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Disposición a pagar en función de la relación entre la seguridad del destino y las expectativas del turista

Willingness to pay based on the relationship between destination safety and tourist expectations

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Abstract

As tourism is one of the industries most affected by the COVID-19 risk, and since it is estimated that tourism recovery is a long-term affair, with the need to work under new conditions, this study aims to analyse the Mexican tourist's willingness to pay based on the relationship between destination safety and the expectations created because of the COVID-19. This is done using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) on a sample of 1113 tourists. Findings show that tourist safety has no significant influence on willingness to pay, but it does influence tourists' expectations and, tourists' expectations in turn have a significant influence on willingness to pay. Additionally, tourists' expectations indirectly mediate the relationship between tourist safety and willingness to pay. Based on said results, we can conclude that the pandemic is an event that

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affects tourists' expectations, which influences their perception of safety, in turn affecting their willingness to pay for COVID-free measures or attributes.
Key words: willingness to pay, tourist expectations, tourist safety, COVID-19, tourism.

Resumen

Siendo el turismo una de las industrias más afectadas por el riesgo del COVID-19, y dado que se estima que la recuperación del turismo es un asunto de largo plazo, con la necesidad de trabajar en nuevas condiciones, este trabajo analiza la disposición a pagar de los turistas mexicanos con base en la relación entre la seguridad en el destino y las expectativas creadas por el COVID-19. Esto se hace utilizando modelos de ecuaciones estructurales de mínimos cuadrados parciales (PLS-SEM) en una muestra de 1113 turistas. Los resultados muestran que la seguridad del turista no tiene una influencia significativa en la disposición a pagar, pero sí influye en las expectativas de los turistas y las expectativas de los turistas en el viaje tienen una influencia significativa en la disposición a pagar. Además, las expectativas de los turistas median indirectamente la relación entre la seguridad del turista y la disposición a pagar. Con base en dichos resultados, podemos concluir que la pandemia es un evento que afecta las expectativas de los turistas, lo que influye en su percepción de seguridad, afectando a su vez su disposición a pagar por medidas o atributos libres de COVID.
Palabras clave: disposición a pagar, expectativas turísticas, seguridad turística, COVID-19, turismo.

1 Introduction

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, better known as coronavirus or COVID-19. This pandemic spread quickly throughout the world, affecting in just a few months social and economic aspects, with short, medium, and long-term consequences difficult to quantify (UNWTO, 2020), and causing the biggest economic disruption since WW2 (Gössling et al., 2020). Among the majorly affected industries are those with a high level of interaction or contact between people, such as the tertiary sector, being tourism the most affected by this situation (Rueda-López, et al., 2021; Zenker et al., 2021; UNTWO, 2020a). In that regard, the World Tourism Organization states that 2020 was the worst year for international tourism, and that reaching the levels before 2019 would take between 2.5 and 4 years, as during the year 2020 the reduction in international tourism reached 74%, which represents a loss of 1.3

billion dollars. Additionally, passenger air traffic was reduced by 60% (UNTWOb,2020), registering a general loss of gross operating income for airlines between 240 and 420 million dollars (ICAO, 2020).

It was suggested that tourism was a system resistant to external factors; nevertheless, there is evidence of considerable impacts, so it is assumed that the recovery time after the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented (Gössling et al., 2020). It is the first time when a health crisis has a global reach that affects all aspects of tourism activity, given that traveling has become a means of disease transmission, forcing governments to restrict or even prohibit it, to manage the risks of viral spread (Arbulú et. al., 2021; Fotiadis et al., 2021; Pappas, 2021). Faced with this scenario, Araújo and Fraiz (2021) mention that, regarding demand, the pandemic brought a decrease of the tourists' willingness to pay. They also signal the fact that the magnitude of this decrease in the willingness to pay is differentiated according to consumer profile, the product to be acquired and the characteristics of the destination. For example, in areas with greater number of tourists, the decrease in the willingness to pay is limited by a likely presence of smaller crowds in those destinations. Along the same lines, Larios-Gómez et al. (2021) mention that purchasing habits change depending on internal and external context, which are those circumstances in which the consumer has no control, such as natural disasters or, in this case, a pandemic, restricting tourist activity.

This current problem and uncertainty must be dealt with to minimize the severe impacts resulting from the pandemic. That is why, understanding the needs of the tourists with regards to travel safety perception, their expectations regarding the way in which tourist services must be handled and finally, their willingness to pay in order to have access to safety measures that reduce the contagion possibility are a way to bring clarity to the tourism industry, about what consumers want and if they are willing to pay for the changes that had to be implemented in order to re-establish functionality. This research allows to deepen the analysis of the tourist's willingness to pay in a context of uncertainty that allow practitioners to design marketing strategies and tourism attraction in future situations like that of COVID-19. In addition, the research proposes a model that differs from similar models studied during the pandemic to analyse the role of perceived risk in the study of tourists' willingness to pay. Unlike Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020), who confirm that perceived risk is a predictor of attitudes and perceived behavioural control, this research proposed that perceived risk considered as tourist safety is also a predictor of willingness to pay when tourist expectations mediate the relationship. In this sense, this research contributes to the understanding

of willingness to pay from tourist safety and tourists' expectations and how tourists' expectations intervene to increase willingness to pay. For that, this study aims to analyse the Mexican tourist's willingness to pay based on the relationship between destination safety and the expectations created because of the COVID-19.

1.1 Tourist safety

According to Zenker et al. (2021), tourism is associated with risks and uncertainty regarding personal health and safety. There is the possibility of contracting contagious infections through vectors of endemic diseases (ticks or mosquitoes). Specifically in the tourism sector, there are different types of risks: physical ones, which include health, accidents or in this case those inherent to the pandemic, organization risks, psychological risks (when tourists are dissatisfied with the trip), social risks affecting the tourists' families and friends, financial and time-related risks. Even though each of these risks can be related to the consequences of COVID-19, over the past few years, concerns regarding health risks and the possibility of contracting an infectious disease have had an increasing influence on the choice of a tourist destination (Chinazzi et al., 2020).

In this regard, Jeon and Yang (2021) mention that the COVID-19 outbreak has changed the perceptions and attitudes of tourists since it increased the recognition of risk by infectious diseases, which has a negative impact on attitudes and behaviors, and for Zhang et al. (2020), in the stage of recovery from the pandemia, tourism companies must manage perceptions of tourism risk using multiple channels (traditional and social networks) by means of timely publications regarding health and security problems at the destination.

Faced with the fear of contagion and the risk perception associated with COVID-19 due to the specific characteristics of this disease and considering that the effect of fear can differ among age groups, affecting tourist destinations but specifically those focused on adults, because of their increased risk of contracting the disease, it is pertinent to investigate the security measures of tourism companies (Arbulú et al., 2021).

1.2 Tourist expectations

Expectation is generally known as a prediction in the consumer's mind regarding expected results, or the performance of a service that he/she can receive in the future. This is a point of reference that consumers use to determine satisfaction or to assess the performance of products and services. It has been long considered an important factor to explain the behaviour of individuals,

particularly in the economic sense (Wang et al., 2016).

In that sense, tourist expectations are defined by Andereck et al. (2012) as a preconceived perception of the trips to be taken, and most people travel for pleasure, to satisfy more than one expectation. Narangajavana et al. (2017) mention that literature describes various types of expectations, but that they are centred around two primordial ones: the normative and the predictive ones. The first ones (or the "should be") are derived from models of service quality such as SERVQUAL. They constitute the beliefs of the clients regarding what they hope the providers offer, such that they represent the standards to which clients compare the services they receive. On the other hand, the predictive expectations (or the "will be") arise as a means of confirmation-disconfirmation, where the predictive expectation is an anticipated experience of what it is hoped will happen in the future. As such, the formation of tourist expectations is important not only because it influences satisfaction, but also because they are the first element in a purchase decision.

In the context of COVID-19, Farazad (2020) mentions that among the expectations of clients in the service industry are tourists hoping for a new normal, that involves digital solutions (apps) for contactless service provision, as a strategy to overcome the traditional physical encounters in the cycle of production and consumption of memorable experiences by clients. Hence the pertinence that tourism service providers be aware of the needs and expectations of tourists, to design an adequate offer and to select the effective commercial strategies to make it known and attract clients that have satisfactory experiences. Specifically, to identify the protective measures to establish inside facilities, to manage the tourism risk perception in a way that it overcomes the feeling of threat, to attract tourists and make them want to travel once again (Zhang et al., 2020).

Awan et al. (2020) emphasize the need to promote the new normal among clients and to redesign service provision in the hospitality industry, to meet the tourist demand regarding security and wellbeing, factors which are becoming increasingly relevant from the perspective of both supply (service providers) and demand (clients). In that respect, hygiene is one of the factors that influence the selection of accommodation services, because the risk of contamination with viruses and bacteria remains even if hotel facilities are adequately cleaned.

Along the same lines, Durgun and Davras (2022) mention that boredom and travel motivation have modulating effects on the intention to travel and that the impact of this intention and the fear of COVID-19 on the willingness to pay (WTP) was rather to benefit from additional security measures

at the destination. Boredom, typical of confinement, has a positive and significant effect on the motivation and intention to travel. In addition, the willingness to pay is positively affected by the intention to travel and the fear of COVID-19. In addition, this fear factor had a moderating role while travel motivation had a mediating role.

1.3 Willingness to pay

According to Ramdas and Mohamed (2014), the willingness to pay is the amount of money a person decides to pay for an increase or improvement in the quality of a product or service, as well as a measure which indicates the tendency to act in financial terms of an individual for an expected change or improvement in quality. In this case, quality includes "safe hotels" or "COVD free" certifications which, according to Feldmana and Reficco (2015) would be an attribute that generates willingness to pay a higher price compared to other attributes.

In the tourism industry, willingness to pay has been frequently used to estimate the value of non-marketable goods based on rational choice assumptions and maximizing utility. The literature focuses on identifying, in different contexts, the factors that determine such a payment preference, as well as the amount that tourists are willing to pay (Durán et al., 2020).

In literature, this construct is frequently based on Azjen's theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (1991), which explains individual behaviour based on attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control: a stated disposition to pay more for a product or service, which could be influenced by one's own sense of what is right and by the perception regarding normative pressures, but limited by the beliefs that it is very unlikely that anyone's behaviour makes a tangible change, or by an actual or perceived lack of availability or access (Kang & Nicholls, 2020).

In the tourism industry, the TPB has been used with different approaches. Panwanitdumrong and Chen (2021) analysed the factors that influence tourist towards an environmentally friendly consumption, Rustiwan and Suryani (2021) analysed the intention of food safety among food handlers in the gastronomic tourism sector, Sewon et al. (2021) used the TPB in conjunction with the theory of motivation and protection, to predict the consumers' behaviour in medical tourism. In that sense, Sánchez-Cañizarez et al. (2020), also studied the willingness to pay beyond the perceived risk, mentioning that the TPB is applicable in the context of the situation created by COVID-19, and highlighting its use in different fields, but with little application in the context of the pandemic.

It is important to point out that this paper does not use the variables of the TPB to predict

willingness to pay, but that it serves as a frame of reference to highlight that the subjective norms, specifically what is perceived as adequate in terms of hygiene and security measures in tourism services, can be instrumental in the tourist's inclination to pay more for such actions. In this sense, it is considered that this research is relevant in practical terms since it seeks to understand how security affects the willingness to pay, this being relevant for companies in the sector that have had to incur new processes and inputs to face health provisions, having economic implications

Other studies give an account of the attributes that affect the willingness to pay, among which are social responsibility and sustainability, relevant attributes for consumers based on the presence of an emotional connection (Ragbir et. al., 2021; Winter et. al., 2021; Feldmana & Reficco, 2015). Recent studies have incorporated the perceived threat of COVID-19 as a control variable, but findings indicate minimal impact, so that it is recommendable to replicate them for inference (Winter, et. al., 2021; Arbulú, et al., 2021). Nonetheless, Zhang et al. (2020) demonstrated that there is a prevalent greater tourist propensity for risk aversion and negative emotional reactions in the face of price increase, when under the threat of an infectious disease such as COVID-19.

The foregoing is consistent with the work of Jeon & Yang (2021) who found differences in the willingness to pay of tourists, being those with a greater tourist attitude and knowledge of the risks of the activity, presented a greater willingness to pay, contrary to those tourists with a higher perception of risk from infectious diseases who presented a lower willingness to pay

In the same order of ideas, it is considered that this work is relevant in the theoretical sense, since it analyses the relationship that exists between perceived security and the willingness to pay through expectations and not only from behavioural control as in the rest of literature.

Based on the theoretical elements, this study aims to analyse the Mexican tourists' willingness to pay based on the relationships between destination safety and the expectations created because of COVID-19. To this end, we present the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Tourist safety has a significant influence on willingness to pay.

Hypothesis 2: Tourist safety has a significant influence on tourist expectations.

Hypothesis 3: Tourist expectations have a significant influence on willingness to pay.

Hypothesis 4: Tourist expectations mediate the relationship between tourism safety and willingness to pay.

2 Method

To test the hypotheses presented, a transversal quantitative study was conducted. A structured questionnaire was applied to tourists from Mexico, country where tourism is a key pillar of the economy, contributing 8.7% to the gross domestic product (GDP), a value that surpasses the primary sectors (INEGI, 2018). During the year 2017, it generated 2.3 million jobs, which represent 5.9% of the country's total (INEGI, 2019). For that reason, the country has not been spared the serious repercussions caused by COVID-19 worldwide.

In that sense, the pandemic – travel restrictions and fear of contagion –caused a severe drop in tourism in Mexico. The global index of temporary accommodations and food and beverage preparation activities during 2020 has decreased by 72% in May, followed by a slight rise, reaching -53.47% in August (Sour-Vargas and Ceron-Monroy, 2020).

The collection of information was carried out through surveys, using a questionnaire with their consent between May 20th and 25th via the Google forms platform, shared through social network traveler groups on Facebook. Tourists who had made trips in the previous months to national and international destinations were considered. We performed a convenience sampling to fulfil the minimum sample size required.

The minimum sample size was obtained using a statistical power analysis to obtain sufficient statistical precision for the data analysis (Benitez et al., 2020). According to Nitzl (2016), the analysis considered the number of predictors, the size of the effect, the significance level, and the statistical power. The size of the effect was considered small, to achieve a conservative approximation (Benitez et al., 2020). The number of predictors was three, the number of construct indicators with the formative measuring model (Nitzl, 2016). The significance level was considered 0.5 and the statistical power 0.8 (Cohen, 1992). With those values, the minimum sample size required was 550 (Nitzl, 2016).

1133 questionnaires were collected in total. 93.7% of the respondents were women and the rest men. Most of the respondents expressed having concluded bachelor's degree studies (61%), 22% claimed having concluded postgraduate studies, 15.7% high school studies and 1.1% junior high studies. The federal entity where most of the respondents resided was Mexico City (49.6%), followed by Estado de Mexico (17.5%) and Baja California (7.3%).

2.1 Measurements

The tourist safety construct was defined according to Reichel et al. (2007) and Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020) as the risk perceived by tourists in their travel experience caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was measured using three items about the tourist's perception of safety at the place of accommodation, in transport during the trip and in the places visited on the trip, using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 – very unsafe to 5 – very safe, as shown in Table 1. Likert scales are recommended for validating the internal consistency of the variables (González & Pazmiño, 2015). In addition, the use of five-alternative scales has been suggested, taking care of and adapting the language to the target population (Matas, 2018). This facilitates its application in other studies by adapting the scales to the population and context.

Table 1. Measurements

VARIABLE	INDICATOR	
Safety tourism	S2C	Assuming that you currently have the resources to vacation, how safe would you feel in the place of accommodation?
	S3E	Assuming that you currently have the resources to vacation, how safe would you feel in transportation during your trip?
	S4G	Assuming that you currently have the resources to vacation, how safe would you feel in the places you visit on your trip?
Tourist expectations	M1B	How relevant are the free spaces between passengers in the means of transport?
	M1C	How relevant are rapid tests before boarding the means of transport?
	M1F	How relevant is the mandatory use of face masks and/or masks in means of transport?
	M2A	How important is the reduction in the number of occupied rooms in the place of accommodation?
	M2B	How important is the daily disinfection of the rooms in the place of accommodation?
	M2C	How important are rapid tests before checking in at the place of accommodation?
	M2D	How important is the opening of hotels under accreditation of a certification in contingency management?
	M2E	How important is the mandatory use of face masks and/or masks in place of accommodation?
	M3A	How important is the reduction in the number of attendees at recreational centers?
	M3D	How important is the opening of recreational centers after the presentation of a security protocol?
	M3F	How important is temperature taking to attendees at the entrance of recreational places?
Willingness to pay	M4A	How much would you agree to pay more for a flight where rapid tests are done on all passengers?

	M4B	How much would you agree to pay extra for a hotel that is certified in health contingency management?
	M4C	How much would you agree to pay for masks and face masks to be provided to all passengers in the means of transport?
	M4D	How much would you agree to pay for more expensive flights given the reduction in available spaces?
	M4F	How much would you agree to pay for an exclusive lodging for you and your family not to interact with other people?

Source: Items adapted from Reichel et al. (2007), Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020), Awan et al. (2020), Wang et al. (2016), Feldmana and Reficco (2015), and Ramdas and Mohamed (2014).

In turn, the scale for tourist expectations was adapted from Awan et al. (2020) and Wang et al. (2016) as the expected results of the tourism service under the new normal caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with regards to the consumer's safety and wellbeing. It was measured through 11 items about the importance of the safety measures that tourists expect in the places of accommodation, the means of transport and the recreational spaces during their trip, using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 – not at all important to 5 – very important.

Lastly, measurement of the willingness to pay was carried out through an adaptation of the scale by Feldmana and Reficco (2015) and Ramdas and Mohamed (2014), as the amount that the tourist decided to pay for hygiene, control, and prevention protocols. This construct was measured with 5 items about the tourist's willingness to pay extra for the implementation of sanitary measures to mitigate COVID-19, using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree.

2.2 Data analysis

The data analysis for the hypothesis test was carried out using PLS-SEM. The covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) methods is more recommended to estimate factor model than PLS path modeling because it generates statistical results with more precision, however, PLS path modeling is an effective method to estimate models that combine reflective and compound (formative) constructs (Benitez et al., 2017). Hair, Risher, et al. (2019) recommend its use when at least one of the constructs has a formative measurement model. Additionally, authors such as Leyva-Hernández et al. (2021) have applied said statistical technique in the analysis of the mediation effect, and with it they were able to determine the type of mediation. We followed the four steps proposed by Ringle et al. (2020) for the data analysis using PLS-SEM, which are: 1) determine the aim of the research

(exploratory), 2) specify the structural model, 3) specify the measurement model (reflective and formative) and 4) result assessment. The data analysis was carried out using the software SmartPLS version 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

One of the limitations of PLS-SEM is validation through goodness-of-fit measures, unlike CB-SEM (Benitez et al, 2020). Since PLS-SEM is oriented to the predictive accuracy of models that have a solid structural theory, in this case the path relationships can be interpreted as causal (Ringle et al., 2020). PLS-SEM offers better results for prediction-oriented models (Richter et al, 2014). Therefore, it is recommended to use criteria that evaluate the predictive performance of the model and the fit indices developed for PLS-SEM as the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the unweighted least squares discrepancy (dULS) and the geodesic discrepancy (dG) (Benitez et al, 2020 and Ringle et al, 2020).

3 Results

3.1 Assessment of the measurement model

Regarding the assessment of the measurement model of a reflective construct, Hair, Hult, et al. (2019) consider assessing: internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha), composite reliability, rho_A, convergent validity (indicator reliability and average variance extracted) and discriminant validity (cross-loading, Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio and Fornell–Larcker criterion).

According to Table 2, the internal consistency reliability values obtained were acceptable. These included Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.70, composite reliability indices greater than 0.80 and rho_A scores greater than 0.70 (Cronbach, 1951; Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2010; Manley et al., 2020).

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity of the reflective constructs

VARIABLE	AVE	INDICATOR	FACTOR LOADING	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	COMPOSITE RELIABILITY	ρA
Tourist expectations	0.593	M1B	0.692	0.931	0.941	0.936
		M1C	0.762			
		M1F	0.8			
		M2A	0.665			
		M2B	0.76			
		M2C	0.804			
		M2D	0.793			
		M2E	0.787			
		M3A	0.799			
		M3D	0.79			

		M3F	0.8			
Willingness to pay	0.708	M4A	0.881	0.896	0.924	0.838
		M4B	0.887			
		M4C	0.851			
		M4D	0.844			
		M4F	0.737			

AVE- Average Variance Extracted. Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the software SmartPLS version 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

Similarly, the assessment of the convergent validity is presented in Table 2, which reflects factor loadings of indicators equal to or greater than 0.70 (Henseler et al., 2009).

However, the indicators with values greater than 0.50 were preserved (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2012). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was greater than 0.5, demonstrating a reliable representation of the indicators with their construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2005).

Regarding the discriminant validity, one of the criteria to consider was the cross-loadings. Table 3 indicates that for all the cases, the indicator loadings with their respective constructs were greater than 0.50 (Barclay et al, 1995). Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) value of the variable "willingness to pay" with the variable "tourist expectations" was acceptable, being less than 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001). The Fornell-Larcker criterion allows for the visualization of a diagonal with the highest indices. The values registered were considered acceptable, as they were greater than 0.50, and above the correlations between constructs (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 3. Discriminant validity of the reflective constructs

INDICATOR	CROSS-LOADINGS		HTMT	FORNELL–LARCKER CRITERION	
	1	2		1	2
1. Tourist expectations					
M1B	0.692	0.195		0.770	
M1C	0.762	0.217			
M1F	0.800	0.259			
M2A	0.665	0.266			
M2B	0.760	0.203			
M2C	0.804	0.250			
M2D	0.793	0.216			
M2E	0.787	0.276			
M3A	0.799	0.284			
M3D	0.790	0.256			
M3F	0.800	0.299			

2. Willingness to pay					
M4A	0.275	0.881	.348	0.327	0.842
M4B	0.258	0.887			
M4C	0.289	0.851			
M4D	0.228	0.844			
M4F	0.307	0.737			

Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the software SmartPLS version 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

According to Hair, Hult, et al. (2019), the assessment of a formative construct considers the convergent validity, collinearity between indicators and magnitude and significance of the indicator weights.

The assessment of the convergent validity of the formative measurement model included the redundancy analysis (Chin, 1998). For it, the formatively measured construct was an exogenous latent variable, and another reflectively measured construct was an endogenous latent variable for the effects that the variable itself measured, i.e., "tourist safety", with 15 items. Using the PLS algorithm, the path coefficient was 0.7, considered the minimum value to validate the formative indicators of the variable which explain at least 50% of the variance of the construct "tourist safety" (Hair, Hult et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the collinearity between the indicators was assessed using the variance inflation factors (VIF). Based on Benitez et al. (2020), the VIF values of the indicators of the formative construct obtained were less than 5, which implies no existence of multicollinearity (Table 4). Additionally, based on Hair, Hult, et al. (2019), the external weights of the formative indicators are significant on a level of 5% (p values less than 0.05 and t values greater than 1.96).

Table 4. Assessment of the measurement model of the formative construct

LATENT VARIABLE	INDICATOR	EXTERNAL WEIGHTS (EXTERNAL LOADINGS)	VIF	T VALUE	P VALUE
Tourist safety	S2C	0.372 (0.707)	1.215	2.341	0.019
	S3E	0.379 (0.660)	1.141	2.381	0.017
	S4G	0.559 (0.834)	1.223	4.053	0.000

VIF- variance inflation factor. The t and p values corresponding to the weights of the indicators. Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the software SmartPLS version 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

3.2 Assessment of the structural model

The assessment criterion for the structural model comprises the evaluation of the predictive relevance through the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the Stone-Geisser values (Q^2), the

evaluation of the effect size (f^2), the evaluation of the collinearity, and the identification of the relevance and significance of the path coefficients (Benitez et al., 2020; Ringle, et al., 2020).

The R^2 values of the endogenous constructs obtained indicated that none of them reach the low value (0.25) (Sarstedt et al., 2017). However, as indicated by Hair et al. (2011), the values of R^2depend on each area of study and, as argued by Benitez et al. (2020), low values of R^2 are accepted when there is no absolute understanding of the phenomenon, such as is the case with the study of the effects of COVID-19 on the tourism industry. In table 5, the f^2 values reveal the fact that the effect was not substantial (<0.02) between tourist safety on the willingness to pay; meanwhile, the effects of tourist safety on tourist expectations and of tourist expectations on the willingness to pay were small (<0.150) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 5. Assessment of the structural model

HYPOTHESIS	PATH COEFFICIENT	T-STATISTIC	p value	f^2	VIF	DECISION
Tourist safety has a significant influence on the willingness to pay	0.028	0.923	0.356	0.001	1.043	Rejected
Tourist safety has a significant influence on tourist expectations	-0.203	5.767	0.000	0.043	1.000	Not rejected
Tourist expectations have a significant influence on the willingness to pay	0.334	13.75	0.000	0.119	1.043	Not rejected
Tourist expectations mediate the relationship between tourist safety and willingness to pay	-0.068*	5.53	0.000	-	-	Not rejected

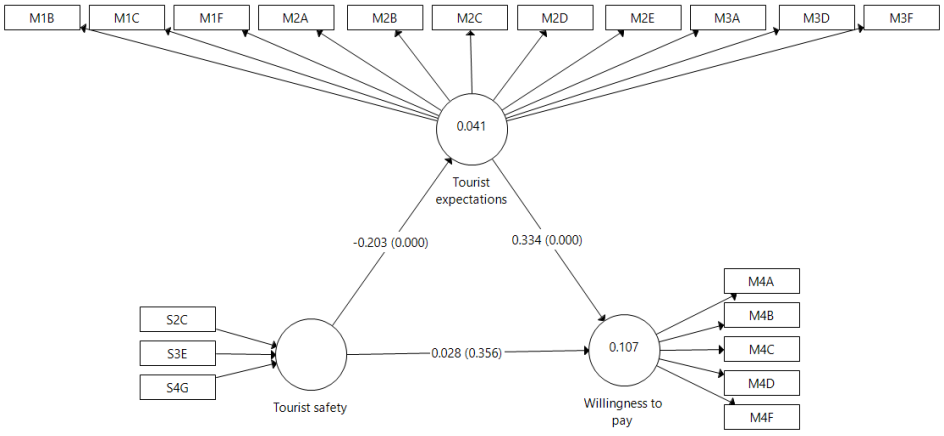
f2- effect size, VIF- variance inflation factor. Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the software SmartPLS version 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

Through the blindfolding, the Q^2 of the endogenous constructs with an omission distance of 7 were obtained (Ali et al., 2018). The endogenous constructs "tourist expectations" (Q^2=0.023) and "willingness to pay" (Q^2=0.073) had a low degree of prediction relevance, as they had Q^2 values greater than 0.02 and less than 0.15 (Ali et al., 2018). According to Hair, Risher, et al. (2019), the VIF values are less than 3, hence there is no multicollinearity (Table 5).

Consequently, we carried out the hypothesis test with the results obtained from the path coefficients (Table 5 and Figure 1). By means of bootstrapping with 5000 subsamples, we obtained

the path coefficients and their significance (Sarstedt et al., 2014). Hypothesis 1 was not supported. Tourist safety had no significant influence on willingness to pay (**β**=0.028, p=0.358) on a confidence level of 95%. In contrast, the hypotheses 2 and 3 were supported. Tourist safety had a significant influence on tourist expectations (**β**=-0.203, p=0.000), and tourist expectations significantly affected the willingness to pay (**β**=0.334, p=0.000), on a 99% confidence level.

Figure 1. Results of the structural model.



Source: self source

The R^2 values are presented inside the endogenous constructs, the path coefficients are on the arrows and the p values are in brackets. Source: compiled by the authors based on the results of the software SmartPLS version 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2015).

For the test of hypothesis 4, the mediation effect of tourist expectations on the relationship between tourist safety and willingness to pay was evaluated. We followed the steps proposed by Zhao et al. (2010) for the assessment of the mediation effect: 1) determine the significance of the indirect effect and 2) determine the significance of the direct effect. When the indirect effect is significant, there is mediation, and if the direct effect is not significant there is only an indirect mediation, while if the direct effect is significant there is a partial mediation (Hair, Hult et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2010). Table 5 reveals that the indirect effect was significant (**β**=-0.068, p=0.000), and the direct effect was not (**β**=0.028, p=0.358), there was only an indirect mediation. For that, hypothesis 4 was supported, tourist expectations had an indirect mediation between tourism safety and willingness to pay.

3.3 Assessment of the overall model fit

The assessment of the overall model was carried out through the approximate model fit, and the test of exact model fit (Henseler et al., 2016). In the approximate model fit, the value obtained by the SRMR was 0.03, less than 0.08, which indicates an acceptable fit (Benitez et al., 2020).

In the test of exact model fit, the value obtained by the SRMR was 0.015, which is below the 95% quantile (0.018). The value obtained by the dULS was 0.043, less than the value of the 95% quantile (0.061). Lastly, the value obtained by dG (0.019) was less than the value of the 95% quantile (0.024). This indicates an improbable discrepancy between the hypothesized model and the real model (Henseler et al., 2016).

4 Discussion

The development of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related lockdown fostered a crisis in the tourism industry that requires learning from this experience to adjust business models using innovation and to generate adaptability to change (Visentin, et al., 2021). Additionally, according to Agovino et al. (2021) health systems of tourist destinations are vulnerable to the speed of treatment and the language barriers, a scenario which deteriorated during the pandemic, an inhibiting factor. Hence the relevance of disclosing the health infrastructure of the destination, an information which could affect travel decisions.

Certainly, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has affected many tourist destinations because of the cancelled reservations and the limited logistics, which illustrates tourists' fears. These can be mitigated by providing tourist safety at the destinations in response to the protection measures established by the authorities, but this would impact operating costs (Fotiadis et al., 2021). In that sense, the tourism industry wants to reduce contagion risks within its activity (Toubes et al., 2021). Additionally, in the new normal the tourism industry must be able to balance the satisfactory experience of tourists with respecting the safety and hygiene measures to reactivate tourism (Rueda-López et al., 2021). To that end, tourist safety and tourist expectations play an important part in their decisions, confirming the claims of Wangt et al. (2016).

Our results indicate that tourist safety in accommodations, transport and places visited explain the willingness to pay through the application of measures that mitigate COVID-19 contagion only when tourist expectations intervene. Similar results during the COVID-19 pandemic were found by Couto et al. (2020). These authors point out that tourists consider cleanliness and safety essential to mitigate COVID-19 contagion in their choice of accommodation, tourist destination and restaurant. Moreover, they are willing to pay more for a safe destination. In turn, Awan et al. (2020) found that tourists expect safe travel destinations, which include social distancing and hygiene practices, and

that their expectations regarding hotels and transportation are that health protocols be implemented.

Similarly, we found that the risk perceived before the pandemic influenced tourist satisfaction, in the choice and decision to travel (Quintal & Polczynski, 2010; Yeung & Yee, 2013). Both tourist safety and tourist expectations have been related to the decision of the tourists, and the results of this research indicate that tourist safety influences willingness to pay when tourist expectations regarding safety and wellbeing mediate the relationship.

Based on this experience, what must stand out is the major necessity to innovate in the tourism industry, to survive when faced with an adverse scenario imposed by COVID-19 (Toubes et al., 2021; Vicentin et al., 2021). Therefore, the results of this research paper may help design strategies to increase tourism to destinations. To that end, it is necessary to design a tourist product based on tourist expectations, given that they are a key element in the decision to select the travel destination.

In the face of the current circumstances as the results indicated, tourist safety has a significant influence on the traveller's expectations, since the choice to travel and visit a tourist destination depends on the visitors' perceptions regarding their safety and protection (Taylor & Tahooey, 2007), and that the process of decision-making is formed around the expectations regarding travel-related risks (Pappas & Gliptou, 2020).

Thus, the risk and, consequently, the perceived safety have been recognized as a significant factor in the choice of a destination. Particularly, in a qualitative study on cruise passengers, Holland et al. (2021) found that the COVID issue is related more closely to the "risk, safety and travel" construct. Additionally, their thematic analysis revealed relationships between cleanliness and hygiene and future travel intention, and that numerous participants in the study emphasized that they expect and want stricter hygiene and health measures. In the context of the pandemic, safety is a relevant topic which in turn is associated with the expectation of cleanliness and health standards while traveling. These results, despite being analysed with a methodological approach and in a different context, are consistent with the findings of this paper. In addition, other studies consider that the perception of risk also affects the intention of carrying out tourist activities such as that of Cheng et al., (2022). That it´s a variable important to analyse in the tourism sector.

Meanwhile et al. (2020) mention that travellers seek health and safety when selecting a hotel, and that soon of the COVID-19 pandemic, thinking, behaviour and travel would change. To that end, they sought to identify tourist expectations for the future of the hotel industry, asking specifically

what people expect from a hotel in these times of crisis. They found that the respondents focused on social distancing and hygiene practices, as well as decreased room occupancy and free spaces. Thus, the authors highlight the need for the accommodation industry to carry out actions like the results found in this paper, to help clients feel safe and enjoy their stay.

In that context, Pappas and Glyptou (2020) mention that accommodation providers need to adapt to the new environment, with the understanding that the most important things to consider at present are health and safety. While the pandemic continues, the levels of hygiene and protection granted to clients will be the essential aspects in the tourists' decision-making process. While health-related aspects have always been important, especially for vulnerable groups, during the current COVID-19 situation they have acquired a primordial role, being associated with the perspective of quality. Thus, it is necessary that providers of tourism services focus their management and promotion on such aspects, making it explicit and clear the way in which they protect customers' health and the hygiene standards they offer and how they have improved these standards. All this, to reduce anxiety and fear, and to make visitors feel safe and consider that their expectations regarding these new requirements are met.

In this scenario, we consider that safety is and will continue to be a determining factor in tourist expectations, from the choice of travel destination to accommodations and transport, and that, within these expectations of hygiene and sanitization there are fundamental aspects which must not only be applied but also communicated to the tourists, to achieve a feeling of reassurance, which leads to enjoyment of their stay and a perception of quality.

Regarding the hypothesis that places tourist safety as a factor of influence on the willingness to pay, which was rejected, this can be an indication of the cultural prevalence of the "haggling" habit, also called "negotiating culture" practiced by foreign as well as national consumers (García, 2017; Ogliastri & Salcedo, 2008). Tourists expect a safe place; for them safety and hygiene are attributes for which they have developed a certain sense of loyalty, but they are not necessarily willing to pay more for them, given the fact that they consider loyalty as payment (Cai, Xu & Gao, 2021).

Due to COVID-19, tourists' perception of risk has increased, which has caused their trips to decrease, which is why several studies have analyzed the willingness to pay more like this study. Sánchez and Cañizares et al. (2020) analyzed the willingness to pay with an extended model of the theory of planned behavior The study by Choe et al. (2022) confirms that the tourist will pay more when considering the purchase of travel insurance. And the results of this research indicate that the willingness to pay increases when the tourist's expectations intervene.

Regarding the hypothetical research model, contrary to Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2020), who address the risk perceived when traveling during the COVID-19 pandemic as a predictor of attitude and perceived behavioural control, and who claim that the willingness to pay for better safety measures is explained by the intention to travel, the results of this research paper reveal that the perceived risk, in this case tourist safety, predicts the willingness to pay by means of tourist expectations, and does not predict only attitude and perceived behavioural control, as claimed by Sánchez-Cañizares et al.

5 Conclusions

One of the strengths of this paper is that it is one of the first ones to tackle aspects of tourism marketing on Mexican travellers in times of pandemic. The results allowed us to infer that the pandemic is an event that affects tourist expectations, which in turn impact their perception of safety and ultimately impact their willingness to pay more for covid-free or covid-safe attributes.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the empirical results allow a better understanding of tourists' willingness to pay, finding that the perceived risk, measured as tourist safety, is one of the factors that most influences the tourist wants to pay more for a service when the expectations about tourism service with regards to safety and wellbeing intervene. This is for the managers of the development of the activity, both at the government and business levels, a milestone for the design of effective strategies that allow tourism to adapt to the new measures, encouraging its growth based on actions that minimize this perception of risk.

Considering that the data collection was carried out by means of an online questionnaire, there is a potential for selection bias due to the non-probabilistic sampling; thus, the findings cannot be generalized to the general population. Nonetheless, given the consequence of the results, the informed data should be considered part of the rapid evidence generated in the evolving context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the scales used present adequate psychometric properties of reliability and validity, which allows us to infer that their adaptation proved reliable in the cultural context of Mexico. However, it is necessary to assess their behaviour in other contexts and moments of the pandemic, as a next step.

Tourism increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission, which has inhibited travel, and for those who do travel, it has become a challenging experience: facing strict inspections, health protocols and sometimes quarantine strategies. That is why, one of the future lines of research is the study of travel burnout and measuring travel-related anxiety.

Given that communication with the tourism sector is relevant for the design of strategies that mitigate the effect caused by situations of future uncertainty, it is recommended that future research have an informative approach so that the information reaches businessmen or representatives of tourist destinations.

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