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The dual effects of health risks and crowd perception on marine traveller behaviour: The case of shared day cruise charter

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Abstract
This study investigates the dynamics of traveller behaviour toward shared day cruise charters regarding Covid-19 as a health-risk situation through the theory of planned behaviour. Following interviews with 22 customers, the findings were evaluated using directed content analysis. The results show that, besides Covid-19's moderating role, physical (e.g., high noise, absence of physical barriers) and social (e.g., a high number of out-group members, high customer heterogeneity) attributes of the service concept intensify the perceived crowdedness in the yacht. Despite being a one-day outdoor activity, the tour is perceived as risky due to the crowded service environment. Thus, crowds and health risks have a dual impact on travellers' attitudes toward tours. The perceived risk is not the only concern related to the traveller personally, it also includes risks related to the transmission of the virus to one's family and friends. Travellers attributed crowding to the opportunistic behaviours of service providers, hence relying on their own precautions. Furthermore, there is an inverse relationship between crowding and the perceived hedonic value of the service. Companion unavailability is a significant barrier; however, there is a negotiation dilemma to persuade hesitant group members. The study contributes to the travel services offered in crowded environments that especially pose health risks and offer important implications for yacht tourism practitioners.

Keywords: Yacht Tourism, Traveller Behaviour, Crowd Perception, Perceived Health Risks, Companion Constraint, The Theory of Planned Behaviour.

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1. Introduction

Crowding has a considerable impact on the service experience of customers and their intentions toward these services (Eroglu *et al.*, 2005; Hyun & Kim, 2015). Despite its both positive and negative aspects (Hanks et.al., 2017; Jacobsen et.al., 2019; Santini *et al.*, 2020), crowding is widely emphasized negatively after the declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic, since de-crowding behaviour has become one of the salient regulators to deal with the chaotic environment employed by people (Miao et.al., 2021). Health concern has been predicted to be a persistent constraint affecting decision-making of tourists (Kock *et al.*, 2020) rather than a mere interruption (Gilchrist, 2022). Thus, studies on the behaviour patterns of customers toward services provided in crowded environments that pose health risks have become more necessary than ever before.

Yacht charter services are marine-based travelling services that contribute to several industries (e.g., marinas, yacht maintenance) and the destinations in which they are arranged. These services are in high demand worldwide, especially in the Mediterranean Basin and the Caribbean Region. The day cruise (*shared charter*) is a type of yacht charter that targets middle-class income customers and offers a package tour including food and beverage services along with swimming activities at various bays. Such tours benefit from economies of scale with some even holding over 1000 passengers resembling small cruise ships. However, most of these yachts do not have cabins, and the only enclosed areas are toilets and changing rooms, making the tour a marine-based outdoor activity. Moreover, customers are exposed to the service all day in a crowded, noisy environment with no physical barriers that would provide them with privacy and space. In addition, apart from the friends or family members they participate with, the crowd with whom they share the service consists of consumers with diverse socio-cultural features that they are unacquainted with. Some yachters specifically prefer such crowded settings because they can find the chance to meet fellow travellers with similar interests (Paker & Vural, 2016), or experience a lively and joyful environment much like festivals thanks to the power of the crowds (Mowen *et al.*, 2003). Yet, the perception of crowding can change adversely depending on the situation, such as in health crises (Dogru-Dastan, 2022; I.-J. Park *et al.*, 2021) even for customers who enjoy crowds.

Considering the negative impacts of crowds, commercial yachting was restricted in some countries during the pandemic due to the large number of traveller, thus aiming to reduce the perceived health risks along with the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As an example, the governments of Greece and Spain declared that yacht charter activities can only be organized for less than 12 passengers (TJB, 2020; GTP, 2020), whereas Türkiye announced a set of rules limiting the number of passengers (TCS, 2022). Nevertheless, most yacht charter services were either cancelled or postponed in the Mediterranean Basin (Talamare, 2020), and The European Boating Industry declared that 54% of recreational boating companies recorded a decrease in revenue due to COVID-19 (European Commission, 2021). Furthermore, despite the increased popularity during the pandemic of short-term (Fan *et al.*, 2022) and outdoor recreation activities (Seong & Hong, 2021), there was a plunge in day cruises in the market. Day cruise income in Türkiye has dropped by up to 40% during the pandemic period (TCS, 2022).

It is proposed that “spatial proximity” and “the number of other people” in the environment affect the psychological state of the people (Latané, 1981, p.4) and the perception of the crowd changes depending on some physical and social factors in the service environment (Rapoport, 1975). However, few studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between how people perceive crowds, tour characteristics, and situational variables (Dogru-Dastan, 2022). Although spatial distance becomes vital during Covid-19, the concepts of the crowd and perceived health risks have been addressed only in a limited way for marine-based travel services, with a focus on large cruise ships (Castaldo *et al.*, 2021). The impact of perceived crowds on the experience of marine travellers has received little attention.

The aim of the present study was to investigate the dynamics of tourist behaviour toward shared yacht charter services regarding Covid-19 as a health-risk situation. The day cruise was chosen as a research context because, despite being a short-term outdoor activity, it experienced significant economic losses and allowed for the observation of the effect of service environment features (loud noise, insufficient physical space, barriers, a highly heterogeneous environment for customers, etc.). Furthermore, it is a keen group activity, and because of the pandemic circumstances, some new group behaviour patterns may emerge.

Europe is a significant market for yacht tourism, with 3.2 million jobs and 183 billion euros invested in marine tourism. About half of Europe's coastal tourism jobs are in the Mediterranean (European Commission Report, 2016), and Türkiye is one of the most popular destinations thanks to its natural and cultural attractions. Every year, about 2 million foreign and domestic tourists participate in day cruises along the coastline of Türkiye. Hence, Türkiye was chosen as a research destination. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was employed as a theoretical framework. In the study, twenty-two experienced customers were interviewed; half of them did not participate in any day cruise during the pandemic. Therefore, the study also discusses why customers did not engage in a tour despite their intention to do so, which has been stated as a gap for TPB studies in the literature (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020). Through semi-structured interviews, service-specific dynamics were also revealed, apart from the theoretical structure.

The next section outlines the conceptual structure of the study. Literature on the theory of planned behaviour and perceived health risks are examined in detail along with the factors that influence crowding perception as well as the negative influences of crowding, companion constraint and negotiation dilemma. The findings are then presented for twenty-two in-depth interviews with customers. Finally, the findings and their theoretical and managerial implications, as well as forthcoming study directions are discussed.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

TPB is a popular theory to describe how travellers make decisions (Han *et al.*, 2020), and it is an extension of the theory of reasoned action that has limits in dealing with behaviours over which persons have only volitional control (Ajzen, 1991). TPB's core concept is that behaviour of individuals is guided by their intentions, which are influenced by attitudes (*behavioural beliefs*), subjective norms (*normative beliefs*), and perceived behavioural control (*control beliefs*) (Ajzen, 2020). In the theory, attitudes and subjective norms represent the volitional process, while behavioural control represents the nonvolitional. The attitude component is a result of a person's salient behavioural beliefs (Conner & Armitage, 1998), and it is formed either favourably or negatively by learning and experience (Hsu & Huang, 2012). It is the evaluation of the expectancy-value or perceived outcomes of the behaviour in question. The attitudes of individuals toward an action are most favourable when they feel that the behaviour will result in positive and joyful outcomes (Gstaettner *et al.,* 2017). A perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a certain behaviour is referred to as a subjective norm (Ajzen, 1991), which has two forms: *injunctive* and *descriptive* beliefs. The expectation or subjective probability that a certain referent individual or group (e.g., family or friends) approves or disapproves of performing the behaviour is known as an injunctive one. On the other hand, descriptive normative beliefs are related to whether important persons perform the behaviour in question or not (Ajzen, 2020). Perceived behavioural control refers to people's perceptions of how easy or difficult it is to do the desired activity (Ajzen, 1991). Control beliefs are influenced by both internal factors such as capability (e.g., information, skills) and external factors such as opportunities, barriers, and the cooperation of others (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Conner & Armitage, 1998; Soliman, 2019), and varies between situations and activities.

Some researchers claim that the suggested additional variables have increased TPB predictability (Conner & Armitage, 1998; Han *et al.,* 2017; Soliman, 2019; Shin *et al.,* 2022).

2.2. Perceived health risk

Perceived risk has been used for numerous studies within the context of TBP and it is a noteworthy concept with a significant influence on the behaviours of consumers. "Even if the risk does not exist in reality" (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006, p. 84), it can act as a deterrent or postponer towards purchasing services (Cunningham *et al.,* 2005). Services include many risks such as financial, social, psychological, and performance (Dowling & Staelin, 1994; Keh & Sun, 2008; Mitchell, 1999; Taylor, 1974; Tsaur *et al.*, 1997), and perceived health risk is one of them (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006). The perceived risk concept is situation-specific, and so a health crisis might also cause tourists to perceive the services as riskier than they are accustomed to, leading to travel avoidance behaviour (Cahyanto *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, the proportional importance of TPB dimensions is also likely to differ among activities and situations (Ajzen, 1991). Many studies on tourist behaviour have been conducted in relation to Covid-19 showing that Covid-19 risk perception is affected tourist behaviour in many aspects (Han *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2021; Seong & Hong, 2021; Ojo *et al.,* 2022; Fan *et al.*, 2022).

2.3. The factors affecting crowding perception and the negative influences of crowding

Crowding is discussed with its two opposite aspects (Hanks *et al.,* 2017; Jacobsen *et al.*, 2019), however, it is widely characterized negatively because it primarily triggers feelings of aggression and hostility. Ditton *et al.,* (1983) define crowds as a state of psychological discomfort caused by a high ratio of people to available space in one's surroundings. Rapoport (1975, p. 134) mentioned crowd as a judgment about density "in terms of the level of appropriateness or excessively high effective density, and it is strongly tied to one's expectations and prior experience, situational, personal, national, and trip characteristics, and some factors such as the absence of other adjacent places (i.e. meetings rooms), and defences allowing the control of interaction (i.e. fences), high level of noise, feeling lack of control accelerate perceived denser of a place. Furthermore, social factors influencing crowd perception such as the high likelihood of unwanted interaction, high heterogeneity between individuals in the crowd (Rapoport, 1975), the behaviour of others (Sun & Budruk, 2017; Westover, 1989), and the combination of in-group vs out-group members in the crowd (Novelli *et al.*, 2013) also influence crowd perception, and other people in the environment may be perceived as threatening.

Studies show that, in addition to physical and social factors, perceived health risk increases perceived crowd. The study by Wang & Ackerman (2019) points out that a pathogen threat resulted in making dense social environments appear more crowded causing greater negative affect toward these surroundings. The study by Kock *et al.* (2020) reveals that crowding perceptions are positively related to perceived COVID-19 infect ability which is also adversely related to the predicted comfort of respondents in a crowded environment. Another study conducted on evolving visitor behaviour in relation to crowded destinations during Covid-19 period pointed out that crowding is primarily perceived negatively by tourists, who described it as claustrophobic, unsanitary and disease-prone, etc. (Kainthola *et al.*, 2021). I.-J. Park *et al.* (2021) conducted a study via manipulated scenario techniques to understand the impacts on decision-making different Covid-19 threat levels. The findings show that as the Covid-19 threat became more serious, customers were more inclined towards avoiding crowded travel.

There are few empirical health risk studies on marine-based travel services majority of which are related to cruise tourism. After Covid-19, health risks became more salient in cruise customer behaviour patterns by turning into a considerable barrier (Holland, 2020; Holland *et al.,* 2021). Interestingly, contrary to expectations, studies on cruise travel did not support the influence of crowding on perceived health risks or negative feelings toward services during Covid-19. Castaldo *et al.,* (2021)'s study findings

maintain that high health risk perception diminishes the intention to go on a cruise, but perceived crowding does not. Radic *et al*. (2021) also discovered that female cruisers have low motivation to visit dining rooms due to the perceived high health risk of COVID-19; however, perceived health risk was not a significant moderator in the perceived crowdedness and emotions linkage.

Crowding also impacts the service experience and behaviour of customers, such as perceived value, satisfaction, and purchase intentions (Machleit *et al*., 2000; Eroglu *et al*., 2005; Santini, 2020). The major promise of yacht charter services is related to hedonic experiences, i.e., sensing nature and having fun, relaxing, and socializing. Crowded and loud tours can diminish the hedonic experience by preventing travellers from behaving freely and maintaining their privacy. Furthermore, while customer similarities boost customer-to-customer interaction, allowing them to socialize and feel more at ease in the environment (Hyun & Han, 2013), other situations lead to negative psychological feelings, increasing the perceived risks associated with the service (Brack & Benkenstein, 2014) and lessening the perceived value (Paker & Gök, 2021c). According to the study results, perceived spatial crowding has decreased the hedonic value of cruisers (Hyun & Kim, 2015). In conclusion, aside from the effect of crowd size, the qualitative elements of the crowd are also an effective factor in the hedonic value sought by the yacht traveller.

Limited studies related to health risks are available in the literature for yacht chartering. Health risk emerged in the study by Paker & Gök (2021b) prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, it was not perceived to have a significant impact on the decision-making process of yachters. Furthermore, no research was conducted on shared day cruises.

2.4. Companion constraint and negotiation dilemma

Shaw (1976, p. 11) defines a group as "two or more persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences or is influenced by each other person". Additionally, Price & Arnould (1999, p. 39) mentioned that a group of friends is defined as a set of persons who share "a voluntary, personal relationship, typically providing intimacy and assistance, in which the two [or more] parties like each other and seek each other's company". Therefore, friends and family members are both shareholders in decisions and suppliers of affection and belonging needs, which makes their role important with regard to traveller behaviour. That is why, most vacation decisions are made jointly by many people (Nichols & Snepenger, 1988), and vacationers are addressed as groups rather than just as individuals (Decrop, 2005; Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1995).

Leisure constraints are barriers that "intervene between the preference for an activity and participation in it" (Crawford & Godbey, 1987, p. 120). The absence of friends and family members, *namely companions*, becomes an interpersonal constraint in the vacation decision-making process. This constraint has an influence on both tourist preferences and participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987) and can have a detrimental impact on the perceived benefit of leisure activities (C.-C. Chen & Petrick, 2016). Several studies' results reveal that the likelihood of travelling intention has decreased when there is no travel partner (Karl *et al*., 2020), the effects of the interpersonal constraint have been perceived as noticeably higher with regard to participation in leisure activities at older ages (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008), and young travellers have been impacted by this travel constraint during the early decision-making stage (H.-J. Chen *et al*., 2013). Although some studies have not supported the influence of companion restrictions (Huang & Hsu, 2009), some scholars claim that integrating travel constraints into TPB gets better results for predicting travel intention (Shin *et al*., 2022).

Constraints can be negotiated if people have a strong motivation to travel (Jackson & Rucks, 1995; S. H. Park *et al*., 2017), and so travellers can overcome the companion constraint by sacrificing some tour

preferences. According to some scholars, COVID-19 could be a new travel constraint, necessitating additional behavioural or cognitive negotiating tactics (Karl *et al.,* 2022). It is well documented in the literature that uncertainty and the possibility of undesirable situations affect consumer behaviour according to the perceived risk level. In this context, a health risk may emerge as a compromise issue; however, because it is a very sensitive concern, it may not be eligible to be discussed as a sacrifice between partners.

3. Research Design

3.1. Data collection and sample characteristics

In the study, the interpretive method was used, and the data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with 22 experienced Turkish customers, half of whom took a shared day cruise during the pandemic, to explore their behaviour dynamics towards crowded tours. The study of Gstaettner *et al.* (2017), which investigated the factors affecting customer behaviour in risky situations through TPB, was adapted to develop the customer interview questions. The risk of walking across the water-covered sandbar mentioned in the questions in the aforementioned study was replaced in the present study with the risk of "participating in a shared day cruise during Covid-19". Purposive sampling techniques were used to select interviewees, and to increase research validity, interviewees with distinct characteristics in terms of experience in different travel destinations, education levels, gender, ages, and income levels were included. Interviews were conducted between February and May 2022, lasting a total of 11 hours. The interviews ended when no new findings were discovered, indicating that the research had reached saturation.

3.2. Data analysis

Data evaluation was carried out using directed content analysis. This type of content analysis is designed to enhance an existing theoretical framework. With the aid of established theories, the research question, the initial coding scheme, and the relationships between the variables are organized. If any context emerges in the research that cannot be classified with the initial coding scheme, a new code is assigned and regulation is enacted (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this study, the prior coding list was based on TPB factors, and the themes were rearranged as a result of new findings that surfaced in later stages.

Two researchers conducted the interviews which were then analyzed independently. A member check procedure was followed to boost confidence and the researchers provided tentative summarized results to the participants following the interviews (Given, 2008). As recommended by Krippendorf (2013), the first researcher re-evaluated the interviews several times to increase intra-coder reliability. The researcher used an iterative strategy, going over previously identified topics and fusing or separating them. Coding was then split into two sections (Neuman, 2006). The first author suggested to the second author the coding table, the hierarchical relationship of the codes, along with the code keywords. Open coding yielded six main codes and 20 sub codes. The first author coded the interviews and then discussed the results with the second author. Seven sub and two main codes were cancelled, and some keywords were changed. After axial coding, the code table had four main and 13 sub codes. In the final coding table, 764 codes were obtained. The second author evaluated the codes of the first author as in agreement or disagreement with the nominal system and offered alternatives. After this process, inter-coder reliability was calculated via Cohen Kappa as 81.1%. Since this coefficient is above the level accepted in literature (Lacy & Riffe, 1996), the research results are considered as reliable. The data were coded and analyzed using MaxQda 18.1.1. program. MaxQda is a popular qualitative data analysis software that assists in the development of a hierarchical code system and the conceptual model of the investigated phenomenon. Information on data collection and analysis procedure is presented in Figure 1, characteristics of respondents are shown in Table 1, while the final coding can be seen in Table 2.

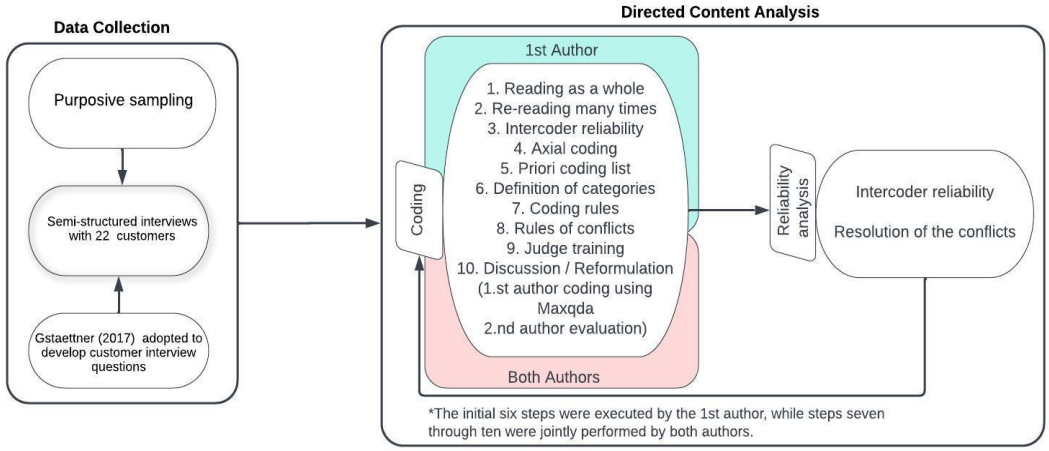


Figure 1. *The data collection and analysis procedure*

Table 1. *Characteristics of respondents*

Respon-dent	Interview duration (Min)	Gender	Education level	Age	Income level	Marital status	Level of perception of risk for themselves	Relatives in risk group	Participated in a crowded tour during the pandemic
R1	42	Female	Master's degree	35	Upper Midlevel	Married	Mid		X
R2	36	Male	PhD	34	Upper Midlevel	Single	Low	X	
R3	28	Female	Undergrad uate	51	Upper Midlevel	Married	Mid	X	X
R4	23	Female	Undergrad uate	75	High Level	Single	High		
R5	28	Female	PhD	43	Upper Midlevel	Married	Mid	X	
R6	23	Female	Undergrad uate	38	Mid Level	Married	Low	X	
R7	27	Female	Master's degree	34	Mid Level	Single	Low		X
R8	28	Female	Undergrad uate	45	Upper Midlevel	Single	Low		X
R9	29	Male	Master's degree	30	Lower Middle Level	Single	Low		X
R10	26	Male	PhD	32	Mid Level	Single	Low		X
R11	52	Male	Master's degree	51	High	Married	Mid		X
R12	28	Male	Undergrad uate	35	Mid Level	Single	Low		
R13	25	Male	High School	21	Mid Level	Single	Low		X

Respon-dent	Interview duration (Min)	Gender	Education level	Age	Income level	Marital status	Level of perception of risk for themselves	Relatives in risk group	Participated in a crowded tour during the pandemic
R14	27	Male	Master's degree	34	Mid Level	Married	Mid		X
R15	25	Male	Master's degree	35	Mid Level	Single	Mid	X	X
R16	17	Female	Undergrad uate	29	Mid Level	Single	High	X	
R17	21	Male	High School	39	Upper Midlevel	Married	High	X	
R18	39	Female	Master's degree	46	Mid Level	Married	High	X	X
R19	55	Male	Undergrad uate	30	Lower Middle Level	Single	High		X
R20	20	Male	Master's degree	34	Lower Middle Level	Married	High		
R21	18	Female	Master's degree	34	Lower Middle Level	Married	Mid		
R22	33	Male	Master's degree	52	Mid Level	Married	High	X	

Table 2. *The final coding table*

Themes	
1- Perceived outcomes	**3- Perceived behavioural control**
1.1. Perceived benefits	*3.1. Trust toward external factors*
1.1.1. Hedonic value	3.1.1. Other customers
1.1.2. Functional value	3.1.2. Service providers
1.2. Perceived risks	3.1.3. Government authorities
1.2.1. Transmitting virus to loved ones	*3.2. Internal factors*
1.2.2. Perceived health risk for him/herself	3.2.1. Precautions against the virus
2- Important ones' attitude & behaviour	3.2.2. Risk reduction strategies
2.1. Important ones' approval	*3.3. Knowledge of crisis management*
2.2. Others' and companions' behaviour	**4- Intention & behaviour**
2.3. Negotiation dilemma with companions	

4. Results

4.1. Perceived outcomes

4.1.1. Perceived benefits

Respondents intensively point out that the hedonic value of the service is a core benefit of the tour. They increase their positive feelings by getting away from their everyday lives, enjoying the beauty of the marine environment, spending a pleasant time with friends and family members, and sometimes developing new friendships as a result of their participation in the tour. According to Holbrook & Hirschman (1982), consumers expect their feelings and well-being to increase while seeking hedonic value, and they perceive this value as the emotional reward of the service experience (Philipp Klaus *et al.*, 2022).

"I can swim in a clear sea during such a tour; these bays are inaccessible by land. We went to Marmaris Turunç Island, where the bottom of the sea was visible despite being tens of meters of deep." (R2).
"This is unquestionably a group activity, which I enjoy. You chat, watch the sea together, and feel the wind. It's so much fun that I wouldn't want to go on tour by myself." (R5).

Furthermore, it was frequently mentioned by the participants that such an environment creates a wonderful atmosphere for an "escape from the reality of the pandemic". One of the essential components of the hedonic-centered experience is an escape from reality (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). The mentioned escape is provided by various environments where the individual can get away from his daily routines and gain new experiences (Holmqvist *et al*., 2020), and the tour meets this need perfectly.

"The pandemic really made me nervous; our nerves were frayed, we needed some fun. When we went to sea, we felt as if there was no pandemic, and everything was normal all day long. It was amazing!" (R3).

Some respondents who participated in the tour stated that they had a more pleasurable experience compared to previous years due to smaller crowds on the yacht as a pandemic measure. The result is consistent with the findings of Hyun & Kim (2015) illustrating an inverse relationship between crowding and hedonic value of cruisers.

"The yacht was not crowded thanks to measures. I had more fun than in previous years" (R7).
"I prefer less crowded boats, even if the price is a little more expensive! The practice of lessening crowding should be kept going anyway; it is definitely a much more enjoyable tour" (R9).

In addition to the hedonic value, some customers also mentioned the utilitarian aspect of the tour, as they were able to both have fun and meet their food and drink needs at an affordable price.

"The price of the tour includes F&B; I think it's very affordable. After swimming in the sea, we have a barbecue at noon" (R17).

4.1.2. Perceived risks

The negative outcome of participating in a daily yacht tour during the pandemic was mentioned as a health risk. The overcrowding on the yacht and the possibility that other travellers carried the Covid-19 virus restrained some customers from participating in the tour. The health concern is not mentioned for the individual, but also includes the possibility that the person will infect those around him/her after the tour. The findings are in line with the results of Ojo *et al*. (2022) in which concerns about infecting others were revealed as a significant factor in the decisions of US individuals to cancel or postpone recreational travel during COVID-19. Respondents hesitated to take these risks to receive the anticipated benefits. It has been observed that customers who are themselves or relatives in the high-risk group in terms of health have greater concerns.

"I didn't visit the house for 1.5 weeks after the boat tour. I live with my mother; I won't endanger her. I returned home after a Covid-19 test came back negative 10 days later." (R15).
" My job requires me to be in crowded places, yes, but I have to. I can't risk my family for fun!" (R5).
"I definitely couldn't join the tour during the pandemic, I'm 75 years old, it's too risky for me". (R4)

In addition, many participants reported that the crowd on the yacht increased their perception of the health risk posed by Covid-19 and that the tour seemed more crowded than usual; similar results were observed during studies by Wang & Ackerman (2019) and Kock *et al*. (2020). The majority of the

respondents also emphasized the high risk of contamination indoors due to inadequate ventilation on board and frequently criticized the overcrowding in shared open spaces, such as sunbathing areas.

> *"It's nice to be outside, you're always in the fresh air because of the wind, but there's still risk in such a crowd service environment. These tours were always crowded, but now it seems even more crowded to me (R17).*

4.2. Important ones' attitude and behaviour

4.2.1. Important ones' approval

It is observed that customers who wish to join the tour during the pandemic period feel this pressure more intensely if they live with or frequently interact with family members who pose health risks and may even give up their plans to join the tour. Especially young people living alone reported that the opinions of their families had little influence on them.

> *"If I had taken the tour during the pandemic, my mother was really worried about themselves without saying "why did you do this, my daughter, you didn't ever think about us" by intimating it, and I wouldn't want to go" (R5).*

4.2.2. Others' and companions' behaviour

Among the interviewees, those with a high-risk perception stated that they would not be affected by the behaviour of important others and would not participate in the tour in any case. Those with low-risk perceptions stated that they care about the attitudes and behaviours of important people if they are in the status of "companion". By emphasizing companion influence, our findings add to current understandings of descriptive normative beliefs (Ajzen, 2020). The risk perception of Covid-19 is quite apparent in group behaviour, and companion constraints became more pronounced during the pandemic period. This also supports the claim that tourist behaviour is a group behaviour rather than an individual behaviour (Decrop, 2005; Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1995).

> *"During the pandemic, my roommate joined the tour and a few more friends. Frankly, I envied them, I was very jealous, but I could not go out because my family did not want to participate in the tour" (R6).*

4.2.3. Negotiation dilemma with companions

During the pandemic, majority of the customers who were enthusiastic about participating in the tour often expressed difficulty convincing their hesitant friends and family members to join them. At the heart of the issue is the possibility of being blamed by their friends, as well as a pang of conscience if they become ill. The fact that the subject under negotiation would jeopardize the person's health increased sensitivity and, in some cases, caused it to be avoided entirely.

> *"I didn't try to convince anyone, and I didn't want to impress anyone. The person should take into account his own health situation! I cannot take the risks for them" (R1).*
> *"I have friends who like this tour but are afraid to go; I won't convince them. Even if they had simple flu, they'd blame me. I wouldn't risk it" (R7).*

4.3. Perceived behavioural control

4.3.1. Trust toward external factors

The presence or absence of resources, opportunities, and barriers perceived by the person to perform the behaviour affects the intention (Ajzen, 2020). The dynamics of the yacht environment have become an important resource in terms of making it easier or more difficult for the traveller to cope with the risk of Covid-19.

Based on experience, interviewees stated that the tour has been arranged with a large crowd for many years, that the customer profile is always quite diverse, and that there are no physical places or barriers on the yacht with which they can separate themselves from other customers they don't like. Some respondents appreciate loud music and dancing, but for others, this could be quite irritating. Furthermore, it has been stated that the necessity of sharing all the resources on the yacht necessitates interaction between the other customers which may lead to conflicts between customers. In such cases, they observed that the 'ability of business owners to intervene is limited. The interviewed customers indicated that the yacht service is provided in a sloppy and overcrowded environment due to the opportunistic behaviour of the service providers, and they also stated a lack of trust in external factors based on previous experiences. The majority of those who did not participate in the tour stated that they did not believe the businesses followed the rules, particularly in terms of limiting the number of passengers. They are almost certain that other customers will ignore the rules even if the businesses apply the pandemic rules.

> *"I don't trust yacht companies. This service is provided in a limited time; I think they will not miss such a chance when they find the customer" (R5).*
> *"Before the pandemic, yacht operators ignored customers, operators were careless about service quality. We lacked trust in tour operators' pandemic management" (R11).*
> *"I've never seen the captain warn customers. Beyond that we saw a very big yacht on the sea, customers were dancing to the loud music shoulder to shoulder!" (R10).*
> *"People don't obey the rules, I don't think it would be possible to control such a crowd on a boat" (R13).*
> *"There are people that hide it even when they have Covid, some are incredibly careless. You can come across such a person on a boat for example, there are all kinds of people on the boat!" (R4).*

Despite the lack of trust toward operators and customers, the Coast Guard, as the government authority, has been cited as the most reliable stakeholder in the service.

> *"I think the necessary rules were taken and implemented during the pandemic. I most trust the governmental authorities, coast guards" (R2).*

4.3.2. Internal factors

The ability of an individual to perform a behaviour is also related to the sufficiency of personal skills and resources (Ajzen, 2020). Respondents stated that they rely on their own factors rather than external ones to protect themselves from the risk of the virus on the yacht during the pandemic period. The most common anti-virus precaution was to keep a safe distance from other passengers. The crowd on the yacht, however, made this precaution difficult to implement.

> *"We were not comfortable at all when we went on the tour, we know the quality of this service from previous years, but we wanted to participate. We thought we could protect ourselves with our own measures. No matter what others do, no matter how bad the boat is, we still relied on our own measures" (R18).*
> *"We tried to stay away from customers on tour. We sat at the stern of the boat because there was no isolated place due to the crowd, we inhaled a lot of exhaust fumes, but thankfully we did not get covid" (R18).*

However, the participants explained that they perceived the virus risk as coming only from outside in such a crowded and high-customer heterogenic environment and tried to keep a distance from others, despite being very close to their own companions. These findings are in line with the statements of

Novelli *et al*. (2013), in which the weight of the number of out-of-group individuals in the crowd influences crowd perception and other customers can be perceived as a threat.

> *"We kept our distance between people we don't know, we kept our masks on. You always think that covid will come from outside, you believe that something like this will not come from someone close to me!" (R11).*

On the other hand, some tour participants stated that they developed risk reduction strategies such as booking private seats for their groups, preferring yachts with small passenger capacities, joining the tour at destinations and times where they thought it would be less crowded, and thoroughly researching yacht precautions before joining.

> *"We preferred the small boat. We felt safer with fewer people" (R10).*
> *"We didn't go on the weekend because we thought it would be crowded, we preferred the weekday tour" (R1).*
> *"We especially joined the tour from Ören to avoid the crowd on the yacht. This is not a popular destination. In fact, we took the first precaution by choosing such a holiday destination" (R18).*

4.3.3. Knowledge of crisis management

Authorities actually took crisis measures, particularly with the half-capacity restriction and additional hygiene measures put into effect during the pandemic. The Coast Guard conducted regular inspections for both yacht operators and travellers, and those who did not follow the aforementioned rules were penalized (TCS, 2022). However, almost none of the respondents had heard of the pandemic measures taken. Some of them had knowledge of safety precautions by calling or asking yacht operators at the dock. A few mentioned that they saw little news about the measures taken during the pandemic in the main media channels.

> *"I didn't know these rules existed. If I had known, I could have been more selective, I would have paid attention to whether the rules were applied on the yacht" (R14).*

4.4. Intention&behaviour for tour participation

Respondents emphasized that the perceived benefits of the service and the personal precautions they took before or during the tour were the most influential factors in their intention to participate in the tour during the pandemic.

> *"I am in the risk group, but the fun and atmosphere of the tour convinced me, I joined the tour despite everything and everyone" (R3).*
> *"I went on the tour with a smaller capacity boat. If my companion insisted on me going out with a bigger boat, I would have done it, but I would definitely stay away from other customers and be cautious" (R13).*

The risk of spreading the virus to loved ones, a lack of trust in external factors, and companion constraints are all factors that influence those who do not participate in the tour during the pandemic. Furthermore, a lack of information about crisis-response measures was unearthed to have an impact on the intention to participate in the tour. Some older participants stated that they were not informed about precautionary measures and would have participated if they had known about them.

> *"After your explanation, I can say that the measures taken by the government are actually very sufficient. To be honest, I was terrified of virus infection due to overcrowding. But I would have joined the tour if I had known these rules had been followed." (R4).*

Based on the discourses of the study, the obtained research model is seen in Figure 2.

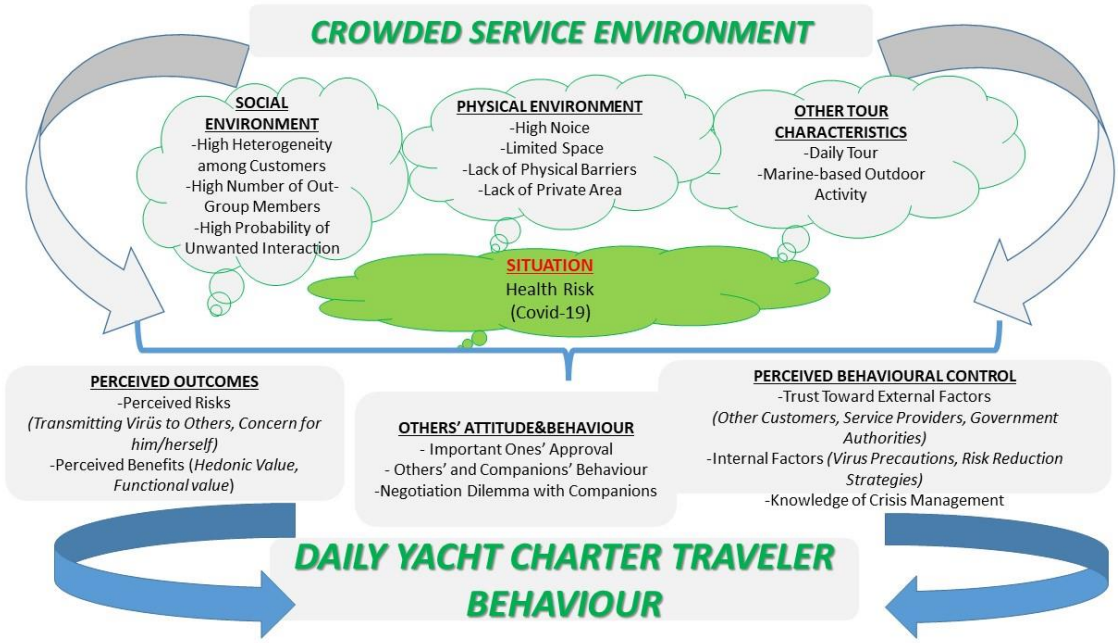


Figure 2. *Research model*

5. Discussion and conclusion

The present study aims to investigate the factors that influence the behaviours of travellers toward travel services offered in crowded environments by concentrating on shared day cruise charters regarding Covid-19 as a health-risk situation, while also addressing several theoretical implications. The study results also fill a gap in the literature on the relationship between crowding perceptions, trip characteristics, and situational variables (Dogru-Dastan, 2022).

Findings show that the health risk in the environment increases the perception of the crowd, and the perception of health risk is more apparent if crowded services are provided in such an environment having attributes like a high number of out-group members, high probability of unwanted interaction, high customer heterogeneity, high noise, absence of physical barriers, limited space, lack of private area. The study's findings revealed the effect of crowds and health risks on tourist behaviour, as well as the relationship between these factors (Kock *et al.*, 2020; Wang & Ackerman, 2019). However, these findings do not support those of studies conducted on large cruise ships during the pandemic period (Castaldo *et al.*, 2021; Radiç *et al.*, 2021). Travellers on cruise ships have their own cabins, as well as a variety of activities and venues, allowing customers to avoid noisy environments or contact with undesirable people. The findings do not support each other because of the differences in the social and physical characteristics of the cruise ship environment and shared day cruise. Furthermore, customers perceive customers other than group members as threats and seek to increase the distance between them as much as possible. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kock *et al.* (2020) the study, which revealed a link between crowd perception, xenophobia, and thus perceived virus contagion.

Study findings also show that the perceived behavioural control related to internal factors is the most influential dimension of TPB. Even though the government took several measures, distrust toward the

service concept was apparent. Based on travellers' previous years' experience, they do not believe the measures were implemented due to the reality of economies of scale by service operators. Travellers perceived that crowding is a result of service providers' opportunistic behaviour, so they trust more on their own precautions over governments, and they developed their own strategies intensively. As far as we know, the relationship between the crowd and the perception of trust toward the service provider has not been discussed together in the literature, so it can be defined as a novel contribution to the literature. Despite the crucial effect on tourist risk perception (Z. Li *et al.*, 2020; Radic *et al.*, 2020), the crisis communication was also evaluated as weak and it was revealed that the measures taken were unknown to travellers. Some customers did not participate in the tour during the pandemic period due to a lack of crisis communication.

It is also observed that there is an inverse relationship between crowding and the perceived hedonic value of the service. Although the crowd and the lower tour price due to economies of scale have a positive effect on the perceived utilitarian value, the actual value expected from the tour is related to hedonistic value seeking. This finding is consistent with Hyun & Kim's (2015) finding that perceived spatial crowding reduces the hedonic value of cruise customers. Customers remarked that the tour was much more pleasurable this year than in prior years due to the smaller number of travellers as a part of the pandemic measures. Besides, they desire this practice to be continued.

The interpersonal constraint was also revealed as a factor with a direct impact on customer intention. As stated by Karl *et al.* (2022), health risk is considered a new travel restriction since the declaration of Covid-19. Almost all respondents that did not participate in the tour during the pandemic stated that they would go on the tour if they found a companion. These findings are in line with the findings of Humagain & Singleton (2021) showing that travellers were mostly constrained by finding individuals to accompany them on a recreational tour during the pandemic. Interpersonal constraints are highly related to motivation, especially when motivations involve socialization (Kang *et al.*, 2022). Yachters are highly motivated by spending time with family and friends (Paker & Gök, 2021a, 2021b), and so the aforementioned constraint may become more salient in yacht charter services.

Furthermore, the negotiation dilemma was also observed as part of the study results. Negotiation is a critical component of group behaviour that necessitates agreement on travel options. What group members will sacrifice in the event of such a health risk, on the other hand, is an extremely sensitive issue. In such a negotiation environment, people struggle to persuade their group members, even if they believe the health risk is low. The issue of the negotiation dilemma has not been mentioned explicitly in previous studies.

Moreover, the perceived risk is not the only concern related to the traveller personally as mentioned under the negative consequences of the service, it also includes risks related to the transmission of the virus to one's family and friends, which are in line with the results of Ojo *et al.* (2022). It is possible to conclude that altruistic behaviour dynamics underpin the hesitant behaviour of persuading others or participating in the tour. Subjective control factors among individuals from collectivist countries have been observed frequently in previous research findings (Hsu & Huang, 2012; Quintal *et al.*, 2010). Türkiye is a distinctively collectivist society (HofstedeInsights, 2021). The influence of others showed up under both attitudes toward behaviour and interpersonal constraints widely in this study, which can be indicated as another theoretical contribution of the present study.

Based on the study findings and relevant literature, several implications are suggested to service providers and authorities, which are seen in Table 3.

Table 3. *Management implications*

Problem category	Management implications
Crowd& Health Risk	-Allow high level of music only for customer segments who prefer it -Providing private area reservations for groups on the big yachts -Using separators, and fences between tables/sunbathing areas - Offering special promotions for private tours - Segmenting customers to bring like-minded people together - Arranging thematic tours such as yoga, classic music, dancing
Trust	-Increasing the visibility of the Coast Guard -Demonstrating posters that inspections have been made -Balancing the gap between the crowd-perceived value -Conducting price sensitivity studies -Keeping promises and taking into consideration of customer compliance -Marketing time window pricing to balance the seasonality effect -Providing consistent standard service quality, especially for sanitation and cleanliness - Educating customers on pandemic behaviour codes - Keeping under control appropriate behaviour and attitude all people at the yacht
Crisis Communication	-Sharing of the measures taken in crisis situations on the main news media channels and social media. -Declaration crisis announcements under the roof of the yacht cooperatives - Shooting films showing that the tour is risk-free
Negotiation Between Companions	- Suggesting group-specific risk-reducing options - Establishing opportunities for people with a similar risk perception to come together.

6. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The main limitation of the study is that qualitative research methods were used, so the results are not generalizable. In addition, the sample size is insufficient, and the cultural diversity is limited to Turkish customers. Studies that are quantitative, with large samples, and culturally diverse will both increase the reliability and validity of the findings and reveal the effect of cultural differences on the results.

Future studies, particularly cross-national research comparing the findings of similar studies conducted in different countries, are highly encouraged. Overnight cruises or charters as a research subject, in order to figure out if the health risks and crowd perception increase, remain, or decrease as the days pass, can yield worthwhile findings. Furthermore, given the disparity in results between this yacht charter study and the studies on large cruise ships, different size cruise ships, particularly those used for river tourism, can be an area of investigation in future studies. Future studies can also discuss other crowded travelling services with limited space, for example, train tours, or city tours by bus can be interesting research topics. Tourism services attended by crowds or groups must be presented on more segmented and smaller scales in order to be sustainable (Miao *et al*., 2021). Thus, investigations on segmentation and effective criteria for increasing similarities are suggested. The concepts of crowding, perceived value, and perceived service quality can all be evaluated, and sensitivity analysis can assist in determining optimal traveller numbers. The expected attributes of the yacht and acceptable pricing

levels can be evaluated using conjoint analysis. Finally, investigations on negotiation methods in health-risky situations are highly suggested.

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