



## Tourists and severe weather – An exploration of the role of ‘Locus of Responsibility’ in protective behaviour decisions

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### H I G H L I G H T S

- ▶ Tourists differ by Internal, Shared and External Locus of Responsibility (LoR).
- ▶ LoR groups have similar levels of Information Seeking intention.
- ▶ External LoR tourists are less satisfied with their current amount and quality of severe weather information.
- ▶ External and Shared LoR groups worry more about severe weather.
- ▶ LoR groups differ in information needs and information source knowledge.

### A R T I C L E I N F O

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### A B S T R A C T

Severe weather events can impact negatively on tourism and put tourists at risk. To reduce vulnerability, tourists should be aware of and be prepared for possible severe weather. Seeking risk information, a type of protective action behaviour, is an important way to reduce vulnerability. This paper presents the results of a study that investigated the role of Locus of Responsibility (LoR) for protection behaviour for severe weather, by linking it with Information Seeking and related intra-personal antecedents. LoR has previously been found to impact protective action decisions, but not within the context of severe weather and tourism. Our survey research among tourists in New Zealand provided evidence for three Loci of Responsibility; “Internal”, “Shared” and “External”. Significant differences between these groups were found for Information Seeking antecedents, though not for Information Seeking. Next, significant differences were found for weather information preferences, both source and content. Findings and implications for tourism and safety management in New Zealand are discussed.

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### 1. Introduction

Weather is an essential component of tourism and it strongly influences destination choice (Førland et al., *in press*; Rosselló-Nadal, Riera-Font, & Cárdenas, 2011) and preferences, tourist behaviour (Becken, Wilson, & Reisinger, 2010; Moreno, Amelung, & Santamarta, 2008; Wilson & Becken, 2011), safety (Peattie, Clarke, & Peattie, 2005) and satisfaction (Coghlan & Prideaux, 2009). Unfavourable weather can impact negatively on tourism, for example due to severe weather events, which is “any type of weather that can pose a risk to personal safety or property, including thunderstorms, tornadoes, freezing rain, heavy rain, wind, dust storms, blizzards, heavy snowfalls, frost,

fog and wind chill” (Silver & Conrad, 2010, p.174). While tourists are able to protect themselves from severe weather, for instance by obtaining relevant information (Scott & Lemieux, 2010), preparing adequately (de Freitas, 2003), and understanding how to behave in certain environmental conditions, little is known about the factors that influence tourist precautionary efforts that protect them from inclement weather.

The extent to which tourists are at risk from the weather depends on the type of holiday they undertake and the climatic conditions of the destination. Not all tourist destinations are equally exposed to severe weather and tourists’ vulnerability differs across destinations (Becken & Hay, 2012). In New Zealand, which is the focus of this paper, tourists spend significant amounts of time experiencing “the outdoors”, whether it is through active means such as hiking, or passively through travelling in a vehicle (Bentley, Meyer, Page, & Chalmers, 2001; Page, Bentley, & Walker, 2005; Simmons & Becken, 2004). In 2011, 2.6 million international tourists visited New Zealand. For the top five markets, which

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make up 2.4 million visitors, 75 percent went walking or trekking, 53 percent visited some natural attractions, 28 percent went to see the volcanic and geothermal attractions, and 25 percent undertook a boat trip. Over three quarters (78%) drove their own rental car or campervan. In addition, there were 16.6 million overnight domestic tourists, generating over 49 million guest nights in 2011 and spending considerable time in the outdoors (Ministry of Economic Development, 2012).

Tourists in New Zealand often travel in remote areas with limited infrastructure and communication networks (Becken, 2005; Becken & Wilson, 2007). The country is known for its wild and beautiful nature, but exactly these characteristics and environmental dynamics result in a potent 'hazardscape' that can pose a risk to tourists. Most recently, these have headlined news media around the world, after the Christchurch earthquakes and the more recent volcanic activity in the Tongariro National Park. Similarly, New Zealand's climate is highly dynamic as it is characterised by high natural variability, with potential weather hazards existing all year round (NIWA, 2010). Typical weather hazards include storms, heavy rain, snow and frost, fog, and indirect consequences of this weather such as landslides and flooding (Becken et al., 2010).

Considering New Zealand's changeable climate characteristics, there is a realistic possibility that tourists are negatively inconvenienced by the weather (Becken & Wilson, 2013) or even at risk (Wilson & Becken, 2011) of substantial damage (e.g., to equipment), personal harm, and last but not least, ruined holidays. Indeed, 2008/09 data from the New Zealand Police (2009) show that 1991 people required assistance from Land Search and Rescue. Of these, 245 (12%) were tourists (the report does not specify how a tourist is defined). Yet, there is little knowledge beyond mere descriptive accounts of tourism misery due to inclement weather, leaving a considerable knowledge gap concerning the behavioural and intrapersonal factors that might underlie why tourists find themselves in a position that they experience negative consequences of weather circumstances.

As pointed out in a study on the risk of sun burn during holiday time (Peattie et al., 2005), little research has taken risk behaviour into the domain of tourism. Yet, in order for emergency management and tourism agencies in host countries to be able to deal with tourism specific risks, there is a need to better understand protective action decision making behaviour of their visitors. Clearly, tourism safety depends not only on top-down measures of the tourism industry or local governments, but also on pro-active behaviour of tourists themselves. One important protection measure is to obtain information about possible risks and useful protective actions (Griffin, Dunwoody, & Neuwirth, 1999; Griffin, Neuwirth, Dunwoody, & Giese, 2004; ter Huurne, 2008; ter Huurne & Gutteling, 2009; Kahlor, 2007; Kahlor, Dunwoody, Griffin, & Neuwirth, 2006; Lindell & Perry, 2004; Terpstra, 2010; Trumbo, 2002; Wilson, 1999, 2000). In that sense, safety information and knowledge about current local weather circumstances is thus an essential pre-requisite for tourist's decision making in hazardous situations. The question however is to what extent tourists in New Zealand engage in such protective behaviour, and whether they feel personally responsible for it.

Earlier research on natural hazard preparedness and response shows that protective behaviour (e.g., seeking risk information) is influenced by attributions of responsibility for protection in combination with perceptions of coping resources (Lalwani & Duval, 2000; Mulilis & Duval, 1997). Likewise, responsibility issues are of great importance in the dynamics of public–authority interaction to the extent that people are informed and inform themselves about possible environmental hazards and how this information is perceived (Stevens, 2009; Terpstra, 2010; Terpstra & Gutteling, 2008). In the tourism context, discrepancies in responsibility

perceptions between tourists and tourism related organisations can have far reaching (negative) consequences, when tourists are unaware of risks, or expect to be protected by authorities in situations where they are initially responsible for their own protection. Also, the availability and accuracy of weather risk information is essential for tourists to engage in successfully preparing for and adapting to local weather conditions. This paper is therefore concerned with perceived Loci of Responsibility for protection against the adverse consequences of severe weather among tourists in New Zealand. More specifically, it explores the links between protection responsibility attributions and Information Seeking, its intrapersonal antecedents and information preferences, by addressing the following research questions:

1. To what extent do responsibility perceptions for protection from adverse consequences of severe weather events vary among tourists?
2. How do perceptions of responsibility relate to predictors of Information Seeking behaviour and to Information Seeking itself?
3. How do perceptions of responsibility affect hazard information preferences of tourists?

While the first two questions are more theoretically oriented, the last question will generate tangible knowledge on how and where tourists seek and expect to find information in their attempts to prepare for and protect themselves from adverse consequences of severe weather risks during their holiday.

## 2. Theoretical background

This section conceptualises responsibility attributions (2.1) and how these have been found to affect protective behaviour. Being interested in Information Seeking behaviour as a specific type of protective behaviour, responsibility attributions are then linked with risk communication models (Risk Information Seeking and Processing model and Framework for Risk Information Seeking), that provide a theoretical basis for the research approach (2.2 & 2.3). Such a multi-theory approach provides opportunities to explore the possible connections between overlapping theories, to test links and relationships between concepts and form hypotheses about such interconnections (Kasperson, Kasperson, Pidgeon, & Slovic, 2003). Finally, in the fourth subsection it is argued that research on Information Seeking contributes to the field of tourism (and to other risk management areas) only, when the content of such behaviour is taken into account, for example in terms of type and sources of information.

### 2.1. Responsibility perceptions

Perceptions of who is responsible for protecting people can be divided into "Internal" (self) and "External" (e.g., government or tourism organisations) or a "Shared" responsibility (Lalwani & Duval, 2000; Terpstra, 2010). Research on responsibility attributions is rooted in the Person-relative-to-Event (PrE) model (Duval & Mulilis, 1999; Mulilis & Duval, 1997; Mulilis, Duval, & Rombach, 2001). Importantly, varying attributions of responsibility were found to affect protective behaviour and ability to cope with hazardous events (Lalwani & Duval, 2000; Lindell & Perry, 2004). When responsibility is attributed to self, i.e. representing an "Internal" Locus of Responsibility (LoR), the engagement in coping strategies specific to a particular risk is higher, but only when the person considers that the resources they have available to deal with the risk are sufficient. Also, people who worry more about a particular risk are more likely to attribute responsibility to an external source

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