

Article

# Discourses of Fear in Online News Media: Implications for Perceived Risk of Travel

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the role of Canadian online news media in framing travel during the pandemic. The article applies Altheide's concept of the problem frame to reflect how news media contribute to the emergence of a highly rationalized problem that, in turn, generates a discourse of fear. While the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism have been extensively examined within tourism scholarship, less attention has been devoted to the impact of news media. Because travel and the pandemic are heavily intertwined, discourse analysis can help process media narratives, furthering our understanding of their role in influencing perceived risk of travel. A critical discourse analysis of over 100 online news articles was conducted using thematic analysis to uncover themes in Canadian media sources and to explore how the media have framed travel during the pandemic. The role of online news media in promoting fear was communicated through the themes of anxiety, antitrust, avoidance, and animosity. The role of the media in producing the problem frame in the context of travel was examined as well as its implications for perceived travel risk and tourism demand. The power dynamics between media, government, and the citizens it serves are also discussed.

**Keywords:** travel; problem frame; discourse analysis; perceived fear; COVID-19; media analysis; risk; Canada



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## 1. Introduction

From the reporting of the first coronavirus case in Canada in January 2020 until August 2022, there were over 4.05 million cases and 42,600 deaths ([www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com), accessed on 5 January 2023). The Canadian economy was also hit hard, with a 50% loss to tourism GDP through 2020, accounting for approximately CAD 3 billion lost revenue, with record job losses in the hospitality and service sectors [1,2]. COVID-19 impacts on tourism have been extensively examined by researchers [3], with important topics in travel risk, vulnerability, and sustainability being explored and other work underscoring the drastic impacts to niche- and sector-specific tourism [4,5]. Through the identification of these impacts, scholars recommend management strategies to mitigate risks through the pandemic, with calls for a resetting of tourism to build back local economies [6,7]. Others have mentioned the importance of interrogating past tourism practices, calling for a re-exploration and re-envisioning of the future of tourism [8,9]. Much of this current research has been dedicated to international travel and covered generalized impacts of COVID-19 on tourism, along with risks, recovery, responses, and resets. However, beyond specific cases examined predominantly in Asia, there is less attention to region-specific perceived travel risks and longer-term impacts associated with the pandemic. This paper provides a nuanced exploration of a region not represented in terms of pandemic-induced impacts on tourism and the perceived risk of travel during these and current times.

Risk perceptions are different from real risks, which are traditionally characterized by uncertainty about the probability of negative outcomes [10,11]. Perceived risks are related to an individual's subjective perceptions, which are influenced by multiple factors and

based on personal experiences and feelings [12]. Perceived risks may influence people's attitudes, decisions, and behavior, even if the real risks are minimal [13]. However, there is a lack of research on perceived health risks in association with tourism [14].

Many studies offer empirical evidence that perception of risk is directly related to travel behavior intentions [15–17]. The pandemic has had an impact on intention and willingness to travel [18], with negative media having been found to influence tourists' perceived risks [19,20]. However, given the extensive research focus on tourism and the pandemic, there has been less attention on media's impact on the travel sector during this time [21]. In a communication-driven world, the role of media discourses in influencing perceived risk is worthy of critical investigation. Moreover, current research has focused on a finite heightened period during the pandemic rather than examining longer-term impacts of the media throughout this ongoing health crisis.

Discourses in news media are not new in the context of mobility and disease [22,23]. Because travel and the pandemic are intertwined with multiple facets involving broader social contexts, discourse analysis can assist with processing media narratives, furthering our understanding of their role in influencing perceived risk and tourism demand [24]. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been used in tourism research in a wide variety of applications [25]. Milutinovic [26] argues that there is a lack of understanding on the media discourses during the pandemic, and this is especially true in the case of travel. This study, set in Canada, explored how news media have framed travel during the pandemic, giving an understanding of the mediatization and politicization of Canadian tourism during this time. It argues that mainstream online news media perpetuates a discourse of fear, using citizens' uncertainty over safety and risk and inconsistent government policy to re-create the problem frame. The paper offers useful insights for tourism professionals and destination marketing organizations to understand tourist behavior about traveling (or not travelling) during the pandemic.

## 2. Literature

### 2.1. *Perceived Risk in Travel in Pandemic Times*

In tourism, risk perceptions are mostly associated with fear, anxiety, worry, and nervousness [14,27]. Several studies explored tourists' risk perceptions as an important determinant of travel intentions and avoidance of potentially dangerous destinations [28]. Common findings from previous research yielded a negative correlation between risk perceptions and tourists' behavioral intentions (e.g., [15]). It was reported that higher levels of perceived risk evaluations led to lower levels of satisfaction, loyalty, attitude toward a destination, and visit intentions [29]. Tourists' risk perceptions have been described as one of the major factors of decision making and behavior intentions [30] and several studies have examined the effects of global health issues on travel behavior [3,22,31,32]. However, not much is known about prospective tourists' risk-taking tendencies and their travel intentions and behaviors when considering trips during the pandemic.

Research has shown that major disease outbreaks are associated with greater perceived risk. For example, tourists' behavior after reopening has depended on their perceptions of safety and risk associated with various travel activities [32,33], and media messaging throughout the pandemic has also influenced travellers' perceived risk of travel, thus affecting their travel decisions [21]. However, media platforms deserve more attention, especially news media, as they belong to an assemblage of social power holders that communicate government policy, such as health, safety, and travel policy during the pandemic, in ways that facilitate fear and blame [26].

### 2.2. *Media Analysis in Tourism*

Media studies have long focused on understanding people's perceptions of the media, whether it may be trust or bias. There is significant literature about the presumed influence of the media and its consequences [34,35]. While media discourse is only a part of the public discourse, it remains an integral source of information [36] especially in terms of travel dur-

ing a health crisis. The analysis of different forms of media is an ongoing focus in tourism research. From early studies analyzing destination image and marketing representations in brochures [37,38] to the role and use of social media (e.g., [39,40]), it is important to understand the influence of media on travel and tourism. Official marketing strategies, such as Destination Marketing Organization websites, were explored in terms of how particular information and images are represented [41,42], while other research investigated how issues are framed in news media with implications for policymakers [43–45]. News media analysis was performed to understand tourists' perceptions of safety in Thailand [46], how climate change was projected in news media over time [47], and to assess media sentiment, with negative sentiment impacting destination image [20]. As epidemics far exceed the knowledge scope of most ordinary people, the news coverage is the most important information source for the public; thus, it is imperative to understand the COVID-19-induced tourism crisis through news media reports accurately [48]. While there are studies investigating media coverage during the pandemic [48,49], there is a need to examine its deeper tones on the tourism industry in specific geographical contexts.

Researchers can examine broader connections of media texts through critical discourse analysis (CDA), understanding that a text must be analyzed within the social context in which it takes place [36]. CDA follows Foucault's [50] ideas that power and knowledge are primarily inseparable and intertwined and reflect power in and outside of particular social groups and actors [51]. It is powerful in showcasing commonly obscure and opaque meanings such as the dominant party in the discourse or during the communicative process [52,53]. Being heavily influenced by socio-political processes, it is useful in analyzing tourism discourses because it can unearth embedded meanings of phenomena that impacts and is impacted by tourism [54]. The number of tourism studies that have adopted CDA has grown steadily since 2011, with peaks that coincide with a more established critical turn within the discipline. Travel motivation and destination image are two topic areas where CDA was applied quite extensively (e.g., [53,55]), whereas socio-cultural issues were explored within the areas of sustainable tourism and ecotourism [56,57]. CDA was also applied in an investigation about power dynamics in tourism, such as the role of government in tourism development [58] and in the way ethnic culture is presented by DMOs in England [59].

Analyzing various media such as newspapers, websites, travel blogs, and commercials is common in CDA studies in tourism [54,55], with socio-political issues being discussed within specific areas of tourism [56–58]. Li et al. [60] applied CDA to analyze over 450 media texts between 2009 and 2017, exploring how media representation changed over time. Some work has connected the role of media in influencing perceived risk and travel intentions [19]. While CDA applications in tourism have grown, more studies are required to further explore tourism phenomena in a broader social context [25]. Furthermore, it is essential to study the media coverage influence on accentuating potential travelers' awareness regarding tourism consumption during and after the crisis [49]. The purpose of this study was to explore how news media have framed travel during the pandemic and to offer an understanding of the mediatization and politicization of Canadian tourism at that time.

### 3. Methodology

As a qualitative analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) considers the reflexive role of researchers and subjective role of participants in establishing and negotiating their relations and identities within a discourse community [52]. CDA presents how the discourse in a specific written or visual text legitimizes or normalizes imbedded ideologies, thereby helping to understand and explain various phenomena in society [61]. Analysts focus on identifying how particular powers, privileges, and knowledges have been circulated and normalized within discursive complexes [62]. It is especially useful in analyzing media conversations and can fully unearth the embedded meanings of a phenomenon that has impacts on travel and tourism [54].

Thematic analysis, applied here, is an interpretivist approach that analyzes fluid and subjective meanings in texts [25,63]. The method applied here for analyzing the discourses within these media texts mirrored that of a thematic discourse analysis [25]. A thematic analysis identifies, analyzes, and reports repeated patterns of meaning. An inductive thematic analysis allows the data to determine the themes [63]. It interprets texts including words, phrases, and syntax, considering their wider scale and socio-political formations [64]. Criteria adopted during the analysis of online news media were like those of Altheide [65] and Mowri and Bailey [36], examining content, tone, catchphrases, and framing. Themes were then analyzed at a deeper level, indicating broader social discourses in relation to the phenomenon [66]. The combination of thematic analysis with discourse analysis has been applied previously to get at deeper nuances within written texts [63].

For this study, online news sources were limited to Canadian media and included national mainstream news sites, regional outlets, and local news sites. A web search using phrases such as “COVID-19 travel in Canadian news”, “Canadian travel during the pandemic”, and several others brought forward more than 100 online Canadian news articles between February 2020 and August 2022. There were several other articles that emerged in these searches that focused on international travel, non-Canadian COVID-19 health, or travel policies, but these were not included in the study. Online news media were read repeatedly and cross-analyzed for themes and deeper meanings and discourses [62]. The over-arching discourse of fear fit within Altheide’s [66] notion of the problem frame.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. *Travel during the Pandemic and Discourses of Fear*

#### 4.1.1. The Problem Frame

According to Altheide [66], frames are the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing an event. Frames focus on what will be discussed; they act as very broad thematic emphases or definitions of a report, like the border around a picture that separates it from the wall [66]. Mass media are part of a problem-generating machine geared to entertainment, voyeurism, and the quick fix rather than understanding social change [66]. Mass news media contribute to the emergence of a highly rationalized problem frame that, in turn, generates a discourse of fear. A key strategy in encouraging this discourse is to continue the interaction with the frame by providing new information. Unlike a fictional story arc, news reports focus on actual people and events to package the entire narrative as realistic. The problem frame is applicable to the way in which travel during the pandemic has been covered by online news media in Canada.

A major discourse transcending the specific issues produced by media is fear [67]. Fear is produced through the interaction of commercial media, entertainment formats and programming, and the rise of the problem frame. The problem frame promotes a discourse of fear that may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of an effective environment. Themes were tied to a format used by journalists who have a short time to tell a story that the audience can recognize. Following Altheide [66], the role of online news media in promoting a public discourse of fear was communicated through the themes of anxiety, antitrust, avoidance, and animosity. Accurate information by the media can minimize misinformation and reduce public anxiety and fears [49], but this was not the case in the context of Canadian news media. Canadian news media promoted a discourse of fear, reiterating the problem frame through the themes of anxiety, antitrust, avoidance, and animosity.

#### 4.1.2. Anxiety

Fear intensified quickly as media reported international and inter-provincial travel regulations and quarantine policies under the Quarantine Act [21,68] stating which leisure and travel-related activities Canadians determined were the most fearful [69]. Even when there was hope for Canadians to begin making travel plans, media sources highlighted

the uncertainty citizens should be feeling. Shepert [70] stated, “While some Canadians can’t wait to travel overseas or simply across the U.S. border, others feel alarmed by the idea”. Other comments in the article from health professionals bolded, “we need to be very alert . . . in regard to travel”.

Other perspectives related to anxiety were the confusion and frustration that grew over new travel rules (Semple, 2020) as well as the fear and anxiety associated with being out of luck, as travellers sought refunds for COVID cancellations. Molina [71] wrote: “would-be vacationers who had planned to soak up the sun overseas were pausing their plans amidst a surge in COVID-19 cases but say heeding health and government officials’ advice has led to an uphill battle with travel companies for reimbursement”.

Anxiety was perpetuated through news stories that air travellers from all countries would need to take COVID tests when arriving in Canada regardless of vaccination status [72]. Restrictions against travel from 10 African countries because of the discovery of the Omicron variant in South Africa led to more anxiety because travellers coming from the USA were exempted. “The federal government has warned travellers that it’s pretty risky to take a trip abroad right now, describing the COVID-19 situation as ‘both risky and unstable’ health minister Duclos said. ‘So if you are thinking of travelling, that should be a serious alarm bell’” [73]. Uncertainty was also felt when the federal government announced on November 19 2021 that test requirements to enter Canada would be dropped, but only for fully vaccinated travellers entering Canada for 72 h or less [74]. Less than a month later, testing resumed [75]. Generating fear and anxiety in the media during COVID-19 mirrored that of previous viral diseases but was amplified because of the pandemic’s scale [22,76,77].

#### 4.1.3. Antitrust

A lack of trust in government and in the messages communicated by media during a conflictual event is common. However, the antitrust during COVID-19 reached new levels. From February 2020 through December 2021, media reported on Canada’s ever-changing travel restrictions, giving unpredictable information [78–81]. News media flipfopped between stories blaming travel [82] and those stating that there was little travel risk [83]. Many public health experts believed COVID-19 could be managed like previous threats whose media attention provoked anxiety before being suppressed [84]. However, the scale of COVID-19, along with the media’s scientific reporting, created confusion on what to believe and which governing body to trust [85]. Reddy et al. [86] indicated that government embraced a rules-based international order by following WHO recommendations on international travel, but this also reduced trust in government, as the measures were confusing, inconsistent, and not based on authentic and appropriately communicated data.

Maher’s [72] article in *Maclean’s* about the mishandling of the crisis began with a reference to March 12, the day before Ontario school-aged children were headed for their spring break, the same day the Premier told families they should not cancel their March break plans, saying “go away, enjoy yourself and have a good time”. Yet other federal government messaging “rose alarm bells at growing concern and impending travel restrictions”. Maher wrote, “I had come to believe Canadians needed to be frightened”, yet policymakers interpreted the advice loosely, with several government officials going on vacation when Canadians were told it was not safe. The contradiction of government and health officials telling Canadians it was unsafe to travel yet travelling internationally themselves led to mistrust and anger. Research showed that air travel is as safe or safer than everyday routine activities such as grocery shopping [83] and medical professionals have referred to an airplane as one of the most well-ventilated indoor spaces [2].

The federal government quietly removed its advisory against non-essential travel without an official press release on 21 October 2021. This advisory had been on Canada’s Travel Advice and Advisory website since March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was first declared [87]. This silence symbolized the intricate relationship government has with media, having released many previous statements, yet not formally acknowledging this one. Moreover, as soon as news came out regarding the discovery of Omicron, the

federal government immediately initiated blanket travel restrictions for those arriving from 10 African nations, this despite declarations by the Director General of the World Health Organization regarding the “unfairness and ineffectiveness of blanket travel in respect to the countries of Southern Africa” [88]. A few weeks later, with no statistical data to back up claims that international and regional travel had caused a severe uptake in Omicron cases, the federal government advised against international travel: “Canada’s government implored residents on Wednesday not to leave the country as provinces ramp up vaccinations to combat the fast-spreading Omicron coronavirus variant [89]. Jones’ headline [88] stated that “experts are divided on whether travel is advisable in light of the Omicron variant”, which spurred restrictions at the border and new travel bans leading into the holiday season.

There is a lack of trust when government continues to warn against travel even as health and safety restrictions are lifting, and case counts are going down [90]. Results from a study of international air travellers arriving in Toronto showed encouraging results from airport-based COVID-19 testing followed by home-based collection [91]. Aziz wrote, “a travel advisory is still in effect, with the government urging against non-essential trips. On top of that, the feds have imposed a raft of measures . . . Provincial health authorities have advised against non-essential travel amid the pandemic and imposed their own set of restrictions”. Frequent changing of travel restrictions and policy has made Canadians mistrust government as well as show a lack of confidence in the travel sector itself [74,75]. This may stem from a loss of trust by local populations in their governments’ approach to controlling the virus’s spread [15]. It is essential to be cognizant of the potential fear, anxiety, and loss of trust that can develop in tourists of countries that have been the target of negative publicity [15]. The outcome of this, which the industry is already facing, is the avoidance of travel altogether.

#### 4.1.4. Avoidance

Rapidly changing restrictions have led to an avoidance of travel altogether and the Hotel Association of Canada says more than half of accommodations country-wide will likely shut down as a result [92]. As global travel bans became prevalent and border policies were enacted, those who chose to travel were highlighted (e.g., [93,94]) and being interrogated [92]. After initial discourses of fear, many media narratives move into a discourse of blame [66]. Even as destinations reopened and airlines increased service, media emphasized shame for those indulging in non-essential travel during the pandemic [95].

In March 2021, school holiday breaks were postponed until April, yet media still urged people not to travel: “With spring break upon us, Ottawa’s health experts and politicians are advising residents to abide by the province’s stay-at-home order and not travel. That means no trips to the family cottage and keeping kids close to home” [96]. Despite encouraging regional travel in the summer and fall of 2020, by spring 2021, the message was to avoid travel even if it meant hunkering down in a family cottage or a city stay in a local hotel. Even the snowbirds who usually travel during the winter months were choosing not to, forcing many to stay in Canada [97].

While hope entered the lexicon of the media, Canadians were seeing the Delta variant emerge in India and some, including the Quebec premier, wanted the prime minister to ban all non-essential flights [82]. The federal government, instead, stopped flights to all sun destinations. Experts were divided on whether travel was advisable, reported Jones [88], who in their headline quoted Firestone, president of Travel Secure: “I’m looking at summer 2022”. Jones reported that some travellers were having second thoughts amid the confusion, namely at airports, over the PCR test requirement. Firestone sounded doubtful: “There’s nothing clearly stated as to how it’s going to work . . . I’m seeing right now there’s many people that are making a decision to cancel their flights or cancel their trips”. Jones [88] continued: “booking an international trip . . . might not be the best idea. So far, just how dangerous Omicron might be is unclear, making it another question in the calculus of

whether travelling is advisable". Moreover, Byers' [98] headline read, "Canadians strongly support travel restrictions, intend to stay home for the holidays".

When Omicron was identified in Africa, Gollom [99] reported that rising case counts from the new variant may change people's holiday plans. Fear weaved through stories about the variant. Media attention on the tourism industry that "may have to live off domestic travel until the fall" suggested a defeatist attitude regarding the immediate future of the tourism sector [100].

Even before Omicron surfaced, some airlines were cancelling flights due to lack of demand. O'Shea [101] reported with the headline, "COVID-19: Sunwing cancels flights, travelers left without holiday packages", supporting the discourse of fear by preventing travellers from booking trips or cancelling pre-planned vacations for fear of it being too late. In Lao's [102] headline, Canadians were told not to travel as "federal government issues another blanket warning against non-essential international travel . . . some Canadians are beginning to re-think their holiday travel plans . . . officials announced Wednesday that Canadians . . . should avoid all non-essential travel". Fear was perpetuated through other media releases, including statements by Health Minister Duclos reminding Canadians and others who "are travelling that they could be in for delays at airports and should get ready for follow-ups about their COVID-19 tests after arriving" [103]. Moreover, when recent PCR testing restrictions were lifted, antigen testing and random airport testing were still deterrents keeping travellers at home [104].

#### 4.1.5. Animosity

Moving beyond fear, anxiety, and loss of trust, tourists develop animosity especially if they have mitigated risks, made decisions to travel, and are angry at hearing negative media coverage of travel for over two years. In the case of Canadian travelers, media perpetuated feelings of frustration and anger at reduced service quality and government travel restrictions and ongoing transport-tourism industry labor shortages that had restricted mobility at airports and the border [105]. Animosity towards travel affects tourists' travel intentions [106], leading to avoidance and threatening the tourism industry. As COVID-19 cases decreased and pandemic-related restrictions began to lift, Canadians grew more confident in booking travel. "Flight Centre Canada has seen a 756% increase for March break travel this year compared to 2021" [107]. While most travel in 2021 was domestic, more Canadians were booking flights to international sun destinations by spring 2022 [108]. While Canadians were becoming excited about potential travel, media quickly reported another problem frame: fear associated with flight delays, cancellations, and lost luggage [105]. These were not specifically related to COVID-19 but a prolonged outcome of transport and travel industry lay-offs and labor shortages during the pandemic [109]. Online news media headlines reported travel "delays", "chaos", "nightmares", and "cancelled flights" [110,111] along with Toronto's Pearson International Airport being labelled the "worst airport in the world" [112] and gaining international attention [113]. News sources report on "devastated" travelers, "being heartbroken", "dreams turning to nightmares" [110,111,114].

This revisiting of the problem (i.e., negative outcomes on travel because of the pandemic) through these narratives has reignited the discourse of fear. Media are playing on citizens' anxiety and mistrust of travel during the pandemic and taking advantage of their position of power in the discourse. Rather than perceived health-related travel risk, these fears coincide with travel-specific activities [33]. Moving beyond the theme of travel avoidance, media are re-framing the narrative and driving feelings of animosity, in fact blaming countries or governments [47]. Animosity is the anger related to previous or ongoing political, economic, or diplomatic events, with those relating to tourism having long-term effects [47].

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## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. *The Problem Frame—Discourses of Fear*

Through a CDA of online news media, this study revealed that travel during the pandemic was presented with what Altheide [66] calls a problem frame that promotes a discourse of fear. Beth Potter, President of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada [2], argued that the tourism sector is one of the safest internationally because of the quick response in following government protocols related to shutting down businesses during lockdowns, capacity limits, heightened cleanliness, and proof of vaccination. So why all the fear? The perception of many is that life is problematic, dangerous, and demanding of extreme measures to protect us, and travel is not immune. While most media stories last two to six weeks, the pandemic has been ongoing over the past two years (at least). Altheide [66] argued that fear becomes a more pervasive component of our life because of the problem frame that dominates many media messages. This frame is tied to the entertainment format that now dominates news production. Claims-makers seeking to promote trouble on an issue turn to the news media for help, often wrapping their concerns in an attractive fear package [66]. Thus, the problem frame reproduces itself.

Those who watch negative news report being significantly more anxious after watching than those who watched either positive or neutral news [77]. Similarly, when a pandemic lasts, there is a tendency for the uncertainty of information to be developed and disseminated by various parties that can create confusion and incorrect attitudes [116]. The discourse of fear and travel emerges through the themes of antitrust, anxiety, avoidance, and animosity, thus requiring citizens to be engaged, mindful, and critical media consumers [77,85,117].

### 5.2. *Silenced Discourses*

CDA identifies the media discourses present, but also brings awareness to silenced discourses, those that are not being communicated because they do not maintain the problem frame. Silenced discourses have rarely been discussed in the context of media discourses and perceived risk when it comes to health or disaster crises impacting travel and tourism. In this study, silenced within the problem frame are the resiliency and management strategies by the tourism sector [53]. The Hotel Association of Canada released statements on how they were accommodating new safety standards during the pandemic [118]. Safe Stay, an industry-wide enhanced standard of health and safety protocols that represents the industry's ongoing commitment to the health and safety of guests and employees, was designed to prepare Canada's hotels to safely welcome back guests and employees. In addition, several hotel chains released their own heightened safety standards, such as Marriott's Commitment to Clean program. Very few media covered the immense work the sector is doing to welcome tourists safely. Accommodation and food services bore the brunt of job losses, with 113,000 jobs lost, or 80% of total jobs lost in Canada in January 2021 during the Omicron surge [119]. When media covered hotels' health and safety, it was done within the problem frame of fear. Collie's [120] headline was "Is it safe to stay in hotels?" Yet the article provided several recommendations and protocols being implemented by the hotel sector since early in the pandemic. Restaurants Canada as well as other provincial and regional governing bodies provided frequent guidelines, requirements, and best practices for food-related service industries, and individual restaurants clearly stated their enhanced protocols on websites and premises. However, these were not shared openly in mainstream media. Other discourses missing relate to the immense work being done by airports and airlines. Frequent communication by Canadian airlines and airports notified the public



about their stringent health and safety measures. These industry media releases were regular—often weekly—reminding Canadians that travel was safe.

### 5.3. Perceptions of Risk and Managerial Implications

News media gave contradicting information about fear and safety in travel. Fear processed through the problem frame impacts viewers and their perceptions of risk in their everyday lives and for travel. Media coverage has been found to contribute to perceived travel risk affecting attitudes towards travel and destination image [14,20]. When online news media relay the problem frame of fear and highlight travel restrictions through antitrust and anxiety, citizens are apt to restrict and avoid travel, thus impacting travel demand. Hansen [43] found several relationships between media frame contents and frame implications. His findings suggest that frames trigger higher perceived risks and demands for specific actions (e.g., avoiding travel) and therefore are highly relevant for tourism managers and policymakers. News media play a vital role in disseminating information during a crisis and highlight the need for a crisis communication strategy by the industry itself [20]. Tourism practitioners need to be proactive in responding on an equal platform to the discourses presented by news outlets through counter media releases. Such a strategy might be a confidence-building campaign, which was administered by many hotels, airlines, and attractions in Canada. The tourism industry should view media framing of travel as a crisis response to improve the long-term viability of tourism enterprises [48]. Tourism enterprises have introduced measures in response to the pandemic such as refunds and continuing to offer heightened health and safety protocols [48]. Furthermore, greater consideration should be given regarding the sensitivity of potential travelers to media in their own countries, as perceived risk impacts future travel intentions [49]. When making travel decisions, potential tourists pass through a sequence of stages, moving from interests to considerations to making the actual decisions. Perceived risk is an influential element that may affect individuals' considerations, as potential tourists often tend to avoid risky situations and visit destinations that, in their perception, are safe. In the pandemic context, uncertain knowledge can impact risk perception and create an indifferent attitude toward health protocols, exacerbating fear of travel and travel avoidance [31]. The stronger influence of subjective norms compared to other variables on behavioral intention indicates that the government and destination management play an important role in controlling information and knowledge, in addition to news media. The role of the government as part of external factors that build social norms becomes vital rather than contributing to the creation of uncertainty [31]. Power reverberates within media discourses [121] and resulted in ambiguous travel demand throughout and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Campaigns to counteract media through a proactive management strategy alongside social media could be effective tools in increasing people's awareness for how the industry is responding to disasters [122]. Destinations should have a plan in place for dealing with the home country's media and make regular attempts to communicate without generating discourses of fear and avoiding negative coverage of the travel industry [19,49]. It is recommended that the tourism sector from various scales of government, DMOs, and SMEs actively provide a counter-narrative to the fear discourse generated by news media.

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