Australian students' activity preferences, perceived physical risk and interest in vacationing in Japan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify Australian students' activity preferences, perceived physical risk and interest in Japan as a vacation destination. Based on a sample of 422 Australian students, five activity factors were determined. These were labeled as *cultural*, *outdoor*, *excitement*, *built attractions* and *personal*. Australian students were extremely interested in vacationing in Japan and they generally perceived few physical risks of a Japanese vacation. Hygiene risk significantly contributed to variance in interest in vacationing in Japan. Four activity types significantly contributed to interest in travel to Japan and perceived physical risk did not mediate the activity preference and interest relationship. Theoretical and practical implications for this research are outlined and limitations and opportunities for future research are provided.

Keywords

Activity preferences, interest, Japan, perceived physical risk, vacation

Introduction

Student travel signifies a substantial, growing market to the global economy (Gardiner et al., 2013; Glover, 2011). It is estimated that by 2020 this market will represent 370 million travelers, which will inject US\$400 billion into the global economy (World Tourism Organization, 2016). In addition to providing destinations with financial injection, the student market is desirable to tourism marketers such as destination marketing organizations (DMOs) because of students being time rich (Thrane, 2016) and having increased mobility (de Wit et al., 2013). The World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation (2013) also argues that young travelers will often spend more than other tourists and are likely to

return and give more value to the destination over their lifetime.

Destinations require superb attractions, accommodation and transport facilities to survive competitively (Enright and Newton, 2005; Morrison, 2013). While activities such as sight-seeing and cultural entertainment may be universally recognized as popular activities at most destinations (Finsterwalder and Laesser, 2013; McKercher et al., 2002), tourism marketers need

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to determine the key attractions that will appeal to specific cohorts of tourists (e.g. segments) which may motivate them to travel.

Regardless of its competitive appeal, such as the attractive activities that they offer, a destination that may cause a tourist harm may serve as a major deterrent to destination visitation (Sönmez and Graefe, 1998). While the types of risks may vary, physical-related issues such as natural disasters (e.g. bush fires, tornadoes or hurricanes) (Nagai and Tkaczynski, 2014; Walters et al., 2015), participation in strenuous physical activities (e.g. skydiving, hiking and white-water rafting) (Beedie and Hudson, 2003; Carnicelli-Filho et al., 2010), or vacationing at a destination when a crisis such as a health outbreak (e.g. Ebola, swine flu) occurs (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011; Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005) represent important inhibitors to travel.

Consideration of the perceived physical risks along with appealing attractions and the interest in the destination is warranted when identifying whether a specific market (e.g. student tourists) will potentially attract a target market that offers considerable lifetime value. Despite a destination's perceived appeal, the potential perceived risks may outweigh the interest in experiencing the activities at a destination (Deng and Ritchie, 2018; Fuchs and Reichel, 2011) and a safer or more familiar destination (Hsieh et al., 2016; Pizam et al., 2004) may be of greater interest.

The purpose of this study is fourfold. First, this study seeks to determine the activity types that a target market (students) would choose to participate in when vacationing at a chosen destination. Second, students' interest in the destination will be identified. Third, students' perceived physical risk of the destination is considered for a destination that offers considerable physical risk. Fourth, this study will seek to determine whether perceived risk mediates the students' activities and interest relationship.

Literature review

Activity preferences

The opportunity for tourists to experience activities outside of their usual lifestyle and surroundings represents a key driver for destination visitation (Morrison, 2013; Prebensen, 2005). Destination activities are closely affiliated with travel motivation (Pesonen, 2015; Moscardo et al., 2001) and identifying these desired activities will enable tourism marketers to promote

specific destination attributes that can be used to satisfy the needs or wants of a tourist (Morrison, 2013). Motivation is usually described in terms of initiating actions that will guide behavior, whereas preferences are portrayed as being linked to destination choice (Goodall, 1991). Consequently, identifying activity preferences prior to destination visitation will facilitate DMOs in determining what activities are desirable among potential tourists (Tkaczynski and Prebensen, 2012).

While certain activities such as hiking (Field, 1999; Pesonen, 2015), sightseeing (Arlt, 2006; Nogawa et al., 1996) and museum visitation (Lehto et al., 2012; Moscardo et al., 2001) may be popular across destinations, certain activities will not appeal to all tourists based on a wide variety of factors such as tourists' age, interest, life stage, income levels and travel party composition. Consequently, activity-based segmentation has been employed to profile tourists into groups based on particular activities for target marketing and positioning purposes. Pesonen (2015) profiled users of three Finnish rural tourism websites and classed respondents into water activities, passives, nature activities, winter activities or active segments. Lehto et al. (2012) determined seven key factors for family vacation and cohesion in a US study. These included city interests, shopping, dining and entertainment, active nature pursuits, family social events, outdoor skill-based sports and farm-based activities. McKercher et al. (2002) segmented cultural tourists to Hong Kong and labeled them as cultural generalists, icon culturalists, Chinese heritage culturalists, cultural tourists, colonial culturalists or Sino-colonial culturalists.

Perceived physical risk

Tourists' prime concern is to travel to a destination to satisfy their need for travel, with limited threats to their health, safety and well-being (Bierman, 2003; Blake and Sinclair, 2003). Potential perceived risks (e.g. long-term injury, death, sickness) resulting from natural disasters (e.g. tornadoes), hygiene (e.g. pollution), terrorism (e.g. security threats), transport (e.g. aeroplane flights) or participating in strenuous activities (e.g. extreme sports) have been identified as major deterrents to destination visitation (e.g. Chew and Jahari, 2014; Hsu and Lin, 2006). While post-disaster recovery marketing strategies have been designed by DMOs (Walters and

Mair, 2012; Walters et al., 2015) and activities such as rock climbing and skydiving may not be chosen by some tourists, certain perceived physical risks such as natural disasters (e.g. tornadoes and hurricanes) or political unrest cannot be removed. Rather the potential impact be minimized through planning and notification of safety precautions and/or the dissemination of information through various media platforms before, during or after a potential risk (Walters and Mair, 2012).

In examining the perceived physical risk of Greece as a tourism destination, Mitchell and Vassos (1998) determined 43 risk factors as perceived by British and Cypriot undergraduate students. Ritthchainuwat and Chakraborty (2009) recognized terrorism, increase in travel costs, lack of novelty seeking, disease, deterioration of tourist attractions and travel inconvenience as the six perceived risk factors for international tourists visiting Thailand. Nagai and Tkaczynski (2014) identified three physical risk factors, disorder, hygiene and impairment, as perceived among international students studying in Australia. Adam (2015) concluded a high rate of road accidents, natural disasters and physical assault as relevant perceived physical risks of backpackers visiting Ghana.

Interest

Despite a destination's competitive resource appeal, tourists may also not choose to have a vacation at this location. Reasons for this avoidance could include a lack of interest, high financial cost and the tyranny of distance (i.e. long-haul travel). While measuring the activities that tourists choose to experience at a destination is usually done by researchers post experience (Lehto et al., 2012; McKercher et al., 2002), it is argued that people's perceptions and attitudes in addition to their past experience can predict future behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Research can therefore be conducted with potential segments prior to impending travel to identify the level of interest among tourists in a destination and to understand the activities that are preferred. For example, Tkaczynski and Prebensen (2012) identified the nature-based motivational preferences that French residents had when considering Norway as a tourism destination. Similarly, Leisen (2001) determined the image of New Mexico as a vacation destination as perceived by non-residents of eight states in the United States. Hsieh et al. (2016) recognized that

Taiwanese youth studying at various universities in Taiwan had different levels of interest in choosing a vacation in Japan.

Student travel

From a tourism perspective, the importance of the student market can be attested to the increasing number of university students engaged in vacation breaks (Thrane, 2016; WYSE Travel Confederation, 2015). Student travel represents a unique market cohort that is distinguishable based on its motivations, travel patterns and activity preferences (Richards and Wilson, 2004; Xiao et al., 2015). For example, Pearce and Son (2004) determined that in comparison to backpackers, English-language student travelers were more likely to travel in a large group, stay in a hotel or motel and be interested in city-based travel activities. Similarly, it was concluded based on research conducted across eight different countries that student travelers showed a greater propensity to immerse themselves in cultural activities or to learn a new language when compared to youth travelers (Richards and Wilson, 2004).

Several pioneering studies (e.g. Field, 1999; Gallarza and Saura, 2006) have been conducted which highlight why students are motivated to experience different activities at different destinations. More recently, Bicikova (2014) segmented 412 British student travelers and identified four distinct clusters of sunseekers, sightseers, in-betweeners and clubbers. Hughes et al. (2015) examined the preferences and perceptions of Chinese students towards Australian tourism products. The authors determined that while costs, distance and time were the key barriers to travel, personal safety was a key concern in traveling to natural environments in Australia.

Thrane (2016) recognized that student tourists defined as 'open' returners stay longer on their trips than the 'prefixed ones'. Mohsin et al. (2017) determined the motives of young Thai university students towards holidaying. The authors concluded that experiencing new cultures, scenic values and adventure are positively related to travel interest. Deng and Ritchie (2018) identified four main risk factors, human induced, social-psychological, financial and health, as perceived by international university students studying at an Australian university.

Japanese inbound tourism

Japan as a tourism destination has become increasingly competitive since the 1990s (Cooper, 2005). In 2003, the Visit Japan Campaign was launched by the Japanese government, which aimed to increase the number of international tourists to 10 million by 2010 (Japan National Tourism Office, 2009). Although the initial figures were strong, only 8,611,175 inbound tourists visited Japan in 2010 (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2015b). It was concluded that the negative effects of the influenza A (H1N1) and high fuel surcharges may have limited tourist numbers in 2010 (World Tourism Organization, 2012).

Although it was predicted that the undesirable effects of the twin disasters of an earthquake and a tsunami in 2011 may have limited further inbound Japanese tourism (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2012), Japan received 10,363,904 international tourists in 2013, which was the first time that the country received more than 10 million international tourists in its history (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2015b). Guided by its strong cultural and natural resources such as its 21 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage sites, many festivals and exhibitions and creative industries, Japan was ranked as the fourth most competitive tourism destination in the world in 2017 (UNESCO, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2017). The Japanese government has also actively promoted the country as a tourism destination after the 2011 earthquake. In addition, the government developed guidelines for protecting international tourists from natural disasters and introduced services to provide the latest disaster and safety information to international tourists such as a multilingual mobile application (Japan Tourism Agency, 2014). Although Japan received around 5,200,000 international tourists in 2003, more than 24,000,000 international tourists visited the country in 2016 with the majority traveling from Asia such as South Korea, China and Taiwan. Australia was ranked seventh as a source market, with 445,200 tourists (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2016, 2017). Overall figures indicated that the number of Japanese inbound tourists has dramatically increased in the past few years. In addition, tourism is now recognized as one of the major pillars of the nation's growth strategy and regional vitalization by the central government. The government now aims to

receive 40 million international tourists by 2020, and 60 million by 2030 (Japan Tourism Agency, 2016).

Several academic studies have recently been published that have examined tourists' interest in traveling to Japan. The results indicate Japan's competitiveness as a tourism destination has been largely influenced by the potential variation in respondents' perceived physical risks that could be experienced through natural or man-made disasters. Hsieh et al. (2016) measured Taiwanese students' travel intentions to Japan. It was concluded that negative attitudes caused by potential perceived risks greatly impacted students' willingness to consider Japan as a travel destination. Of interest, students with past experience were less likely to have their travel intentions inhibited. Ji et al. (2016) identified that Chinese tourists experienced mixed feelings of resistance, admiration, welcome, embarrassment and attachment to Japan and its people. Kim and Park (2016) classified Koreans into one of four groups: non-constraint, non-negotiable, less negotiable and more negotiable based on their willingness to visit Japan due to respondents' varying perceived danger of visiting the country after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident in Fukushima in 2011.

Conceptual framework

Student travel represents a growing source of income for many international destinations (World Tourism Organization, 2016; WYSE Travel Confederation, 2015). In addition to being time rich, having unique travel preferences and travel patterns (Richards and Wilson, 2004; Xiao et al., 2015), it is also argued (e.g. ITB Berlin, 2016; World Tourism Organization, 2016) that young tourists (e.g. students) are continually traveling for tourism purposes regardless of political unrest and health issues, as these tourists want to experience traveling and understand the world in the face of these issues.

Although research has identified students' interest (e.g. Hsieh et al., 2016; Ji et al., 2016), the desired destination activities they wish to experience (Bicikova, 2014; Hughes et al., 2015) and the perceived physical risks that may be incurred by students at a destination (Mitchell and Vassos, 1998; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009), limited academic research (e.g. Hsieh et al., 2016; Park et al., 2016) has aimed to identify how perceived physical risk may or may not impact on a student's interest or

Figure 1. Conceptual model: Australian students' activity preferences, perceived physical risk and interest in vacationing in Japan.

visitation at an activity-orientated destination. This gap in the literature is an impetus to this study.

In this study, Japan was chosen as the destination. Despite considerable research into Japanese domestic tourism (Arlt, 2006; Creighton, 1995), Japanese outbound tourism (Jang et al., 2004; Watkins and Gnoth, 2007) and a current drive by the government to promote Japan as a tourism destination (Japan Tourism Agency, 2015), academic research into Japanese inbound tourism has only become prominent recently (Chew and Jahari, 2014; Ji et al., 2016; Kim and Park, 2016). While several studies have measured Asian students' travel intentions and interest in vacationing in Japan (Hsieh et al., 2016; Park et al., 2016), Australia as a student source market has largely been neglected, despite the country representing a key source market for Japan. Further, although previous research (Field, 1999) has identified that Australians travel extensively during semester breaks, limited research has analysed their interest in vacationing at international destinations. Rather, the majority of research has emphasized international students' perception of Australia as a vacation destination (Son and Pearce, 2005; Waite, 1996).

To determine Australian students' activity preferences, perceived physical risk and interest

in Japan as a vacation destination, a proposed model is presented in Figure 1. The research will employ perceived physical risk as a mediator between activity preferences (independent variables) and interest (dependent variable). When perceived physical risk is combined with activity preferences, the mediating effect of perceived physical risk can be determined.

Japan's cultural activities have traditionally made it attractive for tourists (Hsu and Lin, 2006; Yamamura, 2015). However, segmenting tourists based on one dominant activity such as cultural events can exclude potentially attractive offerings unknown to DMOs that may be desired by tourists (Ashwell, 2015; McKercher et al., 2002). Marketing on one or two activities will also not accurately identify the different interest levels of potential variation in the cohort which might be based on student nationality (e.g. Australian). Hypothesis 1 determines whether the tourism activities influence Australian students' interest in vacationing in Japan. Potential rather than actual behavior is justified based on the previous argument that perceptions and attitudes in addition to past travel behavior, that is, previous vacations, can predict future behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

H1: Activity preferences significantly influence students' interest in vacationing in Japan.

Perceived physical risk may limit a target market's (e.g. students) interest in experiencing activities that a destination has to offer. For example, potential injury and health concerns have been acknowledged as relevant travel barriers to Australians when considering the Middle East as a vacation option (Chien et al., 2016; Sharifpour et al., 2014). Conversely, the perception that a destination has limited physical risks may enable tourists to travel to and participate in activities at the destination (Adam, 2015; Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005). Students have a high propensity for risk-taking that involve physical interaction (Fuchs, 2013; Pizam et al., 2002, 2004) and are learning to live with fear, being 'part of life' (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). Consequently, while certain segments (e.g. elderly, family orientated) may deem a destination physically unsafe, the student market may not be inhibited by potential physical risks.

Perceived physical risk-taking behavior influences tourists' willingness to visit a destination (e.g. Hsieh et al., 2016; Sharifpour et al., 2014). However, identifying perceived physical risk that intervenes between a potential tourist's visitation to a destination and the activities they wish to experience (e.g. culture, built attractions) is unknown. There is the potential that perceived physical risk is not an inhibitor for students' interest in visiting a destination to experience its activities, considering their resilient and adventurous nature. Consequently, it is imperative to identify whether perceived physical risk affects Australian students' interest in visiting Japan, directly, indirectly or not at all. Through employing a mediation process (Baron and Kenny, 1986) that has been frequently adopted within the tourism literature (e.g. Sharifpour et al., 2013, 2014), this study will determine whether perceived physical risk directly or indirectly influences Australian students' interest in visiting Japan. Therefore, hypotheses 2 and 3 are listed below.

H2: Perceived risk significantly influences Australian students' interest in vacationing in Japan.

H3: Perceived risk mediates Australian students' choice of activity and interest in vacationing in Japan.

Methodology

A 29-item, self-administered, questionnaire was designed based on a review of the tourism literature, Japanese promotional material and government documentation. Twenty-four activity items frequently employed within the literature (McKercher et al., 2002; Tkaczynski and Prebensen, 2012) and within the Japanese marketing material (e.g. Japan National Tourism Organization, 2015a) were chosen. An additional activity item 'other' was utilized to allow students to provide an item that may have been of personal relevance to them, not already provided within the questionnaire. In line with previous studies (Oh, 1999; Savinovic et al., 2012; Zabkar et al., 2010), a holistic outcome item (interest) was employed to measure students' intention to vacation in Japan. This procedure would enable Australian students to disclose their interest in visiting Japan as a country, rather than their interest in experiencing individual activities that may or may not be available at different Japanese locations (e.g. Tokyo, Osaka or Niseko).

Three risk items were determined from Nagai and Tkaczynski's (2014) previous research into students' perceived risk in vacationing in Japan. Similar to the literature, each psychographic item (e.g. activities, interest, risk) was measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale to maximize variation in responses (Nagai and Tkaczynski, 2014; Watkins and Gnoth, 2005). Several additional variables (e.g. age, past trip experience) were also provided for classification purposes and were designed as categorical.

The sample comprised Australian students currently enrolled at a large Australian university located in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. This university has a high ratio of international to domestic students. Australian tourists represent an important source market for Japan (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2015b). In 2015, there were 376,075 Australian inbound Japanese tourists, with the largest segment aged between 21 and 29 (males 18.0%, females 14.6%). Several Australian-based student-orientated travel agencies such as Student Travel Association (STA) Travel and Global Student Tours design-specific packages ranging from 7 to 14 days for Australian students aged from 12 to 39. Activities promoted include experiencing big cities (sightseeing) in locations such as Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka; hot springs in Hakone and Kusatsu; and skiing holidays in Niseko,

Table 1. Demographic information ($N = 422$).

Item	Mean	SD	Item	n	%
Interest	5.18	1.62	Age		
Activity			<21	336	79.6
Explore big cities	6.14	1.38	21–25	62	14.7
Skiing/snowboarding	6.01	1.46	26+	23	5.5
Authentic Japanese cuisine	5.69	1.50	Education [current]		
Hot springs	5.57	1.43	Undergraduate	400	94.8
Nightlife	5.44	1.65	Postgraduate	22	5.2
Historic sites	5.32	1.51	Gender		
Cultural events/festivals	5.29	1.43	Male	135	32.0
Theme parks	5.22	1.79	Female	285	67.5
Traditional Japanese beverages	4.95	1.79	Previous experience [touring Japan]		
Meet local people	4.90	1.57	Yes	91	21.6
Water-based activities	4.98	1.77	No	331	87.4
Hiking	4.60	1.74	Trip intentions [visiting Japan]		
Live sports match	4.58	1.85	Within 1 year from now	62	14.7
Luxury boat cruise	4.57	1.92	More than 1 year from now	345	81.6
Extreme sports	4.54	1.99	Travel party composition [for trip to Japan]		
Zoos/aquariums	4.52	1.80	Myself	11	2.6
Traditional Japanese custom	4.48	1.80	Partner/spouse	331	78.4
Museum visits	4.06	1.68	Family	23	5.5
Farms/countryside	3.99	1.68	Friends	112	26.5
Spiritual meditation retreat	3.87	1.93	Partner + family + friends	74	17.5
Cycling	3.38	1.65	Family + friends	63	14.9
Fishing	3.15	1.83	Family + friends + package	18	4.3
Visiting friends and relatives	2.97	2.23	Other	19	10.7
Medical tourism	2.44	1.63			
Other	4.19	2.75			
Perceived physical risk					
Hygiene	3.41	1.80			
Illness	3.18	1.73			
Disability	2.68	1.86			

Hakuba and Nozawa (Global Student Tours, 2017; STA Travel, 2017a).

A convenience sampling approach was applied where students enrolled in various courses were asked to complete the questionnaire at the end of class. The students then handed their completed, anonymous response to the data collector when leaving the lecture theatre. To qualify for inclusion in the study, a respondent needed to be Australian and also knowledgeable of Japan as a tourism destination. The questionnaires were collected between March and April 2015.

Data analysis

Exploratory factor analysis and regression

Exploratory factor analysis in SPSS version 22.0 was employed using a principal components analysis with oblimin rotation. Costello and Osborne's (2005) procedure was followed. For convergent validity to be confirmed, 0.4 was

utilized as a factor loading cut-off point. Cross-loading items that had a factor loading >0.4 on another factor were removed to ensure discriminant validity. Factors that included less than three items were also eliminated (Carmines and Zeller, 1979).

Three different models estimated via multiple regression were employed. In each case, the significance levels, explained variance and t values were evaluated. To ensure that multicollinearity was not an issue, items needed to correlate with each other at <0.7 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001). To answer hypothesis 1, interest in vacationing in Japan was regressed against activity preference factors. Interest was then regressed against illness, disability and hygiene to fulfil hypothesis 2. Next, to provide a solution for hypothesis 3, each perceived physical risk item and the defined factors were entered into the regression equation separately to examine whether risk influenced interest in travel to Japan.

Table 2. Activity factors (segments).

	Cultural	Outdoor	Excitement	Built attractions	Personal
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Cultural events/festivals	0.806				
Historical sites	0.753				
Traditional Japanese custom	0.732				
Museum visits	0.662				
Meet local people	0.622				
Authentic Japanese cuisine	0.539				
Hot springs	0.477				
Spiritual meditation retreat	0.414				
Extreme sports		0.696			
Hiking		0.629			
Water-based activities		0.618			
Cycling		0.608			
Farms and countryside		0.531			
Skiing/snowboarding		0.458			
Nightlife			0.707		
Explore big cities			0.658		
Live sports match			0.558		
Traditional Japanese beverages			0.555		
Theme parks				-0.768	
Luxury boat cruise				-0.678	
Zoos/aquariums				-0.612	
Medical tourism					0.671
Visiting friends and relatives					0.563
Fishing					0.494
Eigenvalue	5.49	3.17	1.88	1.52	1.18
% of variance explained	22.87	13.22	7.86	6.32	4.9
Factor α	0.811	0.704	0.633	0.676	0.591

Results of stage 1

In total, 422 surveys were collected and analysed. Missing data were minimal (<5%) and surveys that were incomplete (e.g. demographic data not completed) or had several (e.g. three or more) of the activity items missing were removed prior to analysis to improve validity. Australian students were interested in vacationing in Japan ($\mu = 5.18$). *Exploring big cities* ($\mu = 6.18$), *skiing/snowboarding* ($\mu = 6.01$) and *tasting authentic Japanese cuisine* ($\mu = 5.69$) were the most popular activities preferred. Perceived physical risks [*hygiene* ($\mu = 3.41$), *illness* ($\mu = 3.18$) and *disability* ($\mu = 2.68$)] were rated at the lower end of the seven-point scale. The majority of respondents were under 21 years of age, female, studying an undergraduate degree and had not previously vacationed in Japan. Students traveling with friends and family and likely to travel within 1 year from now (March 2015; Table 1).

The 24 activity items were factor analysed. The *other* item was removed from the analysis as no dominant additional item was identified by

students. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin was 0.832 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant [$\chi^2(276) = 2836.568$, $p < 0.001$], which suggested that the data were appropriate for factor analysis (Carmines and Zeller, 1979). The correlation matrix produced a scale α of 0.848 which is above the recommended 0.7 level for exhibiting the inter-item correlation (Nunnally, 1978).

Five factors were extracted (see Table 2). Construct validity was confirmed, with all items having a loading score of 0.4 on only one factor (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001).

The first factor ($\alpha = 0.811$) was labeled as *cultural* as all factor items related to cultural activities that represent traditional Japan. The second factor ($\alpha = 0.704$) was interpreted as *outdoor* as these six activities are usually undertaken outside by tourists with some form of physical exertion for maximum enjoyment.

The third factor is related to *entertainment*. Entertainment ($\alpha = 0.633$) included activities that could be deemed exciting and engaging to the targeted Australian audience such as exploring big cities, tasting traditional Japanese

Table 3. Multiple regression.

Independent variables	Dependent variable
	Interest
Cultural	0.372(8.183)**
Outdoor	-0.008(-0.175) NS
Excitement	0.328(7.156)**
Built attractions	0.099(2.146)*
Personal	0.110(2.369)*
Model fit information	
Multiple R	0.542
R ²	0.293
Adjusted R ²	0.283
F value	29.456**

Note: Activity preferences as independent variables. The reported values are standardized β coefficients. The values in parentheses are t values. NS, not significant.

** $p = 0.00$: significant level.

* $p < 0.05$: significant level.

beverages (e.g. sake) and experiencing the Japanese nightlife. The fourth factor ($\alpha = 0.676$) was labeled as *built attractions* to provide activities for potential tourists. Finally, *personal* is the name of the final factor ($\alpha = 0.591$). Activities such as *medical tourism* and *fishing* may be perceived as individual pursuits and personal to a particular tourist. These factors are therefore not shared with Australian students in a similar way to the group-based activities identified within the first factor.

Results of stage 2

When interest in vacationing in Japan was employed as the dependent variable (see Table 3), the model was highly significant ($p = 0.000$) and the five activity factors explained almost a third (29.3%) of variance in interest to travel to Japan. It can be determined that because *cultural*

($p = 0.000$), *excitement* ($p = 0.000$), *built attractions* ($p = 0.033$) and *personal* ($p = 0.018$) were statistically significant, these four activity types contributed strongly towards an interest in traveling to Japan. Examination of standardized coefficients indicated that *cultural* (0.372 [8.183]) and *excitement* (0.328 [7.156]) had the largest influence on interest in traveling to Japan. For every one point increase in each of *cultural* and *excitement*, a related 0.3 increase in travel to Japan was evident. *Outdoor* ($p = 0.861 > 0.05$) was not statistically significant, indicating these activities were not related to interest in traveling to Japan. Consequently, the first hypothesis can be partially supported.

With the three perceived physical risk items employed as independent variables, it was concluded that the explained variance was incredibly minimal for all items (hygiene the highest at 6.3% whereas the other two were under 1%). Only *hygiene* ($p = 0.00$) significantly contributed (and negatively) to interest (-2.54 [-5.332]) in vacationing in Japan. *Illness* ($p = 0.070 > 0.05$) and *disability* ($p = 0.416 > 0.05$) were both insignificant and, consequently, hypothesis 2 can only be partially supported (Table 4).

When each perceived risk item was combined with the five activity preference factors (see Table 5), it was concluded that the contributed variance (29.3%) was the same for all three items. Additionally, *illness* ($p = 0.949 > 0.05$), *hygiene* ($p = 0.952 > 0.05$) and *disability* ($p = 0.945 > 0.05$) all produced an insignificant relationship with interest in vacationing in Japan when combined with the five activity factors. The significance of the four activity factors also remained similar to the initial model (Table 3). Consequently, the third hypothesis was not supported.

Table 4. Multiple regression.

	Independent variables		
	Illness	Hygiene	Disability
Interest	-0.089 (-1.818) NS	-2.54(-5.332)**	-0.416(-0.814) NS
Multiple R	0.089	0.254	0.040
R ²	0.008	0.064	0.002
Adjusted R ²	0.006	0.062	-0.001
F value	3.304 NS	28.435**	0.663 NS

Note: Perceived physical risk items as independent variables The reported values are standardized β coefficients. The values in parentheses are t values. NS, not significant.

** $p = 0.00$: significant level.

* $p < 0.05$: significant level.

Table 5. Multiple regression.

	Dependent variable
Model 1	
Independent variables	Interest
Cultural	0.372(8.064)**
Outdoor	-0.008(-0.177) NS
Excitement	0.328(7.092)**
Built attractions	0.099(2.144)*
Personal	0.110(2.355)*
Activity_illness	0.003 (0.64) NS
Model fit information	
Multiple R	0.542
R ²	0.293
Adjusted R ²	0.281
F value	24.479**
Model 2	
Independent variables	Interest
Cultural	0.372(8.102)**
Outdoor	-0.008(-0.176) NS
Excitement	0.328(7.109)**
Built attractions	0.099(2.144)*
Personal	0.110(2.357)*
Activity_hygiene	0.003(0.60) NS
Model fit information	
Multiple R	0.542
R ²	0.293
Adjusted R ²	0.281
F value	24.479**
Model 3	
Independent variables	Interest
Cultural	0.372 (8.054)**
Outdoor	-0.008 (-0.178) NS
Excitement	0.328 (7.096)**
Built attractions	0.099 (2.144)*
Personal	0.110 (2.357)*
Activity_disability	0.003 (0.69) NS
Model fit information	
Multiple R	0.542
R ²	0.293
Adjusted R ²	0.281
F value	24.479**

Note: Physical perceived risk as a mediating variable. The reported values are standardized β coefficients. The values in parentheses are *t* values. NS, not significant.

***p* = 0.00: significant level.

**p* < 0.05: significant level.

Discussion and conclusions

Student travel represents a growing segment (World Tourism Organization, 2016; WYSE Travel Confederation, 2015) which has great importance to popular student vacation countries (and regions) such as Peru and Ecuador (Latin America), Thailand and Cambodia (Asia) and Fiji and New Zealand (South Pacific) (STA Travel, 2017b). This study contributes to the literature, focusing upon key drivers (e.g. activity

preferences and interest) and inhibitors (e.g. perceived physical risk) of Australian students to Japan, an increasingly attractive tourist destination for international students (STA Travel, 2017b).

The study confirmed that tourists (e.g. students) are heterogeneous in their activity choice (Moscardo et al., 2001; Pesonen, 2015) and highly rated several of the preferred activities. Exploring big cities which can constitute sight-seeing and shopping has consistently been found to be a popular tourism activity in a plethora of studies (Finsterwalder and Laesser, 2013; McKercher et al., 2002) was also relevant to this study. Australian student-orientated travel agencies such as STA Travel and Global Student Tours should continue to promote these activities in their marketing material.

Furthermore, while Australian snowboarding/skiing participation in the international market is relatively small, which has been largely neglected (Dickson and Faulks, 2007), interest in ski resorts such as Niseko of young Australians has increased (SkiJapan, 2013), and Japan's ski locations such as Niseko, Hakuba and Myoko are heavily promoted by student travel agencies (e.g. STA Travel) as a vacation location for Australian students. As students' interest in skiing/snowboarding has been confirmed within this study, this activity should also be emphasized within marketing material. Unsurprisingly, medical tourism and visiting friends and relatives were ranked the lowest preferred activities to experience.

Through employing activity-based segmentation, this study confirmed five activity types. Based on empirical evidence and the fact that the average tour to Japan lasts between seven and 14 days (e.g. STA Travel, 2017a; Global Student Tours, 2017), the Japanese tourism market should promote the first four activity types to Australian students to deliver a range of different experiences across potential one- or two-week vacations. These factors drive international student segment's interest in visiting Japan. Foreign cultural activities are popular to experience generally (McKercher et al., 2002) and within Japan (Ryu et al., 2015). Culture is also identified as Japan's key competitive strength (World Economic Forum, 2017) and cultural activities such as historic sites and cuisine are focused on Japanese marketing communication material such as DMO websites and social network sites such as Pinterest (Song and Kim, 2016). As Australian students were interested in historical sites (e.g.

shrines, temples), traditional Japanese customs (e.g. tea ceremony, Kimono traditional dress) and cultural events (e.g. anime, rock concerts), these activities which are currently promoted for the upcoming 2017/2018 vacation period (STA Travel, 2017a) need to be continually focused on within marketing materials designed by Japanese DMOs, student-orientated travel agencies (e.g. STA Travel, Student Flights) and additional tourism marketers in order to continually attract this important source market.

Australian students have an interest in outdoor activities which are currently promoted within Japan (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2015a). Organizations such as Kumutu (adventure tourism), Niseko Ski Holidays, STA Travel and the Japanese government should further promote these desired activities to Australia to potentially create a larger market. Excitement and built attractions as activities currently exist in big cities such as Tokyo and Osaka and these need to be promoted to stimulate interest in Japan as a tourist destination. Activities such as night-life, exploring big cities and drinking traditional Japanese beverages (e.g. sake) are also desired by Australian students due to these activities potentially representing a unique cultural experience.

A further contribution from this research is that perceived physical risks were largely irrelevant in influencing Australian students' interest in visiting Japan. This contradicts Nagai and Tkaczynski's (2014) earlier findings that Asian students studying in Australia highly rated these perceived physical risks. Asian countries are proximal and the largest source markets for Japan and these tourists may be aware of the difficulties that Japan faced during the 2011 disasters such as the earthquake and tsunami in 2011. In this study, lack of importance of perceived physical risks provides literature support (e.g. Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005; Reisinger and Turner, 2000) that a country's culture can increase or decrease a tourist's motivation or perceived risk in visiting a destination. The low-risk rating supports Lupton and Tulloch's (2002) argument that Australians are adventurous and perceive risk as part of everyday life. Taken together, the results of the current study and the Nagai and Tkaczynski (2014) study indicate that understanding of perceived risk cannot be assumed, rather it must be established for each inbound tourism market.

While Japan may be perceived as a 'safe' destination due to limited political unrest,

terrorism or unhygienic conditions, this destination will continue to face potential natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis which are deemed unpredictable and hazardous (Hewitt, 1997; Ulmer et al., 2015). Consequently, Japanese tourism marketers need to monitor these potential disasters and communicate effectively and efficiently to tourists through different promotional mediums such as tourism websites and social media when natural disasters arise (Ketter, 2016; Walters and Mair, 2012).

The role of perceived risk in the activity preference and destination interest relationship was examined. The results of the current study indicate that perceived risk was not significant in the activity preference and destination interest relationship. This presents a unique contribution to the research, as many studies (Mitchell and Vassos, 1998; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009) have identified risk as a major inhibitor to travel. When perceived risk is examined concurrently with activity preferences to understand the interest in traveling to a destination for a segment that will deliver high value over time, the role of risk in tourist decision-making is diminished. Consequently, when DMOs in Japan are marketing to Australia, the different types of activities can be maximized within the promotional material and any perceived risks can be de-emphasized in communication materials. Rather, the thrill of experiencing outdoor (e.g. skiing/snowboarding) activities is expected to further entice Australians to visit Japan.

Limitations and opportunities for future research

This study is not without its limitations. This study is based on potential rather than actual visitation to Japan. Therefore, respondents' level of interest and potential likelihood of participating in preferred activities might not be accurate. However, research (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) suggests that perceptions and attitudes as well as previous experiences can influence future behavior. Planned behavior has also been recently employed to measure respondents' likelihood in visiting an international destination (Hsieh et al., 2016; Park et al., 2016). To provide further validity, it is recommended that the Australian students be targeted within a couple of years to identify whether their activity preferences, interest and perceived physical risks have changed when considering vacationing in Japan. This will determine whether visitation is likely to

happen as expected and will also indicate whether these physiographic variables remain constant or have changed over the extended time period.

A second limitation is that the data were only collected at one Australian university (where the chief researcher was employed) which limited the generalizability of the research findings. To improve the generalizability, it is recommended that researchers from a variety of Australian universities in different states (e.g. Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales) collaborate to test the research instrument across different contexts and with different students in a follow-up study. Here the results from the additional study will identify whether the results from the initial study can be confirmed or denied.

A third limitation is that while the sample is representative in that the majority of domestic students studying at an Australian university are female (ABS, 2016), two-thirds of the sample is females which is higher than the average (approximately 56%). As research indicated that males aged between 21 and 29 represented the largest cohort of Australian inbound tourists for Japan, future research could be conducted where a quota sampling technique is employed to ensure that a high percentage of males complete the survey.

While this study has provided initial findings in understanding the perceived physical risks such as injury and sickness that have been identified as relevant for students in past research (e.g. Nagai and Tkaczynski, 2014), an opportunity for future research is to consider affective elements in influencing students' destination choice. While cognitive elements are essential for the initial consideration of a destination (Alcañiz et al., 2009; Xie and Lee, 2013), the affective considerations will become operational during the evaluation stage of a destination selection process. Should positive affective elements (e.g. happiness, relaxing) outweigh the negatives (e.g. fear, anxiety), a tourist will be more likely to consider the destination as a potential location for a vacation (Pike and Ryan, 2004).

A final limitation deals with the measurement of interest. A final consideration is that interest was measured in the current study using a single item. Use of a single item is not unusual within the tourism literature (e.g. behavioral intentions) (e.g. Chen, 2008; Oh, 1999; Savinovic et al., 2012). An opportunity for future research exists. Specifically, research is recommended to extend the understanding of interest using a multi-dimensional

item to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between activity types and interest. Here it is necessary to determine the activities that are currently promoted in the seven- or 14-day tourism package and which are the most popular for Australian students when considering vacationing in Japan.

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