# Post-Pandemic Influences of Personal Factors on Domestic Tourist Decision-Making: Evidence from Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

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## Abstract

**Background and Aims:** This study investigates the relationship between personal factors and the decision-making process of domestic tourists after the COVID-19 pandemic. The research highlights the significance of understanding how demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, occupation, education level, and income influence different stages of decision-making: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior.

**Methodology:** Employing a quantitative survey of 400 participants and analyzing data using Chi-square tests reveals income as the most consistently influential factor across all stages.

**Results:** Results reveal that personal factors have varying degrees of influence on different stages of the decision-making process. Gender significantly affected only the evaluation of the alternatives stage. Age influenced the assessment of alternatives, purchase decisions, and post-purchase behavior. Marital status impacted the need recognition and information search stages. The education level affected needs recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives. Occupation influenced all stages except the purchase decision. Notably, income level emerged as the most consistently influential factor, significantly affecting all phases of the decision-making process.

**Conclusion:** These findings contribute to understanding domestic tourist behavior in the post-pandemic context and have important implications for tourism marketing and management in Bangladesh. The findings contribute to tourism marketing and management by suggesting targeted strategies to enhance domestic tourism. However, limitations such as the study's cross-sectional nature and single-destination focus necessitate further research to generalize findings.

**Keywords:** Personal Factors; Tourist Behavior; Domestic Tourists; Decision-making; COVID-19; Post-Pandemic

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the global tourism industry, with repercussions felt at both macroeconomic and microeconomic levels. Globally, travel restrictions and lockdowns disrupted the tourism sector, causing unprecedented declines in revenue and employment. All kinds of travel starting mid-March 2020 were suspended because of the travel restrictions. During the COVID pandemic, the pandemic had catastrophic effects on this industry (Hernández et al., 2023; Sardar et al., 2022; Bhuiyan et al., 2022). In 2019, the GDP contribution from the tourism sector was 804.5 billion BDT, which decreased to 539.6 billion in 2020. It represents a fall of 32.9% (Bhuiyan et al., 2022). In addition, the restrictions from governments on many forms of economic activity have caused a noticeable shift in the country's economy and consumer behavior due to COVID-19. The world is still facing many crises due to the COVID-19 outbreak. However, with time, COVID-19 has become a new normal. Additionally, travel and tourism are still significant factors in the global development of jobs and a dynamic source of employment opportunities. In the aftermath of the epidemic, many countries prioritize domestic tourism as a critical component of their efforts to revive and strengthen this sector. As tourism is a possible flourishing industry, policymakers and tourism managers should focus on this industry with high attention (Mohammed et al., 2022).

In Bangladesh, where tourism contributed approximately 804.5 billion BDT to GDP in 2019, the sector's economic contribution plummeted by 32.9% in 2020 (Sardar et al., 2024). As the pandemic gradually transitions into a new normal, understanding domestic tourism behavior has become a critical area of focus. Understanding the elements influencing vacationers' choices is now widely recognized as one of the most important aspects of growing the tourism industry. However, this becomes challenging when the option is quickly changed during COVID (Islam and Rakib, 2022). As a result of the COVID-19 outbreaks, there has been a continual shift in tourist behavior, and it has become difficult to assess the personal factors that contribute to the decision-making process of domestic visitors. Concerns have been raised regarding the lack of attention paid to the considerations that go into domestic tourism decisions. Cox's Bazar, often referred to as the tourist capital of Bangladesh, serves as an ideal case study due to its unique characteristics and significant contribution to the country's tourism industry. This study addresses a research gap by investigating the influence of personal factors on the decision-making processes of domestic tourists in a post-pandemic context. While prior studies have examined the general impact of crises on tourism, limited attention has been paid to how demographic variables shape decision-making in specific destinations. This research aims to bridge this gap by exploring the interplay between personal factors and the various stages of tourist decision-making at Cox's Bazar. By

integrating global insights with local realities, this study seeks to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers and tourism stakeholders.

## Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between gender, marital status, age, and the stages of decision-making among domestic tourists.

2. To assess the role of education and income level in shaping the early and middle stages of decision-making.

3. To evaluate how occupation influences decision-making stages, particularly post-purchase behavior.

## Literature Review

### Tourism Behavior

Tourism behavior is a field of study that examines the patterns and behaviors related to aspects of tourism such as tourist spending, duration of stay, tourism attractions, destinations, hotels, and activities. Tourist behavior manifests during the stages of holiday preparation, execution, and post-return. To evaluate the effectiveness of its marketing and operational strategies in promoting and organizing tourism activities, the tour operator or destination must acknowledge the various types of behavior exhibited at each stage (Oncioiu and Priescu, 2022). According to Curry and Moutinho (1993), the purchasing procedure involved in tourism has unique features when compared to the procedures involved in other types of purchases. The study of visitor behavior is not only important from a scholarly perspective, but it also provides stakeholders in the tourism sector with useful information that can be utilized to improve the quality of the experiences they provide for tourists (Kumar and Kumar, 2023). Krakover and Corsale (2021) conducted a study where the destination transformation, also known as the destination funneling process, and the choice of tourists are influenced by two sets of factors—environmental and personal characteristics. Environmental variables are external factors, such as informational resources, cultural norms, family influences, and locational factors, whereas personal factors are the sociodemographic factors of visitors that impact a person's decision to purchase.

### Decision-Making Theories

Typically, consumers follow a standard thinking procedure when deciding to purchase a product or service. The Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) consumer decision-making model is a notable marketing theory that outlines the five stages of the mental process involved in customer decision-making (Blackwell et al., 2006). The EKB model is presented in Figure 1.
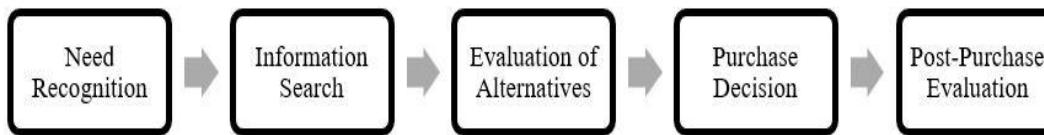
**Figure 1** EKB Model (Source: Blackwell et al., 2006)

**Need recognition:** Recognizing the need for a service or product is the first stage in the decision-making process for customers. When a person is aware of their wants, regardless of what motivates them to do what they are doing, they will end up with the same conclusion. In this context, customers are required to first determine what it is they want before discovering how to get it. There are two distinct methods by which consumers determine their wants and concerns. Because the product they are now utilizing is unsuccessful, a portion of customers in one of two categories decided to get a different one. Consumers who fall into this category are referred to as "real estate-type customers." The second kind of customers are those who purchase an item out of a sense of want rather than need. In most instances, tourism falls within the second group. Identifying the need is the result of an activity that is done as a remedy for the difference between the desired state and the actual situation (Bal and Szabóné, 2019). This desire leads them to search for a vacation spot. In addition, they look for a location that offers attractions and natural splendor that are distinct from those of other places. Destinations such as Cox's Bazar Beach should create and market the tourism products and services of their destination after researching the desires of visitors, so that tourists may readily recognize their need when visiting Cox's Bazar Beach. This would allow Cox's Bazar Beach to maximize its potential as a tourist destination.

**Information search:** The second step, which occurs when the buyer has already chosen a product that will fulfill his or her requirements, is to look for information regarding the product that is intended to be purchased. Internal searches and exterior searches are the two distinct kinds of searches that may be conducted. The method by which a consumer undertakes an introspective investigation of their own prior experiences to draw conclusions and make decisions based on those experiences in the present. When a consumer looks for ways to improve their decision-making skills by doing an outside search, they are taking into consideration elements that exist in the wider world. Digital information is vulnerable because Wi-Fi connections might fail, or batteries can die. Accessibility, user-friendliness, trustworthiness, and content quality determine information channel selection (Zillinger, 2020). When it comes to Cox's Bazar Beach, if they become frequent visitors to the place, they try their best to rely on their previous experiences. First-time visitors, on the other hand, are more likely to look for information from other sources.

The various outside sources of information that may be available, such as newspapers, blogs, social media, tour operators, travel agencies, friends, families, etc.

**Evaluation of alternatives:** At this stage, consumers evaluate the searched alternatives and decide which product would be appropriate (Karnreungsiri and Praditsuwan, 2019). These choices are evaluated based on several predetermined criteria, and the consumer decides which one to go with based not just on the brands but also on the criteria. People judge the merits of various tourist locations according to how well such places meet the requirements that they have. Regarding domestic tourism in Bangladesh, the bulk of visitors to Cox's Bazar Beach prioritize spending their leisure time with their relatives and friends. These visitors constitute a substantial proportion of the target audience for Cox's Bazar Beach. Customers extensively assess several alternatives that provide services or commodities that are very similar to each other. Conducting a study on potential alternative locations is crucial for attracting and overseeing a larger number of visitors from the target market. Furthermore, products and services must be manufactured in a manner that meets approved standards.

**Purchase decision:** During the statewide lockdown, there were noticeable shifts in purchasing behavior in developing nations like Bangladesh, including changes in the selection of where to make purchases, the kind of items being purchased, and the increased use of digital payment methods. Consequently, there is a need to understand the new consumer behavior in terms of new theories, marketing strategies in the post-COVID-19 situation, and factors influencing consumers while buying goods or services post-lockdown. The decision-making process for travel is broken down into four stages: generating tourist motives, information gathering and analysis, final decision, and evaluation. Tourist information sources, information costs, and information technology applied to tourism information gathering analysis are combined, and then influence the trip decisions. Tourism information motivation is the internal demand and external stimulation that work together. The evaluation of a previous trip experience has a significant impact on the collection and interpretation of data. For average tourists, the main factors influencing their travel decisions are their reason for going on vacation and their analysis of the information they have access to. In the age of the internet, users have strong abilities to search for and use information. The Internet's participation, openness, and interactivity provide this ability. Information search speed, low cost, wide range, tracking, and strong search capability have fundamentally altered the way people traditionally acquire information. It can be assumed that as the Internet expands, it will become an increasingly significant factor in how tourists decide where to go.

**Post-Purchase Behavior:** Post-purchase behavioral intentions can be defined as the future behavior commitment to purchase a product or service or the connection with a provider whenever other alternatives are possible (Chen and Chen, 2010). Positive outcomes are more

likely to result in repeat behavior, according to the reinforcement theory, whereas negative outcomes do not. Fulfillment, thus, produces post-buy conduct expectations (Park and Reisinger, 2009). Before the crisis, the behavior of consumers demonstrated a notable tendency towards omnichannel. The sales strategy in travel retail was surpassed by the purchasing behavior of the client. Travelers who experience a lack of safety after the COVID-19 pandemic may choose to bypass browsing and head directly to the gate. Upon completion of usage, the consumer assesses the purchase against their initial expectations. If the buyer fails to meet these expectations, the customer will experience dissatisfaction. Conversely, if the purchase surpasses their expectations, the customer will be impressed. Additionally, consumers can encounter promotional material for a rival product or brand, thus casting doubt on the one they have selected. A visitor may potentially experience a change in their preferences and determine that they no longer require these specific goods.

## Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis of the Study
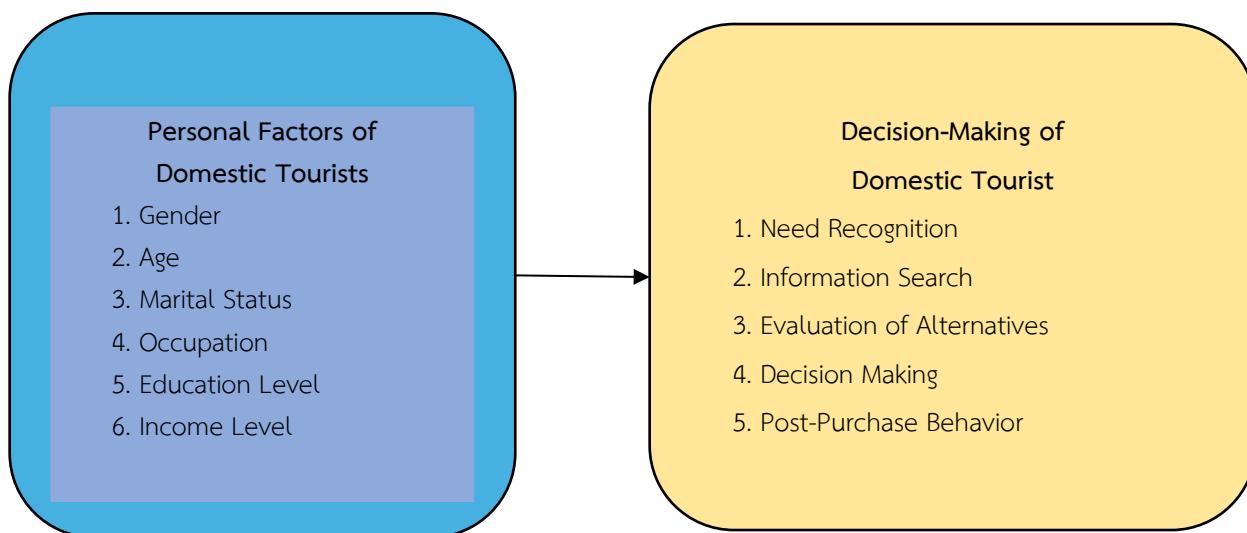


**Figure 2** Proposed Framework of the Study. Source: Developed by Authors

Based on the research objectives and literature review, the following hypotheses are derived and applied to each factor of personal factors.

There is a significant relationship between the personal factors of domestic tourists, such as gender, age, marital status, occupation, education level, income, and decision-making of the tourists after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methodology

### Area of the Study

This study focuses on Cox's Bazar Beach, a renowned tourist destination in Bangladesh that attracts over 10 million visitors annually. Data was collected from November to February 2023. The research area is a highly renowned place of interest in Bangladesh since it has a long, unbroken sandy sea beach. Cox's Bazar district is known as the tourist capital of Bangladesh. Cox's Bazar has a border with Myanmar. It is found 398.3 km from the capital city of Bangladesh and 148.3 km south of Chittagong Port city. Local people likewise call it Panowa or Palongkee (old name). Cox's Bazar should initially strike a chord when considering going to Bangladesh. Consistently, home-grown vacationers and a ton of travelers from outside the nation come to see this oceanside of the world. 64.3% of all-out vacationers in Bangladesh visit Cox's Bazar. With a population of 2,289,990, Cox's Bazar's economy is linked to tourism. Cox's Bazar is busy throughout the year, but November to March is the busiest month for Cox's Bazar, which matches this research time. So, this destination is targeted to explore the factors behind travel decision-making.

### Research Design

This study investigated the personal factors influencing the decision-making process of domestic tourists visiting Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. The population under study comprises the individuals who visit Cox's Bazar. The researcher used the method of determining the sample size by using the formula for calculating the unknown population using the formula (Cochran, 1977) by setting a confidence level of 95% with an error not exceeding 5% or at a significant level of 0.05. The sample used in the research was 385 people, and to prevent mistakes from incomplete questionnaires, the researcher then reserved an additional 15 samples, so the total sample size used in this research was 400. The research applied the simple random sampling method to select the participants, where every individual in the population has an identical probability of being chosen. This research used a questionnaire survey and quantitative research. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in tourism and consumer behavior, ensuring alignment with research objectives. A pilot test involving 30 participants yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.797, indicating high reliability. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, and multiple regression analysis to test hypotheses related to personal factors and decision-making stages. To mitigate potential biases, measures such as random intercept sampling at tourist sites and anonymity assurances were implemented. The study acknowledges limitations related to self-reported data and cross-sectional design, which are discussed in detail in the limitations section.
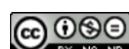
## Results

### Profile of the Respondents

General information on the domestic tourists visiting Cox's Bazar Beach. In Table 1, out of the participants, 72.50% are male, and 27.50% are female. Additionally, 62.25% of the participants were aged 30 or younger. Regarding marital status, 46.25% of individuals are married, 53.00% are single, and 0.75% fall into other categories. The percentage distribution of education levels is as follows: 5.25% have a secondary level education or lower, 24.75% have a higher secondary education or below, 50.50% have a bachelor's degree or below, 17.50% have a master's degree or below, and the remaining 2.00% have education levels above a Master's degree. 4.50% of the participants are employed in government services, 17.00% are employed in private services, 19.75% are self-employed, 12.75% are homemakers, 42.00% are students, 1.00% are retired individuals, and the remaining 3.00% fall into other categories. Conversely, 60.00% of individuals have an income below $200 or Tk. 21200, 25.50% fall within $201-$400 or Tk. 21201-42400, 13.00% fall within $401-$600 or Tk. 42401-63600, and the remaining individuals have an income beyond $600 or Tk. 63601. The subsequent illustrations depict the data.

**Table 1** Demographic Profile of the Respondents

| Demographic/Personal Characteristics | | Frequency | Proportion (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 290 | 72.50 |
| | Female | 110 | 27.50 |
| | Other | 0 | 0 |
| Age | 20 years old or less | 49 | 12.25 |
| | 21-30 years old | 249 | 62.25 |
| | 31-40 years old | 71 | 17.75 |
| | 41-50 years old | 21 | 5.25 |
| | More than 50 years old | 10 | 2.50 |
| Marital Status | Married | 185 | 46.25 |
| | Unmarried | 212 | 53.00 |
| | Divorce | 1 | 0.25 |
| | Widow | 2 | 0.50 |
| Education | Below or equal to the Secondary | 21 | 5.25 |
| | Below or equal to Higher Secondary | 99 | 24.75 |
| | Below or equal to a Bachelor's Degree | 202 | 50.50 |
| | Below or equal to Master's Degree | 70 | 17.50 |
| | Above Master's Degree | 8 | 2.00 |
| Occupation | Government Service holder | 18 | 4.50 |
| | Private Service holder | 68 | 17.00 |
| | Business | 79 | 19.75 |
| | Housewife | 51 | 12.75 |
| | Student | 168 | 42.00 |
| | Retired | 4 | 1.00 |
| | Other | 12 | 3.00 |
| Income | Less than 200 $ (Less than 21,200 Tk.) | 240 | 60.00 |
| | 201 $ to 400 $ (21,201 to 42,400 Tk.) | 102 | 25.50 |
| | 401 $ to 600 $ (42,401 to 63,600 Tk.) | 52 | 13.00 |
| | 601 $ to 800 $ (63,601 to 84,800 Tk.) | 4 | 1.00 |
| | More than 800 $ (More than 84,800 Tk.) | 2 | 0.50 |
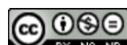
Analysis of the relationship between personal factors of domestic tourists and decision-making after the COVID-19 pandemic

This section presents the findings in a structured manner, explicitly linking them to the research objectives and hypotheses. The results are grouped by personal factors and their impacts on the decision-making stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior.

**Hypothesis 1.1 The relationship between gender factors of domestic tourists and decision-making after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Table 2 illustrates tourists' decision-making at Cox's Bazar Beach, which, in an individual aspect and overall picture, got Sig. = 0.244, 0.851, 0.037*, 0.064, and 0.118 respectively. Only evaluation of alternatives got Sig. = 0.037, which was lower than 0.05 and 0.01 (Level of significance), means that different genders had statistically significant differences in evaluating alternatives, while its impact on other stages was not statistically significant. This result suggests that gender differences emerge prominently during the consideration of travel options. For example, male and female tourists may prioritize different attributes, such as cost versus safety, when evaluating alternatives.

**Table 2** The relationship between gender and decision-making factors

| Decision Making | Gender | | Total | Chi-Square | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | | | (2-tailed) |
| Need Recognition | 290 | 110 | 400 | 13.8 | 0.244 |
| Information Search | 290 | 110 | 400 | 7.88 | 0.851 |
| Evaluation of Alternatives | 290 | 110 | 400 | 23.41 | 0.037* |
| Purchase Decision | 290 | 110 | 400 | 22.78 | 0.064 |
| Post-Purchase Behavior | 290 | 110 | 400 | 15.391 | 0.118 |

Remark: *Have statistical significance (Sig. ≤0.05)

**Hypothesis 1.2 The relationship between age factors of domestic tourists and decision-making on Cox's Bazar Beach in Bangladesh after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Table 3 illustrates tourists' decision-making at Cox's Bazar Beach, which, in an individual aspect, and the overall picture, got Sig. = 0.344, 0.999, 0.018*, 0.001** and 0.000*** respectively. Evaluation of alternatives, Purchase Decision, and Post-Purchase Behavior got Sig. = 0.018*, 0.001**, and 0.000***, which were lower than 0.05 and 0.01 (Level of significance), means that

different ages had statistically significant differences in evaluation of alternatives, Purchase Decision, and Post-Purchase Behavior, with the level of significance = 0.05, and 0.01, while the rest got Sig. = 0.344 and 0.999. Therefore, it can be interpreted that younger tourists are more likely to seek experiential travel options, which manifests in their preferences during evaluation and satisfaction levels post-travel. Older tourists may focus on comfort and reliability, influencing their purchase decisions.

**Table 3** The relationship between age and decision-making factors

| Decision Making | Age | | | | | Total | Chi-Square | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 20 years or less | 21-30 Years | 31-40 Years | 41-50 Years | 50 years or more | | | |
| Need Recognition | 49 | 249 | 71 | 21 | 10 | 400 | 47.173 | 0.344 |
| Information Search | 49 | 249 | 71 | 21 | 10 | 400 | 26.198 | 0.999 |
| Evaluation of Alternatives | 49 | 249 | 71 | 21 | 10 | 400 | 75.626 | 0.018* |
| Purchase Decision | 49 | 249 | 71 | 21 | 10 | 400 | 92.881 | 0.001** |
| Post-Purchase Behavior | 49 | 249 | 71 | 21 | 10 | 400 | 95.797 | 0.000*** |

Remark: *Have statistical significance (Sig. ≤0.05)

**Hypothesis 1.3 The relationship between marital status factors of domestic tourists and decision-making on Cox's Bazar Beach in Bangladesh after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Table 4 illustrates tourists' decision-making at Cox's Bazar Beach, which gives Sig an individual aspect and an overall picture. = 0.000*, 0.000*, 0.188, 0.210, and 0.140, respectively. Need Recognition and Information Search of alternatives got Sig. = 0.000***,0.000***, which were lower than 0.05 and 0.01 (Level of significance), which means that different marital statuses had statistically significant differences in Need Recognition and Information Search, while the rest got Sig. = 0.188, 0.210, and 0.140, respectively. The results indicate that Married individuals often plan trips with family needs in mind, leading to early-stage impacts. Single tourists, however, may have more flexible criteria, influencing information search patterns.

**Table 4** The relationship between marital status and decision-making factors

| Decision Making | Marital Status | | | | Total | Chi-Square | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Married | Unmarried | Divorce | Widow | | | |
| Need Recognition | 185 | 212 | 1 | 2 | 400 | 158.2 | 0.000*** |
| Information Search | 185 | 212 | 1 | 2 | 400 | 94.885 | 0.000*** |
| Evaluation of Alternatives | 185 | 212 | 1 | 2 | 400 | 46.613 | 0.188 |
| Purchase Decision | 185 | 212 | 1 | 2 | 400 | 49.096 | 0.210 |
| Post-Purchase Behavior | 185 | 212 | 1 | 2 | 400 | 38.38 | 0.140 |

Remark: *Have statistical significance (Sig. ≤0.05)

**Hypothesis 1.4 The relationship between education factors of domestic tourists and decision-making on Cox's Bazar Beach in Bangladesh after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Table 5 illustrates tourists' decision-making at Cox's Bazar Beach, which in an individual aspect and overall picture, got Sig. = 0.001*, 0.001*, 0.018**, 0.287, and 0.522 respectively. Need Recognition, Information Search, and Evaluation of Alternatives of Alternatives Got Sig. = 0.001*, 0.001*, 0.018**, which were lower than 0.05 and 0.01 (Level of significance). This means that different education had statistically significant differences in Need Recognition, Information Search, and Evaluation of Alternatives, while the rest had Sig. = 0.287 and 0.522, respectively, which were higher than 0.05 (Level of significance). The results showed that Tourists with higher education levels tend to conduct more thorough information searches and exhibit a methodical approach to evaluating options.

**Table 5** The relationship between education and decision-making factors

| Decision Making | Education | | | | | Total | Chi-Square | A Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Secondary or less | Higher Secondary or less | Bachelor's Degree or less | Master's Degree or less | Master Degree or more | | | |
| Need Recognition | 21 | 99 | 202 | 70 | 8 | 400 | 79.076 | 0.001*** |
| Information Search | 21 | 99 | 202 | 70 | 8 | 400 | 89.022 | 0.001*** |
| Evaluation of Alternatives | 21 | 99 | 202 | 70 | 8 | 400 | 75.701 | 0.018** |
| Purchase Decision | 21 | 99 | 202 | 70 | 8 | 400 | 61.446 | 0.287 |
| Post-Purchase Behavior | 21 | 99 | 202 | 70 | 8 | 400 | 38.853 | 0.522 |

Remark: *Have statistical significance (Sig. ≤0.05)

**Hypothesis 1.5 The relationship between occupation factors of domestic tourists and decision-making on Cox's Bazar Beach in Bangladesh after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Table 6 illustrates tourists' decision-making at Cox's Bazar Beach, which, in an individual aspect and overall picture, got Sig. = 0.005***, 0.022***, 0.008***, 0.061, and 0.009*** respectively. Need Recognition, Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, and Post-Purchase Behavior of Alternatives Got Sig. = 0.005*, 0.022*, 0.008*, and 0.009*, which were lower than 0.05 and 0.01 (Level of significance), which means that different occupations had statistically significant differences on Need Recognition, Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, and Post-Purchase Behavior, while the rest got Sig. = 0.061. It is seen that work-related factors, such as available leisure time and disposable income, influence both the planning and post-travel

satisfaction stages. For example, self-employed individuals may value flexibility, while salaried employees might prioritize planned itineraries.

**Table 6** The relationship between occupation and decision-making factors

| Decision Making | Occupation | | | | | | | Total | Chi-Square | A Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Government Service Holder | Private Service Holder | Business | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | | | |
| Need Recognition | 18 | 68 | 79 | 51 | 168 | 4 | 12 | 400 | 99.799 | 0.005*** |
| Information Search | 18 | 68 | 79 | 51 | 168 | 4 | 12 | 400 | 105.2 | 0.022** |
| Evaluation of Alternatives | 18 | 68 | 79 | 51 | 168 | 4 | 12 | 400 | 111.4 | 0.008*** |
| Purchase Decision | 18 | 68 | 79 | 51 | 168 | 4 | 12 | 400 | 105.0 | 0.061 |
| Post-Purchase Behavior | 18 | 68 | 79 | 51 | 168 | 4 | 12 | 400 | 88.962 | 0.009*** |

Remark: *Have statistical significance (Sig. ≤0.05)

**Hypothesis 1.6 The relationship between income level factors of domestic tourists and decision-making on Cox's Bazar Beach in Bangladesh after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Table 7 illustrates tourists' decision-making at Cox's Bazar Beach, which, in an individual aspect and overall picture, got Sig. = 0.000***, 0.004***, 0.005***, 0.000*** and 0.000*** respectively. Need Recognition, Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Purchase Decision, and Post-Purchase Behavior of Alternatives Got Sig. = 0.000***, 0.004***, 0.005***, 0.000***, and 0.000***, which were lower than 0.05 and 0.01 (Level of significance). Means that different income levels had statistically significant differences in all steps of the decision-making process: Need Recognition, Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Purchase Decision, and Post-Purchase Behavior. The result interprets that tourists with higher incomes have more options and flexibility, influencing every stage of their decision-making process. Conversely, budget constraints may limit the choices for lower-income groups.
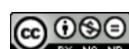
**Table 7** The relationship between income and decision-making factors

| Decision Making | Income | | | | | Total | Chi-Square | A Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Less than $200 | $201 to $400 | $401 to $600 | $601 to $800 | More than $800 | | | |
| Need Recognition | 240 | 102 | 52 | 4 | 2 | 400 | 362.3 | 0.000*** |
| Information Search | 240 | 102 | 52 | 4 | 2 | 400 | 82.518 | 0.004*** |
| Evaluation of Alternatives | 240 | 102 | 52 | 4 | 2 | 400 | 81.763 | 0.005*** |
| Purchase Decision | 240 | 102 | 52 | 4 | 2 | 400 | 104.4 | 0.000*** |
| Post-Purchase Behavior | 240 | 102 | 52 | 4 | 2 | 400 | 242.8 | 0.000*** |

Remark: *Have statistical significance (Sig. ≤0.05)

**Summary of Hypothesis 1- The relationship between personal factors of domestic tourists and decision-making on Cox's Bazar Beach in Bangladesh after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Table 8 illustrates tourists' decision-making at Cox's Bazar Beach, which, in an individual aspect and overall picture, got Sig. = 0.319, 0.672, 0.179, 0.061, 0.401, and 0.002**, only income level got Sig. = 0.002, which was lower than 0.05 and 0.01 (Level of significance), meaning that different genders had statistically significant differences on only income level with significance = 0.05 and 0.01, while the rest got Sig. = 0.319, 0.672, 0.179, .061, and 0.401, respectively, which were higher than 0.05 (Level of significance).

**Table 8** The relationship between personal factors and decision-making factors

| Personal Factors | Decision-Making of Domestic Tourists at Cox's Bazar Beach After the Covid-19 Pandemic | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Need Recognition | Information Search | Evaluation of Alternatives | Purchase Decision | Post-Purchase Behavior | overall |
| Gender | 0.244 | 0.851 | 0.037* | 0.064 | 0.118 | 0.319 |
| Age | 0.344 | 0.999 | 0.018* | 0.001*** | 0.000*** | 0.672 |
| Marital Status | 0.000*** | 0.000*** | 0.188 | 0.210 | 0.140 | 0.179 |
| Occupation | 0.005*** | 0.022* | 0.008** | 0.061 | 0.009** | 0.061 |
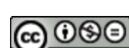
[709]

| Personal Factors | Decision-Making of Domestic Tourists at Cox's Bazar Beach After the Covid-19 Pandemic | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Need Recognition | Information Search | Evaluation of Alternatives | Purchase Decision | Post-Purchase Behavior | overall |
| Education Level | 0.001*** | 0.001*** | 0.018** | 0.287 | 0.522 | 0.401 |
| Income level | 0.000*** | 0.004** | 0.005** | 0.000*** | 0.000*** | 0.002** |

Remark: *Have statistical significance (Sig. ≤0.05)

## Discussion

This study examined the relationship between personal factors and the decision-making process of domestic tourists visiting Cox's Bazar Beach in Bangladesh after the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings reveal complex interactions between various demographic characteristics and different stages of the tourist decision-making process. The results of this study indicate that gender significantly influences only the evaluation of alternatives stage in the decision-making process ($p = 0.037$). This finding partially aligns with previous research by Pourhashem et al. (2022), who found that gender differences affect various aspects of travel decision-making. However, the study suggests a more nuanced impact on evaluating alternatives. This could be attributed to differing preferences or risk perceptions between males and females in the post-pandemic context (Swang et al., 2023). Age also emerged as a significant factor influencing the evaluation of alternatives ($p = 0.018$), purchase decisions ($p = 0.001$), and post-purchase behavior ($p < 0.001$). These findings support the work of Pappas & Glyptou (2021), who observed that different age groups exhibit varying travel behaviors and decision-making patterns, especially in the aftermath of global crises. The strong influence of age on post-purchase behavior is particularly noteworthy and may reflect generational differences in expectations and satisfaction levels (Jamwal & Pandey, 2024).

Interestingly, marital status significantly affected the need recognition ($p < 0.001$) and information search ($p < 0.001$) stages of decision-making. This aligns with research by Tri et al. (2024), who found that family structure plays a crucial role in shaping travel motivations and information-seeking behaviors. The lack of significant influence on later stages of the decision-making process suggests that while marital status impacts initial travel considerations, other factors may take precedence as the decision process progresses. Education level also significantly influenced need recognition ($p = 0.001$), information search ($p = 0.001$), and evaluation of

alternatives (p = 0.018). These findings corroborate the work of Ni et al. (2022), who observed that educational background shapes travel preferences and information processing capabilities. The impact of education on the early stages of decision-making highlights the importance of tailoring marketing strategies to different educational segments (Hun, 2022 & Yen, 2022).

Occupation showed significant effects on need recognition (p = 0.005), information search (p = 0.022), evaluation of alternatives (p = 0.008), and post-purchase behavior (p = 0.009). This comprehensive influence aligns with research by Rahat et. Al. (2024) found that occupation-related factors such as available leisure time, disposable income, and work-related stress significantly shape travel decisions. The impact on post-purchase behavior suggests that occupation may influence satisfaction levels and future travel intentions. Income level emerged as the most consistently influential factor, significantly affecting all stages of the decision-making process (p < 0.01 for all stages). This finding supports previous research by Loa and Habib (2023), who identified income as a critical determinant of travel behavior, especially in the post-pandemic economy. The pervasive influence of income underscores the need for diverse tourism offerings catering to different budget segments (Tubalawony et al., 2024). This study also found that while marital status significantly influenced early stages, its lack of impact on later stages was unexpected. This may reflect evolving priorities as decisions progress, where factors like budget or availability become more critical. Similarly, gender's limited influence outside the evaluation stage warrants further exploration, potentially through qualitative methods.

## Implications of the study

The implications of this study are far-reaching and multifaceted. From a theoretical perspective, the research contributes to the growing body of literature on tourist decision-making in the post-pandemic era, providing empirical evidence that supports and extends existing models. For the tourism industry, the findings offer valuable insights that can inform product development, pricing strategies, and marketing communications, potentially leading to more effective targeting and increased tourist satisfaction (Rahman et al, 2023). Policymakers can utilize these results to develop more targeted and effective tourism policies, addressing the specific needs of different demographic segments as highlighted in recent tourism policy research (Chowdhury and Hassan, 2024). The economic implications of this study are significant, as more effective marketing and product development could contribute to the growth of domestic tourism in Bangladesh, potentially leading to increased economic benefits for local communities and the national economy (Karim et al., 2023). Socially, the study underscores the importance of inclusive tourism development that caters to a wide range of domestic tourists, aligning with recent work on social sustainability in tourism (Ali and Rashid, 2024). Lastly, this research opens up several

avenues for future studies, including longitudinal investigations to track changes in decision-making patterns over time, cross-cultural comparisons, and explorations into the intersectionality of personal factors, as suggested by emerging trends in tourism research methodologies (Haque & Rashid, 2023).

## Conclusion

This study has provided an in-depth exploration of how personal factors influence the decision-making processes of domestic tourists at Cox's Bazar in the post-pandemic era. By identifying income as the most consistently influential factor across all stages, the research highlights the critical need for income-based segmentation in tourism strategies. Additionally, the findings demonstrate the varying impacts of gender, age, marital status, education, and occupation on specific decision-making stages, offering nuanced insights into tourist behavior. Practical implications include developing tailored marketing campaigns, such as family-oriented promotions for married tourists and adventure packages for younger demographics. The consistent influence of occupation suggests opportunities for targeted campaigns addressing the unique needs of different professional groups, such as flexible options for freelancers or time-efficient packages for working professionals. Furthermore, the role of education in early-stage decision-making underscores the importance of providing accessible and detailed information on tourism platforms.

While this study focuses on Cox's Bazar, its findings offer broader applicability to similar destinations in developing countries. However, cultural and economic differences must be considered when generalizing these results. The study's cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data are acknowledged limitations, emphasizing the need for longitudinal and comparative research to validate and expand these findings. In conclusion, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of post-pandemic tourist behavior and provides actionable insights for tourism stakeholders. By leveraging these findings, policymakers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to enhance the domestic tourism experience and foster sustainable growth in the sector.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study recommends a multifaceted approach to enhance the domestic tourism experience in Bangladesh. Tourism stakeholders should develop segmented marketing strategies that address the specific decision-making patterns of different demographic groups, as suggested by recent market segmentation studies (Akter et al., 2024). Tourism operators can design gender-sensitive marketing strategies that address these preferences, such as
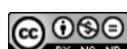
promoting budget-friendly options for one demographic while emphasizing safety and comfort for another. Tailored travel packages that cater to generational preferences—such as adventure packages for younger tourists and relaxation-oriented options for older demographics—can enhance engagement and satisfaction. Tourism platforms can enhance their appeal to educated tourists by providing detailed, easily accessible information, such as reviews and comparison tools. Marketing strategies should also consider occupation-related preferences, such as offering flexible booking options for freelancers or all-inclusive packages for busy professionals. Income-based segmentation is essential. Affordable travel packages, tiered pricing strategies, and premium offerings can cater to diverse income groups.

Creating diverse product offerings catering to various income levels is also crucial, given the pervasive influence of income on all decision-making stages (Rahman and Chowdhury, 2023). Improving the accessibility and quality of travel information is essential, considering the varying information search behaviors influenced by marital status and education level (Islam et al., 2024). Implementing strategies to enhance post-purchase satisfaction and encourage positive word-of-mouth is recommended, particularly focusing on age groups and occupations significantly influencing post-purchase behavior (Haque and Rashid, 2023). Regular assessments of price sensitivity across different income segments should be conducted to ensure competitive and attractive pricing strategies, as highlighted in recent tourism economics research (Mahmood and Ali, 2024). Collaboration with educational institutions to promote domestic tourism can leverage the influence of education on travel decision-making, as demonstrated in recent studies on educational tourism (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Lastly, developing family-oriented marketing materials that resonate with different marital statuses can address their impact on need recognition and information search stages (Ahmed and Hassan, 2024).

## Limitations and Future of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between personal factors and the decision-making processes of domestic tourists in post-pandemic Bangladesh, it is important to acknowledge its limitations and propose directions for future research. Firstly, the study's focus on a single destination - Cox's Bazar Beach - limits the generalizability of its findings. Although Cox's Bazar is a significant tourist attraction in Bangladesh, the results may not fully represent tourist behavior across other domestic destinations with different characteristics. As Rahman and Chowdhury (2023) note in their review of Bangladesh's tourism landscape, destination-specific factors can significantly influence tourist behavior. Future research should extend this study to a diverse range of domestic tourist destinations in Bangladesh to provide a more comprehensive understanding of decision-making patterns across various settings.

Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the study presents a limitation. While it provides a snapshot of tourist decision-making at a specific point in time, it does not capture potential changes in behavior over time, especially as the tourism industry continues to recover and evolve post-pandemic. Haque & Rashid (2023) suggest in their work on evolving tourist behaviors that longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into how decision-making processes change over time and in response to various external factors. Future research should consider employing longitudinal designs to track these changes and provide a more dynamic understanding of tourist decision-making. Lastly, the study focused primarily on demographic factors, which, while important, do not encompass the full spectrum of influences on tourist decision-making. Psychological factors, such as motivations, attitudes, and perceptions, were not extensively explored in this study. Recent work by Islam and Karim (2024) highlights the significant role these psychological factors play in shaping travel decisions. Future research should aim to integrate both demographic and psychological factors to provide a more holistic understanding of tourist decision-making in the context of domestic tourism in Bangladesh.

By addressing these limitations, future studies can continue to enhance the knowledge of tourist behavior, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective and sustainable tourism practices in Bangladesh and beyond. This could involve conducting multi-destination studies, implementing longitudinal research designs, and incorporating psychological factors alongside demographic variables in the analysis of tourist decision-making processes.

## Acknowledgment

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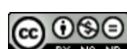
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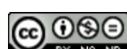
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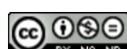
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