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Rethinking Tourism and Public Health Policies in International Travel Megahubs for the Post-COVID-19 Era

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Abstract

**Background:** This article rethinks current public health policies to transdisciplinarily reorient the countries’ tourism policies as a preparation to future pandemics. This adds to the public health discourse that West Asian international travel megahubs could be susceptible spaces to high risks of transnational viral transmissions.

**Method:** This is a letter to the editor.

**Results:** The United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Qatar are the world’s leading international travel megahubs, with Saudi Arabia catching up following its efforts in establishing a new national airline to increase international passenger traffic. Collectively, they are connected to more than half of the world’s leading international travel destinations. While it can be noted that they were able to successfully mitigate the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spread within their territories, these West Asian countries’ shift from an oil-dependent to a tourism-oriented economy make their airports susceptible spaces to high risks of transnational viral transmissions. As such, this article rethinks current public health policies to transdisciplinarily reorient the countries’ tourism policies as a preparation to future pandemics.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Pandemic preparedness, Public health, Tourism
further transnational viral transmission. Public health experts recognize that there will be more pandemics in the coming decades [3]. The researchers recognize that in this globally-connected world, it is inevitable for international tourism to be halted in the future most especially that the World Health Organization already provided guidelines for adjusting public health and social measures in the context of the travel industry [4]. This journal earlier published discourses pertaining to the significance of developing mitigation strategies to fight future pandemics [5] within the context of medical care globalization [6]. Moreover, a commentary piece also expressed a sense of urgency in establishing international leadership for the control of future disease outbreaks [7]. Therefore, there is a need to rethink current public health policies transdisciplinarily reorient the countries’ tourism policies as a preparation to future pandemics.

It is established in tourism academic literature [8] that the people’s negative reactions to emerging communicable diseases were the same as it is unfolding due to misinformation in communicating the accurate information regarding viruses, may it be the outbreaks on severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), the Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS), Ebola, and COVID-19. Moreover, Rahman et al. [9] revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected international travelers’ “travel risk and management perceptions and its impact on risk management, service delivery, transportation patterns, distribution channels, avoidance of overpopulated destinations, hygiene and safety.” This creates a negative impact to tourism-oriented countries as travelers limit their travel plans to locations where they feel safe from their perceived public health risks.

To practically tackle the challenges of misinformation that affect the mitigation of imminent viruses, there is a strong need for the tourism and hospitality industries to increase the capability of their workforce to integrate fundamental public health management and communication strategies in collaboration with their respective local health authorities. It is also imperative for West Asian national carriers to take part in the global ethical and social responsibility of ensuring that logistical measures in emergency pandemic management are in place for them to be able to transport necessary supplies and aid that are essential for quick public health response to destinations with relatively fewer medical capacities.

Conflict of interest
None.

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