

Disastrous impact of Coronavirus (COVID 19) on Tourism and Hospitality Industry in India

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Abstract

The purpose of the current paper is to review the tourism industry has been badly affected by the Corona virus epidemic. The lockdown has broken the back of the tourism industry across the country. This has created employment crisis in front of 38 million people associated with the industry. Crores of people in India are directly or indirectly connected to the tourism industry. Even before the lockdown, many airlines and travel companies had sent more than 35 percent of their employees on leave without salary.

The Travel and Tourism sector accounted for 9.2 percent of India's GDP in 2018 and provided 2.67 crore jobs. ICC Director General Rajiv Singh said, "Due to the Corona Virus epidemic, bookings for the entire year have decreased by 18-20 per cent in 2020, while the average daily fare has come down by 12-14 per cent." The industry association has sought a series of reliefs from the central government, including extending the loan repayment proposal by the RBI by three months to six months and complete exemption in GST for one year for the tourism, travel and hospitality sectors. "The ICC has suggested creating a travel and tourism sustainability fund, which transfers direct benefits to prevent financial loss and employment cuts," the ICC said in a statement.

Lockdown has been done in many cities not only in India but also all over the world. The tourism industry is suffering the most due to this. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the employment of five crore people in the tourism industry could be lost. In 2020, 25 per cent of tourism-related bookings have been canceled. In such a situation, the tourism industry is suffering a lot. According to the WTTC study, it will take about 10 to 12 months to recover from the damage the tourism industry will suffer. Because fear has seethed in people's minds and they will avoid going abroad. Tourism has been affected in every state of the country including Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Agra and West Bengal.

Keywords: Indian Tourism, Travel, Lockdown, Hospitality, epidemic and Corona Virus

Introduction

It is currently wide acknowledged that the Corona virus (COVID-19, as formally known) was first testified in Wuhan, China in Dec 2019, and was recognized by Chinese authorities as a novel virus in January 2020. WHO (World Health Organization) declared this as a PHEIC (Public Health Emergency of International Concern) in the end of January 2020. After the initial delay in the source point (Wuhan), Chinese authorities took utmost efforts to regulate the blowout of the disease; however, it has already started impacting other parts of China as well as other countries during mid to end of January. A term “infodemic” has been used by the WHO Director General at the initial stage of the spread of the virus (during mid- January 2020: which seems to be still valid while writing the paper in the end of March 2020. WHO colleagues have warned the tsunami of information, particularly with social media, which numerous times call for panic condition. We’ve got ascertained this in several countries, as well as fake news spreading through social media. On 11th of March 2020, WHO has declared this as a worldwide pandemic, and as of 30th of April 2020, 212 Countries and Territories all around the world have conveyed as the coronavirus COVID-19 that originated from Wuhan, China.

While the statistics of infected persons, casualties changing rapidly overtime, it is very challenging to put a number. As of 30th of April, there are more than 2,24,301 death reported, while more than 83,000 people are in critical situations globally. More than 31,81,642 people are affected. Though it’s early to create any investigate on the character of its spread, a rare characteristics can define this novel virus as follow:

- ***High rate of spread:*** Within three months the virus has spread globally and is taken into account as a worldwide pandemic. The speed of its spread is high, that happened due to higher mobility of people in a globally interconnected world. It is aforementioned folks to people transmission rate of very high.
- ***Aged and low immune people more vulnerable:*** Data shows that the aged population and people with low immunity (with diabetes or other chronic disease) are more susceptible to this novel virus.
- ***Differential recovery rate:*** While the worldwide average of recovery rate is comparatively low (like 28 to 30%), totally different countries have differential recovery

rate. Whereas China, Korea, Japan has Comparatively high recovery rate, Europe, Iran, USA showed comparatively lower recovery rate. Of course, this can be perpetually ever-changing, and hopefully gets better soon.

Over previous few weeks, there are numerous words which got significant attention like: “community spreading”, “social distancing (physical distancing)”, “self-isolation”, “15 days quarantine”, “lockdown,” “break the chain” and many more. All these are used for one purpose, which is to prevent spreading the novel virus. Although there are reported use of medicines from different countries (without proper confirmation); there is no confirmed medicines accustomed cure this virus, or no vaccine are available on the market for COVID-19 as of April 30, 2020. Thus, the only way to stop the spread is to isolate us from social gathering or masses, and isolate confirmed people for quarantine. This method needs a combination of strong governance, use of existing and next technologies in innovative ways, and strong community participation and solidarity. It made fascinating analysis on however the country-based mitigation measures influence the course of epidemic.

While acknowledging that governance, citizen participation/awareness, penetration of technology varies from country to country, this paper makes a modest effort to investigate the experiences of China, Japan and Korea as East Asian cluster. Statistical analysis of the key governance decision is made and their correlations with the spread of the virus within these three countries are observed. A few common lessons are drawn, that have larger implications to the society during this crucial phase of COVID-19 global pandemic.

Proactive Prevention Activities

To prevent infection and to slow transmission of COVID-19 a Novel Virus, do the following:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water, or clean them with alcohol-based hand rub.
- Maintain at least 1 metre distance between you and people coughing or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Stay home if you feel unwell.

- Refrain from smoking and other activities that weaken the lungs.
- Practice physical distancing by avoiding unnecessary travel and staying away from large groups of people.

**Table 1: COVID – 19 State wise Status
upto 30th April 2020 in India**

State / UTs	Confirmed	Active	Recovered	Deceased
Maharashtra	10498	8266	1773	459
Gujarat	4395	3568	613	214
Delhi	3515	2362	1094	59
Madhya Pradesh	2719	2100	482	137
Rajasthan	2584	1690	836	58
Tamil Nadu	2323	1038	1258	27
Uttar Pradesh	2281	1685	555	41
Andhra Pradesh	1463	1027	403	33
Telangana	1039	572	441	26
West Bengal	795	623	139	33
Jammu and Kashmir	614	390	216	8
Karnataka	576	319	235	22
Kerala	497	110	383	4
Bihar	426	342	82	2
Punjab	357	248	90	19
Haryana	313	101	209	3
Odisha	143	101	41	1
Jharkhand	111	88	20	3
Uttarakhand	57	21	36	0
Chandigarh	56	39	17	0
Assam	42	12	29	1
Himachal Pradesh	40	11	28	1
Chhattisgarh	38	4	34	0
Andaman and Nicobar	33	17	16	0
Ladakh	22	6	16	0
Meghalaya	12	11	0	1
Puducherry	8	3	5	0
Goa	7	0	7	0
Manipur	2	0	2	0
Tripura	2	0	2	0
Arunachal Pradesh	1	0	1	0
Mizoram	1	1	0	0

Source: <https://www.mygov.in/covid-19>

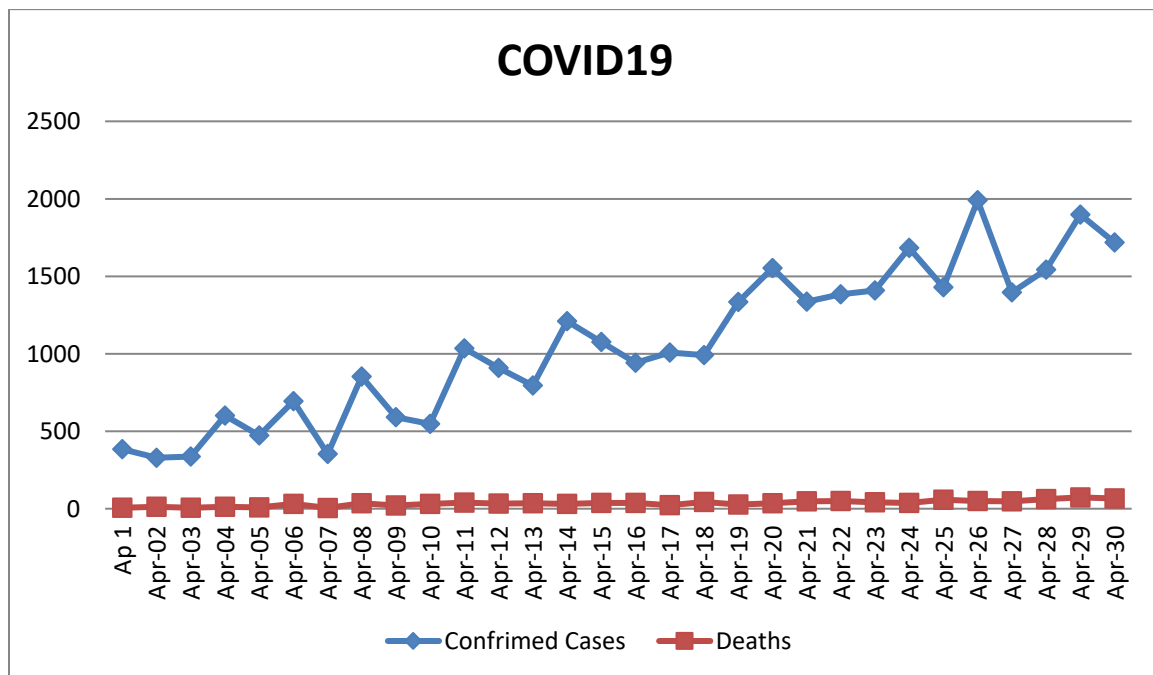
Government of India is taking all essential steps to ensure that we are prepared well to face the challenge and threat posed by the rising pandemic of COVID-19 the Novel Corona Virus. With active support of the people of India, we have been able to contain the spread of the Novel Virus in our country. The utmost important factor in preventing the spread of the Virus locally is to empower the citizens with the right information and taking precautions as per the advisories being issued by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

Table 2: Status of COVID 19 for the month of April, 2020 in India

Day (April)	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15
Confirmed Cases	385	329	336	601	472	693	354	853	591	547	1035	909	796	1211	1076
Deaths	6	12	6	12	9	32	5	35	20	30	40	34	35	31	38
Day (April)	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Confirmed Cases	941	1007	991	1334	1553	1336	1383	1409	1684	1429	1990	1396	1543	1897	1718
Deaths	37	23	43	27	36	47	50	41	37	57	49	48	62	73	67

Source: <https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/in>

Figure 1: Status of COVID 19 for the month of April, 2020 in India



Source: Drawn by authors with basic data from the month of April taken from official websites of COVID19.

Figure 1 shows the number of affected people per day of the month April in India with key WHO decisions stated above. The above description shows that within the month of April 1 to April 30, the virus has taken a significant number of lives, affected a large number of people, and brought down many States, including the economic hubs under lockdown. Several States have made travel bans, lock down of cities and provinces, which have also impacted significantly the local as well as Indian economy.

Hospitality

The hospitality and travel industry have perhaps been most hard-hit, with hourly workers facing potential devastating hardships. Marriott International with approximately 174,000 employees is poised to place tens of thousands of workers on furlough. Hilton Worldwide has also notified lenders on 5th March 2020 borrowing a precautionary \$1.75 billion under a revolving loan to preserve money and to maintain flexibility “in light of uncertainty in the global markets”.

Hotel industry revenue per available room in the United States fell 11.6% for the week ending 7th March 2020, whilst in China occupancy rates fell 89% by the end of January 2020. Other United States hotel companies are seeking approximately \$150 billion in direct aid for employees due to an unprecedented fall in demand, along with an estimated \$1.5 billion loss since mid-February. MGM Resorts International have also announced a temporary suspension in operation at its Las Vegas properties, with casino operations closing on 16th March, followed by hotel operations. Since 1st March 2020, hotel occupancy in Germany decreased by over 36%. Italian cities including Rome have been inadvertently affected with a current occupancy rate of 6%, whilst London remains the most stable with an occupancy rate of approximately 47%. Overall, the COVID-19 crises have led to international distortions for the hospitality industry, and significant slumps for the European hotel market.

Tourism

The tourism sector is currently one of the hardest-hit by the outbreak of COVID-19, with impacts on both travel supply and demand. As a direct consequence of COVID-19, The World Travel and Tourism Council has warned that 50 million jobs in the global travel and tourism sector may be at risk. In Europe, the European Tourism Manifesto alliance, encompassing over 50 European

public and private organisations from the travel and tourism sector, have highlighted the need to implement urgent measures. These include temporary state aid for the tourism and travel sector from national governments, fast and easy access to short- and medium-term loans to overcome liquidity shortages, including funds made available by the EU through the Corona Response Investment Initiative, and fiscal relief. The alliance has also called for the launch of the European Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme.

Internationally, Vietnam received approximately 1.45 million Chinese visitors in the first quarter of 2019, dropping by 644,000 in January of 2020. It is estimated that Vietnam's tourist sector will suffer a \$5 billion loss should the COVID-19 pandemic extend into the second quarter of 2020. Moreover, the Philippines are projecting a 0.3-0.7% slowdown in the country's full year GDP. In the United States, restriction of all non-essential travel, US-Canada border closure, and the suspension of visa services may accelerate disruption of the American economy. In the UK, many parks are now closing to further enforce social distancing as they have in Italy.

Aviation

The travel industry is grappling with an unprecedented wave of cancellations and a significant drop in demand amid strict governmental instructions to implement social distancing and the restriction of unnecessary travel. Globally, border closures are on the rise. In the US, all foreign nationals from China, Iran, certain EU countries are barred from entering. This ban includes anyone who visited these countries within the 14 days prior to their US trip. The UK Foreign Office has also advised UK nationals against all but essential international travel. In Europe, the president of the EU commission has proposed all non-essential travel from outside the EU be suspended for 30 days. Travel suspensions have similarly been implemented across Asia and Africa.

In light of these events, Malaysia Airport reported a 30% decline in international passenger traffic for February. More recently, Airlines for America sought a government bailout encompassing \$25 billion in grants, \$25 billion in loans, and significant tax relief to ensure survival. UK airlines have also called for an immediate £7.5 billion emergency bailout to prevent a widespread shutdown. Ministers in the Netherlands have also reported implementing strategies

to ensure the continued operation of Air France-KLM and Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, whilst the Italian Government have been said to be close to taking full control of ailing airline Alitalia.

Lockdown Has Had Disastrous Impact on Hospitality Sector; Government Support Needed: Industry

The lockdown to contain spread of Covid-19 in the country has had disastrous impact on the hospitality sector, particularly for hotels, hoteliers aforesaid.

"The impact is disastrous. The hotels are businesses that are very capital intensive and even have very high fixed charges," Lemon Tree Hotels Chairman and MD Patanjali G Keswani told PTI.

The capital intensive component is generally debt and it has to be serviced by imbursement of interest on debt and settlement of debt. Hotels are also manpower intensive, so they have lots of fixed charges such as wage bill, besides paying government levies, minimum load charges, among others, he added.

"Earlier Indian hospitality industry was on average witnessing 65 percent to 70 percent or full occupancy till end of the February. First few days of the March were fine, once the things started accelerating; the occupancy has gone down to minimum,"

Going ahead, occupancy in India is going to be very low. So hotels will have to either shutdown or run in a very limited manner, he added. The government has also requested industries to not lay off staff and cut salary, where in liquidity is a problem.

Under this situation, the industry is going to go sick very fast unless you have the external source of capital, like holding company. "The government took a good first step to announce the moratorium on interest and principle repayment for three months. But the problem is the period is too short. One cannot plan on the basis of three months. "Ideally government ought to have done a 12-month moratorium and aforesaid the amount you are not paying in these 12 months shall be added in the debt,"

The industry isn't searching for a dole however is posing for minimum support to survive by pushing back repayment of installment's, some support for paying salaries and waiver in government levies, he added.

In similar vein, Cygnett Hotels and Resorts founder and MD Sarbendra Sarkar said, "The lockdown has adversely affected the hospitality industry...We are experiencing a big drop in new reservations, and increase in cancellations, etc."

While RBI's three-month moratorium has come as a relief, the industry hopes that the government will soon offer schemes that will enable the sector, he said.

In the meantime, Cygnett is reviewing its progress so far and seeks to make necessary changes and strategise for the post-Covid 19 period during this time, he added.

Stating that Covid-19 has severely impacted the industry, Bird Group ED Ankur Bhatia said, "With occupancy crashing to a below 5 percent against 95 percent last year due to the unfortunate impact of Covid-19 mayhem, the tourism industry was in the front line and is the worst hit. No wonder a slew of hotels will fold up under pressure."

The Associations have put forward multiple proposals to stay alive as well to ensure the employees are taken care of and retained, he added.

"We welcome government's move to offer moratorium for three months on loans. The moratorium on capital and interest repayments of loans taken by the registered businesses would help for now as some of the payments were due end of March," Bhatia said.

Amatra Hotels and Resorts co-founder and COO Anurag Dua said hospitality and travel sectors have been amongst the worst affected segments, with the businesses coming to a standstill as governments across the world locked down their countries to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

"The moratorium of three months would provide the much-needed relief for the hospitality sector in India provided banks/NBFCs approve it unanimously with no condition precedent following the RBI move," he added.

However, businesses working on rental models with private owners have not received any benefit which might act as a deterrent to operators at large, Dua said.

"We expect the situation to improve once cases of Covid-19 slows and believe that the domestic tourism industry shall grow at a better rate," he added.

Coronavirus impact: Hospitality industry to suffer losses up to ₹620 crore

The cascading effect of the coronavirus (Covid 19) pandemic will cost the Indian hospitality industry losses to the tune of ₹620 crore. The hotel chain and standalone hotel segment is staring at losses over ₹130-155 crore, whereas the alternate accommodation segment is likely to make losses of over ₹420-470 crore. Layoffs of 'casual staff' or 'contracted staff' are probably going, a research suggested.

Hotelivate, a hospitality consultancy firm has in a report said that the Indian hospitality industry is likely to be hit really hard. The report suggested that domestic hotel companies that follow the fiscal year regime, this amounts to a weak Financial Year 2020 and a weaker Financial Year 2021.

According to the report, while January was still at par for the Indian hospitality industry. The industry had started to see early signs of recovery from February. "Unfortunately, business for the second half of March seems to have dropped off a cliff, pretty much across the board," the report said.

"March has borne the brunt of many large-scale cancellations across the corporate, MICE and leisure segments. Notably, the extent of this lost business has primarily been seen across the top eight markets. Various Tier Two and Tier Three hotel markets in India continue to witness a small erosion in business for now, and occupancies in at least the first half of March were only partially lower despite the spread of the virus in some states", it added.

The Indian government, just like many other governments has closed their borders, have suspended visas till April 15. Several international airlines have trimmed their operations to Indian destinations. Indian airlines have suspended complete operations to international destinations and reduced their domestic operations. To add on to this, the governments have requested people to work from home.

According to the report, in this 'best case scenario' of the viruses impact only being seen devastating for the next two to three months, our estimates are that the weighted impact of this situation is likely to erode the blended nationwide occupancy (in calendar year 2020) by about 18-20 per cent, while the blended nationwide Average Daily Rate ADR may see a drop of 12-14 per cent this year.

The reduced traffic to the hotels will also have an obvious cascading effect on revenue from F&B, MICE and other commissions.

Business Line had reported that the overall business and summer holiday bookings are likely to be impacted by 25 per cent on a year-on-year basis, according to industry estimates.

The Indian standalone and chain hotel segment has over 1.4 lakh rooms which accounts for only 5 per cent in the hotel industry segment.

According to the report, the overall loss of total revenue for the around 140,000 branded/organised hotel rooms across the country will be anywhere between ₹130-155 crore. “This amounts to 27 per cent to 32 per cent erosion in the overall revenue as compared to last year.”

Over 95 per cent of the Indian hospitality industry is dominated by Bed & Baths (B&Bs), Guest Houses, “it is our estimate that there is likely to be an additional loss of anywhere between ₹420-470 crore in total revenue across the alternate accommodation industry.”

It has often been stated that the larger tourism industry in India contributes to about 10 per cent of the GDP (approximately US\$275 billion). It may not be an overstatement to assert that almost all of this revenue may dwindle to a painfully negligible amount if COVID-19 does not come to a halt this year.

Adding to these woes is the fact that anywhere between 15 and 25 per cent of the employees of the various branded hotel chains in India are either contracted or casual staff. It may not be evident to many that about 8 to 10 per cent of the total staff strength of the global cruise liners are Indians . These people become the weak link to the whole chain and it is evident that it may break them first.

First Impact: Travel and Tourism

The travel and tourism industry is already seen a sharp slowdown, which could worsen in the coming weeks.

Foreign tourist arrivals rose by 1.3 percent in January—the lowest in at least a decade.

In recent days, the industry has seen a flurry of international and domestic cancellations, said Pronab Sarkar, president of the Indian Association of Tour Operators. “Foreign tourist arrivals are down by about 67 percent annually in the January-March quarter, while domestic tourists are fewer by about 40 percent,” Sarkar told Bloomberg Quint.

While several state governments are wary of all foreign tourists, domestic travellers are also turning cautious and reluctant to travel, he said.

Madhavan Menon, chairman and managing director of Thomas Cook, said there's still demand for domestic travel. Hoping to temper some of the impact of reduced overseas travel, the company has introduced products to replicate foreign destinations, he said, adding that there is demand for travel to some parts of the country, including Jammu & Kashmir. While foreign travel entails high unit value, domestic travel is able to offset this at least in part, he said.

Airlines, however, have started to warn of lower traffic. In exchange filings, InterGlobe Aviation Ltd., the parent of India's largest airline IndiGo, said traffic numbers have started to fall. "Over the past few days, however, week-on-week, we have seen a 15-20 percent decline in our daily bookings," the airline said, warning of a material impact to the company's earnings.

The hospitality sector will also bear the brunt of reduced travel. According to a March 6 note from Edelweiss Securities, both occupancies and tariffs would be impacted in March 2020 and the April-June 2020 quarter. "While domestic tourism might see an improvement on limited outbound travel, the recent cases in India would limit that opportunity as well," said the note.

Foreign tourist arrivals (FTA) last month dropped 9.3 per cent month-on-month and 7 per cent year-on-year, according to government data. In February 2020, there were 10.15 lakh FTAs, against 10.87 lakh in February 2019 and 11.18 lakh in January 2020.

The number of visitors who visited the Statue of Unity in Gujarat dropped by over 38 per cent from January to February, and the revenue collected fell approximately ₹5 crore.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has 3,691 sites registered with it, of which 38 are world heritage sites. As per information provided by the ASI, the total revenue from ticketed monuments was ₹247.89 crore in FY18, ₹302.34 in FY19 and ₹277.78 crore in FY20 (April-January).

According to Vasant Kumar Swarnkar, Superintending Archaeologist of ASI, Agra Circle, at the Taj, the monthly tickets sold did not fall drastically between January and February. "On an

average, we sell over 22,000 tickets to foreigners. In March, on a daily basis, we weren't able to sell more than 16,000 tickets," he said.

Last Wednesday, authorities had directed the shutdown of the Taj, among other sites. "Two days prior to the shutdown, we were barely able to sell 8,000 tickets on a daily basis," said Swarnkar. On Tuesday, the Centre imposed a 21-day nationwide lockdown, which means all the sites will remain closed.

Way forward

While the world is still struggling with the pandemic, the number of confirmed cases and casualty is growing higher, the East Asian examples and analysis draw a few important lessons as follow:

- 1. Pandemic is global, but its response is local:** In the growing inter connected world, our movement is quite high and fast, and that possibly enhanced the spread of the virus globally very quickly, making it a global pandemic. However, different country showed differences in approaches in responses. Thus, although the medical treatment is universal, we need to keep in mind that the healthy emergency response measures are not universal. It is a combination of country's regulation, governance mechanism, link to science-based decision making, local governance as well as community behavior. Thus, learning from each other's experience is very important.
- 2. Use of technology:** In the advanced stage of technological intervention, a pandemic response is not just a medical response anymore. It needs to link different types of technologies in an appropriate way. COVID-19 response in East Asia showed extensive use of emerging technologies linked to medical technologies.
- 3. Risk assessment:** In a quick analysis has pointed out the need of converging the health response, emergency response and disaster risk reduction in the viewpoint of the Sendai Framework. They analyzed and concluded that current mechanisms and strategies for disaster resilience, as outlined in the SFDRR, can enhance responses to epidemics or

global pandemics such as COVID-19. Some of the recommendations are as follow: recommendations concern knowledge and science provision in understanding disaster and health-related emergency risks, the extension of disaster risk governance to manage both disaster risks and potential health-emergencies, particularly for humanitarian coordination aspects; and the strengthening of community-level preparedness and response. A proper risk assessment is required taking into consideration of health risk, exposures, behaviors and policy framework.

- 4. Use of social media and sensitization on fake news:** In different countries, with different level of social media penetration, the importance of distinction of proper news and fake news becomes more relevant. Importance of negative consequences of fake news is well understood in longer run, not only to fight this pandemic, but also for the longer-term recovery process.
- 5. Economic implications:** The global economic impacts of the pandemic are yet to be understood, but there is a unanimous agreement of a global recession due to the pandemic. However, in different countries, sectorial impacts are already prominent, especially in tourism and hospitality sectors. MSMEs (Micro, small and medium enterprises) are possibly the hardest hit in all the countries need special economic revitalization package.
- 6. Socio-psychological impacts and lifestyle changes:** Country wide or partial local down in cities have initiated a different work culture in East Asian countries, as well as in most of the other countries. Tele-work is becoming popular, online meetings, online classes in the universities are getting common, online education for school children becoming obvious. Thus, there has been a life-style change in many countries and communities, which may have relatively longer socio-psychological and behavioral implications.

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