



Discussion paper

Risk perceptions on cruise ships among young people: Concepts, approaches and directions



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ABSTRACT

Cruising is becoming a more popular form of tourism, leading to the increasingly sophisticated demand and expectations of cruise passengers and the growing number of young cruise passengers. Therefore, it is essential that cruise operators develop a thorough understanding of their customers and determinants influencing the decision-making process. Risk perception plays a key role in affecting purchase intention and retention, and shaping consumer experiences and satisfaction. This paper synthesises the existing knowledge on the role of risk perception in cruising, explores theories underpinning risk perception and its measurements, and identifies key factors influencing risk perception. The paper offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for risk perception on cruise ships, and identifies knowledge gaps that have not yet been explored in the extant cruising literature. This paper contributes to the advancement of risk knowledge in cruise ship behaviour, and allows cruise operators to better understand customer behaviour, especially the youth.

1. Introduction

Cruising has been one of the fastest growing sectors of tourism in the last few decades (Pavlic, 2013) achieving increasingly high worldwide passenger (Cruise Lines International Association—CLIA, 2016). Sea cruises have been progressively perceived as a special form of tourism rather than a means of transport (Pavlic, 2013), meaning that the expectations and satisfaction of passengers during cruise trips are becoming increasingly sophisticated. In light of the rapidly growing demand and sophisticated expectations of cruise passengers, it is essential for cruise operators to determine what elements are involved in cruise passengers' decision-making process and how they affect cruising intention and satisfaction. Among them, risk perception is certainly believed to play a vital role in shaping purchase intention and mediating consumer decision-making processes (Baker and Stockton, 2013; Henthorne et al., 2013; Yüksel and Yüksel, 2007).

However, the cruising literature has portrayed a dearth of research on risk perception on cruise ships (only a few studies including Ahola et al., 2014; Baker and Stockton, 2013; Bowen et al., 2014; Henthorne et al., 2013; Neri et al., 2008), and even no research on risk perception among potential cruise passengers. These studies, however, only focused on individual types of cruise-related risks (e.g. gastronomic outbreaks, food poisoning, terrorism) without offering a holistic landscape of risk perception in the context of cruise-shipping. Also, the target population of these studies is cruise passengers on the actual ships,

which inhibits the possibility of examining potential cruise customers, including the emerging market of Gen Y. Indeed, past research related to cruisers' age shows that there is an assumption that cruise ship experiences were generally for seniors (Hur and Adler, 2013); however, studies have shown that cruisers are becoming younger than ever before (Baker and Stockton, 2013; CLIA, 2017; Dowling, 2006). Young people are regarded as Gen Y/Millennials, who were born from 1982 to 1998, as reported in CLIA (2017) Cruise Travel Report. CLIA (2017) finds that younger generation, especially the Millennials, have been embracing cruise travel more than ever before, regarding it as a better vacation type than other types of land-based vacations. Among cruisers, according to CLIA (2017), the most loyal groups are the younger generations, that over two-thirds of the Millennials say that cruising is their favourite vacation. Moreover, 93% of the Millennials sampled in the report of CLIA (2017) say that they probably or definitely will book a cruise for the next trip. Nevertheless, such statistics would be very questionable if the risk element was mentioned since tourists are in a strong position to practise protective behaviour when noticing risks associated with their vacation (Sönmez and Graefe, 1998a). Risk perception is therefore able to dismiss or alter the whole decision-making process and induce the decision maker to establish a new decision-making practice. Studying risk perception of young people in the cruise shipping context thus contributes to the knowledge of young people's purchasing behaviour and the level of risk awareness of young people on cruise ships.

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Young people may perceive risks differently from other generations. Indeed, Carr (2001) believes, young tourists possess motivations and personality traits that differ from the general population such as sensation-seeking (Pizam et al., 2004), novelty and excitement seeking, and inclinations to engage in physical risks (Lepp and Gibson, 2003). In addition to the peer effect (Adler and Adler, 1998), young tourists are more prone to the feeling of “out of space”, “out of time”, “out of mind” (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006; Selännemi, 2003) which can easily distort their risk perceptions and trigger risk-taking behaviour (Berdychevsky and Gibson, 2015). These traits can lead to the distinctiveness between this segment and the general population in risk perception, group composition and attitude towards particular types of tourism products. As a result, there is a need to obtain some further understanding of the behaviours of younger cruise passengers to respond more appropriately to changes in market segments and demand. The study of risk perception among young cruise passengers allows cruise operators to better adapt to their customers’ travel intentions and contribute to the implementation of risk management plans on cruise ships that correspond to the concern of this increasingly important market segment. By synthesising the existing knowledge on the role of risk perception in cruising, exploring theories underpinning risk perception and its measurements, and identifying key factors influencing risk perception in the cruising context, this paper offers a conceptual framework of risk perception on cruise ships, and an identification of possible knowledge gaps that have not yet been explored in the existing cruising literature.

2. The literature

2.1. Definition of risk perception

2.1.1. Definition of risk

When it comes to defining risk, there is a large variety of conceptualisations of risk available in the literature. The simplest definition comes from Priest (1990), who defines risk as the potential to lose something of value. Kogan and Wallach (1964) define risk as a “chance” if the focus is on probability and a “danger” if the focus is on the consequence, whereas Reisinger and Mavondo (2006b) refer to risk as “a possibility of danger, harm or loss; and a chance or hazard” (p. 13). From the perspective of consumer research, risk can be defined in terms of the uncertainty of buying a product (Dowling and Staelin, 1994); the unfavourable consequences of a purchase (Cunningham, 1967; Dowling and Staelin, 1994); the expectation of loss (Stone and Winter, 1985); and the amount of loss (Cunningham, 1967). Beside these variations, the most all-encompassing definition comes from Dowling (1986), who defines risk as “the situation where a decision maker has a priori knowledge of both the consequences of alternatives and their probability of occurrence” (p. 194). Sharing the similarity but in a more technical way, the international standard, ISO 31000 (2009) suggests that risk is usually expressed “in terms of a combination of the consequences of an event and the associated likelihood of occurrence”. The two elements including the consequences and the likelihood of occurrence conceptualised in Dowling (1986) and ISO 31000 (2009) play an essential part in characterising risks and risk magnitude, either in a cognitive decision-making process or in an organisational scale. These two elements have been incorporated in the risk acceptance criteria, which is usually represented in a matrix that is used as a basis for decisions about acceptable risk (see Fig. 1). This study adapts the risk definition offered by Dowling (1986) and ISO 31000 (2009) to examine risks on cruise ships and employs the risk acceptance matrix as a guide for further risk perception measurements in the latter study.

2.1.2. Risks associated with cruise ships

A number of risks happening on-board have been identified in past cruise studies. For example, infection outbreaks represent a significant public health issue on cruise ships (Kak, 2007) considering the

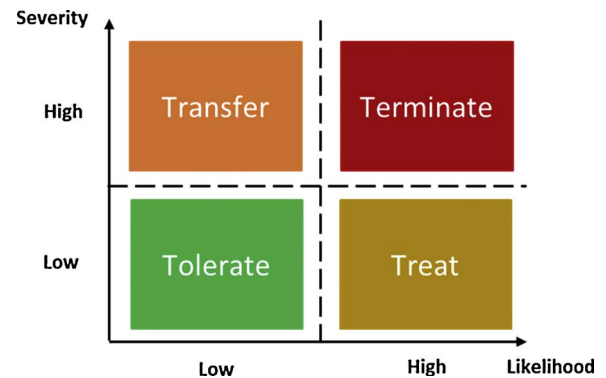


Fig. 1. Risk Acceptance Matrix.
(adapted from Ni et al., 2010)

accelerated rate of occurrence in recent years (Bell et al., 2014). Also, the presence of bars and nightclubs, in addition to the willingness of youth to express themselves and follow their peers (Crotts, 1996), makes cruise ships “hot spots” of increased sexual behaviour, which may lead to the likelihood of acquiring sexually transmissible infections. Motion sickness, on the other hand, is one of the main reasons why travelling by sea can be a bad experience, and is usually the most common illness happening on-board (Bledsoe et al., 2007). Since the number of cruise accidents resulting in severe damage and lives lost are substantial every year, cruise accidents are apparently one of the major concern on cruise ships (Ventikos, 2013). Finally, terrorism, piracy, and crime are regarded as major security threats that cause serious violence to a large number of cruise passengers (Bowen et al., 2014; Panko et al., 2009).

2.1.3. Definition of risk perception

Whereas risk analysts implement risk assessment to evaluate risks, the majority of people use their intuitive risk judgment to evaluate them, which is typically referred to as risk perception (Slovic et al., 1982). A number of studies have been conducted to examine risk perception, in which researchers pay attention to determine how people judge, characterise and evaluate hazardous activities (Slovic et al., 1982). A two-dimensional structure of risk perception was proposed by Bauer (1960) including uncertainty and adverse consequences. Indeed, uncertainty is defined in terms of probabilistic beliefs, whereas adverse consequences refers to importance of loss when attempting to achieve a set of buying goals (Dowling, 1986). In addition to the two-dimensional structure, researchers have suggested that perception of risk is related to various types of loss such as social, physical, financial, psychological, time, etc. (Dowling, 1986). In sum, risk perception can be defined as a two-dimension (probability and importance of loss) (Bauer, 1960; Dowling, 1986) and multi-faceted (social, physical, financial, psychological, time loss, etc.) construct. However, since little consensus regarding this construct’s precision and how to measure it has been achieved, thus, risk perception is still regarded as a ‘fuzzy’ concept (Dowling, 1986).

On the other hand, Mitchell et al. (1999) and Haddock (1993) acknowledge risk is perceived in at least two levels. Specifically, product-category risk (perceived risk) reflects an individual’s perception of the risk involved in purchasing any product, whereas product-specific risk (absolute risk) is the actual risk associated with the consumption of that product. This acknowledgement imply that there should be a clear boundary between examining risk perception and perception of associated risks (Haddock, 1993; Mitchell et al., 1999). Henthorne et al. (2013) agree with these arguments as they state that “the concept of perceived risk defined risk from the viewpoint of the consumer” (p. 70), thus, “the perception of risk may or may not match with the actual risks involved” (p. 83). However, Mitchell et al. (1999) assert that the product-specific risks (absolute risks) are most real to consumers and most

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