandemic. An official from a local municipality also added that likelihood of travelling to the less popular destinations of South Africa had increased owing to indirect impacts of the COVID-19 restrictions. In this respect, they argued that the less popular areas like the Northern Cape Province would likely get more visitors because they are likely to be seen as less of a health risk because they had very low incidents of infection. Moreover, many people had travelled from urban areas to their rural homes and during the lockdown, constantly posting pictures of the scenic areas therein on their social media pages, which may prompt much interest from others. The continued updates on the less hot spots of the pandemic like the Northern Cape have made people more interested in visiting the province. Another thing is because people are in the deep peripheral areas currently with their families posting pictures of unique attractions in their areas and this on its own is a marketing strategy to the less-exposed area

Interestingly, there were fairly divided results pertaining to the potential swiftness of the recovery of the South African tourism industry from the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the majority of the respondents (52.3%) felt that the industry would make a quick recovery, there were nuances of doubt where some (31.1%) were unsure if this would be the case and thus were neutral and quite a notable percentage (16.6%) of them who felt that it would take a while for the industry to recover. Nevertheless, those with a positive feeling towards the industry's recovery may be doing so on the basis of their earlier assertions about their willingness to both travel and actively promote a spirit of travelling amongst their close circles post-pandemic. In fact, there were many people (65.6%) who indicated that they were intending to travel around South Africa a lot more so that they may play their role in boosting domestic tourism, which they felt was an important sector for the economy. They also indicated that they felt that a lot more people would likely travel to local destinations anyway due to fears around the pandemic. This was a view closely supported by the key informants, who felt that the lockdown frustration would make people travel more specially to go visit friends and relatives, but to also explore other parts of South Africa. As one Lodge owner argued, there would need to be astute management of this going forward, especially if the industry is to make a quick recovery:

Put strategies in place to entice travelling (reduced rates). More precautionary measures should be set in the industry to assure clients of their safety which then boosts the chances of tourists wanting to undertake trips like before

On the other hand, a tour operator felt that there were bigger socio-economic issues that were obstacles for people to engage in domestic tourism. Their argument was that, many people, even before the pandemic could not afford to participate in the sector owing to financial limitations. Such limitations have only gotten worse with the financial implications of the pandemic, with a lot of people losing jobs, being retrenched, having their salaries reduced etc.

Unless the lives of the people drastically change in terms of earning disposable income to explore their country and regions it may not change much. South Africans have been battling even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has a huge dependency on social reliefs from the government, and the unemployment rate keeps on rising drastically. This makes it difficult for some local people to participate in tourism or buy some of our packages as tour operators. Having a holiday away from home is still a dream which may not materialize anytime soon, many people are struggling to meet their day to day conditions. South Africa's minimum wage of R3,500 doesn't go far in the tourism industry, leaving many without any disposable income for leisure.

Another stakeholder, within the business tourism sector argued that a lot of the focus was on government, with very little actively being done by the private sector and other partners in terms of suggesting solutions. They argued that besides waiting for the national government announcement, the collective tourism stakeholders should be looking at leading government with practical directives specifically for the industry:

We, as the tourism industry should look to help government plan the reopening of tourism. I think we should be involved in demonstrating which tourism businesses are ready and pose the least risk in order for government support. It is imperative that we not only make the case for job losses but that we are a partner in the pandemic. We need to help government and each other manage the pandemic. What is Tourism's phased approach to reopening?

Since the time of the interviews, the industry has subsequently opened for operation under strict safety conditions. However, the response above is seen as being important in highlighting the need for collaboration and the strengthening of partnerships amongst the stakeholders in the industry. The effective relaunching and kick-starting of the tourism activity in South Africa hinges on such collaborations and involvement of all in solving the current issues that the pandemic has brought unto the industry. Besides, tourism in South Africa may be led by the government, but it is largely driven and funded by the private sector and as such, their involvement in proposing solutions and working in collaboration with government (public-private partnerships) cannot be undervalued (Harilal & Nyikana, 2019).

Conclusion and recommendations

With little available empirical inquiry into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings from this study may assist in understanding the attitudes and perceptions of people regarding domestic travel intentions going forward. The study makes a modest contribution towards the theoretical advancements relating to disasters and their management and implications on the tourism industry, especially from a South African point of view. This area of focus has largely been neglected in the past and as such findings from this current study will add to the literature in this respect. The study therefore contributes to the growing knowledge into the impacts of pandemics of this nature on tourism in South Africa in particular, and Africa more generally. In this study for example, it was established that many people were generally concerned about the pandemic, but more so with the inaccuracies, inconsistencies and unreliability of the reporting from the government. Thus, on a practical level, this has implications on the existing relationships between the government and other stakeholders in the industry. For example, there seems to be a lack of trust in government reporting owing to the perceived inconsistencies and unreliability of information flowing out to the stakeholders. The authorities, particularly in government spheres should therefore see this as an opportunity to further engage with their stakeholders and seek to strengthen their relations and collaboration efforts which may result in more trust in the systems they put in place and the overall information that they send out. Such strengthening of relations would also ensure that enough buy-in is received for any strategy that may be launched in attempting to kick-start tourism beyond the times of the pandemic in a country that is largely reliant on the tourism industry. Besides, the more involved the private sector is in the development of such a strategy, in terms of which effective consultation processes are expected, the more likely it is for the strategy to both be successful and sustainable in the short-, medium- and to an extent long-term.

In addition to this, many people were willing to wait until all the restrictions have been lifted before they embark on domestic tourism trips. Interestingly, they were willing to also market the country and influence others to travel to local areas in an effort to assist the recovery of the tourism and hospitality industry. Subsequently, many people indicated that they had actually planned trips within the next few months. This study has provided insights into the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the South African domestic tourism ecosystem. While the pandemic highlights issues of vulnerability of domestic tourism more specifically, the role of domestic tourism as a tool for the recovery and longer-term transformation towards tourism resilience is noted. It is prudent therefore for tourism stakeholders to re-assess and re-evaluate the current domestic tourism industry, especially in the light of the formulation of recovery strategies, protocols and policies that will satisfy peoples' needs for safety and desires for travel, and, this should be approached with a holistic and innovative frame of mind instead of focusing narrowly and directly on tourism recovery, so as to ensure a safe return to domestic travel once the restrictions are lifted. Finally, the study findings, whilst with certain limitations as outlined below, may prove useful in setting the basis for more research especially towards the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on tourism in South Africa. In this regard, future researchers could use this study as a basis for a model or framework that could be adopted by relevant authorities as a guide towards tourism development and management in times of disasters and pandemics similar to this one. One of the major criticisms observed in the study is the lack of preparedness for such unpredictable disasters within the South African context specifically, and the African continent generally. Thus the study findings may assist other researchers and future studies their research endeavours about this phenomenon, all geared towards bringing a framework of solutions as well as direction for government and other stakeholders in such times of disasters and pandemics.

This study is not without its limitations, and thus should be read with these in mind. Firstly, owing to the lockdown restrictions, travelling to collect data was impossible, and as such an online survey was employed. This meant that responses would be limited to those who had access to the survey which does not necessarily represent everyone in terms of the residents. Secondly, due to time limitations, a bigger sample size could not be obtained. It is also worth noting that the majority of the respondents were from the Gauteng province and as such, this could be seen as a limitation when considering the overall implications in a country-wide context. In addition, the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism were considered, and not the impacts. The crisis is still ongoing and its impacts will only be understood over time making it worthy of further research inquiry in future studies. Future studies are therefore recommended in order to comprehensively evaluate these impacts.

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