

## HOW READY ARE CUSTOMERS TO RE-TRAVEL FOR TOURISM? INSIGHTS FROM THE UAE AND EGYPT

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate individuals' perceptions of travel fear and anxiety of COVID-19, the protection procedures taken by both UAE and Egypt to maintain tourists' safety and how these perceptions affect travel intentions. An online questionnaire is implemented to collect data from a convenient sample of the UAE and Egypt populations and structural equation modelling was employed for analysis purposes. Findings show that the intention of travel varies according to individuals' belief in the protection measures across the UAE and Egypt.

**Key words:** Travel Fear and Anxiety, Travel Intention, Protection Procedures, UAE, Egypt

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as a pandemic in 2020, the biggest global lockdown has taken place with an emphasis on international travel for tourism (Turnšek et al., 2020). Thus, tourism has experienced its worst in the year of 2020 in history with a decrease reached 74% in international arrivals with an expectation to rebound to normal levels in 2023 (UNWTO, 2021). According to the expectations of Škare et al., (2021), the recovery of travel and tourism will take more than the expected average of ten months. According to UNWTO experts, it will take from 2.5 to 4 years to recover to 2019 levels of international tourist flow. Some experts would rather expect a significant increase during 2022. As for 2024 or later, they also expect some return to pre-pandemic levels. Experts expect that the change would be rapid in the Middle East while it could be slower but more stable in Europe, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and Africa (UNWTO, 2021). With the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines and careful travel precautions taken by tourist destinations, it is expected that tourists will become gradually and slowly confident to restart their travel for tourism (UNWTO, 2021). The present study aims to explore the causal relationship between travel fear and anxiety and intention to travel considering the moderating role of protection measures' efficacy based on collected data from the UAE and Egypt.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Travel Fear

Emotions were a centre of interest in tourism research due to their impact on tourists' cognitive evaluations and behavioural responses (Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Volo, 2021). The definition of emotion is multifaceted and varies according to the domain of science, but it is agreed that it is difficult to be observed. It is a complex phenomenon that includes joy, sadness, fear and anger. Fear is defined as a natural emotion that is exposed in case of danger, pain, or harm (Luo and Lam, 2020). Travel activities evoke many aspects of fear or phobia like agoraphobia (vast public spaces), aviophobia (air travel), and nosophobia (infectious disease) (Zenker et al., 2021). After the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, fear arises among populations of the world, which figures the attention of scholars in different disciplines. Ahorsu et al., (2020) established the "Fear of COVID-19 Scale (FCV-19)" to identify the level of fear among the population. This could include the fear of losing life, and to be infected and so on. Previous studies have attempted to measure the level of fear among populations (i.e., Bratić et al., 2021; Luo and Lam, 2020, Magano et al., 2021; Wachyuni and Kusumaningrum, 2020). Turnšek et al. (2020) tested the effect of pandemic's severity and susceptibility on travel avoidance decisions and found that gender, experience, and age have been significantly associated with travel avoidance decisions. Similarly, Zheng et al., (2021) found that fear of COVID-19 is a substantial predictor of travel avoidance decisions. Hence, the first hypothesis is developed as follows:

**H1:** Travel fear has a negative effect on travel intention.

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