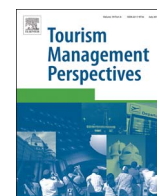




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Tourism Management Perspectives

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tmp

Reflections to move forward: Where destination crisis management research needs to go

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A B S T R A C T

The frequency and fury of crises have flourished over the past decade. Globally, we are faced with more crises and disasters than ever before. The need for quality academic research is at an all-time high. More scholarly approaches to problems, greater theoretical foundations for studies, fewer case studies, more longitudinal research, and more comparative studies will help advance the destination crisis management scholarship while, at the same time, aiding the industry to mitigate crises both prior to as well as during times of need.

1. Introduction

The frequency and fury of crises have flourished over the past decade. Globally, we are faced with more crises and disasters than ever before. The types of crises and disasters range from natural disasters (such as cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis) to political crises and security incidents. The tourism industry is regularly faced with attacks which impact the tourist as well as the destination. In 2016 alone, the world saw crises arising from disasters such as: (1) Hurricane Matthew which impacted Haiti and the United States, (2) a magnitude 7.8 earthquake which rocked Ecuador, killing almost 700 people, and (3) terrorist attacks in Brussels, Nice, and Orlando.

In the past few years, there have also been several new kinds of crises which have emerged and, consequently, impacted our industry. For example, tourism boards are fighting for their existence due to perceptions by elected officials of a lack of transparency or effectiveness of public dollars to fund them. This threat has forced the industry to invest more heavily in research to demonstrate how tourism benefits local economies. As an area of inquiry, the tourism scholarly literature has been scant with respect to documenting the impact of lost marketing dollars on more than visitor numbers. There is a need to move beyond visitor numbers and document benefits to the community, quality of life, environmental sustainability, public land management, and other positive benefits.

We have also seen a new type of crisis, which has little to do with an immediate shock and more to do with geopolitics. Although the opportunity to travel to more destinations has flourished, so too has the threat of traveling to destinations which might have strained relations with a visitor's home government. Poor images of destinations created by the media due to poor or strained foreign relations between two or

more countries has led to decreased tourist arrivals from certain markets. This is an area which is more than ever impacting destinations all over the world, yet has received little attention in the academic literature.

The need for quality academic research is at an all-time high. More scholarly approaches to problems, greater theoretical foundations for studies, fewer case studies, more longitudinal research, and more comparative studies will help advance the destination crisis management scholarship while, at the same time, aiding the industry to mitigate crises both prior to as well as during times of need. This paper outlines several areas for future research in the area of destination crisis management and resilience which warrants attention in the academic literature.

2. Future directions

2.1. New nature of crisis

Crises which affect the tourism industry are a way of life. It is not if a crisis will happen to a destination but when it will happen. In a 24 hour news cycle, there are often two or three crises affecting global destinations at the same time. In fact, within the first two weeks of September 2017, there was an earthquake in Mexico, two hurricanes in the Caribbean and Florida, and a potential volcano eruption in Bali. Destinations must be prepared.

Unfortunately findings from previous research conducted by the Tourism Crisis Management Initiative at the University of Florida suggests that destinations are still underprepared for crises, with less than 50% of the industry engaging in yearly updates to their tourism crisis management plan. The question to this is “why?” The academic

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.11.013>

Received 24 October 2017; Accepted 16 November 2017
2211-9736/ © 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

literature has attempted to determine why the industry is not fully engaged in ongoing crisis management planning and it appears that leadership style, empowerment of leaders, and commitment to the process are all indicators to an ongoing crisis plan (Parmenter, 2010). If a leader is committed to strategic crisis management planning, then the plans tend to be improved and updated regularly. However, if the leadership is not committed, we see little investment in crisis management. Regrettably, we are left with many questions that are unanswered by the academic community, such as: What impedes an organization's commitment to ongoing crisis management planning? Are there comprehensive management models in other disciplines which can be adapted to the tourism industry to better link inputs and outputs? Are their cultural differences to crisis management planning? Without a doubt, research on drivers of commitment to destination crisis management planning is deficient.

2.2. Need for a less linear approach

By nature, crises are not linear. However, we manage them like they are. Crisis management is a set of interdependent activities, often presented across four phases. Traditionally, crisis management models have had multiple stages and scholars and practitioners do not agree on the numbers. Models have four stages (Pacific Asia Tourism Association, 2003), three stages (Luhman, 2005), or six stages (Faulkner, 2001). While, in the seminal works of destination crisis management it might have been important to understand the phases by which a crisis evolves, this has posed some limitations due to the assumption that activities happen in a sequential fashion. One of the areas which warrants greater attention is extension of the traditional management model beyond sequential steps to clusters of related, integrated activities which may overlap or occur simultaneously.

Some scholars outside of crisis management have called for the separation of the mechanistic from the strategic segments of the crisis management process (Jaques, 2010). Within the strategic segment, two distinct areas for research are outlined: crisis preparedness and crisis prevention. While, within the mechanistic segment, crisis event management would include: crisis management, system activation/response, and crisis recognition. Overall, new, innovative, discipline-specific models should be conceptualized and tested. Tourism is a unique discipline which warrants specific disciplinary approaches to crisis management.

2.3. Need for a more interdisciplinary approach to destination crisis management

One of the ways to move the models forward is to adopt a more interdisciplinary approach. The classic scholarly approach to crisis management studies blends practical application and operational management. Typically it looks at crises within an organization and responds to a discrete event. Thus, there tends to be a focus on case studies of specific disaster events (Tierney, 2001, p. 10) rather than systematic responses. Unfortunately, many studies have lacked an interdisciplinary approach to evaluating the management process. This lack of interdisciplinary approach prevents the destination from being able to assess the situation from different angles and thus formulate strategic alternatives.

In the past, geographers looked at the conditions that created disasters and sociologists looked at how humans behave in or respond to disasters. However, outside of the field of tourism, we are starting to see a greater attempt to blend these perspectives. As the field of destination management grows, it is more important now than ever to adopt such practices in our scholarly research. Destination management in higher education is not new, however, the science behind tourism crisis management is relatively new. As we move forward to address more complicated problems, which may have more critical implications, the need for more multidisciplinary, as well as interdisciplinary approaches

is critical. Works produced should include sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, medical scientists, and many other disciplines. Researchers should share facilities and research approaches while both working separately on distinct aspects of the problem, as well as collectively on the problem. Not only do we have a need to expand the types of questions we are asking, but also the way we are trying to answer them.

2.4. Need for a more technologically driven approach

One recommendation to move forward is to adopt a more technologically driven approach to conducting research. All phases of the crisis management process demand greater integration of technology in both the analysis stage, as well as the implementation stage. We have seen some attention in the literature to digital media and its integration in the tourism crisis management planning process (Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, Donohoe, & Kioussis, 2013), however, few studies in destination crisis management have used technology or new technology as a tool to aid in addressing research questions.

Big data is a hot topic and use of technology to analyze this data in times of crisis or the aftermath of a crisis are two areas which are ripe for research. Use of tools such as GIS in both the planning phases, as well as the response phases should be considered as means to advance our research agendas. For example, GIS can help destinations identify vulnerable areas within the destination. One study recently conducted in the northern part of Iran, identified earthquake prone areas and linked them to two factors: (1) perception of the residents' personal and community level of resilience and (2) the government's allocation of funding for hazard mitigation (Hajilo, Pennington-Gray, & Talkhab, 2017). The study found that there were several areas which were highly vulnerable and scored among the lowest in personal and community perceptions of resilience. The use of mapping highlighted gaps between vulnerable areas and allocation of social and financial investments. This revelation can help aid government officials in redistributing, re-allocating, or assigning new educational or financial programs to help more vulnerable communities. More studies like this are needed to combine the wealth of existing secondary data with traditional methods of inquiry through technological applications.

In addition to GIS, software programs such as Verily (www.ver.ly/about), a program aimed at crowdsourcing during disasters should be explored in the tourism industry. The role of social media during disasters is a hot topic in the crisis management literature. What is missing is the use by different tourist markets. Some research has examined cultural differences of perceptions of social media use during crises, however, real time use and messaging by tourists in the same destination at the time of a crisis has yet to be explored. Use of simulation programs created by virtual or augmented reality might be one way to capture responses during a crisis. In addition, using simulation programs as a tool to test evacuation routes for tourists is another area which warrants attention in the scholarly literature. In all, the need to use technology as a function of the research process in the destination crisis management merits more attention.

2.5. Need for more theoretical research

Although the scholarly literature on tourism crisis management has grown over the past decade, the use of theory is still scarce. There is no one theoretical framework for tourism crisis management research, either on the supply side or the demand side. Little attention has been given to developing tourism management theories or risk management theories. In particular, in the risk literature, there is an over dependence on categorizations and classifications of risk type rather than understanding the multidimensionality and process of risk perceptions. Although some works have adopted the risk-belief model or been grounded in the Protection Motivation theory (Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray, & Thapa, 2004; Kozak, Crotts, & Law, 2007; Law,

2006; Pennington-Gray, Thapa, Kaplanidou, Cahyanto, & McLaughlin, 2011; Schroeder et al., 2013), lack of theory to guide the risk literature is still commonplace.

Future research on travel risks needs to turn to the vast body of knowledge related to perceived risk in the fields of health behavior and psychology. More specifically, travel risk research needs to address multiple dimensions of perceived risk as is the case in these fields. Risk outside of the travel literature suggests that risk perceptions are considered to be an evaluation of the perceived vulnerability to and perceived severity of a risk. In addition, the psychology literature recognizes that in addition to cognitive risk perceptions, affective risk perceptions play a significant role in risky decision making. The academic literature in tourism needs to extend our research to include both aspects of risk perceptions.

2.6. Need for more transfer of knowledge across different types of crises

Given that much of the research on destination crisis management has been case studies or one-time studies, the need for more research which looks at transferring knowledge across different types of crises is vital. Part of the reason for this lack of transferability may be due to the point above which highlights that much of the research has lacked a theoretical foundation. In addition, much of the research in the area of destination crisis management has failed to adopt one model to examine the crisis management process. Similarly, most research on the demand side has used a categorization approach to risk perception types and not theory driven relationships. All these shortfalls have resulted in an area of research which is more chaotic, disorganized, muddled, and thus less comparable. Due to the variety of variables and contexts of studies, it might be wise to adopt a systems theory to advance our knowledge and broaden our understanding of the destination crisis management process.

2.7. Need for more documented distinctions of a crisis

In opposition to the point above, some scholars would argue we need a more broad approach to the literature. It could be argued that crises by their very nature are geographically, temporally, and contextually unique and discrete. Thus, the scope of research can vary and take a more opportunistic and adaptable approach. Adopting a range of both inductive and deductive approaches to the research is important to reveal the distinctions of varying types and contexts of crises. The literature has, however, been fairly scant in the connectedness of studies. Research in this area is typically ad hoc, which has resulted in disparate bodies of knowledge. The questions remain: How is one crisis different from another? What makes them different? Is it the type of crisis itself or the complexity of the variables associated with the crisis? Highlighting unique aspects of crises will help develop more detailed models for future inquiry.

2.8. Need for a greater understanding of the link between crisis management, resilience, and sustainability

Disaster resilience is a rapidly emerging area of interest in the greater crisis management literature. The study of resilience in tourism has developed at a more gradual pace and most of this research has been linked to sustainability or ecology studies (Lew, 2014; Tyrrell & Johnston, 2008). The connection between resilience and tourism crisis management has been understudied and there is currently no globally accepted resilience framework that can be used in tourism crisis management. The first gap in the literature is to document the relationship between resilience, tourism crisis management, and sustainability. Movement forward in this area will provide a scope of future research which can clearly outline similarities and differences in the concepts and what questions are appropriate under which area of inquiry.

The second research area includes the need to develop a conceptual

framework for destination resilience and indicators that destinations can use to measure the resilience of their tourism system. This conceptual framework, which should draw on multiple models from various disciplines, will provide a starting point for a wider discussion of the factors and indicators that contribute to destination resilience.

The third research area which is necessary is the testing and refinement of the model and indicators for destination resilience in different sized destinations and among different types of shocks to the system (e.g., different crisis types based on root cause and from a temporal perspective, different severity of impacts, different frequency of shocks to the system, etc.). Adoption of this model across various contexts will enable greater transfer of knowledge, which was eluded to earlier as a necessary step forward in the research. The goal would be to validate measures of destination resilience over time.

Adopting a destination resilience framework is a critical part of proactive tourism crisis management because it gives the foundation for destinations to measure their resilience score on a regular basis. As a result, destinations are able to react more quickly in the event of a crisis. Given that destination resilience should go beyond making plans (crisis management planning) for a shock to the system, another need is to translate the destination resilience model and indicators into policy recommendations.

3. Conclusions

Just as destinations and their demand for quality crisis management is undergoing massive evolutions, so too is the need for scholarship in this area. Never before has there been such a pressing desire to advance our knowledge of destination crisis management. This paper has tried to identify gaps in the scholarly literature and has attempted to illustrate why we need to move this area of research forward.

As a field of inquiry, destination crisis management still has a long way to go. Academic research can be a way to move the industry forward. Scholars have a responsibility to help provide new insights, new methods of inquiry, and new approaches to aid the industry, especially in times of crisis. Academic institutions have an opportunity to take a leadership role in the area of destination crisis management. Provision of empirical evidence to build an advocacy message for the industry is desperately needed all over the world. For those scholars who are focused in the area of destination crisis management, now is the time. Moving this body of knowledge forward with a clear research agenda for the industry which is theoretically and methodologically sound is the first step. It is hoped that this paper will spark some controversy, as well as encourage others to help shape the direction of this vital discipline of destination crisis management.

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