

Effects of the Covid-19 Crisis Preparedness and Recovery Strategies on Tour Operators' Business Continuity in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions in the global tourism industry, prompting countries to develop strategies to get back to operation. This study focused on the effects of Covid-19 management strategies on the business continuity of tour operators in Nairobi County. Using the Theory of Change and the Relational Model for Crisis Management, the study aimed to examine the effects of crisis preparedness and recovery strategies. The exploratory research design was used and data collected from 226 randomly selected tour operators out of a population of 518 using an online questionnaire through Google forms. The results showed that most tour operators were not prepared for a crisis as they did not anticipate the occurrence of such a global health crisis as Covid-19. However, they responded by communicating with employees and customers and putting up Disaster Recovery plans as a strategy to get back to business as soon as possible. The study recommends that the Kenyan government should develop a crisis management plan that can be used for future reference in case such a crisis occurs. The study also recommended parallel studies to be conducted to compare results with other tourism sectors.

Key Words: Crisis Preparedness, Crisis Recovery, Business Continuity, Covid-19

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I. INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, a novel coronavirus (Covid-19) was discovered in Wuhan, Hubei Province in China, belonging to the coronavirus family that can cause anything from a simple cold to lethal pneumonia. The Covid-19 virus has been compared to the severe acute respiratory syndrome virus (SARS), which caused an epidemic in China in 2002-2003. In January 2020, 41 people in China were hospitalized with confirmed infections of Covid-19. (WHO, 2020a; Bruns et al., 2020). The Covid-19 outbreak led to governments implementing travel restrictions to protect their citizens, causing mass transportation to be subjected to social and physical distance limitations. The tourism industry has been severely affected, with both supply and demand for travel impacted. In 2019, international travel and tourism contributed \$8.9 trillion to global GDP and 330 million jobs worldwide. However, the Covid-19 crisis can be considered a sudden threat, which has had devastating global socio-economic impacts, particularly on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-firms in the tourism sector. Strategic management during times of crisis is necessary to limit economic loss.

Governments implemented measures such as curfews, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and bans to limit the spread of Covid-19, leading to a significant impact on the tourism industry worldwide. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported a 57% decrease in tourist arrivals and a loss of \$80 billion in income in the US due to the pandemic (UNWTO, 2021). The pandemic is also expected to result in an 80% reduction in international tourists compared to 2019. China's tourism industry has been negatively affected by the pandemic, with many international tourists postponing their visits, and domestic bookings being cancelled due to fear of the second wave of Covid-19. To survive, Chinese travel companies have resorted to using internet business tactics and adopting OECD recovery strategies. Strategic planning and adaptation are necessary for the tourism industry to recover from the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic has had a severe impact on the tourism industry in Denmark, with 88% of enterprises reporting a revenue loss and 79% of businesses reporting a decline in the number of guests as of April 14, 2020 (Statista, 2020). The number of domestic and international tourists in Denmark significantly dropped from March to June 2019 to the corresponding months of 2020, with international tourist arrivals decreasing by 88% by January 2021. The Danish government has developed a national strategy for tourism continuity through the National Tourism Fund to fund tourism businesses for further operation amid the crisis.

In the United States, the pandemic resulted in \$492 billion in cumulative losses for the travel economy from March to December 2020, with daily losses of approximately \$1.6 billion for the 10 months. The country implemented strategies such as emphasizing health and hygiene efforts, embracing digital tourism, and staying competitive amidst the pandemic. However, according to Tori & Holmberg (2021), close to six in 10 (58%) do not anticipate resuming face-to-face events until the second half of 2021, and half the travelers are not willing to travel until vaccines are fully administered. In Africa, Covid-19 restrictive measures, such as closing non-essential activities, schools and cities, and encouraging people to stay home, had negative effects on the economy, and economic policies were used to mitigate these effects. The tourism industry was also impacted as tourist numbers significantly reduced. By July 2020, Africa had recorded over 873,000 cases of Covid-19, with the largest outbreak in South Africa, followed by Egypt, Nigeria, and Ghana. The pandemic effectively shut down most of Africa's tourism attractions, including Egypt's pyramids, Cape Town's Table Mountain cable cars, Ghana's forts and castles, and safari lodges across Eastern and Southern Africa. These deserted sites serve as powerful symbols of the Covid-19 crisis's impact on Africa's tourism economy. (Source: WTTC, 2020; WHO, 2020; Statista, 2020; Ozili, 2020;)

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted Egypt's tourism and aviation industries. In the tourism industry, hotel bookings were cancelled and international travel restrictions were imposed, resulting in a 60-70% decline in revenue. Additionally, there was a significant reduction in the search for air travel and passenger flights after Egypt suspended all international passenger flights. To help increase tax returns and allow the private sector to participate more equally with other sectors in the country, the Egyptian government eliminated tax and customs duties for SMEs and tax exemptions for larger firms in 2021. Kenya is the third largest tourism economy in Africa with approximately 2.1 million international visitors in 2019, but the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a significant drop in tourism revenue since March 2020, with a decline in tourism activity, export revenues, and interruption of the supply chain. The Kenyan government implemented strategies to promote domestic tourism and adopted the WTTC travel health protocols to be used by tour operators in the country for business continuity. Despite the implementation of these strategies, the tourism industry is still struggling due to the 'second wave' of the pandemic since September 2020.

Problem statement

The world did not have the Covid-19 virus until December 2019, but now it has spread globally, causing various impacts on the business world. This pandemic is a significant external factor that affects the tourism and travel industry, and the related businesses should be mindful of it during their daily operations. The tourism and travel industry in Kenya is one of the highest revenue generators and a significant contributor to the country's GDP. However, the industry has been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite stable revenue growth in the past years, the industry experienced a disruption in February 2020 when the virus reached Africa through Egypt. The pandemic resulted in cancellations of most international bookings and a halt to local tourism in March 2020 due to the government's travel restrictions and movement cessation measures. Tour operators were less prepared to tackle such a crisis, and some had to lay off employees or close their businesses. The study aims to investigate the effectiveness of crisis management strategies employed by tour operators who continue to operate amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Study objectives

- i. To assess the effects of general crisis preparedness strategies on business continuity of tour operators in Nairobi County.
- ii. To assess the effects of Covid-19 recovery strategies on business continuity of tour operators in Nairobi County.

Hypothesis of the study

- i. H₀1: There is no significant relationship between general crisis preparedness strategies adopted by tour operators in Nairobi County and business continuity during Covid-19 pandemic.
- ii. H₀3: There is no significant relationship between Covid-19 crisis recovery strategies and business continuity of tour operators in Nairobi County.

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (TOC) was created by Carol Weiss in the 1990s to identify the underlying assumptions necessary to achieve a long-term goal. TOC provides a framework for organizations to create the conditions necessary to bring about the desired change in a given context, especially in times of complexity and uncertainty like the Covid-19 pandemic. The process of change, according to Goldberg (2017), involves four phases shown in Figure 2.1, where change is constant and evolves through emergent interactions.



Figure 1: Theory of change, adopted from Carol Weiss, 1995

In the first stage, individuals or companies operate in their usual environment, with no thought of potential disasters. However, in the second stage, when a disaster arises, individuals may be in shock or denial of the situation. In the third stage, individuals begin to react towards the change process, experiencing feelings of anger, resentment, fear, or concern. In the renovation stage, individuals accept the need for change and agree to the available terms, which is the turning point of the organization. Finally, in the satisfaction stage, individuals learn the importance of embracing change and work towards bettering the company results.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism industry, causing the industry to undergo the stages of change. The industry initially denied the existence of the pandemic, leading to confusion about how to handle the situation. However, the industry eventually became more conscious of the pandemic and is now at the stage of satisfaction, competently trying to handle the current situation and normalize life within the era.

Relational Model for Crisis Management

According to Tony Jaques (2007), the process of crisis management is not a sequential or linear process, as multiple processes and actions may occur concurrently. Jaques suggested that crisis management and issue management are interrelated disciplines that involve creating systems to deal with problems. Issues management is concerned with developing processes to handle problems, which are more repetitive than crises. However, issues can turn into crises when not adequately dealt with. The relational model of crisis management comprises four key fundamentals, namely crisis preparedness, crisis prevention, crisis incident management, and post-crisis management. These fundamentals have various activities and processes to help achieve them. Figure 2.2 provides an illustration of these fundamentals.

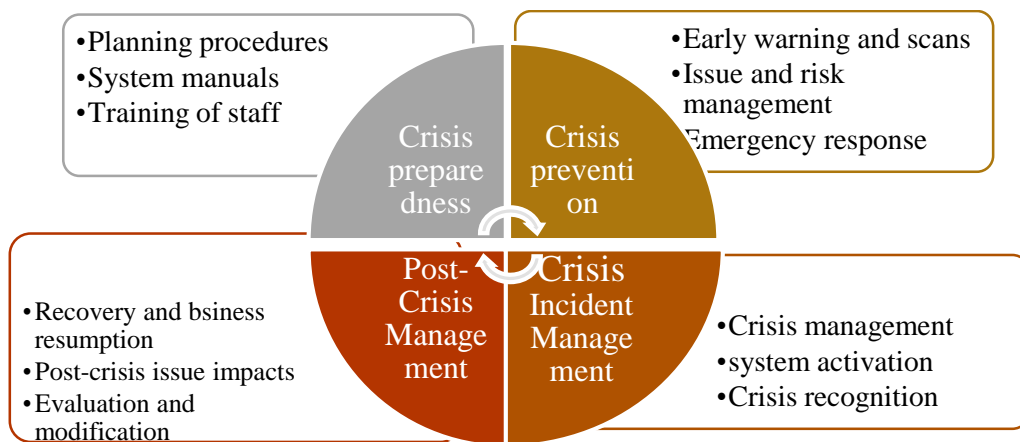


Figure 2: .Relational Model of crisis management, adopted from, Tony Jaques, 2007 (page 150-151)

According to Tony Jaques, the most effective way of managing a crisis is by addressing the root cause of the crisis. Jaques provides a model that outlines the necessary management processes that organizations should adopt to achieve this outcome. The model emphasizes the importance of crisis prevention and preparedness through training and emergency planning, in addition to managing the actual crisis incident and post-crisis management. By adopting this approach, tourism businesses can overcome the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and other potential crises, leading to the successful restoration of their businesses.

II. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of a research design is to investigate research questions and provide solutions to a specific situation or phenomenon. For this study, a descriptive research design approach was adopted, which is concerned with specific predictions and describes the characteristics of particular individuals, groups, or situations. This approach was chosen as it helps to determine the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of the target population. The study focuses on tour operators, who were the unit of analysis, as they are among the tourism stakeholders most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. (Kothari, 2014; Thyer, 2010).

Boslaugh & McNutt (2008) define the target population as the specific respondents who are part of the overall population under study, whose behavior or characteristics are under investigation. For this study, the target population comprises tour operators who have been operating in Nairobi County's tourism industry for at least five years. The study's sample size was obtained from the Kenya Tourism Regulatory Authority (TRA) records, which indicated that there were 650 licensed tour operation businesses in 2017/2018. After eliminating businesses that did not operate in subsequent years and new entrants, the study found that 518 tour operation businesses had been consistently operational for the past three years, making them the target population for the study.

The study chose tour operators as the target population because of their important mediating role between tourists and the tourism industry stakeholders. As pointed out by the author, tour operators serve as a link between customers and the various aspects of a tour package such as accommodations, meals, and transport arrangements, among others. This makes them crucial players in the industry. The study recognizes the crucial role that tour operators play in linking tourists to attractions and destinations.

Sampling design is a plan that outlines the process of selecting the study population, determining the sample size, and selecting participants (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In this study, the researcher initially used purposive sampling to select tour operators who had been operational for at least three years. Simple random sampling was then employed to establish the sample size since all potential respondents had an equal opportunity for selection and the responses of the selected sample could be used to generalize the findings of the entire population under study.

Yamane's 1964 formula is a sample size calculation method that is ideal when the only information available about the population being sampled is its size. This formula was used to determine the sample size for this study. The formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where n is the sample size,

N is the population size,

1 is a constant and

e is determined by the level of confidence required from the study.

For a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 0.05, a sample size of 226 respondents was derived from a total population of 518 tour operation businesses. (Yamane, 1967). The researchers used a questionnaire to gather data from tour operators, which was either physically administered or mailed. The questionnaire was structured into five sections, with the first section seeking demographic information and the other four sections aiming to collect information based on the study's objectives. The questionnaire was designed to allow for the measurement of independent and dependent variables. A web-based survey was also conducted using Google Forms, as it minimized physical contact in data collection. A standard data collection procedure was followed, which involved obtaining an introduction letter from the School of Graduate Studies and Research to facilitate obtaining a permit from NACOSTI, distributing questionnaires through mail with the help of trained assistants, and collecting data from one location before moving on to the next to ensure consistency. Finally, the raw data was compiled and prepared for analysis.

The collected data for the research was checked for accuracy and completeness through coding, assigning each variable a name and noting its sequence (Dooley, 2003). The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis. The analysis was conducted using the SPSS program, and the output was verified for accuracy. Qualitative data was analyzed by reviewing each case and quoting unique responses. The data was presented using tables, graphs, and charts where applicable. Kendall's association index was used to

assess the correlation of independent variables, while Pearson’s correlation was used to show the direction of flow of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Regression analysis was used to test the four null hypotheses related to the four objectives of the study. Simple and multiple regression procedures were conducted to establish the significance and contribution of the dependent and independent variables to the study, using the multiple regression formula below:

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + e$$

Where:

y is the dependent variable; β_0 is a constant variable; X_1 is crisis preparedness strategies; X_2 is crisis response strategies; X_3 is crisis recovery strategies; X_4 is crisis mitigation strategies; β_1 , β_2 , β_3 , and β_4 are coefficients of X_1 , X_2 , X_3 and X_4 respectively and e is the error term. Additionally, ANOVA was conducted to determine the association between the independent and dependent variables, with R2 indicating the strength of the relationship between the model and response variables.

III FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study had a response rate of 72.1%. The study obtained the demographic information from the respondents as summarized: Majority of the respondents, 52%, had been working with their respective tour firms for 1-3 years. In terms of designation, majority of the respondents, 50%, were general managers of their firms. Most of the tour operators had been in operation for a period of 7-9 years. Most of the tour operators, 71%, were managed by the owners. It was also observed that majority of the respondents conducted their tour operations on rented space. Majority of the respondents’ major markets were both international and domestic tourists. The study established that most of the tour operators that took part in the study were not members to a national professional body. The study observed that majority of the tour operators in the study saw a reduction in the number of employees by the end of the Covid-19 restrictions. The study concluded that the pandemic had a significant impact on the continuity of tour operations firms.

Descriptive Analysis

The majority of tour operators in Nairobi did not have prior planning for global health crisis handling within their operations, according to the respondents (Mean = 2.84, SD = 1.006). However, the standard deviation indicated a significant variation in responses, suggesting that some operators may have considered the possibility of a crisis. Most firms provided training on business preparedness, but not specifically for global health crises (Mean=3.93, SD=1.025). Respondents generally disagreed that their training programs included a guide on global health crisis handling (Mean=2.91, SD=0.978). Most respondents had a crisis manager responsible for training staff on crisis preparedness (Mean=3.13, SD=0.707), and training for crises or risks was done on scheduled plans (Mean=3.33, SD=7.53). While most operators had handled crises before the pandemic (Mean=3.97, SD=1.274), the standard deviation suggested that some may not have experienced significant crises. While previous crises were documented (Mean=3.71, SD=1.414), the standard deviation suggested that some may not have been documented. Most operators had a formal crisis handling procedure (Mean=4.06, SD=1.093), but the high standard deviation suggested that some did not have such procedures in place. Most operators had reviewed their manuals to include Covid-19 and other health-related crises in future preparations (Mean=4.45, SD=1.161), but the standard deviation suggested that some may not have done so.

Table 1: Crisis Preparedness Strategies

Crisis Preparedness Strategies	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
The manuals have been reviewed to include Covid-19 and other related global health issues that may arise in the future	163	1	5	4.45	1.161
There is a formal crisis handling procedure /manual in the firm	163	1	5	4.06	1.093
The firm has handled other crises before covid-19	163	1	5	3.97	1.274
There have been prior training programs on any business crisis preparedness	163	1	5	3.93	1.025
Former crises have been documented	163	1	5	3.71	1.414
Training for crisis or risks is done on schedule in the firm	163	1	5	3.33	0.753
The firm has a crisis manager liable for training	163	1	5	3.13	0.707
The training program included a guide on global health crisis handling	163	1	5	2.91	0.978
There has been prior planning on global health crisis handling in the firm	163	1	5	2.84	1.006
Valid N (listwise)	163				

The study found that most of the tour operators in Nairobi implemented a Disaster Recovery Plan (DRP) to reactivate their firms (Mean=4.71, SD=0.606). However, majority of the respondents agreed that there was no clear back-to-work formula as they were being called back to work spontaneously (Mean=3.34, SD=0.945), indicating that some tour operators may have called all employees back as soon as restrictions were lifted. Most employees agreed that a team was in place to handle the process of resource recovery (Mean=3.91, SD=1.023), although some respondents were not aware of such a team.

Table 2: Crisis Recovery Strategies

Crisis Recovery Strategies					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
The firm put in place a Disaster Recovery Plan (DRP) to reactivate the firm back to operations	163	3	5	4.71	.606
A team has been put in place to handle the process of resource recovery and employee handling	163	1	5	3.91	1.023
There was no clear back-to-work formula as employees were called back to duty spontaneously	163	1	5	3.34	.945
Valid N (listwise)	163				

Regression Analysis

The section performed both simple linear regression and multiple regression analyses to determine the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable. The independent variables, Crisis Mitigation Strategies, Crisis Preparedness Strategies, Crisis Response Strategies, and Crisis Recovery Strategies, were averaged before the multiple regression analysis was done. The study examined the link between these independent variables and the dependent variable, Business Continuity of tour operators. The results of the multiple regression analysis were presented in tables.

Table 3: Model Summary for Crisis Preparedness Strategies and Business Continuity of tour Firms

Model Summary ^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.320 ^a	.102	.097	.31326	
a. Predictors: (Constant), Crisis Preparedness					
b. Dependent Variable: Business Continuity					

The results of the regression analysis in Table 4.24 showed that there is a correlation between Crisis Preparedness Strategies and Business Continuity for tour operators in Nairobi, with an R value of 0.32. The R squared (R²) value of 0.102 indicated that 10.2% of Nairobi tour operators business continuity is explained by their crisis preparedness, while 89.8% could be attributed to other factors.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance for Crisis Preparedness Strategies

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.802	1	1.802	18.362	.000 ^b
	Residual	15.799	161	.098		
	Total	17.601	162			
a. Dependent Variable: Business Continuity						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Crisis Preparedness						

The analysis of variance in Table 4.25, showed that there was a fit between the hypothesized model and the obtained data with F= 18.362 and P < 0.05. This indicated a significant relation between crisis preparedness strategies and business continuity for tour operators in Nairobi.

Table 5: Crisis Preparedness Strategies Coefficients

		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.967	.146		27.227	.000
	Crisis_Preparedness	.171	.040	.320	4.285	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Business Continuity

crisis preparedness had a positive and significant effect on business continuity for tour operators with $\beta = 0.171$ at $P < 0.05$. The simple linear regression model equation fitted by use of unstandardized coefficients therefore could be deduced as; $Y = 3.967 + 0.171X_1 + e$ where 3.967 is the constant while X_1 is crisis preparedness strategies index. This implies that crisis preparedness positively and significantly affect the continuity of tour operators business within Nairobi.

Crisis Recovery strategies and business continuity

Table 6: Crisis Recovery Strategies Model Summary

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.433 ^a	.187	.182	.29806

a. Predictors: (Constant), Crisis Recovery
b. Dependent Variable: Business Continuity

The findings from Table 4 indicate that there is a correlation between crisis recovery strategies and business continuity for tour operators in Nairobi as the value of R is 0.433. The R squared (R²) value of 0.187 implies that 18.7% of the impact on business continuity can be attributed to crisis recovery strategies, while the remaining 71.3% could be influenced by other factors.

Table 7: Crisis Recovery Strategies Analysis of Variance

		ANOVA ^a				Sig.
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	
1	Regression	3.298	1	3.298	37.120	.000 ^b
	Residual	14.303	161	.089		
	Total	17.601	162			

a. Dependent Variable: Business Continuity
b. Predictors: (Constant), Crisis Recovery

From the analysis of variance indicated in Table 4.31, the results showed existence of fit between the hypothesized crisis recovery strategies model and business continuity with $F = 37.12$ and $P < 0.05$. This indicated a significant relation between crisis recovery strategies and business continuity for tour operators in Nairobi.

Table 8: Crisis Recovery Strategies Coefficients

		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.114	.090		56.643	.000
	Crisis Recovery	0.453	.074	0.433	6.093	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Business Continuity

Table 4.32 showed that crisis recovery strategies had a positive and significant effect on business continuity for tour operators in Nairobi with $\beta = 5.114$ at $P < 0.05$. The simple linear regression model equation fitted by use of

unstandardized coefficients obtained was; $Y = 0.453 + 0.453X_1 + e$ where 0.453 is the constant while X_1 is crisis recovery strategies index. This indicated that crisis recovery strategies positively and significantly affect business continuity for tour operators in Nairobi.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The study found that having prior planning and training programs for extreme crisis like a global pandemic can help tour companies transition their operations to suit restrictions while remaining in operation. The study also found that firms with a crisis manager and documented procedures/manuals for handling crises are better positioned to handle crises. The study concluded that a Disaster Recovery Plan, clear back-to-work formula, and a team to handle resource and employee challenges during a crisis facilitate smooth recovery and return to operations. Reorganizing system and resource management to cater for crises also facilitates business continuity.

V. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends several policy and implementation strategies for the tourism industry. These include establishing a tourist recovery program, increasing stakeholder participation and involvement, providing budgetary support from the government, and enhancing mobile applications to enable easier access to transportation and information. The means and standard deviations were not provided in this extract.

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