

Reshaping The Future Of Mice Tourism Post-Covid-19: Challenges And Opportunities

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Abstract

This paper explores the repercussions of COVID-19 on MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism and outlines a path to revive and elevate its impact on the economy, particularly in developing countries. As a vital sector with a multibillion-dollar presence in India, the tourism industry holds substantial potential for global expansion and diversification. The focus is on promoting inbound tourism to uplift nations, especially those in the developmental stage. By gathering insights through primary research from travelers and travel company owners, the paper addresses the pandemic's impact on the tourism industry. The research delves into the perspectives of various demographic groups regarding their readiness to travel post-pandemic.

The study assesses preferences concerning travel modes, duration of stay, and socio-economic factors influencing purchasing behavior. The ultimate goal is to provide valuable inputs to society for the recovery and development of the tourism industry, thereby contributing to economic growth and mitigating unemployment challenges.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, MICE Industry, Hospitality Industry, Travel & Tourism

1. Introduction

COVID-19 the sudden crack in the global environment had brought the human movement at a pause for a long time. Lockdown over the world brought all the industries to a halt. This created a huge impact on the economy of all the sectors, which brought down the up going income for major sectors worldwide. Tourism is the major sector which is impacted due to novel coronavirus. Business tourism or MICE tourism hold more shares than leisure tourism on a global basis. Compared to leisure tourism, it had badly impacted the humanity related towards the work for business tourism and showed a bad time to the travel agents.

Somewhere people are still in a scary situation even after the lockdown is open for all countries. This is due to lack of awareness of fear in their mindset against death.

In this paper we will be highlighting the impacts caused due to pandemic especially for MICE tourism and will be providing some future scope which will help in giving again the boost to MICE tourism. This will help in bringing back life to lively status for the travel agents and to their connected dots.

Travel & Tourism

Travel terminology is defined as the displacement of crowds or defined people within any geographical locations on the map. Mode of movement can be used as foot, bicycle, 4-wheeled vehicles, railways, cruises, flights or any other medium this might be with or without the baggage. This would be one way or even return trip depending on the cycle of stay which can be short stay starting from 1 night onwards till 364 nights and long stays more than 365 days ahead.

Movement termed as tourism can be for pleasure or business purpose; also, the practice of touring is a business for attracting, accommodating and entertaining the travelers. It can be across borders or within nations also.

As per tourism defined by World Tourism Organization, it states that "beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only", as traveler "travelling to and staying at places other than their regular routine and where are surviving in day-to-day routine for not more than one consecutive year for leisure and not less than 24 hours, business and other purposes"

COVID-19

Coronavirus disease / infection which is termed as COVID-19 is a communicable ailment or disease impacted by the terrible breathing syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The 1st patient having coronavirus was detected in Wuhan, China in the year 2019 December month. Since then, till now, the infection had reached almost 95% of land and impacted badly on the population, resulting in an ongoing pandemic.

On 11th February 2020, WHO had issued the official names for this infection as COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2. Acronym was termed as Co-Corona, Vi-Virus, D-Disease and 19 for the outbreak year of 2019, this was given by Tedros Adhanom and explained as above. In addition to this, WHO uses more terms as Covid-19 Virus, and it is responsible for pandemic causes.

MICE Tourism

MICE Tourism, encompassing Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions, involves meticulously planned gatherings. The term "meeting industry" is now preferred to avoid acronym confusion. Industry educators use the broader term "events industry," covering meetings and various professions. MICE's components, understood by experts, exclude the "incentive" term. Incentive-based tourism involves companies rewarding dealers or retailers for exceeding targets, with short-duration stays at different nations. The cost is based on achieved targets, contributing to company profits. This type of tourism primarily focuses on entertainment rather than professional or educational purposes. MICE events, themed and topic-specific, aim for progressive results in the realms of professionals, academics, or trade companies.

2. Literature Review and Study

The advent of COVID-19 disrupted global industries, necessitating revitalization for international recovery. Unlike previous diseases confined to specific sectors, COVID-19 targeted international travel, causing unparalleled global impact. The travel and tourism industry, vital for post-pandemic socio-economic stability, significantly contributes to India's economy and covers an expansive area in the populous nation. Since the first COVID-19 case in January 2020, India's tourism sector remained stagnant due to strict governmental measures, impacting the hospitality and travel industry.

As countries ease restrictions, prioritizing health is essential, necessitating protection for workers, organizations, and travelers. The aim is to make the sector carbon-neutral by 2030 through innovation, digitalization, and local values. Before the pandemic, the industry contributed over 10% to global GDP, employing 320 billion people. The recovery begins with leisure travel, followed by corporate travel based on economic conditions. Themes like smart tourism and social media offer opportunities for local development.

City planners can construct smart cities to boost tourism, as suggested in a March 2021 article, and stakeholder contributions are crucial for rearranging tourism for a sustainable, resilient model, as emphasized in a May 2021 article. This collaborative effort is vital for tourism to be a catalyst for positive change in the future.

Novel Corona, a Global Pandemic

The World Tourism Organization projected a positive outlook for global tourism, expecting a rise from 1.5 billion international travelers in 2019 to an estimated 1.8 billion by 2030. However, the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic,

originating in China in November 2019, drastically altered this trajectory, causing unprecedented challenges akin to those faced during World War II.

The pandemic wreaked havoc across various industries, notably crippling travel and tourism. The global lockdown, a historic first, severely impacted the movement of people and goods, affecting air travel, accommodations, and entertainment. While many nations faced significant losses, India's timely and effective response controlled the pandemic, providing quarantine facilities for all and essential supplies.

Looking forward, India's tourism recovery seems promising. In 2019, tourism contributed 9.3% to India's GDP, showing a 4.9% increase in the Travel & Tourism GDP. Despite the pandemic's setback in 2020, the sector still contributed 6.8% to India's economy, amounting to INR 16,681 billion and employing around 32 million people, reflecting its substantial impact on the nation's economic landscape.

COVID-19 CASES UNTIL 30TH JUNE 2023

Total cases reported	India	World
Total Infections	44,674,459	649,814,997
Total Deaths	530,628	6,646,124
Total Recovers	44,138,235	627,009,440
Active Cases	5,596	16,159,433

Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> & <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>

3. Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are the following

1. To estimate the present economic development in India for tourism sector by seeing the impact due to novel coronavirus disease.
2. To suggest strategy for improving the current tourism situation in India.

4. Significance

This research paper will be giving a glimpse of the side effects caused due to COVID-19 which gave rise to pandemic situation on to hospitality and tourism industry. Mainly focused on MICE tourism which will be playing the vital role in giving boost for the sustainable development and including the relationship with environment and culture. It will lighten the impacts on human being including youth and employment which came down due to lockdown and will help in boosting back the tourism industry.

5. Research Methodology

For this research, exploratory research was carried out. It was done for the better understanding of the situation from April 2022 to Sept 2022. It was referred to as grounded theory approach.

Sampling unit encompasses the travelers (consumers / guests/ tourist) and the Travel agents (B2B & B2C). For travelers the survey was conducted over various parts of the country, whereas for the travel agents the survey was done on a global basis including both types of service providers.

Data collection was done for the primary research by the mode of online questionnaire floated across various platforms. Responses were recorded and then analyzed by using a convenient sampling method.

6. Data Collection Along With Its Analysis

Primary data was gathered in two different types and was analyzed based on the responses.

1. Data collection based on responses from workers / owner of an organization or travel agents based out of India as well as overseas.

Responses had been recorded with questionnaire as below for 14 unique travel agents.

Associated with organization	Estd. Year	City of working
ATP Travel	1955	New York City, Las Vegas
Cosmic Safaris Kenya	2007	Delhi
Destination Anywhere	2011	Mumbai
Hamdaan Travels	2020	Karachi, Pakistan
Jo Holidays	2018	Pune
Kesari Tours Pvt Ltd	1984	Pune
One Above Holidays Limited	2019	Hong Kong
Oyo	2013	Mumbai
Resfeber Travel Solutions	2018	Kalyan
Riya Holidays Pvt Ltd	1980	Mumbai
Rove The Map	2020	Gurugram
Sangam Tours	1995	Nagpur
Travstore Travel Management Pvt Ltd	2012	Pune
Walkers Tours Limited	1969	Colombo, Sri Lanka

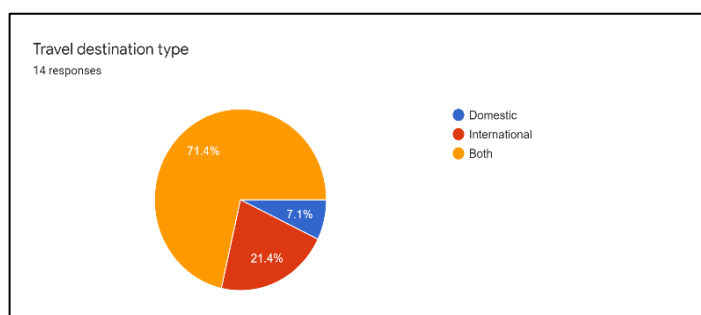


Diagram 1.1

Major of the agents operates for both the domestic and international travel destinations.

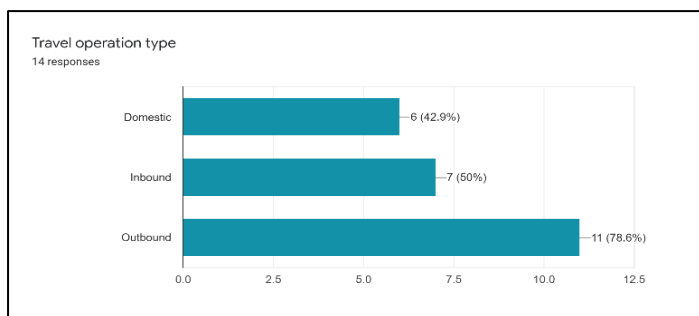


Diagram 1.2

Mostly the operation carried is outbound travel for the surveyed agents.

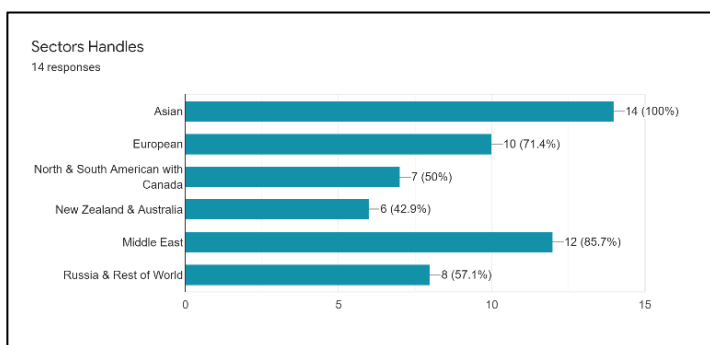


Diagram 1.3

Sectors handles are more or less same across the globe.

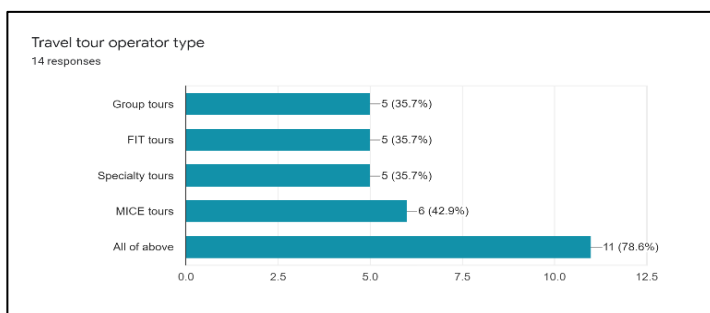


Diagram 1.4

Maximum of the operators operate for all type of tours and also majorly focusing in MICE operations.

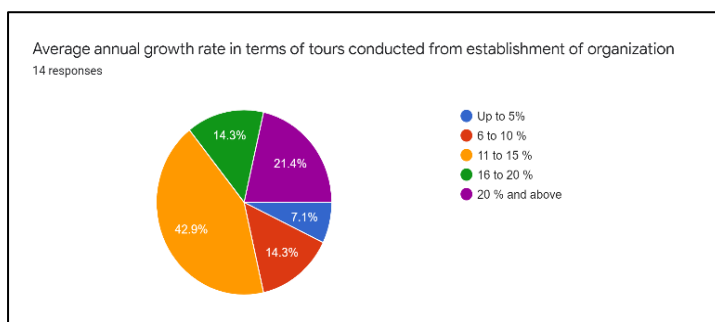


Diagram 1.5

Pre-pandemic the annual growth was mostly in the range of 11 % to 15% and very few were below the scale of 5%. This says the industry was growing with time.

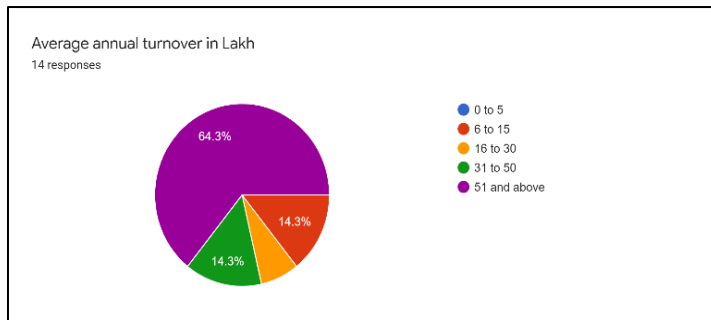


Diagram 1.6

Most of the companies were generating turn over more than 51 lakhs. This eventually leads to growth of nation and GDP as well.

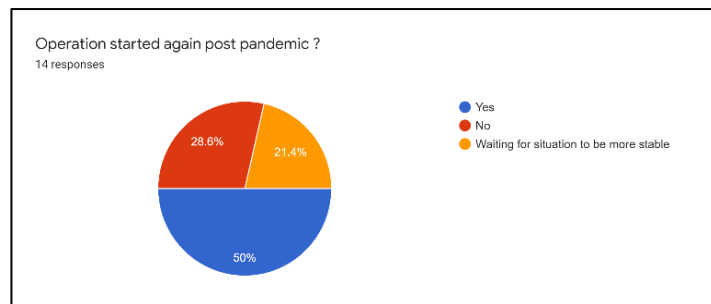


Diagram 1.7

Nearly 50% of agents are ready and all set to operate for the post pandemic period.

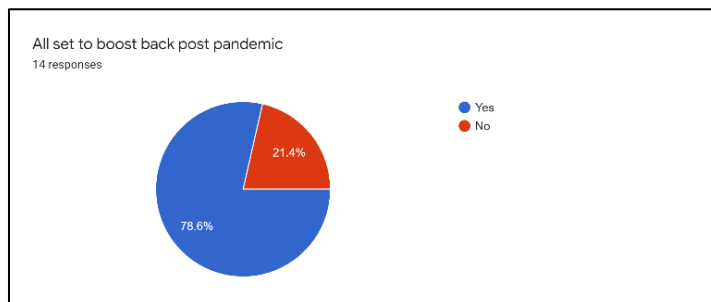


Diagram 1.8

More than 75% of agents are ready to boost back with new strategies in the tourism market in post pandemic period.

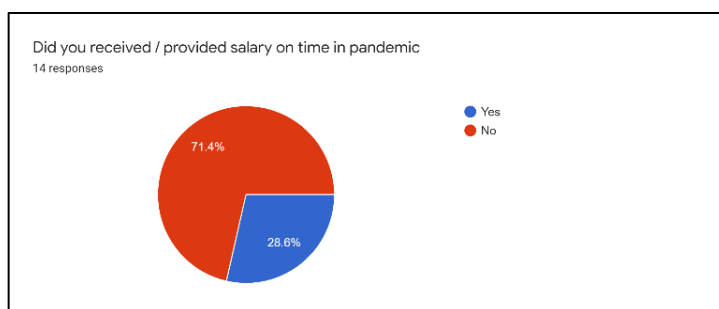


Diagram 1.9

Very few agents had paid their employees during the pandemic for their survival. Others could not due to no inflow of income.

Interpretation over data collected

A survey conducted across various travel agents from different places over globe operating across different sectors conclude as below points

1. Major agents provide their destinations for both domestic and international travel for their guests. This helps the agents to keep their revenue going in all cases of local as well as abroad travel packages for customers.
2. Annual growth rate for major companies is 11 to 15%, followed by 6 to 10% and 16 to 20%. Very few are there that have a growth rate up to 5%, this means that it helps in generating a lot of revenue over the sales closure every year and contributes towards the nation's economy.
3. Average annual turnover is more than 51 Lakh for major of the organizations. This directly showcases that their growth is more and more every annual, which helps for GDP growth towards the nation.
4. Very few organizations are waiting for the situation to get more stable, whereas others have already started operating for guests and conducting groups.
5. Very fewer organizations have provided salary to their employees, and others have paid variable pay to their employees for survival during pandemic.
6. Most of the companies are set and ready to operate back with a boosted energy post pandemic and just now waiting for the situation or government approval for starting tourism again.

2. Data collection based on responses from tourists / guests traveled at some location at some point of time within India or overseas.

Responses had been recorded with questionnaire as below for 65 unique traveled tourists.

Responses were recorded from the age group of 21 to 53 years young. A graphical representation of various responses is as shown below.

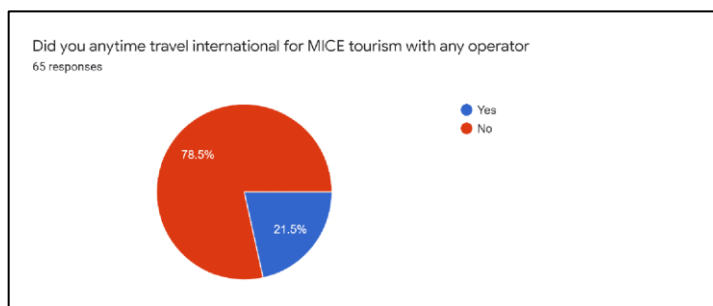


Diagram 2.1

Very few had traveled internationally on MICE tourism.

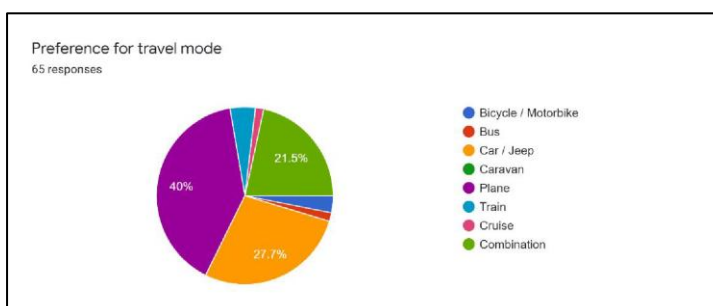


Diagram 2.2

Major people would prefer Planes as transport mode followed by the car / jeep and very less interested to travel by bus.

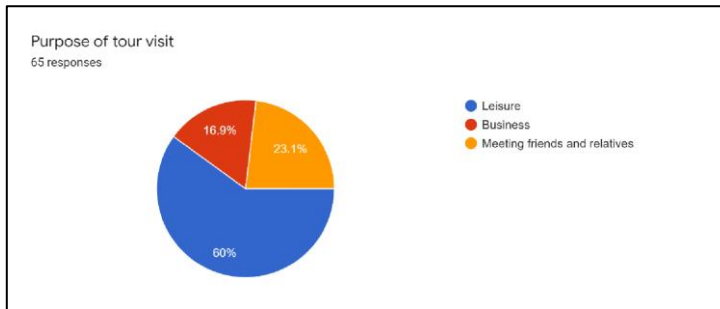


Diagram 2.3

For business hardly 16.9% people traveled and for leisure was more share of people traveling.

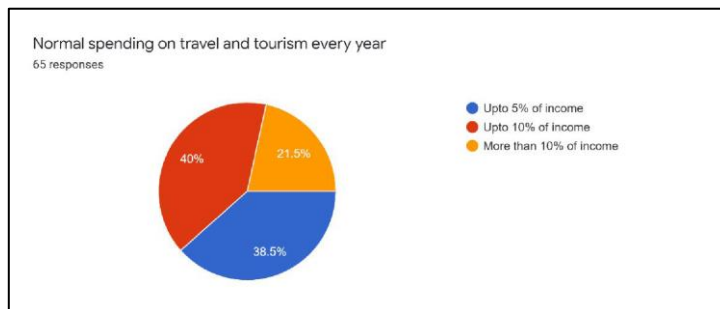


Diagram 2.4

Major people pay less than 5% of their annual income for travel purposes. And less share more than 10% of income on travel that are high class people.

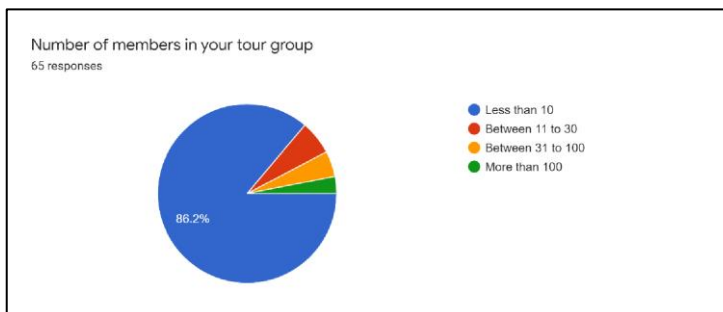


Diagram 2.5

Maximum people prefer traveling in a group size of less than 10 people.

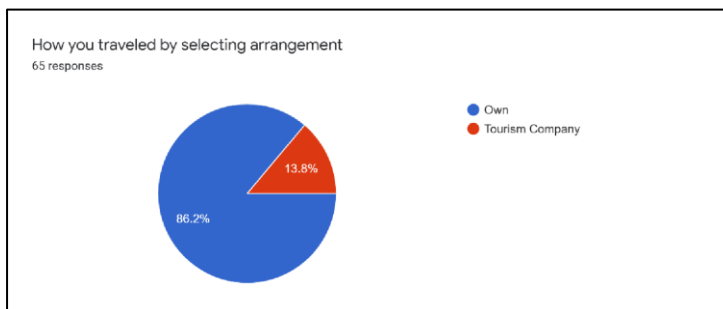


Diagram 2.6

Many people prefer traveling by making their own arrangements rather than approaching the travel agents.

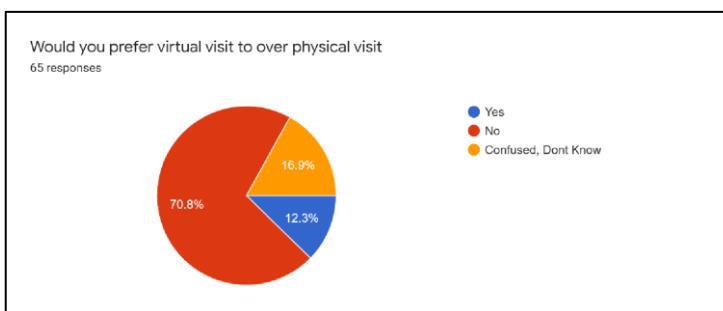


Diagram 2.7

Travelers are keen on visiting physically only at any of the tourist destinations.

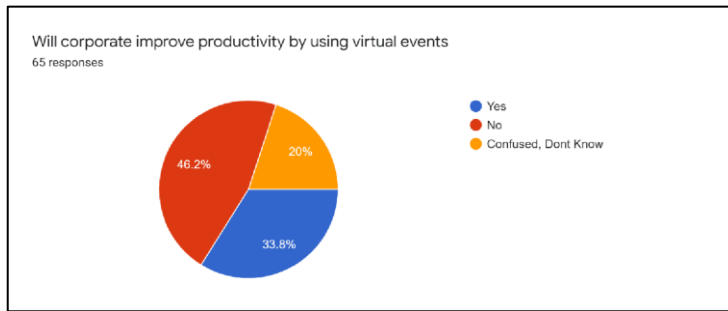


Diagram 2.8

As per travelers, corporate productivity might or increase. There are closed reviews of consumers for the same.

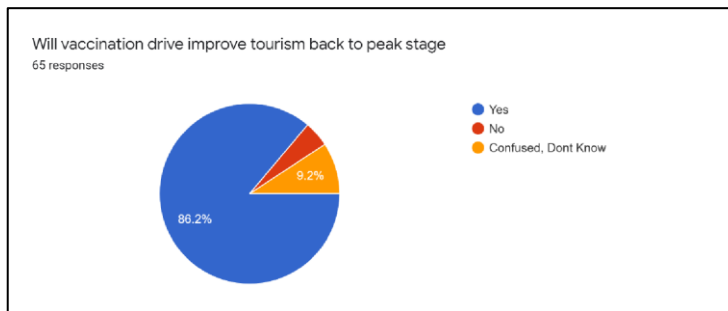


Diagram 2.9

Major reviews are that vaccination will surely improve and bring back tourism to peak again.

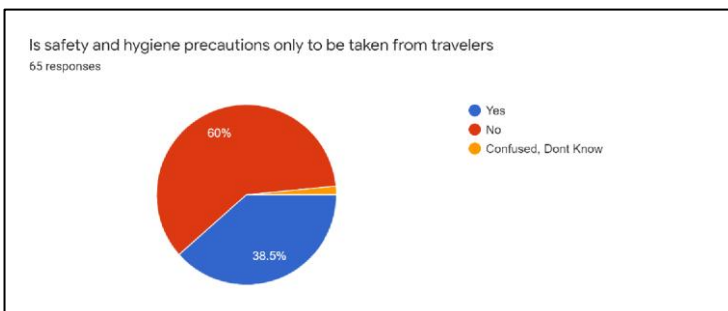


Diagram 2.10

Safety and hygiene are surely to be taken by travelers and the service providers as well.

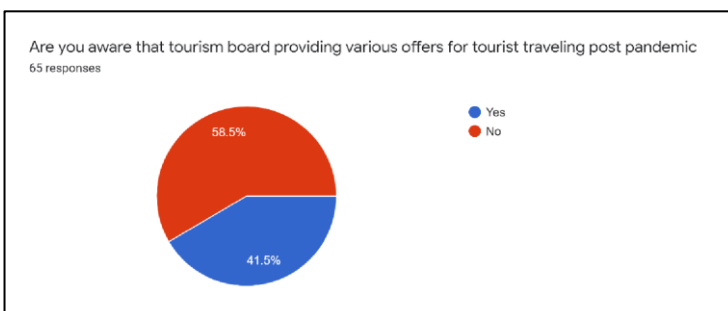


Diagram 2.11

The Majority of the crowd is now aware that even the tourism board is providing some offers for tourists traveling post pandemic to their countries.

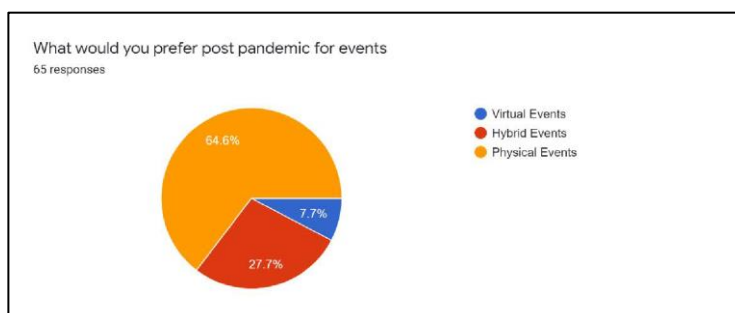


Diagram 2.12

Surely the major feedback or preferred by people is for physical events attending after the pandemic.

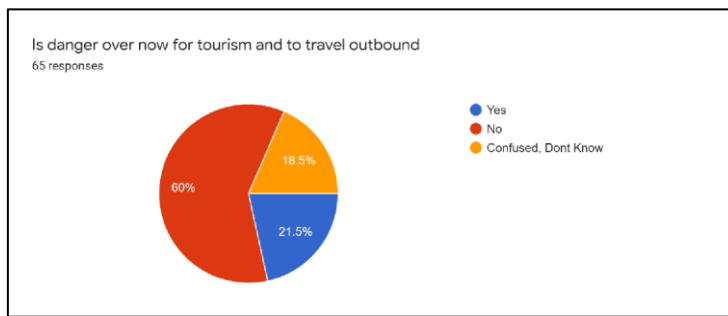


Diagram 2.13

People are aware that the danger is not yet over for outbound travel for tourism purposes.

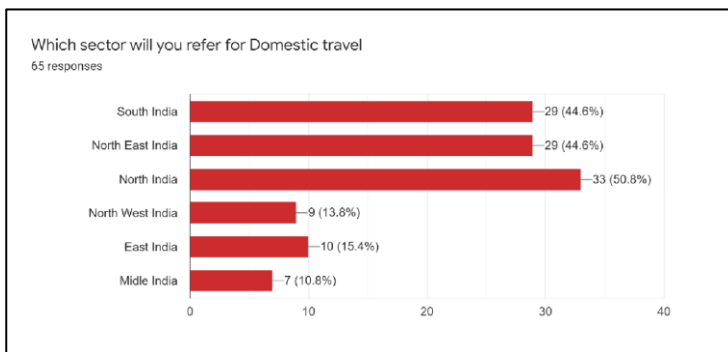


Diagram 2.14

Major of crowd preferring to travel North India and very less preference to travel Middle India post pandemic as their travel destination for domestic mode

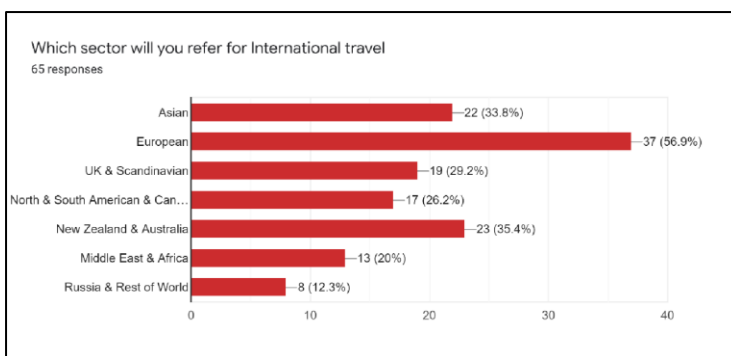


Diagram 2.15

Maximum crowd preferring European countries for travel. And rest countries followed by NZ & Australia, Asia and so on.

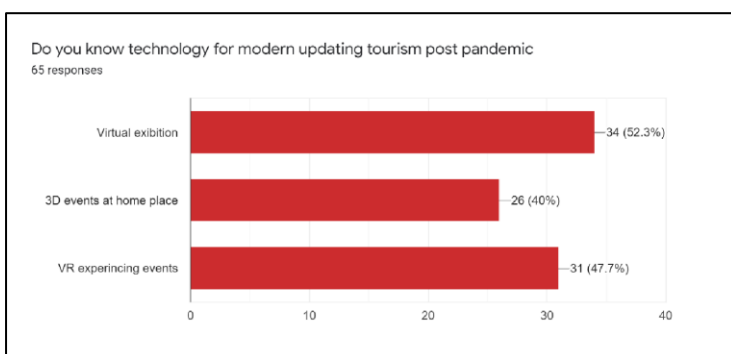


Diagram 2.16

People are much aware about the modern technologies used for tourism purposes.

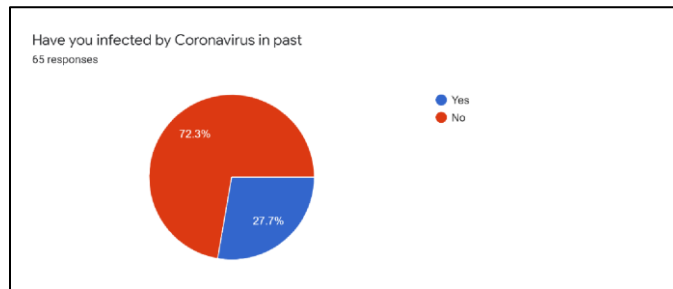


Diagram 2.17

More than 70% of people were infected by coronavirus in the past.

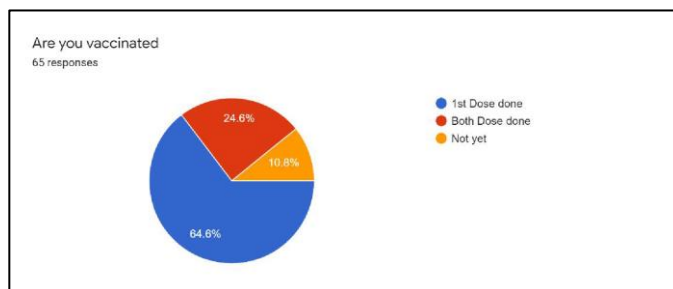


Diagram 2.18

Hardly, only 24% of people are vaccinated by both doses. And still around 10% of people haven't taken any dose of vaccination.

Interpretation over data collected

1. Many people have traveled as tourists over MICE visits.
2. Maximum people refer to the plane as mode of travel, followed by car / jeep and then in making combinations and travel.
3. Purpose of visit was majorly for leisure and less for business travel
4. Very few people spend more than 10% of income of their annual income
5. People prefer traveling in group of 10 or less than that
6. As per response, major people prefer own arrangements then going for travel agents
7. Still, around 70% of people are confused whether to go for virtual or physical events
8. Maximum of people are not aware that even tourism board provides offers for tourist post pandemic travel
9. Post pandemic people are fix to attend physical events
10. Post pandemic people would refer traveling to North India for their domestic visit
11. Major people would prefer traveling to European countries, followed by Australia & New Zealand sector post pandemic international travel.
12. More than 70% people have already infected by Corona in past
13. Major people are vaccinated with the first dose, whereas still 10% people are not vaccinated.

7. Aftermath on Mice Industry, Tourism and Hotel

The global pandemic, claiming 200 million lives, severely impacted over 190 countries, causing economic downturns. India's robust tourism sector, a key Foreign Exchange earner with \$29.962 billion turnover in 2019, faced a collapse with lockdowns and restrictions over 17 months. Pre-pandemic, tourism contributed \$194 billion (6.8% of GDP) and employed 39.80 million people (8% of the workforce). India is now recovering, with tourism improving as COVID-19 cases decline to 0.92% and daily positivity rates stay below 2%. The economic fallout extends beyond tourism, impacting interconnected sectors.

Globally, tourism, constituting 10.4% of GDP, experienced a 3.9% growth decline, resulting in a \$4.5 trillion loss. The hospitality industry's challenges underscore the need for urgent measures, including relief from loans and support for retention and small businesses. Recovery requires leveraging technology, medical advancements, and widespread vaccination efforts, coupled with proactive strategies for a resilient and sustainable future.

8. Scope of Future Implication

The global pandemic severely impacted India's tourism and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector. COVID-19 brought hospitality and corporate activities to a halt, disrupting MICE and business tourism. The recovery outlook for sub-sectors varies. Meetings nearly ceased, their revival linked to decreasing infection rates.

Incentives faced a slowdown due to budget cuts. Conventions shifted to virtual platforms, reducing costs. Exhibitions experienced a substantial income decline. Differential recovery expectations include limited growth in meetings, increased reliance on video conferencing. Conventions trust technology for improved turnover. Incentives await safe travel resumption. Economic recovery and physical exhibitions depend on the tourism sector's revival and evolving technologies, as organizations assert that virtual events cannot replace face-to-face interactions.

Vaccination- Rebooting Tourism Sector

The opening of tourism for vaccinated individuals is seen as a confidence booster for domestic and international destinations, promoting tourism recovery. Government officials emphasize the need to digitalize and transform India's tourism offerings, with vaccine certificates acting as a key facilitator for traveler movement. Before the vaccination drive, negative RTPCR reports were mandatory for travel, a significant requirement for global tourism destinations. India's vaccination certificates provide reassurance, and states anticipate a tourism boom once vaccination coverage expands, aiding in recovery from pandemic losses. The introduction and distribution of vaccines have brought relief, allowing vaccinated individuals to travel with increased confidence, potentially boosting tourist numbers. MPs Ramesh Kaushik and Raju Bista highlighted significant unemployment during lockdowns, with the travel industry seeking government aid to revive from the pandemic-induced collapse, given its substantial contribution of over 2.5% to the country's GDP.

Policy Implications

Tourism is a cornerstone of the socio-economic sector, contributing significantly to employment and livelihoods, especially in developing countries. The sector's revival hinges on swift vaccination campaigns to restore traveler confidence and reduce cancellations. Three key policy dimensions emerge:

First: Developing countries need proactive measures to revive tourism, emphasizing the importance of vaccinations in instilling confidence and encouraging risk-free travel. Targeting over 93% population coverage with both vaccine doses by the end of 2022 is crucial for economic recovery.

Second: Prioritizing measures to minimize the impact on human lives is essential. Developed countries are already taking steps to support and rejuvenate the tourism sector, viewing it as an investment in future resilience and prosperity.

Third: Nations must redefine their tourism strategies for a post-pandemic world. Long-term planning is vital, considering the enduring impact of coronavirus fears. Governments should support struggling locations, considering shifts in travel patterns, focusing on sustainable practices, and adapting to reduced reliance on certain resources, such as cruise ships.

Technology to reboot services

The face and body of tourism had totally changed compared to the situation before Feb 2020.

Somehow the MICE sector had started coming up after first wave of coronavirus, but again after 12 months exactly the same situation of lockdown with second wave gave rise to creating more intense situation for events and exhibition sector. But on other side the vaccination input gave much nice view and a golden seeing view to the industry with more positive hopes in coming time. MICE industry gave the platform to interact with other organizations even during pandemic with the help of new technical terms.

A very bad time was seen by the tourism sector on global platform and this eventually impacted the economy as well. Need of time is to observe how the new trends reshape the sector and helps in its recovery stage. The main objective for MICE sector was for boosting the overseas trade, innovations and growing economy for the local vendors directly as well as indirect support as they spend on hotels for long stays and event help and also while touring, they purchase local goods and crafts. The two vital role-playing bodies of technology and safety will help for the recovery of the sector. The industry needs to provide the grip of technology in creating ways when they provide various services to the customers and also to develop new policies and while resuming the services and to keep main targeted focus of increasing economy along with major parameters of health and hygiene.

Domestic market is new hope

India, contributing approximately 9% to the global GDP, historically leaned towards international tourism. However, it's now imperative to stimulate the domestic MICE market. Encouraging organizations to host events domestically post-COVID is vital. Incentivizing these events and offering a variety of domestic destinations' catalogs is key. With the vaccine rollout, travel confidence increased, yet challenges persist until the pandemic becomes endemic.

The domestic tourism economy saw an upswing as people, seeking relief from lockdown monotony, and embraced travel. Restricted international travel shifted focus to domestic exploration. This trend compensates for the loss in inbound tourism experienced by many nations. Homebound populations are poised to boost domestic travel, favoring free travel, heritage sites, Ayurveda, medical tourism, and well-being sectors. Local events and festivals will be significant attractions post-pandemic, emphasizing safety, hygiene, and competitive pricing, ensuring a surge in tourism and revenue.

Upcoming days of Travel and Tourism Industry, Is Pandemic over?

Rebuilding the economy post-pandemic requires a robust plan to address the potential negative impacts on business investment and the overall risky environment. A surge in pandemic cases could disrupt the demand and supply in the industry, leading to revenue losses. Travel spending may decline, encouraging a trend towards home-bound activities to reduce infection risks. Face-to-face interactions in the hospitality sector might face challenges as confidence levels decrease.

Emergency measures are essential to stimulate tourism and engage in disaster management strategies. Operators must gather positive feedback from consumers throughout the value chain. Collaboration from a global to local level is crucial, fostering trust among hospitality businesses, destination management companies, and public health authorities. Minimizing group events and addressing public uncertainties becomes pivotal, promoting healthy practices among both residents and tourists. The focus should shift to creating a resilient ecosystem that encourages responsible tourism.

9. Impact and Way Ahead For Mice Industry

Virtual events

As the world's 7th largest country area-wise and the second-largest by population, navigating the challenges posed by COVID-19 requires innovative solutions. Virtual and hybrid conventions offer alternatives, reshaping the landscape of meetings and conferences. Post-COVID, organizations, grappling with tightened budgets, embrace cost-effective options

like virtual meetings and video conferencing, fostering the rise of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) events. This shift poses challenges for traditional marketing campaigns in the MICE industry, as social media becomes a dominant platform for product promotion. Adapting to these changes is crucial for organizations to stay connected and thrive in the evolving landscape.

Hybrid events

Moving more ahead providing solution with giving hybrid event is a solution to regain market position for MICE industry. These events are a mixture of live as well and virtual components. It is mainly the event where the performers of the presenters are physically present at locations with proper setup and the attended are viewing it at any of the remote location. If the humankind can adopt these two types of events, it can give a rise back to economy in multiple folds in short time.

10. Conclusion

Concluding towards the findings for the research done we can provide the future implication, or we can term it as already suggested above as future scope.

Recently the unprecedented health crises of the human population are leading towards the catastrophic economic crisis on worldwide scale and same is for tourism, hotel and event sectors. Growing back to the peak with the other sectors striving to regain economic growth is now in parallel with tourism, hotel and events sector. Hence, the future score suggested is for actualizing and checking its graph which is going up in repose the growing good situations. This resulted in taking major precautions of safety and hygiene of the visiting guests had become now top priority for the hospital industry. On other side as all are now at same position in market, so to be one of the top market players it's vital for improvising and creating new and innovating sales marketing and promotional events and costing discounts for both domestic and international travel.

Potential customers can be attracted by offering the discounts or flexible services. Like flexible offerings of services, costing, flexible work environments, cancellations terms and conditions etc. would positively result in long term durability for the travel and tourism industry. MICE or Business travel is one of the sectors which was impacted badly due to his pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, thousands of events had been cancelled all over India as well as on global scale more than that. This showed direct down graph for the development of the country and hardly impacted the Indian MICE industry.

Viewing the future from today's date to upcoming few months or a year, it's very crucial time for hospitality and travel and tourism industry to get back to more than 50% level which it was during pre-pandemic period. This will eventually help towards growing back the world's economic and recovering from Covid19. We can implicate virtual and hybrid events as uplift towards benefiting the industry for a while. This will help in increasing the numbers in financial terms, economic growth, reasonability and ease of transition.

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