

COVID-19 Crisis and Hiking Intention

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People's lives have drastically changed since the outbreak of COVID-19. One concern during the pandemic has been the level of inactivity among people. Compared to various generations (e.g., baby boomers, generation alpha), Generation Z (Gen Z) traditionally spends much less time in outdoor spaces. Due to the pandemic, their inactiveness is assumed to be even more severe. Hiking, an outdoor activity, has become a possible remedy for young people to exercise in a safer sport environment compared to traditional facility-based activities. Although various studies have supported the link between motivations and hiking intention, the relationship may be altered based on psychological influences unique to the pandemic situations—perceived risk and coping appraisals.

Keywords: leisure sport ; push–pull motivation ; perceived risk ; coping appraisal ; covid-19

1. Introduction

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has spread fast globally and severely impacted people's health ^[1]. One concern during the pandemic has been the level of inactivity among people, especially Gen Z. Gen Z, the “net” generation or the digital natives, is currently studying in secondary and higher education or has recently entered the employment market ^[2]. Segmenting the market by differentiating generational groups is a common way to understand consumer behavior better. The generation of baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (Millennials) have been studied extensively. However, little attention has been paid to an emerging Gen Z. Gen Z has been treated as the world's most influential consumer group, representing 40% of all consumers by 2020 ^[3]. According to the China statistical yearbook, Gen Z accounted for 10.74% in 2019 ^[4]. Compared with other generations, Gen Z spends less time outside and easily loses a connection to nature, especially under the severe behavioral restrictions due to COVID-19. Louv ^[5] claimed that because these young people have been raised in a digital world, nature has gradually become something to watch (i.e., nature videos) or ignore. Declining nature participation may result in physical and mental issues. Since Gen Z is less vulnerable to COVID-19, they are recommended to spend time outdoors, in natural environments, and engaging in sport activities to maintain health and well-being in the short and long term ^[6].

A possible remedy that can help improve people's inactivity in COVID-19 situations is outdoor sports due to a relatively safer environment than traditional facility-based activities. Data showed an increased rate of outdoor recreation participation, presumably due to the safer environment ^[7]. Among various nature recreation, day hiking has received keen attention ^[8]. As a nature-based outdoor activity, hiking is beneficial to mental health and well-being ^[9]. Wen et al. ^[10] also mentioned that hiking would allow participants to enjoy nature, contact others, and release the pressure derived from the pandemic in a relatively safer environment.

Before the outbreak of COVID-19 in China, hiking was a popular outdoor activity among Chinese citizens ^[11]. The Chinese government has adopted plenty of policies and measures fighting against the pandemic, encouraging people to return to everyday life based on the successful progress of COVID-19 control ^{[1][12]}. Wen et al. ^[10] claimed that outdoor recreation like hiking could serve as a traveling option for people during the holidays. Although various studies have supported the link between motivations and hiking intention, the relationship may be altered based on psychological influences unique to the pandemic situations—namely, perceived risk and coping appraisals. Under such an environment, does Gen Z still have the intention to go hiking? The literature does not include systematic and empirical investigations demonstrating how people's perceived risk and coping appraisal influence their motivations and hiking intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, sports marketers must understand Gen Z's consumption behaviors and what factors young consumers consider ^[13].

Motivation is an essential determinant of behavioral intention ^{[14][15]}. Prior researchers adopted the push–pull theory to interpret the influence of participants' internal and external motivations on their attitude or behavioral intentions ^{[15][16]}. For example, a study conducted to understand Chinese people's marathon participation found that internal motivation (i.e., excitement) was positively associated with their behavioral intention ^[17]. Sato et al. ^[18] also demonstrated that Japanese

people's behavioral intention (i.e., recommending adventure tourism destination) was positively associated with external motivations (i.e., cultural aspects of the destination and activity-related environment) in the context of white-water rafting. Happ et al. [19] showed that hikers' external motivations (i.e., competition and exhibitionism) had significant associations with their attitudes toward hiking activities and intention to visit the destination. While internal motivations (i.e., social interaction and challenge) only influenced one's attitude to the activities. Thus, there are mixed findings regarding the impact of push–pull motivations on behavioral intentions in tourism and leisure contexts.

The mixed findings regarding the relationship between motivations and behavioral intention are partly because of insufficient consideration of moderating variables. Due to the pandemic, individuals have started to pay more attention to risk and coping when making decisions about sport and physical activities. These constructs are imperative during unexpected risk events like the pandemic of COVID-19. Perceived risk appraisal refers to an individual's perceptions of their susceptibility to harm. Previous studies found that perceived risk can play a moderating role in the relationship between motivations and behavioral intention in various contexts such as leisure and outdoor activities [20][21][22]. Rather, the authors of [23] also demonstrated that people's risk perception can influence their behaviors. In addition, coping appraisal—the ability to cope with the potential loss or damage arising from the threat—is also an important cognitive component when unexpected crises occur [24]. The coping appraisal could moderate the relationship between motivation and behavioral intention [25][26][27][28]. Perceived risk and coping appraisal can interactively moderate the relationship between motivations and intention [29][30]. Nevertheless, such moderating roles have not been assessed in the crisis contexts like the COVID-19 situation.

2. Push–Pull Motivations and Hiking Intention

Sport participants' motivations are multifaceted. Participation in recreational sports or physical activities includes a variety of motivations such as socialization, goal achievement, and escaping from boredom or daily life [31]. Prior scholars categorized motives into internal and external propositions [32]. Internal motivations are identified as internal psychological comprehensions that drive individuals to engage in certain behaviors. In contrast, external motivators are social or environmental factors that draw individuals to engage in certain behaviors [33]. For example, individuals are internally motivated when engaging in a particular activity driven by principles, feelings, and ambitions. Externally motivated individuals are driven by external environments such as advertising, media, and attributes of products and services.

The push–pull motivation framework has captured the multifaceted motivations in leisure and tourism. Push motivation, also called intrinsic motivation, is a fundamental and internal desire to get out from their living places to undertake travel [34]. Pull motivation, also called extrinsic motivation, is the external factors like destination attributes that attract people to visit the specific destinations over other places [34][35]. The push–pull motivation framework helps explain travel behaviors as to whether to go (push) and where to go (pull). Accordingly, the push–pull motivation framework can be applied to understand the socio-psychological decision-making process by internal desires and external forces [36][37].

The relationship between push–pull motivation and behavioral intention has been of significant interest in sport, events, and tourism [17][18]. For example, a previous study demonstrated that internal motivation, or excitement, positively correlates with intending to participate in, revisit, and recommend Chinese marathon events [17]. Khuong and Ha [38] also found that tourists' returning intention to the destination is enhanced by the push and pull motivations. More consistent with the current study context (i.e., hiking), Sato et al. [18] found that push and pull motivations are significantly associated with sport tourists' intentions to revisit the outdoor sport destination (i.e., white-water rafting destination).

3. The Moderating Roles of Perceived Risk and Coping Appraisal

People worry, feel uncomfortable, and believe they are in danger due to the outbreak of COVID-19 [23][39]. In such situations, risk perception and coping appraisals are two important psychological factors that may influence behaviors. First, the authors of [23] defined the perceived risk as the perceived level of possible loss by an individual due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. As described previously in the literature on risk perception and health behavior, susceptibility plays a significant role in determining how individuals perceive risk [40]. Despite various cultures (e.g., ethnic background), regions (e.g., Eastern vs. Western), and countries [41], perceived risk has proven to be a vital predictor for health-protective behavior in many studies regarding respiratory infectious diseases [42]. Secondly, coping appraisal includes perceived self-efficacy (the belief that they can conduct the suggested behavior effectively to prevent the risk) and perceived response efficacy (the belief that they are performing the suggested action successfully to avoid the risk) [43].

Scholars have argued that perceived risk can moderate the relationship between motivations and behavioral intention [20]. Such moderating roles of perceived risk can be well explained based on the prospect theory [44]. Prospect theory

suggests that individuals make decisions under risky and uncertain situations by evaluating potential gains and losses ^[45]. People tend to be more risk averse when the problem is framed as gains, whereas they tend to be less risk averse if they think they are at a loss ^[46]. In other words, people become more sensitive about losses compared to gains ^[47]. Prospect theory provides a comprehensive understanding of individuals' decision-making process. Specifically, an individual's evaluation of potential gains and losses will influence their preferences and behaviors under risk and uncertainty ^[29]. Different people evaluated the perceived gain and loss based on customers' perceptions of specific behavior and individual differences ^[48]. As a result, people will have different reactions and psychological effects towards the same amount of loss ^[49].

Gains are associated with the actualization of tourism motivation, and losses are involved with risk ^[50]. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider gains and losses as push–pull motivation and perceived risk, respectively. People consider both motivations and risks when deciding whether or not to visit a focal destination ^[51], meaning that motivations and risk perceptions are interactively influencing behavioral intention. For example, in the context of upscale restaurants, motivations (i.e., intellectual and escape) significantly influence visit intention. This relationship is more prominent in consumers whose perceived risk is low ^[22]. Focusing on the Ebola case, Cahyanto et al. ^[52] also indicated that perceived risk influenced Americans' avoidance of domestic travel behaviors. Similarly, Tavitiyaman and Qu ^[53] concluded that travelers' risk perception of SARS and tsunami negatively influenced travel intention to Thailand.

In addition to perceived risk, it is essential to consider the effect of coping appraisal. Coping appraisal refers to an individual's assessment of his or her ability to cope with and avert the potential loss or damage arising from the threat ^[24]. For example, individuals can still decide to travel to the destination with risk if they can protect themselves by evaluating the situation and taking necessary protection actions. In the Protective Motivation Theory, the coping appraisal consists of (1) self-efficacy and (2) response efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual's perception of their capability to perform behaviors. Response efficacy refers to the perceived effectiveness of recommended risk preventative behaviors. Previous literature suggests that perceived self-efficacy and response efficacy can be associated with individuals' behavioral intention. For example, tourists with high coping appraisal demonstrated stronger protection intention in the contexts of hospitality in Malaysia ^[54]. Focusing on food safety, Choi et al. ^[55] found that US college students with high perceived self-efficacy and perceived response efficacy tend to choose a safer restaurant to eat. These findings are in line with the food safety research of Crowley et al. ^[56], revealing that coping appraisal enhanced Americans' intentions not to purchase irradiated food because of its potential health risks.

Prior research has shown that people with greater self-efficacy had stronger motivation to participate in physical activity ^{[25][26]}. Similarly, physical activity participants with high self-efficacy in the self-enhancing condition (i.e., intellectual motivation) do more exercise ^[28].

According to the Risk Perception Attitude (RPA) framework ^[40], those who have solid coping appraisal are likely to treat potential risks as challenges to be overcome, whereas those lacking coping appraisal typically think they have a great possibility to risk ^[57]. Four groups are formed based on individuals' risk perceptions and coping appraisal ^[29]. They are (1) the responsive attitude group (high perceived risk, high coping appraisal), (2) the avoidance attitude group (high risk perceptions, low coping appraisal), (3) the proactive attitude group (low risk perceptions, high coping appraisal), and (4) the indifference attitude group (low perceived risk, low coping appraisal), suggesting that risk perception and coping appraisal are mutually interactive. Researchers found that if the environment gave a specific level of risk, those with more robust coping appraisal were likely to show more positive health intention than those with lower coping appraisal ^[30]. In the research of food delivery under the COVID-19, Leung and Cai ^[28] revealed that coping significantly moderated the relationship between perceived risk and purchase intention. Specifically, higher self-efficacy customers are more likely to order digital food deliveries even facing perceived risk. When it comes to watching videos, Wong and Yang ^[58] found a significant moderating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between watching positive risk-taking videos and risk-taking intention. Individuals with higher self-efficacy will have lower risky behavior when perceiving higher risk. Wang et al. ^[59] also indicated a significant moderating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between perceived value and purchase intention. In the current study, the perceived risk captures one's expectation of exposure to the COVID-19 virus during hiking. For instance, when someone goes hiking and feels serious about the threat to health, the individual has a high likelihood of feeling risky. The person may respond to this situation and take measures to reduce the threat effectively. Some of them will be confident in their abilities to deal with such a situation. Therefore, they will still want to go hiking even with the COVID-19 threat to their health. However, some may not be confident of their ability, so their intention for hiking will be influenced.

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