



## **Factor affecting hotel selection and perceived behavioral changes among domestic tourist for a family holiday during COVID-19 in Kathmandu.**

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*The present research aims to identify the factor affecting hotel selection and perceived behavioral changes among domestic tourists for a family holiday during COVID-19. The study employed mix method. Five variables destination attraction, price, location, health and safety and security; and Hygiene, and cleanliness were taken for the quantitative measure, and data was collected using a survey questionnaire. Respondents were the family who went on a family holiday and spent a minimum of one night in a hotel during the time of Christmas and New Year in the outskirts of Kathmandu. Total 244 samples were collected using snowball and convenience sampling techniques. For the qualitative part to understand perceived behavioral changes the in-depth-interview with hotel representatives was taken. The study concludes health and safety; and security issue, hygiene and cleanliness, location and destination attraction has a significant impact on the hotel selection. However, the price does not have any significant impact on hotel selection during COVID-19. On behavioral aspects, the consumer is concerned about health and safety, and security; hygiene and cleanliness, and the destination with low density and availability of medical facilities while looking for the hotel*

**Keywords:** *Hotel selection, family decision making, destination attraction, price, location, health and safety and security; and Hygiene, and cleanliness, behavioral changes*

### **Introduction**

Family holidays refer to spending quality times with family members away from the location of stay for the sole purpose of recreational activities and nourishment of the mind. Some favorite family vacations might include the most popular touristic spots, cultural hearts, and religious sites. Vacations simply take place in a free time or break time where no work should cause any other problem during their holidays (Inglis, 2000). Tourists' behaviors and preferences have changed after the breakdown of COVID-19, most of the travelers who want to enjoy are now scared and trapped inside the house due to the fear of getting infected. Because of this reason, while selecting a hotel, travelers seek low tourist density and sanitary conditions in a destination. To avoid overcrowded places, tourists show preferences for destinations with outdoor activities and contact with nature (Gursoy, Chi, & Chi, 2020). This is also an opportunity for a smaller destination to attract tourists, creating a more balanced flow of travelers to many destinations.

Family holidays are not always pleasing and peaceful as they can turn out into challenges to fulfill the desire of all family members perhaps generate stress and conflict at the same

time (Gram, 2005). There are different age groups inside the family and along with this various requirement and expectation which is very difficult to maintain in such case they can compromise in a certain aspect or they have the list important requirement. Families remember moments when they were active and immersed in activities together. Children remember activities, and parents remember the moment when they could relax if it is fulfilled the family will be happy.

The selection of a hotel in a different destination is of high priority and significance for travelers (Sohrabi, Vanani, Tahmasebipur, & Fazli, 2012). People expend most of their valuable time on selecting a suitable hotel for their family. The selection of hotel has now become more hectic after the breakdown of the COVID-19, travelers now have a condition when they travel and select a hotel accordingly as the family health comes first. Understanding the new travel requirement (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020) has launched a "Safe Travels" global safety and hygiene stamp for destinations and their offers. The designation follows protocols backed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization and is based on recommendations from the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control. The research done by (Koddi Team, 2020) found that domestic searches continue to represent the bulk of demand for hotels across the globe, in September, over 90% of hotel searches were for domestic destinations, so travel marketers should focus their recovery efforts on domestic travelers. Nepalese started visiting their own country after the earthquake of 2015, and there was a massive domestic tourist movement (Joshi, 2019).

Domestic tourism is gradually increasing and is helping to mitigate the impact on employment and businesses in some destinations. Nepal has taken deliberate steps, such as establishing hygiene protocols, setting up the Tourism Recovery Task Force, and launching a domestic tourism campaign to prepare for the reopening of the tourism sector. (Nepal Tourism Board, 2020) Posited NTB along with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have jointly launched a new project "Sustainable Tourism for Livelihood Recovery" to support the recovery of Nepal's tourism. The CEO of NTB further reiterated the importance of the program in creating opportunities and momentum for a speedy recovery of the tourism sector in the post-crisis period. The purpose of the current research is to identify the factor that affects hotel selection and perceived behavioral changes among domestic tourist for family holidays during COVID-19.

### **Objectives of the study**

The general objective of this study is to examine the factor affecting hotel selection for a family holiday during COVID-19. Other specific objectives are as follows:

RO1: To identify the impact of (destination attraction, price, location, health and safety, and security; and Hygiene and cleanliness) on the hotel selection.

RO2: To explore the behavioral changes observed among travelers during COVID-19

### **Limitation of the Study**

Many factors affect hotel selection for a family vacation and it depends upon the family background individual choices and influences only five variables are taken. Such as destination attraction, location, price, health and safety, and cleanliness are granted for studies. Current research is done in the period of COVID-19 focusing on family holidays which might not be applicable for other leisure holidays after this pandemic. Data was collected around Kathmandu in the time of Christmas and New Year from 20 December 2020 to 15 January 2021. At that time, a questionnaire was distributed 400 but received 244 from different destinations.

### **Literature review**

Stringam, (2008) states that leisure and business travelers prefer to go with their family when they are on vacation or business. In the current scenario, families are the significant market of the hospitality and tourism industry (Brey & Lehto, 2008). Family holidays also help to improve the relationship among the family members with good communication between them, relaxed time together, and joy of shared experiences. Moreover, spending time together with all of the family members on holiday simply provides the opportunity to enjoy and get a chance to develop a much closer understanding of each other's; giving them the reassurance they are loved and creating memorable memories for all of them. As people are busy with their daily work life they seek to refresh their stress level with some recreational activities and also to develop a healthy relationship with their family members. Similarly, family fun and time togetherness are what every family is searching for when they are on a family vacation. Therefore, every parent feels glad when their children are happy with their lives. Moreover, family tourism is increasing significantly having a huge market all over the world should give attention to well-being (Kazembe, Mwando, & Muyambo, 2015).

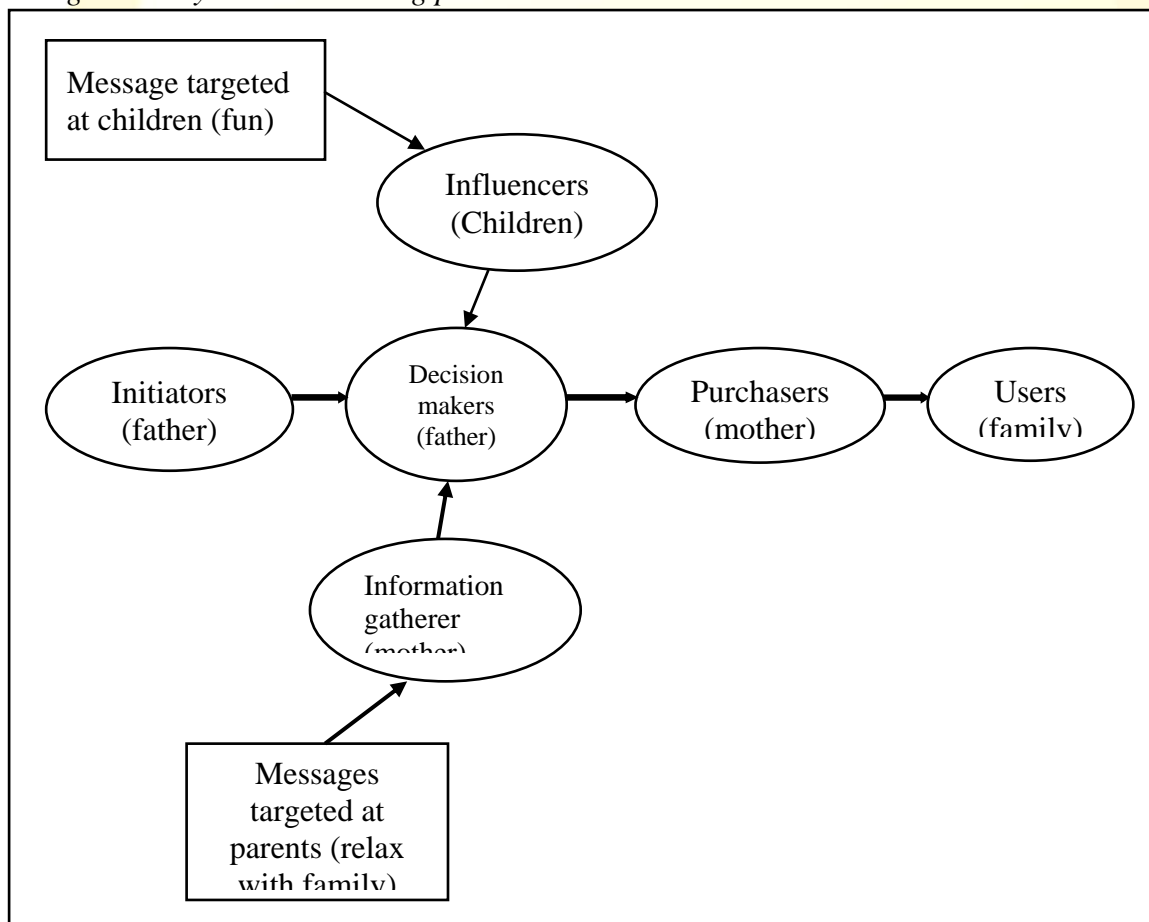
### **Family Decision-Making Process.**

In the family buying decision, several family members are involved. They play a variety of roles in the buying process; each member may take more than one role or at all. A family

buying decision is composed of a sequence of decisions; different family members may play different roles at different stages (Lackman & Lanasa, 1993). In general, the roles are likely to vary between families concerning demographic variables, different product types, time, and even individual decisions (Verma&Kapoor, 2003). Further, family

Further, some authors have proposed the expansion of a caretaker role in specific situations, in which certain family members are responsible for dealing with the product after purchase. Given the various roles of people inside the family decision-making process and the smoothness of these roles, it would appear to be difficult for one family member to report on the complexities of family decision making. For instance, the figure describes below delineates the various roles family members might have in a family holiday decision, in light of the Hawkins et al. (2001) model. In the model, the father perceived the need for a family holiday, the mother accumulated the data about choices, the children were counseled about the decision and influence the criteria, the father made the final decision, the mother purchased the holiday and the family devoured the holiday together.

*Fig1: Family decision-making process*



*Source: Hawkins et al. (2001)*

### **Consumer Behavior during COVID-19**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 virus has had a major impact on daily life and consumer behavior all around the globe. As stay-at-home orders and country-wide lockdowns begin to be eased, consumer behavior continues to be pushed through new personal instances, which include modifications in discretionary income and spare time and reconsidered values and priorities. The findings of (Sheth, 2020) indicate the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown and social distancing mandates have disrupted the consumer habits of buying as well as shopping. Similarly, consumers are learning to improvise and learn new habits in a creative and innovative method. For instance, consumers cannot go to the store, so the store comes home. However, consumers are responding to the crisis in different ways like some feel anxious and worried, fueling panic-buying of staples and hygiene products. At the other extreme, some consumers remain indifferent to the pandemic and are continuing their business as usual, despite recommendations from government and health professionals. A critical situation pushes human behavior in different directions with some aspects of behavior being irrevocable (Mehta, Saxena, & Purohit, 2020). COVID-19 pandemic is not a normal crisis, and to control the spread of disease several measures and precautions have been taken inclusive of whole and then partial lockdown. Because all factors of the economic system are intricately interrelated with public health measures and lockdown, this resulted in economic instabilities of the nation hinting toward alternate in marketplace dynamics. In every market, customers are the drivers of the marketplace competitiveness, growth, and financial integration. With economic instability, consumers also are experiencing a transformation in behavior.

Many consumers in America which have continued their reopening are keen to get out and explored from their place. A national survey of 2,000 travelers was conducted by (Overseas Leisure Group, 2020) suggested that there's a rising demand for hotels and resorts amongst customers and that 72% of Americans tired of being cooped up at home are presently making plans for their next holidays. Similarly, nearly eight in ten vacationers would be willing to travel via air for their future trip, and 82% believe that the travel marketplace is certainly on pause at the current moment. Therefore, with many airlines and hotels offering flexible changes and cancellations, booking interest among consumers is expected to remain high

The recent surveys conducted between April and May 2020, revealed that there is still a desire to travel since the COVID-19 lockdown, but the key priorities are low tourist

density locations and the presence of sanitary condition when selecting a holiday destination. Price does not appear to be the primary factor influencing the choice of the destination. Furthermore, there is also a preference for tourist activities that allow nature and the outdoors to be enjoyed. While there is still readiness to fly outside the home country for holidays, the choice would go to national destinations changes are also expected in the duration of the trips namely making them shorter or with the same duration but divided into several small trips particularly when traveling by private vehicle. Madubuike, (2020) proves that the outbreak of COVID- 19 has had a major impact on buyers of the tourism product. Responses obtained from the respondents showed that when compared to their traveling lifestyle before the COVID-19 outbreak, tourism consumers traveling lifestyle was profoundly affected by destination choice, and what product is affordable.

### **Conceptual model and hypothesis development**

Early research on family tourism has indicated that family vacation is usually associated with beaches, good weather, and eating out (Cullingford, 1995) even though visiting cultural sites is viewed as a family-friendly activity by numerous families too. Similarly (Gram, 2005; Small, 2008 & Mintel, 2009;) pointed out that children want activities, sensory experiences, and play, where they are dynamic and can invest energy with other children. Therefore, destinations need to provide attractions for children and open doors for the socialization of the family members in the events that they target family travelers. According to the study of (Birchler, 2012) indicated that some resorts offer special pricing for single-parental travelers. The Splash Resort Caraco, Mexico waives the supplemental charge for single-parents and allows one child to stay for free. Choi & Chu, (2001) states that “price and quality” were evaluated as the most significant components of all age classifications in hotel selection. Similarly, Ananth et al. (1992) also found that Price and Quality were evaluated as the most significant attributes followed by attributes related to Security and Convenience of Location.

Along with the price, location is one of the most important attributes that is unaltered once chosen. Hotels can change amenities, room rates, interior decoration, and service standards but the location can't be changed (Yang, Huang & Shen, 2017). Similarly, (Milman, 1997) studied guest satisfaction at a family resort hotel and the study found that family travelers preferred to stay nearby shopping malls, restaurants, and theme parks within a two-mile

radius of the hotel. (Choi & Chu, 2001; and Xue & Cox, 2008) found that business travelers are more concerned about hotel location followed by convenience to the airport, convenient location, quiet area, and comfortable ambiance. Due to COVID now a day's most of the consumer traveling with the family prefers the convenient location.

The hospitality industry is one of the most vulnerable industries that could be easily affected by any kind of crisis whether economic, political, or natural crisis, and that guests considered health and safety as the most important issue in the destination (AlBattat & Mat Som, 2014). Ensuring many researchers reported that health and safety followed by emergency service, fire alarm, safety equipment, and security of a hotel are the highest consideration by travelers when choosing a hotel (Xue and Cox 2008; Sohrabi et al., 2012). Health and safety have become key criteria in global travel decisions (Turnšek, Brumen, Rangus, Gorenak, Mekinc, & Štuhec, 2020). Health and safety concerns must be minimized for individual vacationers due to the fact their travel plans most in all likelihood contain other family members along with spouse and kids. Similarly, Makens (1992) discovered that developing programs for children is a natural service extension and found that health, safety, and security must be first concerned for children. During the COVID-19 crisis, guests are demanding further assurances that hotel properties must have additional verified health checks and standards in place. Similarly, Health and safety have a profound influence on a travelers psyche and is consequently what travelers are looking for while selecting a hotel.

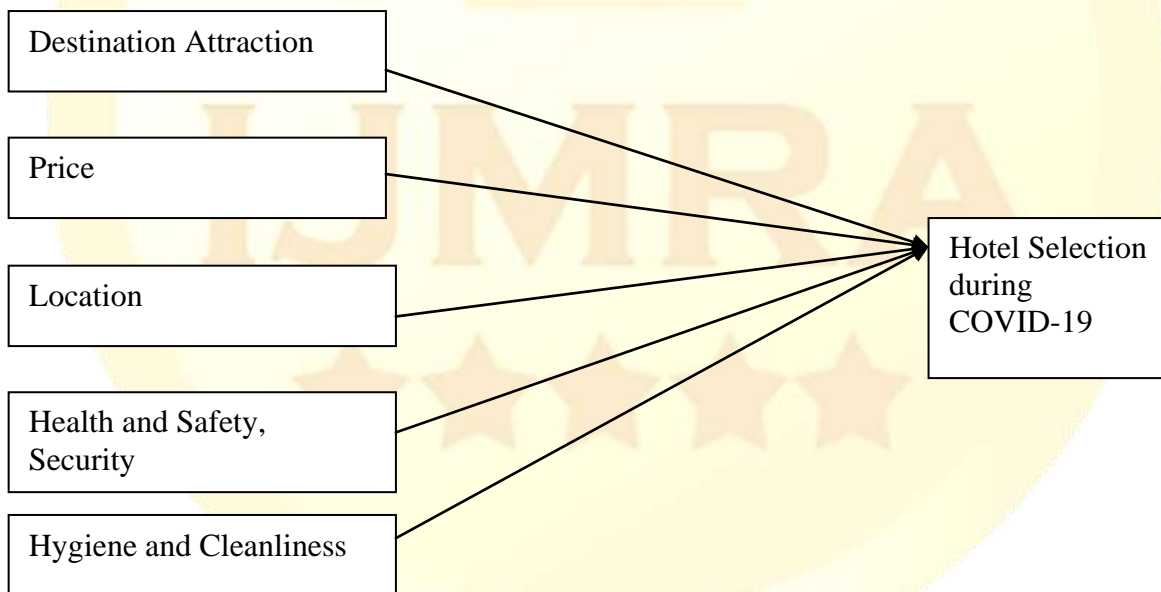
Jang and Weng (2020) claimed due to the global health crisis triggered by COVID-19 while making travel decisions, travelers are now likely to pay more attention to the availability and quality of medical facilities. The importance of hotel cleanliness and hygiene has become particularly salient as of late because COVID-19 can be spread by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus (WHO, 2020b). As noted, hotel surfaces receiving frequent human contact are more likely to be contaminated through touch (Park et al., 2019) and become sources of transmission of infective diseases such as COVID19 (Chen et al., 2020).

The hotel industry provides the quality of cleanliness as the first thing for guests in a hotel. When examining Middle East tourists' hotel selection attributes in Kuala Lumpur (Yusoff & Abdullah, 2010) found that "cleanliness attributes" are the most hotel selection attributes for Middle Eastern tourists. This was supported by (Lockyer, 2003) who identified cleanliness as a strong indicator in a selection of a hotel. Customers frequently

mention that they appreciate it when the rooms, lobby, cafe, and restaurant are clean (Darini & Khozaei, 2016). COVID-19 has changed the way human beings think about the world around them and with it, how hotels have to operate in a good way to care for and reassure vacationers. Whilst the cleanliness of a hotel has constantly been a deciding aspect on where to stay, now more than ever, consumers will have an eagle eye on the measures that the hotel is taking to ensure their safety and well-being. While studying traveler preferences, Travelers are yearning for better transparency around cleaning, hygiene, and sanitization measures at a property (Rijvers, 2020). The COVID-19 created fear among the people and they were locked inside the house and now they have started to come out for refreshment. Especially elder in the family started to bring children out of this situation in such case they have started going on a vacation. Based on the factors identified in the literature the present researcher have identified the relevant factor for the current study and developed a conceptual framework which is presented in fig. 2 below;

*Fig2, Conceptual framework for the study*

**Independent Variable Dependent Variable**



**Hypothesis for the study**

H1: Destination attractions have a significant impact on hotel selection during COVID-19

H2: There is a significant impact of price on hotel selection during COVID-19

H3: There is a significant impact of location on hotel selection during COVID-19

H4: Health and safety, and security have a significant impact on hotel selection during COVID-19

H5: There is a significant impact of hygiene and cleanliness on hotel selection



## Research Design and Methodology

The current research uses mix method with causal-comparative and exploratory research design. The quantitative method emphasizes objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical analysis of data collected through survey questionnaires. A qualitative research method was used to discover the behavioral changes of the travelers. The sample size for the study is 244 family members who visited the hotel for holidays in the outskirts of the Kathmandu valley. The total population of the study is unknown. So the current researcher followed Rose, Sprinks & Canhoto, (2015) method to calculate sample size for unknown population  $n=4pq/d^2$ . Snowball and convenience sampling technique is used to collect the quantitative. The interview method is used to collect qualitative data where the representatives of the different hotels were interviewed to identify the behavioral changes of the customer due to COVID-19. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to find the relationship between independent and independent variables. Similarly, regression was conducted to discover the impact of the dependent and independent variables.

## Correlation Analysis

Finally, to examine the statistical level of significance of the relationship between various dependent and independent variables considered in the present research, the information pertaining to the correlation between these variables has been presented in tables. The researcher has used Pearson's correlation to analyze the data collected which is presented in tabular form. Hence the hypothesis test is done through the result gained from the data analysis and a conclusion is drawn.

Variables	Hotel selection	Destination Attraction	Price	location	Health and safety, and security	Cleanlines s
Hotel Selection	1					
Destination attraction	.230**	1				
Price	-.290**	-.015**	1			
Location	.760**	.290**	.276**	1		
Health and Safety, and security	.391**	.388**	.353**	.475**	1	
Cleanliness	.591**	.479**	.314**	.345**	-.233**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results presented in Table, the correlation coefficients between the hotel selection and its factors have posted a statistically significant, positive association; except

for that between price. The correlation coefficient between hotel selection and destination attraction, location, health and safety, and security, and Hygiene and cleanliness is 0.230, 0.760, 0.391, 0.591 respectively, which is statistically significant at 1% this indicates that there is a significant relationship between destination attraction and hotel selection. However, the hotel selection and the price have posted a negative correlation (-.290) which is statistically significant at 5% to. It may be attributed to the possibility that the travelers believed that price doesn't matter in the selection of hotel during COVID-19.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

a. Dependent Variable: Hotel selection			
b. Predictors: (Constant), Destination attraction, Price, location, Health and Safety, and Cleanliness	Beta	t-test	Sig
Constant	11.223	4.752	.000
Destination Attraction	.051	1.038	.003
Price	-0.106	-2.093	.037
Location	.147	2.141	.002
Health and Safety, and security	.266	6.869	.000
Hygiene and cleanliness	.113	2.683	.000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.188		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.171		
F	10.998		.000
The number in the parentheses isa p-value			
*Significantly different from zero at the 0.01 Level			
Note: Based on the author's Survey, 2020-2021			

Table 3 shows the regression results of the hotel selection regression model fits with the data when performing the regression of dependent and independent variables. It denotes that the independent variables have a significant amount of variation in purchase intention. Here R square is 0.188 or 18.8%, which explains that an 18.8% change in the dependent variable is predicted by the independent variables. F-value 10.998 confirmed the strength

of the relationship. The value sum of squares, mean squares and F-value relationship between the study variables are highly significant at the 0.000 level.

Similarly, to determine which independent variables significantly predict the hotel selection. The t-value for destination attraction was calculated at 1.038 with beta value 0.051 whose p-value is 0.003 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Destination attraction, therefore, has a significant impact on the hotel selection. Since the beta value is positive it means that for every one-unit increase in attraction, the hotel selection increases by the value of 0.051, hence H1 is accepted.

Whereas, the value. The t-test value for price attraction was found to be negative i.e. -2.093 its beta value is -0.106 it indicates that it has a negative but significant impact on hotel selection (p-value of  $0.037 p < 0.005$ ). It does not support the theory as presented in the hypothesis. Since the beta value is negative in the case of price, every one unit change in the predictor variable, the outcome variable decreases by beta value, i.e. by -0.106. Hence H2 cannot be accepted.

Likewise in the case of location t-value was calculated at 2.141 with a beta value of 0.147 whose p-value is 0.002 ( $p < 0.005$ ). The result indicates that location has a positive and significant impact on the hotel selection. Since the beta value is positive it means that for every one-unit increase in the location, the hotel selection increases by .147. Therefore H3 is accepted.

In the same way, the t-value of Health and safety, and security was calculated at 6.869 with a beta value of 0.266 whose p-value is 0.000 ( $p < 0.005$ ). Health and safety, therefore, have a significant impact on hotel selection, hence H4 is accepted. Also, the t-value of hygiene and cleanliness is 2.683 with a beta value of 0.113 whose a p-value is .000 ( $p < 0.005$ ). The result indicates that cleanliness has a significant impact on hotel selection, therefore H5 is accepted.

### **Behavioral changes of the guest before and during COVID-19**

Respondents said these days' guests are more concerned about their health and safety; and security, hygiene and cleanliness, and the destination with low density as they travel with their family. Guest seeks health and safety protocols while booking the rooms and also the occupancy percentage. They even make sure about the availability of medical care at the designated place for isolation with the access of doctor and nurse. One of the respondents

even shared, a few days back an international organization booked 7 hotel rooms for their stay online. But when they came to visit the hotel they found rooms have only one ventilation so they decided to cancel their booking because of lack of air circulation. Therefore, the hotel immediately started to work to maintain the air circulation system in a hotel.

Furthermore, these days guest behavior is changed and they seek low-density areas where they can maintain social distancing and stay safe from other people. Before COVID-19, the guest wants to stay on the top floor but now the guest request for the lower floor because guests are not willing to use elevators. Similarly, the guest wanted to become familiar with staffs by talking and spending more time but nowadays they ignore. Besides these guests feel scared to use a pen, paper, a key used by different people around the hotel. They used to spend more time in the restaurant, recreation centers, and public area. But nowadays they prefer to stay in a room or a quiet and open space. Most of the guest wants to use high technology products to be safer from disease, such as they are willing to pay their bills through QR scanner instead of paying cash.

### **Discussions**

The present study result share similarity with Gursoy et al., (2020), in which researcher has analysed the restaurant and hotel customers' sentiment, and found that visible sanitizing efforts (such as hand sanitizers at the entry, staff wearing masks and gloves), implementing social distancing, limiting the number of customers served, more rigorous and frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces in common areas, and employee training of health and safety protocols are the most important safety precautions customers expect from a restaurant and a hotel. Furthermore, the study reveals around one-third of restaurant customers and around 40% of the hotel customers are willing to pay more for increased safety precautions. While customers expect hospitality businesses to implement more rigorous safety/cleaning procedures, a portion of them are willing to pay for those added safety measures. The study reveals that consumers are more concerned with health, safety, hygiene, cleanliness, and security. The finding of the current study also demonstrates a similar attitude towards the factors.

Similarly, the present researcher also shares closer linkage with that of Kowisuth (2015) the objective of the research was to identify the factor influencing hotel selection of tourist traveling with children in Phuket. The study identified that hotel safety and security was the most important element in hotels selection when traveling with children followed by room quality, value for money, hotel price, hotel staff and service, hotel location, hotel

image, and hotel service. The current research is conducted on-going situation caused by a COVID-19. But still, except price the study other variable cleanliness and hygiene, a destination with low density, health and safety; and security, and location played a significant role in selecting hotel. In this situation, it can be assumed that family members were more conscious about each other's' health while traveling and selecting hotel now and then.

### Conclusion

From the overall learning achievement and analysis of the information regarding the factor affecting hotel selection and perceived behavioral changes among domestic tourist for family holidays during COVID-19, Before COVID-19, destination attraction, price was the priority for the family holidays but these days guests have changed their perception into health and safety; and security, Hygiene and cleanliness which also can be carried over in upcoming days too. Important factors will eventually help hotels in providing better services to their guest who can lead to word-of-mouth advertisements from friends and relatives. As it is obvious that choices differs with the guest categories. For instance, family tourists are more concerned about the health and safety and cleanliness while selecting a hotel rather than a price. Therefore, the hotel should have a better and clear vision on what kind of guest they are targeting by knowing the various factors which influence the hotel selection among the domestic tourist.

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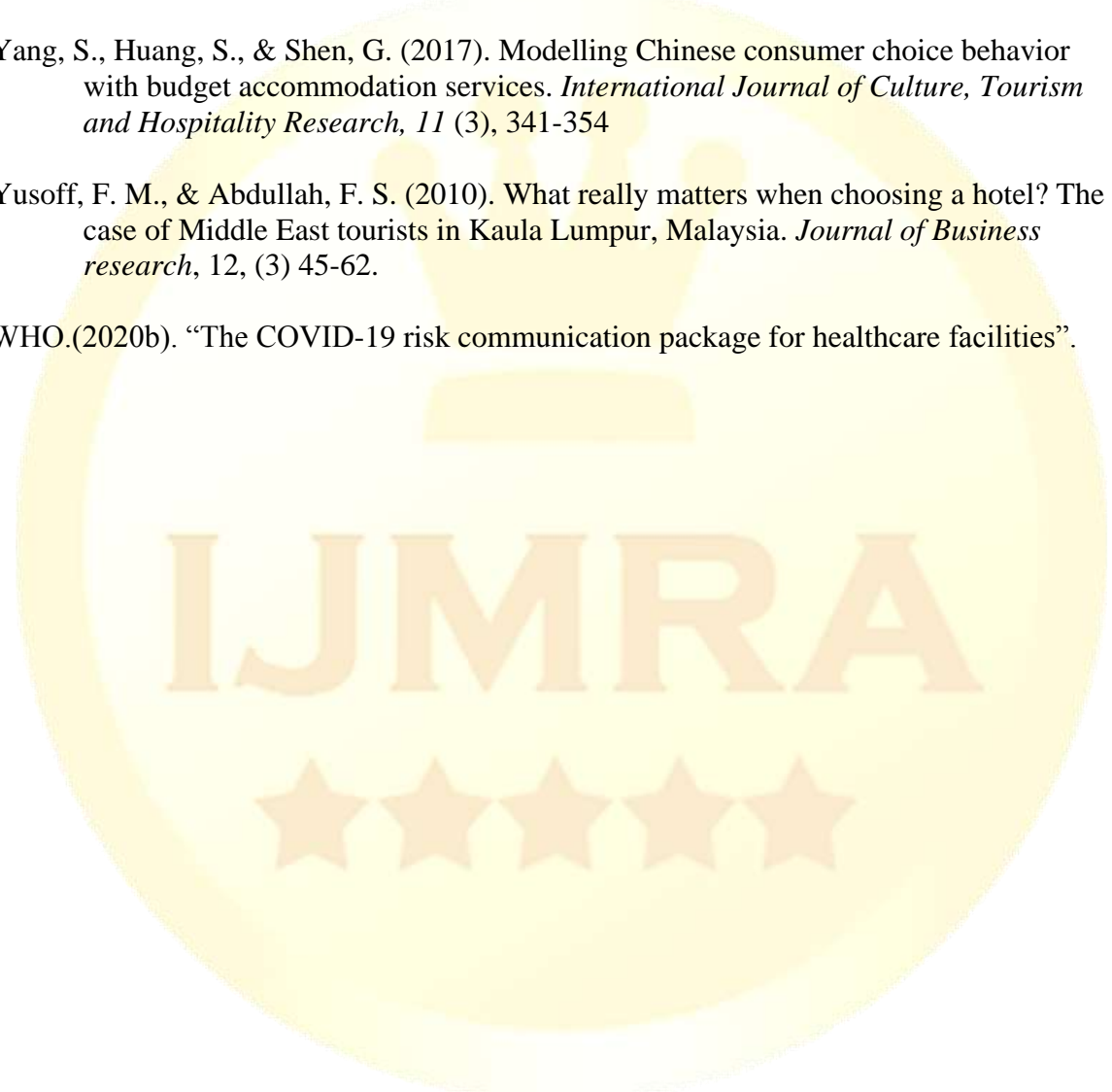
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**Appendix****Respondent Information**

	Component	Frequency	Percent
Gender of the respondent	Male	135	55.3
	Female	109	44.7
	Total	244	100.0
Education level of Respondent	High School	34	13.9
	Diploma	10	4.1
	Bachelor Degree	72	29.5
	Master Degree	88	36.1
	M Phil	25	10.2
	PhD	15	6.1
	Total	244	100.0
	Employment status of the respondent	Employed	148
Self-employed		70	39.35
How many family members are you traveling with	1	36	14.8
	2	46	18.9
	3	55	22.5
	4	44	18.0
	5	15	6.1
	5 or more	48	19.7
	Total	244	100.0
When did you begin making your travel plan	1 month before	102	41.8
	1-2 months before	46	18.9
	2-3 months before	27	11.1
	3-4 months before	28	11.5
	4-5 months before	15	6.1
	More than 5 months	26	10.7
	Total	244	100.0
What type of activities do you seek	Natural focused	98	40.2
	Cultural	21	8.6
	Historical	28	11.5
	Leisured	41	16.8
	Adventurous	47	19.3
	Others	9	3.7
	Total	244	100.0