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30 March 2021

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/110693/>  
MPRA Paper No. 110693, posted 23 Nov 2021 20:30 UTC

# Reviving tourism sector in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic : The role of competitive intelligence.

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**Abstract:** *Towards the end of 2019, the world experienced an unprecedented crisis. The COVID-19 virus was spreading quickly forcing authorities to impose drastic measures to contain it. Thus, the pandemic resulted in a deep worldwide economic crisis leaving many sectors vulnerable. Tourism, a vital sector that contributes strongly to the economic growth of many countries, was seriously affected. Even though some borders have been opened, vaccination campaigns have been launched and restrictions have been softened worldwide, the sector still struggles. In order to stimulate their activities, in the new challenging context created by the pandemic, tourism companies should not mainly rely on the support measures offered by governments. They are rather required to re-examine their traditional managerial approaches and start implementing more effective practices, such as competitive intelligence to anticipate future threats and identify new growth opportunities. The aim of this paper is therefore to provide a reflection on the role that competitive intelligence could have in the recovery of the tourism sector following the damages caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.*

**Key Words:** Competitive intelligence, information, anticipation, Covid-19 pandemic, tourism, recovery.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2019, the world has been heavily hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The proliferation of the virus have threatened the lives of many people and resulted in the collapse of the world economy.

Tourism is a powerful lever for the economic development of any country. With the emergence of the pandemic, it has been profoundly affected. Even with the reopening of different borders, the launch of vaccination campaigns and the easing of certain restrictions, the future of the sector remains uncertain.

It is worth saying that tourism companies were dealing with a very challenging environment long before Covid-19. However, this unprecedented crisis has created a new reality with very tough competition and an incredibly high level of uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

In order to be able to face such a context and relaunch their activities, tourism businesses have requested the support of the governments. The initiatives of policy makers are certainly essential. However, we believe that they are not enough. Along with these efforts, it is necessary for companies to start reconsidering their own managerial practices.

Since, the business world is oriented towards a knowledge-based economy, they should prioritize the adoption of new managerial practices and approaches that create a strategic knowledge required to overcome the difficulties and the challenges that may appear.

Focused on information processing and knowledge creation, competitive intelligence is, indeed, considered to be one of the best practices that the tourism companies must implement in the Covid-19 era. Therefore, the question that arises is: How could competitive intelligence contribute to the recovery of the tourism sector in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic?

To answer this question, we will start by giving an overview of competitive intelligence. Then, the focus will be on the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic and its major impacts on the tourism sector. Further on, we will outline the role that could have the competitive intelligence in reviving tourism sector.

## 2. Competitive intelligence: A theoretical background.

Implementing competitive intelligence is essential for any company operating in a turbulent and complex environment with intense competition and a high level of uncertainty.

The purpose of this part is to review the concept of competitive intelligence; Mainly its definitions, the key stages of its process as well as its different components.

### 2.1 Definitions of competitive intelligence.

In today's competitive business environment, organizations must adapt to their surroundings in order to survive and prosper. The speed and aggressiveness of competition has forced organizations to think beyond traditional approaches (Rapp et al., 2011). Therefore, several researchers and practitioners focused attention on competitive intelligence due to its effective contributions when it comes to shaping and making strategies. In fact, it identifies relevant information quickly and helps the make of more successful choices. It also detects market threats and opportunities and identifies winning strategies in unknown areas (Rouach and Santi, 2001).

Several researchers have outlined that Competitive intelligence is vague, complex and ambiguous (Jakobiak, 2009; Oubrich and Rih, 2015) . The reasons behind are the various concept related and the multiplicity of the activities that can be integrated into it. However, existing literature provides a proper insight about this complex practice.

According to Damaisin D'Ares (2016), competitive intelligence is a state of mind using mental faculties to understand and discover relationships between things related to human activity of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of goods and services, leading to a conceptual and rational knowledge of them and their environment. These faculties should allow to adapt to new situations and to process information in order to achieve defined objectives with the least possible expenditure of resources.

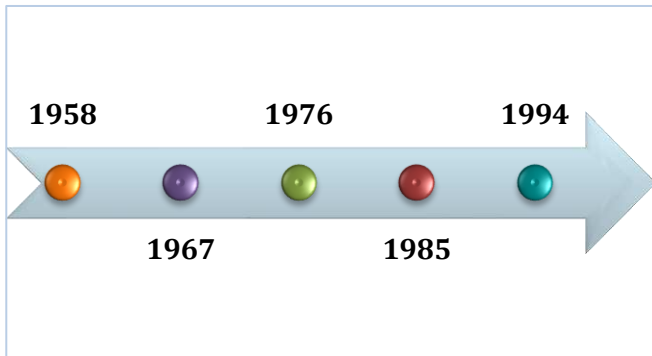
As pointed out by Larivet (2006), competitive intelligence manages information flows between the company and its environment. It is therefore, in a way, a mode of strategic information management. More precisely, it is a way of managing information asymmetry. By allowing the firm that practices it to be better informed than its competitors, it increases this asymmetry to the benefit of the firm that practices it and thus gives it a source of competitive advantage.

Badr and his colleagues (2006) tend to define it as a process by which organizations actively gather information about competitors and the competitive environment, and, ideally, applying it to their decision making.

Delesse (2011) notes that competitive intelligence is also defined as a cultural, strategic and operational response to the problems of governments, business leaders and decision-makers in general. Transdisciplinary, it mobilizes specific skills and collective intelligence.

In other words, we can say that competitive intelligence is a dynamic process for collecting, processing, disseminating, interpreting and managing useful information in order to direct decision-making in an uncertain environment. Its practices make it possible to learn about competitor's intentions, assess their capabilities and thus build a sustainable competitive advantage, all while respecting the rules of ethics and codes of conduct.

It should also be mentioned that the key factors that have motivated the development of competitive intelligence include: intense and fierce competition, globalization, as well as the increase in the volume of information, which imposes sorting and selecting the most important ones. The emergence of this concept is far from being linear, since the intelligence services were created during the Second World War. The figure below highlights some historical landmarks of the evolution of competitive intelligence.



**Fig -1:** Historical evolution of competitive intelligence (Author)

Luhn was the first to develop a definition of competitive intelligence in 1958. Larivet (2001) states that Luhn defines economic intelligence as the ability to apprehend the interrelationships between available facts in order to guide action towards a desired goal.

In 1967, competitive intelligence appeared in Harold Wilensky's book "Organizational Intelligence: Knowledge and Policy in Government and Industry". He noted that it is a knowledge production activity serving the economic and strategic goals of an organization, in a legal context and from open sources.

Since 1976, many universities such as Lund and Stockholm integrated competitive intelligence into their accredited degree courses.

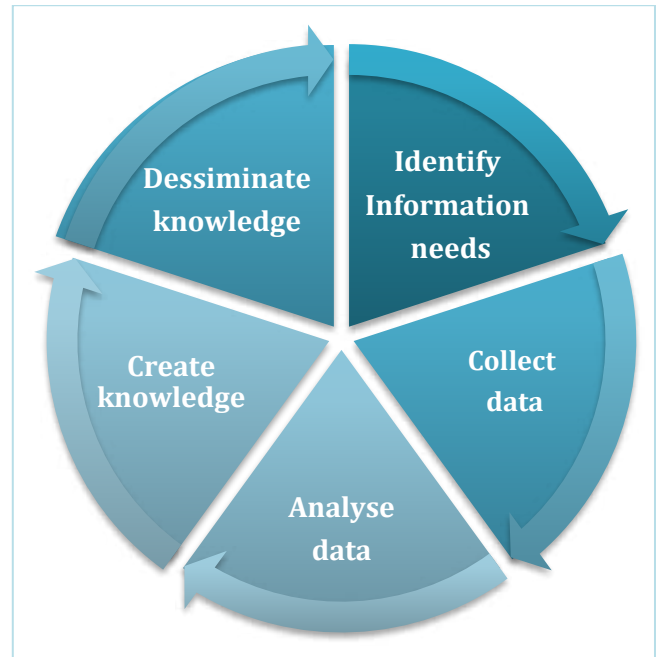
1985 was the year when Leonard Fuld published its book «Competitor Intelligence: How to Get It, How to Use It ». And in 1994, France established its own competitive intelligence system by publishing Martre report. It tries to explain competitiveness factors in a new context known for globalization, the emergence of new economic powers, and the development of new technologies.

## 2.2 Competitive intelligence process.

One of the essential elements of strategic capital, which today determines the prosperity of societies, the competitiveness of companies and therefore the evolution of employment, is information. Knowing how to look for it, process it and disseminate is one of the priority tasks of all economic actors (Paustrat et Delbecque, 2006). Actually, every decision based on information allows companies to anticipate the various changes in their environment, and enables them to act quickly and effectively in order to overtake their competitors.

Information is the raw material of competitive intelligence process. In point of fact, competitive intelligence is a process contributing, by constructing meaning, to modify the representations that the actors of the organization have of their environment. (Said, 2006)

Through the literature review, it turns out that competitive intelligence process involves five key steps including: identifying information needs, collecting and analyzing data, creating knowledge and then disseminate it (Martinet and Mati, 1995; Levet and Paturel, 1996; Hassid et al., 1997; Bournois and Romani, 2000; Jakobiak, 2006). The following figure illustrates competitive intelligence process.



**Fig -2 :** Competitive intelligence process - Edited version (Oubrich, 2007)

The first step is identifying information needs. Specifying, what types of information does the company need? Why does it need this information? What is the origin of this request for information? The definition of these needs will therefore lead to the design of strategic areas of monitoring on which the system will focus (Tchouassi, 2017).

Then comes the data collection stage. Bulinge (2002) highlights two collecting methods. One via technical means and the other via human means. The first refers to using internet technologies and computer software. While the second refers to the mobilization of a network of experts, whether they are client, suppliers or organizations.

On the other hand, analyzing involves estimating the quality, reliability and usefulness of the data collected, synthesizing it in a clear and concise manner and classifying it by strategic axis (Tchouassi, 2017).

The third step is to develop and create a useful knowledge. It requires interpreting all the information available thanks to some human skills. Indeed, Mack (1995) notes that knowledge is information plus human interpretation.

Simply creating knowledge is not enough. It is imperative to disseminate it to the relevant managers so that they can use it in their decision-making. Actually, there are several means of dissemination, such as computerized systems and internal database,...Moreover, this step requires taking some security measures in order to protect the knowledge developed by the company.

### **2.3 Competitive intelligence components.**

Revel (2006) points out that competitive intelligence has three components: the collection of information, or monitoring; the protection of human, material and immaterial assets; and the offensive or proactive use of information.

Monitoring is at the heart of competitive intelligence, yet these two practices are often confused.

According to Ansoff (1975), it's an informational practice designed to promote responsiveness and support the ability of organizations to adapt to their environment's changes by detecting weak signals. Usually broken down into commercial, competitive, environmental and technological monitoring. It therefore involves keeping track of important events, new trends and changes in the company's environment.

Another component of competitive intelligence which represents its defensive aspect is the protection of information. Its aim is to preserve company's informational patrimony against every single malicious intent whether it is internal or external. In this sense, Marcon and Moinet (2011) mention that in this area, two main categories of threats can be considered: hard actions and so-called oblique actions. Hard actions generally fall within the scope of the law: computer theft, executive managers poaching, computer attacks. On the other hand, oblique actions, are not prohibited. However, they are less permitted since their lack of sense of ethics. They can, actually, cause significant damages. These actions include: questioning subcontractors, competitor's customers or suppliers; listening carefully to private conversations in a public place; and dissecting the competitor's products.

As for lobbying, it's the offensive aspect of competitive intelligence. Commonly considered illegal, Revel (2006) indicates that this word has long been badly connoted. Yet, its purpose is to make a person or a group of people change their mind and point of view thanks to persuasion. Through the literature, several researchers have tried to give a precise definition to lobbying.

Damaisin D'Ares (2016) defines it as set of legal actions, notably indirect, targeting individuals or entities able to put a certain pressure on market's actors. Revel (2006), underlines that it is a strategy and tactic of convincing decision-makers in an ethical and professional manner, based on an appropriate treatment of information.

As a matter of fact, Delbecque (2006) explains that economic warfare is therefore the decisive form of confrontation between power interests. Still, victories in commercial and financial operations, as well as in the field

of norms of exchange definition (which benefit some actors and disadvantage others), are obtained today through complex strategies and operations of influence with dreadful consequences for those who have neglected to resort to them.

### **3. Tourism sector in the time of Covid-19 pandemic.**

Tourism is fundamental for the world economy. Because of the propagation of Covid-19, it was, unfortunately, one of the most devastated sectors. Throughout this part, an overview of the Covid-19 pandemic will be given. Then, its main effects on the tourism sector will be highlighted.

#### **3.1 An overview of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

According to Pinshi (2020), diseases have plagued humanity since the beginning of the world, however, it should be noted that intensive trade has opened up new opportunities for human and animal interactions that have accelerated such epidemics, the Covid-19 pandemic was a sobering reminder of the enormous damage caused by epidemics, events that have marked our collective memory and have long been identified as important sources of risk to humanity.

Coronavirus, also referred to as Covid- 19 is a disease caused by an infection with the newly discovered virus called SARS-CoV-2. It emerged towards the end of 2019, in Wuhan, which is located in Hubei province in central China.

Initially thought to be transmitted from an animal or bird source to humans, it is now clear that there is efficient and thus widespread human-to-human transmission via airborne droplets (Bong et al., 2020). In spite of the striving to contain its dissemination within china, the virus spread rapidly all over the world with harmful effects.

In order to slow down and reduce the spread, countries took several measures, such as closing their borders, prohibiting traveling and therefore tourism, increasing social distancing and imposing a quarantine period. In fact, Weder di Mauro (2020) notes that full or partial lockdown, like in China, is one of the most extreme measures and can bring production and consumption almost to a standstill. Such extreme measures are likely to remain restricted to certain areas and will be difficult to maintain for a long time. Less extreme measures, such as cancelling large-scale events, are likely to remain in place for longer.

These drastic measures, whether those that directly affect the activity or those that are more subtle, have certainly prevented a significant increase in cases. However, they have had an intense impact on world economy. In fact, they led to a suspension of trade between countries, slowed up many businesses and decreased supply and demand. In many sectors, the pandemic resulted in a negative supply shock due to a drop in production and a

negative demand shock as a result of the decrease in demand from households and companies.

The effect of the pandemic on growth come firstly, from the internal shocks suffered by the economies, with the quarantine period determining the length of time that activity is put on hold. They also depend on the sectoral composition of value added, and in particular the weight of market services, which are particularly affected by the lockdown. They can also be explained by the degree of openness of countries and their differing exposure to the shocks suffered by their trading partners. (Analysis and prevision department, 2020)

The Covid-19 pandemic is not only the most serious global health crisis since the 1918 Great Influenza (Spanish flu), but is set to become one of the most economically costly pandemics in recent history (Boissay and Rungcharoenkitkul, 2020).

In the same vein, Pastré and De Forges (2020) state that there is a deep crisis in the emerging countries, which are affected by capital outflows, the decline in tourism, the fall in commodity prices. Then there is, and this is a central characteristic of the current crisis, very profound changes in the sectoral structure of economies. Some sectors will suffer durably with the sanitary norms, with new consumption and work practices (automobile, air transport, aeronautics, commercial real estate, traditional distribution, tourism, culture); while other sectors will have a strong activity (new technologies, telecoms, online distribution, health and pharmacy, security).

Regarding the labor market, it was also deeply affected. As pointed by Pastré and De Forges (2020), the Covid-19 crisis will increase inequalities, between employees in sectors affected by the crisis and others, between those with short-term temporary employment contracts and those with long-term employment contracts; young people are particularly affected: hiring freezes, courses become inappropriate.

Several research studies have brought out the different effects of covid-19 pandemic. The following table provides a summary of these effects on a global scale.

**Table -1:** The global effects of Covid-19 pandemic

Studies	Years	Covid-19 Effects
<b>Eka</b>	2021	Significant drop in business revenues layoffs and job losses Decrease of the companies turnover
<b>Pinshi</b>	2020	Loss of real GDP Unemployment increase General price increase Decline in commodity prices Threat to peace and social cohesion

<b>McKibbin and Fernando</b>	2020	Mortality and morbidity. Global economic activities slow down Production interruptions Global supply chain disruption Limited transport
<b>World Bank Group</b>	2020	Large number of deaths. Disruption of economic activity worldwide. Persistent slowness of growth and investment, Decrease in commodity prices. Increased food insecurity in several African countries. Depreciation of currencies. Disruption of agri-food supply chains. Reduced movement of labor, Difficulties in accessing credit or cash. Budget deficits.
<b>Analysis and prevision department, OFCE</b>	2020	Decrease in activity Job destruction and deterioration of the labor market
<b>Wren-Lewis</b>	2020	Significant fatality rate Collapse of stock markets Supply and demand shocks Reducing GDP Fall in production
<b>Oudda et al.</b>	2020	Global transactions freeze Alarming decreases in foreign demand and household consumption Economic recession Disruptions in supply chains Significant losses in the tourism sector Limited foreign exchange reserve capacity

Source : Author

The severity of this crisis exceeds the previous epidemics that followed the Second World War. It particularly highlights the fragility of a highly globalized world economy (Fouquin and Chaponnière, 2020) which has suffered an unexpected shock that has overturned the

economic paradigm (Analysis and prevision department, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary that the government and international bodies cooperate to reduce the economic consequences of the effects of the virus in the future (Verma et al. 2021)

As outlined in (McKibbin and Fernando, 2020) a range of policy responses is important both in the short term as well as in the coming years. In the short term, central banks and treasuries need to make sure that disrupted economies continue to function while the virus outbreak continues. In the face of real and financial stress, there is a critical role for governments. While cutting interest rates is a possible response for central banks, the shock is not simply a demand management problem but a multi-faceted crisis that will require monetary, fiscal and health policy responses.

Covid-19 pandemic is, actually, a major force that has paralyzed all business sectors. In order to deal with its devastating impacts, urgent funds have been set aside for the benefit of the poor, the employees who lost their jobs and businesses that have been closed due to economic and epidemic reasons (Soltani, 2021).

Since the pandemic have threatened the lives of millions of people, governments started investing in their health care systems. They have been also trying to revive their economy that has collapsed by providing subsidies to companies to help them get back into business; Increasing government's spending to stimulate demand, and also lower interest rates.

### 3.2 Major Effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the tourism sector.

Tourism is an economic, social and cultural phenomenon related to people who move to places outside their usual place of residence. These persons, referred to as visitors, include both tourists and excursionists. Tourism comprises the activities of visitors, undertaken by those who are travelling for holiday, leisure and recreation as well for business, health, education or any other purpose with the exception of employment by an entity resident in the destination country. As an economic sector, tourism comprises numerous industries: accommodation for visitors, food and beverage serving activities, passenger transport : air, road, railway, water, equipment rental, travel agencies and other reservation services as well as cultural, sports and recreational events (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities “CCSA”, 2020)

Tourism is a vital sector that contributes strongly to the social and economic development of any country. As pointed out by the World Travel and Tourism Council (2020) in its report entitled “ The future of travel and tourism in the wake of Covid-19”, It's one of the fastest growing sectors in 2019, accounting for one in four new jobs created worldwide over the last five year. It's not only an important contributor to entrepreneurship, but it continues to create opportunities for women, youth and minorities. It does so regardless of gender, education level, background or religion, creating meaningful social impact,

particularly for developing nations around the world. In effect, women account for 54% of employment in the sector, compared to 39% for the global economy, and employs almost twice as many youth than other sectors. This inclusive sector's contribution to local communities is also significant, supporting employment and income generation, local cultural and natural (WTTC, 2020)

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development highlights in its report focusing on Middle East and North Africa “MENA” economies that tourism represents a major economic pillar for MENA economies and a key component of economic diversification for oil-exporting countries (OECD, 2020). The figure below gives an overview of the contributions of tourism to MENA economies.

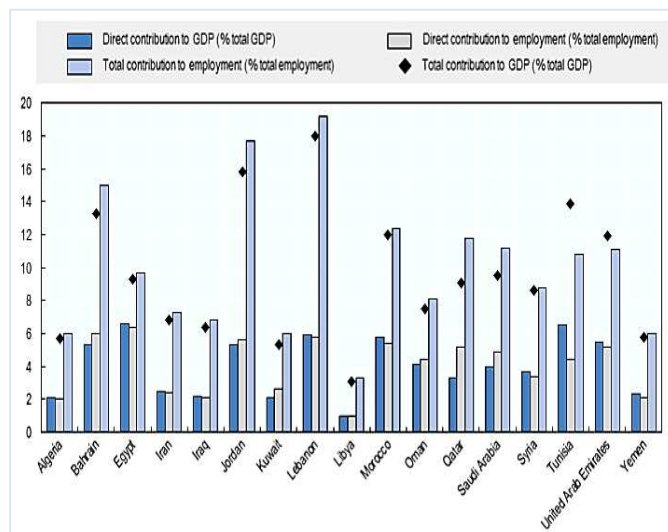


Fig -3 : The importance of tourism sector in MENA economies (OECD, 2020)

In 2019, the travel and tourism sector accounted for 5.3% of GDP growth and 6.7 million jobs across the MENA region (OECD, 2020).

The growing importance of tourism has been globally acknowledged from an economic, socio-cultural and pro-environmental perspective. Tourism has become a major agent for pro-active change for destinations where impacts are internalized and managed. However, tourism remains highly vulnerable to crises and disasters ( Reddy et al., 2020)

The COVID-19 outbreak is marked as an impactful incidence in world history. During this epidemic, human contact and mobility are discouraged; thus, the tourism industry is affected. The effect is disastrous to destinations that largely depend on tourists (Hoc Nang Fong et al., 2020). The pandemic resulted in the closure of all tourist destinations and this had a significant economic impact on tourism actors (Cahyadi and Newsome, 2021)

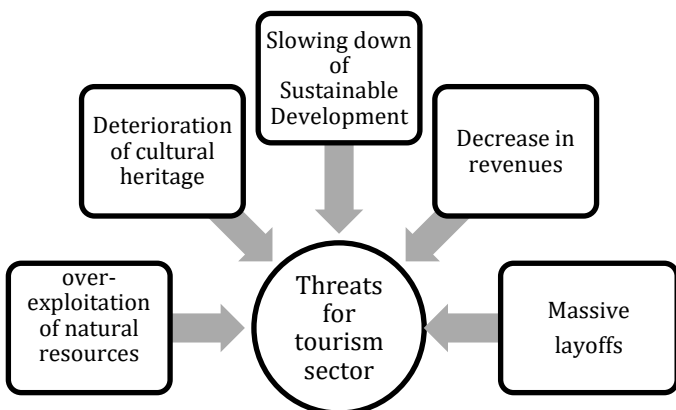
The tourism industry has experienced sharply falling revenues. The shock affects both the demand side (restrictions on freedom of movement, border closings, guests' fear of infection) and the supply-side, closure of accommodation and catering establishments as well as leisure facilities used for tourism. (Uğur and Akbiyık, 2020).

In fact, Uğur and Akbıyık (2020) found that the recent spread of the virus leads to a noticeable decline in so-called “social consumption”. Several prominent events have already been postponed or even canceled in many countries. Given the high number of cancellations, the airline industry has reduced the flight plans by almost half. Hardly any other industry is as dependent on the development of intangible values as the tourism sector. This fact illustrates the vulnerability of the tourism sector to adverse events. An incident can destroy these intangible assets in the long term.

According to the data published on its website, the United Nations World Tourism Organization states that international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) plunged by 74% in 2020 over the previous year due to widespread travel restrictions and a massive drop in demand. The collapse in international travel represents an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion in export revenues - more than 11 times the loss recorded during the 2009 global economic crisis. Moreover, Asia and the Pacific saw an 84% decrease in international arrivals in 2020, about 300 million less than in the previous year. The Middle East and Africa both recorded a 75% drop in arrivals. In Europe arrivals declined by 70%, representing over 500 million fewer international tourists, while the Americas saw a drop of 69%. (UNWTO, 2021)

As claimed by the same organization, the extended scenarios for 2021-2024 indicate that it could take between two-and-a-half and four years for international tourism to return to 2019 levels. The gradual rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine is expected to help restore consumer confidence, contribute to ease travel restrictions and slowly normalize travel during the year ahead. (UNWTO, 2021)

With all that being said, it seems that tourism is one of the most affected sectors. It has faced huge difficulties and was devastated because of the spread of Covid-19. The following figure recapitulate the multiple effects of the pandemic on tourism.



**Fig -4 :** Effects of Covid-19 pandemic on tourism sector (Author, based on United Nation policy brief, 2020)

The pandemic has resulted in the interruption of activities which generated a significant decrease in revenues and an

important loss of incomes; Therefore, tourism companies were forced to let go many employees.

As mentioned by the United Nations in one of their policy briefs related to effects of Covid-19 on tourism, for women, rural communities, indigenous peoples and many other historically marginalized populations, tourism has been a vehicle for integration, empowerment and generating income. It has enabled service delivery in remote locations, supported economic growth of rural areas, provided access to training and jobs (United Nations, 2020)

In addition, the loss of tourism income further endangers protected and other conserved areas for biodiversity, where most wildlife tourism takes place. Without alternative opportunities, communities may turn to the over-exploitation of natural resources, either for their own consumption or to generate income (United Nations, 2020). This practice will eventually hinder sustainable development.

Moreover, tourism is closely linked to several society aspects. Being harshly hit by the pandemic led also to the deterioration of the cultural heritage.

As a matter of fact, many intangible cultural heritage practices such as traditional festivals and gatherings have also been halted or postponed, with important consequences for the social and cultural lives of communities everywhere. Those working in the performing arts and traditional crafts, including local and indigenous communities, who largely operate in the informal sector, have been hit particularly hard. Cultural World Heritage sites and museums, also rely highly on tourism revenues to carry out instrumental monitoring, conservation and archaeological work. The reduction in visitors has had a direct negative impact on these operational budgets (United Nations, 2020)

Given all these enormous threats, reanimating this sector that is collapsing is a must. Yang and his colleagues (2020) indicate that it is critical for policymakers to monitor recovery across numerous destinations. In fact, governments have a crucial role in shaping a positive outlook of tourism recovery in the future (Hoc Nang Fong et al., 2020). Actually, they have been providing stimulus packages and interventions (e.g. tax reliefs, subsidies, deferrals of payments) to ensure the viability and continuity of tourism firms and jobs (Sigala, 2020)

Tourism companies as well have made significant efforts and have taken many measures. In this sense, Sigala (2020) explains that they have already upgraded their cleaning procedures by adopting new standards and restraining staff. Many of companies promote their hygiene certifications accredited by health expert associations. Tourism professionals are being trained to become ‘contact tracers’ obtaining relevant certifications confirming their skills to identify cases, build rapport and community with cases, identify their contact and stop community transmission. Restaurants, hotels, airports, public spaces are re-engineering their operations to make them contact free or contactless.



It should also be noted that the pandemic is a reminder that sustainability in tourism means not only a healthy natural environment for visitors and all to enjoy, but also economic opportunities and social benefits for communities. The impact of crises such as the current pandemic, and mitigation and recovery efforts, are intertwined with the sector's sustainability (Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities "CCSA", 2020)

#### **4. The role of competitive intelligence in reviving the tourism sector.**

It goes without saying that the measures taken to contain the spread of Covid-19 have severely affected the tourism sector worldwide.

Therefore, tourism companies must adapt to their surroundings in order to survive and prosper, they are also forced to think beyond traditional approaches (Rapp, 2011). This is why implementing practices such as competitive intelligence is a must. In this part of the article, the focus will be on the different contributions of competitive intelligence to the recovery of the tourism sector.

It is true that the covid-19 pandemic has not yet disappeared permanently. However, in several countries, borders have been opened and restrictions have been eased, allowing some tourism businesses to reopen. The current challenge for these companies is to effectively manage the post-covid phase.

In times of crisis, the social, political, economic and technological environments generate a succession of radical changes. These changes generate complexity by their global, universal and sometimes irreversible aspects. (National institute of advanced security studies, 2009). Managing the post-crisis period requires knowing how to capitalize on information thanks to feedback. Moreover, managing information allows the company to predict the environment to reduce its exposure and limit the harmful consequences of the crises (Saltet de Sablet d'Estières, 2006)

Acquiring meaningful and useful data, accessing usable information for operational purposes, and then linking and interpreting it in order to develop knowledge that allows making strategic choices and decisions that are in favor of the company's sustainability and development is a daily challenge for all economic actors (Delbecque and Fayol, 2018), especially for tourism companies, which are operating in a context that is even more complex as a result of the effects of the pandemic.

Competitive intelligence is the ability of an organization to link and prioritize contexts in order to draw out the logic of actions in order to better use and develop the environment according to its strengths and assets and make the environment evolve according to its strengths and assets (National institute of advanced security studies, 2009). In point of fact, information is at the heart of the competitive intelligence process. Its purpose is to reduce uncertainty through the good mastering of information and the creation of strategic knowledge both before and

after a potential crisis. If this practice is essential for a relevant decision making in normal conditions, it is even more useful during the post-crisis period.

According to Saltet de Sablet d'Estières (2006), in the management of the post-crisis phase, competitive intelligence has a triple aptitude:

- Ability to observe and analyze the environment.
- Ability to detect risks and anticipate crises.
- Ability to carry out the follow-up and the return of experience.

As a matter of fact, the activating and the strategic choice of competitive intelligence monitoring at times of crisis is a vital necessity. Generally speaking, competitive intelligence allows for all-time, all-branch, all-profession and all-country management. It is therefore particularly useful in times of global recession (National institute of advanced security studies, 2009), and even more useful to go through the post crisis phase.

The current crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly highlighted the vulnerability of the tourism sector. It has led to profound changes in the environment in which tourism companies operate. To overcome all the challenges, it is necessary for these companies to become more involved in the knowledge economy and to value anticipation.

De Montaudouin (2020) states that we are, as an economy reacting to the issues, rather than anticipating them. This lack of anticipation meant that decision makers were deprived of time to plan. Time is of the essence in a crisis, and in particular during a health crisis involving a novel coronavirus with exponential growth.

Thus, tourism companies must reorganize, restart their activities, and design a new strategy, a new policy of action. They must capitalize on their knowledge and experience in order to draw conclusions on past mistakes and finally readjust (Saltet de Sablet d'Estières, 2006). That is why these companies are in a crucial need of data, information, or knowledge gathered through formal processes or informal activities (Koseoglu et al, 2016).

After processing and cross-checking, information has an economic value. It is, therefore, an asset for any company (Monino, 2013). While placing information at the center of its approach, competitive intelligence allows, through its different components and its coordinated process which generates a useful knowledge:

- Identification of scenarios to overcome the crisis impacts.
- A strong reactivity to emerging changes.
- Detection of threats and opportunities.
- Exceptional adaptation to changes.
- Anticipation of environment evolutions.

Competitive intelligence will allow tourism companies to identify new growth opportunities. Through the implementation of several categories of monitoring, these companies will be able to have a wider vision of the expectations of their customers, which have certainly changed during the pandemic.

In this sense, the national institute of advanced security studies (2009) emphasizes that the competitive intelligence will highlight the new interests and trends on topics as diverse as sustainable development, changing consumption patterns,... All these evolutions create new opportunities.

El Otmani (2020) outlines that keeping an eye on the environment by collecting strategic information, anticipating risks, rationalizing decisions on the basis of processed and analyzed information, and above all acquiring the ability to positively impact one's environment, are the foundations of competitive intelligence.

As mentioned before, competitive intelligence identifies relevant information quickly and helps the make of more successful choices. It also detects market threats and opportunities and identifies winning strategies in unknown areas (Rouach and Santi, 2001). That is why, it is highly recommended for tourism companies in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic.

## 5. CONCLUSION

All in all, it should be noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has had serious consequences on the tourism sector. Due to this crisis, the economic context has become even more volatile and uncertain. Therefore, tourism companies are required to revive their activities while dealing with sudden and unlimited changes.

As a matter of fact, the treatment of information, this key element that drives the process of competitive intelligence, allows the reduction of uncertainty and a better assimilation of the issues of the experienced crisis. It also provides tourism companies with the clear vision needed to manage the post-covid phase, anticipate potential threats and identify new growth opportunities.

The pandemic has, actually, shown once again the usefulness of competitive intelligence in times of difficulty as an essential approach to revive and develop the tourism sector. As pointed out by El Otmani (2020), it has become obvious for any company, that identifying and exploiting relevant information related to its specific environment remains a permanent challenge. This pandemic is now making competitive intelligence a top concern for decision-makers, above all others.

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