



# Understanding travelers' intentions to visit a short versus long-haul emerging vacation destination: The case of Chile



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- We investigate intentions of travelers from short and long-haul markets to visit Chile as a vacation destination.
- An extended TPB model is used as a theoretical framework.
- Perceived behavioral control and subjective norms are the strongest predictors of intentions to visit Chile for vacation.
- Destination familiarity and self-concept differentiate short and long-haul travelers' intentions to visit Chile.

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## ABSTRACT

Limited research examines short-haul and long-haul travelers' intentions to visit an emerging vacation destination in South America. To fill this gap, this research investigates intentions of potential travelers from two short-haul (Peru and Brazil) and two long-haul (Spain and Germany) markets to visit Chile as a vacation destination. The authors develop a conceptual model that expands upon the theory of planned behavior (TPB) framework by incorporating self-concept theory and destination familiarity. The data were collected by applying an online questionnaire to respondents in four countries. Hypotheses are tested with structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. The results verify that the extended TPB model has good explanatory power and that destination familiarity and self-concept, in particular the ideal social self, help to differentiate what drives short and long-haul travelers' intentions to visit Chile. Perceived behavioral control and subjective norms are the strongest predictors of both short and long-haul travelers' intentions to visit Chile for vacation.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, there is a growing demand for international tourism that will continue over the next few years, led by emerging economies (WTTTC, 2015). The World Tourism Organization predicts that the market shares of these economies will grow gradually until 2030 with the expectation that arrivals will increase twice as much as those in advanced

economies (UNWTO, 2015). Additionally, the market share in tourist arrivals in emerging markets is projected to reach 57% in 2030, which corresponds to over 1 billion international tourists (UNWTO, 2014).

Although various studies examine the drivers of travelers' intentions to visit a vacation destination, the vast majority consider destinations in more developed regions and those of short-haul travelers (e.g., Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Assaker & Hallak, 2013). Few studies investigate the antecedents of travelers' intentions to visit emerging destinations, especially those in Latin America, even though this region has become a major leading inbound destination for many tourists around the world (WTTTC, 2016). For instance, tourist arrivals to South America grew at double the rate recorded in 2014 (+6%) (UNWTO, 2015), with Brazil, Argentina and Chile as

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the main players in the region. Furthermore, tourist arrivals to South America are projected to grow 4.4% between 2014 and 2018, which is a higher rate than the world average (Euromonitor, 2015).

Several factors help to explain the more recent expansion of the tourism sector in South American markets, such as the gradual transition to democracy, the progress of basic public services and government investments in infrastructure (Santana, 2000). More specifically, South American countries are growing rapidly with a decrease in potential threats of danger and terrorism (Santana, 2000). However, South American countries continue to be affected by factors that hinder higher growth in tourism (Economist, 2015). Although the political and economic environments of many South American countries have changed, potential travelers may still sense that South American countries are unsafe due to unstable economic contexts and former acts of terrorism or crime (Burton, 1995; Ryan, 1993; Santana, 2000). In addition, geographic distance and scant tourist information may also constrain travelers from visiting vacation markets in this region. Overall, a general worry for safeness, distance, and high expenses may negatively affect visitors' intentions to travel to a South American destination for vacation (Economist, 2010).

While some tourism destinations in developing regions, such as those in Asia and Africa have begun to attract the attention of destination marketing scholars (e.g., Chen & Phou, 2013; Mutinda & Mayaka, 2012), South American destinations still remain somewhat overlooked (Bianchi, Pike, & Lings, 2014; Santana, 2000). While this is the case, there are a few recent studies that do consider factors influencing tourists' intentions to visit South America as a vacation destination (Shani, Wang, Hudson, & Gil, 2009; Strizzi & Meis, 2001). Recently, Bianchi et al. (2014) used a consumer-based brand equity model to examine the performance of Brazil, Chile and Argentina among a sample of Australian long-haul travelers. The findings show that attitudinal brand loyalty (intention to visit and recommend to others) is positively related to the destination's brand salience, brand associations, and brand value. However, these countries are not salient vacation destinations for Australian travelers in terms of brand equity dimensions. Further, Shani et al. (2009) examined the effect of historical films on the destination image of South America among young North American students and find that South America was perceived as an affordable tourism destination with ecotourism attractions, such as nature, heritage and history. Further, the study showed that South America was also perceived as being very different from North America regarding lifestyle, personal safety and health issues.

Additional to a lack of research on intentions to visit emerging destinations, especially those in South America, most of the published research on tourists' choice and intentions focuses on travelers from geographically close (short-haul) (e.g., Hernandez-Maestro, Munoz-Gallego, & Requejo, 2007; Horng, Liu, Chou, & Tsai, 2012; Sparks & Pan, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to better understand factors influencing tourists' intentions to visit emerging destinations (Bianchi & Pike, 2011; Hughes & Allen, 2008), considering travelers from both short and long-haul markets. We draw on classifications adopted from previous studies (e.g., Bao & McKercher, 2008; Ho & McKercher, 2012; McKercher, 2008), where potential visitors from countries located within 3000 km are identified as short-haul markets, while those located more than 7000 km from Santiago de Chile are classified as long-haul markets.

Supporting the imperative to examine travel intentions of both short and long-haul travelers, prior research suggests that travelers' attitudes and visit intentions can be influenced by the distance between a traveler's country of origin and their vacation destination (McKercher, Chan, & Lam, 2008). In particular, to attract long-haul travelers may comprise different challenges and factors compared to short-haul travel, such as airfare costs, travel time, and

consumer uncertainty (McKercher, 2008; McKercher et al., 2008; Nicolau, 2008). In addition, distance may generate damaging stereotypes or ambiguity regarding destination attributes (Prebensen, 2007), which may hinder travelers' intentions to visit a destination (Li & Kaplanidou, 2013). Moreover, short-haul travelers may have different characteristics from long-haul travelers in terms of consumer behavior and motivation (Bao & McKercher, 2008; Ho & McKercher, 2012).

In sum, given the scarcity of research on travelers' intentions to visit a South American destination for vacation, potential differences between short and long-haul travelers, and the lack of empirical studies comparing short-haul versus long-haul traveler visit intentions, a key goal of this research is to provide a theoretical understanding of the motivational drivers regarding tourists' intentions from both short and long-haul markets to choose a South American vacation destination. Using an integrated approach by drawing on existing theories and previous findings will help make it possible to examine motivational factors that similarly influence short and long-haul travelers and those that differentially influence them to visit a vacation destination, enhancing our theoretical understanding of traveler behavior.

To be more specific, different approaches and factors have been examined to shed light on tourists' intentions to visit vacations destinations (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Dolnicar, Coltman, & Sharma, 2013; Ferns & Walls, 2012; Hung & Petrick, 2011). For example, a number of studies utilize the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985, 1991, 2001). This model has been previously tested in a wide range of contexts, including tourism, travel and hospitality (e.g., Amaro & Duarte, 2015; Han, 2015; Kaplan, Manca, Alexander, Nielsen, & Prato, 2015) with many studies focusing on travelers' destination intentions (Hernandez-Maestro et al., 2007; Lam & Hsu, 2004; Quintal, Thomas, & Phau, 2015; Sparks & Pan, 2009).

The basic premise of TPB is that attitudes toward performing a behavior, behavioral norms, and perceived behavioral control influence behavioral intentions. In other words, people's intentions to carry out a particular type of behavior will increase if they believe that such behavior will lead to a valued outcome; their peers will approve of their behavior and they have the necessary capacity and resources to perform such behavior (Lam & Hsu, 2004). Given its ability in predicting travelers' intentions to visit a vacation destination in several regions of the world, we examine its generalizability to predict both short and long-haul travelers' intentions to visit an emerging country in South America. Further, to determine whether there are motivational factors that differentially influence short and long-haul travelers' visit intentions, we extend the TPB model by incorporating destination familiarity and self-concept, in particular the ideal social self-concept, as two additional antecedent variables of intentions to visit an emerging market in South America. Both destination familiarity and travelers' self-concept have been found to influence traveler visit intentions (Hernandez-Maestro et al., 2007; Horng et al., 2012). Destination familiarity refers to a visual or mental impression of a destination which can be based on prior experience and/or exposure to destination information (Hernandez-Maestro et al., 2007; Horng et al., 2012). The ideal social self-concept refers to how a person would like others to perceive him or her (Sirgy, 1982). We believe that the addition of these two factors to the model will help to distinguish between short and long-haul tourists' visit intentions.

Specifically, long-haul travel compared to short-haul travel entails greater costs (e.g., financial, consumer uncertainty and ambiguity about destination attributes (Prebensen, 2007). Greater cost of long-haul travel increase the perceptions of financial risk. Additionally, long-haul travelers are less likely to have previous travel experience to a particular long-haul destination compared to short-haul travelers, resulting in more uncertainty and ambiguity

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