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Targeting cruise ships: A study of security perceptions around terrorism

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~~ "A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for" ~~ John A. Shedd

Abstract

This exploratory paper set out to ascertain three main important data regarding security and cruise travel. Firstly, whether people actually paid attention to security and whether a lack of security bothered them. Secondly, how each gender perceived security issues. And thirdly, what are individual's personal views on terrorism. In general, this study is about security in the hospitality and tourism industry. Particularly, it is about the cruise sector. It is about how the sector views security: is it just another additional requirement that needs to be complied with or do cruise operators genuinely care about their customers and want to protect them. The answers to the above mentioned three main areas, will be useful for customers of cruise holidays when making their cruise holiday decisions, and it is also important information for cruise operators. The findings will inform cruise operators about the expectations of their customers and since the data is broken down to gender levels, it will provide them with useful information about how to market their offerings to each gender. So, in essence, the findings here will help with strategic planning in terms of operations (security) as well as marketing.

Key words: tourism security, cruise operators, tourism, cruise holidays, decision making process.

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Introduction

Bowen, Fidgeon and Page (2014) state that 44% of the participants from a particular study conducted believe that terrorists attacking cruise ships will occur sometime in the not too distant future. They believe that a maritime attack will occur. They also state that despite this view, cruise travelers do not believe that cruise operators will increase their security measures and they also accept that safety and security is a part of travel in this post 9/11 world. This security risk is associated with life going forward.

"The sea is a domain increasingly beyond government control, vast and wild, where laws of nations mean little and secretive ship owners do as they please and where the resilient pathogens, of piracy and terrorism flourish" (Langewiesche, 2003). This statement by Langewiesche in 'Anarchy at sea' is true, even today. There are a lot more security controls, checks and sophisticated defense mechanism in place today, but terrorist groups are determined and have been sharpening their maritime capabilities as well. They are ready to take on the challenge.

A maritime attack on a cruise ship carrying 8,000 people will be more devastating that the attacks on the World Trade Centre (9/11). Shkolnikova (2018) states that 2,983 people perished in the 9/11 attacks. That is close to 3,000 people but a successful attack on a cruise ship could end with a much higher toll and terrorists are aware of this. Hence, their interest in a maritime attack. Given the numbers involved, it is important for governments and cruise operators to ensure that there is absolute no chance of a security breach. Culley (2016) describes how ISIS and al Qaeda have been slowly assembling a 'navy' and that ISIS is looking to attack cruise ships and merchant ships. These are real possibilities; one that governments and cruise ship operators must take seriously. These groups should not be underestimated. A design for a maritime attack has been in the planning stage for some time now.

This exploratory study hopes to understand people's view about terrorism and their own safety and security. In order to design a particular service offering, it is important to understand the security risks involved and factor them into your thinking and strategic planning. Cruise operators need to acknowledge the importance of security and demonstrate the efforts they are making with regards to protecting their customers and employees.

Literature review

Importance of safe seas

According to Tzannatos (2003) all forms of transportation have been at risk of a terrorist attack for a long time. These include road, rail, air and sea travel. The reason why terrorist target these modes of transportation is obvious — it paralyses the world. Without transportation, commerce will be disrupted; business travel will be halted, and holiday travel will be out of the question. More importantly, attacks on these important infrastructures will instil fear and cause havoc which is the goal of any terrorist organisation. Domestic and international trading is reliant on all modes of transportation being operational and safe. Tzannatos also states that 90 percent of freight is carried by sea and that cruise ships, with its 'human' cargo are also very likely targets.

Lorenz (2007) list some of the more infamous terrorist attacks that specifically targeted transportation such the Super Ferry 12 attack in February of 2004 in the Philippines, the bombing of the trains in Madrid in March 2004 and the famous bus and underground subway bombings in London in July 2005. There are too many other incidents to list them all here, but it is safe to say that the terrorist intentions are very clear – disrupting transportation is in their sight. Lorenz also mentions the USS Cole and MV Limburg incidents. These two cases alone, should leave no one in doubt that terrorist have been building up their maritime capabilities for a long time and they are ready to deploy them. One would have expected military vessels to have been able to protect themselves, unlike commercial vessels.

Sea going vessels, especially huge cruise ships, are easy targets in that they are in the middle of the ocean, almost alone, at the mercy of the elements, nature, pirates and terrorists.

Cruise holidays

Cruise holidays have increased in popularity over the years. Its attraction is the all-inclusive one price for travel, food and entertainment. Plus travellers, in many cases, get to visit several destinations on a single cruise. Brida and Zapata (2010) state that cruise tourism has been increasing for several years and that passengers spend approximately \$18 million annually. It must also be noted that passengers, once they like a particular destination, tend to return to

that destination for a longer stay. Most cruise stops are very brief. Their return visit introduces extra money into the local economy which is most welcomed.

Fan, Qui, Hsu and Liu (2015) also claim that leisure cruising is growing rapidly worldwide. Their study based on the Chinese market, states that the main motivation for a cruise holiday is the opportunity to relax and spend time with family. According to Winter (2016), Wellington in New Zealand, received \$58 million dollars in the sailing period of 2015 to 2016. That's a huge injection for a small economy such as Wellington and New Zealand. There are several other major ports in New Zealand so the overall amount would have been much higher. Bigger cruise vessels are continually being built. Jeffery (2017) discusses the capacities of larger vessels currently in operation and he confirms that the largest cruise ship is being built and will be launched in 2022. This cruise ship, capable of hosting 6,850 passengers will cost just under £ 2 billion. It will have the usual amenities including a shopping village. A ship of this size will normally carry about 1500 staff as well. That is in excess of 8,000 people in one small location.

Airport security

Post 9/11, airports have become more secure and almost impenetrable. This is because of the shock and the experience of 9/11 and how hijackers managed to board aircrafts so easily. Kierzkowski (2017) states that airports have control systems in place to ensure no foreign objects gets into the aircraft or other restricted areas of the airport. Airports are investing in security personnel training, better ways to x-ray luggage and biometrics to help them thwart any possible terrorist attack. Weinberger (2010) explains how airport security officers monitor passenger's behaviour, targeting those with tell-tale signs that require further investigations. There is continual risk profiling and risk assessment process taking place as passengers check in. Airports around the world process thousands of passengers each day. There is constant research to find ways to clear passengers faster without compromising on the quality of the checks. It is better to delay an aircraft then to allow one terrorist on board. According to Labati, Genovese, Munoz, Piuri, Scotti and Sforza (2016), automation is the answer because the security checks will be consistent and compared to checks by security officer, there will be less chance of error due to fatigue. It will also be a lot fast and more passengers can be cleared reducing congestion.

Biometrics, according to Maguire (2009) started off with finger printing, facial and iris recognition. It has now evolved into recognising vein patterns of an individual, hand geometry and even the smell from our bodies. These checks are run alongside the traditional passport and password checks. It is just to confirm that the individual presenting the document or password is the correct person. The anxious state of an individual is also taken into account.

Sea port security

Quite evident that a significant amount of effort is continually being made with regards to airport security. Also the vast amount of literature available regarding airport security sends the signal that this is a significant issue and it is taken very seriously. A lot of money is being invested in researching and developing new equipment and methods of ensuring security. Most of these equipment being used for security checks are expensive but when dealing with large numbers, it is a worthwhile investment. However, many smaller airports or airports in poorer countries will not be able to afford them. The same will apply to sea ports. Sea ports do not process as many passengers as airports. For security to work properly, there must not be any breach anywhere in the loop, meaning all ports on the route must be secured to the same levels. But this is not possible. There is also a severe lack of literature regarding sea port security pointing to the fact that little seems to be done in this area. Privatisation of port security is also very risky as demonstrated by Sciascia (2013) in an article about an Indonesia port. In that particular case, due to privatisation, the very people who were charged with protecting the port, were the problem themselves. Criminal elements were working for the private security company. Private companies will want to return a profit, so their quality of security checks may not be up to the required standards.

Maritime security development

Bergin and Bateman (2005), recognising the dangers of sub-standard protection of sea ports in Australia, made several expensive recommendations to ensure that Australian states provided good security in and around their respective sea ports. The long list of recommendations included amongst others, a A\$100 million security programme led by the government and the creation of dedicated police units by individual states to protect their sea

ports. The researchers confirmed that there were a lot of gaps in the security protocol and they had to be addressed immediately.

According to Bradford (2011), as part of the security provisions in the Indian and Pacific ocean regions, the United States ensure they have sufficient combat ready teams in the region. This helps to safeguard their own interest, provide safe passage for other users and it may also act as a deterrent against terrorist activities. These are more recent developments and not all countries will be able to afford such 'luxury'. These developments are expensive such as the latest software, security devices and equipment, and not every country will be inclined to purchase them. And terrorist organisations are aware of this fact and they will exploit it to their advantage.

Methodology

A total of 115 participants responded to the survey. However, they did not answer all the questions. Some questions only received 94 responses. The entire study comprised of 25 question. Only six of those questions are being presented here. Two of them were demographic questions.

- 1) What is your gender?
- 2) Age?
- *3) Is security a factor when you choose your cruise holiday?*
- 4) With specific reference to maritime terrorism, what do you believe is the most likely method a cruise ship and its passengers can be attacked?
- 5) Taking into consideration cost and safety, select your preferred cruise option:-
 - I. cruise off Fiji \$2,000.00,
 - II. cruise off Africa \$4,000.00,
 - III. cruise off Italy \$8,000.00.
- 6) Which of the following represents your views on terrorism most closely?
 - I. "Big problem we must act immediately!"
 - II. "A little bit worrying, but not a big deal"
 - III. "Who cares, doesn't bother me"
 - IV. "I support the attacks"
 - *V. Other (please specify)*

Questions were tested and uploaded onto Survey Monkey and advertised through Facebook and personal networks. Participants were encouraged to publicise this survey through their own networks and to get their friends and families who were keen or experienced in cruising, to contribute and participate in this survey. This is a method known as *snowball sampling*. Within a week, 115 participants had completed the survey. In the usual manner, the data was securely stored in a password protected storage device. The questions were grouped according to common themes and presented along with gender details so that readers and other users of this study can easily evaluate the perspectives according to the gender. This will help cruise operators to design their services according to the needs of the customers.

Findings, analysis and discussion

Demographic data

Table 1: Gender

Gender	%	Count		
Female	59.1%	68		
Male	40.9%	47		

Table 2: Age

Age	%	Count		
<18	0.0%	0		
18 - 29	33.9%	39		
30 - 44	28.7%	33		
45 - 59	26.1%	30		
60+	11.3%	13		

Off the 115 participants that responded to the survey, there were 47 males and 68 female (Table 1) which works out to approximately 1:1.44. Cropp (2017) provided data from a survey done in New Zealand in 2017 with regards to cruise holidays that stated that there were 100 male for every 121 female. This works out to 1:1.21 approximately. So, the trend is that more females than males prefer cruise holidays. Cruise ship activities and services should design their cruises with this data in mind. Also cruise ship security should also factor in to their planning that more females

than males prefer cruise holidays. Females are more concerned with security (Table 3).

Table 2 shows the age breakdown from this survey. Note: While there weren't any participants that were under 18, that does not mean that there aren't any passengers that are under 18. So, again security planning must consider the young travelers as well. The age spread depicted in the survey seems to contrast with the figures presented by Cropp (2017) which states that three quarters or 75% of cruise passengers are between 50 and 80 years old. The figures in table 2

describes a younger group of people interested in cruise holidays. It could possibly be that older travelers chose not to participate in the survey or that since the survey was conducted through Survey Monkey and advertised through Facebook, they were left out. Not everyone uses Facebook. Either way, cruise operated have to consider older travelers when planning their cruises, especially where security is concerned. So, the demographic data presented here will set the scene for the security questions in the survey. When reading and analysing the security questions, study it in conjunction with the gender and age presented here.

Gender vs Security

Table 3: Comparing gender vs security

Gender against security					
Gender	ler Yes No Blank				
Male	27	14	6	47	
Female	40	13	15	68	
Total	67	27	21	115	

94 out of 115 participants chose to respond to this question. The question specifically asked whether participants considered security when making cruise holiday plans. Of the 115, 21 or 18% did not answer

the question. Off the 21 blank responses, 6 were male and 15 were female. What were these 18% of participants thinking? Why did they leave this simple question blank?

Out of the 94 participants that responded, 67 participants or 71.27% said 'yes' and 27 participants or 28.72% said 'no'. The spread for those that said 'no' is quite even at 14 male and 13 female. The differences in the figures for the 'yes' category is somewhat more pronounced: 27 male out of 67 'yes' responses equates to 40.29% and 40 female out of 67 'yes' responses equates to 59.70%. So there is roughly a 60% to 40% split between genders in the 'yes' category. Females appear to take safety and security more seriously.

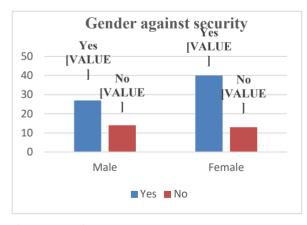


Chart 1: Gender against security

The reason for the detailed breakdown and significance of the figures presented in Table 3 and Chart 1 is important because it provides a clearer understanding of who or which gender specifically is more interested in security and has security considerations when traveling or on a cruise holiday. Knowing this will help providers to address their needs and anxieties around security.

More study into why participants responded 'no' when asked this question would help to understand the reasons why they do not have any security concerns or whether they are just resigned to the fact that security and terrorism are part and parcel of everyday life now. Why are females more interested in security than males? Is it because they are concerned not only for themselves, but also about the safety and security of their loved ones and families. A qualitative study might help understand this phenomenon better.

Preferred cruise option

There are several ports that are considered dangerous around the African continent like Port Harcourt (Nigeria), Ivory Coast, Tunis (Tunisia) and Aden (Yemen) to name a few. The Horn of Africa is often mentioned when discussing the dangerous waters around Africa.

Table 4: Cruise options

Cruise options	%	Count	
A Cruise off Fiji	55.3%	52	
Cruise off Africa	5.3%	5	
Cruise off Italy	39.4%	37	

A question was designed offering participants a choice of various cruises to evaluate whether they would stay away from known dangerous seas. The three options were Fiji for NZD \$2,000.00, Africa

for NZD \$4,000.00 and Italy for NZD \$8,000.00. The prices were selected in such a way that Africa would not be the most expensive. If Africa was the most expensive and it was rejected by the participants, it would be difficult to evaluate whether it was rejected because of price or security. So, it was decided that Africa would hold the middle position in terms of pricing.

Results in Table 4 show that most (55.3%) of the participants, who were from a variety of different countries, chose Fiji. Pricing could have been a factor in their decision. Only 5 or 5.3% of the participants opted for Africa which was priced at NZD \$4,000.00. The low number could signify perhaps that security is a factor when deciding on specific tours. Even the most expensive option, Italy priced at NZD \$8,000.00 received 37 or 39.4% of the votes. From here it can be concluded that security does play an important part on our holiday decisions and destination choices.

Most likely mode of attack

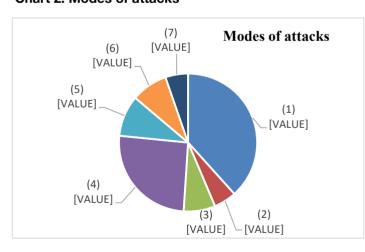
Table 5: Mode of attacks

SN	Modes of attacks	%	Count
1	Passengers attacked while on-shore visiting	38.3%	36
	Places of Interests.		
2	Ramming cruise ship with another sea-going	5.3%	5
	vessel	0.070	
3	Use of rocket propelled grenade (RPG)	7.4%	7
4	Suicide bomber on board the cruise ship	25.5%	24
5	Contaminating food supply (food terrorism)	9.6%	9
6	Planting incendiary devices on the cruise ship	8.5%	8
7	Other (please specify)	5.3%	5

Participants were asked to choose an option or scenario that they believed was most likely in terms of a terrorist attack. Only 94 participants out of 115 answered this question. Off the 94,

36 or 38.3% chose the first scenario which was about cruise ship passengers being attacked while on-shore. It is quite common for cruise ship passengers who are often stopping over for a brief visit at a destination to be attacked by criminal elements wanting to rob them. However, one major event that matches the first (1) scenario was the attack on cruise ship passengers in Tunis, Tunisia. That attack according to Sherwood (2016) took place in March of 2015 where 21 people were killed. They were mostly cruise ship passengers visiting the local Bardo Museum. It took about one year for Tunisia to see another cruise in their port. Recovery from an attack takes quite a lot of time.

Chart 2: Modes of attacks



The next biggest group is the suicide bombers on board the ship (4). 24 participants 25.5% of the or participants see this as a real possibility. Suicide bombing is very common in terrorist ideology. Throughout history there are many examples of terrorists successfully using suicide bombers to attack moving targets. Hassan (2010) states

that suicide bombing is a weapon of choice by many terrorist groups. Hutchinson (2007) states that suicide bombings are carried out in order to seek political change. Bloom (2011) discuss the use of women as suicide bombers because it gives that extra element of surprise and as

women, they do not appear as suspicious as their male counterparts. This allows them to move closer to their intended targets. Suicide bombing in terms of its use on a cruise ship is a real possibility because these ships often dock in smaller ports along the way. These smaller ports do not have very sophisticated or strict security protocols and could be the entry point for would-be terrorist. Once ships come into port, there is a lot of movement in and out of the ship, including from the passengers, crew, suppliers maintenance companies and contractors.

Besides these two options, the other options did not garner much interest. They were all less than 10% (Table 5).

Perspectives on terrorism

Participants were offered several different perspectives on terrorism and they were instructed to choose only one. Off the 115 participants, only 94 participants answered this question. Their responses are listed on Table 6 and their responses are further broken down according to their gender.

Table 6: Personal opinions on terrorism

Perspectives	%	Count	Male	Female
"Big problem - we must act	53.2%	50	19	21
immediately!"			19	31
"A little bit worrying, but not a big deal"	27.7%	26	13	13
"Who cares, doesn't bother me"	4.3%	4	3	1
"I support the attacks"	1.1%	1	0	1
Other (please specify)	13.8%	13	6	7

50 participants or about 53% of the participants feel that terrorism is a big issue and must be dealt with swiftly. Of the 50, 19 were

male and 31 were female. Females tend to be more security conscious as depicted in Chart 1. The next biggest group amounts to almost 28% and they think that terrorism is an issue but it is not really worth worrying over. There were also 13 participants that chose 'other' and they have a different perspective of terrorism. Their response are listed below.

1. I don't like civilians being killed, whether it is by terrorists or by those who claim to fight terrorists.

- 2. The generally gutless responses made, should be ruthless.
- 3. It is a concern and something needs to be done.
- 4. Terrorists could attack anywhere in the world at any time. Big problem but we must not let it affect our day to day living too much. We should still travel, but travel with care. Avoid the hot spots of the world where there are threats of war and obvious danger (parts of the Middle East, parts of Africa, parts South America) etc.
- 5. This is becoming a problem affecting more of us, but not sure how to address it.
- 6. Smoke screen for a bigger agenda behind the scenes where control of a nation's wealth is the end game. It is a big deal and must be dealt with at its root immediately.
- 7. A big deal but we need to react without violence as violence does not solve violence.
- 8. I will not allow the idiocy of a few to affect my day to day living!
- 9. No view
- 10. I am more concerned about terrorism inflicted on people by their governments.
- 11. I assume the cruise organisations have it covered.
- 12. It's complicated: Security is important, but more important is to reduce the inequality gap within each society so people don't become radicalised. But unfortunately governments won't bother so there's not much hope, the security industry will thrive!!
- 13. Danger.

The general theme appears to be that terrorism is a part of our lives now and that we have to accept it and not allow it to get in the way of how we live. One participant believed that the cruise operators would have already taken care of security and it wasn't the concern of the passengers.

Limitations and opportunities for further research

Several issues come to mind when discussing limitations. Firstly, the sample size was too small to really generalise the findings. It is a good start but a bigger study is certainly

warranted, going by the findings. Secondly, not getting all the participants to answer all the questions was a problem. It made the study incomplete in some ways. The questions might need to be amended to encourage participants to respond to all the questions in future. Thirdly, quantitative data can only give you a limited amount of information. A future study using a qualitative approach will elicit deeper responses and answer the important 'why' questions.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, cruise ships are very desirable targets as far as terrorists are concerned and there is sufficient evidence in the public domain, that suggest that terrorists are, and have been aiming for a maritime attack for some time. This is not a secret.

These main findings from this exploratory study show that security is a concern for most travelers. It appears from this study that females are more concerned about security. They will put their and their family's safety and security first, before they decide on traveling or which particular cruise to take. This security consciousness is important to note and it helps cruise operators align their offerings with the needs of their customers.

Also of interest to note is the individual perspectives on terrorism. More than half of the participants in this study believe that terrorism is a big issue and that it must be addressed immediately. So, individuals who believe terrorism is a serious issue will have safety concerns and they will make the effort to protect themselves or they will avoid the danger completely. Cruise operators will have to overtly demonstrate that they too are security conscious, that they take security seriously and that they are working on improving security and protecting their customers. Passengers also believe that the most likely method of a terrorist attack against cruise ship passengers is while they are onshore for a brief stopover. Therefore, cruise operators must choose their destination ports wisely to ensure that they only stop in safe destinations along the way.

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