Perceived Risk and the Non-Institutionalized Tourist Role: The Case of Israeli Student Ex-Backpackers

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While backpacking is often associated with a propensity for risk-taking, the literature lacks quantitative analyses of backpackers' perceived risk. The current study attempts to fill this gap by exploring risk perceptions of 579 Israeli students who were backpackers. The study findings indicate that perceived risk of the backpackers' experience is a multidimensional phenomenon, which includes factors of risk similar to those mentioned in both the consumer behavior literature and in studies on perceived risk in tourism. This finding supports the thesis that backpacking is becoming more institutionalized and less distinct from conventional mass tourism. In addition, the study reveals that perceptions of risk involved in the backpacking experience vary across the individual's characteristics, such as gender, past backpacking experience, and preference for fellow travelers. This is congruent with the contemporary notion of backpacking as a heterogeneous tourist experience.

Keywords: *perceived risk; risk-taking propensity; backpacking experience; Israeli backpackers; youth traveling*

Consumer behavior literature has dealt with the theory of perceived risk for more than four decades. Perceived risk is defined in this literature as "a consumer's perception of the overall negativity of a course of action based upon an assessment of the possible negative outcomes and the likelihood that those outcomes will occur" (Mowen and Minor 1998, p. 176). According to Conchar et al. (2004), who proposed an integrated model of consumer perceived risk, the marketing literature often conceptualizes risk as involving two elements: uncertainty and consequences. Yet, there are numerous diverse and sometimes conflicting definitions and models.

Despite the importance of the subject, tourism literature has only turned its attention to the concept of perceived risk in recent years. Previous investigations reveal tourist risk perception to be a multidimensional phenomenon, consisting of various components, varying from the physical to the psychological, from the functional to the political (e.g., Fuchs and Reichel 2004, 2006; Lepp and Gibson 2003; Mansfeld 1996; Pizam 1999; Reisinger and Mavondo 2005; Roehl and Fesenmaier 1992; Sönmez and Graefe, 1998a, 1998b). The study of these dimensions was usually geared toward particular tourist destinations and the way that these dimensions of perceived risk are related to various tourists' characteristics, such as gender, previous travel experience and affinity for novelty. Yet, very few studies focused on the perceived risk involved in a particular travel experience of a defined segment. The current study attempts to fill this gap in the literature by exploring risk perceptions of individuals who engaged in the noninstitutionalized form of tourism that is often referred to in contemporary research as backpacking (Noy 2004; Noy and Cohen 2005; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002).

Historically, the study of backpacking is often attributed to Cohen's typology of the "tourist role" (1972), which differentiated between noninstitutionalized tourists and their institutionalized counterparts. The conceptual differentiation between institutionalized and noninstitutionalized tourist roles associates organized and individual mass tourists with the quest for familiarity, as opposed to drifters and explorers characterized as novelty and adventure seekers (Cohen 1972). In line with this distinction, a more recent study by Lepp and Gibson (2003) reveals that tourists seeking novelty perceive lower levels of risk associated with international tourism than those seeking familiarity. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that backpackers (as noninstitutionalized

Arie Reichel is a professor of management and dean of the School of Management and the founder of the Department of Hotel and Tourism Management at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. He earned his PhD at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He taught at New York University and the New School University. Professor Reichel has published in the Annals of Tourism Research, Tourism Management *as well as in other leading tourism and hospitality management journals. He also served on the board of advisors to the Israel Ministry of Tourism. Galia Fuchs earned her PhD at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. She is a lecturer of marketing and services in the School of Business Administration, the College of Management Academic Studies, Israel. She specializes in risk perception and services marketing. Dr. Fuchs has published in the* Tourism: An Interdisciplinary Journal *and in the* Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing. *Natan Uriely earned his PhD in sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is a senior lecturer and chairman of the Department of Hotel and Tourism Management at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. Dr. Uriely specializes in the sociology of tourism and leisure. His articles have appeared in* Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Travel Research, Tourism Management, Leisure Studies, Sociology of Sport, International Sociology, *and other journals.*

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tourists) would differ from institutionalized mass tourists in terms of their approach toward risk. For instance, backpackers might not conform to the depiction of institutionalized mass tourists as rational consumers who tend to be risk averse, and prefer avoiding visits to risky destinations (Lepp and Gibson 2003; Poon and Adams 2000; Sönmez and Graefe (1998b). Moreover, backpackers might have their own particular perceptions of risk, such as commercialized and overcrowded sites, and consequences of illicit behavior such as drug consumption. In addition, individual characteristics, such as previous travel experience and gender, might have a different impact on backpackers than on conventional mass tourists. Note, however, that the assumption of clear differences between backpackers and conventional mass tourists in terms of perceived risk might be disproved in light of recent studies that point to a process through which the differences between the former and the latter are decreasing (Hampton 1998; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Schvvens 2002; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002). Also, it is worth noting that recent research suggests that while backpackers might share a similar form of travel, they are not homogeneous in terms of their attitudes and motivations (Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002). In light of these findings and trends, one might hypothesize that backpackers' risk perceptions and propensity are heterogeneous as well.

In an attempt to examine these assumptions, an exploratory study was conducted with Israeli students who experienced "backpacking." It has been documented that a considerable number of Israeli backpackers follow a pattern, going from the obligatory military service to higher education via the backpacking experience stage (Noy and Cohen 2005). These students were asked to fill out a close-ended questionnaire that included questions about the various types of risk involved in their travel, including health, crime, terror, injuries, stolen money, social image, and other aspects of perceived risk including overall risk and risk propensity. These aspects of perceived risk were examined in relation to the backpackers' characteristics, such as gender, previous experience in backpacking, form of travel, and type of military service. By exploring these issues, the study aims to provide additional insight into both the study area of backpacking, and the literature on tourists' risk perceptions and propensity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to consumer behavior literature, consumer perceived risk can be of a number of types: physical—the risk of physical harm to the consumer as a result of the malfunctioning of the product; financial—the risk that the money invested in the product will be lost; performance—the risk identified with the possibility that the product will not operate as expected; social—the fear that the purchase will not conform to the standards of the reference group; psychological—the fear that the product will not be compatible with the self-image of the consumer; time—the possibility that consumption of the product will be overly time consuming; and opportunity loss—the risk that by taking a course of one action, the consumer will miss out on something else, he /she would otherwise do (Bettman 1973, 1975; Conchar et al. 2004; Dowling 1986; Grahame, Dowling, and Staelin 1994; Jacoby and Kaplan 1972; Peter and Ryan 1976; Zikmund and Scott 1973).

As soon as the consumer has experienced a certain level of risk, his/her behavior changes, from delaying the purchase, to using strategies designed to reduce the level of risk to "tolerable" (Mowen and Minor 1998; Roselius 1971). For example, developing brand loyalty, searching for information, purchasing a popular brand, and purchasing expensive or inexpensive brands. These strategies may boost confidence in the results of the purchase and reduce the severity of the results in case of failure. It should be noted that perceived risk influences the consumer even if the risk does not exist in reality. In contrast, an unperceived risk will not affect consumer behavior even if it is real and tangible.

Being an integral part of the service sector, tourism is characterized by intangibility, inseparability, variability and "perishability" that intensify consumers' perceived risk compared to products or goods (Grönroos 1990; Lovelock 1996; Zeithaml and Bitner 1996). In addition to the aforementioned attributes, the tourism product is prone to influence by particular factors, such as bad weather, unfriendly locals, airport strikes, distasteful local food, terror, crime, political unrest, disease, and natural disasters. The research in this area of study suggests that these factors raise the level of tourists' perceived risk (Fuchs and Reichel 2004, 2006; Mansfeld 1992; Pizam and Mansfeld 1996; Reisinger and Mavondo 2005; Roehl and Fesenmaier 1992; Seaton and Bennett 1996; Sönmez 1998; Sönmez and Graefe 1998a; Tsaur, Tzeng, and Wang 1997; Witt and Mountinho 1995). In addition to measurement of tourists' perceived risk in general, the literature addresses various types, or aspects, of risk perceived by tourists. For example, Tsaur, Tzeng, and Wang (1997) focused on physical risk and equipment risk. One of their main findings illustrated the significant role of the "law and order" risk dimension, a part of physical risk. Mitchell and Vassos (1997) identified a list of 43 risk factors ranging from serious occurrences such as natural disasters, to trivial matters like nonparticipation of a tour representative in activities. Mäser and Weiermair (1998) investigated various aspects of perceived risk through empirical analysis based on a survey of Austrian residents. In their research, the assumed types of risk were associated with travel-related diseases, crime, natural disasters, accidents, hygiene, danger of various means of transportation, culture/language barriers, and uncertainty with destination-specific regulations and laws. More recently, Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) utilized 13 travel risk perceptions ranging from cultural to equipment/functional, financial, health, physical, political, psychological, satisfaction, social , airplane hijacking, bomb explosion, biochemical attack, to time.

Tourists' perceived risk is also identified in the literature as a determinant of visitation patterns in various destinations. In this respect, Sönmez and Graefe (1998b) examined types of risk associated with international travel and the overall degree of safety felt during such travel, as well as the effect on the likelihood of travel to, or avoidance of, certain geographic regions on the respondent's next international vacation. Their study examined various types of risk, including equipment/functional risk, financial risk, health risk, physical risk, political instability risk, psychological risk, satisfaction risk, social risk, terrorism, and time risk. The results revealed several perceived risks as strong predictors of the likelihood of avoiding destinations. For example, those perceiving a higher degree of risk in international travel due to political instability were likely to say they

would avoid traveling to Asia and South America, whereas those who perceived more risk due to terrorism were likely to say they would avoid the Middle East and Africa. Clearly, the threat of terror, politically motivated violence, constitutes a major risk associated with international travel (Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow 1999).

The literature also reveals that tourists' characteristics, such as nationality, previous tourist experience, gender, and quest for novelty, have an impact on their perceptions of risk. With regard to tourists' country of origin, Fuchs and Reichel (2004) compared and contrasted the destination risk perception of tourists from different nations while visiting Israel. They found destination risk perception to be a multidimensional concept that varies across nationalities and cultures. Similarly, Seddighi, Nuttall, and Theocharous (2001) found different levels of perceived risk among travel agents from six European countries. The travel agents were from Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, and the destinations under investigation included Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Malta, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey. Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) found that travel risk perception was a function of cultural orientation and psychographic factors. Pizam and colleagues (2004) found travel risk-taking and sensation-seeking tendencies to vary among nationalities.

Previous tourist experience also appears to explain differences in perceptions of risk. Specifically, a study conducted by Pearce (1996) indicates that less-experienced tourists were concerned about health, terror and food concerns, whereas more-experienced tourists were mainly concerned about risks associated with cultural barriers. With respect to gender, the literature appears to be inconsistent. Although Sönmez and Graefe (1998a) found no differences between men and women in terms of perceived risk, a study by Mattila et al. (2001) on student vacationing on spring break, found gender as having significant impact on health-risk behavior. Lepp and Gibson (2003) indicated that men were less concerned about health- and food-related risks than women. Note, however, that Lepp and Gibson's study (2003) focuses on tourists' quest for novelty as a determinant of risk perceptions. In this context, they utilize Cohen's typology of the tourist role (1972) to associate perceived risk to particular forms of travel.

Risk Perception and Tourist Role

As previously noted, Cohen's typology (1972) consists of a distinction between *institutionalized* and *noninstitutionalized* tourist roles. Whereas the former is associated with a quest for familiarity, the latter is characterized by novelty seeking. The two categories were further classified by Cohen (1972) into organized-group and individual mass tourists within institutionalized tourism, and into explorers and drifters within noninstitutionalized tourism. The term *organized-group mass tourists* refers to the least adventurous kinds of travelers, whose excursions are entirely planned within the "environmental bubble" provided by the tourism industry. Conversely, the term *drifters* refers to the most spontaneous and unconstrained kinds of travelers who tend to shun regular tourist routes and use a minimum of tourism facilities in trips that are mostly unplanned. By applying Cohen's typology of tourist roles in terms of quest for familiarity/novelty, Lepp and Gibson (2003) associate higher levels of perceived risk with organized and individual mass tourists. Accordingly, Lepp and Gibson (2003) conclude that what may be a source of concern for conventional mass tourists may be a source of excitement for explorers and drifters (akin to backpackers). This perspective is congruent with early conceptualizations of noninstitutionalized tourists as adventure seekers (Cohen 1972; Vogt 1976). Furthermore, it receives support from Elsrud (2001) who found that risk and adventure are central to the construction of a backpacker identity. Specifically, it appears that backpackers' narratives tend to include accounts of their supposedly adventurous experiences as part of their attempt to distinguish themselves from conventional mass tourists (Elsrud 2001).

Interesting findings derive from studies that address the interaction between *tourist role* and individual characteristics, such as gender and past travel experience. For example, Gibson and Jordan (1998a, 1998b) found that, in contrast to institutionalized tourists, drifter women perceived the risk of terror as less threatening than drifter men. Intriguingly, experienced tourists, who comply with the features of both organized mass tourists and the drifter roles, perceived greater risk in cultural barriers than their less experienced counterparts. In contrast, the risk perceptions of inexperienced tourists were found to be higher than those of their experienced counterparts (Lepp and Gibson 2003). Note, however, that these studies identify the tourist role by relying on their respondents' quest for novelty, rather than their actual travel experience. In this respect, the current study introduces a first attempt to measure levels of perceived risk among individuals who actually experienced backpacking.

The attempts to measure and contrast perceived risk across tourist roles should be reconsidered in light of two developments identified in literature on backpacking. Specifically, a growing number of studies indicate that backpacking is becoming less distinct from institutionalized tourism (Hampton 1998; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Schvvens 2002; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002), and that backpackers are actually a subset of all independent travelers (Hyde and Lawson 2003) and cannot be regarded as a homogeneous category of tourism (Cohen 1972, 1973, 2004; Maoz 2005; Riley 1988; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002). For example, Riley (1988) reveals that some backpackers are indeed interested in meaningful experiences for self-development purposes. Yet, she also found that similar to mass tourists, many backpackers are motivated by hedonistic considerations and perceive their trip as a period of recreation. Similarly, Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai (2002) empirically demonstrated how Israeli backpackers differ in the degree of alienation from their home culture and thus travel in quest for different modes of tourist experiences. Their argument regarding the plural nature of backpacking is also based on the finding that some individual backpackers, referred to as "multi-type backpackers," corresponded to more than one mode of tourist experience across their "backpacking biography" or even during a single trip. Accordingly, Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai (2002) conclude that backpacking is becoming less distinct from mass tourism in terms of motivations and attitudes.

The notion of backpacking as a diversified phenomenon receives additional support in studies that associate attitudinal and behavioral variants within backpacking with individual characteristics of backpackers, such as social class

(Cohen 2004), age (Maoz 2005), gender (Elsrud 2001; Noy 2004) and country of origin (Noy and Cohen 2005). For example, Noy and Cohen (2005) suggest that Israelis and possibly Japanese differ from backpackers of other nationalities in terms of their inclination to restrict their interaction with co-nationals rather than with members of all countries. In addition, they point toward cultural differences, such as musical fashions and use of drugs, between middle-class and working-class backpackers.

Taking into account the lack of empirical research on the risk perception of the backpacker experience, the first goal of the current study is to identify the various dimensions of backpacking experience risk perceptions. Second, in light of both the original notion of backpacking as a distinct category of tourism (Cohen 1972) together with the growing indications about the diminishing differences between backpackers and conventional mass tourists (Hampton 1998; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Schvvens 2002; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002), the study questions whether the risk dimensions identified in this study would be similar or different to those reported in studies on perceived risk of conventional mass tourists (Fuchs and Reichel 2004, 2006). Third, given recent indications of the growing heterogeneity within backpacking in terms of motivation, attitudes, and personal characteristics (Cohen 1972, 1973, 2004; Maoz 2005; Riley 1988; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai. 2002), it is hypothesized that the risk perceptions identified in this study would be heterogeneous as well. In this context, the study examines possible variations in risk perception of backpackers, overall risk, and risk-taking propensity profiles across subgroups based on variables such as gender and previous experience. Specific features of Israeli backpackers, including the nature of their previous military service and inclination to form enclaves of Israeli backpackers in various destinations (Noy and Cohen 2005), are examined as well. In sum, it is assumed that the identified profiles of backpackers' risk perceptions, overall risk, and risk-taking propensity would vary across gender, previous travel experience, military service, and preference for travel with colleagues.

METHOD

To examine the risk perception, background, and behavior of backpackers, a questionnaire was used. The backpacking experience risk-perception questionnaire is based on Fuchs and Reichel's (2004, 2006) tourist risk-perception questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed according to accumulated literature on consumer risk as well as specific tourist destination risk perceptions, that is, Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992), Sönmez (1998), and Sönmez and Graefe (1998a, 1998b).

In addition, input from in-depth interviews with tourists, tourist guides, and tourism experts was integrated into the questionnaire (e.g., "the way the locals would react to tourist behavior," "crowded sightseeing," "tasteless food," and "tourist valuable vacation time"). There were a total of 34 questions about risk perceptions, each measured on a 7-point Likert scale. For the purpose of the present study, the questionnaire was adapted to backpackers by referring to their experience as well as to additional information from the backpacking literature (e.g., Elsrud 2001; Lepp and Gibson 2003). Moreover, the authors conducted a series of in-depth interviews with 12 former backpackers who at the time attended two major universities in Israel. The interviews were semistructured, focusing on the backpacking experience and risk perception toward the trip and destination chosen. Special issues raised by the backpackers were added to the questionnaire. For example, it became apparent during interviews that the issues of traveling alone, (as opposed to with company), or traveling only with Israeli colleagues or with foreigners, were significant issues related to the backpacking experience risk perception.

The study's final version of the questionnaire begins with a clarifying question that examines whether the respondent has had backpacking experience during the last three years. Those respondents, who answered negatively, were thanked and hence excluded from the analysis. The following section of the questionnaire deals with motives for visiting the last backpacking destination, such as visiting new sites, new experiences, and meeting local people. The next part includes questions about planning and implementing the trip, including information on preference for fellow travelers, modes of transport, and accommodations. Next, questions about the risk perception prior to the backpacking trip were included. The respondents were asked about pretrip perceptions to assess their level of risk prior to the actual experience, that is, presumably before risk-reduction strategies were implemented. Note that considerable part of the available studies on tourist risk perceptions relied on reconstructing past risk perceptions (e.g., Mäser and Weiermair 1998; Roehl and Fesenmaier 1992).

Overall risk perceptions were measured by two questions: "I worried that the destinations were risky" (Q36) and "destinations I chose were riskier than others" (Q70). Also, risk-taking propensity was measured by the question "How would you evaluate yourself in terms of risk-taking propensity?" (Q88). The questionnaire also included information about past travel experience and sociodemographics.

The backpacker-adapted questionnaire was tested for clarity on a group of 16 students with backpacking experience. After minor modifications, the final version of the questionnaire was ready for distribution.

A group of six tourism and hospitality management students were trained in administering questionnaires as part of a senior year seminar. The students were closely supervised by the authors. Data collection took place in November and December 2004 by a self-administered questionnaire. On average, it took half an hour to complete the questionnaire. The initial sampling method was similar to the snowball effect. The nucleus group of backpackers was identified through a call for participation in a study on backpackers, posted at the authors' institutions. At an early stage of data collection, it became apparent that backpackers form a special bond that enabled the writers to contact several subjects through recommendations of fellow backpackers. In addition, approximately half of the subjects were approached while traveling to school on a train. This is the most widely used form of transportation for students on their way to campus or visiting home for the weekend. The "captive audience" on the 90-minute train rides was attentive to the requests of fellow students to participate in a relatively tedious task of a 30-minute questionnaire. This informal nonrandom method yielded hundreds of responses, as most of those who identified themselves as having

backpacking experience were ready to cooperate. The informal Israeli culture—evident during the snowball part of the study and the intercity train rides—allows respondents to be approached for cooperation without a sense of intrusion. Note that the response rate is impossible to estimate, as it was not clear who did not agree to respond for lack of motivation or backpacking experience. The unusually large sample of 579 usable questionnaires of past backpackers gives a certain level of comfort in the generalizability of the results.

RESULTS

Out of the 579 respondents, 302 (52.2%) were male and 277 (47.8%) female. The average age was 25. The youngest was 19 and the oldest 39. The backpackers averaged 14 years of formal education. Most of the respondents (94.6%) have served in the military. Among those who served in the military, 204 (37%) served in combat units.

The respondents were characterized in terms of their past backpacking experience risk perceptions, overall risk perception, and risk propensity across personal features and trip features. Personal features include gender and military service. Trip features include traveling alone versus with a companion, traveling with Israeli companions versus traveling with foreigners, and first trip versus returning to destination. First, the dimensions of risk perceptions were identified. Next, these risk dimensions as well as overall risk perceptions and risk propensity were used as means for featuring the profiles of subgroups among the respondents.

Dimensions of Backpackers' Risk Perceptions

To test the underlying dimensions of backpackers risk perceptions, factor analysis on 32 particular risk measures was utilized, employing the method of principal component with varimax rotation. The treatment of the missing values was done according to the list wise option. A summary of the results of the factor analysis are presented in Table 1. The cutting point of variable inclusion in a particular factor was above .5. Accordingly, 25 variables were grouped into 8 factors.

Factor 1, "Site-related physical," includes the questions that measure food safety, food taste, cheating, facilities acceptability, crime, and diseases (Q37, Q45, Q38, Q51, Q46, Q56, respectively). This factor reflects the risk perception that stems from visiting particular destinations and accounts for 10.53% of the variance. The Cronbach's alpha of this factor is 0.81.

Factor 2, "Sociopsychological," includes questions that measure the compatibility of the trip with self-image, the backpacker's image in the eyes of his/her family, the backpackers' perception of how the trip might affect his/her future, the way friends think of the backpacker, and the effect of academic or professional delay on future success (Q57, Q50, Q44, Q62, and Q43, respectively). This factor accounts for 9.18% of the trip variance and its Cronbach's alpha is 0.72. This factor reflects the sociopsychological risk stemming from the backpacker's decision to take the trip.

Factor 3, "Physical harm," includes the questions that measure car accidents, natural disasters, injury, and terrorism (Q41, Q61, Q58, and Q48, respectively). This factor reflects the risk perception of possible physical harm and accounts for 8.92% of the variance. The Cronbach's alpha of this factor is 0.77.Comparing Factors 1 and 3, it can be speculated that Factor 1 reflects risks that are mainly under the control of the local population, while Factor 3 represents risk issues that are not necessarily under the control of the local population.

Factor 4, "Expectations," includes questions about expectations that haven't been fulfilled, dissatisfaction with the trip, mistaken choice of the destination, and the trip as a waste of time (Q66, Q60, Q67, and Q55, respectively). This factor reflects the fear that the trip would fail to meet expectations, and accounts for 8.13% of the variance. The Cronbach's alpha of this factor is 0.79.

Factor 5, "Sociopolitical difficulties," includes questions that measure political unrest, hostile natives, and strikes (Q52, Q54, and Q49, respectively). This factor reflects the fear of danger that stems from the sociopolitical condition of the destination, and accounts for 7.96% of the variance. The Cronbach's alpha of this factor is 0.75.

Factor 6, "Financial risk," includes questions that measure expected extra expenses, impact of trip on the individual's financial situation, and fear that the chosen destination would be more expensive than other destinations (Q40, Q47, and Q65, respectively). This factor reflects the financial risk perception in selecting a particular destination, and, in the current study, accounts for 8.13% of the variance. Cronbach's alpha is 0.64.

Factor 7, "Mass risk," reflects the risk stemming from commercialized and crowded sites (Q59 and Q64). It accounts for 5.87% of the variance. The Pearson correlation between Q59 and Q64 is 0.53.

Factor 8, "Self-behavior risk," contains questions measuring the level of the backpacker's apprehension related to drug abuse side effects and the negative impression his/her conduct might make on locals (Q63 and Q42). This factor reflects the fear of danger due to the backpacker's behavior. Factor 8 accounts for 4.67% of the variance. The Pearson correlation between Q63 and Q42 is 0.24.

The above eight factors account for 62.65% of the variance. The following questions were not included in any factor due to low loading (less than 0.5): Q53, "preparation would take too much time"; Q39, "weather problems"; and Q68, the unwelcoming attitude of employees in the local tourism industry.

Backpackers' Features and Risk Perception and Propensity Profiles

The eight risk perception factors, along with the two questions on overall destination risk perception as well as the question on risk-taking propensity, form a possible multivariate profile that will distinguish between male and female backpackers, and between combat and noncombat military experience by means of discriminant analysis. The profiles provided by discriminant analysis serve as predictors of group membership, for example, a particular risk perception profile serves as a predictor of classification into male or female. Yet, these profiles might serve as possible multivariate characteristics of the two groups under investigation. Specifically, although originally serving as independent variables aimed at predicting group membership, in our case to one of two possible subsegments, they can be interpreted as "determinants" or "profiles" as will be outlined below.

TABLE 1

VALIDATION RESULTS: FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS VARIMAX ROTATION (N = 579)

Factor	Loading	% of Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha	Pearson Correlation
Factor 1				
"Site-related physical"		10.53	0.81	—
Q37 Food safety	0.78			
Q45 Food taste	0.70			
Q38 Cheating	0.62			
Q51 Facilities acceptability	0.60			
Q46 Crime	0.56			
Q56 Diseases	0.55			
Factor 2				
"Sociopsychological"		9.18	0.72	—
Q57 Self-image	0.73			
Q50 Way family thinks	0.69			
Q44 Negative impression in the future	0.66			
Q62 Way friends thinks	0.66			
Q43 Effect on future success	0.61			
Factor 3				
"Physical harm"		8.92	0.77	—
Q41 Car accidents	0.73			
Q61 Natural disasters	0.66			
Q58 Injury	0.65			
Q48 Terrorism	0.58			
Factor 4				
"Expectations"		8.13	0.79	—
Q66 Not meet the expectation	0.77			
Q60 Dissatisfaction	0.77			
Q67 Make a mistake in choosing the destination	0.74			
Q55 Waste of time	0.56			
Factor 5				
"Sociopolitical difficulties"		7.96	0.72	—
Q52 Political unrest	0.69			
Q54 Hostile native	0.67			
Q49 Strikes	0.63			
Factor 6				
"Financial"		7.38	0.64	—
Q40 Unexpected extra expenses	0.77			
Q47 Impact on financial situation	0.70			
Q65 More expensive than other destinations	0.62			
Factor 7				
"Mass"		5.87	—	0.53
Q59 Commercialized	0.81			
Q64 Crowded	0.77			
Factor 8				
"Self-behavior"		0.47	—	0.24
Q63 Side effects of drugs	0.66			
Q42 Negative impressions on locals	0.62			

Gender

As illustrated in Table 2, men are characterized or "profiled" by a "sociopsychological" risk dimension, "sociopolitical difficulties," "mass tourism," "behavioral," and the belief that the destination chosen is "riskier than others." Female backpackers, on the other hand, are associated with "site-related physical"; physical harm," expectations," and financial." They expressed concern that destinations chosen were risky. Female backpackers were also characterized by a tendency to avoid risk.

Military Service

Since the majority of the backpackers had military experience, (compulsory for most young Israelis), a distinction was made between the two groups of those with combat experience versus those without. Since combat experience

TABLE 2

DISCRIMINANAT ANALYSIS RESULTS MALE VS. FEMALE—BACKPACKING RISK PERCEPTIONS

Risk Dimensions	Standardized Coefficients
	Function 1
Factor 1: "Site-related physical"	0.28
Factor 2: "Sociopsychological"	−0.44
Factor 3: "Physical harm"	0.46
Factor 4: "Expectations"	0.08
Factor 5: "Sociopolitical difficulties"	−0.01
Factor 6: "Financial"	0.14
Factor 7: "Mass"	−0.13
Factor 8: "Self-behavior"	−0.29
Destinations I chose were riskier then others	−0.09
I worried that the destinations were risky	0.11
"Risk-taking propensity"*	0.63
1—Male N = 296 Centroid −0.32	
2—Female N = 275 Centroid 0.34	
60.4% correctly classified	
* < 0.01	

*1 = risk taker, 7 = risk averse.

might be associated with gender, cross-tabulation of gender and combat experience was utilized. The results indicated high significance relations between gender and combat experience. For example, 93% of the females had no combat experience versus 35% of the males. Consequently, discriminant analysis of the two groups of combat versus noncombat experience was carried out on male soldiers only. The analysis did not yield significant results.

Types of Trip and Risk Perceptions

Various characteristics of the trip were also examined by means of discriminant analysis to identify group membership prediction profiles in terms of risk-perception and risk-taking propensity of backpackers taking different patterns of trip. The results are presented in Tables 3–6.

Traveling Alone versus Traveling with Others

Table 3 depicts the results of discriminant analysis on backpackers who traveled alone versus those who traveled with a companion or group. Interpretation of the profiles reveal that those who traveled with others are associated with the risk dimensions of physical harm, expectations, and mass tourism, and also the perception that the "destination I chose is riskier than others." Accordingly, those who traveled alone are characterized by the risk dimensions of site-related physical, sociopolitical difficulties, financial, and are relatively risk averse.

Traveling with Foreigners

The respondents were asked about their travel companion pattern, whether they traveled with Israeli companions or with foreign backpackers. As noted earlier, the in-depth interviews revealed this information to be of high significance to the backpacking culture. Table 4 presents the discriminant analysis results of the prediction profiles of group membership of

TABLE 3

DISCRIMINANAT ANALYSIS TRAVELING ALONE VS. TRAVELING WITH OTHERS—BACKPACKERS' RISK PERCEPTIONS

Risk Dimensions	Standardized Coefficients
	Function 1
Factor 1: "Site-related physical"	0.49
Factor 2: "Sociopsychological"	−0.07
Factor 3: "Physical harm"	−0.17
Factor 4: "Expectations"	−0.43
Factor 5: "Sociopolitical difficulties"	0.72
Factor 6: "Financial"	0.16
Factor 7: "Mass"	−0.22
Factor 8: "Self-behavior"	0.05
Destinations I chose were riskier then others	−0.10
I worried that the destinations were risky	0.07
"Risk-taking propensity"*	0.35
0—Traveling Alone N = 457 Centroid 0.11	
1—Traveling with Others N = 98 Centroid −0.51	
82.3% correctly classified	
* < 0.01	

*1 = risk taker, 7 = risk averse.

Israeli backpackers traveling with foreigners versus those traveling with fellow Israelis. Interpretation of the results in terms of group profiles reveals that those traveling with foreign backpackers are characterized by sociopsychological, physical harm, sociopolitical difficulties, mass tourism, self-behavior, and the perception that the destination chosen is riskier than others. They "worried that the destination was risky." Their counterparts are associated with site-related physical, financial, and risk aversion.

TABLE 4

DISCRIMINANAT ANALYSIS TRAVELED WITH FOREIGNERS VS. DID NOT TRAVEL WITH FOREIGNERS—BACKPACKERS' RISK PERCEPTIONS

Risk Dimensions	Standardized Coefficients
	Function 1
Factor 1: "Site related physical"	−0.46
Factor 2: "Sociopsychological"	0.13
Factor 3: "Physical harm"	0.10
Factor 4: "Expectations"	−0.03
Factor 5: "Sociopolitical difficulties"	0.11
Factor 6: "Financial"	−0.15
Factor 7: "Mass"	0.30
Factor 8: "Self-behavior"	0.28
Destinations I chose were riskier then others	0.46
I worried that the destinations were risky	0.17
"Risk-taking propensity"*	−0.71
0—Did Not Travel with Foreigners N = 165 Centroid −0.39	
1—Traveled with Foreigners N = 321 Centroid 0.20	
66.8% correctly classified	
* < 0.01	

*1 = risk taker, 7 = risk averse.

TABLE 5

DISCRIMINANAT ANALYSIS FIRST "BACKPACKERS' TRIP" VS. "REPEAT BACKPACKERS' TRIP"—BACKPACKERS' RISK PERCEPTIONS

Risk Dimensions	Standardized Coefficients
	Function 1
Factor 1: "Site-related physical"	0.53
Factor 2: "Sociopsychological"	0.42
Factor 3: "Physical harm"	0.41
Factor 4: "Expectations"	−0.31
Factor 5: "Sociopolitical difficulties"	−0.22
Factor 6: "Financial"	−0.16
Factor 7: "Mass"	−0.14
Factor 8: "Self-behavior"	−0.10
Destinations I chose were riskier then others	−0.09
I worried that the destinations were risky	0.07
"Risk-taking propensity"*	−0.06
0—First "Backpackers Trip" N = 134	Centroid −0.45
1—Repeated Backpackers Trip N = 348	Centroid −0.17
73.0% correctly classified	
* < 0.01	

*1 = risk taker, 7 = risk averse.

First versus Prerious Backpacking Experience

The backpackers were also divided into two groups in terms of past experience. As seen in Table 5, the prediction profile of those on their first backpacking experience is comprised in terms of expectations, sociopolitical difficulties, financial, mass tourism, and behavioral. Those with multiple backpacking experiences are associated with site-related physical, sociopsychological, and physical harm.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The factor analysis yielded eight factors reflecting backpackers' experience risk perceptions. It is interesting to note that these factors clearly distinguish between two main issues: the first relates to the particular backpacking form of travel, and second, social–personal concerns related to the backpackers' social environment. The former issue includes the first factor—site-related physical—comprising variables associated with the chosen destination, such as food safety and taste, disease, and quality of facilities. The factor also includes concern about crime and fraud. Clearly, these are all common risks awaiting a typical backpacker at tourist destinations. A cursory examination of every backpacker's guide (e.g., Lonely Planet) would indicate particular warnings of these risks. Destination risk factors are also apparent is Factor 3—physical harm. Here, main concerns are road accidents, natural disaster, injury and terrorism. It is possible that common to these issues is destination-related risk beyond the control of hosts and tourists, as opposed to threats specifically targeted at backpackers (such as Factor 1's fraud or crime). Note that recent terror attacks may preclude the issue of terror from this explanation, given that terror acts might be specifically directed toward tourists. Similar to Factor 3, Factor 5—sociopolitical—deals with destination-related risk. Issues like political unrest, strikes, and hostile hosts are clearly characteristics associated with a particular destination or a series of backpackers preferred destinations. On a similar rationale, Factor 6—financial risk—refers to fears of extra expenses accruing during a trip ("destination more expensive than expected") and the negative impact on the subject's financial situation. Known in general as a frugal segment (Riley 1988; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002), it is not surprising that the issue of financial risk is openly presented by backpackers as a tour-related risk.

Factor 7—mass tourism—is also a destination-related dimension. Specifically, the risk elements of overcommercialization and crowded sites are integral parts of certain destinations. It should be noted that backpackers have been described in the literature as mass- and crowd-averse (Noy 2005; Riley 1988; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002). Referring to mass, overcrowded tourist sites as "risks" is congruent with backpacking culture and preferences for remote, off-the-beaten-track destinations.

While the above factors concern risk and threats associated with the destination, three other factors are closely related to backpackers' psychological and sociological concerns. Factor 2—social—concerns risk associated with a backpacker's home social environment and academic/career issues. Specifically, backpackers are confronted with possible lack of compatibility between destinations chosen and self-image. There may also be concern about their image vis-à-vis family and friends. Interestingly, these social concerns are associated with fear of delays in their academic and professional careers. Clearly, career, at least in this case, is an integral part of the sociopsychological environment. Note that this concern is also expressed by backpackers about drugs; they are fearful of being recognized by current or potential colleagues or employees (e.g., Uriely and Belhassen 2005). Interestingly, Factor 8—self-behavior—relates to risk involved with drug abuse side effects and the fear of creating a negative impression on locals. Again, this risk dimension may relate to Uriely and Belhassen's report (2005) of a genuine concern for drug side effects. The issue of "conduct" could also relate to drug consumption. Factor 4—expectations—focuses on expectations, dissatisfaction, and wrong choices, all concerns of individual backpackers. The fear of expectations not being met, or disappointment with a trip or choice of destination seem to prevail as concerns among travelers, including the risk of wasting time.

The risk associated with time is congruent with Mowen and Minor's (1998) definition of time risk as "risk that a decision will cost too much time" (p177). Note that backpackers' preoccupation with time is not trivial, given their image as long-term travelers (Riley 1988).

It is interesting to compare backpacking experience risk factors to institutionalized tourist destination risk perceptions. Will the risk factors identified among backpackers be similar to those of institutionalized tourists? Given that the risk-perception scales utilized in the current study are based significantly on Fuchs and Reichel's (2004, 2006) studies on institutionalized tourist destination risk perceptions, a conceptual comparison is possible. The authors found that the destination risk perception of Israel is composed of six risk types or factors: "human-induced" risk, "financial" risk, "service quality" risk, "sociopsychological" risk, "natural disaster and car accidents" risk, and "food safety and weather" risk. In comparison with the current study, backpackers seem to put more emphasis on issues related to the social environment and personal internal processes. Both backpackers and

institutionalized mass tourists were concerned about the ramifications of their trip on their reference group's opinion. However, backpackers specifically express fears about the consequences of a trip on academic studies, career development, and self-image. This may stem from the uniqueness of this segment's age or lifestyle. Yet, both studies, although conducted on different populations, establish tourist risk perception as a multidimensional phenomenon, congruent with consumer behavior literature (Bettman 1973, 1975; Dowling 1986; Grahame, Dowling, and Staelin 1994; Jacoby and Kaplan 1972; Peter and Ryan 1976; Zikmund and Scott 1973) and studies on perceived risk in tourism (Reisinger and Mavondo 2005; Roehl and Fesenmaier 1992; Sönmez 1998; Sönmez and Graefe 1998a; Tsaur, Tzeng, and Wang 1997). The similarity of backpackers' experience to risk factors reported in the aforementioned tourist behavior literature, together with the factor structure similarities between the two populations, supports a thesis that tourist experience risk perception is a multidimensional concept and that backpacking is becoming more institutionalized (Hampton 1998; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Schvvens 2002).

The study's findings indicate that backpackers' experience risk perceptions vary across gender, past backpacking experience, and idiosyncratic Israeli background variables such as preference for fellow travelers. The heterogeneity of backpackers' perceived risk is congruent with Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai's (2002) observation that they cannot be regarded as a homogeneous type of tourist in terms of their attitudes. In terms of gender, it is interesting to note that male backpackers are primarily characterized by risk dimensions related to how the decision to travel and associated on-site behavior are perceived by family, friends, and hosts. Specifically, "sociopsychological" and "self-behavior" risk dimensions. In contrast, their female counterparts are characterized by risk dimensions related to the physical elements of the destination—such as "site-related physical" that includes food safety, food taste and the risk of diseases, and "physical harm." These findings are consistent with Lepp and Gibson (2003), who found men to be less concerned about health- and food-related risks than women.

Differences were also found between experienced and inexperienced backpackers. The former are characterized by risk dimensions they may have already experienced and/or dimensions such as "site-related physical" and "physical harm" risk. Sociopsychological dimensions like image and the social environment's response are also factors. In comparison, inexperienced backpackers are characterized by risks such as "expectations," "sociopolitical," "financial," and "mass" risk. The findings of the current study stand in contrast to previous research (Lepp and Gibson 2003; Pearce 1988, 1996; Sönmez and Graefe 1998a, 1998b) that suggested positive relations between past tourist experience and high levels of risk regarding terror, health, and food. An explanation of the relationship between past experience and low levels of perceived risk is provided by Pearce (1988, 1996), who presents the concept of "tourism career ladder" (TCL), by relying on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970). In this respect, Pearce (1988, 1996) suggests that compared to experienced tourists, their inexperienced counterparts are more likely to be concerned about the satisfaction of lower-order needs such as food and safety. However, it is possible to speculate an alternative explanation, namely, experienced tourists are socialized to a traveler culture that includes risk awareness. In other words, experienced backpackers learn which risk dimensions to be concerned about. This knowledge can be seen as an affirmation of the "veteran" or "professional backpacker." Accordingly, the more experienced the backpacker, the higher the sensitivity toward different aspects of risk.

With respect to the specific issues associated predominantly with Israeli backpackers, military experience and the tendency to travel in groups (Maoz 2005; Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002), there were mixed findings. Focusing on combat experience versus noncombat experience of males indicated no significant results.

Combat experience is associated in Israel with "masculinity" (Noy and Cohen 2005) and might shift the reference point of fear, leaving the individual to deal with his social image. Yet, at least in backpacking experience risk dimensions that were revealed, the two subgroups apparently merged into a relatively homogenous group.

Backpackers traveling alone were profiled by concrete, specific risk dimensions and were risk averse, whereas those traveling with others were characterized by dimensions related to personal internal processes and their social environment. A similar pattern was found in the discriminate analysis of traveling with foreigners. Backpackers who traveled with foreigners were profiled with similar risk dimensions as those who did not travel alone. When backpackers travel with others or with foreigners, this may, on the one hand, reduce risks associated with the destination (better decision making, consulting with others), but on the other hand, increase the sociopsychological risk dimensions and exposure to social pressure associated with the backpacking culture (Elsrud 2001).

To conclude, this study contributes to the literature on risk perception of tourists, and to the study of the backpacking experience. With respect to the former, the study clearly reaffirmed risk perception as a multidimensional concept that varies across market segments and consumption patterns. As noted earlier, very few existing studies focus on the perceived risk involved in the particular travel experience of a defined segment. With regard to backpacking, various studies associate this form of tourism with risk taking (Cohen 1972; Elsrud 2001; Lepp and Gibson 2003; Vogt 1976). Yet, neither type of study quantitatively measured levels of perceived risk among individuals who actually experienced backpacking. The findings are also congruent with recent research on backpackers suggesting that backpacking is becoming less distinct from institutionalized tourism (Hampton 1998; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Schvvens 2002) and that backpackers cannot be regarded as a homogeneous type of tourist in terms of their attitudes (Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai 2002). It should be noted however, that the results reflect the experiences of Israeli backpackers who were not randomly sampled. It is also an ex post facto analysis, given the fact that the subjects were interviewed after returning to their home country. Clearly, issues such as risk perceptions prior to the trip might be distorted as time passes. In addition, despite the fact that most Israeli backpackers follow the travel–university pattern, the study did not include backpackers who did not follow this path. Given the social and economic importance of backpackers, it is recommended to further investigate the concept of their perceived risk of the backpacking experience by utilizing quantitative methods and representative samples in various nations. Future studies can focus on risk-reduction strategies employed by backpackers as well as by other segments of tourists. In addition, further research should explore the risk-related information provided by the tourism industry, including travel agents, tour operators, destination policy

makers as well as editors of guides and Internet sites. In this respect, an interesting question is whether tourism practitioners address the issue of risk in accordance with the specific fears and worries of the segment they serve. Another question concerns the responsiveness of tourists to the risk-related information provided by the media and the tourism industry. In this regard, one might ask to what extent tourists are interested in such information, and do they make use of suggestions that appear in guide books or other tourist information sources. Also, what is the impact of extensive risk-related information on the attractiveness of the guide books, Internet sites, or the tourism agencies that provide people with such information?

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