

# Traveling The World Freely? The Role of Pandemic Panic on Traveler Behavior in Global Destination Marketing: The Case of Turkey

## Dünyayı Özgürce Gezmek Mi? Global Destinasyon Pazarlamasında Pandeminin Yarattığı Panik Durumunun Gezgin Davranışları Üzerindeki Rolü: Türkiye Örneği

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### Abstract

Since destination activities hold a great importance in terms of the travel and touristic trips planned by individuals and travelers, they should be considered as a fact to be managed and planned. The difficulties faced by the destination marketers, who have been affected by some different effects in the past years and the adverse effects of today's pandemic, are growing. This paper describes the conceptual definitions of the subject and the general situation of the pandemic in the world. Afterwards, the current study evaluates the changing behaviors of consumers and travelers in terms of health anxiety in the context of destination activities in the case of Turkey. Furthermore, the economic dimensions of the pandemic, which make it impossible to travel at the national or international levels, and the psychological pressures on people inhibit destination activities. The data obtained from the study have revealed that travelers and consumers with health anxiety avoid destination consumption. The results have indicated that although individuals' health anxiety levels have increased due to the pandemic, their avoidance of international travel is more due to legal restrictions. Although the results have revealed that individuals have changed their living standards and perceptions of hygiene, legal restrictions have led to avoidance of travel more effectively than the fear of the pandemic. The results of the survey have determined that individuals have avoided destination activities during the pandemic due to both economic and health concerns. Furthermore, the negative impact of this process is related to the restrictions and measures taken by the government.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Destination Marketing, Health Anxiety

### Öz

Destinasyon faaliyetlerinin bireylerin/gezginlerin planladıkları seyahat ve turistik gezileri açısından öneminden dolayı, yönetilmesi ve planlanması gereken bir durum olarak değerlendirilmesi gerekmektedir. Geçmiş yıllarda bir takım farklı etkilerden ve günümüzde yaşanan salgın hastalık kaynaklı olumsuzluklardan etkilenen destinasyon pazarlamacılarının karşılaştığı zorluklar giderek büyümektedir. Bu makalede konuya ilişkin kavramsal tanımlar ve salgının dünyadaki genel durumu anlatılmış. Ardından da Türkiye örneğinde gezginlerin/tüketicilerin destinasyon faaliyetleri bağlamında değişen davranışları sağlık anksiyetesi açısından değerlendirilmiştir. Ulusal ya da uluslararası düzeyde dolaşıma olanak vermeyen salgın hastalığın ekonomik boyutları ile birlikte insanların üzerindeki psikolojik baskılar da destinasyon faaliyetlerinin karşısında engel teşkil etmektedir. Çalışmada elde edilen veriler de sağlık anksiyetesi taşıyan gezginlerin/tüketicilerin destinasyon tüketiminden kaçındığını ortaya konmuştur. Bu çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre, bireylerin sağlık anksiyetesi düzeyleri, pandemi sürecine bağlı olarak artmış olsa da, uluslararası seyahatten kaçınmaları daha ziyade yasal kısıtlamalardan kaynaklanmaktadır. Elbette, bireylerin yaşam standartlarını, hijyen algılarını değiştirmiş olduğu gözlenmiştir ancak, yasal kısıtlamaların salgının korkutuculuğundan daha efektif bir biçimde seyahatten kaçınmaya yol açtığı görülmüştür. Çalışma kapsamında yapılan anket sonucunda, bireylerin pandemi sürecinde hem ekonomik hem de sağlıkla ilgili kaygılar sebebiyle destinasyon faaliyetlerinden kaçındığı tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca bu sürecin olumsuz etkilenmesi, hükümet tarafından alınan kısıtlamalar ve önlemlerle ilişkilidir.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Destinasyon Pazarlaması, Sağlık Anksiyetesi

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## Introduction

Throughout the history of mankind, pandemics have been seen in all periods and under all conditions, and many of them have become historical due to their effects on humanity. Pandemic diseases are defined as infectious diseases that can be transmitted from one living thing to another. Compulsory environments such as being together and sharing with other people as a requirement of the socialization need of human beings increase the spread rate of these diseases. The study conducted by Alaeddinoğlu and Rol draws attention to the fact that the history of mankind is full of pandemics that have caused the death of millions of individuals. Alaeddinoğlu and Rol (2020) have listed these diseases as SARS, avian influenza, swine flu, MERS and Ebola, alongside with relatively ancient pandemics such as the Black Plague (14th century) and the Spanish Flu (1918-20), and emphasized that these pandemics have caused significant effects on people's lives (Alaeddinoğlu & Rol, 2020; 234). The historical pandemic of the new century, called the digital age, is the Covid-19 virus. Covid-19 virus, which started to be mentioned for the first time in December 2019 and showed its effects in all countries of the world rapidly within a few months, is known as a disease originated in Wuhan, China.

The Covid-19 outbreak, as a pandemic that changes the lifestyle of people around the world or is called the new normal, requires people to live in a new normal in order to maintain their health and safety. The direct proportion between the freedom of movement and the spread rate of the virus in all environments outside the home requires serious restrictions for all people, especially for travelers. In the new world order that has turned into a big kindergarten, people are taught how hand washing and hygiene should be and calls to stay at home and not to go out are made from the very beginning. Restriction calls have been made for tourism activities, which are one of the most important economic lifelines of countries. Back at the beginning of the process, the importance of passenger awareness in preventing Covid-19 transmission has been highlighted for the first time in a joint statement made by WHO and ICAO in February 2020 (WHO, 2020). In this joint declaration and in the statements made afterwards, calls have continued to be made regarding the return of passengers to their countries, quarantine conditions of the countries, things to be considered in plane, train, bus or ship journeys and mandatory measures to be taken (WHO, 2020). From the beginning to the present, evaluations show that tourist visits have decreased significantly during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the literature, there are striking data on the subject during the almost one-year pandemic period. In their study conducted in September 2020, Almlöf et al stated that the COVID-19 pandemic changed travel behavior and reduced the use of public transportation worldwide, but the decrease was not uniform. Their study analyzed the trend for 1.8 million smart card holders in Stockholm, Sweden who stopped using public transport vehicles during COVID-19 pandemic (Almlöf et al., 2020;1). Hamdan et al conducted a study in early 2020 in the case of Indonesia and found that the COVID-19 virus not only had harms on the health and safety of the human psychology, but also had a tremendous impact on businesses in Indonesia. The impacts of the pandemic in the business context are decreases in people's purchasing power, consumers, causing companies to fail, and eventually terminating employment (Hamdan et al., 2020;1). Fithriya (2020;1) concluded that one of the sectors which was adversely affected the most by the COVID-19 pandemic was the tourism sector, and during the pandemic, destination activities and tourist visits decreased significantly. Paramita and Putra (2020) stated that the COVID-19 outbreak is an pandemic that changed the lifestyle of people around the world or prepared the grounds for a new normal, and people must live in a new normal in order to maintain their health and safety. Furthermore, as a result of the study conducted by Abli, they stated that COVID-19 had a very heavy impact on the economy, especially on those who relied on the economy in the tourism sector (Paramita & Putra, 2020;57). A study conducted in Turkey by Aydın and Doğan (2020) had similar negative results. Aydın and Doğan (2020; 98) stated that "The negative effects of COVID-19 on tourism in Turkey started in March 2020. The pandemic negatively affected both Europe and Turkey in this month. Strict precautions and measures taken by both Turkey and Europe led to a decrease in the number of tourists coming to countries by 67% compared to March 2019 (<https://yigm.ktb.gov.tr>). Since mid-March 2020, flight bans and shutting down many businesses, including hotels, have turned April and May 2020 into loss months in terms of tourism."

As can be seen, the COVID-19 outbreak has dealt heavy blows to the economies of countries in many areas, especially in the tourism sector. The lack of an antiviral and medical solutions for COVID-19 has raised public concern about routine life activities around the world. Therefore, governments have adopted new policies of practicing normal life for citizens to carry out ordinary activities outside the home by implementing some measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Apart from the tourism sector, a number of measures continue to exist to provide a sense of sanitation and improvement of the tourism system (self-distance) that prioritize health and safety. The lack of a vaccine for the COVID-19 virus at present, and the fact that there are so many risks for all people, especially the elderly and those with existing chronic diseases or immune problems, cause the number of measures taken to increase. This pandemic, which is defined as an internationally important emergency (Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)) by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), has also brought the destination activities that require national or international circulation activities to a halt. The calls for restrictions and precautions regarding the pandemic, which are on and after March 2020, have led to cancelations of travels around the world. With the attention paid to the rapid social spread of the virus in many countries

that can be considered as destination centers in the world (Italy, Spain, Iran, China, USA, etc.), a serious panic state has started to dominate all humanity.

## 1. Literature Review

The COVID-19, which is a global crisis and causes panic and stress, continues to exist as an extraordinary period affecting the tourism sector all over the world (Dalkıran & Demir, 2020; 94), and it is uncertain when this process will come to an end. In addition to disruptions in the continuation of life routines, outbreaks cause a number of changes in short, medium and long terms in individuals' decision-making for vacations, choosing travel destinations and determining their behaviors (Alaeddinoğlu & Rol, 2020; 238). As reported in Alaeddinoğlu and Rol's study, UNWTO noted that the number of international tourists decreased by 4% after the global economic crisis in 2009, whereas the SARS pandemic in 2003 led to a decrease of only 0.4% (UNWTO, 2020b). The same study addressed the World Tourism Organization's report on the effects of COVID-19 on tourism which stated that the number of international tourists decreased by 22% in the first quarter of 2020. Furthermore, in March, when the majority of the decrease occurred, the number of international tourists decreased by 57% worldwide while the number of this decrease was 68% in Turkey. Furthermore, the report stated that the number of international tourists may decrease by 60% to 80% for the whole year (UNWTO, 2020c; cited in Alaeddinoğlu & Rol, 2020). According to the same report, possible demand losses in international travels are as follows (UNWTO, 2020c; cited in Alaeddinoğlu & Rol, 2020):

- Loss of 850 million to 1.1 billion international tourists
- Loss of US\$910 billion to US\$1.2 trillion in export revenues from tourism
- 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk

As Dalkıran and Demir (2020; 94) have pointed out, as results of the pandemic, reducing human mobility and interaction have become the most important priority; the borders of the countries have been closed, the health system is on alert, and concepts such as quarantine, isolation, physical and social distance have become the most used concepts. Although the pace of the pandemic is tried to be slowed down with calls such as "stay at home", "comply with social distance", "wear a mask" all over the world, the success of a productive and safe COVID-19 eradication is closely linked to collective awareness in compliance with community disciplines and health protocols. The role of the authorities is very important in adopting new habits, such as wearing masks, maintaining physical distance, washing hands with soap and running water, always exercising regularly, getting enough rest, not panicking, and always consuming nutritious foods. Health institutions, governments, businesses, media tools, and especially local authorities share the responsibility to create the necessary awareness. For example, local governments should implement some protocols such as public transport protocols, crowded center protocols (markets, malls and stores), event organization protocols (weddings, praying, concerts, sport events, business travels, etc.) the new normal period protocols (education and school services, workplaces, outdoor activities, health services), and oblige people to obey the rules with some sanctions because the economic dimensions of the pandemic are growing very seriously and become unmanageable. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate serious decreases in both Gross Domestic Product level, which is an important indicator of purchasing power parity, and consumption levels, which countries experienced during this pandemic period. The report published by PWC has stated that individuals tend to use a restricted spending method in terms of private consumption to achieve a savings of 0.5% and these individuals are likely to display a more cautious consumer behavior in terms of going out and spending money (PWC, 2020).



**Figure 1. GDP Loss of Countries during the Pandemic Period (Million USD)**

Source: The report of the possible economic consequences of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, March 2020.



**Figure 2. Consumption Loss of Countries During Pandemic (Million USD)**

Source: The report of the possible economic consequences of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, March 2020.

Destination consumption is also included in the luxury consumption group, and the indicators in the report confirm the decline in tourism activities around the world. The revenues in the tourism sector or the expected number of visitors is not a guarantee (Eryılmaz, 2020; 16), and tourism is a consumption area open to surprises due to its very nature. However, in addition to its general structure and the nature of destination consumption, tourism is the most affected sector by the COVID-19 process (Kılıç et al., 2020; 556). The main reason for this situation is that COVID-19 and other pandemic diseases might cause changes in tourists' behaviors (Kılıç et al., 2020; 558) and in addition to its physical and biological effects, the virus has some psychological effects (Çelik & Diker, 2021; 17). Postponement and cancellation of tourist visits have halted tourism activities, causing the layoffs of employees in the tourism industry, reducing the level of tourist visits to tourism destinations, and the tourism industry has come to a standstill. The table below shows the point that the virus has reached all over the world as of January 2021. The point has greatly increased the fear of exposure in humans. Large-scale social restrictions, as well as fear of exposure, have caused both domestic and foreign tourists to cancel their travels and thus significant declines in cultural tourism, nature tourism and community-based tourism models. The economic decline in the midst of the threat of spreading, which is not yet known when the pandemic will end, is a challenge for societies to adapt to current conditions.

**Table 1. Covid-19 table according to WHO's data as of 25/01/2021 at 5:30 pm**

	Cases - Cumulative Total	Deaths - Cumulative Total
GLOBAL	98.280.844	2.112.759
UNITED STATES	24.604.325	410.667
INDIA	10.654.533	153.339
BRAZIL	8.753.920	215.243
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	3.719.400	69.462
THE UNITED KINGDOM	3.617.463	97.329

FRANCE	2.985.259	72.484
SPAIN	2.456.675	55.041
ITALY	2.455.185	85.162
TURKEY	2.424.328	24.933
GERMANY	2.134.936	51.870

Source: WHO, 2020, <https://covid19.who.int/table?tableDay=yesterday>

Continuous sharing of data on a daily and up-to-date basis provides information about the current pandemic levels of the countries. When data such as population rates of countries, number of cases, death rates are examined, it is seen the COVID-19 pandemic is more common in continents, countries and regions where human mobility is intense (Akyol, 2020; 114). Although this situation is used as a political tool that can be effective in compensating the income loss in tourism by providing updates of the 'countries to travel' list determined by countries according to various criteria (Dalkıran & Demir, 2020; 94), destination consumption and tourism are the industries most at risk of facing various difficulties in the form of crises. With the World Health Organization (WHO) announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted people's mobility around the world to reduce the infection rate on March 11, 2020, the evacuation of people to their homes from countries where they were for whatever purpose was provided very urgently. For example, as of April 2020, Turkey called back all students who studied abroad and citizens who were in Mecca for religious purposes (pilgrimage) to the country and organized special flights for its citizens. Furthermore, 14-days of compulsory quarantine at the designated places was required before all the citizens to continue their social lives so that the spread of the virus could be taken under control. This and other practices around the world show that the pandemic creates a necessity for humans to redesign their geographical perceptions and senses of belonging to a community, a country, and a global or local dimension (Şengel et al., 2020; 1434). When all these tables and dramatic data are evaluated together, creating a collective consciousness and cooperation become a necessity to combat this epidemic. As we can take some measures personally to protect ourselves and keep our immune system strong to protect and prevent the disease during the COVID-19 pandemic (Çınar & Özkaya, 2020; 40), governments also need to take some measures. Since the deceleration in global tourism movements brings along the decrease in tourism revenues and economic loss (Akyol, 2020; 113), all country administrations and the European Parliament are working on the subject. The report published by the European Parliament Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs in November 2020 draws attention to the effects of the pandemic on tourism. The report mentions the negative effects of COVID-19 on tourism and travel activities, and leisure activities. The economic losses and difficulties caused by this situation are among the issues highlighted in the report. Tourism accounts for 13% of Gross Domestic Product and 15% of total employment in countries such as Italy and Spain. The report draws attention to the negative consequences of the process, especially in countries such as Cyprus, Greece and Portugal where tourism and travel revenues have a large share in the economy (EP, Covid-19 Newsletter 1, 2020; 3). Furthermore, in November 2020, Members of the European Parliament adopted the Recovery and Resilience Facility, an instrument designed to help EU countries combat the effects and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the European Parliament have issued a call for the use of 672.5 billion euros in grants and loans to finance national measures designed to mitigate the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, which will be in place from 1 February 2020 (EP, official page).

## 2. Destination Marketing

The concept of destination is defined as the places where people travel and choose to stay for a while to experience certain beauties or differences. Many companies in the tourism industry take part in their marketing activities in the destination, putting this process in a partially industrialized form due to its nature. The fact that the most important income sources of countries are tourism revenues is a clear indicator of this situation. One of the main goals of destination promotion and competitiveness is to create a new image or to reinforce the existing positive image of a place in travelers' minds. Destination adversity is under the responsibility of not only tourism companies but also government and public institutions. Therefore, various tourism organizations around the world run and finance travel projects designed to provide basic information about travelers and develop marketing strategies and actions accordingly. As Wang and Xiang (2007; 76) highlight, destination marketing is a challenging path for communities that see tourism as an important investment and income for economic development, and the joint marketing efforts of tourism organizations representing the destination have to address this challenge. Increasing business relations between all stakeholders of the tourism sector in conducting

destination marketing activities provides benefits in many ways, some of which are (1) quality information sharing, (2) ease of access, (3) ecological sensitivity, (4) high-level security / respect for privacy, (5) visual appeal, (6) confidence, (7) interaction, (8) personalized practices, and (9) delivering on promise. Aligning destination marketing efforts with the needs and priorities of the sector and ensuring that public and private sector expenditures work towards a common goal are needed to benefit from the aforementioned areas; however, this situation has brought about new opportunities and challenges regarding the way destination marketing activities are conducted (Ritchie & Ritchie, 2002; 440). Apart from these difficulties, tourism destination marketing is a difficult industry in general (Bennett, 1999; 49). In this vein, as Soteriades (2012; 108) points out, today, tourism destinations continue to face a series of new challenges arising from consumers and changes in the environment. Considering the climatic changes experienced with the increase in the number of tourist destinations and the increasing competition between different destinations (Molina et al., 2010; 723), destination marketing is becoming an increasingly competitive sector worldwide (Buhalis, 2000; 97). The fragmented nature of the tourism industry requires significant coordination and cooperation between different stakeholders in destination marketing (Wanga and Daniel, 2007; 863), mainly because tourists want to spend less time and effort than they would travel if they were traveling to an unknown destination. Therefore, as Morgan (2012; 9) argues, tomorrow's successful tourism destinations will be places that increase the welfare of their populations through tourism and embrace new ways of sustainable living, and the importance of innovative approaches will increase. Considering that the information sources of touristic activities have changed greatly in recent years, primarily due to the impact of new technologies and then to changes in tourist consumer behavior, the importance of innovative approaches is striking.

Destination marketing is now recognized for tourists as a pillar of the future growth and sustainability of tourism destinations in an increasingly globalized and competitive market (UNWTO, 2011, cited in Pike & Page, 2014). Some of the published research on destination marketing represents an important growth area that has become a separate paradigm in tourism (Bowen, Fidgeon, and Page, 2014) and is reinforced by the four basic propositions related to global tourism: first, the inclusion of different and unique dimensions of tourist activities in destinations (Leiper, 1979), second, the destinations proposed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) being the "fundamental unit of analysis in tourism" (WTO, 2002), third, the emergence of major brands in the travel industry (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002), and finally, many countries, states, and cities now wanting to compete with other destination centers and attract visitors to their centers / areas by financing a Destination Marketing Organization as the main tool (Pike & Page, 2014; 203) because destination marketing is a sensitive industry shaped by traveler behavior and decisions, and following the changing traveler trends in this area is also very important. As cited by Mohsin (2005), Ross (1998) defines four main characteristics of travelers as follows:

1. They are people who travel to and stay in various places.
2. Their destinations are different from their normal places of residence and work, so their activities are not the same as those of the resident and working population of their destination.
3. Their orientation is to depart within a few days or months, so the trip is temporary and of a short-term nature.
4. Their travel purposes are not permanent residency or finding a salaried employment.

As can be seen, various studies have demonstrated that apart from being a structure sensitive to traveler behavior, destination marketing is also affected by extreme weather conditions such as climate change, storms, heat waves or heavy and prolonged rains. In addition to all these factors, the effect of the pandemic, as the current study points out, on the destination is undeniable. As Hübner and Gössling cite (2012; 48) various studies have highlighted that tourism in an industry sensitive to weather and climate changes (Maunder, 1970; Besancenot, 1991; Scott & Lemieux, 2010), furthermore, it is also heavily affected by pandemics. The same study also cites that Scott, Hall and Gössling (2012) demonstrate a general consensus that seasonality, extreme events and annual climate variability are also of great importance for global tourist flows, and that weather and climate can be both resources and constraints for tourism. As Hübner and Gössling (2012; 48) point out, touristic activities may come to a standstill during pandemics (Hübner & Gössling, 2012; 48) since tourism is a sensitive area which is affected even by some variables such as weather and climate (De Freitas, 2003). There is a vast amount of literature on the impact of pandemics, which affect all individuals around the world psychologically, socially and economically, on destination activities. Zoltan and Masiero (2012; 86) show that the psychological motivation of tourist visiting a destination has an enormous effect on revisiting that place again. In general, the motivation behind people's travel to certain places is to satisfy their desires for things like escaping, relaxation, and spending time with family members and friends. In addition, the desire for natural travel is further stimulated and reinforced by places such as beaches, cultural attractions, shopping and other attractions (Lee et al., 2012; 107), which results in an increase in people's destination interests and activities. In this vein, a number of changes are necessary in the preferred spatial scale of economic governance in terms of destination marketing and management (Coles et al., 2012; 6). The basis of the attraction tools is to persuade people to be travelers. Persuasion activities, which convince people of national or

international circulation and destination activities, aim to affect the traveler at three times: before leaving home, while on the road to the destination, and after arriving at the destination (Perdue & Pitegoff, 1990; 45). Using stories of other tourists (Tussyadiah, 2011; 64) and getting government support to promote the destinations are necessary to achieve aforementioned effect. Researchers and industry explicitly acknowledging the strong relationship between food, culture and tourism since the mid-1990s (Du Rand & Heath, 2006; 206) contributes to the development of the field.

In summary, destination management and marketing continues to be an economic issue as an academic field of study and an important field for the tourism industry (Liv d., 2017; 95), and studies continue to be carried out with the great blows destination marketing has received during the pandemic. In this context, the importance of the strategic tourism networks to be established in destination marketing (Wang & Krakover, 2008; 133) is revealed. These networks need to be in cooperation especially in extraordinary periods, such as the Covid-19 outbreak. The results of the current study and many other studies show that this sector is extremely susceptible to impact from extraordinary situations.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants

Considering the legal freedom in travelling at the national or international levels, a cross-sectional and anonymous online survey was conducted with 494 people over the age of 18. The questionnaire form was conducted between January 1 and January 25, 2021 using Google Forms. Initially, all participants were given informed consent and then asked to complete the form. In addition, research ethics committee approval was obtained in order to conduct the survey (ethics committee decision dated 29.12.2020 and numbered 18). A total of 494 participants selected with the convenience sampling method completed the whole questionnaire and formed a response rate of 100%. 41.3% of the participants were men and 58.7% were women, their average age was 33.6 (SD = 11.51) and ranged between 18 and 69 years old. The criteria for participating in the study were being over the age of 18, having a fluent Turkish and being a volunteer. No payment was made to the participants for their answers.

#### 3.2. Measures

Salkovskis and others (2002) developed the Health Anxiety Scale to evaluate health anxiety, and the Turkish adaptation of the scale was developed by Aydemir and others (2013). The Health Anxiety Scale is a self-report scale consisting of 18 items. Fourteen items of the scale are composed of expressions containing four sequential answers that question the mental state of the individuals. The remaining 4 questions ask individuals to think about how their mental state might be with the assumption that they have a serious illness and interrogate accordingly. The scoring of the scale is between 0 and 3 for each item, and high scores indicate a high level of health anxiety (Aydemir et al., 2013). During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals' changes in their destination attitudes, including international travels, were compared with their health Anxiety levels.

#### 3.3. Design

The conducted survey in this study measured the relationships between the panic levels and Anxiety perceptions of tourists / travelers and the destination activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The conducted analyzes were determined by testing the assumption of normality. Skewness and Kurtosis values were found in the expected (-1 and +1) ranges and Shapiro-Wilk analysis confirmed the the normal distribution of the data. Therefore, parametric tests were applied. The study design and the tested hypotheses are as follows:

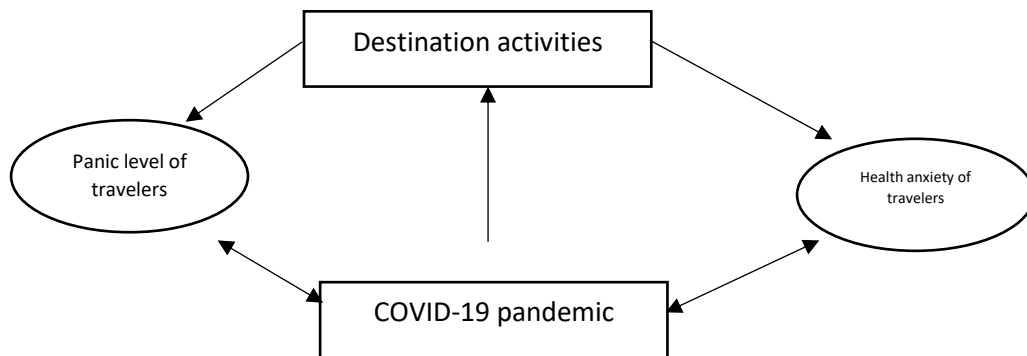


Figure 3. The study design

H1: The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affects people's panic levels.

H2: The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affects people's general anxiety levels.

H3: The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affects people's vacationing.

H4: The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affects people's decisions to go abroad.

H5: The COVID-19 pandemic positively affects people's hygiene sensitivity.

H6: The COVID-19 pandemic has a mediating role in the relationship between people's destination activities and their health anxiety levels.

The diagram of the proposed hypotheses for testing the above-identified hypotheses are as follows:

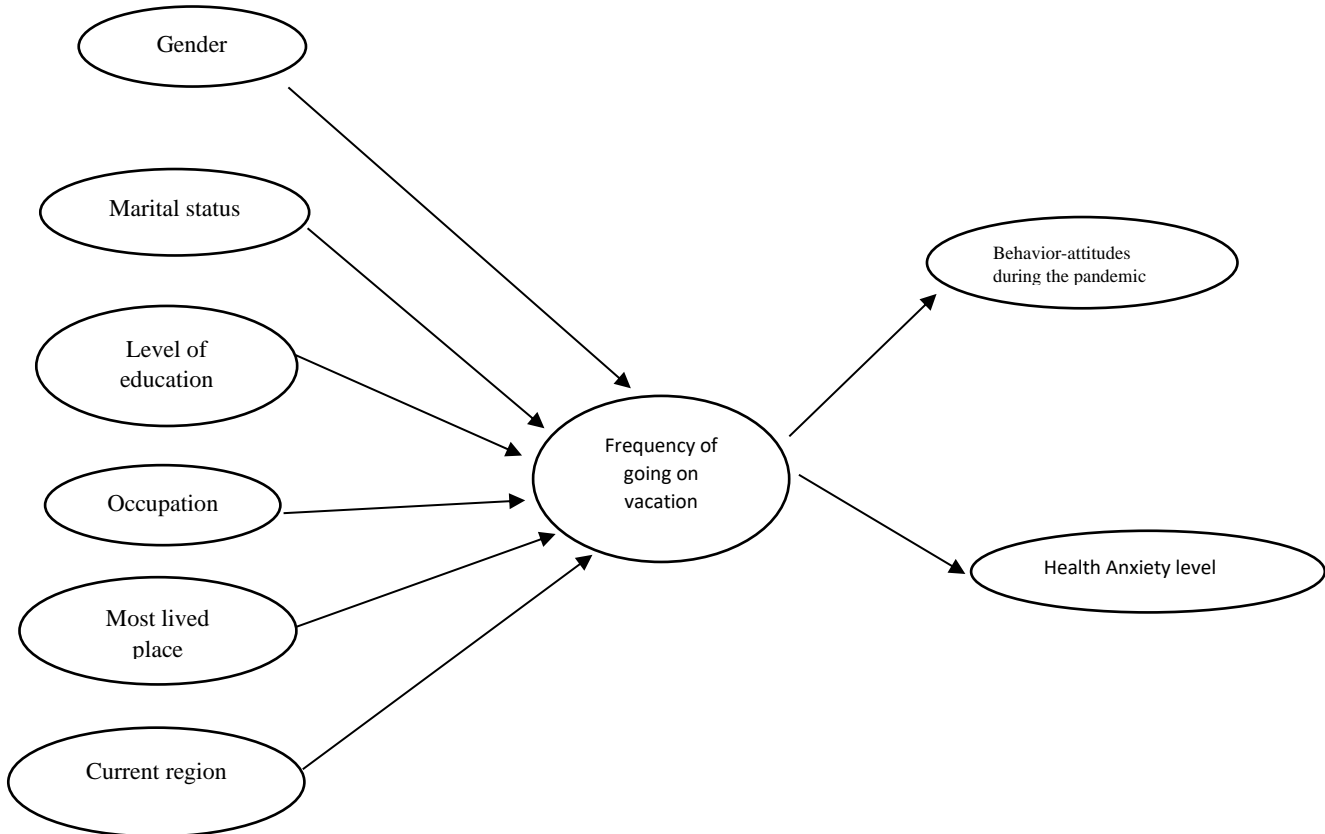


Figure 4. Hypothesis testing diagram.

#### 4. Results

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (22). The results obtained by applying descriptive statistics, frequency distributions and hypothesis tests (T Test, ANOVA and Correlation) are given in tables in following pages. The average age of the participants was 33.66 (SD = 11.51) and ranged between 18 and 69 years old. In addition, the average income level was TL 4254.55 (SD = TL 2459.60). It showed a distribution around the average income (minimum wage). The average score of the anxiety scale was 17.39 (SD = 7.27) and ranged between 1 and 50 points. 58.7% of the participants were women, 41.3% of them were men, the living place was mostly urban area (85.0%), and, considering the distribution of the geographical region of the participants, most of them lived in the central part of the country (Central Anatolia) at the rate of 45.5%. Most of the participants had at least graduate education. The distribution of marital status, which is an important factor in destination activities, showed that 48.8% of participants were married and 51.2% of them were single. 35.6% of the participants were public servants, 32.0% of them were students and 20.7% of them were self-employed entrepreneur. The rate of going on vacation was 51.8% for at least once a year.



**Table 2. Comparison of the occupation of the participants with the frequency of going on a vacation (Crosstab)**

		The frequency of going on vacation			Total
		Once a year	More than once a year	Never	
Occupation	Public servant	90 51,1%	71 40,3%	15 8,5%	176 100,0%
	Freelancer	38 52,1%	30 41,1%	5 6,8%	73 100,0%
	Self-employed entrepreneur	12 41,4%	17 58,6%	0 0,0%	29 100,0%
	Student	88 55,7%	33 20,9%	37 23,4%	158 100,0%
	Unemployed	19 59,4%	6 18,8%	7 21,9%	32 100,0%
	Housewife	9 34,6%	13 50,0%	4 15,4%	26 100,0%
Total		256 51,8%	170 34,4%	68 13,8%	494 100,0%

Considering the distribution balance between occupation and income, the occupational group with the highest frequency of going a on vacation was public employees (40.3%) while the occupational group with the lowest frequency of going on vacation was students with a rate of 23.4%.

**Table 3. Distribution of the participants according to their traveling habits during the pandemic**

	Yes (f, %)	No (f, %)	Toplam (f, %)
COVID-19 made me "panic attack"	158 32,0%	336 68,0%	494 100%
COVID-19 increased my level of "Generalized Anxiety"	208 42,1%	286 57,9%	494 100%
COVID-19 reduced my desire to go out.	375 75,9%	119 24,1%	494 100%
Have you ever been on vacation before?	428	66	494

	86,6%	13,4%	100%
Have you ever been abroad?	218 44,1%	276 55,9%	494 100%
Have you ever vacationed abroad?	147 %29,8	347 %70,2	494 %100

Although it was observed that the anxiety levels of the participants increased by 57.9% during the pandemic, there was no significant increase in panic levels. However, it is a striking result that the desire to go out decreased by 75.9%. In addition, 86.6% of the participants, who had been on a vacation at least once before, stated that they did not vacation abroad (70.2%).

**Table 4. Distribution of the participants' behavior and attitudes during the pandemic**

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic;	Yes	Occasionally	No	Total
Do you use a tissue while coughing or sneezing?	329 66,6%	117 23,7%	48 9,7%	494 100%
Do you wash your hands often with soap and water?	474 96,0%	19 3,8%	1 0,2%	494 100%
Do you avoid touching your face and eyes?	310 62,8%	144 29,1%	40 8,1%	494 100%
Do you maintain social distance (or home quarantine)?	420 85,0%	65 13,2%	9 1,8%	494 100%
Do you eat healthy?	314 63,6%	158 32,0%	22 4,5%	494 100%
Do you lead a healthy lifestyle?	278 56,3%	190 38,5%	26 5,3%	494 100%
Do you follow all government rules? (Mask, curfew restrictions, social distance, etc.)	466 94,3%	24 4,9%	4 0,8%	494 100%

The participants, who showed a high level of sensitivity in the hygiene behaviors during the pandemic, chose mostly the positive options regarding the measures taken. The abovementioned sensitivity and the discipline of obeying rules are actually important reasons for the decrease in destination activities.

**Table 5. Analysis of the Relationship between the Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants and Their Health Anxiety Levels (T TEST)**

HYPOTHESIS	TEST TYPE	t	p	RESULT
H1a: There is a statistically significant difference between the gender of the participants and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST*	2,638	0,009	ACCEPT

H1b: There is a statistically significant difference between the marital status of the participants and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST*	-3,379	0,001	ACCEPT
H1c: There is a statistically significant difference between the place where the participants mostly live and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST*	-2,565	0,011	ACCEPT
H1d: There is a statistically significant difference between COVID-19 pandemic leading the participants to panic attack and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST	8,671	0,000	ACCEPT
H1e: There is a statistically significant difference between the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on participants' general anxiety levels and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST	6,964	0,000	ACCEPT
H1f: There is a statistically significant difference between the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' desires to go out and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST	5,141	0,000	ACCEPT
H1g: There is a statistically significant difference between the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on individuals who have been on vacation before and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST	-3,067	0,002	ACCEPT
H1h: There is a statistically significant difference between the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on individuals who have been abroad before and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST	-4,724	0,000	ACCEPT
H1i: There is a statistically significant difference between the effect of COVID-19 on individuals who have vacationed abroad before and their health anxiety levels.	T TEST	-4,389	0,000	ACCEPT

\*F and Sig values were checked in the analysis and "Equal variances assumed" rows were examined since the significance values were greater than 0.05 in all comparisons (their variances were homogeneously distributed).

The hypotheses defined as alternative hypothesis were accepted as a result of the T test conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the means of the variables. In other words, significant differences were found between the demographic variables of the participants, their frequency of going on vacation, and their attitude levels during the pandemic and their health anxiety scores. Accordingly, women's health anxiety levels (mean = 18.11) were higher than men's (mean = 16.36). The average score of single participants (18.45) was found higher than married participants (16.26). The average score of participants living in rural areas (19.37) was higher than those living in urban areas (17.04).

**Table 6. The relationship analysis between the Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants and their Health Anxiety Levels (ANOVA)**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	
Current region of the participants	Between Groups	146,547	38	3,856	1,297	,116	
	Within Groups	1352,824	455	2,973			
	Total	1499,370	493				
		Between Groups	58,187	38	1,531	1,263	,141

Level of education	Within Groups	551,805	455	1,213		
	Total	609,992	493			
Occupation	Between Groups	126,751	38	3,336	1,333	,094
	Within Groups	1138,619	455	2,502		
	Total	1265,370	493			
Frequency of going on vacation	Between Groups	30,093	38	,792	1,620	,013
	Within Groups	222,361	455	,489		
	Total	252,453	493			

According to the ANOVA results, no significant difference was found between the region where the participants live now, their education levels, occupations, the frequency of going on vacation and their health anxiety levels.

**Table 7. Analysis of the relationship between the age and income level of the participants, and their Health Anxiety Levels (CORRELATION)**

HYPOTHESIS	TEST TYPE	Pearson Correlation	p	RESULTS
H2a: There is a statistically significant difference between the age of the participants and their health anxiety levels.	Correlations	-0,225	0,000	ACCEPT
H2b: There is a statistically significant difference between the income level of the participants and their health anxiety levels.	Correlations	-0,174	0,000	ACCEPT

There were significant negative relationships between the age and income level of the participants, and their health anxiety levels ( $r = -0.225$  and  $-0.174$ , and  $p < 0.05$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study determined the changing consumption behaviors of individuals during the pandemic according to their health anxiety levels of their destination habits and the effects of the pandemic (see Figure 3). The results showed that during the pandemic, individuals' levels of health anxiety increased, and therefore, they stopped their destination activities. However, the most striking result to emerge from the data is that the travel bans and restrictions taken by governments are more effective than the health Anxiety levels. The study showed that variables such as income, marital status, age and gender of the participants are also important variables at destination decisions. Considering the distribution balance between occupation and income, the main reason why the occupational group with the highest frequency of going on vacation is public servants is that the income level of this occupation group is at a good level compared to the country average. Another important finding supporting this is that the group with the lowest habit of going on vacation is students. The main reason for the low participatory behavior of students in destination activities is the unequal distribution of income and low level of income distribution. Therefore, occupation and income balance are also determining factors in destination activities for individuals living in Turkey. Furthermore, most of the participants who had been on vacation at least once before stated that they did not vacation abroad. This suggests that the uneven distribution of income levels is much more effective than a pandemic in terms of destination activities because there was no serious increase in the panic levels of individuals whose health anxiety levels increased at a certain rate, however, their desire to go out decreased dramatically. Therefore, the economic difficulties experienced due to the pandemic process are also a trigger in this sense. As mentioned before, visits to different parts of the world in terms of destination activities are based on an important economic power. Individual economic power is a bigger determinant of destination activities compared to the pandemic.

On the other hand, individuals experienced changes in their hygiene perceptions and related attitude-behaviors. Participants showed a high level of sensitivity to hygiene behaviors that increased during the pandemic, therefore, avoid destination activities. Furthermore, it was found that there was a high level of compliance with the measures taken by the government and that rules were not violated. The sensitivity shown here and the discipline to obey the rules are actually important reasons for the decrease in destination activities. As Xie and Lee (2013; 540) cite, a growing body of literature has shifted its focus to the intangible and emotional appeal of destination activities (e.g. Gretzel, Yuan & Fesenmaier, 2000; King, 2002; Palmer & Bejou, 1995; Prideaux & Cooper, 2003; Ritchie & Brent Ritchie, 2002; Woodside, 1990), however, the pandemic seems to have changed this focus. Although the income level does not affect the first stage of needs awareness, it strongly influences all other stages of the decision-making process (Djeri et al., 2014), therefore, it plays a significant role in destination activity planning. In this vein, the current study examined differences between demographic variables of the participants, their frequency of going on vacation, their attitude levels during the pandemic and their health anxiety levels, and the results indicated that there were significant differences. For example, the study concluded that women tended to show a more sensitivity in this sense.

Having discussed the findings, that this study concludes with some implications for further studies. First, after the pandemic, traveler behavior must be measured again in the new world order. Changing behaviors of individuals in the case of Turkey need to be re-determined. How the concerns individuals generally have been experiencing at the international travel points during the pandemic will change after the pandemic is over should be determined. This study is the first step towards understanding the importance economic power in destination activities since the relevant literature focused on the attractiveness of destination activities before the pandemic started. Therefore, further studies should focus on the importance of economic power instead. In other words, the current study observed that while many variables, mainly income, played a role in the destination preferences of individuals, individuals' health anxiety levels increased as well. The changes to be experienced regarding this situation in the following years should be followed.

In summary, this study investigated the effect of COVID-19 on individuals' destination activities and presented a perspective. The effects of the demographic characteristics of the individuals, their attitudes and behaviors that they displayed depending on certain habits related to the pandemic were observed. It is very difficult to say that this effect is positive in terms of destination activities.

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