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A Study on the Revenge Travel Intention in the Endemic Era: Using the Theory of Planned Behavior and Heuristic Cues

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Abstract: This study aimed to demonstrate the effect of negative emotions elicited by COVID-19 on the revenge consumption of international travel through both rational and irrational buying intentions. The theory of planned behavior and heuristic cues were used to explain revenge consumption in terms of rational and irrational buying intentions, respectively. A survey was conducted using MTURK from 31 May 2023 to 2 June 2023 among adults who experienced COVID-19. A structural equation model (SEM) was used to test the hypotheses, and the Hayes PROCESS macro was used to test the mediation effect. The results revealed that negative emotions due to COVID-19 affected irrational buying intentions, but not rational buying intentions, and that both irrational and rational buying intentions significantly affected revenge consumption intentions for international travel. In addition, irrational buying intentions affected rational buying intentions. These results indicate that when making an international travel decision due to negative emotions caused by COVID-19, an irrational decision process was employed, whereas later, at the travel reservation and planning stage, individuals consumed and planned travel based on rational intentions. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it illuminates the phenomenon of revenge consumption following disasters such as pandemics.

Keywords: revenge travel; COVID-19; theory of planned behavior; heuristic cues; rational buying intention; irrational buying intention

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1. Introduction

For three years and four months, policies for social isolation, lockdown and personal distancing were implemented worldwide to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. These containment measures restricted the movement of individuals and compelled them to stay at home, minimizing daily interactions between people, and diminished economic relations between countries by restricting the movement of individuals and goods at the national level [1]. Although measures were successful in curbing the spread of the pandemic, they resulted in a prolonged decline in personal contact [2], and humanity is now suffering from mental side effects such as loneliness, anxiety, depression and panic [3]. In addition, prolonged global lockdown measures elevated rates of psychological depression and anxiety among individuals and caused them to experience abnormal behavioral patterns. For example, insomnia, irregular sleep patterns, overeating or loss of appetite due to psychological anxiety; therefore, stress increased, while direct social contact became difficult, leading to a significant increase in digital communication and digital participation based on "untact" [4]. Among these abnormal behavior patterns, individuals also exhibited changes in consumption patterns that relieved the mental stress and negative emotions caused by COVID-19 [5]. Specifically, as the severity of COVID-19 eased, consumption patterns of goods and services such as tourism, shopping malls, theaters and visits to

offline retail stores—which were limited by the pandemic—experienced an instantaneous surge [6], a phenomenon known as "revenge consumption". This manifested as a consumption behavior aimed at compensating for or treating the psychological depression experienced during the pandemic by purchasing products [7]. In general, individuals tended to prefer playful products or services as targets for revenge consumption, while at the end of the COVID-19 era consumption activities related to the tourism and hospitality industry increased significantly [8].

Revenge travel, which can be viewed as a type of revenge consumption, refers to a distinct change in tourist behavior after COVID-19 [9,10], whereby tourism consumption increases sharply as a reward for individuals who have been oppressed by long-term disaster situations, enabling them to restore their freedom along with their physical and mental health through tourism activities [11]. For instance, Lu, Lee, Wu and Li (2022) [12] conducted an empirical study which revealed that perceived isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic was a major factor in shaping compensation desires and consumption intentions in the travel and hospitality industries. In a study conducted by Zaman et al. (2021) [9], pandemic fatigue was shown to have a positive effect on the formation of revenge travel awareness. Xia, Wang and Santana (2021) [13] investigated whether post-COVID-19 nostalgia and the desire for leisure caused revenge travel and found that the more seriously consumers perceived COVID-19, the more their desire for travel increased after the pandemic. Girish (2021) [14], who examined the psychological changes of revenge travelers by integrating the theory of reasoned action and a tricomponent attitude model, reported that negative emotions can amplify revenge travel. Through these studies, it can be seen that the threats and negative emotions caused by COVID-19 had a significant effect on revenge consumption and the desire for revenge travel.

Globally, the tourism industry suffered a severe downturn due to "converging to zero" tourism consumption during the pandemic [15] but is rapidly recovering through a sharp increase in tourism consumption after COVID-19 [8,16]. This rapid increase in tourism is mainly due to "revenge travel" in which the desire for consumption was entangled during COVID-19 [15]. Thus, just as the consumption of home appliances such as TVs exploded during or after COVID-19, the revenge consumption of tourism after the pandemic was determined by individual emotions. However, existing studies on revenge consumption tend to overemphasize the influence of individual emotional factors and overlook the extent to which rational factors among consumers control behavior [5,17]. Therefore, it is highly likely that the emotional factors of tourists also had a considerable influence on revenge tourism which exploded to satisfy the desire for tourism after COVID-19. Thus, consumption decisions are influenced by individual emotional factors, as well as by individual rational factors [18]. In particular, revenge travel must pass through the "rational consumption planning stage" in that it is necessary to establish a travel plan beyond the individual's "emotional decision stage".

Therefore, in the case of general goods, "momentary consumption" may be a possible emotional factor for consumers, but in the case of travel, there are decision-making stages that must be determined by rational factors such as schedule management and reservation. Therefore, if revenge travel is understood only in terms of emotional factors, a full understanding will be impossible. Because revenge travel is an unusual social phenomenon that emerged specifically in the context of a pandemic [19], it is necessary to understand how individuals decide upon revenge travel. Given that it is essential to emotionally determine travel consumption and plan it rationally, revenge travel consumption should be understood through a combined emotional and rational approach [16]. This study therefore applied a model that integrated the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and heuristic cues to consider both the emotional and rational factors underpinning revenge travel.

The TPB extends the theory of reasoned action [20] by explaining individual behavior in terms of three variables: attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavior control [21]. The first variable, attitude, refers to the likelihood of an expected outcome through a specific action and the individual evaluation of the overall behavior rather than focusing only on a

specific object or target (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980 [22]). Subjective norms are defined as the social pressure exerted on an individual to participate in a particular behavior [22,23]. Lastly, perceived behavioral control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing a specific action which can be said to represent an individual's belief in the existence of a specific element that can promote or hinder the performance of a specific action [22–25]. Several prior studies in tourism have applied the TPB to predict the behavioral intentions of tourists [26–28]. Soliman (2021) [29], who studied the intention to revisit Egypt, found that all three variables had a significant and positive effect on the intention to revisit. Casaló et al. (2010) and Han, Hsu and Sheu (2010) [21,30] examined the relationship between the TPB and international travel behavioral intentions and found that attitude toward international travel and perceived control significantly influenced international travel behavioral intentions. Other studies have used the TPB to examine the effect of electronic word of mouth on a tourism destination choice [31], food tourism intention [32] and sustainable tourism behavior [33]. In addition, numerous studies have investigated word-of-mouth intentions [31], food tourism intentions [32] and sustainable tourism behavior [33] using the TPB. Consequently, the TPB has been verified as having high explanatory power in predicting the decision-making behavior of travelers [30].

However, not all human behavior is planned [34]. Sometimes irrational and emotional factors determine an individual's behavior, which means that a consideration of irrational decision-making is also necessary [19,35,36]. A heuristic cue is a concept that explains how an individual judges and acts according to intuitive thinking through the bias generated by experience [34]. As such, it explains the decision-making process adopted in situations where an individual cannot make a reasonable choice or there is no need to make a reasonable and systematic decision [37]. This means that an individual makes an intuitive judgment based on past experiences, rather than a rational analysis of information given to him or her in the process of making decisions [38]. Ideal decision-making requires a sufficient information search and an inordinate amount of time in order to minimize bias in behavior and achieve reasonable results. In reality, decisions that rely on intuition and experience are also made frequently, so a heuristic is used to explain irrational real-world behavior based on the intuition and experience of individuals [39–41].

Thus, heuristic cues can compensate for the inability of the TPB to explain non-cognitive and intuitive and experience-dependent individual behavior [42]. Miles et al. (2017) [42] employed the TPB and heuristic cues to investigate the relationship between daily sex and the intention to use condoms, confirming that heuristics complement the social context that may be omitted from the TPB. The author of [43] conducted a study that applied the TPB and heuristics to understand consumers' food evaluation and purchasing patterns and found that when the two theories are combined, consumers' understanding of behavior can be higher.

This study aimed to expand the scope of understanding of this general structural relationship to revenge travel consumption by combining the TPB, which emphasizes individual rationality with the heuristic cues that emphasize irrationality. The results also make a theoretical contribution to expanding the TPB by examining the explanatory power of a model that integrates it with heuristic cues. In addition, the findings will have practical implications for tourism industry operators by enhancing their understanding of post-disaster travel consumption behavior in the future.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Hypothesis and Research Model

Depicted in Figure 1, the research model was derived from evidence generated in previous studies.

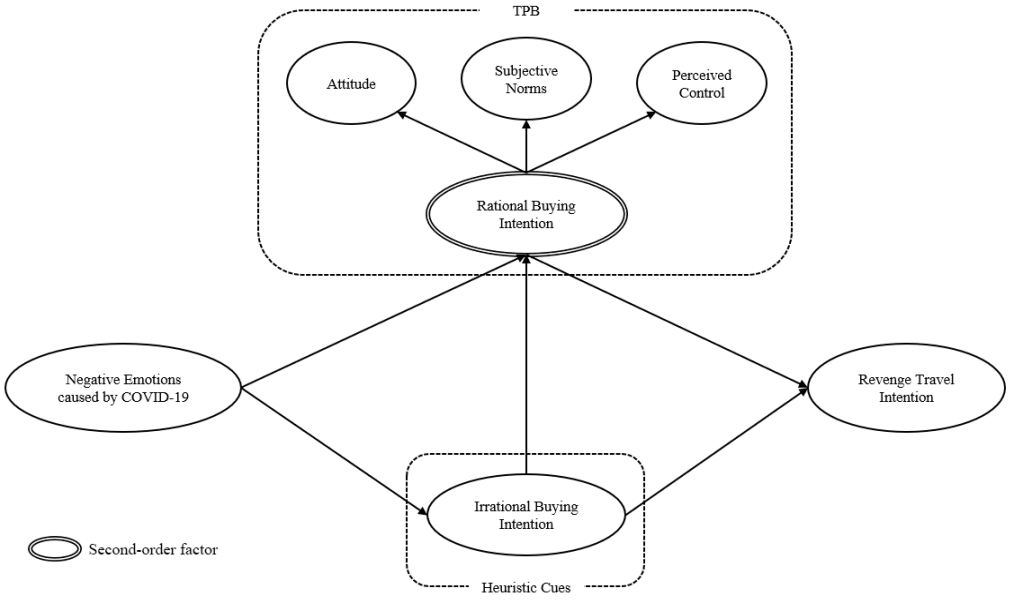

Figure 1. Research model.

By applying the TPB and the heuristic cues, this study aimed to investigate the effect of negative emotions caused by COVID-19 on revenge travel intentions. The three variables of the TPB—attitude, subjective norms and perceived control—are composed of secondary factors that were used to measure rational buying (purchase/action) intentions, while irrational buying intention was assessed through questions that measure heuristic cues. Therefore, to achieve the objectives of this study, the following research hypotheses were derived.

H1. *Negative emotions caused by COVID-19 have a significant positive effect on rational buying intentions.*

H2. *Negative emotions caused by COVID-19 have a significant positive effect on irrational buying intentions.*

H3. *Irrational buying intentions have a significant positive effect on rational buying intentions.*

H4. *Rational buying intentions have a significant positive effect on revenge travel intentions.*

H5. *Irrational buying intentions have a significant positive effect on revenge travel intentions.*

2.2. Research Participants and Data Collection

From 31 May–2 June 2023, a survey was conducted with adults over 20 years of age who had experienced COVID-19. To collect data, an online survey method known as Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTURK) was used. Out of a total of 299 responses, 58 were excluded, leaving 241 for analysis. With reference to the study by Lee (2022) [44], three questions on negative emotions caused by COVID-19 and four questions on revenge consumption intention for international travel were composed. In addition, based on the research of Yoon, Oh and Yoon (2010) [45], two questions on attitude, two questions on subjective norms and two questions on perceived control were composed. Finally, four questions related to heuristic cues were supplemented and revised to fulfil the aim of this study by referring to the research of Jang, Kim and Lee (2021) [46]. All questionnaire items were responded to on a 5-point Likert scale.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Characteristics

Of the 235 respondents, 58.1% (n = 140) were male, and 41.9% (n = 101) were female. As for the age, those aged 30–39 were the most at 48.1% (n = 116), and those aged 20–29 accounted for the second largest percentage at 37.0% (n = 65). As for the academic background, graduation from 4-year university was the most common at 48.1% (n = 116), and clerk/white-collar workers were the most at 29.0% (n = 70) (Table 1).

Table 1. Profile of the respondents (N = 175).

Variables		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	140	58.1
	Male	101	41.9
Age	20–29 years old	65	27.0
	30–39 years old	116	48.1
	40–49 years old	38	15.8
	50–59 years old	14	5.8
	Older than 60 years old	8	3.3
Academic Background	Less than high school	12	5.0
	2–3-year College	59	24.5
	4-year University	116	48.1
	Graduate school and above	54	22.4
Income	Under 10,000	39	16.2
	10,001~20,000	28	11.6
	20,001~30,000	34	14.1
	30,001~40,000	0	0.0
	40,001~50,000	47	19.5
	50,001~60,000	37	15.4
	60,001~70,000	20	8.3
	Over 70,001	36	14.9
Job	Student	11	4.6
	Businessman	57	23.7
	Civil servant	13	5.4
	Clerk/white-collar worker	70	29.0
	Blue-collar worker	31	12.9
	Retired	4	1.7
	Unemployed	14	5.8
	Other	41	1.7

3.2. Validation and Reliability of Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to verify the validity of the measurement tool, while attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control (the TPB variables) were composed of secondary factors. As a result, the model fitness index was RMR = 0.056, GFI = 0.929, NFI = 0.932, CFI = 0.977 and RMSEA = 0.044, which met the suitability criteria. The discriminant validity verification of this study confirmed that all AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values were 0.5 or more and all values of CR (Construct Reliability) were 0.7 or more, ensuring the centralized validity of the constituent concept (Table 2).

Discriminant validity is achieved when the squared value of the correlation coefficient of the variables is less than the AVE value and the confidence interval of the correlation coefficient (correlation coefficient $\pm 2\times$ standard error) does not contain 1 [47]. In this study, the chi-square values of the correlation coefficients of the variables were all lower than the AVE values, whereas the confidence interval of the correlation coefficients did not include 1, so discriminant validity was confirmed (Table 3).

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis results.

Factor	Measure	Standardized Estimate	CR	AVE
Negative Emotions caused by COVID-19	Overall, sad and depressed because of COVID-19.	0.778	0.756	0.508
	Feeling pressured to comply with all COVID-119 regulations and recommendations.	0.712		
	I am losing the mental space to respond to COVID-19.	0.707		
Irrational buying intention	When I go on an overseas travel, I choose it considering the distance.	0.723	0.829	0.550
	When I go on an overseas trip, I choose it considering the value for money.	0.667		
	When I decide to travel abroad, I listen to experiences or recommendations from people around me.	0.717		
	When I travel abroad, I prefer famous or representative destinations.	0.783		
Rational buying intention	I think it is desirable to travel abroad.	0.810	0.901	0.604
	I think it is good to travel abroad.	0.847		
	My acquaintances think that traveling abroad is a good experience for me.	0.857		
	My acquaintances encourage me to travel abroad because there is a lot to gain.	0.866		
	I can travel abroad anytime.	0.664		
	I am not afraid to travel abroad.	0.726		
Revenge travel intention	I want to go on an overseas travel to relieve the stress of COVID-19.	−0.831	0.870	0.625
	I want to go on an overseas travel that can comfort my depressed mind due to COVID-19.	0.855		
	I want to actively overseas travel as a reward for COVID-19.	0.798		
	I want to go to an overseas destinations that I could not go to due to COVID-19.	0.785		

RMR = 0.056, GFI = 0.929, NFI = 0.932, CFI = 0.977, RMSEA = 0.044.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Test Results.

	Negative Emotions Caused by COVID-19	Irrational Buying Intention	Rational Buying Intention	Revenge Travel Intention	AVE
Negative Emotions caused by COVID-19	1				0.508
Irrational buying intention	0.216 (0.047)	1			0.550
Rational buying intention	0.121 (0.015)	0.318 (0.101)	1		0.604
Revenge Travel Intention	0.387 (0.150)	0.352 (0.124)	0.589 (0.370)	1	0.625

RMR = 0.057, GFI = 0.931, NFI = 0.932, CFI = 0.977 and RMSEA = 0.045.

3.3. Goodness-of-Fit and Test of Hypothesis

Examining the goodness-of-fit of the research model using a structural equation model revealed that the model fit satisfies the standard value with RMR = 0.057, GFI = 0.931, NFI = 0.932, CFI = 0.977 and RMSEA = 0.045. The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in Figure 2.

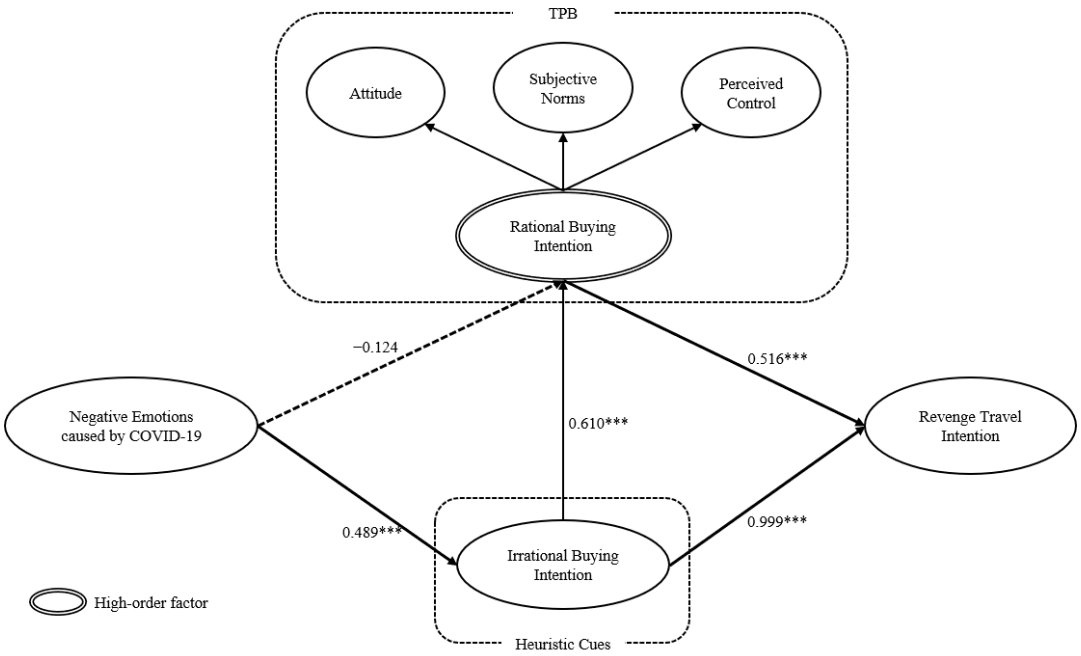

Figure 2. Structural modeling result. *** $p < 0.00$.

Negative emotions caused by COVID-19 did not significantly affect rational buying intentions; therefore, the first hypothesis was rejected. However, negative emotions caused by COVID-19 had a significant positive effect on irrational buying intentions, while irrational buying intentions had a significant positive effect on rational buying intentions, and rational buying intentions had a significant positive effect on revenge travel intentions. The effect of irrational buying intentions on revenge travel intentions also resulted in a significant positive result. Thus, Hypotheses 2 to 5 were supported. The specific figures are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Structural equation model.

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	Result
H1	Negative Emotions caused by COVID-19→Irrational buying intention	0.489	0.092	5.344 ***	Supported
H2	Negative Emotions caused by COVID-19→Rational buying intention	−0.124	0.088	−1.402	Rejected
H3	Irrational buying intention→Rational buying intention	0.610	0.094	6.453 ***	Supported
H4	Irrational buying intention→Revenge Travel Intention	0.999	0.197	5.080 ***	Supported
H5	Rational buying intention→Revenge Travel Intention	0.516	0.079	6.534 ***	Supported

*** $p < 0.00$.

3.4. Mediation Effect

Hayes' Model 6 was used to examine whether the negative emotions caused by COVID-19 affected revenge travel intentions through the mediation of irrational and rational buying intentions. Firstly, there was a direct effect of negative emotions caused by COVID-19 on revenge travel intentions. Secondly, irrational buying intentions mediated the relationship between negative emotions caused by COVID-19 on revenge travel intentions. Thirdly, the effect of dual mediating irrational buying intentions and rational buying intentions was also significant. However, there was no significant mediating effect of rational buying intentions on the relationship between negative emotions caused by COVID-19 and revenge travel intentions. The specific figures for this are shown in the Table 5.

Table 5. Hayes PROCESS macro.

Category	Paths	Effect	SE	t	95% Confidence Interval	
					LLCI	ULCI
Total Effect		0.479	0.064	7.521 ***	0.353	0.604
Direct Effect	Negative Emotions caused by COVID-19→Revenge Travel Intention	0.331	0.054	6.110 ***	0.224	0.437
Indirect Effect	Negative Emotions caused by COVID-19→Irrational buying intention → Revenge Travel Intention	0.078	0.035		0.213	0.155
	Negative Emotions caused by COVID-19→Rational buying intention → Revenge Travel Intention	−0.024	0.039		−0.098	0.056
	Negative Emotions caused by COVID-19→Irrational buying intention → Rational buying intention →Revenge Travel Intention	0.095	0.026		0.051	0.151
	Indirect Effect Total	0.148	0.051		0.224	0.437

*** $p < 0.00$.

4. Conclusions

This study focuses on the changes in individual tourism behavior after the global epidemic, especially the explanation of revenge consumption behavior. Recreational product or tourism consumption would be subject to revenge consumption, and as infectious diseases such as COVID-19 are expected to continue to emerge in the future, the phenomenon of revenge consumption for tourism goods would continue to be observed. Therefore, academic consideration of the phenomenon of revenge consumption could be fairly important in the sustainable aspect of the tourism industry. Previous studies have explained revenge consumption through irrational intentions, although some scholars have suggested that revenge consumption can also be explained through rational purchase intentions [35,36]. Therefore, this study examined whether negative emotions caused by COVID-19 affected revenge buying intentions for international travel through rational and irrational buying intentions. The TPB and heuristic cues were used to confirm the rational and irrational intentions of revenge consumption, respectively. The main results were as follows. Firstly, the higher the negative emotions caused by COVID-19, the higher the irrational buying intentions, the increase in which led to revenge travel intentions. Secondly, the negative emotions caused by COVID-19 did not significantly affect rational buying intentions. The non-significant effect of negative emotions caused by COVID-19 on rational buying intentions can be interpreted as negative emotions not immediately leading to rational and planned behavior. This supports previous studies by Casaló et al. (2010) and Han et al. (2010) [21,30] which demonstrated the effect of rational buying intentions on revenge buying intentions. Thirdly, irrational buying intentions affected rational buying intentions. In addition, when the mediating effects of rational and irrational buying intentions on the relationship between negative emotions caused by COVID-19 and revenge travel intention were tested, both the direct and indirect effects were significant. This suggests that after forming irrational buying intentions due to non-cognitive and emotional factors, rational buying intentions can ultimately lead to multiple consumption. In other words, rational buying intentions and behavioral patterns emerge in the pre-trip preparation phase after unplanned travel decisions are made due to negative emotions. Thus, given that the characteristics of international travel require prior preparation (e.g., flight reservation, accommodation reservation, schedule), even if the trip is decided spontaneously based on irrational buying intentions, it can be seen that in the process of preparing for the trip, the consumption behavioral pattern changes to that of rational buying intentions.

The academic implications of this study are as follows. Previous studies on revenge consumption have primarily focused on emotional and irrational aspects to explain revenge

consumption behavior and intentions. However, this study explains this phenomenon using both the rational and irrational aspects of revenge consumption, thus demonstrating that revenge consumption can also be explained by the rational intentions of individuals. That is, by applying TPB and heuristic cues together, both cognitive and emotional aspects of an individual's revenge consumption behavior are considered, so that revenge consumption behavior can be explained more convincingly than from one point of view. In addition, this study not only demonstrates the mediating effect of rational and irrational purchase intentions on revenge consumption intention, but also reveals that there is a formation order between rational and irrational buying intentions.

The results of this study can provide practical implications for increasing economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability for tourism industries that may stagnate after global disasters such as COVID-19.

Considering the research results that show that revenge consumption intentions are primarily increased by irrational buying intentions and secondly by rational buying intentions, travel agencies and airlines also need step-by-step countermeasures. For example, in times when it is difficult to travel, such as when COVID-19 spreads widely, tourism companies such as airlines and travel agencies should consider marketing measures that can stimulate tourists' irrational and emotional buying intentions. Specifically, a strategic approach may be needed to increase the potential demand of tourists by utilizing marketing methods using emotional appeals that can stimulate tourists' emotions. Next, when travel is possible in earnest, it will be necessary to consider ways to help tourists make rational buying decisions by providing more diverse travel options (e.g., price, travel product type and time). This, in the end, if appropriate marketing methods are introduced after a global disaster such as COVID-19, it will cause a rapid increase in tourism demand, which can contribute to increasing the economic sustainability of the tourism industry.

In addition, the marketing strategy mentioned above can not only help the tourism industry recover economically by rapidly increasing the shrinking tourism demand, but it can also contribute to revitalizing disconnected socio-cultural exchanges between countries and individuals in a short period of time.

Finally, with the recent increase in social interest in environmental protection and the increase in interest in value consumption, consumers tend to purchase products from companies using eco-friendly policies even if the price of the product is somewhat high [48,49]. In other words, a company's eco-friendly policy can lead to consumers' irrational behavior toward prices. Therefore, at the stage where irrational buying intention affects revenge consumption intention, the promotion strategy for eco-friendly policies of tourism companies can stimulate eco-friendly consumption of potential tourists, which will ultimately lead to revenge tourism consumption based on eco-friendliness.

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