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Could Airships Make a Comeback?

Evidence from a Case Study within the Tourism
Industry of Queenstown, New Zealand

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Aviation at Massey University, Manawatū Campus, New Zealand

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2016

Abstract

Airships are lighter-than-air (LTA) aircraft that have historically been used for passenger and cargo services. However, since the advent of the Hindenburg Disaster in 1937, their use in civil aviation has been markedly limited. Airships have a number of characteristics that are unique from other aircraft and arguably may generate consumer interest for certain applications. This thesis illustrates that one potentially viable application of airships within civil aviation is scenic flights for touristic purposes. To examine consumer interest in scenic airship services, a mixed-methods approach was employed using Queenstown, New Zealand as a case study. Focus groups were used to explore broad consumer opinions relating to airships, including preferences and concerns. These opinions were quantified using a questionnaire. The focus groups and questionnaire results revealed consumer preferences with regard to activities (e.g. food and drink), airship design (e.g. facilities) and the nature of the experience (e.g. novelty), as well as concerns (e.g. safety). To present a business case, these preferences were used to design two options for a scenic airship service, both using a conceptual airship design called the Aether Concept. The first option was a 3 ½ hour sightseeing tour that incorporated a meal and a drink, while the second option was an all-inclusive overnight service. A market evaluation using these two options revealed significant interest (in terms of pricing and demand) from consumers towards both options as well as the idea of performing adventure activities as part of either option. Consumer justifications for pricing and purchase decisions in the market evaluation were incorporated with the preferences and concerns from the focus groups and questionnaire to form a descriptive model that shows the motivational factors (relaxation, adventure, nature, novelty, quality, enjoyment and education) and mediating factors (location, duration, on-board activities, airship design, risk perception and price perception) that contribute towards consumer interest in scenic airship services. In addition, a new methodology for developing and testing new discontinuous products is presented and demonstrated in this thesis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Mark Avis and Dr. Kan Tsui for their direction and feedback during my research. Without their input this thesis would not exist in its current form.

To my partner, Anynda Yuris, I extend my greatest gratitude. Your love and support in the most stressful times was greatly appreciated.

The generous financial support of the Massey University Scholarships Committee was essential for the completion of this research. I am immensely grateful for this support.

I would like to thank my friend and colleague, Jamie Henderson, for his company during late nights of study. Having a friend to go through the hard yards of this degree with was much appreciated.

Thank you to my parents for their support of my studies. Family has been an invaluable asset throughout my Masterate studies.

I would like to thank God for his guidance and moral support throughout my life. I am blessed to be in a position of being able to study a Master's degree, which those in less fortunate situations may struggle to attain.

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