

Risk management strategies to avoid the effects of health pandemics on the tourist guide profession in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: Tourist guides play a key role in the tourism industry as they contribute to building the destination's image and tourists' experiences, enhancing tourism in the country. As such, the tourist guide profession is considered one of the most important in the tourism sector. The profession is one of those most clearly and very greatly affected and damaged by health pandemics, as happened recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study aims to explore risk management strategies to avoid such effects. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was chosen as the case study for this research. In order to fulfill the aim and objectives of the research, 10 certified Saudi tourist guides were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study revealed that tourist guides were affected financially and psychologically by health pandemic. Based on the findings, some suggestions, techniques, and solutions are presented to overcome and manage this financial and psychological impact.

Keywords: Financial risk, Health pandemics, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Psychological risk, Risk management, Tourism, Tourist guide profession.

I. INTRODUCTION

As mentioned by Hall et al. (2020) and Çetinkaya and Öter (2022), throughout history there have been several epidemic diseases that have hit the world either globally or in certain areas, such as bird flu, the Black Plague, Ebola, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Spanish influenza, swine flu, and Zika virus. In addition, the World Health Organization (2018) predicted that the history of outbreaks will repeat itself, emphasizing that “[a] new HIV, a new Ebola, a new plague, a new influenza pandemic are not mere probabilities. Whether transmitted by mosquitoes, other insects, contact with animals or person-to-person, the only major uncertainty is when they, or something equally lethal, will arrive.” What confirms this is the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which measurements and restrictions were put in place in most countries worldwide to stop the spread of the virus, such as border closures and limitations on international air transportation and domestic air transportation to a lesser extent (Grancay, 2020b). Consequently, most sectors have been affected, but one of those hardest hit was tourism (Grancay, 2020b), because it relies on people's mobility (World Tourism and Travel Council, 2021). In addition, the tourism and hospitality sectors have very fragile structures, meaning that pandemics have a devastating effect on their activities and jobs all around the

world (Jiang and Wen, 2020). Such crises “disrupt the proper functioning of the tourism industry” (Laws and Prideaux, 2005, p.2). As a result of the recent pandemic, tourists could not visit sites and monuments and had to maintain social distancing (Grancay, 2020b). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2021), the number of arrivals globally in 2019 was about 1,460 million, dropping in 2020 to about 440 million. International tourist arrivals were still low from January to May 2021, at about 460 million, compared to the same period in 2019 (UNWTO, 2021). The same scenario was found in Saudi Arabia. According to the Ministry of Tourism (2022), the number of inbound tourists was 17.53 million in 2019; 4.14 million in 2020; 3.48 million in 2021; and 16.64 million in 2022; while the number of domestic tourists was 17.53 million in 2019; 4.14 million in 2020; 3.48 million in 2021; and 16.64 million in 2022. This reduction in the number of tourists indicates that both international and national tourism have been badly affected by COVID-19. In addition, over 75 million jobs in the tourism industry are either at risk or have already been lost (Han et al., 2021). Tourist guides are one of the backbones of the tourism industry and are front-line employees, and as such their profession was among those most severely affected by the pandemic (Alrawadieh et al., 2021; Isaac and Abuaita, 2021). They faced several job-related challenges and issues (Çetinkaya and Öter, 2022), which particularly affected those working as freelancers (FEG, 2020), many of whom became unemployed (Brito and Carvalho, 2021). Of all the different crises that have struck the world, COVID-19 has had the strongest, deepest, and most rapid impact, and brought about change at all levels and in all sectors, including those affecting communication, ways of living, travel, and tourism. However, Mbatha et al. (2021) stated that the tourism industry was one of the first to begin to recover, which qualified it to earn the title of the most resilient industry among other industries globally. Therefore, today when considering the development and survival of tourism or jobs in the tourism sector, to avoid the collapse that happened because of the pandemic, tourism operators must learn from tourism’s experiences before, during, and after the pandemic (Carvalho, 2022). According to Pololikashvili, the UNWTO Secretary General, “[t]his crisis is an opportunity to rethink the tourism sector and its contribution to the people and planet; an opportunity to build back better towards a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism sector that ensures the benefits of tourism are enjoyed widely and fairly” (Pololikashvili, n.d.) Therefore, considering the background, this study is an in-depth examination of the risk management strategies that should be applied to avoid the effects of health pandemics on the tourist guide profession in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

II. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Based on the researcher’s analysis and the information viewed, this study is significant in that it fills several gaps in the existing literature. First, limited articles have been published in relation to the tourist guide profession and health pandemics. In addition, most of the existing articles discuss the tourist guide profession and the extent to which it has been affected by the recent COVID-19 pandemic in particular, not health epidemics in general. Second, this study can be considered the first to focus on the research phenomenon in Saudi Arabia. Third, in terms of methodological approach, this study used a qualitative approach while most other studies related to the tourist guide profession and health pandemics have used quantitative approaches for example, but not limited to Grancay (2020a) used a questionnaire to study governments’ provisions to support tourist guides, Nazli (2022) studied the impact of COVID-19 on tourist guides by using E-mail interview, and Sun et al.’s (2022) adopting a quantitative research to study the effects of environmental dynamism on Chinese tourist guides’ performance in their job.. Therefore, it

was very important to study and pay attention to the application of risk management strategies to reduce the effects of health pandemics on the tourist guide profession in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as it is considered one of the most important keys to the success of tourism and plays a crucial role in reflecting a positive image of the host country as well as promoting tourists' experience.

III. RESEARCH MOTIVATION

There are two strong reasons that motivate the researcher to study this phenomenon. First of all, the researcher is an assistant professor in the tourism guidance track at King Abdulaziz University. The researcher teaches and trains female students to be tourist guides. When considering the health pandemics that have occurred in the world in general and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in particular, the latest of which is the COVID-19 pandemic, and their effects on the tourism sector in general and the tourist guide profession in particular, the researcher felt concerned about the impact of these epidemics in the future (if they are repeated) on the male and female students who have hope and ambition to become tourist guides and continue in the profession. Therefore, the researcher studied this phenomenon to explore risk management strategies to avoid the effects of health pandemics on the tourist guide profession. Second, Saudi Arabia could be one of the leading countries in the tourism field, and for this to be achieved, the tourism sector is in dire need of the presence of tourist guides who have sufficient job security to continue in the profession.

IV. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to investigate risk management strategies to avoid the effects of health pandemics on the tourist guide profession in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Thus, based on this aim, the study objectives are to:

1. Identify the risks arising from health pandemics that affect the job of a tourist guide from tourist guides' own point of view;
2. Understand in detail the financial and psychological risks posed to the profession as a result of health pandemics;
3. Explore the strategies that can be applied to avoid risks arising from health pandemics to the profession from tourist guides' own point of view.

V. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Based on the nature of the situation during health pandemics and because of the procedures that take place during those periods, as previously mentioned, the job of the tourist guide is affected to a very large degree, so the focus in this study is on the related financial and psychological risks. An example of this is what happened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many tourist guides have become unemployed, which has impacted their financial status. Although many European countries have provided financial assistance to those whose employment was affected, it is not enough to regain the lifestyle they were accustomed to before COVID-19 (Brito and Carvalho, 2021). This is consistent with other studies' finding that governments in many different countries provided plans to support the tourism sector, tourist guides, and tourism stakeholders: the US government provided loans to the most-affected industries (Cochrane and Fandos, 2020); Turkey provided credit agreements from public banks for tourist guides (Dogancili, 2020); financial assistance was given to tour operators in Germany (TUI Group, 2020); China supported smart and digital tourism and provided temporary refunds for travel agencies (UNWTO, 2020); the UK suspended tax payments, and social security and insurance obligations (OECD, 2020); while Italy gave

salary support (Nhamo et al., 2020). Moreover, Nazli (2022) studied the impact of COVID-19 on tourist guides and found that they were looking for monthly allowances and other support and help, such as incentives from the government, to keep their job safe and secure. Coşkun and Akgündüz (2023) mentioned that tourist guides expected support from the government and tourism institutions, such as loans, social security, and the initiation of a “piggy bank-like system.” Such a system allows savings to be accrued, thus benefiting those paying in, such as tourist guides, in times of crisis, including period of ill health.

Brito and Carvalho’s (2021) study found that, since physical walking tours are difficult to implement in times of social distancing, to overcome financial risks, tourist guides have become innovative, using technology to create walking tours on social media. This is aligned with Grancay’s (2020a) examination of governments’ provisions to support tourist guides, with many examples of different kinds of support. For example, the Korean government’s “Digital Storytelling Service,” a substitute for live tours with tourist guides, or something like it, might be widely used during pandemics. The Faroe Islands government equipped local tourist guides with cameras, allowing them to guide on a path controlled by online viewers. Meantime, the capital city of Slovakia, Bratislava, introduced a campaign called “Tourist in One’s Own City,” which consisted of filming short videos of tourist destinations in the city during the pandemic; even after the government eased measures, the municipality continued to offer funded tours of the city.

Unfortunately, even though tourist guides have received support from governments and other entities in the tourism sector, it was not enough, and has left tourist guides vulnerable (Galí, 2022; Masihlelo, 2020; Plasket, 2021). Many tourist guides live month to month, which forced them to use their savings, take out loans, and minimize their lifestyle costs (Mbatha et al., 2021; Carvalho, 2022). Therefore, Grancay (2020a) reached the conclusion that the tourist guides must be keen to obtain a stable source of income and not have guiding as their only source of income. This corresponds with surveys that were done by the Association of Tourist Guides and Tour Managers in August 2021 asking 180 tourist guides about their profession: over half intended to work as a tourist guide after the COVID-19 crisis, 53 were working temporarily in jobs other than guiding, and 40 percent were thinking of combining working in guiding with other jobs (Carvalho, 2022). This is aligned with Carvalho’s (2022) qualitative study, in which he studied the adaptation of Portuguese tourist guides to the crisis: although the tourist guides stated that guiding is their passion, they had to work in other professions to obtain other sources of income, such as in call centers or real estate companies, among others (Carvalho, 2021). Of course, they benefited from the experience in communicating and interacting with others that they gained from their guiding profession. Yan, Ma and Zhang (2023) stated that freelancers tourist guides can benefit from their knowledge and skills to develop low-cost tourism business through introducing online travel experiences to tourists. Due to the pandemic, tourists have changed their travel and tourism habits, and thus the use of technology has become a necessity for the benefit of the economy and the financial status of tourist guides (Carvalho, 2022). Ziolkowska (2021) introduced in his study the opportunities that came about during uncertain times and took Guides without Borders as a case study for his research. Guides without Borders is a company that was started during the COVID-19 lockdown by four Polish tourist guides. The idea is that tourist guides prepare videos of city attractions accompanied by information about the sites that can be sold and watched worldwide. This idea emerged due to tour guides’ fear of losing their work and jobs, about which they were passionate, as well as their loss of financial income due to the COVID-19 precautionary measures. The same scenario occurred during the lockdown in 2020 in China, where 270 million users on TikTok were interested to see short videos about travel and tourism (Yan, Ma and Zhang, 2023)). Moreover, tourist guides decided to work online for the tourists and create experiences for them (Nazli, 2022). In addition, Coşkun and Akgündüz’s (2023) qualitative study concluded that, as a new way

to diversify sources of income and create opportunities to obtain financial income, tourist guides can give online training courses to students in tourism guiding departments with contributions from tourist guide associations and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Turkey.

Deng et al. (2021) found that tourist guides, who usually have contact with tourists, were directly impacted by not communicating with tourists for long periods during the pandemic, which affected them psychologically. This corresponds with Sun et al.'s (2022) study on the effects of environmental dynamism on Chinese tourist guides' performance in their job, which revealed that, since tourist guides are usually in direct contact with tourists, they were among those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic precautionary measures, impacting their mental health and causing them depression and anxiety. In addition, the more tourist guides are exposed to such dynamism, the more they will face the risk of psychological and emotional stress, and loss of cognitive resources when facing such pandemics which force them to lose communication with tourists (Halbesleben, 2006; Little et al., 2011). Nazli (2022) examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourist guides using a qualitative approach, and pointed out that the tourist guides' fear of losing their job or lack of financial income may cause a psychological impact that appears in the form of anxiety and depression. Coşkun and Akgündüz (2023) reported in their qualitative research psychological issues such as anxiety, job dissatisfaction, and stress, which affected the tourist guide profession and tour guides' personal development during health pandemics such as COVID-19. Moreover, due to tourist guides' long time period of staying home and economic loss during the pandemic, they faced anxiety and psychological and social problems (Coşkun and Akgündüz, 2023). However, during the crisis, tourist guides directed their efforts to developing their skills and experience through practical and theoretical training (Brito and Carvalho, 2021) as well as attending courses in sustainability and digital marketing (Carvalho, 2022).

Regarding tourist guides' education process, researchers stated that an "educational framework ensures high standards of guiding service" (Brito and Farrugia, 2020, p. 8). In their education, tourist guides must keep pace with the current times in order to adapt to new challenges, as this era is characterized by speed and the impression of the whole world as a small village. Therefore, tourist guides should include new technologies in their education and training courses to survive in their profession (Brito and Farrugia, 2020; Carvalho, 2021).

To sum up, according to Mbatha et al. (2021), government support, using digital services, and having an online presence allows immediate survival and securing of tourist guides' career and profession in either the COVID-19 crisis or any other crisis that might occur. Mbatha et al. (2021) concluded their study with a very important recommendation: the need to apply a proactive resilience risk management plan either specifically in tourism organizations or generally in the tourism industry to avoid the impact of upcoming crises. Moreover, the most important recommendation and expectation provided by tourist guides was effective crisis management, which can eliminate many negative situations (Coşkun and Akgündüz, 2023).

VI. STUDY METHOD

A. *Study Area*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was used as a case study for this research not only because the researcher is Saudi but also because the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a country that is full of many historical, cultural, and attractive sites, and has developed not only religious tourism but also other kinds of tourism, such as leisure, nature tourism, heritage and culture, sports, business, and ecotourism. Initially Saudi Arabia's economy was primarily dependent on oil, but it decided to change that by diversifying sources of income to include several industries and thus launched Saudi's Vision 2030 project (Medabesh and Khan, 2019;

Jawadi and Ftiti, 2019). Tourism was one of these industries. International tourism revenue contributed approximately 1.9 percent to the country's income in 2019 when Saudi Arabia launched an e-visa for tourism purposes for citizens of 50 countries, compared to a 1.8 percent contribution in 2015 (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). As mentioned earlier, the tourism sector is a sector that is rapidly affected by events, be they political, economic, wars, or health pandemics. An example of this is what happened recently in the COVID-19 pandemic in all countries, including Saudi Arabia. Due to local and international restrictions on the tourism sector, there was a decline in tourism income due to a reduction in tourist spending, which amounted to only 95.1 billion Saudi riyals in 2021, compared to 164.56 billion Saudi riyals in 2019 (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). This decline shows the extent to which the tourism sector has been affected, in turn impacting the country's economy and thus stakeholders, services, and jobs in this sector, including the tourist guide profession (National Department of Tourism, 2021; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021). Therefore, it was necessary to find strategies to reduce the impact on this profession, as it is considered one of the most important professions in the tourism sector, as will be explained below.

B. Tourist Guides and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Context

According to the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, a tourist guide is “a person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area which person normally possesses an area-specific qualification usually issued and/or recognized by the appropriate authority” (Vij and Upadhy, 2020, p.2). According to the Saudi Ministry of Tourism, a tourist guide is “an ambassador of a country, inside and outside his homeland. He has a clear role in creating and leaving a positive impression on tourists visiting his country. This includes the development and promotion of tourism in the Kingdom, keeping in mind that this activity is as good as a salaried job with the added option for having holidays in the company of a variety of attractive tourist groups” (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). As mentioned in much research, tourist guides play a crucial role in the tourism industry as they are considered the first line of defense for tourists. They also present their country and reflect a positive image of it, break the cultural barrier between tourists and local people, and explain to tourists about tourist sites and attractions (Weiler and Ham, 2002; Chan et al., 2015; Chowdhary and Prakash, 2010; Huang et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2018; Žerajić, 2021). Tourist guides have roles and sub-roles, as they are ambassadors, information givers, mediators, culture brokers, leaders, interpreters, intermediaries, caretakers, salespersons, and teachers (Cohen, 1985; Zhang and Chow, 2004). The aforementioned explains the importance of the tourist guide to the tourism sector; it is a role that is very hard to replace (Hu, 2007; Weiler and Black, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to study the risks posed to the tourist guide profession resulting from health pandemics (Isaac and Abuaita, 2021), and develop strategies to try to reduce or prevent them.

C. Data Collection

This study involved tourist guides in order to understand their point of view about the phenomena described. It relied on selecting tourist guides based on a purposive sampling technique, which is common in qualitative studies (Bryman, 2008). This technique gave the researcher the opportunity to select participants based on their valuable insight, knowledge, and experience in the research topic. This aligns with Yin (2011), who mentioned that “purposive sampling is deliberate and will most likely yield the most relevant and plentiful data” (p.88). Moreover, in qualitative research, researchers collect data not based on the size of the sample, but until it reaches saturation (Matteucci and Gnoth, 2017; Court et al., 2018). Data saturation is about collecting in-depth information about the phenomena, not the amount of data, until additional data provides no new information to the study (Creswell, 2007; Court et al., 2018). Therefore, in this study, data collection was terminated when saturation had been reached in the researcher's opinion, after interviewing 10 Saudi certified tourist guides from different cities in Saudi

Arabia. The participants were divided into six males and four females, and the age of tourist guides varied from 25 to 64. When it came to marital status, seven of the tourist guides were married with children, two were divorced, and one was single. All tourist guides hold university education as a type of qualification. Regarding the type of employment, eight of the tourist guides were freelancers, one was in a part-time job, and one was in a full-time job. For type of visitor, all tourist guides guided local/domestic and international tourists. Seven of the tourist guides had from 16 to 20 years' professional experience, while three had five years or fewer, which meant that all of them started working in this profession in 2019 or before. Table 1 includes detailed about demographic information of 10 interviewees. This research took place between August 2023 and December 2023. It targeted tourist guides from different cities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to get a broad understanding of the phenomena.

Table 1: Interviewee demographics

Gender		Age	Marital Status			Education Level	Employment			Type of Visitor		Experience (years)	
Male	Female	25–64	Married with children	Divorced	Single	University	Full-time	Part-time	Freelancer	Local/Domestic	International	16–20	<5
6	4		7	2	1	All	1	1	8	All	All	7	3

D. Research Instrument

To fulfill the aim and objectives of this research, the researcher used the semi-structured interview method. Using such a method allowed tourist guides to express their points of view openly and freely, especially given the sensitive nature of the topic of study (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2018). This study aims to investigate risk management strategies to avoid the effects of health pandemics on the tourist guide profession, which is considered a sensitive issue. As Boholm (1996) argues, people's thoughts about risk are influenced by social context and values, beliefs, and individuals' ways of live. Moreover, using semi-structured interviews is beneficial for the researcher by giving her extensive control over the conversation (Holloway and Brown, 2012). For all these reasons, a qualitative approach and using semi-structured interviews as a method are found to be best to gain in-depth information. Despite the aforementioned benefits, qualitative research and semi-structured interviews suffer from a lack of reliability, but creating an interview guide contributes to enhancing the reliability of the research (Holloway and Brown, 2012). In this study, an interview guide was developed from the literature review of the tourist guide profession, health pandemics, the effect of health pandemics on the tourist guide profession, and the possible strategies to avoid such effects.

E. Data Analysis

In qualitative data analysis, the process goes through a number of steps. First, since this research targeted tourist guides from different cities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, all interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform to facilitate the process of data collection. The researcher requested permission from the interviewees to record the interviews. Since the native language of both the interviewees and the researcher is Arabic, all interviews were conducted and recorded in Arabic. This practice contributed to obtaining in-depth information about the topic because the participants were not exposed to a language barrier, which could be an obstacle to clarifying their point of view (Kornilaki and Font, 2019). Second, the audio recordings were transcribed manually and labeled as T.G.(1), T.G.(2), ... T.G.(10), based on the order in which they were conducted. The researcher left the transcripts aside and then checked again as well as comparing them with the original audio to ensure the accuracy of the data. It is very important for researchers to take this step, to familiarize themselves with the transcription and to develop perspectives on it (Temple and Young, 2004). Third, as mentioned above, the data was

collected in Arabic and subsequently analyzed in Arabic; translating the data into English at the first stage may cause loss of meaning (Shkclarov, 2007). This drove the researcher to pay close attention when translating the quotes to minimize any potential risk of losing the valuable meaning of the data. Since this study used a qualitative approach to collect data, it applied the strategy of thematic analysis. According to Yan and Zhang (2023), the thematic analysis technique allows researchers “to produce a deliberate, well-documented, theory-based analysis” (p.33). The fourth stage was coding, which is defined as “examining and breaking down the data into pieces of text and naming them” (Jones et al., 2013, p.199). The researcher preferred to code each interview separately, line by line, manually, to create an interaction between the researcher and the information, as well as an evaluation of the information based on the researcher’s information and previous studies related to the phenomena. As mentioned by Creswell (2007), the use of computer software to code the data may affect the researcher’s evaluation of and interaction with the data. Last but not least, the researcher categorized codes into similar groups in order to create potential themes.

VII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher will discuss the results she obtained to reach the goal of the research, which is to develop strategies to manage the risks to which the tourist guide profession is exposed in health pandemics. From the tourist guides’ point of view, these risks are financial and psychological. The results showed that most of the tourist guides in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia work as freelancers, and this was proven in the research, as eight out of the 10 tourist guides worked as freelancers. The tourist guides’ profession helped increase their financial income, which enabled them to achieve a certain standard of lifestyle, and they were financially harmed by the pandemic. This corresponds with Brito and Carvalho’s (2021) study, which found out that, due to the implementation of COVID-19 safety measures, many tourist guides around the world became unemployed, which affected their financial status. Consequently, the standard of living to which they were accustomed decreased. Participants stated that tourist guides do not have social nor medical insurance to help them in the event of injury or unemployment. Therefore, tourist guides should be required to have social and medical insurance, and there should be a link between the tourist guide license and such insurance, such that tourist guides cannot obtain a tourist guide license or even renew it unless they prove that they have obtained medical and social insurance. To overcome financial risks, the Saudi Ministry of Tourism exempted tourist guides from fines and tourist license fees. This had a positive impact as it reduced the financial costs that the tourist guides incurred. This is in line with what the UK government did, as it exempted tourist guides from tax payments, and social security and insurance obligations to help them overcome financial risk (OECD, 2020). Also, the tourist guides expressed a desire that the Ministry of Tourism provide other forms of support, for example, paying a salary to tourist guides or a lump sum bonus. As mentioned by Nhamo et al. (2020) in their study, the state in Italy gave salary support to tourist guides during the pandemic. However, the reason for the Saudi Ministry of Tourism not doing that may be because, as mentioned above, most Saudi tourist guides in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia work in this profession as freelancers and are not dependent on it to secure their income. However, with the expansion of the tourism sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia there is an increased need for a large number of tourist guides who work full or part time. The tourist guides therefore demanded that the Saudi Ministry of Tourism issue decisions and risk management plans to support tourist guides, and associations and parties in the tourism sector, along with tourism guidance and development mechanisms to implement these decisions. This corresponds with the research of Mbatha et al. (2021) and Coşkun and Akgündüz (2023), who concluded in their studies that tourist guides expected effective crisis management from governments, tourism

agencies, associations, and related parties to eliminate many negative situations that could have happened in the future.

The precautionary measures implemented during the COVID-19 period, the inability of the tourist guides to practice their profession, and the interruption of financial income led tourist guides to search for new jobs to obtain additional financial income. The tourist guides reported the importance of having another income and not relying solely on the tourist guide profession, which can be achieved by obtaining another job in addition to tour guiding. This is consistent with Grancay's (2020a) and Carvalho's (2021) findings in their studies that tourist guides must have another source of income in addition to a stable source of income, and the guiding profession should not be the only profession they have from which to obtain their income.

The tourist guides also mentioned that focusing on online training, providing courses to help new tourist guides qualify, and providing courses in specialized skills for qualified tourist guides opens additional opportunities for them to diversify their income. They also mentioned expanding the practice of social networking sites to provide information related to tourist guiding, information about sites and landmarks, training, and other matters, in addition to preparing and creating new tourism programs and tourist itineraries, and working to market and sell them to tourism agencies or tourist guides. This is also consistent with the findings of Coşkun and Akgündüz (2023) that tourist guides can offer online training courses to students in tourist guiding department.

Moreover, participants also suggested that tourist guides may consider expanding the use of technology to reduce financial risk, and conduct virtual tours of prominent and rare landmarks to attract tourists' attention to this new trend. The guides explained that this step works positively in two ways: the first, as mentioned, is to reduce the financial risk to the tourist guides and secure their constant presence in the tourism sector, and the second is to provide entertainment for tourists during health pandemics. This agrees with Nazli's (2022) finding that tour guides decided to offer online tours to tourists and create experiences for them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The tourist guides explained that their profession requires meeting tourists almost daily, interacting with them, and sharing their moments, and interruption of this work negatively affected them psychologically. This is what Deng et al. (2021) and Nazli (2022) concluded in their studies, as they found that there is a relationship between tourist guides' communication with tourists and the guides' psychology in the event of not communicating with tourists for a long period. It turned out that this prolonged lack of communication caused anxiety and tension for tourist guides and thus negatively affected their psychology.

The tourist guides described the uncertainty and lack of knowledge about when they would return to communicating with tourists, in addition to the fear of losing their tourist guide profession, and to what extent this would affect their financial status, their income, and consequently their lifestyle, all of which constitutes a cause of anxiety and fear and which has negatively affected their psychological state. This is in line with Nazli's (2022) study, in which he explained that fear of losing the tourist guide profession, lack of financial income, and inability to communicate with tourists may affect the psychology of tourist guides, which appears in the form of depression and anxiety. Moreover, some tourist guides lost their passion for practicing tour guiding after the end of the precautionary measures and the return to normal life. Consequently, this had a negative impact not only on the tourist guides, but also on the tourism sector as a whole, as tourism lost competent, qualified, and experienced tourist guides. Therefore, the research participants indicated that one of the measures that helps tourist guides overcome psychological risk is to turn health pandemics, or any crisis affecting the tourism sector and preventing tourist guides from

practicing their profession, into an opportunity to focus on developing their skills, especially since the rapid expansion in the tourism field in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia requires them to keep up with developments. Developing new skills, such as learning how to use technology to provide online tours and public speaking skills, among others, and attending training would help increase tourist guides' passion for their profession and reduce the stress and pressure caused by health pandemics. This is in line with Carvalho's (2022) conclusions that to overcome psychological risk during pandemics, tourist guides should direct their efforts to developing their skills and experience through theoretical and practical training. In the same vein, Brito and Carvalho (2021) advise attending specialized courses in specific fields, such as digital marketing and sustainability.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to find risk management strategies to minimize or avoid the effects of health pandemics on the tourist guide profession within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. To be able to fulfill the aim and objectives of this study, a qualitative approach was used and 10 certified Saudi tourist guides were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method. To sum up, the study showed that financial risks and psychological risks were among those that affected the tourist guides' job. To reduce the impact of these risks, tourist guides called for several measures to support their status and continuity in the tourism sector, including applying social insurance that includes medical insurance linked to tourist guide licenses. This requires support from the Saudi Ministry of Tourism to clarify the mechanisms for the associations concerned with implementing this decision. They also advocated using technology to implement virtual tours and promoting this trend, which requires including how to benefit from technology in the training plan for tourist guides to obtain a license. Developing the skills of tourist guides in various fields was also discussed, through training to acquire new skills that will help them enhance the quality of their job performance in addition to developing their knowledge. In addition, diversifying the tourist guides' sources of income to avoid financial hardship, especially in times of crisis, was advised. As examples, the tourist guides had resorted to training new tourist guides, planning new tourist itineraries and selling them, and documenting a specific event and selling it. Moreover, there is lack of literature related to health pandemics and the tourist guide profession generally worldwide and specifically in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it is expected from this study that the results, findings, and recommendations will not only contribute to the literature related to health pandemics and the tourist guide profession but will also enrich risk management strategies in any crisis that may affect the tourism sector in the future in general and during health pandemics in particular.

IX. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has some limitations. The first is that it used a qualitative approach and therefore the results cannot be generalized because the sample size is small, which affects the validity of this research. The problem with small samples is that they are susceptible to bias, so the larger the sample size, the greater the reliability and validity. Second, this research focused its scope on data from tourist guides and did not collect data from travel companies and agencies, governments, site organizers, tourists, or visitors. These parties play an important role in developing tourism and preserving it from collapse, and gathering their perspectives would have given a better understanding of the strategies that may be applied to manage risks to avoid the impact of health epidemics on the tourist guide profession and the wider tourism industry.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For future research, in order to overcome the limitations of this research, it is very important to expand the sample size of tour guides to understand the phenomenon more broadly. Moreover, although this phenomenon has been studied in South Africa (Nyawo, 2020; Mbatha et al., 2021), Portugal (Carvalho, 2022), China (Sun et al., 2022), Slovakia (Grancay, 2020), Turkey (Çetinkaya and Öter, 2022; Coşkun and Akgündüz, 2023), Malaysia (Ng et al., 2022), Serbia (Žerajić, 2021), and the European Union (Ziółkowska, 2021), this study, as mentioned previously, is the first of its kind in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it is preferable to conduct other studies in Saudi Arabia to understand more deeply the strategies that can be applied to reduce the risks that may occur during health epidemics in the tourist guide profession. In addition, since the tourism sector includes several parties that have been affected by health epidemics, such as travel companies and agencies, governments, site organizers, tourists and visitors, it would be beneficial to understand their opinions on how to manage risks and apply strategies to avoid the impact of such epidemics in the future on the tourist guide profession and on the tourism sector as a whole.

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استراتيجيات إدارة المخاطر لتجنب آثار الجوائح الصحية على مهنة الإرشاد السياحي في المملكة العربية السعودية

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المستخلاص : يلعب المرشدون السياحيون دوراً رئيسياً في صناعة السياحة حيث يساهمون في بناء صورة الوجهة وتجارب السياح، مما يعزز السياحة في البلاد. ولذلك تعتبر مهنة الإرشاد السياحي من أهم المهن في قطاع السياحة. تعتبر المهنة من أكثر المهن تأثراً وتضرراً بشكل واضح وكبير جداً من جراء الجوائح الصحية، كما حدث مؤخراً خلال جائحة كوفيد-١٩. ولذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف استراتيجيات إدارة المخاطر لتجنب مثل هذه الآثار. وقد تم اختيار المملكة العربية السعودية كدراسة حالة لهذا البحث. من أجل تحقيق هدف البحث وغاياته، تمت مقابلة ١٠ مرشدين سياحيين سعوديين معتمدين باستخدام مقابلات شبه منتظمة. وأظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن المرشدين السياحيين تأثروا مادياً ونفسياً بالجائحة الصحية. وبناء على النتائج تم تقديم بعض الاقتراحات والتقنيات والحلول للتغلب على هذا التأثير المالي وال النفسي وإدارته.

كلمات مفتاحية: المخاطر المالية، الأوبئة الصحية، المملكة العربية السعودية، المخاطر النفسية، إدارة المخاطر، السياحة، مهنة الإرشاد السياحي.