Let's go to Puri: An empirical study on post-pandemic travel intentions of Odisha residents

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Abstract

Considered as one of the *chaar-dhaams* (holiest four) of India, Puri is famous for being the adobe of Lord Jagannath. It is the most visited destination in the state of Odisha. It serves as a get-away spot and a place with highest religious importance for the residents of Odisha. Due to widespread pandemic, lockdowns and outbound restriction, Puri along with its tourism stakeholders have suffered an unprecedented decline in footfall. Travellers have shown travel avoidance behaviour coupled with lack of travel intentions across the globe in the current situations. This study identifies the factors which influence the post-pandemic Puri travel intentions through an empirical approach. An extended TPB model was proposed with predictors like attitude, subject norms, perceived behavioural control and past Puri travel behaviour regressed against the criterion. A statistical data analysis was performed using SPSS on a sample data of 327 respondents to verify the hypothesis. The study will help the tourism partners and collaborators along with Odisha government to devise and implement strategies to attract existing and new travellers of Odisha and re-flourish the sector as a whole. It will also guide researchers of tourism to assess domestic travel with a different perspective in light of pandemic.

Keywords: Pandemic, Odisha, Travel, Puri, travel intention, post-pandemic travel

Introduction

Situated on the Eastern coast on the shore of Bay of Bengal, Puri is one of the four most sacred and celebrated religious places for Hindus (Chandan *et al.*, 2021). The capital city of Bhubaneswar, along with Puri and Konark form an explicit tourism triangle for the domestic tourists of Odisha. As per the data published by Government of Odisha in 2020, every year millions of traveller and pilgrims visit Puri to get a glimpse of Lord Jagannath, enjoy the vast beach side and other tourist engagements in and around Puri. In any case, the new episode of COVID-19 pandemic shook the actual groundwork of the travel industry and journey in Puri. Furthermore, every time it attempts to resuscitate, another wave caused by a new variant of the deadly virus disturbs the harmony and equilibrium of the travel synergy.

The ongoing pandemic has increased the vulnerability of the hospitality sector (Altinay and Arici, 2021). The risk of contraction of COVID-19 topped up with lockdowns and travel restrictions have triggered travel avoidance behaviour amongst the travellers (Neuburger and Egger, 2021). Recovery in tourism of Puri after pandemic is critical for Odisha's tourism sector. Thus, concentrating on the elements that impact the post-pandemic Puri travel intentions of Odisha residents is vital. The study undertakes extended TPB model to study the predictors which influence the Puri travel intention post-pandemic amongst the residents of the state of Odisha.

Literature Review

Travel restrictions and several lockdowns imposed by the centre and state had unimaginable ramifications on tourism sector (Wen *et al.*, 2020) as the industry is very vulnerable to such widespread pandemic (Gupta *et al.,* 2021). As reported by the state tourism authorities, there was a decrease of more than 80% in the domestic tourism in Puri (*Department of Tourism | Government of Odisha*, 2021). Thus, this study aims to empirically test the reduction in footfall of domestic Puri travellers:

H1.   There is a significant difference in the tourists' visitation to Puri in pre-pandemic and post-pandemic scenarios.

The study is inspired from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which investigates the association relating to attitude, intention and behaviour (Juschten *et al.*, 2019). Through the extent literature, TPB has been successfully used to predict the intentions of subjects in various contexts i.e. by Shen and Shen (2020) for tourism, Seow *et al.* (2020) for medical tourism, Huang *et al.* (2019) for tourists' revisiting intention to a location, Erul *et al.* (2020) to study the intention of residents to support tourism.

In context of the study, attitude refers to the traveller's assessment of a particular way of behaving (Ajzen, 1991). Plentiful research encompassing TPB framework have upheld the constructive outcomes of attitude on travel intention (Liu *et al.*, 2021). This study thus attempts

to test the impact of attitude on the intention to travel to Puri among domestic travellers of Odisha through the following hypothesis:

H2. Attitude (ATD) has a significant and positive impact on Odisha residents' post-pandemic Puri travel intentions (PPTI).

Subjective norm (SBN) as described by Ajzen (1991) is the prevalent societal coercion which empower or deter a subject to participate in a particular way of behaving. SBN was found to be leading to development of a behavioural intention in the literature (Bamberg *et al.*, 2003). This research paper aims to assess the impact of SBN on post-pandemic travel intention among the residents of Odisha:

H3. Subjective Norms (SBN) have a significant and positive impact on Odisha residents' post-pandemic Puri travel intentions (PPTI).

The implication of introduction of a non-volitional factor i.e. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) in the framework of TPB was acknowledged to be significantly important and an improvement in existing literature (Wang and Wong, 2020). Juschten *et al.* (2019) describe PBC as the self-assessment of the one's capacity to perform explicit ways of behaving with respect to variables like ability and resources. PBC has been found to be a significant contributor to travel intention in recent studies like the study by Liu et al. (2021) on Chinese travellers' outbound travel intention. The current study aims to investigate the impact of PBC on Odisha travellers

on post-pandemic travel intention to Puri:

H4. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) have a significant and positive impact on Odisha residents' post-pandemic Puri travel intentions (PPTI).

As indicated by the literature on human behaviour, the future way of behaving and its intention can be best predicted by frequency or recurrence of associated past behaviour (Sonmez and Graefe, 1998). Previous trips to Puri by the tourists tend to uphold a sense of comfort and security during the upcoming travel and hence it boosts their future intention to travel to the same destination (Juschten *et al.*, 2017). A favourable travel experience urges travellers to return to vacationer destinations, though a negative travel experience abridges the inflow of guests (Huh *et al.*, 2002). The related hypothesis in the context of the study is related to the how the frequency of past Puri travel impacts the intention to travel to Puri in post-pandemic scenario:

H5. Past Puri travel behaviour (PPTB) have a significant and positive impact on Odisha residents' post-pandemic Puri travel intentions (PPTI).
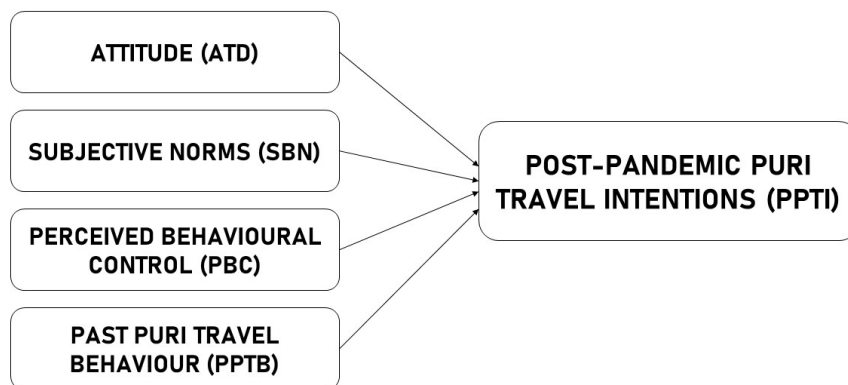
Fig. 1 outlines the model proposed by the study.

Figure 1. Proposed model by the study.

Methodology

Operationalization of variables

The variables and items used in the study were adopted from extent travel and

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│      ATTITUDE (ATD)         │
└─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────────────────┐
│   SUBJECTIVE NORMS (SBN)    │─────────┐          │  POST–PANDEMIC PURI      │
└─────────────────────────────┘          ────────→ │  TRAVEL INTENTIONS (PPTI)│
                                                     └──────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│  PERCEIVED BEHAVIOURAL      │
│      CONTROL (PBC)          │
└─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   PAST PURI TRAVEL          │
│    BEHAVIOUR (PPTB)         │
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tourism literature with modifications made to fit the context of pandemic and domestic Puri travel. The research paper contains four independent variables and one dependent variable. The items for measuring the four variables namely ATD, SBN, PPTI and PBC were adapted from the scale proposed, developed and used by Ajzen (1991), Lam and Hsu (2006), Liu *et al.* (2021) and Sparks and Pan (2009). There were in total of 18 items to represent these variable in the instrument. The variables were measured a 5 point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The study used one item to measure the past Puri travel behaviour (PPTB) which asked the respondents about the frequency of Puri travel before pandemic in a year. The study also included items to capture the socio-demographic details of the respondents like age, gender, educational qualification, annual household income and the district of Odisha they were currently staying in.

Data collection

In order to collect the data from the respondents, an online questionnaire was administered by the researchers for 5 weeks from December, 2021 to January, 2022. Due to lockdown and travel restrictions, online questionnaire was deemed to be fit under the given circumstances. Convenience sampling was used to collect the data. The respondents who were residents of the state of Odisha and had travelled to Puri in or after 2018 were the target population of the study. Voluntary participation was encouraged by the respondents with confidentiality and anonymity affirmation. A total of 327 responses were received from 28 districts of Odisha. SPSS software version 26 was used to statistical analysis of data.

Data analysis

Demographic profile of respondents

The analysis of demographic revealed

that out of 327 respondents 144 (44.04%) were females and rest 183 (55.96%) were males. The age group of 26-35 had highest number of respondents i.e. 107 (32.72%) followed by the age group of 36-50 years old 98 (29.97%), >50 years old 62 (18.96%) and lastly 14-25 age group had 60 respondents (18.35%).

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents. Maximum percentage of the respondents were post-graduate i.e. 136 (41.59%) followed by graduates 104 (31.80%), diploma holders 29 (8.87%), higher secondary 28 (8.56%), matriculation 12 (3.67%), doctorates 10 (3.06%) and primary school 8 (2.45%) in terms of education al qualification.

Demographic items (for 327 respondents)	Frequency	(%)
Gender		
Female	144	44.04%
Male	183	55.96%
Age		
14-25	60	18.35%
26-35	107	32.72%
36-50	98	29.97%
>50	62	18.96%
Education		
Primary education	8	2.45%
Matriculation	12	3.67%
Higher secondary	28	8.56%
Diploma	29	8.87%
Graduate	104	31.80%
Post – Graduate	136	41.59%
Doctorate	10	3.06%
Annual Family Income		
< 2 Lakhs	16	4.89%
2- 5 Lakhs	63	19.27%
5 Lakhs - 10 Lakhs	153	46.79%
> 10 Lakhs	95	29.05%

Source: Authors' estimation

In terms of annual family income, the highest number of respondents were in the bracket of 5 lakhs to 10 lakhs 153 (46.79%), followed by > 10 lakhs - 95 (29.05%), 2 lakhs to 5 lakhs – 63 (19.27%) and lastly less than 2 lakhs – 16 (4.89%).

Results of t-test

A paired sample t-test was performed on frequency of yearly Puri visits by the respondents pre-pandemic (2018-

2020) and post-pandemic (2020 March onwards). The result is presented in table 2.

From the test result it is clear that there is a significant difference in the Puri visitation frequency by the respondents in the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic scenarios. This finding supports the first hypothesis i.e. H1.

Results of the reliability test

Paired Samples Test		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PPTB - Post_Pandemic_Travel	1.896	1.283	0.071	1.756	2.036	26.727	326	0.000

Table 2. Paired sample t-test result

The test of reliability of the study variables was performed to check the internal consistency and uni-dimensionality. The Cronbach's alpha values of the variables ware found to be between 0.710 and 0.837. The Cronbach's alpha values can be considered satisfactory as they are above the threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).

Item	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Attitude (ATD)			
Traveling to Puri is risky right now	4.19	1.07	
COVID-19 is a very dangerous and infectious disease and a potential threat to human life	4.62	0.63	
I am concerned about COVID-19 during travelling to Puri right now	4.36	0.91	0.747
I am not concerned about contracting COVID-19 during travel right now	3.93	0.84	
It is dangerous to travel right now because of COVID-19	4.35	0.92	
Subjective Norm (SBN)			

Most people who are important to me think that I should travel to Puri when the pandemic is over	4.13	0.91	
Most people whose opinion I value agree with me about traveling to Puri when the pandemic is over	4.11	0.95	
Most people whose opinion I value support that I travel to Puri when the pandemic is over	4.08	0.93	0.837
Most of the people Whose opinions I value recommend that I travel to Puri when the pandemic is over	4.03	0.90	
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)			
I have enough time to travel to Puri when the pandemic is over	4.63	0.67	
I have enough money to travel to Puri when the pandemic is over	4.40	0.72	
I am confident that if I want, I can travel to Puri when the pandemic is over	4.49	0.70	0.765
I feel there is nothing that prevents me from traveling to Puri when the pandemic is over if I want to	4.11	0.94	
Post-pandemic Puri Travel Intention (PPTI)			
I want to travel to Puri after the Pandemic	4.12	0.80	
I intend to travel to Puri after the pandemic	4.16	0.83	
I am planning to travel to Puri after the pandemic	4.14	0.74	
I will make an effort to travel to Puri after the pandemic	4.12	0.75	0.710
I will certainly invest time and money to travel to Puri after the pandemic	4.27	0.68	

5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree (N = 327)

Results of multiple regression

The analysis of regression coefficient presented in table 6 states that except PPTB (β = 0.025, p = 0.083) all other predictor coefficients are statistically significant at 95% confidence interval namely ATD (β = 0.266, p = 0.000), SBN (β = 0.098, p = 0.011) and PBC (β = 0.317, p = 0.000). The predictors were found to be positively impacting the criterion. With respect to the hypothesis, H2, H3 and H4 are consistent with the research findings. H5 could not be statistically proven in the analysis. Thus, there is no significant impact of PPTB on post-pandemic Puri travel intention (PPTI).

Other descriptive statistics

The analysis of a few general Puri travel

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.749[a]	0.561	0.555	0.34511
a. Predictors: (Constant), PPTB, PBC_Mean, ATD_Mean, SBN_Mean				

Table 4. Model summary.

ANOVA[a]					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	48.99489128	4	12.2487228	102.8447162	.000[b]
Residual	38.34994052	322	0.11909919		
Total	87.3448318	326			
a. Dependent Variable: PPTI_Mean					
b. Predictors: (Constant), PPTB, PBC_Mean, ATD_Mean, SBN_Mean					

Table 5. ANOVA.

Coefficients[a]					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.127	0.156		7.200	0.000
ATD	0.266	0.044	0.320	6.110	0.000
SBN	0.098	0.039	0.144	2.543	0.011
PBC	0.317	0.054	0.358	5.840	0.000
PPTB	0.025	0.014	0.066	1.740	0.083
a. Dependent Variable: PPTI_Mean					

Table 6. Regression Coefficients.

related questions asked to respondents like 'with whom do you generally travel to Puri on most occasions?' and 'what is the average duration of stay in Puri during your visits?' revealed the following picture. It was observed (figure 2) that most of the respondents travel to Puri with their family (50%) followed by friends (40%) and colleagues (6%). Very small number of 15 (5%) of respondents travel to Puri alone.
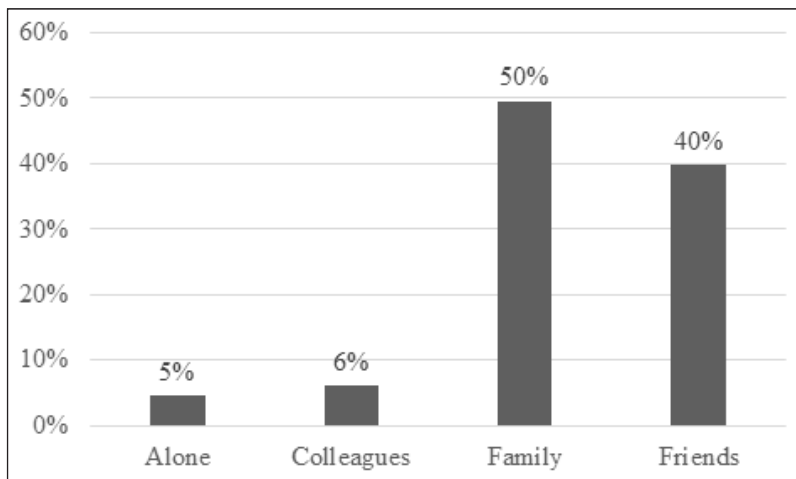

Figure 2. Percentage of relations with whom respondents generally travel to Puri.

The analysis also revealed that most of the respondents (56%) stay in Puri on an average of 1-2 days followed by 30% respondents who stay in Puri for less than a day (or return the same day). 12% of them stay for 3-5 days on an average and only 2% of them stay for more than 5 days averagely in Puri.
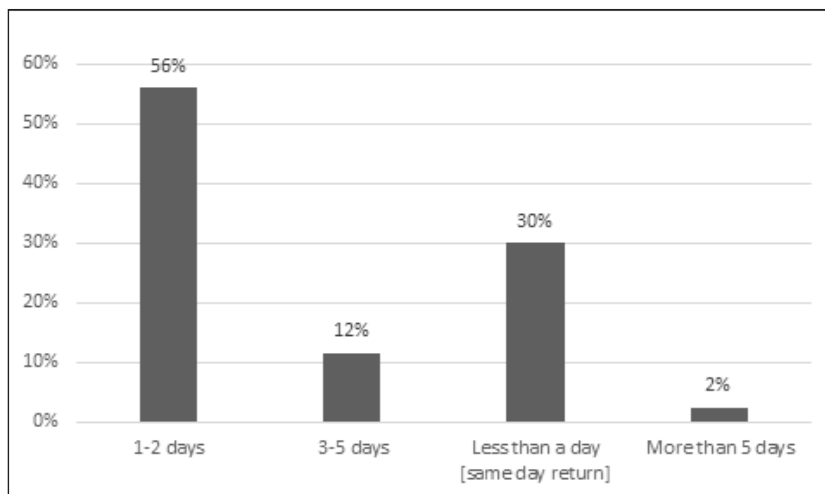

Figure 3. Percentage of average duration of stay at Puri

Discussion and conclusion

This study successfully made an effort to recognize and analyse factors which motivates the domestic travellers of Odisha to take a trip to Puri in post-pandemic paradigm. The significant factors were distinguished from the existing literature concerning progressing COVID-19 pandemic and their impact of future travel intentions was estimated effectively. A model the same has been proposed and empirically tested. COVID-19 pandemic has escorted movement avoidance all through the world, jeopardizing the hospitality and tourism industries because of their dependence on movement. The same has been proven true for local and domestic travel context.

Travel intention of Odisha travellers is generally high when it comes to Puri as the place offers a plethora of engagements under one single destination. The study variables namely subjective norms, attitude and PBC have shown significant and positive influence on the travel intention of Odisha travellers. Exceptionally, PBC has shown the strongest impact in the travel intention. Past travel behaviour in this study didn't prove to be significant which is inconsistent with studies of Lam and Hsu (2006) and Leung (2019). This could be explained by the fact these studies were conducted in a setting where pandemic was in its initial phase. The current situation of COVID-19 pandemic after 2 years and 3 waves might have diluted the relation of past travel behaviour to future travel intentions.

Implications

The study has both theoretical and practical significance in domestic travel sphere. Theoretically, the study fostered an extension into the existing TPB model with unrivalled the predictive capacity for people's domestic travel intention. It also uncovered the components through which Odisha inhabitants' impression of COVID-19 influences their post-pandemic Puri travel intentions.

In a practical context, this research will help the industry stakeholders to ideate, innovative and implement new ways to attract the old and new travellers to the sacred place (Puri) and reinstate the safe travel norms to change their attitude. The partners, professionals and state government department connected with the travel industry area might be convinced to embrace new and inventive techniques for administrations and operations (Altinay and Arici, 2021). Wellbeing affirmation advancements, disinfected facilities, appealing cost offers, online entertainment promoting, powerhouse commercials and unique bundles for old individuals going with family are a portion of the drives which might assist with recapturing the trust of travellers. Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) with the help of locals of Puri district can derive constructive input from this study and try to influence the subjective norms among the residents of Odisha by creating a buzz about Puri and the experiences they used to have in pre-COVID context. The travellers ought to feel the control they possessed

before pandemic while planning and executing a trip to Puri to improve their perceived behavioural control.

Limitations and future research

This research paper tried to study the factors which deemed relevant to impact the travel intentions of Odisha residents to Puri. There could be other factors which the authors have missed in context of domestic travel. Further research in this area can identify and empirically test the same. Secondly, due to travel restrictions, researchers had to stick to online questionnaire which captivated the chance to conduct interviews and FGDs and explore more about Puri travel through in-vivo experience. Lastly, the supply side of the tourism sector can be focused in upcoming researches. COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on the hoteliers, travel agents, tour guides and many other stakeholders relating to travel and tourism across the country. Exploring that side of the table might reveal some uncharted facts and theories in context of domestic tourism.

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