

## **Travelling During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Mitigating the Needs and Wants**

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### **Abstract**

Health protocols and travel restrictions have been applied everywhere as a part of the efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19. In contrary, Bali had been visited by 22,000 domestic visitors per day as Christmas 2020 and New Year 2021 season was coming up. The research is to study whether the domestic tourists' considerations and perceived risks have impact on the decision to travel to Bali and how they allay the disharmony that occurs between the desire to travel and to stay at home because of the pandemic situation in making the decision. Data were collected through questionnaires to 96 domestic Bali tourists and interview with 3 individuals from them to gain deeper insights on the travel decision-making process between January-February 2022, a point where the COVID-19 case in Indonesia rose once again after its stagnant low case report in the third quarter of 2021. Regression analysis was performed and suggest that there is an impact between the perceived risks on purchase decision-making. In addition, results revealed that for the most part, these domestic tourists tend to set aside their worries about COVID-19 and other safety concerns so that their choice to visit Bali can be more prominent, essentially because of feeling weary with the pandemic situation which makes them feeling the urgency to escape from the "routine". This also implies the need for the government altogether with travel and tourism business actors to review the travel restrictions and regulations, as well as health protocols.

**Keywords:** Cognitive dissonance; perceived risk; travel behaviour; COVID-19; coronavirus.

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### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The decline in COVID-19 cases in Indonesia since July 2021 provides hope for the Indonesian tourism industry to recover after community activities and Indonesian tourism doors have been tightened since 2020 in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Based on the COVID-19 Recovery Index conducted by Nikkei Asia, Indonesia's recovery speed compared to 120 other countries as of 30 June 2021 was ranked 110 (Nikkei Asia, 2021) and then improved as of 30 December 2021 with a rank of 53 (Nikkei Asia, 2022). The number of new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Indonesia as a whole began to decline from July to October 2021, although the decline in cases from day to day was still not persistent.

Bali Governor Wayan Koster (in Sari, 2021) believes that the high level of vaccination achievement in Indonesia has made it easier for people to travel, so it is better if Bali focuses on turning on the number of arrivals of domestic tourists first compared to foreign tourists, related to policy developments from their country of origin. Chairman of the Environmental Culture and Public Relations Division of the BPD PHRI I Gusti Ngurah Rai Suryawijaya (in "22 Ribu Wisatawan Domestik", 2021) stated that until 14 December 2021, Bali had been visited by at least 22,000 domestic tourists, both by air and by land transportation per day. This indicates that there is emerging public interest to travel across cities while the pandemic is not yet over. The Acting Head of the Bali Tourism Office Tjok Bagus Pelayun (in Sari, 2021) addresses that this is a trial period to find out whether Bali is ready to open its tourism doors wider during the pandemic. However, positive

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cases of COVID-19 have increased since the Omicron variant was discovered and began to spread in Indonesia as of December 2021 (Satuan Tugas Penanganan COVID-19, 2021).

Traveling during a pandemic certainly carries risks, especially health risks, coupled with the nature of the Omicron variant which spreads and transmits more quickly (World Health Organization, 2021). Based on the data obtained by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2021), there is a sense of fear and worry felt by the public to travel during the pandemic. However, this creates a contradiction to the data on domestic tourists visiting Bali towards the end of 2021 mentioned earlier.

### **Cognitive dissonance, perceived risk, driving factors to visit Bali, and tourist's decision-making process**

Perceived risk, based Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) can be understood as a person's perception of the uncertainty and consequences of purchasing goods or services. Perceived risk itself is divided into six categories, namely functional risk, financial risk, physical risk, psychological risk, social risk, and time-risk (Kotler, Keller, Ang, Tan, Ang, & Leong, 2018). In context for this research, these perceived risks can be translated as follows:

1. Functional risk – when the vacation to Bali does not perform up to expectations.
2. Physical risk – when the vacation to Bali poses a threat of the physical well-being or the tourist's own health or others.
3. Financial risk – when the vacation to Bali is not worth the price paid.
4. Social risk – when the vacation to Bali results in embarrassment from others.
5. Psychological risk – when the vacation to Bali affects the mental well-being of the user.
6. Time risk – when any failure of doing a vacation to Bali results in an opportunity cost of finding another satisfactory vacation or recreation experience

Traveling during a pandemic already carries its own risks because there is still a possibility of being exposed to the coronavirus. The stay-at-home lifestyle (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2021) is highly recommended, but there are several internal factors (push factors) that make a person still wants to travel, such as escaping from daily routines, exploring local Balinese culture, exploring Balinese nature, experience different lifestyles, cultural tourism attractions, learn Balinese culture, immerse oneself in Balinese culture, and relax spiritually (Subadra, Sutapa, Artana, Yuni, & Sudiarta, 2019).

There is an inconsistency between what potential tourists should do (stay at home) and the desire to travel or vacation, with various reasons behind it. This inconsistency is known as cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance itself was first proposed by Leon Festinger in 1957. The assumptions of this theory: (1) The presence of cognitive dissonance causes one's psychological discomfort, and therefore, the person will try to reduce the existing dissonance to reach a conclusion, decision, agreement, certainty, or compatibility (consonance); (2) When a dissonance is created, in order to reduce the existing dissonance, the person will actively avoid situations and information that have the potential to increase the dissonance itself.

A revision of Festinger's original theory of cognitive dissonance in 1957 has received an empirical attention that one needs to feel personal responsibility for producing aversive consequences in order to experience cognitive dissonance and attitude change associated with the dissonance (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2019). With regard to perceived risk, the side effect of any decision that comes from the cognitive dissonance of these potential domestic Bali tourist who have gone through the risk consideration process is assumed to be known by the person and it is

assumed that the person is ready to bear the consequences. This reflects on some previous studies that suggested that perceived risks unlikely impacting the travel behavior (Utama & Setiawan, 2020; Serlinda & La Are, 2021). However, a study by Serlinda and La Are (2021) also found that visit intentions strongly impacted tourist behavior.

### **Purchase Decision Process**

Kotler et al. (2018) divides purchase decision-making into five stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and postpurchase behaviour. The buying process begins when consumers realise that there is a need to be fulfilled, either initiated by internal or external stimuli. If this desire is gratified, the next stage consumers will try to find more information and then will face various alternative choices. The next stage then consumers will have a tendency to choose a product or service based on what they like. After making a purchase, consumers will experience a certain level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

This study wants to examine whether there is an impact of perceived risks (namely functional risk, financial risk, physical risk, psychological risk, social risk, and time-risk) that occurs in the domestic tourists' considerations on the decision making to travel to Bali. Furthermore, it is also to understand how these domestic tourists ease the disharmony that occurs between the desire to travel and the pandemic situation that is still lurking, until they arrive at the decision-making stage to continue travelling to Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Ho: There is an impact between perceived risk toward purchase decision making*

*Ha: There is no impact between perceived risk toward purchase decision making*

It is hoped that the results of this study can provide an initial picture of travel behavior during the pandemic so that it can be used as a reference for the government in communicating travel safety and making tourism policies in the future.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The initial primary data were collected through questionnaires distributed to the sample respondents. The population in this study is individuals with the following criteria:

1. are Indonesian domestic tourists;
2. had travelled to or are visiting Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic within the time period of December 2021 until February 2022, with the aim of having a vacation;
3. are the decision maker to vacation in Bali; and
4. can fill out questionnaires without adult guidance.

The exact amount of population with these criteria cannot be identified, hence counted as infinite. The sample calculation uses the Rao Purba formula (in Sujarweni, 2015).

$$n = \frac{Z^2}{4 (MoE)^2}$$

n : number of samples

Z : normal distribution level at significant level 5% = 1,96

MoE : margin of error, 10%

$$n = \frac{1,96^2}{4(0,10)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3,8416}{4(0,01)}$$

$$n = 96,04, \text{ rounded to } 96.$$

The quantitative data collection was done through digital questionnaires which were distributed to the research sample of 96 domestic tourists using non-probability purposive sampling with the criteria mentioned earlier. The questionnaire results were processed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23. To strengthen the research data and to obtain more details on how these individuals reduce the existing dissonance in making the decision to travel to Bali, interviews were also conducted towards 5 informants taken from the respondents using a semi-structured method through virtual meetings. Denzin and Lincoln (2017) argue that semi-structured interviews provide space for researchers to dig up information more freely and for informants to provide wider information because they are not fixated on interview guidelines. These two types of data then were analysed using data triangulation.

Both of the data gathering activities focused on what kind of perceived risks that occurs in each stage of the decision-making process and how these individuals diminish the dissonance.

### C. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The process of making a decision involves various kinds of considerations, in this case referred to as perceived risk. Perceived risk based on the opinion of Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) can be understood as a person's perception of the uncertainty and consequences of purchasing goods or services. Perceived risk itself is divided into six categories, namely functional risk, financial risk, physical risk, psychological risk, social risk, and time risk (Kotler et al., 2018). In context for this research, these perceived risks can be translated as follows:

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6. Time risk – when any failure of doing a vacation to Bali results in an opportunity cost of finding another satisfactory vacation or recreation experience

The pre-existing uncertainty was emphasized by the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic which brought health and financial risks, including on vacation. There is an inconsistency between what potential tourists should do (stay at home) during the COVID-19 pandemic and the desire to travel or take a vacation, with various reasons behind it. This inconsistency is known as cognitive dissonance.

This study wants to examine the perceived risks in the minds of domestic tourists and how these domestic tourists ease the disharmony that occurs between the desire to travel and the pandemic situation that is still lurking, until they arrive at the decision-making stage to continue traveling to Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the questionnaire were calculated using the SPSS 23 statistical software package.

Data were collected through questionnaires to 96 domestic Bali tourists and interview with 3 individuals from them to gain deeper insights on the travel decision-making process between January-February 2022, a point where the COVID-19 case in Indonesia rose once again after its stagnant low case report in the third quarter of 2021. Statistical analysis and discussion will be strengthened using interview data conducted on one informant who had symptoms of COVID-19 before going on vacation to Bali, one informant who had experienced COVID-19 and had recovered before leaving. vacationing in Bali, and one informant who has not experienced COVID-19 at all. Interviews were conducted online and used semi-structured techniques.

The following are the characteristics of 96 respondents of domestic tourists who have or are on vacation in Bali:

**Table 1**  
*Respondent characteristics*

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Man	50	52%
	Woman	46	48%
<b>Age</b>	17-24	24	25%
	24-34	38	40%
	34-44	26	27%
	> 44	8	8%
	<b>Occupation</b>	Freelancer	14
	Private sector employee	11	11%
	Government sector employee	24	25%
	Student	20	21%
	Retiree	4	4%
	Entrepreneur	21	22%
	Lecturer	1	1%
	Housewife	1	1%
<b>General amount of expense in a month</b>	Rp 1.000.000-Rp 5.000.000	44	46%
	Rp 5.000.000-Rp 10.000.000	43	45%
	> Rp 10.000.000	9	9%
Amount of budget to travel to Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic	Rp 1.000.000-Rp 5.000.000	87	91%
	Rp 5.000.000-Rp 10.000.000	5	5%
	> Rp 10.000.000	4	4%

Source: Authors (2022)

Based on the table above, domestic tourists visiting Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic are dominated by those aged 24 to 34 years, which are still included in the millennial generation. The 17-24 age group is dominated by students. The 24-34 years age group consists of 2.44% lecturers, 14.63% self-employed, 14.63% civil servants, 34.15% private employees, 4.88% students, 29.27% self-employed. The dominance of the age group traveling to Bali is in line with the results of previous study by Parhusip and Arida (2019) that millennial tourists prefer to allocate funds for

travel experiences compared to material ownership, vacation for relaxation purposes, and are relatively risk takers in terms of vacations.

Overall, 77.08% of respondents allocated Rp. 1,000,000 to Rp. 5,000,000 for a trip to Bali. Eleven out of fourteen respondents who have jobs as freelancers have a budget to travel to Bali of IDR 1,000,000 - IDR 5,000,000. Nineteen out of twenty respondents with student jobs or college students have a budget to travel to Bali of IDR 1,000,000 - IDR 5,000,000. A total of 66.67% of private employees and 72.72% of civil servants have a budget to travel to Bali of IDR 1,000,000 - IDR 5,000,000. Six of the nine respondents who have a budget for a trip to Bali above IDR 10,000,000 are self-employed.

Validity test is carried out with Pearson's product moment where the statement can be said to be valid if  $r$  count is greater than  $r$  table. The data can be said to be reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value is more than 0.7 (Raisch, 2004). After testing the validity and reliability of all statements on the variables X and Y, the results are declared valid and reliable.

**Table 2**  
**Linear regression analysis result**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	59.375	2.515		23.524	.000b
	Perceived Risk	0.261	0.054	.452	4.910	.000b

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decision making

Source: Authors (2022)

Hypothesis testing in simple linear regression analysis was conducted to see whether the regression coefficient was significant or not (Schroeder, Sjoquist, & Stephan, 2017). The basis for decision making in this regression analysis is seen from the significance value (sig.) of the SPSS output results are:

1. If the significance value (sig.) is less than the probability of 0.05, it means that there is an influence between the X variable and the Y variable.
2. On the other hand, if the significance value (sig.) is greater than the probability of 0.05, it means that there is no effect between the X variable and the Y variable (Schroeder et al., 2017).

The data above shows that the significance value is smaller than the probability number of 0.05, it can be interpreted that there is an influence between perceived risk (X) on purchase decision-making (Y). The constant number of unstandardized coefficients in the table of calculation results above is 59.375. This figure is a constant number which means that if there are no perceived risk factors from tourists traveling to Bali (X), then the value of purchase decision-making (Y) is 59.375.

Based on the table above, the regression coefficient number has a value of 261. This figure means that for every 1% addition of perceived risk (X) factors, the purchase decision-making (Y) will increase by 261.

Thus, the equation is as follows:

$$Y = a + bx$$

$$Y = 59,375 + 261 x$$

**Table 3**  
**R Square analysis result**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.451a	0.204	0.196	8.389
a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Risk				

Source: Authors (2022)

The data in the Table 3 shows that the significance value is smaller than the probability number, which is 0.05, it can be interpreted that there is an influence between perceived risk (X) on purchase decision-making (Y). Judging from the R square model summary, X affects Y by 20.4%.

The results of statistical tests conducted on the perceived risk (X) variable consisting of functional risk, financial risk, physical risk, psychological risk, social risk, and time-risk indicate that the majority of respondents' answers do not agree with the statements on variable X, this means that respondents who are Bali domestic tourists have thought about all these considerations well when they decide to travel to Bali and are sure of the decision, with the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 not stopping them from deciding to go on vacation to Bali. This is also reflected in the results of the questionnaire which stated that 23.7% of respondents stated that before deciding to travel to Bali, they were not worried about being exposed to the COVID-19 virus while on vacation in Bali.

The results of statistical tests conducted on the purchase decision-making (Y) variable consisting of problem recognition, information research, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decisions, and post-purchase behavior indicate that these domestic tourists strongly agree with all statements on the Y variable. 52.6% of respondents stated that they went to Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic on their own accord, the three informants also answered the same thing.

Following the statistic results, interviews were conducted towards three informants chosen from the respondents. This is to gain deeper insights on the travel decision-making process by verifying most of the quantitative result of each questionnaire statements and through 'how' and 'why' questions regarding it. The interview data then analysed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's Interactive Model (2014) consisting of data collection, data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The following section provides the conclusions drawn from the interview and discussion.

### **Things that make tourists are not too worried about traveling or traveling**

Based on the results of interviews, informants in general said they were not too worried about traveling or traveling because:

1. Health protocols have been carried out everywhere and apply to yourself too, with the assumption that if you are destined to contract COVID-19 then whenever and wherever you are will not reduce the probability of being infected;
2. according to the informants, there was a fairly constant decline in COVID-19 cases in October to early December 2021 so that the informant felt it was safer to travel;

3. all informants have at least twice vaccinated against COVID-19, so they feel a little safer; and
4. the need to go on vacation/recreation/escape from reality was felt to have been held back for too long, considering that all informants stated that vacationing in Bali was like a routine every year.

These reasonings might also add to Christian's reaserch in 2021 saying that the society sees they have low potential of contracting the COVID-19 and believes that it will look like the common cold. This also is exacerbated by the society's lack of understanding of the advantages of adhering to health protocols, barriers to accessing health facilities, and a lack of government guidance on how to act during the pandemic; of which resulting a low obedience towards health protocols.

However, there are several things other than health risks that become fears or worries for the informants although in the end these things did not become a barrier for them to still decide to vacation in Bali (see Table 4).

**Table 4**  
***Perceived external conditions and situations and things to do respondent-informant to reduce cognitive dissonance***

<b><i>Perceived external situation and/or condition</i></b>	<b><i>Perceived risk</i></b>	<b><i>What is done to reduce or eliminate cognitive dissonance</i></b>
The stay-at-home lifestyle	Being concerned or disputed among their own family members, neighbourhood, and/or co-workers  <i>(Social risk, psychological risk)</i>	Not to tell anybody/limiting who knows about them leaving for vacation and/or not posting anything related to the vacation on social media/limiting the viewers
Bali has become less crowded due to the COVID-19 pandemic	Tourist attractions and streets become quieter, so there are concerns about personal safety, especially at night  <i>(Physical risk, psychological risk)</i>	Back to the inn not late at night
There is a new government regulation issued regarding travel restrictions and it will be enforced immediately	Finding it difficult to travel in terms of arranging accommodation  <i>(Functional risk, psychological risk, financial risk, time-risk)</i>	Taking care of accommodation near the departure date
There are unpredictable crowds in public places, for example: restaurants, beach clubs, open beaches	Causes physical, mental discomfort, and health anxiety  <i>(Functional risk, psychological risk, physical risk, time-risk)</i>	From the beginning, I had planned to visit a place that is usually empty of visitors (search is done through browsing) or has access that is quite difficult, or to change locations if the place visited is deemed too crowded.

Source: Authors (2022)

The informants also stated that the purpose of traveling to Bali is to escape from routine, and therefore, they actively seek or update themselves information related to Bali and travel restrictions. As many as 43.3% of respondents stated that they strongly agreed with the statement "I am looking for accurate information about traveling to Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic".



In addition, both the majority of respondents and the three informants stated that they had not prepared other travel locations because they were determined to have a vacation in Bali, and planned to return to vacation in Bali, whether it was still during the pandemic or when the pandemic was declared over, because the experience of vacationing in Bali remained constant, feel comfortable, and satisfying.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Functional risk, financial risk, physical risk, psychological risk, social risk, and time-risk do have impact on the tourist's decision to travel to Bali. These risks are concurrent on the minds of these tourists when it comes to planning a vacation during this COVID-19 situation, and because of that they tend to plan more carefully and thoughtful. However, the concerns of these domestic Bali tourists about COVID-19 tend to be put aside (more on the psychological risk, social risk, and time-risk) and some are also suppressed (more on the functional risk, physical risk, and financial risk) so that the decision to travel to Bali can be more salient. This is mostly because they are already worn out by the pandemic situation which has lasted for about two years and is still ongoing that makes them feeling the need to relax, rejuvenate, and/or escape from the "routine". Other considerations also exist; these domestic tourists have considered the risk considerations carefully, understand the consequences, but are willing to prepare an extra budget if things are out of control or are expected to happen. In other words, they have lowered their expectations of vacationing in Bali with the existence of health protocols which result in shorter operating hours of visiting places than before the COVID-19 pandemic, there is the possibility of more limited mobility, the possibility of having to change the location of the place to visit if the place is too crowded with visitors, and also the physical/health risks that still exist.

From a practical standpoint, there is a need for the Bali government, travel agents, and tourism business actors to make adjustments to health protocols and travel regulations in supporting local destinations in order to revive the Indonesian tourism industry before missing this momentum. This is needed to avoid lack of business preparedness just like what Djalante et al. (2020) found through their research regarding travel and tourism agencies responses to COVID-19 back in early 2020.

Based on the interview result, local destinations with potential crowd such as restaurants need to be more assertive in taking further action if a customer is found not following the health protocols in order to create and maintain a safer and a more comfortable place for other customers in general, during this pandemic. Another implication is for the government to also consider the creation of communication strategy for socialising the health protocols toward foreigners that live in Bali, based on the research findings.

Based on the outcomes of this study, future research should target cluster analyses, longitudinal studies, data collecting at various stages during a pandemic epidemic, or when the COVID-19 case load in Indonesia is at its highest and when the rate is seen as low. Further research could compare the findings of this study with more segmented tourist sociodemographic background, such as family background, economic status, leisure interests, and travel preferences, as well as with cultural norms and values, and vacation destinations. This helps to better understand how the perception of risk changes and how it also affects the way the potential tourists mitigate the dissonance in making the decision to travel during the pandemic outbreak.

There are several limitations that should be taken into account in interpreting the results of this study. First, the time the data gathering for this research conducted was when the Omicron type of COVID-19 just occurred in late 2021. The data results could be different if it was taken on a

different time during the pandemic or when there is another outbreak of another type of COVID-19.

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