The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Life Cycle of Tourist Destinations from the Perspective of Tourism Operators

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THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE LIFE CYCLE OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TOURISM OPERATORS

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the tourism sector and economic landscape. Impact studies on tourist destinations are insufficient; decline in tourist arrivals as the core indicator of the impact level is inadequate for comprehending destination scenarios and developing revitalization strategies. Instead, the tourism area life cycle (TALC) model helps understand how the pandemic affects tourism destinations. This study explores the pandemic's impacts on tourism destinations by extending the TALC using qualitative interviews with tour operators. The findings reveal that the pandemic has severely impacted tourism businesses regarding tourist arrivals, business closures, and job and income loss. These impacts can be interpreted in four stages: stagnation, exploration, involvement, and development. The phases illuminate the contextual issues requiring different approaches to ensure that the destination remains attractive, competitive, and sustainable. These findings have theoretical and practical implications; in particular, the TALC enables the development of post-pandemic marketing and promotion strategies.

Keywords: *Tourism Area Life Cycles; COVID-19 pandemic; Malaysia; tourism destination; rebuilding strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented phenomenon that has significantly affected the tourism industry worldwide (Schmude et al., 2021), triggering immense destruction to the global economy. Specifically, it has affected various sectors of tourism businesses at different magnitudes. Researchers worldwide have conducted in-depth studies on the effect of COVID-19 on tourism sectors (e.g., Sigala, 2020). Such studies have been conducted in the Malaysian context (Karim et al., 2020; Foo et al., 2021; Hashim et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2022; Chan & King, 2020; Chan, 2021; Kasim et al., 2020). This literature indicates several rebuilding tourism strategies.

Notably, open communication is key, and government-sponsored loans are crucial for the tourism industry's survival (Yeh, 2021). Juhanda et al. (2022) identified three recovery strategies for tourism businesses: improving hygiene and health standards, intensifying promotion, and controlling operational costs.

Nevertheless, impact studies on tourist destinations are insufficient, especially regarding destination life cycles. Using the decline in tourist arrivals as the core indicator of impact level is inadequate for understanding destination scenarios and developing revitalization strategies. As a result of the pandemic, tourist arrivals have declined, affecting various tourism businesses and thus the growth and sustainability of the tourist destination and the area life cycle of the destination's development stage. The tourism area life cycle (TALC) model is relevant to understanding this phenomenon, facilitating strategies for rebuilding and revitalizing tourism destinations. This paper examines the pandemic's impact by using the TALC model to describe the stages of the tourism destination. This understanding is essential for post-pandemic development of the tourism industry in relation to the destination's stages of development. To this end, this paper explores the pandemic's impacts on Malaysian tourism destinations from tour operators' perspectives. It uses the TALC to describe the different life cycle stages of tourism destinations and then proposes revitalization approaches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry

The tourism industry has been one of the most directly affected and hardest hit sectors worldwide in the COVID-19 pandemic. This unprecedented event led to socio-political, economic, and tourism demand crises (Beh & Lin, 2021). Compared to previous health-related crises, the COVID-19 pandemic is more global and has a longer effect, creating critical scenarios of uncertainty and resilience. These scenarios have brought negative impacts and changes in the economy in different magnitudes; a new business landscape is inevitable. Major tourist destinations are enduring most of the consequences; the unknown duration of the pandemic, travel restrictions and potential global economic recession have become major challenges. Some countries are likely to be worse affected than others due to their high reliance on tourism; eight of the top ten destinations for international tourism (France, Spain, the USA, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, the UK, and Thailand) are the hardest hit.

Tourism revitalization and recovery strategies

The pandemic has had a profound impact on the tourism industry in Malaysia, resulting in significant declines in tourist arrivals, tourism revenue and job losses. The impacts have driven changes within destinations, thus influencing

their 'evolution.' As a result, tourist destinations and business have had to rethink their strategies for rebuilding and recovery. The strategies implemented involved a combination of health and safety measures, diversification, innovation, and collaboration to adapt to the 'new normal' and regain traveller confidence. The post-pandemic situation remains uncertain for many tourism businesses. Thus, it is essential to develop immediate, short-term, and long-term responses. National Tourism's development plan sought to boost tourist arrivals to Malaysia. Recovery strategies should attend to segmentation and planning, integrating tourism into sustainable development and considering underlying causes (Goh, 2021). Open communication is key to successfully combatting the pandemic, and government-sponsored loans are crucial to the tourism industry's survival (Yeh, 2021). Three strategies are improving hygiene and health standards, intensifying promotions, and controlling operational costs (Ralinas et al., 2022). The tourism industry can adjust to the 'new normal' following the pandemic by adopting such strategies (Assaf & Scuderi, 2020).

Tourist destinations can be conceptualized having different life cycles – birth, early growth, teenage years, maturity, and decline. This process may vary in term of duration, as it is influenced by several factors. Without good planning and controls, tourist destinations tend to decline over time in the quality of visitor experience (Plog, 2004). A tourism destination offers various business and leisure activities to cater to tourist needs. It has a complex relationship with the society, the economy, and the environment. These dimensions are important for the destination's sustainable growth; each contributes differently to the tourism business and economic landscape, which has been significantly adversely influenced by the pandemic in Malaysia (Chan et al., 2022). In addition, the context of a tourist destination is critical, as it influences the post-pandemic recovery strategies to rebuild the tourism industry. The pandemic has significantly affected city tourism destinations' economy, community lifestyle and destination environment, which impacts city destination sustainability.

A tourist destination is a geographical location that attracts visitors. Typically, the key components of a tourist destination are attractions, infrastructures, hospitality businesses, accessibility, amenities, safety, security, and environment. The magnitude of the pandemic's negative impact can be observed in the steep drop in tourist arrivals, tourism receipts and business closures as a result of travel bans, border closures and safety measures. Research investigating the pandemic's impacts on tourist destinations is important for developing recovery measures and strategies (Škare et al., 2021). Various practical measures have been considered to stimulate tourism demand and facilitate destination capacities to meet expectations (Huynh et al., 2022).

At the destination level, disruptive technological applications (e.g., travel apps) help tourists tailor a safe travel plan. Tourism destinations can foster tourists' travel intentions and support tourism revitalization in the post-

pandemic period (Phan et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the social, psychological, socio-economic, and cultural influences of various tourism stakeholders, impacting destinations through changes in the business landscape.

Destination development processes are influenced by many factors, including tourist arrivals, tourism resources and the destination's condition. Tourist destinations, as the product, undergo an evolutionary process in response to changes not only in demand and supply but also to critical factors such as health and safety issues. It thus suggests that a new pattern is possible. Indeed, the life cycle concept is a useful analytical tool for destination stages (Choy, 1992). The post-pandemic recovery of the tourism industry requires insight into the stages of a destination; the TALC model is thus relevant.

Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle and tourist destinations
Butler's model (Figure 1) provides a useful framework and descriptive tool regarding the destination's evolution and its markets (Cooper & Jackson, 1989). It highlights the importance of balancing economic development with sustainability, providing essential details about the tourist destination's growth and underlining the need for destinations to adapt to changing market conditions. The model describes the distinct stages that tourist destinations may go through in their development over time. The model has an 'S' shaped curve and is divided into six stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and decline or rejuvenation. Each stage is characterized by certain trends and challenges, providing a framework for understanding how a destination may evolve over time.
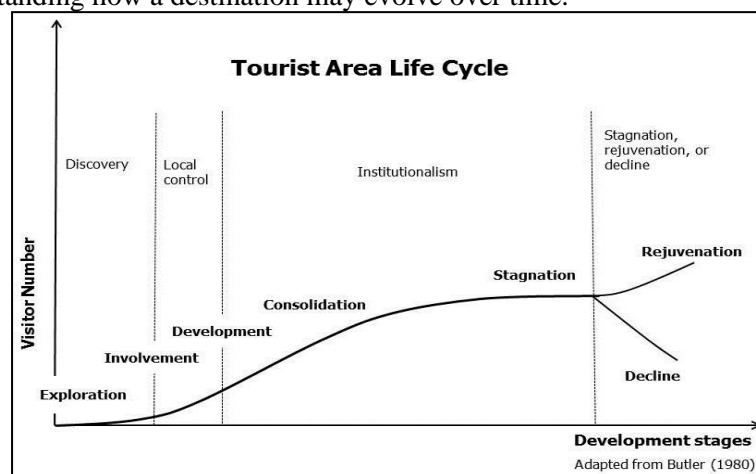

Figure 1: Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle model
Source: Butler (1980)

Exploration is the first stage of the life cycle, characterized by small numbers of visitors who are attracted by the destination. The infrastructure is limited, and the tourism industry is still in its infancy. The main challenge in this stage is to create awareness of the destination and attract more visitors.

Involvement is the second stage, characterized by increasing numbers of visitors and the development of basic tourism infrastructure, including accommodation, restaurants, and transportation. The destination starts to become more established in the tourism market, and there is growing awareness of its attractions. The main challenge in this stage is to ensure that the growth of tourism is sustainable and does not harm the natural environment.

Development is the third stage, characterized by rapid growth in visitors and development of more sophisticated tourism infrastructures, including luxury hotels, theme parks and other attractions. This is the most critical stage, where the destination becomes a popular destination. There is growing competition between different businesses and some negative impacts on the environment and local culture. The main challenge is to manage the tourism growth, ensuring that the destination remains attractive to visitors. This phase indicates if tourism is sustainable or not. Essentially, tourism stabilises during the consolidation stage; destination managers can prolong the consolidation phase by developing better tourist facilities. The development stage could be strategically planned so that the benefits can be equally shared by the local community and the tourists.

Consolidation is the fourth stage, with a mature industry with well-established infrastructure and a steady flow of visitors. It focuses on maintaining and improving quality. The destination may face challenges (e.g., overcapacity), address negative impacts and promote sustainable tourism.

Stagnation is the fifth stage; the destination may experience a decline due to factors such as changing travel patterns or competition. The destination may need to adapt and diversify to attract new visitors. This stage is characterized by reduced popularity, as economic, social, and cultural problems crop up. After this stage, the destination may decline, rejuvenate, or reposition itself by introducing a new market segment or new tourism product.

Decline or rejuvenation is the final stage. The destination may continue to decline or undergo rejuvenation to revitalize the tourism industry. This may involve rebranding, developing new attractions or improving infrastructure.

Butler (1980) introduced TALC to understand the how tourist destinations evolve and develop. It maps temporal changes in tourism destinations (Gore et al., 2022) and is thus a useful tool for tourism planners and developers to understand how tourist destinations can transform over time in response to the changing demands of the tourist industry. It is one of the most robust and widely used conceptual and managerial frameworks employed in tourism (Baum, 1998) and the most researched model in the tourism literature.

Based on the product life cycle framework, tourism scholars since the early 1960s have understood that destinations evolve through a life cycle process (Martin & Uysal, 1990; Tooman, 1997). The model has successfully been applied to more than thirty country cases. Park (2006) investigated the marketing strategies for Jeju Island to extend the life cycle of each tourism segment. TALC has also been used to assess the progress and decline of ecotourism destinations in Western Canada (Boyd, 2006), China's Zhangjiajie National Forest Park (Zhong et al., 2008), Niagara Falls (Getz, 1992) and destinations with multiple features (Hovinen, 2002; Tooman, 1997), as well as in rural tourism (Lane & Kastendholz, 2015).

Few studies specifically apply the TALC model to revitalize tourism destinations impacted by the pandemic or discuss its potential as a framework for understanding the pandemic's impact on tourism destinations and recovering planning. TALC facilitates an understanding of tourist destination development stages, helping tourism planning stakeholders evaluate and learn from past strategies. It can also help predict the destination's future trajectory through various forecasting methods. Destination managers can use this information to avoid a decline. Hence, the paper suggests that the TALC model is a relevant and useful framework for understanding the pandemic's effects on tourism destinations and recovery planning. It is especially important to consider the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the post-COVID era and to prioritize sustainability and resilience in recovery strategies.

METHODS

This paper uses exploratory qualitative research to examine tourism destination development stages and the pandemic's impacts from tour operators' perspectives. The qualitative inductive approach helps understand individual perspectives regarding the subjective, individualized, and contextual aspects of the pandemic's impacts. The respondents' opinions were collected through semi-structured interviews held online using Zoom; participants gave permission to be recorded during the interview session. Data collection was carried out with nine tour operators in Malaysia from August 2021 to March 2022. Table 1 presents the respondent profile. The study used a convenience sampling technique using lists of tour operators registered under the Malaysia Travel and Tour Association. Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes. Key questions concerned the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tour business and the stages of Malaysia as a tourism destination. Data analysis was driven by the interview responses, and thematic analysis was guided by concepts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the six stages of Butler's TALC model.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Nine tourism operators participated in the online interviews. The average age is 51–60 years and older. The majority are male. The average length of tourism business operation is 21–30 years. These tourism operators are from Sabah, Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Sarawak followed by Pulau Penang. Four respondents operate inbound tourism business, four are involved in inbound, outbound and ticketing businesses and one is in inbound and ticketing business.

Table 1: Respondent profile

Demographics	Categories	Number of respondents
Gender	Male	7
	Female	2
Age range	20–30	0
	31–40	0
	41–50	2
	51–60	3
	Above 60	4
Type of tour business	Inbound	4
	Inbound and ticketing	1
	All three (inbound, outbound, and ticketing)	4
Location	Sabah	2
	Kuala Lumpur	2
	Selangor	2
	Sarawak	2
	Pulau Pinang	1
Years in operation	1 to 10	1
	11 to 20	1
	21 to 30	4
	31to 40	2
	41 to 50	0
	51 to 60	1

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Impacts of the pandemic on tourism businesses

Table 2 presents the four main themes that emerged from the interview responses on impacts of the pandemic on tourism businesses: severity, business operations, financial losses and reduction in staffing and compensation.

Table 2: Themes regarding the pandemic's impact on tourism businesses

No.	Themes on the pandemic's impacts on tourism businesses	Interview responses and respondents' explanation of themes

1	Very severe, unprecedented, unexpected	TO1: We do not know how long the pandemic will last, it a prolong event and very uncertain. TO2: The impacts are very, very severe, worse as compared to the Asian financial crisis in 1997–1998 one. TO3: Not sure how recovery would look like TO6: Unexpected and unprecedented TO6: There is no timeline, entire world is suffering
2	Business operations affected: border closure, zero business, no arrivals, new normal, work from home.	TO4: Borders were closed, it was zero business. TO2: All going down to zero and operation stops. TO3: Zero business for the last two years since the pandemic started. TO4: Business dropped until zero. TO6: No business and of course it is exceedingly difficult to maintain our operation and to maintain our people. TO7: Our booking automatically went to zero as there were no arrivals. TO8: It a new change of operation, everyone works from home using technology. TO8: When we embrace technology, we are like border-less. TO9: It is like shutting down business operation for the 27 months. TO9: Border close, so nothing as we depend heavily on long haul business
3	Financial impacts: revenue, cash flow, cost of maintenance, expenses	TO7: Main impact of course would be on our financial status and to our staffing itself and no revenue coming. TO1: Huge financial losses, more than three million (RM) TO3: Impacted on our financial unbelievably bad and on our cash flow. TO3: Cost of maintenance to the properties TO4: It is difficult to cover the expenses. TO8: Revenue was down from 70 to 80%
4	Human resources: reduced staffing, unpaid leave, retaining key staff.	TO1: Dismissed our staff. TO1: Pay at a less 50% for salary for those post critical position, to keep them. TO3: Keeping only core staff with unpaid leave of course. TO7: Reduce our staffing itself

The responses in Table 2 show that the pandemic was an unprecedented event that severely impacted tourism. The border closing meant that there were no arrivals, which affected the businesses' revenues and profits. They were forced to downsize or close. The tour operators suffered significant financial losses, faced cash flow problems and were unable to sustain maintenance costs

and business expenses. From their perspectives, the pandemic was extremely detrimental for the industry in Malaysia and worldwide.

The resulting massive financial losses led to downsizing in staffing and a new work environment: working from home (see Assaf & Scuderi, 2020). Because COVID-19 is health hazard, it has changed the way tourism businesses operate. The consequent 'new normal' requires adaptability. As TO8 stated, the 'new normal' relates to the application of digitization. Tour operators dependent on technology are fortunate enough to work from home and sustain their business. However, tour companies depending on long-haul business were affected seriously due to international border closures, as TO9 pointed out.

These findings correspond well to past studies on the pandemic's impacts on the tourism industry worldwide, which document declines in tourist arrivals in tourism-dependent countries and adverse effects on revenue, profitability, and sustainability. Chan et al. (2022) show that the pandemic resulted in business interruptions and revenue losses for tourism industry service providers. Foo et al. (2021) also confirmed that the pandemic significantly impacted tourism business personnel.

The impacts of the pandemic on Malaysia's destination life cycle
Table 3 presents the interview responses on the four tourist destination stages of stagnation, exploration, involvement, and development.

Table 3: Themes regarding Malaysia's TALC stages

Themes: TALC stages	Interview responses / respondents' explanation of themes	Proposed approaches to revitalize the destination life cycle
Stagnation	TO2: Malaysia has reached a stagnation level, not only stagnation but come to a decrease in terms of performance. TO2: Tourism Malaysia has always been living in the past, have been successful in the past. TO5: Malaysia is a matured destination, people know Malaysia. TO6: Lack of proper direction where we want to go, we cannot stay in the stagnant stage or decline stage	Rejuvenate or reposition the destination by introducing a new market segment and new tourism products. Increase the tourist arrivals. Diversify tourist attractions. Develop innovative marketing and promotion strategies. .

Involvement	TO1: we are somewhere here in involvement; recovery is slow and need to do promotion. TO3: We are at involvement stage; it is still at an incredibly early stage. TO4: We need to involve and to get things ready, enough infrastructure for tourist arrivals. TO5: Include the government involvement is essential	Increase awareness of destination attractions. All tourism players and related government agencies need to get involved to rebuild the tourism industry and ensure that the growth of tourism is sustainable and does not harm the natural environment.
Exploration	TO3: It is a suitable time to restart this whole thing, especially re-look into my infrastructure, different product, and segment. TO3: It is at difference stages, exploration. TO4: Should be exploration and to explore and to get the right thing. TO4: Whatever things you plan now is still uncertain because it has kept changing. TO4: Exploration stage as you must get things ready. TO9: Need to explore new markets as the mass market countries are yet to not reopen. TO9: We are at exploration stage in this new normal with uncertainty environment created by pandemic	Create awareness of the destination and attract more visitors. Explore new markets and rebrand the destination.
Development	TO4: At the development stage as we cannot stop and need to get things ready. TO9: Development stage as we are not ready yet	Manage the growth of tourism and ensure that the destination remains attractive to visitors; development benefits can be equally shared by the local community and the tourist.

The responses reveal that tour operators perceived Malaysia as a tourism destination as being in the stagnation stage, followed by involvement, exploration, and development. The stagnation stage is based on the decline of tourist arrivals due to border closures, movement control orders and health and safety issues. The involvement stage implies the need for tourism stakeholders and government agencies to rebuild the industry, especially to increase tourist arrivals with adequate infrastructures. Respondents also described Malaysia tourist destination as in the exploration stage, as the pandemic has created a new tourism business landscape and environment. Work and travel behaviours will be different; there is uncertainty in the existing market segments. Hence, the destination will need to explore new attractions and market segments, creating

awareness of the destination to attract more visitors.

The majority of the tour operators regarded Malaysia as a tourist destination at the stagnation stage, with a high possibility of regeneration. They stated that Malaysia's tourist arrival performance is far below those of neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia, especially in reference to Malaysia's performance before the pandemic. There is a lack of clear direction to bring Malaysia as a tourist destination to greater heights, which is why there is stagnation in terms of competition and markets.

Other respondents believe that Malaysia as tourist destination is in the involvement stage because tourism recovery is slow, requiring involvement from both private and public sectors; tourism stakeholder involvement and cooperation are crucial in the early stage of recovery to rebuild. The numerous subsectors of tourism businesses must be involved to revive the tourism destination, increasing visitors, and developing basic tourism infrastructure.

Other respondents thought Malaysia is in the exploration stage because the pandemic has drastically transformed the tourism business landscape. Innovative approaches are thus required to revive tourism, especially regarding the country's infrastructure. TO3 used Sabah as an example of a tourism location that prioritizes the environment but has inadequate infrastructure. The existing infrastructure cannot accommodate large numbers of tourists and lacks sufficient access to clean water, electricity, and waste disposal. TO4 and TO9 perceived Malaysia as in both the exploration and development stage, resulting from the pandemic. They expressed the need to explore novel approaches to create appealing tourism products for different targeted market segments, ensuring that Malaysia remains a popular destination for both domestic and international visitors; tourism associations should collaborate with the government to develop new products and promote destinations in Malaysia.

The stagnation stage indicates few or no tourist arrivals due to the pandemic, with competition leading to the destination falling behind neighbouring destinations. The involvement stage refers to stakeholders and government agencies rebuilding the tourist destination, especially sufficient infrastructure. The exploration stage implies that the destination faces recent changes due to the pandemic. Thus, tourism stakeholders must explore innovative approaches and create appealing products for different market segments. The development stage implies that the destination will eventually move towards sustainable growth, so it is vital to ensure that it remains attractive to visitors and experiences sustainable growth while benefiting the local community.

To revitalize destinations and rebuild the industry, stakeholder engagement in destination management is key. At the stagnation stage, destination managers should engage with local communities, government agencies and private sector businesses. At the involvement stage, they should

engage with tourists, local communities, and other stakeholders to ensure the destination's sustainability. Destinations in decline or stagnation may require targeted interventions for revitalization, different from those in the growth or consolidation stages. Tourist destination changes and challenges emerged due to the pandemic; the model may need to be adapted to reflect contemporary trends in tourist behaviour, prioritizing sustainability, and resilience in recovery strategies.

The identified life cycle stages suggest that sustainably rebuilding destinations should primarily focus on increasing visitor numbers and developing tourism infrastructure for more comfortable travel while maintaining affordable prices, which is consistent with Assaf and Scuderi (2020). The paper thus proposes these strategies to revitalize tourist destinations:

1) Develop new products by creating unique products and experiences to attract new and repeat visitors, including themed tours, cultural festivals and culinary experiences that add value to visitor experience.
2) Develop strong marketing and promotion strategies to raise awareness of the destination and its unique offerings through social media, targeted advertising and partnering with travel boggers and influencers.
3) Expand beyond traditional markets to increase visitor numbers and reduce dependence on a single segment. New tourism products and experiences that appeal to specific market segments are essential.
4) Enhance infrastructure and facilities and improve the quality of infrastructure such as airports, roads, and public transport to improve tourist experiences and the appeal of the destination.
5) Collaborate with other stakeholders such as government agencies, private sector businesses and NGOs to develop new tourism products and experiences, sharing best practices and resources.

IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The results that there are four life cycle stages to describe the pandemic's impact on the tourism destination from tourism operators' perspectives. These stages are affected by the pandemic context: changes in destination status are shaped by the pandemic, which brought travellers to a standstill and created new phenomena. This has influenced the destination development stage, which can be analysed using the TALC model. Stagnation is considered as the main stage due to decline and no tourist arrivals because of movement of control orders and border closures. As a result, tourism businesses were forced to close, so the development phase is described as a stagnation or immobility phase. Involvement implies that tourism stakeholders must get involved in increasing numbers of tourists and establish the tourism market. Involvement in establishing new attractions, basic infrastructure and new traveller behaviour is

crucial. The pandemic has transformed tourist destinations into a new business landscape with a new normal business environment; the destination has evolved, requiring the exploration of new attractions and markets to create awareness of the destination and attract more visitors. The paper contributes a valuable understanding of the destination's development context of effective cross-linking strategies and sustainable tourism development.

The findings have practical implications for destination management and stakeholder engagement. They inform the development of effective destination management strategies: at the stagnation stage, destination managers should focus on developing new products and experiences, investing in marketing and promotion including rebranding and enhancing infrastructures and facilities to be more appealing to visitors. At the involvement stage, destination managers should focus on maintaining the quality of visitor experience and developing sustainable tourism practices. At the exploration stage, they should focus on managing visitor numbers, developing new products to maintain a competitive edge, and ensuring the sustainability of the destination.

The findings have several theoretical and practical implications. By expanding the TALC model to understand the impact of the pandemic on the tourist destination, it moves toward new avenues of TALC research. The results provide an in-depth understanding of the pandemic's impact on the development stages of the tourism destination. It addresses this research gap in the Malaysian context. The findings add to existing literature on the pandemic's impact on the tourism industry with respect to destinations and tour operators.

In terms of theoretical implications, the findings highlight that all products cycle through introduction, growth, maturity, and decline. Innovation in the stagnation stage helps destinations move from stagnation to the involvement and exploration stages, sustaining growth in the long term. The involvement stage underscores the importance of tourism stakeholder collaboration to revitalize destinations. Stakeholder engagement is also critical in ensuring sustainable tourism development that benefits tourists and the local community.

In term of practical implications, the findings serve as useful guides to tourism planning, development, and promotion to rebuild the tourist destination following the pandemic. The proposed strategies align with the development stages for tourism practitioners to revitalize the industry, identifying the essential post-pandemic destination management and marketing strategies.

The paper is not free from limitations. The findings cannot be generalised based on the development stages, as each tourism area is unique, and the magnitude of pandemic impact varies. However, similar destinations can be compared and contrasted to get valuable insights into the development process. The life cycle span of the tourist destination depends on planning and

policy initiatives. Future research should triangulate qualitative and quantitative data and analysis. The determination of the TALC stages is primarily based on the pandemic impact data specific to the destination only from the tour operators' perspective. Hence, future research should include other tourism stakeholders such as the promotion board and accommodation and airline industries, and the use of other relevant variables is necessary to analyse destination growth.

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