

Social Perception of the Seafaring Profession in South Korea

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[Abstract]

This study provides an in-depth analysis of social perceptions of the seafaring profession in South Korea, focusing on three key dimensions: knowledge, image, and value perceptions. Seafarers, as the core workforce of the maritime industry, play an essential role in the national economy and security; however, the industry struggles to secure qualified personnel due to a lack of public awareness and negative perceptions. To address this issue, a survey was conducted with 491 respondents (students, the general public, and current seafarers) to assess their knowledge levels, image perceptions, and recognition of the social and economic value of the seafaring profession, while also analyzing perception differences based on demographic characteristics. The findings revealed that current seafarers possess a high level of knowledge about their profession, whereas the general public exhibits limited knowledge and negative perceptions. Students, however, tended to highly value the social contribution and economic significance of seafarers. These results highlight the need for tailored promotional and educational programs to foster a positive perception of the seafaring profession. Furthermore, efforts to enhance the profession's attractiveness through improved working conditions, expanded welfare benefits, and a clear future vision are necessary. This study is expected to contribute to the development and implementation of policies aimed at improving social perceptions of the seafaring profession, thereby supporting the sustainable development of the maritime industry.

▶ **Key words:** Seafaring Profession, Social Perception, Maritime Industry, Public Awareness, Seafarer

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[요 약]

본 연구는 한국 사회에서 해기 직업에 대한 사회적 인식을 심층적으로 분석하고, 지식, 이미지, 가치 인식의 세 가지 주요 차원을 중심으로 탐구하였다. 해양 산업의 핵심 인력인 해기사는 국가 경제와 안보에 필수적인 역할을 수행하지만, 대중의 인식 부족과 부정적인 이미지로 인해 인력 확보에 어려움을 겪고 있다. 본 연구는 이러한 문제점을 해결하기 위해, 491명의 응답자(학생, 일반인, 현직 선원)를 대상으로 설문조사를 실시하여 해기 직업에 대한 지식 수준, 이미지, 사회적 기여도 및 경제적 가치에 대한 인식을 측정하고, 인구통계학적 특성에 따른 인식 차이를 분석하였다. 현직 선원은 해기 직업에 대한 지식 수준이 높았으나, 일반 대중은 지식 부족과 부정적인 이미지를 가지고 있었다. 학생은 해기사의 사회적 기여도와 경제적 가치를 높게 평가하는 경향을 보였다. 이러한 결과는 해기 직업에 대한 긍정적인 인식 확산을 위한 맞춤형 홍보 및 교육 프로그램 개발의 필요성을 시사한다. 또한, 해기 직업의 매력도를 높이기 위해 근무 환경 개선, 복지 확대, 미래 비전 제시 등의 노력이 필요하다. 본 연구는 해기 직업에 대한 사회적 인식 개선을 위한 정책 수립 및 실행에 기여하고, 해양 산업의 지속 가능한 발전에 이바지할 수 있을 것으로 기대된다.

▶ **주제어:** 해기 직업, 사회적 인식, 해양 산업, 대중 인식, 선원

I. Introduction

The maritime industry remains a vital artery of the global economy, facilitating the movement of goods and resources across oceans and continents. South Korea, with its prominent shipbuilding sector and strategic geographical position, relies heavily on a skilled and dedicated seafaring workforce to maintain its competitive edge in international trade. Seafarers, often unseen and unacknowledged, are essential for ensuring the smooth and efficient flow of commerce, connecting nations and driving economic growth. However, despite their critical contributions, the seafaring profession often suffers from a lack of public awareness and a prevailing negative social perception.

Existing research, such as that by Sanchez-Beaskoetxea et al. [1], has highlighted the tendency for media portrayals of seafarers to focus on accidents and negative events, contributing to a distorted and unfavorable public image. Furthermore, studies like that of Cho and Enrico [2] have identified negative stereotypes associated with the profession, including perceptions of high risk, intense labor, and significant stress. This lack of understanding and negative imagery can have

detrimental consequences, impacting the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel, ultimately threatening the long-term sustainability of the maritime industry. While previous research has acknowledged these challenges, a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the current social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea remains lacking.

The social perception of a profession significantly influences its attractiveness to potential recruits, shaping career aspirations and influencing the overall quality of the workforce. A positive social image can attract talented individuals, fostering a sense of pride and purpose among those who choose to dedicate their lives to the sea. Conversely, a negative or indifferent social perception can deter potential candidates, leading to a shortage of skilled seafarers and potentially compromising safety and efficiency within the maritime sector. As Kim[3] demonstrated, a stronger sense of social identity among seafarers is linked to lower turnover rates, underscoring the importance of fostering a positive social perception to improve workforce stability.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a detailed and contemporary analysis of the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea, addressing the limitations of previous research by focusing on three key dimensions: knowledge, image, and value perceptions. By examining these dimensions across a diverse sample of respondents, including students, members of the general public, and current seafarers, we seek to gain valuable insights into how the seafaring profession is currently viewed and identify the factors that influence these perceptions. This research moves beyond simply identifying negative perceptions, as previous studies have done, by exploring the underlying factors that contribute to these perceptions and developing targeted recommendations for improvement.

This research is driven by the following key objectives: to assess the level of knowledge regarding the seafaring profession among various segments of society; to examine the prevailing image of the profession, exploring stereotypes and biases; to evaluate the perceived value of the profession, assessing its economic, social, and strategic contributions; and to identify the demographic factors that influence these perceptions.

To achieve these objectives, this study employs a quantitative research methodology, utilizing survey data collected from a diverse sample of 491 respondents. The survey instrument is designed to capture a comprehensive range of perceptions related to knowledge, image, and value, providing a rich dataset for analysis. Statistical techniques, including descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), F-tests, and T-tests, will be employed to identify significant differences in perceptions across demographic groups and to explore the relationships between various factors.

The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions seeking to enhance the social perception of the seafaring

profession in South Korea. Unlike previous studies that have focused primarily on identifying problems, this research aims to provide actionable solutions by developing targeted interventions and strategies aimed at promoting a more positive and accurate understanding of the vital role seafarers play in our society. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the maritime industry by fostering a greater sense of appreciation and respect for the men and women who dedicate their lives to the sea, offering a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the social perceptions surrounding this critical profession.

Section 2 reviews the existing literature and presents the theoretical framework and modeling approach for the study. Section 3 conducts an empirical analysis based on survey responses, examining the collected data to identify key trends and differences in perceptions. Finally, the paper concludes with policy recommendations and a summary of findings, offering actionable insights for improving the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea.

II. Previous Studies and Methodology

This study builds upon a diverse body of existing literature that explores various aspects of the seafaring profession, including its social perception, working conditions, career intentions, and factors influencing professional consciousness. Several key themes emerge from the reviewed studies, providing a valuable foundation for the current research.

The social perception of seafarers is a recurring theme. Several studies highlight the prevailing negative image of seafarers in the media and the general public. Sanchez-Beaskoetxea et al. [1] found that media portrayals of seafarers often focus on accidents and negative events, contributing to a negative public perception. Cho

and Enrico [2] also identified a negative image associated with high-risk, high-intensity labor, and high stress. Furthermore, many studies emphasize a lack of public awareness regarding the vital role seafarers play in the global economy and national security. The importance of social recognition for attracting and retaining skilled seafarers is also underscored. Kim and Lee [3] found that a higher sense of social identity among seafarers is associated with lower turnover rates, suggesting that improving the social perception of the profession can have a direct impact on workforce stability. In comparing the social perception of firefighters to that of other professions, Lee [4] highlighted the importance of public recognition and support for those in demanding and dangerous occupations, providing valuable insights for understanding the factors that contribute to a positive social image.

The literature consistently portrays the seafaring profession as demanding and challenging, characterized by long hours, isolation, and potential safety risks. Shin et al.[5] found that seafarers are increasingly prioritizing quality of life over salary, suggesting that improving working conditions is crucial for attracting and retaining talent. Several studies have examined the factors that influence career intentions among seafarers, including job satisfaction, work-life balance, and perceived career opportunities. For instance, Yuen et al.[6] investigated the determinants of job satisfaction and performance among seafarers, revealing that job satisfaction significantly influences performance. Their study identified work stress and rewards as the primary drivers of job satisfaction, followed by seafarers' dispositions and job characteristics. These findings underscore the need to address occupational stressors and enhance reward systems to improve retention and performance, aligning with the need for better working conditions to support career longevity. Moreover, Jensen and Oldenburg[7] highlighted the

significant psychophysical stress experienced by seafarers, particularly among Southeast Asian crew members, who reported higher levels of loneliness and physical strain. Their study also revealed that officers face stress from high responsibility and extensive administrative work, emphasizing the need for targeted training in stress management and intercultural leadership to address these challenges and improve crew well-being. Additionally, Woo[8] explored gender inequality in the Korean seafaring profession, confirming that seafarer jobs remain male-dominated, with women as a minority. The study identified key factors contributing to this disparity, including societal perceptions, workplace culture, and structural barriers, such as limited opportunities for women in maritime roles. Woo's findings highlight the need for systemic interventions to address gender disparities and promote inclusivity in the maritime industry, particularly in South Korea. The literature also suggests that addressing these challenges can positively impact career intentions. Additionally, several studies explore the impact of technology on the seafaring profession, highlighting the potential for technology to improve communication, enhance safety, and increase efficiency, while acknowledging the challenges associated with automation and the need for seafarers to adapt to new technologies [9].

Recent research has further explored the factors influencing seafarers' career decisions and professional consciousness. Shin et al.[10] examined the relationship between crew demographics, on-board working characteristics, and professional consciousness. Their findings suggest that factors such as age, marital status, nationality, and position within the ship's organization significantly influence professional consciousness. Specifically, they found that professional consciousness tends to be lower among older seafarers, unmarried individuals, and those from certain nationalities. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of welfare

satisfaction and cross-cultural adaptability in fostering a stronger sense of professional consciousness among crew members.

Kim and Kim[11] study provides valuable insights into the determinants of long-term boarding intentions among prospective seafarers in South Korea. Their research identifies crew composition, long-term planning, work environment, and family environment as key factors influencing these intentions. Notably, the study reveals that a stronger perception of long-term planning and a lower sensitivity to the work environment correlate with a greater desire for long-term boarding. Furthermore, the study highlights gender differences in the perception of these factors, suggesting that interventions aimed at promoting long-term seafaring careers may need to be tailored to address the specific concerns and priorities of both male and female seafarers.

The existing literature provides several important implications for the current study. Given the evolving nature of the maritime industry and the changing social landscape, there is a need for an updated assessment of the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea. The literature highlights the importance of focusing on key dimensions such as knowledge, image, and value perceptions, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding public attitudes towards the seafaring profession. The literature also suggests that targeted interventions are needed to improve the social perception of the seafaring profession, focusing on addressing negative stereotypes, raising awareness of the profession's contributions, and improving working conditions. Additionally, the findings from Yuen et al.[6] emphasize the critical role of job satisfaction in enhancing performance and retention, suggesting that policies aimed at reducing stress and improving rewards could further support positive social perceptions by fostering a more satisfied and stable workforce. Similarly, Jensen and Oldenburg[7] advocate for the

integration of stress management and intercultural training in maritime education, noting that current programs in Germany often lack such components due to time constraints, despite their necessity for managing multicultural crews and mitigating occupational stress. Woo[8] further supports the need for policy interventions by illustrating the gender disparities in the Korean maritime sector, calling for initiatives to break down structural barriers and promote gender equity to enhance the profession's social perception and workforce diversity.

While the existing literature provides a valuable foundation for understanding the seafaring profession, the current study offers several unique contributions. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea, examining knowledge, image, and value perceptions across a diverse sample of respondents. This study also explores the demographic factors that influence perceptions of the seafaring profession, providing valuable insights into how different segments of society view the profession. Furthermore, this study offers specific policy recommendations for improving the social perception of the seafaring profession, based on the findings of the empirical analysis. Finally, this study integrates multiple perspectives, including those of students, members of the general public, and current seafarers, providing a holistic understanding of the social perception of the profession.

By building upon the existing literature and offering these unique contributions, the current study aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions seeking to enhance the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea and ensure its continued success.

III. Research Design and Results

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing survey data collected from a sample of 491 participants. The sample consisted of three distinct groups: students (n=204, 41.5%), members of the general public (n=145, 29.5%), and current seafarers (n=142, 28.9%). Participants were recruited through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods. Data was collected over a period of 1st Dec. 2024 ~ 31st Jan. 2025 using a structured questionnaire administered online. The questionnaire included a series of questions designed to assess participants' knowledge, image perceptions, and value perceptions of the seafaring profession. The key questions analyzed in this section are Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4.

The selection of the four survey questions (Q1 to Q4) was grounded in the theoretical framework established in the literature review, focusing on three key dimensions of social perception: knowledge, image, and value. Q1 ("How well do you know the seafaring profession?") was included to evaluate the level of public awareness, addressing the low knowledge levels highlighted by Sanchez-Beaskoetxea et al. [1] and Cho and Enrico [2]. Q2 ("What is your image of the seafaring profession?") aimed to explore societal stereotypes and perceptions, building on Kim and Lee [3]'s findings that social image impacts the profession's attractiveness and retention rates. Q3 ("Do you think seafarers play an important role in society?") and Q4 ("Do you think seafarers contribute greatly to the economy?") were designed to assess the perceived societal and economic value of the profession, reflecting the underrecognized contributions of seafarers noted in prior studies (e.g., Jensen & Oldenburg [8]) and aligning with this study's objective to enhance social recognition through empirical insights. Together, these questions provide a comprehensive framework to systematically analyze the social perception of the seafaring profession across the identified

dimensions.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 22, employing descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), F-tests, and T-tests to identify significant differences between groups.

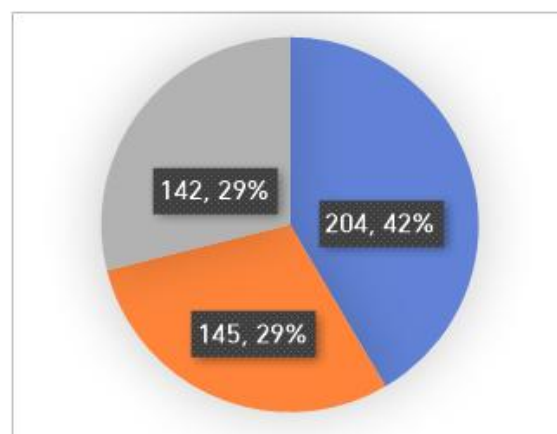


Fig. 1. Composition of respondents

Question 1: "How well do you know the seafaring profession?"

Question 1 aimed to assess the level of knowledge about the seafaring profession among the three participant groups. Participants were asked to rate their knowledge on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very well). The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in knowledge levels between the groups ($F(2, 488) = 22.584, p < 0.001$). Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) indicated that seafarers ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.71$) reported significantly higher levels of knowledge compared to both students ($M = 3.49, SD = 0.57$) and the general public ($M = 3.59, SD = 0.72$). There was no statistically significant difference in knowledge levels between students and the general public. These findings suggest that while seafarers possess a strong understanding of their profession, the general public and students have limited knowledge.

Table 1. ANOVA result for Q1

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	29.487	2	14.743	22.584	0.000%	3.0142
Within Groups	318.58	488	0.6528			
Total	348.07	490				

Table 2. F-test for Q1

	F-ratio	pvalue	variance hypothesis
Student-Public	0.7905	6.2%	Equal vaiance
Public-Seafarer	1.0059	48.6%	Equal vaiance
Student-Seafarer	0.7952	6.8%	Equal vaiance

Table 3. T-test for Q1

	t-statistic	pvalue	mean
Student-Public	-1.115	13%	Same
Public-Seafarer	-4.782	0.00%	Difference
Student-Seafarer	-6.628	0.00%	Difference

Question 2: "What is your image of the seafaring profession?"

Question 2 explored the image perceptions of the seafaring profession among the three groups. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements related to the image of seafarers on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in image perceptions between the groups ($F(2, 488) = 5.970$, $p = 0.003$). Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) indicated that students ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.88$) had a significantly more positive image of the seafaring profession compared to the general public ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.92$). There was no statistically significant difference between seafarers ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.84$) and the other two groups. These findings suggest that students tend to have a more favorable image of the seafaring profession compared to the general public.

Table 4. ANOVA result for Q2

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	10.48652	2	5.243262	5.970313	0.002744	3.014198
Within Groups	428.5725	488	0.878222			
Total	439.0591	490				

Table 5. F-test for Q2

	F-ratio	pvalue	variance hypothesis
Student-Public	0.95639	38.3%	Equal vaiance
Public-Seafarer	1.084837	31.4%	Equal vaiance
Student-Seafarer	1.037527	41.0%	Equal vaiance

Table 6. T-test for Q2

	t-statistic	pvalue	mean
Student-Public	3.262794	0.1%	Difference
Public-Seafarer	-0.87305	19.2%	Same
Student-Seafarer	2.345268	1.0%	Difference

Question 3: "Do you think seafarers play an important role in society?"

Question 3 assessed the perceived importance of seafarers' role in society among the three groups. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "Seafarers play an important role in society" on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived importance between the groups ($F(2, 488) = 3.482$, $p = 0.032$). Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) indicated that students ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.92$) perceived the role of seafarers as significantly more important compared to the general public ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.91$). There was no statistically significant difference between seafarers ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.78$) and the other two groups. These findings suggest that students place a higher value on the societal contribution of seafarers compared to the general public.

Table 7. ANOVA result for Q3

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	6.100402	2	3.050201	3.481598	0.031524	3.014198
Within Groups	427.533	488	0.876092			
Total	433.6334	490				

Table 8. F-test for Q3

	F-ratio	pvalue	variance hypothesis
Student-Public	1.002592	49.7%	Equal vaiance
Public-Seafarer	1.173112	17.1%	Equal vaiance
Student-Seafarer	1.176152	15.1%	Equal vaiance

Table 9. T-test for Q3

	t-statistic	pvalue	mean
Student-Public	2.573673	0.5%	Same
Public-Seafarer	-1.61372	5.4%	Difference
Student-Seafarer	0.908639	18.2%	Difference

Question 4: "Do you think seafarers contribute greatly to the economy?"

Question 4 examined the perceived economic contribution of seafarers among the three groups. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "Seafarers contribute greatly to the economy" on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived economic contribution between the groups ($F(2, 488) = 9.431, p < 0.001$). Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) indicated that students ($M = 4.23, SD = 0.62$) perceived the economic contribution of seafarers as significantly greater compared to both the general public ($M = 4.03, SD = 0.53$) and seafarers themselves ($M = 3.86, SD = 0.73$). These findings suggest that students have a stronger appreciation for the economic value of seafarers compared to the general public and seafarers themselves.

Table 10. ANOVA result for Q4

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	11.79845	2	5.899224	9.431203	9.58E-05	3.014198
Within Groups	305.2443	488	0.625501			
Total	317.0428	490				

Table 11. F-test for Q4

	F-ratio	pvalue	variance hypothesis
Student-Public	1.179357	14.6%	Equal vaiance
Public-Seafarer	0.720163	2.5%	Unequal vaiance
Student-Seafarer	0.849329	14.3%	Equal vaiance

Table 12. T-test for Q4

	t-statistic	pvalue	mean
Student-Public	2.447	0.7%	Difference
Public-Seafarer	1.797	3.7%	Difference
Student-Seafarer	4.160	0.0%	Difference

The analysis of Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 reveals several key insights. First, seafarers possess a significantly higher level of knowledge about their profession compared to students and the general public. Second, students tend to have a more positive image of the seafaring profession compared to the general public. Third, students place a higher value on the societal and economic contributions of seafarers compared to the general public and seafarers themselves. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to improve public awareness and appreciation of the seafaring profession, particularly among the general public.

IV. Conclusion

This study sought to examine the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea, focusing on knowledge, image, and value perceptions among students, the general public, and current seafarers. The findings revealed

significant differences in perceptions across these groups, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to improve public awareness and appreciation of this vital profession. Specifically, the analysis of survey data indicated that current seafarers possess a significantly higher level of knowledge about their profession compared to students and the general public. This underscores the importance of providing accurate and accessible information about the seafaring profession to the broader public. Furthermore, the study revealed that students tend to hold a more positive image of the seafaring profession compared to the general public, suggesting that educational initiatives may be effective in shaping positive perceptions. Finally, students placed a higher value on the societal and economic contributions of seafarers compared to both the general public and seafarers themselves, highlighting the need to emphasize the importance of the seafaring profession to the national economy and global trade.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are offered to enhance the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea. Targeted public awareness campaigns should be developed and implemented to increase knowledge and improve the image of the seafaring profession. These campaigns should utilize a variety of media channels, including television, radio, print, and social media, to reach a broad audience, emphasizing the positive aspects of the profession, such as the opportunity for travel, personal growth, and contributing to the global economy. Integrating information about the seafaring profession into school curricula at all levels is also crucial. This could include guest lectures from seafarers, field trips to ports and maritime museums, and the development of educational materials that highlight the importance of the profession. Collaboration between maritime industry stakeholders, educational institutions, and government agencies should be encouraged to

promote the seafaring profession. This could include the development of scholarship programs, mentorship opportunities, and internship programs that provide students with firsthand experience in the maritime sector. Actively engaging with the media to ensure accurate and positive portrayals of seafarers is also essential. This could include providing media outlets with access to seafarers and maritime facilities, and working with journalists to develop stories that highlight the contributions of seafarers to society. Finally, addressing concerns regarding working conditions in the seafaring profession, such as long hours, isolation, and safety risks, is critical. This could include implementing policies that promote work-life balance, providing access to mental health services, and investing in safety training and equipment. By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to enhance the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea, attract and retain qualified personnel, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the maritime industry.

While this study provides valuable insights into the social perception of the seafaring profession in South Korea, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. First, the sample size, while adequate, may not be fully representative of the entire population. Future research should aim to recruit a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relied on self-report data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could utilize qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to gain a deeper understanding of the nuances of social perception. Third, the study focused on a limited number of factors that influence perceptions of the seafaring profession. Future research could explore additional factors, such as cultural values, family influences, and personal experiences. Finally, this study was conducted in South Korea, and the findings may not be generalizable to other countries. Future research should examine the social perception of

the seafaring profession in other regions to provide a more global perspective. Future research should also explore the effectiveness of different interventions aimed at improving the social perception of the seafaring profession. This could include conducting experimental studies to evaluate the impact of public awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and industry collaboration efforts. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could be conducted to track changes in perceptions over time and to assess the long-term impact of these interventions. Finally, research should explore the relationship between social perception and career intentions among potential seafarers, examining the factors that influence individuals' decisions to pursue a career at sea and identifying the barriers that prevent them from doing so. By addressing these limitations and pursuing these avenues for future research, it is possible to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the social perception of the seafaring profession and to develop more effective strategies for promoting its long-term sustainability.

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