



Destinations, disasters and public relations: Stakeholder engagement in multi-phase disaster management



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ABSTRACT

Research about disasters in tourism has emerged in earnest since the 1990s covering insights for preparedness and response. However, recently, authors have called for more systematic and holistic approaches to tourism disaster management research. To address this gap, this study adopted a public relations perspective to refocus attention to relationships and stakeholder expectations of destination communities across multiple phases of disaster management. The authors used a mixed method approach and developed a battery of disaster management attributes by conducting interviews and analysing industry documents and the extant literature. These attributes formed part of a survey of tourism businesses. Exploratory Factor Analysis resulted in a two factor solution: i) business disaster preparedness, and ii) destination disaster response and recovery. Findings also show that participants reported a gap between the importance and destination performance of these attributes. In particular, tourism businesses perceived destinations did not adequately engage in disaster preparedness activities, which had implications for disaster response and recovery.

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1. Introduction

Disasters are unexpected natural or man-made events that injure people, damage property and infrastructure, and threaten the survival of organisations (Pearson & Clair, 1998). Past disasters include terrorist attacks, natural hazards, and organisational incidents such as technical errors or corporate malfeasance. The tourism industry is particularly susceptible to the short term and longer term effects of disasters due to: i) disruption of services at destinations and along the transit routes, and ii) the (mis)perceptions of consumers in distant markets. Recent examples of disasters to impact on tourism are highlighted in Table 1.

Disaster management comprises four phases: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (PPRR). Prevention involves preventing or mitigating hazard impact such as disaster-proof infrastructure, preparedness ensures measures are in place before a disaster occurs, response comprises effective and efficient reaction to a disaster, and recovery includes the short and long-term efforts

to restore communities following disasters (Cronstedt, 2002).

Despite the range of disasters and the existence of disaster management and engagement strategies, preparedness levels within the tourism sector remain historically low (Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001; Hystad & Keller, 2008; Paraskevas, Altinay, McLean, & Cooper, 2013). Although past disaster experience can motivate action (Ciocchio & Michael, 2007), the traditionally low levels of disaster preparedness amongst tourism businesses are attributed to beliefs that disasters are not likely (Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001; Hystad & Keller, 2008), and a lack of funds, staff, and time (Spillan & Hough, 2003). A lack of disaster preparedness in the tourism industry has the potential to impede disaster response and recovery for individual destination stakeholders and the economic health of the sector.

A key influencer in disaster management, from preparedness to recovery, is the destination marketing organisation (DMO). A DMO is formed as a result of a community seeking to become organised in the pursuit of destination competitiveness, and predominantly coordinates marketing communications (Pike & Page, 2014). Some DMOs have supported knowledge-building activities related to disasters (Blackman, Kennedy, & Ritchie, 2010; Blackman & Ritchie, 2008), yet the field of DMO involvement in disaster management is relatively new (Paraskevas et al., 2013).

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Table 1
Recent disasters impacting on tourism.

2015	Terrorist attacks, Paris Earthquake and landslides, Nepal Wildfires, Canada, USA Volcano eruption, Mount Raung, Bali Capsized cruise ship, China Cyclone Pam, Vanuatu Juno Blizzard, USA Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), South Korea and Middle East
2014	Typhoon Haiyan, Philippines Malaysian Airlines Flights MH370 and MH17 Polar Vortex, USA Mount Everest Avalanche, Nepal Ebola Virus Outbreak, Western Africa
2013	Hurricanes Manuel and Ingrid, Mexico Typhoon Phailin, India Earthquake and Tsunami, Solomon Islands Tornadoes, USA
2012	Bombing, Boston Marathon, USA Protests, Arab Spring, Egypt Hurricane Sandy, USA Shooting, Sandy Hook Elementary School, USA Floods, Philippines
2011	Fukushima nuclear disaster, Japan Christchurch earthquake, New Zealand Tropical cyclone Washi, Philippines Drought, East Africa Floods, Thailand

Although existing studies have examined strategies for disaster preparedness, response and recovery, comparatively few studies examine disaster management in holistic and systematic ways (Faulkner, 2001; Paraskevas et al., 2013; Ritchie, 2004). The lack of research covering multiple phases of disaster management and the relationships within the sector potentially limits how the tourism industry manages change, complexity and follow-on disruptions that are commonly associated with disasters. To address this lack of research, this study adopts a public relations perspective to examine the multiple phases of disaster management from the perspective of key stakeholders in destination communities.

Public relations emphasises the value of relationships between organisations and their environments. According to one of the most frequently cited definitions, public relations is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Broom, 2009, p. 25). While public relations is commonly understood as a publicity and promotion function for organisations, its value in relationships and stakeholder engagement deliver sustained and mutually beneficial outcomes. This study focuses on public relations practices around stakeholder engagement that are designed to enhance and/or create capabilities in disaster management and preparedness.

Building on the opportunity to contribute to existing research and enhance engagement processes, the study investigates tourism destination stakeholders' perceptions of current disaster management preparedness initiatives at their destination. The study contributes to disaster management research in the tourism literature by giving attention to disaster preparedness, response and recovery phases to enhance engagement and build resilience in the sector. In addition, the study builds understanding of the expectations that drive the relationship and engagement between DMOs and tourism destination stakeholders in disaster management. The aims of the study were twofold: i) to identify destination management attributes deemed important to stakeholders and ii) to identify stakeholders' perceptions of their destination's disaster management performance.

2. Literature review

2.1. Stakeholder engagement and DMOs in disaster management

A destination community contains diverse stakeholders with varying levels of vested interests in the success of their destination community (Pike & Page, 2014). For DMOs, stakeholder engagement and relationship management are important because they build trust, resilience and performance (Sloan, 2009). As a key function of public relations, stakeholder engagement is conceptualized in this study as the relationship-building principles that can improve tourism destination stakeholders' business capabilities in disaster management (Taylor & Kent, 2014). There are multiple ways to engage and manage relationships with stakeholders from monitoring to involvement to deep collaboration or integration into decision-making (Basu, Bose, & Ghosh, 2013; Burnside-Lawry & Carvalho, 2015). The relationships between DMOs and destination stakeholders create social capital, which is an important part of public relations practice as it enables the achievement of business and social outcomes (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Engagement is also an important part of effective disaster management. The role of DMOs is most clearly defined in disaster response and recovery which brings a focus on marketing activities designed to restore the industry (Blackman & Ritchie, 2008; Wang & Pizam, 2011). Although researchers have identified DMOs as industry educators that can assist businesses to plan for and cope with the negative effects of crisis (Blackman et al., 2010), there is limited research that explores the critical relationship between these organisations.

Engagement around all areas of disaster management will be influenced by the pre-disaster relationships (Coombs & Holladay, 2001), in this case between DMOs and destination stakeholders including tourism operators. Tourism research shows divergence in these pre-disaster relationships. For example, less interest in destinations and their competitiveness is shown by small tourism businesses whose owner/operators are motivated by lifestyle (Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011), over business design. However, DMOs, their stakeholder engagement strategies and the competitiveness of the destination influences the success of individual tourism ventures and cooperatives (Pike, 2004).

For DMOs, the ultimate aim is to achieve alignment between their actions and tourism destination stakeholder expectations, an outcome also shared by public relations. The lack of alignment between organizational and stakeholder interests can reflect in social and economic performance (Sloan, 2009). In this regard, there has been a relatively small stream of research investigating tourism destination stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of the DMO's destination leadership (see for example Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Donnelly & Vaske, 1997; Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, & Mihalic, 2012; Evans & Chon, 1989; Selin & Myers, 1998; Wagner & Peters, 2009). Within these studies, a noticeable gap is the extent to which destination stakeholders are satisfied with their destination's disaster management. A DMO's disaster management activities are vital in ensuring resilience in the tourism industry. In the context of disaster management, the lack of alignment has the potential to affect how stakeholders, in this case tourism businesses prepare, respond to and recover from disasters.

2.2. Evaluating DMO performance using expectation confirmation theory

Expectation confirmation theory (ECT) was originally developed by Oliver (1980) who suggested expectations and perceived performance lead to satisfaction. This effect is mediated through a

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