

COVID-19 Safety and Preventive Measures and Social Norms: How It Shaped Airlines Passengers' Trustworthiness

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Abstract

In the era of COVID-19, travel decisions are influenced by social norms, which is a deciding factor between one's perception of risk and their travel intention. Moreover, serious safety measures, such as increased aircraft cleaning, social distancing during the boarding process, and the use of face masks are critical factors that influence passengers' trust in air travel. This study examines the direct effects of safety and preventive measures and social norms on passengers' trust in travelling with airlines. A total of 210 responses were obtained online. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the study hypotheses. Based on the result, social norms are the most influential predictors of passengers' trust, followed by safety and preventive measures. Furthermore, the study suggests that media coverage and social circle influence can be critical elements in transferring information to passengers, influencing their decision, and instill trust to travel during the pandemic. Notably, apart from exercising social norms, the airline industry also needs to focus on safety and preventive measures consisting of staff safety practices towards the passenger and new standard operating procedures (SOPs) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study findings assist the airline industry in understanding passengers' post-pandemic travelling behaviour. Notably, the implementation of health security protocols at airports, supported by the provision of continuous safety information, is indeed an important feature for passengers.

Key Words: COVID-19; travel influence; safety and preventive measures; social norms; trustworthiness; Airlines

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1. Introduction

Air travel has been made possible owing to the diverse range of airlines and commercial flying companies that transport people and goods. Air travel has gained tremendous popularity as it enables passengers to reserve seats on aircraft and travel between destinations. As a result, the airline industry, which sells flights and provides the service to transport people from point A to point B, has inevitably had a significant impact on tourism as they play a critical role in transporting people around the world.

When liberalisation policies were implemented in the mid-1970s, the airline industry proliferated as a result of the significant increase in passenger demand. The airline industry expanded further with the entry of low-cost airlines (Tan, 2016), which offered lower fares, increased flight frequencies, route diversification, and improved safety performance, leading to increased competition between airlines, which benefits the passengers.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the global airline industry. According to the International Civil Aviation Organization (2021), the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the airline industry is without precedent. This has resulted in many countries' public and private airline industries temporarily or permanently discontinuing their operations (Polat et al., 2021). Besides, travel bans, quarantine restrictions, and lockdown measures in early 2020 led to minimal air services demand (Graham et al., 2020, Hanafiah et al., 2021). As a result, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) (2020) reported that travel demand fell by 65.9 percent in 2020 compared to the previous year. This is the largest ever decline in the history of aviation. In addition, airline passengers' reserve bookings have decreased gradually since late December 2020, making airlines strapped for cash flow (UNWTO, 2020). As airline profits and revenue are heavily reliant on passengers, airlines must prioritise the re-establishment of their financial standing following the pandemic. Each flight needs to have an adequate number of passengers (Lamb et al., 2020) to ensure the airline's survival. Hence, in order to earn travellers' confidence, ensuring the safety and protection of passengers from contracting COVID-19 during the flight has become a top priority.

In response, the International Civil Aviation Organization (2021) outlined a strategic plan to reopen high-volume domestic and international air travel while safeguarding passengers from COVID-19 transmission. The plan establishes a comprehensive set of health safety measures to prepare airlines to operate during and after a pandemic. However, implementing new public health measures in the airline industry has created new operational challenges, including employee availability, risk management, and the industry's future performance issues (Castillo et al., 2020). Enhanced safety measures, such as increased aircraft cleaning, social distancing during the boarding process, and the use of face masks are the new SOPs. Berry et al. (2020) stated that air travel transportation had taken a variety of physical safety measures to minimise staff contact with passengers, ensure a safe travel process, and rebuild passenger trust.

As a result, a strong emphasis has been placed, among others, on the health of cabin crew members, as they are a critical factor in ensuring passenger safety and gaining public confidence (Grout & Leggat, 2021). However, there is no guarantee that COVID-19 will not be transmitted from infected airline staff or passengers, as anyone can become carriers without showing any symptoms of the COVID-19 virus (Enitan et al., 2020). Hence, it is critical for passengers to strictly adhere to the airlines' and destination's recommended safety protocols. The staff must follow stringent safety procedures and preventive SOPs to minimise the risk of virus infection during the flight. As airlines are service-oriented organisations, balancing these requirements presents a significant operational challenge. However, there are reports on active cabin crew members afflicted with the virus, which raises questions about the safety of the passengers and the crew themselves (Grout & Leggat, 2021).

One of the strongest influences on travel decisions is social norms, which often plays the deciding factor between one's perception of risk and travel intentions (Meng et al., 2021). Additionally, from an airline perspective, passenger choices are also influenced by their immediate and distant environments, such as the media and public opinion (Neuburger & Egger, 2020; Polat et al., 2021). The new media plays a vital role in disseminating knowledge in a digitalised society and has since emerged as an important tool to transfer information to society. Not only that, the role of the media has a considerable impact on the reputation of a destination and the trust of people to travel (Chemli et al., 2020). According to Matiza (2020), COVID-19 health risk perception lead to increased information seeking on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.). This is because people are looking for more information to support their travel decisions. However, it is possible that unfounded and biased media coverage will put off

people from flying, and they may consequently avoid the journey altogether. Besides, it may cause some passengers to distrust the travel experience by air, even if it does not apply to the majority of people (Polat et al., 2021).

Along with this, public opinion or social circles also play an important role in influencing potential passengers' intentions to travel by air. In line with the concept of social norms, passengers can choose and evaluate the consequences of their decision to travel by air during the COVID-19 pandemic by seeking advice from opinion leaders who are members of the referral community (Polat et al., 2021). These social circles: reference groups, including family, friends and colleagues, could influence purchasing decisions. However, they may negatively affect current and prospective passengers' intentions and perceptions of air travel without sufficient information.

Given the evidence and arguments, it is clear that numerous factors influence passengers' confidence in air travel. Currently, there is a critical gap in how passengers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic choose and trust to travel with airlines. Thus, this study examines the effect of travel-related factors such as safety and preventive measures and social norms on airlines passengers' trust. The results of this study would assist policymakers in better understanding passengers' travel preferences, particularly those from Malaysia, during the COVID-19 pandemic and assist the airline industry in improving the quality of travel influences to attract and build confidence among current prospective passengers. Due to limited studies focusing on airlines features in the Malaysian context, this study will also contribute to the current literature on passengers' trustworthiness to travel with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study contributes to the limited understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the travel and tour industry in general.

2. Literature review

Since the 1960s, various researchers have proposed various theories and models for understanding what factors influence tourists' behaviour (Lin & Zhang, 2021; Krbova, 2016; Huderek-Glapska, 2010). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) explains individuals' intentions to perform behaviours according to three attitude determinants on why a person performs or does not perform a particular behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). The first determinant is known as "attitude towards the behaviour" which include a person's judgment and feeling followed by "subjective norm" driven by social pressure or outside influences. The last determinant is perceived "behavioural control", a concept of self-efficacy related to an individual's judgment and ability to perform an action associated with the prospective situation to achieve a goal. In this study context, social norms are determined by an individual's motivation to behave with others' views and their perception of social pressure from others to act in a certain way. According to Polat et al. (2021), social norms are recognised on a psychological level and have evolved into collective norms that results from individual systemic processes to fill the entire social structure. Social norms also describe how individuals' behaviours are influenced by the perceptions of important reference groups (e.g., friends, family, colleagues etc.) (Soliman, 2019). The reference group influences travellers' decision to travel by providing information to the decision-maker that may or may not be used depending on the decision-understanding of the information's usefulness as well as the reputation of the reference group members.

Apart from TPB, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one of the most influential social sciences theories in understanding travel motivation. When engaging in tourism activities such as sightseeing and visiting a destination, all aspects of conscious and unconscious needs like novelty, escape/relaxation, relationship building (Hwang et al., 2020), safety, love, and self-actualisation are considered to be fulfilled and satisfied. However, in the context of crises such as a disease outbreak, Currie (2020) further illustrated that safety and security are the most crucial factors in determining a travel destination. In the tourism industry, an immediate crisis will result in the suspension of operations due to concerns over tourists'

safety, where stricter safety and security procedures will then be implemented to minimise risk and build trust. The perception of safety can be seen as a multidimensional construct; its dimensions can vary from one destination to another and is fundamentally unique to the situation (Samdin et al., 2021).

Since tourism is an intangible service that differs according to the situation, risk plays an important role in influencing tourist behaviour. It is essential to acknowledge and completely understand the motivations that influence tourists' travel behaviour, as they directly impact their travel decisions. Tourist behaviour during and after their trip is the outcome of a continuous relationship that can influence certain environmental and personal variables. The importance of travel influence is designated based on tourists' situations and responses on both sides. Abdullah et al. (2020) concluded that infection-related factors such as wearing face masks, maintaining social distance, practising hygiene, ensuring safety, and addressing infection concerns are vital under pandemic conditions. Factors that had once influenced tourists in the time before COVID-19, such as travel time savings, comfort, and cost, have become less significant during the pandemic.

Matiza (2020) stated that the real-time disease situation reported by the official media significantly impacts tourist transportation decision-making. In the airline industry context, social norm factors that focus on media coverage and public opinion have become important elements in transferring information to passengers (Polat et al., 2021). As a result of fear of infection and perceived risk of COVID-19, these factors impact airline travel behaviour, with their significance depending on the demographic characteristics of the tourists (Abdullah et al., 2020). In addition, the safety and preventive measure aspect is a priority for passengers' consideration of the airline's decisions and trust. Based on the above arguments, travel influences such as social norms and safety and preventive measures are major factors in determining whether passengers will want to travel by airline during COVID-19.

Furthermore, social norms are expected to influence current and potential passengers' willingness to travel by air during the COVID-19 pandemic (Polat et al., 2021). The decision to avoid or cancel a flight trip during the pandemic is closely linked to media coverage reporting an increased rate of cases, deaths, and other information focusing on COVID-19 (Neuburger & Egger, 2020) in addition to reference group opinion. Hence, airline industry practices and procedures play a vital role in generating passenger trust in air travel.

2.1 Hypothesis Development

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an unprecedented crisis in the tourism industry, given the immediate and huge impact on the aviation sector. Consequently, COVID-19 safety and preventive measures are implemented to support the airline industry's health safety protocol and best practices on how airports and airlines conduct their passengers (European Union Safety Agency, 2020). This implementation aims to ensure the health and safety of staff and passengers while maintaining business continuity to transform and restructure the airline industry into a safer and more sustainable business (Dube et al., 2021). In order to advertise safe and sustainable airline transportation during the COVID-19 pandemic, a closely coordinated international approach requires safety practices for the airline staff to align to recognised preventive health measures (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2021). This includes providing infectious disease detectors, sanitisers, and other equipment to each airline. In addition, proper SOPs for airports are being developed and implemented to identify passengers who have been vaccinated before flying. Moreover, airports also have thermal screenings that use artificial intelligence to detect whether the passengers are wearing a face mask or not.

Generally, when people experience threats amidst a social crisis, they are more likely to rely on online media (television, newspapers, radio, etc.) and public opinion (Kuc-Czarnecka, 2020; Parady et al., 2020). These are known as social norms that can determine a person's motivation to behave based on other people's views and perceptions of social pressure to act in a certain way. Although there are opportunities to obtain information from various sources, the public generally trusts and considers the

information to be reliable whenever it originates from the media. The media has played an essential role in disseminating information and gaining public trust amid the pandemic. This covers traditional media (television, radio and newspapers) and social media (new media) as it is able to create awareness about the disease, healthcare, safety procedures, and updates related to the crisis. Barua et al. (2020) further added that the media effect on the issues surrounding the crisis is linked to non-urgent risks and protective behaviours. This includes social media platforms and people's opinions as a medium to generate information that provides emotional responses (Lin et al., 2016). In the tourism industry, under critical situations, tourists rely heavily on media exposure to obtain pertinent information and build trust, which influences their selection and decision on holiday destinations both directly and indirectly.

Therefore, the perception of the risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic may influence travel behaviour and decisions. Neuburger and Egger (2020) stated that risk perception during the COVID-19 pandemic is influenced by external factors such as the media and other information sources from groups of people. This is because social norms are recognised at the psychological level, which forms collective norms as a result of individual systemic processes to fill the entire social structure in decision making (Polat et al., 2021). Other than that, social norms describe how individuals' behaviours are influenced by the perceptions of important reference groups such as friends, family, colleagues, and others (Soliman, 2019). Social norms refer to the assumption that a particular individual or group of individuals will accept and encourage certain behaviours that can influence beliefs. Therefore, for individuals who feel connected, the social norms will establish and significantly impact their personal decisions and behaviour.

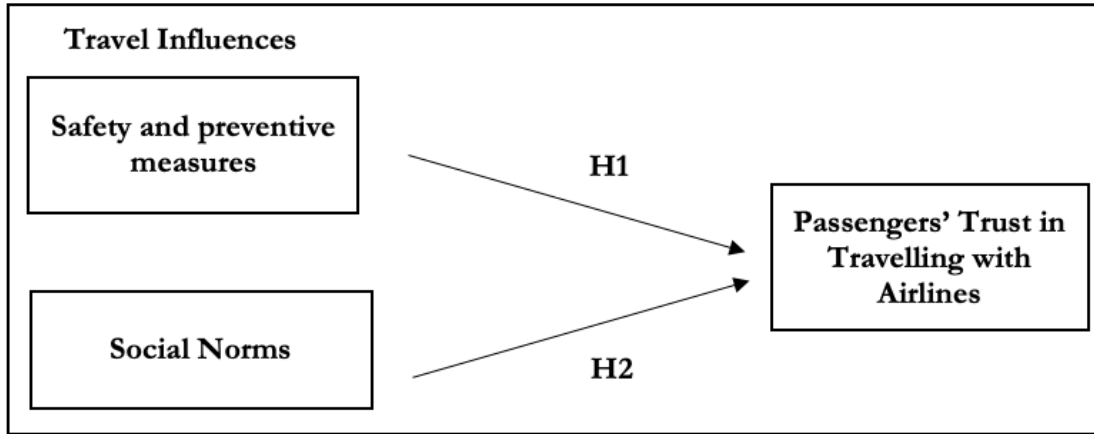
During the pandemic, the implementation of social distancing, disinfection of public areas, body temperature screening, and the requirement to wear face masks are part of the safety and preventive measures designed to increase tourist trust. These enforcements are part of the initiative to control and limit the spread of the virus and reduce anxiety among tourists, which will increase their trust to travel since they are more certain that their safety will be ensured (Samdin et al., 2021). For the airlines industry, the importance of safety preventative measures in limiting the spread of infectious diseases in airlines may lower the risk of passengers contracting the virus (Polat et al., 2021 & Berry et al., 2020). Furthermore, passengers are more willing to travel with airlines during the pandemic if their preferred airlines put more effort into strengthening and implementing safety and preventive measures for the safety and health of the aircraft. This is because passengers who have a high level of trust are able to tolerate complexity in a range of circumstances and situations. For example, the more informed passengers are about their flight, the more trust they have in the airline or airport (Lamb et al., 2020; Taufik & Hanafiah, 2019).

Overall, during the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, safety and preventive measures and social norms influenced passengers' trust in travelling with airlines (Polat et al., 2021). The information provided by airlines provides an opportunity for passengers to make decisions and take control of their own safety and flight experience for those willing to travel during the pandemic. In addition, the concept of passengers' behavioural patterns as a reference group can help lower the trait of fear, which could thus increase their trustworthiness in travelling with airlines during this pandemic (Parady et al., 2020). According to Neuburger and Egger (2020), the media distributes information about the global health crisis to motivate tourists' risk perceptions. This can be seen, for example, in the television news as the general media coverage influences related to COVID-19 may increase or decrease tourists' trustworthiness in travelling with airlines during this era. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed in the context of travel influence (safety and preventive measures and social norms) and passengers' trustworthiness.

- H₁: *There is a significant relationship between safety and preventive measures and passengers' trust in travelling with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- H₂: *There is a significant relationship between social norms and passengers' trust in travelling with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

The study framework (Figure 1) was developed based on the literature review and hypotheses propositions. There are two independent variables (safety and preventive measures and social norms), and passengers’ trust in airlines is the dependent variable.

Figure 1. Study framework



Source: adapted from Chemli et al. (2020) and Castillo et al. (2020)

3. Methods

This study proposes a causal relationship between travel influences towards passengers’ trust to travel with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the quantitative approach and survey questionnaire was utilised for data collection. The questionnaire’s design was developed based on previous studies, and basic modifications were done to fit the study’s purpose.

Table 1. Survey Instruments

Variables	Sources	Measurement
Safety and preventive measures (8 items)	Berry et al. (2020) Graham et al. (2020) Song and Choi (2020)	Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)
Social Norms (7 items)	Chemli et al. (2020) Song and Choi (2020)	
Passengers’ Trust in Travelling with Airlines (8 items)	Berry et al. (2020) Graham et al. (2020) Chemli et al. (2020) Song and Choi (2020)	

Source: own elaboration

A total of twenty-three items have been paraphrased, where the items used simple words and language to reduce any potential ambiguities. The instruments were adapted from previous studies (Berry et al., 2020; Chemli et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2020; Song & Choi, 2020). The adapted instruments were pilot tested to confirm their reliability within the new research settings, as Hair et al. (2016) proposed. Based on Hertzog’s (2008) suggestions, 25 respondents participated in a pilot study. The Cronbach’s

alpha for safety and preventive measures (0.889), social norms (0.902), and passenger trust (0.842) confirmed the instruments we valid and reliable (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. Reliability Test Result

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Items	Reliability Test
Safety and Preventive Measures	.889	8	Very Good (Acceptable)
Social Norms	.902	7	Excellent (Acceptable)
Passenger Trust in Travelling with Airlines	.842	8	Very Good (Acceptable)

Source: own elaboration

The research data was collected through an online survey using the Google Form platform. The survey link and QR code were distributed through social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram) from June 2021 until November 2021. The survey was conducted with the following procedure to reach the right respondents. The potential respondents were identified through the purposive sampling approach. The study respondents were 18 years old and above with experience using the airlines' services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers distributed the survey link using the snowball technique, in which respondents who had taken part in the study would recommend the survey to other contacts who had similar experiences.

A total of 210 completed questionnaires were successfully collected. The data was then keyed in, coded and analysed using the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) software. Descriptive analysis was conducted to report the respondents' demographic profile, followed by multiple linear regression analysis for hypotheses testing. Prior to the empirical data analysis, the assumptions of multiple linear regression were tested via the application of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and the Levene tests on the standardised residuals. The findings verify the assumption that normality and homoscedasticity are met.

Next, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was utilised to confirm the measurement validity. According to Hair et al. (2014), several assumptions need to be considered when dealing with the EFA. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy values must exceed .50. The minimum requirement of factor loading is .05, and lastly, Bartlett's test of sphericity should be significant at .05. The underlying relationships between items were statistically tested via the Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The PCA was executed with varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalisation on 22 items. Items with factor loadings below 0.5 and communalities of less than 0.5 were removed.

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) Result

Code/items	Factor loading		
	1	2	3
Safety and Preventive Measures		AVE	CR
		0.480	0.879
PM2	.793		
PM3	.789		
PM6	.772		
PM1	.665		
PM7	.664		
PM5	.639		
PM8	.612		

PM4	.572		
Social Norms		AVE	CR
		0.567	0.901
SN3		.832	
SN4		.817	
SN6		.766	
SN5		.740	
SN2		.724	
SN1		.719	
SN7		.661	
Passenger Trust in Travelling with Airlines		AVE	CR
		0.517	0.881
PT2			.794
PT6			.778
PT3			.768
PT1			.719
PT7			.700
PT5			.687
PT4			.560
KMO=.818 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity=1818.72*** Total Variance explained=64.10%			

Source: own elaboration

Table 3 reported the EFA results. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy value was 0.818, indicating that the items were interrelated and shared a common factor. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also significant (Chi-Square=1818.72; $p < .001$), indicating the correlation matrix's significance, and thus factor analysis was undertaken as appropriate.

4. Results

4.1 Respondents Profile

The majority of the respondents were female ($n = 122$, 58%), and the remaining were male ($n = 88$, 42%). Most of them were between 31 to 40 years old ($n = 124$, 59%), undergraduate degree holders ($n = 156$, 55%) and ($n = 132$, 63%) were married. The majority were working in private or government sectors and self-employed ($n = 155$, 74%), were students ($n = 36$, 17%), and were retired and unemployed ($n = 19$, 9%).

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

Table 4 reports the descriptive analysis for each of the study constructs. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 reflecting "strongly disagree" to 5, which depicts "strongly agree".

Table 4. Mean Score and Standard Deviation

Coding	Items	N	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
<i>Safety and preventive measures</i>				
PM1	This airline requires all staff to wear a face mask during the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	4.71	0.478

PM2	Airlines in Malaysia require their staff to comply with the new safety service adjustment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	4.55	0.626
PM3	The staff thoroughly cleans the high-risk surfaces of the aircraft.	210	4.45	0.687
PM4	The airline limits the interaction between staff and passengers.	210	4.32	0.695
PM5	The airline practises social distancing throughout the process of boarding.	210	4.36	0.695
PM6	The airline provides hand sanitiser at each boarding gate and it is easy to access.	210	4.51	0.689
PM7	I get a temperature check when travelling with the airline.	210	4.71	0.478
PM8	The airline always reminds me about the safety and preventive measures of COVID-19 during the process of boarding.	210	4.49	0.541
<i>Social Norms</i>				
SN1	The media coverage has reduced my fear during the COVID-19 pandemic to travel with the airline.	210	3.91	0.866
SN2	The media is an accurate and reliable source of information related to airlines and COVID-19.	210	4.09	0.780
SN3	The media's information on the pandemic increased my confidence to travel with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	4.03	0.731
SN4	When I travel with airlines, it is based on how the media reports.	210	4.32	0.980
SN5	There is a lot of awareness about COVID-19 reported by the media when travelling with the airline.	210	3.78	0.807
SN6	I will travel with the airlines based on other people's perceptions.	210	3.97	0.904
SN7	The influence of other people's opinions may affect my decision to travel with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	3.79	1.028
<i>Passenger Trust in Travelling with Airlines</i>				
PT1	The requirement of staff to wear a mask influenced me to travel with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	4.63	0.597
PT2	Airlines staff that limit interactions between passengers makes me feel safe to fly with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	4.50	0.659
PT3	Airlines' social distancing practices make me feel confident to travel with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	4.55	0.557
PT4	The reminder about the safety and preventive measures of COVID-19 during the process of	210	4.43	0.573

	boarding makes me feel confident to board with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.			
PT5	Media awareness about COVID-19 has reduced my anxiety to travel with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	4.06	0.827
PT6	Media coverage on airlines' safety practices due to COVID-19 makes me want to take a risk to travel with airlines	210	3.80	1.064
PT7	My family and friend's opinions give me an assurance feeling to travel with the airlines in this situation.	210	3.68	1.091
PT8	Other people's perceptions influenced my willingness to travel with the airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.	210	3.73	1.134

Source: own elaboration

The respondents' responses on the safety and preventive measures implemented by airlines strongly agreed that the airline required all staff to wear a face mask during operations ($M=4.71$, $SD=0.478$). They also claimed that airlines in Malaysia require their staff to comply with the new safety service adjustment due to the pandemic ($M=4.55$, $SD=0.626$). They also agreed that the airline staff thoroughly cleans the aircraft's high-risk surfaces ($M=4.45$, $SD=0.687$) and limits the interaction between the staff and passengers during operations ($M=4.32$, $SD=0.695$). Regarding social norms' information and output, most respondents claimed that the media is an accurate and reliable source of information for updates and information on airlines and COVID-19 ($M=4.09$, $SD=0.780$). They also agreed that the media's information on the current status of the pandemic increased their confidence to travel with airlines ($M=4.03$, $SD=0.731$). In terms of passenger trustworthiness, most respondents agreed that the requirement of staff to wear a mask influenced them to travel with airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic ($M=4.63$, $SD=0.597$). Meanwhile, they also agreed that the airlines' staff limiting interaction between passengers made them feel safe to fly with airlines during the pandemic ($M=4.50$, $SD=0.659$) and the implementation of social distancing practices ($M=4.55$, $SD=0.557$). In addition, the reminder about safety and preventive measures of COVID-19 made them feel confident to fly ($M=4.43$, $SD=0.573$).

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

The study hypotheses were tested using multiple linear regression analysis. It reports the linear relationship between the explanatory (independent) variables and the response (dependent) variable. Table 5 reports the analysis outputs.

Table 5. Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Beta (β)	T-statistics	P-value	R ²	Results
H ₁ : Safety and preventive measures > Passengers' Trust	.333*	5.017	.0001	.640	Accepted
H ₂ : Social Norms > Passengers' Trust	.606*	9.123	.0001		Accepted

* $p < 0.001$ ** $p < 0.05$

Source: own elaboration

The multiple regression analysis reports that preventive measures and social norms contributed 64% of the variance of passengers' trust to travel with the airline during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both independent variables can reliably predict passengers' trust to travel with the airline. The first hypothesis revealed that airlines' safety and preventive measures positively influenced passengers' trust in airlines. The regression beta coefficient of the safety and preventive measures showed a positive and significant value ($\beta=.333^*$). This indicates that airlines' safety and preventive measures positively and significantly influenced passengers' trust in airlines during COVID-19. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H_1) is supported.

This result is supported by Song and Choi (2020) as the level of safety, and preventive measures of COVID-19 at airlines had a fairly significant influence on the passengers to continue travelling with airlines during this era. Moreover, results from other studies in the Middle East stated that the most significant aspects that might influence visitors' decisions when choosing a trip were strong infectious disease measures and the presence of a competent healthcare and safety system (Ivanova et al., 2020; Kourgiantakis et al., 2020; Hassan & Salem, 2021). However, while all airlines require passengers to wear masks during the flight, there are significant differences in the measures taken prior to and during the flight. Passengers need to keep their hands clean and keep their bodies apart from each other from when they enter the airport until they leave, and they must wear continuous face coverings to keep COVID-19 from spreading (Bielecki et al., 2021).

The second hypothesis proposed that the social norms information and output positively and significantly influence passengers' trust to travel with the airline during the COVID-19 pandemic. The social norms of regression beta coefficient reported a positive and significant value ($\beta=.606^*$). This indicates that social norms positively and significantly influenced passengers' trust. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H_2) is supported. This is supported by Song and Choi (2020), who claimed that positive changes in the social influence among passengers are expected to boost air travel demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Chemli et al. (2020) stated that media coverage greatly impacts people's awareness to travel during a health crisis. Polat et al. (2021) further clarified that social norms benefit travel intention by lowering risk perception. Thus, airline management must operate the mass media and social media platforms efficiently in the COVID-19 era, particularly in the provision of customised services related to security updates. This will indirectly stimulate their personal moral obligation by increasing positive emotions and reducing negative perceptions associated with the travel safety risks associated with airlines. This is because public perceptions of health risks are likely to be influenced by health crises, leading to changes in decision-making and behaviour, which may be partly explained by the sensational nature of crises reported by the media and others (Lu & Atadil, 2021).

The path analysis confirms that social norms are much more significant predictors of trust than preventive measures, demonstrating that accommodating social norms is more important than focusing on preventive measures. The finding is supported by research from Castillo et al. (2020), Song and Choi (2020), and Chemli et al. (2020), who stated that passengers prefer airlines to provide more information and media coverage on the COVID-19 safety practice. This is because passengers perceived that the information provided from various resources such as media coverage or other people's influences could assist them in avoiding and managing infection risks while travelling with airlines during the pandemic (Holland et al., 2021). Notably, the online platforms in the hospitality sector are crucial during the pandemic (Kostynets et al., 2021). This is because tourists share their travel experiences and knowledge with prospective tourists, and this word-of-mouth communication impacts travel decisions (Göker & Ayar, 2020).

5. Discussion and Implication

This study offers several academic and practical implications. First, in the theoretical aspect, this study provides valuable knowledge to the current literature and academic material on travel influences, specifically how they affect passengers' trust to travel with airlines during the pandemic. Meanwhile, in practical aspects, it can help the airline industry understand and strengthen the preferences of passengers' travel influences to travel with the airlines in the future. Social norms are a strong predictor of passenger's trust during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, media coverage and social circle influence can be critical components in disseminating information to passengers, influencing their decision, and instilling trust in airlines during a pandemic. External effects like the media, other information sources, influence organisations, or public opinion impact passengers' risk perceptions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Neuburger & Egger, 2020). This was also demonstrated by Chemli et al. (2020), who indicated that information received through media coverage had become a critical instrument in influencing passengers. The media has a substantial impact on increasing the public's awareness of the risks associated with travelling.

In this context, we may state clearly that the media and other information sources have the credibility and weight that airlines companies can use to influence a traveller's decision. Furthermore, airlines may also utilise their websites to continually update and publish new information about COVID-19, provide an online feedback form, a dedicated helpdesk, or a chatbot, which would ultimately better prepare passengers who wish to travel with their flights. According to Meng et al. (2021), travellers' information-seeking behaviour via social interaction will improve their awareness of the COVID-19 risk and desire to travel during the pandemic.

Apart from social norms, the airline industry also needs to focus on safety and preventive measures. Numerous safety precautions exist, including airline staff safety control measures, requiring passengers to wear face masks, restricting passenger interaction and practising social distancing, providing sanitiser and temperature checks, and reminding passengers about safety precautions. These measures help reduce the spread of disease and increase passengers' positive perceptions of air travel. Further, in addition to adhering to fundamental safety protocols, airlines should monitor compliance and be adaptable to changing security risk management requirements. They should also adopt enhanced methods and technologies applicable to international aviation and public health requirements, standards, and procedures to promote confidence among their passengers. Thus, it can be concluded that airlines' preventive measures can help increase passengers' positive perceptions of travel during the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with Wittmer and Wegelin (2017), where passenger acceptance is measured by an airline's responsibilities and safety environment.

The TPB (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000) exhibited a reasonable fit and explained passengers' trust in travelling with airlines during the pandemic. Theoretically, this study identified the ability of other people and safety and preventive measures to influence decisions to travel with the airlines. Subjective norms that amount to a referral group (e.g., family, friends, acquaintances, and doctors) and online platforms significantly strengthened the intention to travel with airlines. While the empirical data obtained in this study fits the TPB model, the model mainly focuses on individual decisions made by medical tourists. As this study demonstrated, decision-making was significantly more complex and involved networks of individuals in different places. For example, safety and preventive measures are implemented by airlines to increase the trustworthiness of passengers. This is supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs as safety is part of the consideration in influencing travel decisions, especially in crisis conditions (Samdin et al., 2021). Hence, both travel destinations and marketers need to focus on these variables in their marketing plans. The prediction of travel behaviour, safety, and knowledge of travel motivation all play important roles in creating demand and assisting travellers in their decision-making (Antošová et al. 2019). This will foster familiarity and security among travellers, significantly impacting the intention to travel (Soliman, 2019; Bianchi et al., 2017; Chen & Lin, 2012). As travellers become more familiar with the destination's regulations, they become more confident in their decision, reduce risk perceptions and increase their sense of security.

As a result of the preceding discussion, the outcome of this research is expected to aid and assist the airline industry in understanding passenger preferences better, allowing them to communicate effectively and practise consistent health measures in the future as travel and passenger volume continues to grow. A risk-based approach should be taken, and preventive measures should be adjusted following the situation or risk level while maintaining consistency and promoting public confidence through transparency, enabling a consistent and predictable travel experience (safe and secure). Novák Sedláčková et al. (2019) stated that airports could participate in public consultations prior to Aviation Guidelines' adoption at the national level. This includes imposing stringent safety and security procedures on the tourism sector, and any changes must first be approved by the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Air Transport Association (IATA). In addition, the airlines could very well adhere to the same safety procedures and processes, ensuring a higher level of confidence among travellers. Once travel restrictions are lifted, tourists will travel to sites and destinations where they feel safe, regardless of their perceived unwillingness to travel (Ivanova et al., 2020). Therefore, tourism destinations must establish clear safety measures and utilise social media to improve passengers' information on their rights, particularly during periods of travel disruption. This also includes the conduct of independent audits to ensure that airlines adhere to the established safety protocol. Besides that, for technical considerations, airlines could implement and calibrate their international travel-related measures to consider the country's unique epidemiological and socioeconomic contexts and health system to ensure that tourists are proportionate to their health risks.

Additionally, airlines could establish the flexibility of passengers' rights to travel for legislative purposes, given the uncertainty surrounding travel conditions and health safety. There are concerns that the lack of flexibility could harm a destination's tourism value since the success of a destination is determined by its capacity to integrate demand-side value creation and supply-side resources (Fernando, 2020). This is supported by another study conducted by Vatankhah et al. (2019) in the Middle East, which found that the flexibility of flights had varying effects on prospective consumers based on their socio-demographic status and travel behaviour. This should boost tourism demand and aid in the recovery of national economies, which would also be a vital element of broader government efforts to lessen the effects of the global epidemic. The perception of infection risks and hurdles to travel may be reduced by improving quality standards and airport credibility by conveying relevant airlines' health safety, hygiene, and cleanliness procedures (Hassan & Salem, 2021). More importantly, because information on social media is a significant source of concern, government and tourism policymakers must utilise social media platforms to convey safety procedures and eliminate exaggerated views of risk. This may involve sharing credible information from experts in verifying the airport's safety and doing promotional operations to alleviate travellers' concerns. Besides, they could offer better complaints handling procedures and security enforcement.

This study has a few limitations. The distribution of the questionnaires was only based on online platforms through Google Form due to movement control orders. It is difficult to collect data face-to-face due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in limited direct communication between the researchers and respondents in online surveys. Future research is suggested to collect data using a different approach, such as the face-to-face setting or mixed-methods, to gain more explicit results. Moreover, the research may be reproduced in other countries to allow effective comparison analysis and elicit viewpoints from tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, this study mainly focuses on two independent variables: social norms and safety and preventive measures. Hence, there is a need to expand this present study by looking at the broader scope of other direct or indirect variables. Future research is suggested to test the study framework using SEM simulations.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that social norms are the most influential and most substantial contributor to passengers' trust. In this context, passengers will rely on media coverage and information from various platforms and seek out the opinions of others as a first step towards developing their trust and decision to travel with airlines during this pandemic. Additionally, as a secondary factor, safety and preventive measures, which include airline safety practices, are set to influence their decision in the latter. The passengers would be exposed to all safety measures and procedures (for example, mandatory face masks, safety reminders during boarding, and social distancing); this may increase their trust and influence their decision to patronise airline travel in the future. The inherent risk of being infected with COVID-19 is associated with a poor perception of the effectiveness of safety measures and influences a high propensity for future travel. Airport safety should be considered when governments, tourism stakeholders, and relevant agencies execute future strategic plans to reduce travellers' perceived risks. In short, the implementation of health security protocols at airports, supported by the continuous safety information, is an important feature for passengers.

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