

The effects of perceptions of terrorism and political instability risks on leisure tourists' willingness to participate in tourism products, as mediated by tourism preference type and by personality.

Man-caused disasters of political instability and terrorism increase tourists' perception of travel risk and influence their travel decision. Perception of travel risk and related behaviour is characterised by complexity and tends to vary depending upon a range of factors such as: type of risk, news media coverage, previous tourist experience, as well as psychographic and demographic characteristics of tourists. The current study aims to deepen the understanding of relationships among a range of key variables and willingness of tourists to participate in tourism products with a particular reference to events of terrorism and political instability.

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## 1. Background

Tourism is highly susceptible to external shocks such as natural disasters, political instability (PI) and terrorism (Mansfeld and Pizam, 2006) because it is an industry where consumption is based on faith and trust. Events that damage that faith destabilise the tourism system and affect the elements within the structure and the surrounding environments via demand fluctuations (Blake and Sinclair, 2003; Neumayer, 2004). The impact of such events is especially high in discretionary forms of tourism where tourists, especially first-time visitors, largely rely on destination images to guide the process of travel decision-making (TDM) (Fletcher and Morakabati, 2008). This is mainly because of the unique, service specific characteristics of tourism product i.e. intangibility and inseparability (Zeithaml et al., 2006), which mean that the product is produced and consumed simultaneously, thus cannot be tested prior to its purchase (Tasci et al., 2007). With diverse options, and multiple things that may go wrong for tourists once on holiday, risk associated with possibility of experiencing a negative outcome is a central element of TDM (Dolnicar, 2007). In this respect, perceived risk related to safety and security levels are fundamental as they determine tourists' decisions (Beirmann, 2003; Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005). In summary, studying travel risk perception is of great importance, as in the 'purchase-on-faith' world of tourism, perception is the reality when it comes to decision making (Santana, 2001).

Among different events which destabilise the tourism system, it is the man-caused disasters that seem to intimidate people the most (Cavlek, 2002; Heng, 2006). In this respect, Fletcher and Morakabati (2008) point out that PI and terrorism have a particularly high magnitude of impact. One of the main consequences is that, apart from physical damage, such events may largely constrain the flow of tourists towards the impacted destination, by escalating fear, uncertainty and perception of risk in individuals' minds (Sonmez and Graefe, 1998a).

Essentially driven by the above discussed issues, the topic of travel risk perception has received a considerable amount of attention in the tourism literature. Extant research typified tourist risks, identified a variety of determining factors and their influence on destination choices. What emerges from this literature is that risk is inherently subjective, and as consumers are above all individuals, what they perceive as risky is likely to differ. Breakwell (2007) argues that although empirical evidence on these differences exists it is incoherent. Thus, understanding how individuals comprehend and act upon risks in tourism environment deserves further investigation.

Broadly speaking, degree of sensitivity and susceptibility of tourists' to travel risk and ultimately decisions people take vary depending on tourist socio-demographic and psychographic characteristics (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005; Sonmez and Graefe, 1998a). Specifically: personality and motivation (Lepp and Gibson, 2008; Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005); tourist travel preferences (Lepp and Gibson, 2003); previous experience (Floyd et al., 2004; Kozak et al., 2007); culture from which they originate (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2006); and demographics such as age (Seddighi et al., 2002); gender (Reisinger and Crotts, 2010) and travel group composition all help us in understanding the different ways in which consumers may react to risk. Moreover, seeing as most people come to contact with risk information via different media channels (Driedger, 2007; Slone, 2000), rather than personal experience, tourists' media consumption patterns are likely to play a significant role in the perception of

risk they hold. The effects are also expected to vary depending on nature of events, individuals' awareness of their occurrence, and geographical knowledge.

## **2. Proposed research design**

The issue of risk in tourism research is usually addressed via quantitative methods that often assume tourists to be rational consumers who tend to be risk averse and prefer to avoid destinations which appear unsafe (e.g. Rohel and Fesenmaier, 1992; Sonmez and Graefe, 1998a; Irvine and Anderson, 2006). Although these studies shed light on the process of destination choice by establishing relationships between key variables the results are generally limited in answering why these occur. Moreover, as Walle (1997) explains, the relative lack of depth of quantitative methods can lead to a loss of understanding of people's experiences and motivations. Fewer studies use qualitative methods, which address the depth of subjectively defined risk in tourism and its influence upon travel decisions (e.g. Hunter-Jones et al., 2007; Silva et al., 2010; Uriely et al., 2007). However, because of the fact that they use small samples and particular settings their findings cannot be generalised to wider populations.

In order to enhance the understanding of the relationship between perceptions of terrorism, political instability risk and leisure tourists' willingness to participate in tourism products, sequential mixed method approach is proposed. Through a mixed method design, the researcher first seeks a breath of information through testing relationships between key variables identified in extant literature. The findings of the quantitative method of data collection are then elaborated on and complemented by a depth of views from participants to support and elaborate on these findings (Creswell, 2009). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) the results from one study can help identify participants to study or questions to ask in the other method. Additionally, qualitative methods can aid interpretation of traditional surveys, to identify the 'whys' of the results as well as implications, e.g. by using qualitative quotes to support statistical results.

In the context of this research, the questionnaire survey serves as the preliminary method of data collection with a UK sample of leisure tourists. The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather information on a wide range of variables, including: tourists' travel related risk concerns; awareness of risk events; news media consumption patterns; geographical knowledge; preferences for different types of tourism; personality dimension of locus of control; willingness to participate in tourism products and, demographic characteristics. This information will be used to test relationships among variables to understand differences in tourists' willingness to travel to destinations which have been subject to terrorism and PI. This stage of data collection also serves to identify the sample for the interview.

The purpose of the interview is to gain more depth of information in regard of relationships tested in the questionnaire survey. Moreover, by employing a projective technique called Thematic Apperception Test this stage will seek to provide explanatory power to relationship between travel preferences and willingness to travel to risky destinations by gaining insight into a personality dimension i.e. tourists' unconscious needs.

### **3. Conclusion and expected findings**

This paper presented the concept of travel risk and its role in the relationship between man-caused crises of terrorism and PI, and willingness of tourists to travel to affected destinations. By adopting a mixed method approach, the project aims to contribute to existing research in the field by providing breadth and depth of information in reference to this complex relationship. In particular, by seeking to understand whether different travel preferences, as influenced by tourists' unconscious needs, determine differences in susceptibility of tourists to perceived risk of terrorism and PI. These findings will contribute to travel risk and tourism consumer behaviour theory, as well as provide valuable knowledge to tourism marketers.

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