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## Solidarity during times of crisis through co-creation

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### ABSTRACT

Solidarity tourism provides tourists with the opportunity to help others who are suffering during crisis by offering shared resources and a sense of community. Although solidarity in times of crisis promises attention to tourists' desires and wellbeing, there is limited evidence of this. This paper aims to understand how solidarity occurs in times of crisis by applying value co-creation. A total of 21,719 traveller posts were thematically analysed to reveal that solidarity can be achieved in various contexts through tourists' co-created care practices, which have emotional and cognitive value. Practices include co-producing, connecting, co-advocating, co-suffering and consuming collaboratively. This paper conceptualises and illustrates solidarity as a relational practice, which is an effective means of support during crises.

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### Introduction

Crises are challenges that disrupt tourism businesses and tourists' experiences (Zhai, Luo, & Wang, 2019). During these times, solidarity tourism should be exercised. This refers to "tourism-related action taken by governments, tourism businesses and tourists to help people suffering during and after crises, driven by empathy towards people, a sense of unity, and a shared understanding of societal standards and responsibilities" (Dolnicar & McCabe, 2022, p. 1). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism practitioners have not been able to actively engage travellers (Liu-Lastres, 2022) or provide accurate, context-based information or resources in a prompt and efficient manner, resulting in concerns and uncertainty for many travellers (Carter et al., 2021). This is coupled with tourists experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and post-travel insomnia (Blaine, 2021).

Calls have been made for practices that support tourists' wellbeing (United Nations, 2022). Despite some destinations having eradicated travel restrictions for international tourists, the effects of the pandemic continue globally. Destinations and tourism businesses face many challenges, such as no or slow responses to tourists, lengthy service processes, travel delays and business closures. Supportive practices are salient during the pandemic recovery period, as tourists continue to experience psychological distress in the form of social isolation, anxiety and deterioration in their mental wellbeing (Colakoglu, Yurcu, & Avsar, 2021). However, there is little evidence of solidarity practices and recommendations on how to establish them among tourists in times of crisis.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2003, p. 1), a crisis is "any unexpected event that affects travellers' confidence in a destination and interferes with the ability to continue operating normally". At present, there is little theoretical understanding of crisis responses and management within tourism research (Senbeto & Hon, 2020). While there are responses, there are perceived as being shaped by an economic mindset. Businesses operate in institutionalised settings that conform to top-down, neoliberal structures that were not set up to deal with unprecedented situations such as the COVID-19 pan-

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demic (Pachucki, Grohs, & Scholl-Grisseemann, 2022). Hospitality and tourism businesses have expressed fear of lowering restrictions, which demonstrate their preference for the economic success resulting from the business of travel restrictions (Sigala, 2020). This hampers tourists from experiencing care and a sense of community in coping with the isolation and fear that can persist over time (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022). Durkheim (1984) argued that a continued privileging of capitalist production over individuals' interests as well as pressures from enforcing structures of solidarity can shift the focus from a top-down orientation to a community of similar individuals:

“Under the influence of some great collective shock in certain historical periods, social interactions become much more frequent and active. Individuals seek out one another and come together more... People live differently and more intensely than in normal times”.

[(Durkheim, 1995, pp. 212–213)]

A few studies on solidarity in tourism have explained that tourists can exercise agency by extending support to other tourists, but these are focused on travel experiences prior and unrelated to the pandemic (Joo & Woosnam, 2020, 2022; Woosnam, Norman and Ying, 2009). Turning to crisis management literature in tourism, there appears to be limited research on tourist agency. Studies are based on championing the rights of tourists and calling for boycotting organisations (Luo & Zhai, 2017).

Durkheim did not expand on the notion of collective agency that he witnessed through solidarity behaviour during challenging times. Scholars further afield in sociology, business and management studies have classified solidary behaviours as vertical and horizontal solidarity behaviour. Vertical solidarity refers to behaviour that occurs from the top down or the bottom up, as in the case of charity initiatives and donations. Horizontal solidarity is a relational practice based on mutuality and reciprocity among individuals at the same level with similar interests (Prouska, Myfoudi, Psychogios, Szamosi, & Wilkinson, 2022). Experiences in the context of crises must be co-created and care-oriented (Fotaki, 2022; Van Portfliet & Kenny, 2022), but this is yet to be acknowledged in tourism. Co-creation, drawing from research in transformation services, provides insights that can further develop understanding in tourism (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022).

This paper aims to illustrate how solidarity occurs in times of crisis among tourists by examining “Nina Island South Inmates” WhatsApp group. Unlike prior crises, the pandemic has seen a widescale development of online communities, though comparatively few in tourism – an industry where businesses have yet to deliver transformational instead of transactional experiences since the pandemic (Haywood, 2020). This WhatsApp group targets travellers to Hong Kong, a destination known for having the toughest travel restrictions since the pandemic, with travellers even wanting to commit suicide while in isolation. In response, the group provides a sense of community and care for tourists (South China Morning Post, 2022). Their influence has even caused some entities such as Nina Hotel in Hong Kong to consider changing their general practice to that of care in order to cater for guests during and after the pandemic. The co-created practices of tourists for showing support still remains unknown, but their impact on tourists and businesses signal that they are worthy of investigation.

The research applies exploratory qualitative methods to reveal the five co-created care practices, embedded with emotional and cognitive value, for showing support in tourism:

1. co-producing refers to active development in completing tasks carried out individually and collaboratively to achieve efficiency, standardisation and convenience while facilitating emotional closeness for travellers;
2. connecting focuses on establishing relationships for emotional closeness, though there are concerns of alienation, while offering time to co-create memorable experiences;
3. co-advocating entails promoting the interests of others, which is a means of having sympathetic understanding while fulfilling the purpose of promoting and receiving resources for social outreach;
4. co-suffering involves acknowledging and sharing painful experiences, which enables the evaluation of perspectives and conducting of purposeful actions while embracing a sympathetic understanding of others; and,
5. consuming collaboratively means providing resources for travellers' convenience while having feelings of closeness and sympathetic understanding towards other tourists.

This paper provides a novel perspective on solidarity from an agency perspective with the aim of enhancing solidarity in tourism research. This builds upon the structural views proposed by Durkheim that have been applied in tourism (Joo & Woosnam, 2022; Xiang, Huang, Gao, & Lai, 2022). By focusing on tourists' daily interactions, this study provides a novel perspective on solidarity as a relational practice occurring in tourist contexts. Practices not only have emotional but also cognitive value, thereby extending beyond previous views of solidarity in tourism literature. The paper presents co-created practices for solidarity, which incorporates the notion of care and wellbeing. This research responds to calls for incorporating transformative services scholarship into tourism research (Galeone & Sebastiani, 2021), enhancing the under-theorised literature on crisis response strategies (Wut, Xu, & Wong, 2021) and diversifying theories of solidarity in tourism (Nautiyal & Polus, 2022). This study can assist stakeholders in filling the gap for real-time, immediate responses and communities of care in times of rapid change (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022). It can also help tourists create a sense of community for combatting unattended personal interests, alienation and deteriorating mental health (Cordoba, Peredo, & Chaves, 2021).

## Solidarity in times of crisis

Solidarity towards tourism development has been extensively examined. However, there is scant research in this area during times of crisis, when significant instability exists, making it a context worthy of investigation. Crisis management studies explain that support can be shown through providing resources, such as medical support or homes to house tourists (Kousis & Lahusen, 2021). Some entities formulate and send messages to guests to illustrate their ability to keep guests safe and secure during crises, and these are often shared by tourists (Jiang & Wen, 2020; Liu-Lastres, 2022). Organisations raise funds and donations (Moller, Wang, and Nguyen (2018)) as well as share information about events, promotions and operating hours (Park, Kim, & Choi, 2019). While discussions on solidarity in crisis literature is lacking in theorisation (Wut et al., 2021), Joo, Xu, Lee, Lee, and Woosnam (2021) draw on emotional solidarity, which was influenced by Durkheim's views and affective solidarity, to examine residents' support for tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Woosnam, Joo, Aleshinloye, and Denley (2021) also found that tourists had emotional solidarity with residents during the pandemic. Emotional solidarity refers to having a welcoming attitude, emotional closeness, which signifies being welcomed, and sympathetic understanding, which refers to having a lot in common.

Hospitality and tourism stakeholders have shown support for tourists during times of crisis, but they do not adequately attend to tourists' desires and wellbeing (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022). Many social scientists are reluctant to view solidaristic behaviour from businesses as being reciprocal practices (Thijssen & Verheyen, 2022). In natural disasters, support noted in crisis management plans is usually directed to businesses to lessen economic fallout, whereas tourists are provided with information on updates regarding natural hazards (Ritchie, 2009). After the 9/11 attacks in the United States, businesses would use this as an opportunity for promotion, while hotels and travel companies focus on sales promotions and marketing tactics to boost revenue and increase loyalty (Laws & Prideaux, 2012). In the pandemic, governments, destinations and travel businesses initiate their crisis strategies of information sharing to preserve their brand image (Pachucki et al., 2022). Scholars argue that the pandemic has shown the potential for autocratic systems and economic pursuits to command a crisis, thereby fuelling issues of exploitation and lack of care (Bor, Jorgensen, & Petersen, 2021). Sigala (2020, p. 314) proposes that

“our growth-paradigms and assumptions that has led to the current situation and assumptions that have led to the current situation and enable us to reimagine and reset tourism... COVID-19 tourism research should inspire tourists, businesses and destinations alike to reimagine and reset new mindsets [...] to generate well-being... COVID-19 tourism research should not only be the means to overcome the crisis and resume previously chartered economic growth trajectories”.

Durkheim suggested that understanding of solidarity changes under challenging periods, shifting from structure to agency, which is yet to be explained in tourism. Structures such as the rituals that were enforced during the pandemic (Xiang et al., 2022) can alienate individuals and deprive them of social interaction. Individuals may turn to suicide because they lack sufficient social integration and consideration for their needs, which was expected during the pandemic (Devitt, 2020). Additionally, Durkheim (1984) explained that in the Middle Ages employees could work alongside their employers while not being considered equals. Employees believed that their managers did not act in their best interests and that this resulted in the inequality of their conditions. Individuals ceased support through bottom-up relations and instead embraced communities of similar individuals. This resulted in equal exchanges, reciprocal treatment, support emerging based on functional interdependence, a sense of belonging, empathy and freedom for individuals to act in social relationships (Durkheim, 1984). Like the Middle Ages, online communities became public spheres for solidarity that promised communality, participation and deliberation during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fuchs, 2021; Habermas, 1992).

Durkheim was not clear about the practices of solidarity that should be exhibited with this shift in relations as he never explained or developed his notion of agency (Acevedo, 2005). Sociology and management scholars have since conceptualised the two interactions described in Durkheim's work as vertical and horizontal solidarity behaviour. Vertical solidarity behaviour focuses on “vertical interactions of unilateral support between donors and beneficiaries” (Fernandez, Lahusen, & Kousis, 2021, p. 650). An individual is positioned in a hierarchy relative to others. Examples include relations between employees and managers (Sanders & Emmerik, 2004) and organisations providing goods and services to individuals in need (Fernandez et al., 2021). Meanwhile, horizontal solidarity behaviour concentrates on “horizontal relations of mutual support between equal associates” (Fernandez et al., 2021, p. 650). Examples include social movements and employees within organisations (Sanders & Emmerik, 2004). They are non-state agents who adopt a decentralised approach (Baldassarri, 2015). Individuals play an active role in co-creating activities, such as sharing practices and partaking in projects and campaigns while spending time engaging with communities (Bin-Nashwan, Al-Daihani, Abdul-Jabbar, & Al-Taffi, 2020). As Habermas argues,

“the perspective complementing that of equal treatment of individuals is not benevolence, but solidarity. This principle is rooted in the realisation that each person must take responsibility for the other because as consociates all must have an interest in the integrity of their shared life context in the same way”.

[(Pierce, 2018, p. 548)]

There are two studies that focus directly on settings that can be considered horizontal solidarity. Joo and Woosnam (2020) provide an understanding of how tourists feel about other tourists, specifically based on the concept of emotional solidarity. Similarly, Joo and Woosnam (2022) revealed how shared belief, behaviour and the propensity to interact influences faith-based

tourists' emotional solidarity towards others. However, these studies are unidirectional, limited to emotions and bounded by structures, hence, do not capture tourist agency and its reciprocation.

In social psychology, scholars propose an affect theory of social exchange, which combines both the affectual aspects of solidarity and social exchange theory. These studies propose that individuals are engaged in recurring exchanges that are affected by and can result in mutual affection. The affect theory of social exchange primarily benefits formal organisational contexts that are geared towards task-oriented exchanges rather than loose, decentralised networks (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Paraskevaidis and Andriotis (2016) investigate altruism in tourism, which is akin to solidarity (Widegren, 1997). Social exchange theory was noted as being an inappropriate lens for understanding reciprocal relations, as tourists' behaviours of support in voluntary contexts was not selfless. These limitations can be overcome by applying value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), which is the dominant logic underpinning relational work in tourism (Phi & Dredge, 2019). It enables an understanding of solidarity as a relational practice through its focus on agency, reciprocity and practices of more than emotional value.

### Co-creation, tourist-to-tourist interactions and solidarity

Co-creation proposes a shift in marketing logic from one focused on production to one focused on co-creation among resource integrators who develop and define value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Value co-creation, which can be defined as actively and collaboratively creating and producing experiences, entails the following components: resources, practices and resources integrators. Co-created experiences are possible due to operand and operant resources, namely tangible and intangible competences, respectively (Akaka et al., 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Skills and knowledge of individuals are considered to be operant resources, such as physical resources and equipment. Individuals involved in co-creation are considered resource integrators who initiate practices, such as routinised mental and physical interactions, that can change and evolve over time (Reckwitz, 2002; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009).

Rihova, Buhalis, Moital, and Gouthro (2013) examine tourist relations by applying customer-to-customer co-creation, which resulted in tourists' customer-to-customer co-creation practices in tourism. The resources within the social context include personal resources, shared images, social structures and contexts (Rihova, Buhalis, Gouthro, & Moital, 2018). Places for solidarity are fixed physical sites where interactions occur, such as attractions or destinations (Woosnam et al., 2018). Co-created practices in tourism include socialising and sharing knowledge among peers and strangers. These practices offer affective and cognitive value (Rihova et al., 2018). Cognitive value is derived through goal-directed activities, such as information processing, evaluating options and decision-making. This can result in function, evaluative thoughts, efficiency, convenience and standardisation (Holbrook, 1999). Emotional value focuses on preferences and attitudes towards others, such as expressing emotions, enjoyment and pleasure (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Co-created practices should be care-oriented in times of crisis (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022). Discussions on co-created care practices have emerged in marketing studies by transformative service scholars. The research area focuses on practices for creating meaningful and uplifting improvements in consumer wellbeing. These practices include co-designing (collaborative design), cooperating (accepting information), collating information (sorting information and other resources), co-learning (seeking and sharing information), connecting (building relationships) and co-producing (reconfiguring setups) (McColl-Kennedy, Vargo, Dagger, Sweeney, & Van Kasteren, 2012). Like McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012), Peng, Wu, Chen, and Deng (2022) highlight co-producing, cooperating, maintaining interpersonal interactions and spending time with others as vital co-creation practices. Taheri, Pourfakhimi, Prayag, Gannon, and Finsterwalder (2021) acknowledge the importance of co-design as necessary for co-created food well-being.

Co-creation is a relational perspective that can aid in responding to the call by sociology, business and management scholars for conceptualising solidarity not as an emotion but as a relational practice in examining crisis contexts (Fig. 1). This view of solidarity has been adopted in management (Prouska et al., 2022), education (Heilbronn, 2013) and health care studies (Jennings, 2018). In shifting understandings of the concept as a stable, coherent activity to a temporally evolving process, it cannot be captured in advance. Furthermore, individuals have different ways of emoting, knowing, thinking and reflecting (Reckwitz, 2002). They may draw on a combination to produce different actions during the collaborative process (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007). Complexities such as prejudices and differences may also emerge through interactions, which shows that practices are linked to wider societal practices that can either facilitate or inhibit their enactment (Skalen & Hackley, 2011).

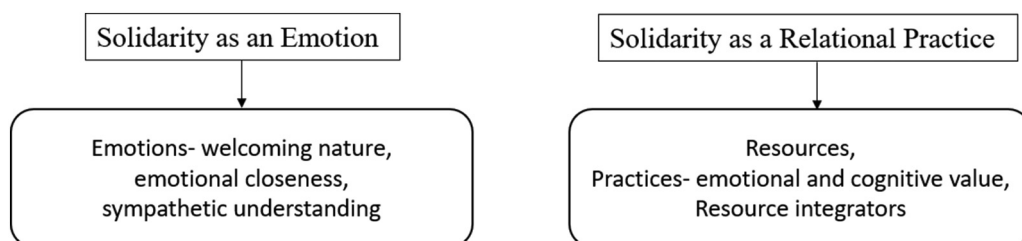


Fig. 1. From established theory to a new theoretical framework for solidarity.

Many online solidarity initiatives emerged in the pandemic as a result of the social distancing measures. Online communities offer environments for active human expression and interactions (Zhai et al., 2019). These communities facilitate horizontal solidarity behaviour through strong support and reciprocity (Downey & Fenton, 2003). They provide opportunities for users to communicate and garner support regarding challenges during times of distress (Chung & Buhalis, 2008) and represent the main means of crisis communication online for tourists (Zhou, Kim, Okumus, & Cobanoglu, 2021). Unlike virtual groups such as blogs and social media pages, online communities are dedicated to consumer practices (Kozinets, 2015). During the pandemic, there were numerous Facebook groups created, such as for travellers to Dubai and individuals in Belgium. However, these were unidirectional rather than interactional. Accordingly, two-way communication tools operated by tourists, such as WhatsApp groups, can be used to establish a sense of community and attend to psychological needs (Fuchs, 2021).

## Method

The research is guided by the philosophical tradition of pragmatism whereas solidarity is considered a relational practice (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015). As a practice, it is seen “as something that is first and foremost enacted, rather than an abstract value or an inner sentiment” (Prainsack & Buyx, 2014, p. 15). A practice-based perspective has been infused into the work done on co-creation in tourism (Rihova, Buhalis, Moital, & Gouthro, 2015) and co-creation care practices emerging from studies on transformative services (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012).

The research design followed a case study approach, as solidarity for tourists in times of crisis is a theoretically and empirically under-explored research phenomenon. The case must be unique and provide a deeper understanding of a rarely or unexplored phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Hong Kong's travel requirements during the pandemic include being in hotel quarantine for 21 or 14 days prior to being officially allowed to roam freely in the destination. The data for this research was gathered from the “Nina Island South Inmates” WhatsApp group. “Inmates” (travellers to Hong Kong) found that networking over WhatsApp was the fastest and most reliable way to exchange information and develop support and resilience during quarantine.

The group was a participant-driven online travel community established during the COVID-19 pandemic for Nina Hotel guests in quarantine, which is a sign of horizontal solidarity behaviour. This is a user-driven group that provides real-time information, platforms for resource exchange and connectivity to other online platforms for sharing information and experiences. The group information spread through the Facebook Group HK Quarantine Support Group, which in April 2022 included nearly 80,000 members. It was acknowledged by media houses for co-created acts of care (South China Morning Post, 2022), which are necessary in times of crisis. Agency can disrupt organisational structures (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022). Micro interactions within the group affected the operation of Nina Hotel management, resulting in improvements to the services offered.

Data collection took place in the month of September 2021. It yielded 21,719 posts contributed by the group of more than 100 members who were spending their quarantine at Nina Hotel Island South Hong Kong. The group included international travellers to Hong Kong who were mostly new to the destination as well as local residents returning home. They had to comply with complex legislation and restrictions at different points, such as prior to departure, during travel, on arriving at the destination airport, during their hotel stay and finally in entering Hong Kong. The number of users fluctuated as individuals joined and left the group at different stages. The researchers joined the online community in August 2021. As full disclosure of the researchers' presence was necessary (Kozinets, 2015), the group was made aware of the researchers' position and affiliation.

The researchers requested permission and received consent from the group members on September 11, 2021 to use the group's data. Ethical approval was also received from the researchers' university. The research attracted enthusiastic support. Some responses from group members were as follows: “In for this yeah, good luck with your research paper – great idea!”, “I am in!”, “I got in yesterday but am already experiencing a very different vibe than my first quarantine in January”. The researchers downloaded chats from the WhatsApp platform, and password-protected folders were created to store data securely. The researchers ensured the anonymity of informants by using pseudonyms in posts and removing telephone numbers, images or user documents.

Data analysis was based on a framework of co-creation, as noted in Fig. 1. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step interpretive thematic analysis process was applied. The first step was to get familiar with the data while making notes regarding different tourists' interactions, such as establishing legitimacy and discussing quarantine experiences. The second step was to identify the data that was associated with the concept of solidarity. The practices identified were in keeping with the operational definition of practice (Reckwitz, 2002). This made the researchers focus on observable actions rather than emotions such as emoticons. Unlike online communities such as TripAdvisor, Facebook or Reddit, individuals' posts may not be directly related to the immediate post above it. Consequently, it was important for the researchers to be insiders in the group in real-time to be able to follow posts and understand tourists' dialogues.

The third step was to search for themes, which involved gathering the data relevant to the framework. Themes emerged over time, such as the types of solidarity practices, dimensions of solidarity in crisis and spheres of solidarity. The fourth step involved reviewing the themes. Dimensions were removed and spheres of solidarity were categorised with other resources, such as resource integrator, operand and operant aspects. The fifth step was refining the themes, which was done in line with the aim of the study, namely to draw on co-creation to illustrate how solidarity occurs in times of crisis. Practices from a pragmatist tradition must concentrate on actions and be described using performative language (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015). Analysis was an iterative process of reading, evaluating, identifying and changing themes and sub-themes.

Data may be triangulated using interviews, focus groups or in-person netnographies (Kozinets, 2015). In light of face-to-face restrictions, investigator triangulation was performed. Following individual data analysis, the researchers consulted with each

other and agreed on the final practice themes that emerged from the study. This was done to ensure the analysis led to trustworthy interpretations. Kozinets (2002) urges scholars to immerse themselves in communities by participating in activities and engaging with individuals to establish credibility and dependability, which was the case for this research.

**Results and discussion**

The themes that emerged provided an understanding of how solidarity occurs among tourists during times of crisis. Online communities unify tourists across borders (Kavoura & Buhalis, 2022), and there was an ongoing dialogue of recognising the needs of others and engaging in efforts not only for the benefit of themselves but of others (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). Travellers shared similar sentiments that further confirm that the online community was an environment that facilitated solidarity: “love how this group shares and supports one another”, “the group is great and gives good help and assistance”, and “thank you guys for your banter, knowledge and support”.

While the tourist is seen as a recipient of support during times of crisis (Liu-Lastres, 2022), a co-creation approach frames them as being active in reciprocating solidarity practices. Five co-created practices were found, which fostered solidarity among tourists, namely co-producing, connecting, co-advocating, co-suffering and consuming collaboratively (Fig. 2).

*Co-producing*

Co-producing focuses on active development and participation to achieve support individually and collaboratively (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012). Individuals were involved in co-production in two ways: voluntary and solicited. In either case, tourists abandoned their own self-interest to fulfil the needs of others. Travellers joined the group in search of information that could result in experiences that were efficient and effective. This was seen through ongoing deliberations, which is a sign of functional value being offered within the community (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982): “Try setting it to auto. Then it switches off until it is needed”, “Great idea! Just changed it, thanks”, “I followed your advice, but mine never turns off”, “Not comfy to sleep at night definitely”. Some discussions even continued in a private sphere. This occurred in instances where there was sharing of personal contact information: “PM (personal message) me if you would like their contact”. This existence of a private sphere is unlike the singular virtual public sphere that Habermas (1989) speaks of for facilitating support.

Although queries could be raised in the public sphere, information guides were created collaboratively that could provide answers to individuals’ frequently asked questions:

Post #50: If anyone has any feedback on the Google sheet, message me before I enter in the rest of the data.

Post #60: Actually, if anyone is bored or has time and they would like to set up a sharable Google sheet to manage our inventory and create space for a phone number + room number/confirmation number + booking name for each person in the queue, that would be fabs.

Post #61: I don’t see why not.

Post #188: I used these (recommendations from the list), they were efficient and easy to contact.

Individuals offered practical value by designing and sharing their knowledge within the group voluntarily (Rihova et al., 2018). This adds to their credibility and increases their attractiveness to others, which aligns with previous conceptualisation of emo-

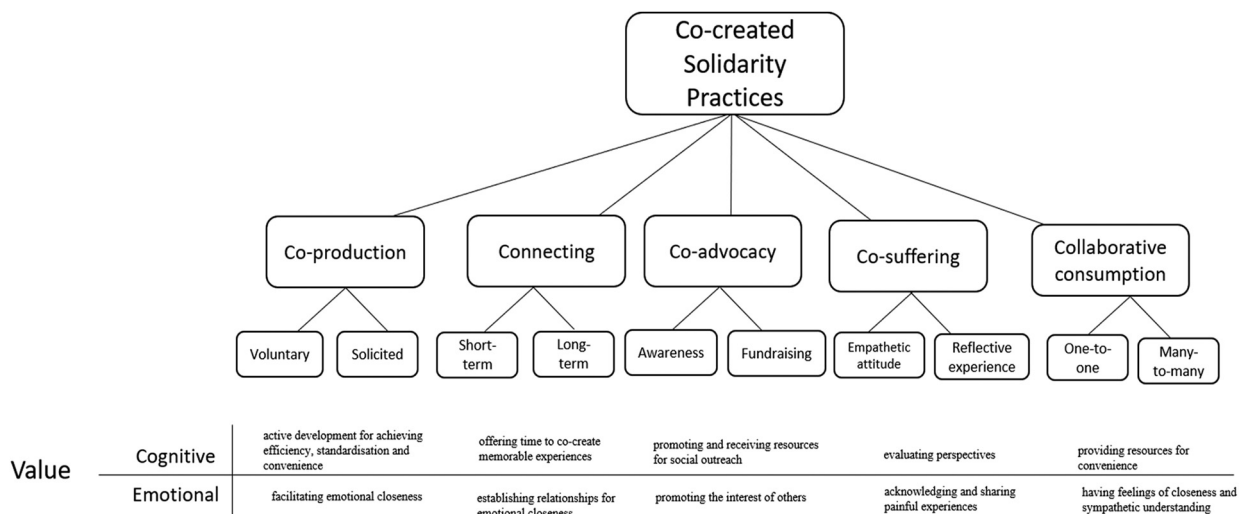


Fig. 2. Co-created solidarity practices.

tional closeness. Not all respondents were associated with this feeling of closeness, however, as it was associated particularly with “veterans”, who are recognised voices in the sphere. They were past members (“survivors”) who wished to continue contributing to the group. Users created activities in virtual spheres such as Zoom and Kahoot and shared the links with members of the online community who wanted to participate: “Mark your calendars for a piano-led Tuesday at 8 pm. Will send round the Zoom details Tuesday at 7 pm”. Here, participants illustrate that they are proud to invite others to their event. While this resonates with [Woosnam and Norman's \(2010\)](#) construct of having a welcoming nature, the emotional feeling is not unidirectional. Guests reciprocated these feelings and provided cognitive value for convenience. They made suggestions regarding resources that could contribute to achieving the desired activities while expressing feelings through appreciation of feedback:

Post #400: Maybe we should all order Indian food in solidarity.

Post #401: I like the sound of that.

### Connecting

Connecting refers to establishing and maintaining relationships ([McCull-Kennedy et al., 2012](#)), which is a sign of emotional closeness ([Woosnam & Norman, 2010](#)). Going beyond [Woosnam and Norman's \(2010\)](#) work, this study shows that there are negative feelings that arise when this form of solidarity is lacking. Individuals had a sense of regret over missing out on these times of engagement: “Thanks Jake for organising. Unfortunately, I had to be on calls and missed the zoom”. Other travellers took steps to ensure that they lessened the chance of missing these opportunities. A traveller noted that they had the activities webpage open while doing work: “Had a work call but it provided a great background support”.

Concerns of alienation have been raised by communication scholars, thereby questioning the virtual travel sphere as an environment for solidarity practices among diverse groups ([Fuchs, 2021](#)). In the online community, attention would sometimes be drawn to specific social groups. Individuals welcomed, introduced and engaged members based on national identity:

Post #133: Since there are many French in the group, a random question. I am going to order a bottle of sparkling wine from a French wine shop in Hong Kong. It will be discount if 6 bottles or above. Anyone interested (you) can PM (private message) me. I will share the info (information).

Reference to similarity can still emerge within spaces of diversity in homogenous groups. Further research would be needed to determine if this is linked to a normative practice within the French culture. Nonetheless, similarity provides functional value as it results in efficiency, sharing and saving resources.

While the online community provides tourists with the opportunity to show support through dialogue ([Chung & Buhalis, 2008](#)), findings reveal that there are two types of connections, namely short-term and long-term. Short term refers to connections that are limited to exchanges during the time in which travellers are within quarantine. Travellers fostered open, two-way communication to illustrate their support and empathy for others. While this is possible in the online community, other platforms (virtual spheres) were turned to for facilitating these conversations. Individuals would offer their time to create memorable experiences. A Zoom link would be created for travellers to engage in shared entertainment and personal celebrations:

Post #80: Thanks all for joining! Happy birthday Jake!

Post #81: Thanks for a lovely evening on Zoom. It's so bizarre to have spent so long chatting to a group of strangers that are strangers no more. Putting faces to names and now knowing who sends all these messages is such a special connection. Thank you to all involved. Highlight of the week!

Emotional closeness becomes apparent as individuals embrace other travellers as friends and colleagues. The features embedded in the platform also allowed individuals a chance to gaze on others within the group to create moments of unity: “It would be such a funny group photo if everyone requested bathrobes at 7 pm tonight and tuned in for wearing them” and “if anyone wants to wave at my husband, he's on the hill (for group photo)!”.

Individuals should be able to separate their personal lives from occurrences within the public sphere ([Habermas, 1989](#)). There were some members of the group who choose to “switch off from this amazing group”. This was not always the case. Reference to the group's identity and acts of solidarity continued after guests' quarantine, resulting in long-term connecting practices. This extends upon previous tourism research to illustrate that solidarity practices go beyond the context where this behaviour was initially formed. Supportive co-creation behaviours can continue even after a crisis. Members noted that they made arrangements to meet face-to-face after leaving the group:

Post #500: We connected with the Survivors and asked them to join us on the Mountain. Your family and friends are of course also very welcome to join in. The more, the merrier! They can join with messages, banners, balloons and whatever else makes them visible. The photographers will also make pictures of the “mountain people”.

Post #600: Get to meet graduated survivors in person if you want at events organized by members.

This finding further extends Habermas' work by noting that online solidarity can result in continued solidarity within a physical environment. It opposes the long-standing view that the impact of online communities is a limited one ([Dahlgren, 2005](#)). This can develop into frequent interactions, thereby giving rise to associational solidarity, which has yet to be unravelled in tourism.

### Co-advocating

Co-advocacy is based on situations where tourists promote the interest of others beyond themselves and those within their immediate group (Sharma, Conduit, & Hill, 2017). While travellers continued to show solidarity through co-creating with those focused on the immediate needs of members of the group, attention was also being placed on external groups. Environments for providing cooperation become spaces for promoting awareness of social issues. There were concerns for vulnerable individuals within the host destination. Travellers felt affection towards each other, which aligns with Woosnam and Norman's (2010) construct of sympathetic understanding. In this case, however, support is not geared towards tourism development as seen in previous studies. Travellers were deeply aware of the vulnerability of the individuals they were trying to help by soliciting resources (GG, Lahusen & Kousis, 2020; Van Portfliet & Kenny, 2022). Users turned to the platform for promoting and receiving resources for social outreach, thereby illustrating the duality of passive empathy and active support:

Post #1010: Hello all – the AI Foundation raises awareness of gynaecological cancer. They will be having an art exhibit to raise money and awareness. As such, they are looking for a small 'army' of volunteers that can help support their exhibition which will show across the entire month of October at SOHO House.

Individuals engaged in advocacy efforts to raise funds and collect resources for charities that operate within the host destination. This is similar to what is identified as redistribution, which is a form of support that is based on fundraising (Schwabenland & Hirst, 2022):

Post #2100: Please help donate to Maya Community and the Pink Foundation. Our donations are shared with the homeless on Kowloon side and given out along with meals cooked every second Friday. Please note Lin comes and picks up all the donations and sorts through all the items collected on her own, as she does not have any help.

By supporting these causes, individuals can have immense impact on the destination based on the frequency of initiatives and the size of the community being served, which is purposeful (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The reaction to co-advocacy practices in the group demonstrates that there is decreasing solidarity by tourists when it comes to efforts associated with benefiting the poor in the host community (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009). In addition, it tends to reproduce social hierarchies of superiors and inferiors. This differs from the symmetrical form of cohesion that has been seen in horizontal solidarity practices.

### Co-suffering

Co-suffering refers to acknowledging and sharing painful experiences (Jacobs, 2015). Tourists displayed empathic attitudes through narratives and emoticons as was the case with Akaka et al. (2014). The community provided a space for users to co-create by sharing their anger and frustration while experiencing collective liberation from the challenges that suppressed them (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). It was more than simply identifying with visitors to illustrate sympathetic understanding, as seen in previous emotional solidarity studies:

Post #2500: I am feeling quite anxious, this is my day 5, so I am far from safe, holding my breath for today's test.

Post #2501: Try not to worry. And pour that wine.

Post #2502: Peta, please don't be anxious. It's a party in here! We will help make you laugh and relax.

Interactions with participants caused individuals to reflect on their own experiences, which is a type of cognitive response (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989). It was also an example of a transformative tourism experience, which is unlike other experiences embarked on by tourists, such as wellness travel, volunteer tourism and pilgrimages (Reisinger, 2015). It was throughout discussions within the virtual sphere that they recognised there was also a need to extend solidarity to others. This illustrates that tourist (horizontal) solidarity is interwoven with tourist-to-resident (vertical) solidarity. For instance, users engaged in spectatorship regarding happenings within the hotel and wider destination, drawing the attention of other tourists to these situations, which resulted in a change of attitude towards self and others.

The online community provided the space for individuals to engage in collective contemplation and comparison regarding their circumstances, thereby shifting their initial views of themselves as the only victims of circumstance: "Most messed up thing for me is that many (quarantine workers and locals) have it much worse, crazy". Solidarity emerged not because of commonality but because of the differences between the groups. Individuals showed their solidarity through reflecting on the suffering that others had undergone. This conjured emotions, which are not expected in online communities (Fuchs, 2021), and also resulted in cognitive responses that were purposeful (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Acts of kindness, though considered by many, are commonly practiced at the individual level (Komter, 2005). This differed among guests, however, in such expressions as "Thank you, we appreciate what you do" and in having "a quick banter" with the staff. Like traditional media, the online community provokes engagement with the needs of others without elevating one's status, as seen in previous cases of cognitive and emotional tourist experiences (Holbrook, 1999).



### Consuming collaboratively

While online travel communities are seen as platforms for garnering information (Chung & Buhalis, 2008), findings show that the platform also served as a space for collaborative consumption. This refers to the exchange of goods for one's convenience, as seen on sharing economy platforms such as Craigslist (Parguel, Lunardo, & Benoit-Moreau, 2017). An inventory list with photos of the items was set up, and access was provided to users via a link in the WhatsApp group. Individuals were able to contribute to the inventory upon their departure by providing descriptions of items. The range of items included groceries, household items and gym equipment. There were one-to-one and many-to-many exchanges within the group:

Post #3201: I don't have the money for anything but big orders. This entire stay is breaking me.

Post #3202: I'm wondering if we put in a mass order for pizza at Venezia, we could get a delivery. It's the best in HK (Hong Kong).

Post #3202: No worries. If no one else wants, I can send you the whole bottle (of wine).

Travellers posted lists of items that were able to be shared with other members: "Hi everyone, we'll be leaving tomorrow! Please put your name and room number next to items you are interested in" and "I am sharing this list of free browser-based games that my friends and I used extensively during lockdown". Individuals questioned whether the weekly shared data could be "pinned" within the group, thereby establishing it as an important feature within the group. Prainsack (2020) refers to this as moving from the interpersonal level of exercising solidarity to group level activities becoming informal norms. Individuals who left quarantine occasionally offered to deliver care packages to hotels for users within the group:

I will be making a small delivery for one of the inmates tomorrow evening. If anyone has grocery or pharmacy items they have been having problems getting, I can do a quick purchase & also deliver it to you. Please direct message me if I can be of service.

Individuals noted how they felt compelled to act, which is a feeling felt within contexts of difference (Van Portfliet & Kenny, 2022). The impetus to act represents their rationale for engaging in collaborative consumption. However, this practice ultimately stems from emotions, specifically feelings of closeness and sympathetic understanding.

### Discussion and contribution

This study explores how solidarity among tourists occurs in times of crisis and contributes to solidarity in tourism research in several ways. It extends Durkheim's theory of research on solidarity in tourism. Previous solidarity in tourism studies focused on the concept as an emotion, drawing solely from Durkheim's work that emphasises structure (see Joo et al., 2021). Solidarity in tourism research has since been based on emotional solidarity constructs that have been generalised for different contexts of tourism development, events (Li et al., 2018) and crises (Joo et al., 2021). However, Durkheim noted that acts of solidarity can change in these challenging periods. This paper shifts the focus of solidarity as an emotion to being a relational practice of emotional and cognitive value. This research illustrates that tourists are central stakeholders for co-creating support during crises. Tourists are not mere recipients of information but co-creators of their experiences within their context in real time (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

While Joo and Woosnam (2020, 2022) examined tourists' interactions for emotional solidarity, this paper, based on a relational practice (co-creation) perspective, draws attention to what tourists actually do, their contexts and how they reciprocate solidarity among other tourists (see Fig. 3). The contexts previously noted in tourism research are supplier-operated and offline. This study shows that practices are based in tourists' contexts and that they can occur and extend beyond online spheres to the physical environment after a crisis. Solidarity is also usually seen as linear and generalisable. However, this paper shows that solidarity practices can be complex or problematic. For instance, the emotional value of solidarity practices, such as co-producing, did not resonate with all individuals. Also, while the group illustrated reciprocal behaviour, it encouraged reflective thinking for individuals external to the group. Furthermore, individuals' actions can sometimes produce social hierarchies.

Prior studies of crises in tourism mainly shed light on responses that are top-down (Jiang & Wen, 2020; Liu-Lastres, 2022). This paper provides novel insights on how solidarity occurs among travellers in times of crisis. Tourist agency during crises has mainly been spoken about in terms of consumer resistance, rights and justice (Luo & Zhai, 2017). In this study, there is mutual support for tourist in-transit experiences from equal associates who have a better understanding of their problems and interests than businesses and governments. The tourist experience in a crisis situation must be meaningful for the specific individual, in terms of their situation and sociocultural context. Solidarity among travellers represents a type of horizontal solidarity behaviour- a behaviour that has become more relevant since the COVID-19 pandemic (Fotaki, 2022; Prouska et al., 2022). This research enhances research on other types of horizontal solidarity behaviour such as among customers and employee-to-employee (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, & Varman, 2021; Prouska et al., 2022). The research draws on co-creation to illustrate the interactive and reciprocal nature of solidarity practices (Fig. 3), while enhancing crisis response and management research, which is currently lacking in theory (Wut et al., 2021).

This paper contributes to value co-creation research by examining care practices that have become relevant during the COVID-19 period. It illustrates that solidarity is an outcome of co-creation, which contributes to the existing literature of co-creation in

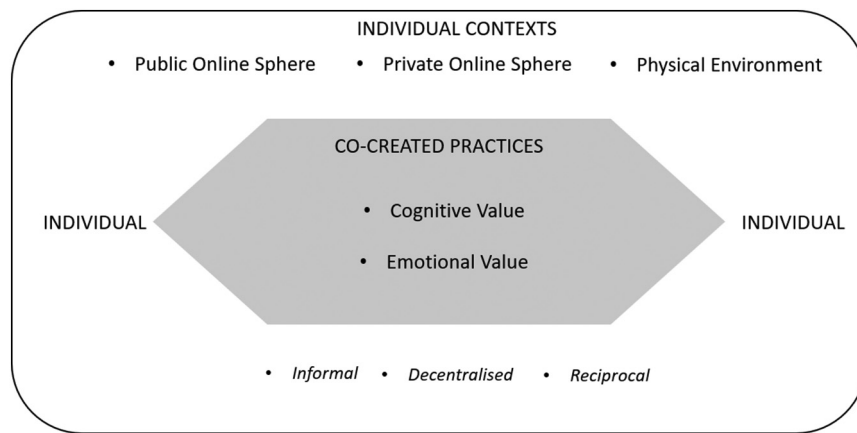


Fig. 3. Solidarity as a relational practice.

tourism. Although the practice approach to co-creation is not novel to tourism studies, the emerging practices are (Rihova et al., 2018). As captured by Fig. 2, solidarity occurs within multiple public and private online spheres (tourist contexts) through co-producing (voluntary and solicited), connecting (short term and long term), co-advocating (for increasing awareness and fund raising), co-suffering (through empathic attitude and reflective experience) and consuming collaboratively (one-to-one and many-to-many). These practices enhance tourism co-creation literature, with the latter two being novel to business and management literature.

The research introduces concepts emerging from the recently developed area of transformation service research with application being called for in tourism (Sheldon, 2020; Galeone & Sebastiani, 2021) and proposes a practice-based co-created solidarity typology (Fig. 1). As such, it provides empirical evidence on co-creation in hospitality and tourism during times of crisis (Mohammadi, Yazdani, Pour, & Soltani, 2020), illustrating that solidarity can also exist among strangers who are members of different families, communities and nations and occur in multiple consumer-created contexts. This contrasts with other tourism studies, which are underpinned by views of spatial proximity and relatedness.

## Conclusions

A pandemic is a type of crisis involving rapid and unexpected changes that demand responses that are meaningful for tourists' wellbeing and sense of community (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022). This study fills the gap for emergency crisis management through real-time responses. A co-created perspective provides insights that are of practical value to service providers and travellers. Tourists are provided with insights on how to develop a sense of community, rather than enduring the heightened distress brought on by a crisis. Service providers are called to shift their marketing logic in times of crisis from one focused on marketing promotions. Instead, tourist experiences centred on care and wellbeing are required.

The paper provides insights on shifting away from the capitalist culture of tourism. Organisations must realise that they no longer exert control over individual practices. Service providers need to redefine their roles since the emergence of these contexts and identify solidarity environments as alternatives to satisfying travellers. Seidl and Whittington (2021) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted old practices that were geared towards norms of efficiency and maximisation. It led to stabilising, changing and adding new practices that cater to individuals' wellbeing. An understanding of how solidarity develops within groups can foster social change and result in success.

For practitioners, acts of care may prove challenging to scale. However, a lack thereof can lower tourist confidence in businesses and increase competition from individuals within bottom-up groups that engage in micro/digital entrepreneurship (Schwabland & Hirst, 2022). The findings in this study can help service providers to identify areas for improvement in complementing tourist solidarity practices and in understanding how to better organise solidarity efforts. Such an understanding is becoming increasingly important, as the industry continues to be shaped by neoliberal discourses that privilege individuality, while conversations of care (Tronvoll & Edvardsson, 2022) and inclusion resurface globally (Prouska et al., 2022).

This study has a number of limitations, some of which present areas for future research. These include the context under examination, the focus on one type of solidarity behaviour and a practice-based approach to co-creation. The study focused on co-created practices that emerged among tourists. The co-created practices for solidarity could also be explored within business-to-tourist contexts. Scholars could adopt a social constructionism approach to co-creation to unravel its antecedents. While the research focused on co-creation practices, the study introduced solidarity from a relational practice approach. Future studies can apply this approach, as well as relevant theories and methodologies to examine other crises, such as lockdown restricted contexts and the war in the Ukraine, as well as other horizontal solidarity behaviour such as employee-to-employee.

The findings demonstrate a shift from solidarity within an online context towards increased support face-to-face as a result of established similarities. As such, there is a need to combine relational approaches to explore solidarity through differences, both in

interpersonal and institutionalised forms. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to examine how co-created practices for solidarity change over time. Nonetheless, the conceptualisation of solidarity resulting from co-created experiences among tourists addresses the lack of support being experienced by travellers during crises and explores ways to increase resilience among the different stakeholders.

### CRediT authorship contribution statement

Abbie-Gayle Johnson: Conceptualisation; Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing - original draft; Writing - review, edit and revise.

Dimitrios Buhalis: Conceptualisation; Data collection; Formal analysis; Supervision.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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