

Perceived risks and future travel intentions: The experience of solo female travelers

Rossella Baratta

University of Verona – Italy

ORCID: 0000-0002-0030-5053

E-mail: rossella.baratta@univr.it

Vania Vigolo

University of Verona – Italy

ORCID: 0000-0003-1898-1743

E-mail: vania.vigolo@univr.it

Francesca Simeoni

University of Verona – Italy

ORCID: 0000-0002-8985-9860

E-mail: francesca.simeoni@univr.it

Sonia Andrich

University of Verona – Italy

ORCID: 0000-0002-8114-1483

E-mail: sonia.andrich@studenti.univr.it

PURPOSE

Solo travelers are a growing tourist segment, and the large majority are women (Khan et al., 2017; Karagöz et al., 2020). Female travelers, however, may face higher risks than men when traveling alone (Yang et al., 2017), because of destination specific risks, socio-psychological risks, and gendered risks (Wilson and Little 2008; Yang et al., 2018). Previous literature has already reported the critical impact of perceived risks on travel choices (Fuchs and Reichel, 2006), and in the current pandemic scenario, health-related risks may additionally lower future travel intentions (Xie et al., 2021). Previous research has also lamented a lack of research on one of the largest groups of international travelers, i.e., solo travelers (Khan et al., 2017). In order to bridge this gap, this study aims at investigating the following Research Questions:

RQ1: Are there correlations between solo female travelers future travel intentions and perceived risks?

RQ2: Are there other factors affecting solo female travelers future travel intentions?

RESEARCH METHODS

A questionnaire was administered online during November-December 2020, mainly through online social communities for women traveling alone. Measures were adapted from previous research (Khan et al., 2017; Karagöz et al., 2020), and respondents were asked to rate on a 7 point Likert scale: their perceptions of gendered risks (5 items), socio-psychological risks (4 items), and destination specific risks (5 items, including epidemic diseases); travel motivation (6 items); factors affecting destination choice (22 items); and their future travel intentions (3 items). The final sample is made of 199 Italian women. The average age is 28, 80% of respondents are single, and the majority has a high level of education (40% have a bachelors' degree and 24% a masters' degree). Respondents traveled alone 8 times on average. Descriptive statistics and correlations were calculated, with the aid of SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Solo female travelers display low perception of risks (3.43), with gendered risks the most significant (4.52), followed by destination specific risks, (3.53, with epidemic diseases rated 3.88), and very low socio-psychological risks (1.94). On the contrary, future travel intentions are very high (5.76). Interestingly, solo female travelers' future intentions are not related with perceived risks. While some previous studies found a negative relation between perceived risks and solo female travelers' future intentions (e.g., Karagöz et al., 2020), other studies show that perceived risk does not necessarily prevent travel intentions (e.g., Yanget al., 2017). The current research provides support to this latter stream of research, since no correlations between risks and travel intentions have been found, not even in the current pandemic scenario, where destination and health-related risks were expected to be higher.

Future travel intentions, however, show significant correlations with the number of previous travels, with some travel motivations, i.e., travel to seek adventure and travel to know different cultures, and with some pull factors, i.e., possibility for adventurous vacations and cultural interests of local people. These results further support previous research stressing the poor risk-sensitivity of solo female travelers (Yang et al., 2017).

IMPLICATIONS

Solo female travelers seem to be a low risk-sensitive tourist segment, and their future travel intentions are not affected by any of the perceived risks, not even health-related. In addition, women traveling alone in search of culture and adventure are more willing to travel in the future.

Tourism is a resilient industry (Gössling et al., 2002) and there is a global need to reimagine and restart tourism in safety and security (Sigala, 2020). Solo female travelers can therefore represent a good re-starting segment for cultural and adventurous tourism. However, gendered risks remain quite high and tourism operators should develop marketing strategies to reassure women about safety and security. They should prevent gender bias while fostering an inclusive tourist environment instead. Results of this research are limited to a specific sample, i.e., young Italian women, that are mostly single and with a high level of education on average. Future research should enlarge the sample to increase the generalizability of results.

KEYWORDS

Solo female travelers; travel risks; travel intentions; resilience.

REFERENCES

- Fuchs, G., and Reichel, A. (2006). Tourist destination risk perception: The case of Israel. *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, 14(2): 83–108.
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., and Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1): 1-20.
- Karagöz, D., Işık, C., Dogru, T., and Zhang, L. (2020). Solo female travel risks, anxiety and travel intentions: examining the moderating role of online psychological-social support. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1-18.
- Khan, M. J., Chelliah, S., and Ahmed, S. (2017). Factors influencing destination image and visit intention among young women travellers: role of travel motivation, perceived risks, and travel constraints. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 22(11): 1139-1155.
- Sigala, M. (2020). Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for advancing and resetting industry and research. *Journal of Business Research*, 117: 312-321.
- Wilson, E., and Little, D. E. (2008). The Solo Female Travel Experience: Exploring the 'Geography of Women's Fear. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 11(2): 167-186.

- Xie, C., Zhang, J., Morrison, A. M., and CocaStefaniak J. A. (2021). The effects of risk message frames on post-pandemic travel intentions: the moderation of empathy and perceived waiting time. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1-20.
- Yang, E. C. L., Khoo-Lattimore, C., and Arcodia, C. (2017). A systematic literature review of risk and gender research in tourism. *Tourism Management*, 58: 89–100.
- Yang, E. C. L., Khoo-Lattimore, C., and Arcodia, C. (2018). Power and empowerment: How Asian solo female travellers perceive and negotiate risks. *Tourism Management*, 68: 32–45.