

Chapter 32

The Impacts of Cognitive and Affective Risk Perception of COVID-19 on Life Well-Being: The Mediating Effect of Understanding COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to reveal the effect of cognitive and affective risk perceptions that the employees perceive due to COVID-19 on their well-being. Another purpose is to reveal the mediating role of understanding of COVID-19 in the impact of the risk perceptions perceived by the employees due to COVID-19 on their well-being. The data of the study were collected between December 15, 2020 and February 15, 2021. It was found that cognitive and affective risk perceptions caused by COVID-19 significantly and negatively affected the well-being of the employees.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected the whole world, caused radical changes in our daily life. It has led to the implementation of new applications not only in social life but especially in business life, which has negatively affected employees and business owners. One of the most affected sectors is tourism due to border closures, travel bans, social distancing, and quarantines. Mandatory certification

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and other requirements were implemented in the tourism sector, which regained vitality after the lifting of some bans in the summer of 2021. Because tourism is a labor-intensive sector in which employees constantly communicate and interact with both customers and other employees, employees may perceive a higher risk of catching COVID-19. Risk perception is an active component of attitudes towards behavior (Dillard, Ferrer, Ubel, & Fagerlin, 2012), with a strong relationship between risk perceptions and behaviors (Brewer, Chapman, Gibbons, Gerard, McCaul & Weinstein, 2007). Risk perception is also at the center of many health behavior theories. Brewer et al. (2007), for example, define perception of risk as a belief about potential harm while Bae and Chang (2020), drawing on Bauer (1960), define risk perception as subjective beliefs or value judgments about uncertain situations arising from a certain risk. Individuals evaluate and react to risk both cognitively and emotionally. Although these two reactions are interrelated, they have different determinants: cognitive evaluations cause emotions whereas emotions cause evaluations (Loewenstein, Hsee, Weber, & Welch, 2001). In his risk perception model, Van der Linden (2015, 2017) also differentiates between cognitive and emotional risk.

Cognitive risk perception includes the individual's perceived susceptibility to a particular risk and the severity of the consequences of that risk (Sjöberg, 1998; Shim & You, 2015; Bae & Chang, 2020). The perceived susceptibility of a situation for the individual includes broader and more complex issues, such as whether the disease will lead to death, whether it will reduce or permanently reduce physical or mental functioning for a long time, and the effects of the disease on work, family life, and social relationships. Therefore, perceived susceptibility and severity have a strong cognitive component and partly depend on the information obtained (Rosenstock, 1974). Employees who communicate and interact with many may face a greater risk of getting COVID-19. Employees' risk perceptions may be affected by their awareness that they have a high risk of getting COVID-19, their tendency to get this disease is higher than other people, and the possibility of dying due to COVID-19 in line with the information they have obtained from the environment and through media channels (Bae & Chang, 2020). Emotional risk perception expresses the person's worries about being exposed to a risk (Sjöberg, 1998; Shim & You, 2015; Bae & Chang, 2020). If the risk is concrete and sensorially threatening, the perception of risk increases anxiety (Sjöberg, 1998). Generally, an individual's feelings about danger or risk (emotional response) affect their risk perception (Peters & Slovic, 1996; Demir, Demir, Dalgiç, & Ergen, 2021). Regarding COVID-19, emotional risk perceptions are affected by various factors, such as employees' fears of being in contact with people who have caught COVID-19, the anxiety of infecting their family members, and the concern that COVID-19 will become a serious and widespread health problem (Bae & Chang, 2020). Thus, studies of risk perception need to include both types of reactions (Sjöberg, 1998).

COVID-19 has led to an increase in employees' cognitive and emotional risk perceptions, which affects their well-being. The well-being of individuals can be affected by various factors, such as their working environment, social life, and experience of good and/or bad events. In particular, the pandemic has affected individuals' vital well-being. Life well-being incorporates the individual's satisfaction with their life, reaching some dreams, feeling real happiness, living a good life, and having fun (Zheng, Zhu, Zhao, & Zhang, 2015). These components, and therefore life well-being, may be adversely affected by individuals' cognitive and emotional risk perceptions of COVID-19. On the other hand, if individuals can understand COVID-19, then their life well-being may be less affected, even if their risk perception levels are high. This is because individuals who understand COVID-19 have more information about the disease's transmission status, incubation period, symptoms, prognosis, and effective responses to getting COVID-19 (Prasetyo, Castillo, Salonga, Sia, & Seneta, 2020). Accordingly, the present study tests two predictions regarding the effect of tourism employees' COVID-19 risk perceptions on their

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