

# The Complexity of Accommodation Decisions in Greece During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr K K Lavania, Associate Professor

Arya College of Engineering, Jaipur

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors that determine tourist accommodation choices during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on Athenian residents and the added complexity of health uncertainty. Qualitative research will be used to explore five key areas: health and safety concerns, the price-quality nexus, risk perception, the relationship between quality and health safety, and decision-making under uncertainty. The study employs fsQCA and NCA and discovers how health protocols, risk perceptions, and a trade-off between price and quality shape the decision by tourists. Findings from the study suggest an importance attached to accommodation, stricter health measures, prioritizing quality over cost, and adaptive strategies in the process of decision-making by those in uncertain times. This study is helpful to the accommodation industry as it will guide on how to stay aligned with changing consumer priorities in health crises.

### Correspondence:

Email:

krishankantlavania@aryacolleg  
e.in

## **Introduction**

This paper investigates the accommodation choice decision-making process among tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic, considering the added complexities of health uncertainty. The central research question relates to how increased uncertainty affects the purchasing preferences for accommodation among Athenian residents. Five sub research questions guide the study: the influence of health and safety issues, the impact of the price-quality issue, effects of perceived risk, effect of quality related to the health and safety, and factors influencing decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. A qualitative methodology is used by the study in exploring all these issues. The study is then structured to progress from the literature review to methodology and findings to conclusions.

## **Result & discussion**

This paper examines critical aspects of current literature with respect to tourists' decision-making attributes amid pandemics. Five broad areas form the basis for discussion in this paper, that are, health and safety concerns, price-quality nexus, risk aspects, quality-related to health and safety concerns, and uncertainty surrounding the decision. Related works identify gaps this paper addresses with regard to tourist behaviour under COVID-19. Shortcomings of the model include inadequate comprehension regarding health risks and accommodation preference interactions and insufficient information related to long-term consequences associated with these decisions.

### **Health and Safety Concerns**

Early studies indicated that health and safety are crucial in tourist accommodation choices, focusing on basic hygiene practices. Later studies went further to include comprehensive safety protocols but were not consistent in implementation. Recent studies have focused on the trust of travelers in health measures, indicating a gap in understanding how trust influences decision-making during pandemics.

### **Price-Quality Nexus**

Initial studies regarding the price-quality relationship in tourism emphasized budget constraints against quality concerns. Subsequent studies included consumer willingness to pay for superior quality but generally neglected the intricacy of price-quality trade-offs within health crises. The current study attempts to achieve this balance but fails to capture pandemic-specific influences on consumer perception.

### **Risk Factors**

Studies on risk perception in tourism started with general safety concerns, then became specific with terrorism, but the pandemic-related risk research is still at a very limited stage, mostly focusing on shallow risk factors without exploring the psychological impacts. Recent work tries to combine these elements but lacks comprehensive models to predict behaviour under pandemic conditions.

### **Health and Safety Quality**

Research on quality considerations initially focused on service excellence, evolving to incorporate health-related quality metrics. Although recent studies address quality in the context of safety, they often fail to explore how these factors influence purchase decisions during a pandemic, leaving a gap in understanding the holistic impact on consumer behaviour.

### **Decision-Making Under Uncertainty**

This would first begin to explore economic models about decision-making processes under uncertainty and later with behavioural insights. Although current studies about uncertainty have focused on diverse contexts, it somehow inadequately addresses unique challenges faced by COVID-19. The problem, therefore, calls for specific models that take into consideration uncertainties unique to pandemics.

## **Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach of fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) and Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA) to analyse the choice-making attributes of Athenian tourists. The data were gathered through a sample of 385 permanent residents through the survey, which captured the preferences and perceptions of the residents. The fsQCA methodology can identify complex causal relations, while NCA tests the size effect of conditions affecting accommodation choices. This methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of tourist behaviour during uncertain times, offering insights into key factors driving decisions.

## **Findings**

Using qualitative data analysis, the study identifies critical factors influencing accommodation choices during the pandemic. Findings reveal the significance of health and safety concerns, price-quality considerations, risk perceptions, quality related to health and safety, and decision-making dynamics under uncertainty. Each conclusion relates to sub-research questions and provides an understanding of how these elements combine to influence tourist choice in the context of COVID-19. The findings reveal that tourists prefer accommodations with healthy health protocols, are complex in their trade-off between price and quality, perceive risks, value quality as related to safety, and change their decision-making strategy to cope with uncertainty.

### **Health and Safety Concerns**

The study reveals that health and safety protocols are crucial in a tourist's accommodation choice. Interview data reveal that a travelers prefers establishments with evident and strict health measures and gives examples of accommodations that indicate their safety practices. Thus, this finding underlines the role of trust and transparency in tourist choice-making during health crises.

### **Price-Quality Nexus**

Analysis reveals that the tourist is willing to pay extra for better quality and safe accommodations. Responses from surveys indicate that though price will always be a concern, the perceived value of safety and quality has become a new dominant factor. This finding reveals that consumers now prioritize quality over cost amid the pandemic.

### **Risk Aspects**

The study uncovers that risk perceptions significantly impact accommodation choices, with tourists prioritizing options perceived as lower risk. Qualitative data from participant interviews illustrate that personal risk assessments, including health risks, heavily influence decision-making, challenging previous assumptions about risk tolerance in tourism.

### **Quality Related to Health and Safety**

Findings show that quality, especially on the issues of health and safety, determines tourist accommodation choice. The data suggest that travel consider the quality of the accommodation with regard to the standards for health safety. There are examples of the desire to stay in a facility with some certification or explicit health procedures. This evidence illustrates the fusion of quality and safety in consumer assessments.

### **Decision Under Risk**

The study reveals that tourists utilize adaptive decision-making strategies in handling uncertainty, weighing and compromising between factors such as health risks, cost, and quality. Interview findings further indicate that decision-making is not static but rather evolves depending on the changing pandemic conditions and personal situations. This reflects a rather nuanced approach to uncertainty management.

## Conclusion

This research offers valuable insights into the decision-making attributes that influence tourist accommodation choices during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is based on the interplay between health concerns, price-quality considerations, risk perceptions, and quality related to health and safety. The findings challenge existing models by showing the complex dynamics of decision-making under uncertainty, providing practical implications for the accommodation industry in better aligning with consumer priorities. Despite its contributions, the study has a focus on Athenian residents, which limits its generalizability. It is recommended that future studies expand the sample to be more diverse and examine the long-term implications of these decision-making attributes in a post-pandemic scenario, thereby improving both the theoretical and practical understanding of tourist behavior during crises.

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