



The Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic and Recovery Strategies for the Travel and Tourism Sector in Bangladesh

S.M. Shariful Haque

Lecturer, Department of Marketing, Jashore University of Science and Technology, Jashore, Bangladesh

*Corresponding author: shariful.mkt@just.edu.bd

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Research Article

Abstract

Purpose: This study's purpose is twofold: first, to examine the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Bangladesh's travel and tourism sector and second, to suggest some recovery strategies to reduce the negative effects of this pandemic so that the travel and tourism sector of Bangladesh can bounce back.

Methods: This study is qualitative in nature, applying secondary data analysis technique to collect data from various sources, which includes academic journals, news articles, and websites of different professional bodies like the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Travel Owners Association of Bangladesh (TOAB), etc.

Results: The findings indicate that Bangladesh's travel and tourism sector has been impacted considerably by the pandemic due to travel restrictions, movement control order, apprehension of Covid-19 contamination, etc. Some recovery strategies are also suggested to minimize the pandemic's detrimental consequences.

Implications: This research provides guidelines for tourism marketers, which will help them to revise their strategies so that they will be able to remove anxiety from travelers' minds and influence their visit intention.

Originality: Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on the travel and tourism sector have been an emergent research area since travel and tourism is one of the severely affected sectors during the pandemic. However, so far insufficient studies related to this area in the context of Bangladesh are available. Hence, this research is an attempt to bridge this gap in the literature.

Keywords: Covid-19, Pandemic, Travel and Tourism, Recovery, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the travel and tourism sector. The travel and tourism sector creates revenues to get a nation along with cultural wealth. It's also one of the most important economic engines for both development and growth. Based on the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2019, the industry accounted for 10.4 percent of worldwide GDP and 330 million occupations worldwide. Thus, it established itself among the most important and most populous businesses of the globe.

The travel and tourism sector in Bangladesh is regarded as a promising sector with its entire contribution to the GDP of Bangladesh was more than Taka 840.2 billion in 2019, which is 4.4 percent of the total GDP ("Tourism contributes 4.4 pc to GDP," 2020, para. 2). Even though the contribution of this sector to the GDP of Bangladesh remains low, however, outbound tourists in the country are increasing each year due to the pragmatic measures embraced by the government to attract global tourists through branding the nation as "Beautiful Bangladesh" in front of the world (Patwary, 2020). As indicated by the Bangladesh Tourism Board, around 3,23,295 tourists visited Bangladesh in 2019, which is 21 times noteworthy compared to the number of tourists in 2018 (Patwary, 2020). The travel and tourism sector's market size was equal to USD 590 million in 2017, compared to USD 59 million in 2007 (Rahman and Chakma, 2018). Besides, the data collected by the Pacific Asia Travel Association's (PATA) Bangladesh Chapter (2020) confirmed that there are 4 million people in Bangladesh who are directly or indirectly involved with the travel and tourism sector.

Provided the significance of the travel and tourism sector in the world economy, one can imagine the damage the COVID-19 pandemic has caused to this sector. Ever since Wuhan, China, Corona Virus has been spreading out globally. Since July 11, 2020, there are 12,735,534 instances and 565,068 deaths. Intensely worried both by the alarming levels of spread and severity and by the startling levels of passivity, which evaluated that COVID-19, can be declared a pandemic. Covid-19 patient in Bangladesh was first recognized in March 2020 ("First coronavirus cases detected in Bangladesh," 2020, para. 1). Following the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), there are 181,129 definite cases, including 2305 associated deaths; Case Fatality Rate (CFR) is 1.43% (till September 27, 2020).

Table 1: Overall COVID- 19 cases in Bangladesh and around the world by 27/09/2020

Total Cases Reported	Bangladesh	World
Total Infections	357,873	32,967,063
Total Deaths	5,129	996,449
Total Recovers	268,777	24,322,013
Active Cases	83,967	7,648,601

Source: Worldometers (2020); IEDCR (2020)

As the travel and tourism sector is mainly based on human movement and social interaction, governments' initiatives to inhibit coronavirus stretch have caused this sector to be the worst sufferer. With the grounding of airlines and the transformation of luxury hotels into ghost cities, the travel and tourism sector has been adversely impacted. In their recent report (2020), World

Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) stated that the tourism sector is undergoing a critical situation with 1 million jobs being suffered daily while 100.8 million workers are already at risk of losing their jobs.

The Asian tourism sector has been seriously affected in the aftermath of the pandemic and is expected to lose GDP, equivalent to USD 1041 billion (Holy, 2020). The travel and tourism sector of Bangladesh is no exception. Bangladesh's tourism industry has reportedly halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The virus was believed to be transmitted to Bangladesh in March 2020, the pandemic has expanded every day throughout the country, and the number of infected people has increased. The government was forced to close all public events at tourism sites temporarily due to the massive fear of this epidemic to save all residents (Lalon, 2020). In its newly established website "Covid-19: Measures to Support Travel and Tourism", The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has disclosed that the tourism industry of Bangladesh will face a deficit of USD 470 million in 2020 (Hossain, 2020).

Although Covid-19 is substantially affecting the worldwide tourism sector, little research has been done regarding Covid-19 pandemics' effect on Bangladesh's travel and tourism sector. Besides, the recovery strategies to reduce the pandemic's detrimental effect have not been adequately elucidated in the previous studies.

Considering these issues, the author felt an urge to analyze the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Bangladesh's travel and tourism sector. As the travel and tourism sector comprises of several sub-sectors like aviation, hotel, restaurants, amusement parks, and other interlinked industries, this study will mainly address the following objectives:

- a) To assess the impact of Covid-19 on the aviation sector of Bangladesh.
- b) To investigate how Covid-19 affects the hospitality industry (which includes hotels, restaurants, amusement parks) of Bangladesh.
- c) To recommend recovery strategies to minimize this pandemic's detrimental consequences.

2. Literature Overview

Since tourism is one of the most affected industries by COVID-19, several attempts have already been made to get insights into its impact on travel and tourism sectors in various parts of the world. However, little work has focused on the effects of Covid-19 on the Bangladesh travel and tourism sector. The following table summarizes the recent studies and results-focused on the impact of the Covid-19 travel and tourism sectors of different countries.

Table 2: Summary of Selected Previous studies

Author/Date Method/Context	Topic/Focus	Findings
Skare et al. (2020) Quantitative/ Worldwide	Effects of Covid-19 on the travel and tourism industry "To measure the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the short and long term, both worldwide and on a geographical level" (p. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The travel and tourism sector's contribution to worldwide GDP has decreased. •Employment, as well as investment in the tourism industry, has fallen drastically.

Gursoy and Chi (2020) Quantitative/ USA	The impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on hospitality industry: Study of current scenarios and plan for future study "To generate new knowledge that can provide insight to the industry about how to transform their operations according to newly emerging customers' needs and wants due to COVID-19 pandemic" (p. 529)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •More than 50% of the individuals are not interested in visiting travel destinations though travel restrictions have been eased. •Tourism marketers should concentrate on more research to understand the behavioral aspects of the tourists during this pandemic.
Karim et al. (2020) Qualitative/ Malaysia	Movement Control Order (MCO) as a result of Covid-19 and its effect on the tourism and hospitality industry "To examine the future impact of the tourism and hospitality industry due to restricted movement control order for novel COVID-19" (p. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The aviation sector was among the most harmed in sales as the number of passengers fell by nearly 20%. •Due to the pandemic, almost 10% of the entire staff have lost their Malaysian hotel industry jobs.
Mykhailo and Halyna (2020) Quantitative/ Ukraine	Quarantine impact on the Lviv (Ukraine) tourism sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic "To analyze the sectoral losses of the tourism industry during quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Lviv, a city whose historical center is included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site" (p. 194)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •All the tourism sectors and sub-sectors have faced the most remarkable economic setbacks due to the pandemic. •Mass cancellation of the tour programs has questioned financial stability and the brand reputation of the tour operators.
Bas and Sivaprasad (2020) Qualitative/UK	COVID-19 Pandemic Effects on the travel and tourism sector of the U.K. "To analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the T&T industry and to propose five key recommendations to facilitate in coping with the aftermath of the crisis" (p. 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tourism is the U.K.'s fifth-largest GDP sector, which is most severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. •In the U.K. aviation industry, Passenger numbers fell by 52%, and some airlines planned to minimize jobs.
Hoque et al. (2020) Qualitative/China	Coronavirus (COVID-19) and its effect on China's Tourism Industry. "To measure the impact of the occurrence of coronavirus on the tourism industry in China" (p. 53)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tourism in China is mostly affected because the tourism industry is entirely dependent on people's outgoing trends. •There are substantial losses in the hotel, restaurants, and transport industry due to a customer shortage.
Patel et al. (2020) Qualitative/India	Nobel Corona Virus (Covid-19) impact on India's tourism industry "To measure the effect of coronavirus on Indian and global tourism industry" (p. 782)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Almost 585 international flights from and to India were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic since February 1. •Foreign tourists have decreased 25 to 30%, while hospitality companies have seen bookings in India dropping by 50%
Ranasinghe et al. (2020) Qualitative/ Sri Lanka	Covid-19 pandemic effects and the way ahead for tourism, hotel, and mice sector in Sri Lanka "To discuss the global and local history of the outbreak, the implications of the outbreak and recommendations for quick restoration" (p. 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The economy of Sri Lanka relies heavily on tourism, and its contribution to the GDP growth was 11.4% in 2019. •Due to pandemic, tourism, hotel, and mice industry are facing challenging times as they are interlinked.

Deb and Nafi (2020) Qualitative/ Bangladesh	Covid-19 pandemic impact on Bangladesh Tourism "To discuss the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry in Bangladesh".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inbound and outbound tourism of the country has been severely affected caused by the Covid-19 outbreak • Tour operators are undergoing significant financial losses and job cuts due to the cancellation of hotels' flights and vacancies.
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Apart from the study of Deb and Nafi (2020), there is a general lack of research in Bangladesh's context regarding the impact of Covid-19 on tourism. However, this study (Deb and Nafi, 2020) has not highlighted the effects of the Covid-19 outbreak on Bangladesh's restaurants and amusement parks, even though they are an integral part of the travel and tourism sector. In the face of these research gaps, this study was conducted.

3. Materials and Methods

A descriptive research design was employed for this study, where the secondary data analysis technique was used to collect data from different sources. With the proliferation of available electronic data, the scope for secondary data analysis has amplified (logan, 2019; Carter et al., 2011). In this study, the author adopted 3 step secondary research procedures as suggested by Johnston (2014). The first phase in the secondary research is to construct the research question, and for this study, the research question is: "What are the impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic on the travel and tourism sector of Bangladesh?" The second phase of secondary research is to identify the dataset, which will help the researcher answer the intended research question correctly. A comprehensive literature analysis of the areas of concern for this study was done to find out the appropriate dataset, which includes academic journals, news articles, and websites of different professional bodies like the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Travel Owners Association of Bangladesh (TOAB), etc. The next and final move in this process is to evaluate the secondary dataset. This stage is critical to ensure the reliability and validity of secondary data from external sources (Smith, 2008). To assess the correct match of a dataset to a research question, the following six questions must be considered:

- a) **What was the purpose of the research?** The purpose of the studies considered for secondary data sources should meet the proposed research question's needs. Therefore the related studies aimed at Covid-19 Pandemic's impact on the tourism sector were taken into account to better suit our purpose.
- b) **Who was in charge of gathering the information?** The "who" aspect affects the data's reliability, so the data provider's background is very much necessary. Data was taken from internationally recognized and nationally renowned professional bodies of tourism like UNWTO, IATA, WTTC, PATA, CAAB, TOAB, etc.

- c) **What kind of data has been obtained?** Both the quantitative (ex: UNWTO, PATA statistics) and qualitative (ex: Newspapers, Articles) forms of secondary data were collected, which are relevant for this current study.
- d) **When was the data gathered?** As the Covid-19 pandemic is a new phenomenon and Bangladesh reported its first case in March of 2020, all the data were collected between May 15 and August 20. The data did not get obsolete.
- e) **What methods were used to collect the data?** In assessing the secondary data, researchers should be aware of the methodologies that were adopted by the data providers (Johnston, 2014). Therefore, tourism-affiliated organizations' methods in collecting data regarding Covid-19 impact on tourism were also considered.
- f) **Whether the data is compatible with data from different sources?** In secondary research, it's necessary to evaluate the research findings with other research and check whether there remains any inconsistency (Granderson, 2018). Keeping this in mind, this study's findings were compared with other tasks related to Covid-19 impact on tourism, and the author found consistency in research findings with other studies.

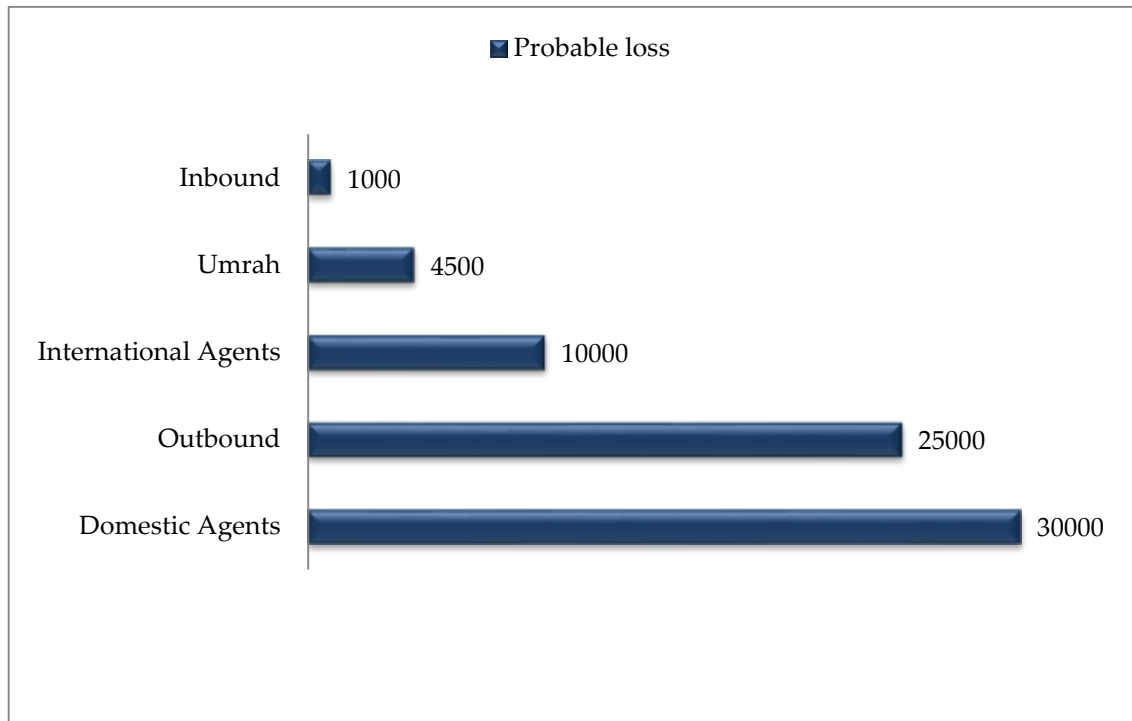
4. Assessment of Covid-19's Effect on Bangladesh Tourism

Bangladesh's travel and tourism sector was considered a possible contributor to its economy. Bangladesh's tourism revenue hit USD 357 million in December 2018, as per the data from the Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC) (Chowdhury, 2020). However, the COVID-19 epidemic has affected this field adversely. If the situation does not change, Bangladesh's travel and tourism sector alone could lose up to USD 710 million this year, predicted by the Tour Operator Association of Bangladesh (TOAB), a 678 tour organizer (Chowdhury, 2020). In addition to this, PATA Bangladesh (2020) has estimated that Bangladesh's total travel and tourism industry would lose about USD 1144 million by June 2020 owing to the COVID 19 pandemic outburst. ("Tourism sector for specific incentive combating COVID 19 situation", 2020, para. 11).

The country's inbound and outbound tourism has been going through a tough time due to the minimization of international flights and suspension of on-arrival visas for all nationalities by the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Hossain, 2020). Besides, domestic tourists are unlikely to travel to keep themselves isolated. Consequently, the Bangladesh Tourism industry is going to experience substantial monetary losses and job cuts. In this regard, PATA Bangladesh (2020) has made a video demonstrating probable loss of income by different Bangladeshi tour operators.

In their report named "Impacts on Bangladesh Tourism and TOAB due to COVID-19", TOAB (2020) has confirmed that tour operators lost near tk 15 billion and they were forced to eliminate 5000 jobs as of April 2020 ("Tourism sector may face Tk 60.00b loss this year", 2020, para. 4). PATA Bangladesh (2020) has reported that more than 0.3 million employees in the tourism industry are presently at risk of losing their jobs (Holy, 2020).

Figure 1: Probable Loss of Income by Tour Operators
(BDT Million, \$1= 84 BDT)

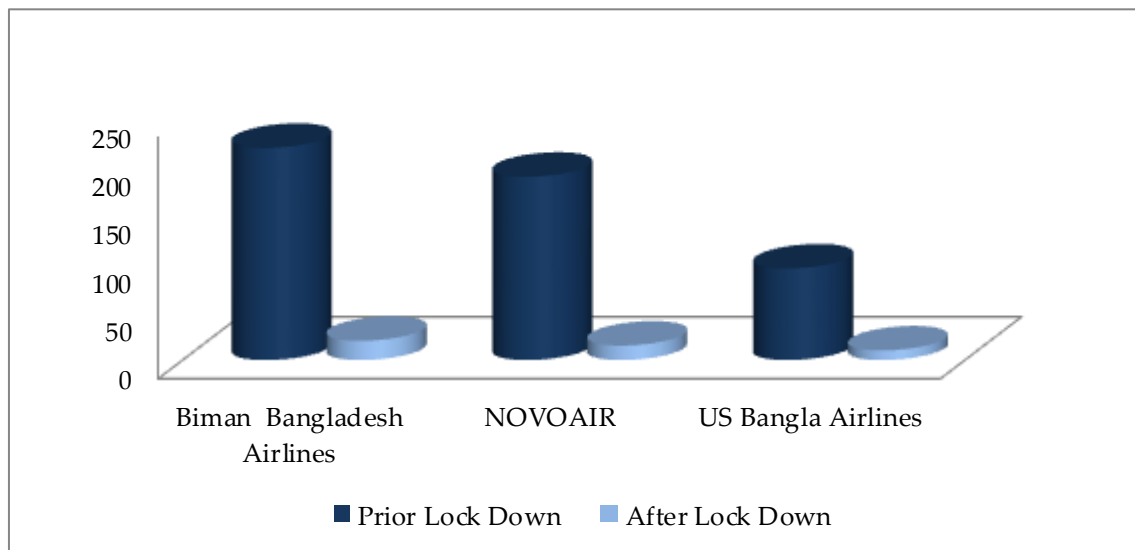


Source: LightCastle Analytics Wing (2020)

4.1. Effect on the aviation sector

The aviation industry of Bangladesh has been able to link the nation in a manner that appeared difficult a couple of years ago, offering a crucial mode of transport and connectivity that has bolstered the region's economic growth. The global travel ban has affected aviation firms directly and placed service providers under intense financial strain during the coronavirus epidemic.

Figure 2: Changes in the number of weekly flights due to Covid-19



Source: DATABD.CO (2020)

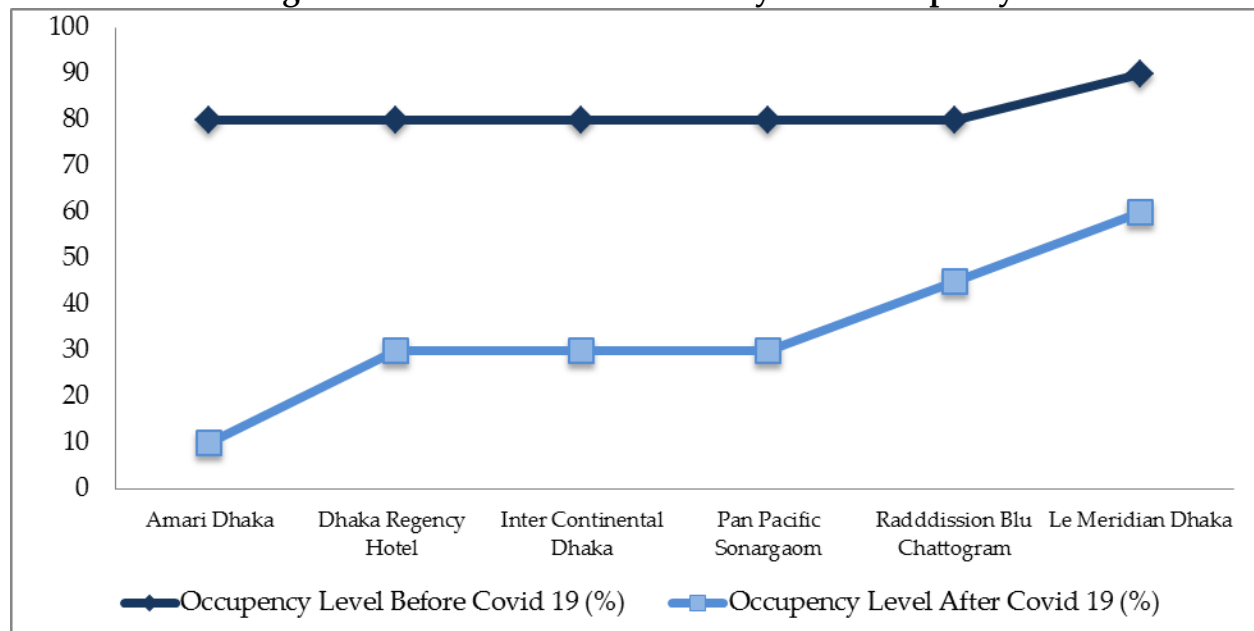
International Air Transport Association (IATA) has reported that a pandemic of coronavirus could reduce the sales of Bangladeshi airline operators by USD 190 million in 2020 (Hasan, 2020). IATA data also suggested that 17,000 people explicitly employed in the airline industry and related businesses are already fearful of losing their employment ("Aviation industry on the brink of collapse," 2020, para. 1). The immediate repercussion of the crisis has affected Bangladesh's local airlines further, as they have smaller balance sheets and less financial capital to deal with the disaster. With almost all flights suspended since the lock-down, the number of flights has fallen sharply. The number of passengers dropped from 25 to 30 percent on domestic routes (Alo, 2020).

By March, Biman Bangladesh Airlines, the flag carrier, announced losses approaching BDT 4 billion. Besides, the airline terminated 698 international and domestic flights within March (Shifat, 2020). US-Bangla, the most significant private local carrier, has slashed international route flights by more than 60%. Therefore, they experienced a net loss of an average of BDT 250-300 million in January and February of 2020 (Shifat, 2020).

4.2. Effect on the hotel sector

Bangladesh's upscale hospitality industry is hit hard by the coronavirus disaster. PATA Bangladesh Chapter (2020) projected that around 1 lakh employees had lost their hospitality sector jobs, and the industry has experienced an enormous loss of 15 billion U.S. dollars up to June 2020. Economic consequences have also impacted the hotel industry due to travel restrictions and flight cancellation. In April, the occupancy rates of luxury hotels fell dramatically. Although hotels usually have seen an 80% occupancy rate, the average current rate has plummeted to 30% (Hasan, 2020).

Figure 3: Covid-19 effects on luxury hotel occupancy



Source: DATABD.CO (2020)

Convention centers also struggle as major national and international events have already been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The country's largest convention center, namely

International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB), has been severely affected as half a dozen international conventions in February were postponed because of a coronavirus outbreak ("Coronavirus bleeds Bangladesh's hospitality industry," 2020, para. 4).

4.3. Effect on the restaurant sector

Since the Covid-19 pandemic mostly caused people to stay locked up, the restaurant business is one of the countries' primary sectors to be affected. The Bangladesh Restaurant Owners' Association estimates that around 60,000 restaurants are located in the country, with about 12 lakh employees (Siddiqui, 2020). Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, contains one-sixth of the total restaurants in Bangladesh, and the business in Dhaka restaurants has fallen by 90 percent due to Covid-19 (Devnath, 2020). Until June 2020, the restaurant industry has suffered enormous losses of USD 4.5 billion, and 1.5 lakh people have become jobless, according to an estimate made by PATA Bangladesh Chapter (2020).

An interesting phenomenon in the restaurant business due to the Covid-19 pandemic is the emergence of the "Cloud Kitchen" concept (Amit, 2020). A cloud kitchen, also known as a ghost kitchen, is essentially a delivery-only restaurant with no physical existence for its clients. It usually works in a commercial and central kitchen and collaborates with third-party service providers to distribute food. The only option for consumers to get their items is to order food through various apps. In Bangladesh, Kludio is regarded as the pioneer in the cloud kitchen industry, which started its journey in 2019. The covid-19 pandemic has increased the need for optimal food packaging and distribution, and because of this, other cloud kitchens cropped up around the country (Amit, 2020).

4.4. Effect on the amusement parks

Regardless of the seasonal business period, the Amusement parks of Bangladesh have incurred severe loss due to Covid-19, as the gardens are closed as per the government's instruction since March 2020. Over the past four and a half months, owners of amusement parks in the country have struggled to cover high operating costs, payments, and bank credit installments, as revenue has sunk to zero (Hasan, 2020). Also, several rides from parks and recreation centers are impaired since the rides have long been closed ("Tourism industry seeks nod for reopening," 2020, para. 3). The country's renowned amusement park, namely the Fantasy Kingdom, a concern of concord entertainment, has lost approximately Tk 1 million per day since March 20 due to ticket and food sales (Hasan, 2020).

The Foy's Lake complex, located in the port city of Chattogram, is now facing difficulties to bear the operating cost of 4.8 million takas per month, including monthly staff pay (Chowdhury, 2020). Besides, employees and staff members of Dream Holiday Park in Narsingdi are getting 50 percent of their salaries since March due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Hasan, 2020). In addition to amusement parks, all the country's public places and parks have been publicly unavailable from the beginning of the outbreak. As a result, it is exceedingly difficult for older people in the country to preserve their health since they have no room for physical activity ("Parks must reopen with Covid-19 health guideline in place", 2020, para. 2).

5. Recovery strategies for the travel and tourism sector

5.1. Proper implementation of the incentive package declared by the Government: To boost the tourism industry, the government of Bangladesh announced that they would be providing loans at 9% interest to the tourism stakeholders in which the government would pay 4.5% interest and the business will bear the remaining 4.5% ("Covid-19 to cost B.D.'s tourism sector Tk40bn: UNWTO," 2020, para. 11). The tourism authority should make sure that the government's opportunities are adequately used transparently.

5.2. Compliance with health and hygiene protocols to resume tourism amid Covid-19: Bangladesh Tourism Board, under the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, has prepared an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) to be followed by all tourism collaborators. Guidelines include temperature monitoring, physical disassociation, better cleaning efficiency, and hygiene materials for healthy air travel and hotel facilities, etc.

5.3. Digitization of tourism services: Tourism marketers should concentrate more on digitizing tourism services and reduce the number of touch points that involve automated check-in and departure at hotels, contactless flight boarding, etc. Besides ensuring safety and security, digitization will enable the marketers to provide a smooth travel experience to the tourists.

5.4. Stimulation of demand through continuous marketing activities: In this troubling time, tourism advertisers should play a key role in forming a favorable attitude towards travel destinations by promoting the execution of health and hygiene protocols in all domestic tourist destinations via different communication channels and social media platforms. Moreover, travelers should be inspired to explore by claiming that vacation destinations are fresher than they have ever been.

5.5. Engagement and participation of the local community: To promote and restart a destination from the outset, it is crucial to engage the local community in all possible activities. Rebuilding a destination as a brand mostly depends on maintaining cohesiveness with local citizens and communities.

5.6. More emphasis on domestic tourism: Domestic tourism would be crucial in reviving the tourism sector since travel restrictions, and coronavirus fear may delay international tourism. So tourism marketers should concentrate on regional tourism by promoting short distance or one day trip as people will likely to travel destinations, which is close to their home during this pandemic.

5.7. Conduct more research to understand tourists' travel behavior amid Covid-19: The potential travelers' behavioral patterns will not be the same during and post COVID-19. So tourism-oriented research should be conducted more to understand the behavior of travelers. These studies will also enable tourism marketers to find new market segments or new segments in the existing market.

5.8. Establishment of travel bubbles with neighboring countries: Bangladesh Government may take initiatives to establish travel bubbles or travel corridors with neighboring countries that have shown remarkable results in minimizing and battling the pandemic within their territories like Sri Lanka. This will enable both countries' travelers to travel easily within the corridor without quarantine on arrival.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

This study has examined the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Bangladesh's travel and tourism sector based on the secondary data analysis. It is one of the few studies from the Bangladeshi perspective that have examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on all the possible sectors and sub-sectors of tourism.

Nonetheless, this research has some drawbacks. Firstly, no primary data has been collected for the study. So the scope of empirical work is apparent in this field for future researchers. Secondly, the behavioral aspect of Bangladeshi tourists is not considered in this research. Therefore, future studies should try to predict Bangladeshi tourists' intention to visit travel destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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