



Using the media's tweets to broaden previous conceptualizations of political travel risks

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ABSTRACT

This study utilized content analysis to identify and analyze the types of risk mentioned in the news media's tweets. The findings broadened previous conceptualizations of travel risk related to politics and highlighted the significance of geopolitics as a potential source of harm for destinations. Approximately two-in-three tweets mentioned *foreign relations*, a novel travel risk type. Specifically, strained foreign relations emerged as a significant risk for the destination. An additional finding resulted in the integration of political instability into the novel travel risk type of *internal affairs*, which captured the political environment within the destination. Monitoring the types of risk mentioned in media messages related to a destination is an essential function of destination risk management. Particular attention should be given to issues that may have either direct or indirect impacts on tourism. This study highlighted the need for DMOs to continuously monitor Twitter for emerging sources of risk for destinations.

1. Introduction

Destination management organizations (DMOs) around the globe have been faced with several major challenges recently (TCMI, 2017). One particularly significant challenge that these agencies, who are responsible for managing tourism destinations, have been faced with is the ever-increasing pervasiveness of a wide range of crises affecting the tourism industry (Drabek, 2009; TCMI, 2017). According to PATA (2011), a tourism crisis is “an event or set of circumstances which can severely compromise or damage the marketability and reputation of a tourism business or an entire tourism destination region” (p. 1). A few contemporary examples of tourism crises include terrorist attacks in the iconic destinations of Brussels, Istanbul, London, and Paris; a devastating earthquake in Ecuador; destructive hurricanes in the United States; and outbreaks of Zika virus in the Americas.

As a result of this recorded intensification of crises influencing the tourism industry (Drabek, 2009; TCMI, 2017), risk management has gained attention as being a critical function of destination management (PATA, 2011). Risk management has been defined as “An iterative process consisting of well-defined steps, which, taken in sequence, support better decision-making by contributing a greater insight into risks and their impacts” (Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand, 1999, p. iii). Risk management has two central purposes: (1) to

identify and analyze risks; (2) to use strategies to mitigate or reduce risks (APEC International Centre for Sustainable Tourism, 2006). The risk management process is cyclical in nature (Gurtner & Morgan, 2007, as cited in PATA, 2011, p. 5). Related to the first purpose of risk management, the risk management process requires organizations to continuously monitor, analyze, evaluate, and manage risks (PATA, 2011). Thus, risk management should be both preemptive and continuous in nature and include an evaluation of all potential risks (Leopkey & Parent, 2009). In tourism, risk has been defined as “the prospect or probability of negative events and subsequent loss to a tourism business or destination arising from a negative event” (PATA, 2011, p. 5). Since DMOs are responsible for managing the destination, it is their responsibility to continuously evaluate all potential risks and manage risks at the destination level (TCMI, 2017).

The news media has been recognized in DMOs' management strategies because of the effects that news media can have on public opinion (Leopkey & Parent, 2009). Although uncommon in practice, identifying and analyzing the types of risk that the media mention most often in relation to a destination is an important function of destination risk management for three reasons. First, tourists' risk perceptions are believed to be affected by exposure to media messages (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Rowe, Frewer, & Sjöberg, 2000; Schroeder & Pennington-Gray, 2014; Sönmez, 1998; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998a), whereby

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negative media messages related to a destination may contribute to heightened risk perceptions (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Sönmez, 1998; Wahlberg & Sjöberg, 2000). Second, tourists with higher risk perceptions are likely to exert a greater amount of effort into their information search during travel planning (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Those with heightened risk perceptions are likely to spend more time and consult more sources when searching for information than those with lower levels of risk perceptions (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005). Third, tourists' destination risk perceptions have been found to influence intentions to travel to a destination (Pennington-Gray, Schroeder, & Kaplanidou, 2011; Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, Kaplanidou, & Zhan, 2013). Collectively, the literature suggests that the types of risk that the media mention most often in relation to a destination may heighten tourists' destination risk perceptions and may consequently influence their intentions to travel to the destination. In other words, the media may play a facilitating role in creating or reducing destination-specific risk in the minds of prospective tourists. Thus, monitoring media discourse can serve as a risk management tool for destinations (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; TCM 2017).

The public generally hears about risks and risk events from different information sources (Kasperson & Kasperson, 1996). Among different risk communication agents, the news media is considered to be particularly significant (Kasperson & Kasperson, 1996). Several factors are believed to affect the public's assessment of risk, namely: "the extent of media coverage; the volume of information provided; the ways in which the risk is framed; interpretations of messages concerning the risk; and the symbols, metaphors, and discourse enlisted in depicting and characterizing the risk" (Kasperson & Kasperson, 1996, p. 97). Therefore, monitoring media discourse related to risk can help DMOs detect the amplification or attenuation of risk by the news media (Kasperson & Kasperson, 1996). This can also help destination managers better understand media and consumer perceptions of the risk, as well as the potential spread of impacts on the tourism industry in the affected destination. Efforts to monitor media discourse can contribute to the early identification and management of risk, which is important because risks that are not responded to quickly and managed effectively can escalate into a crisis (APEC International Centre for Sustainable Tourism, 2004).

Social media has become an "indispensable tool" for information dissemination (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2013) and has redistributed the dynamics of the news process (McCombs, 2004; Meraz, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2014; Reynolds, 2006). Between 2012 and 2017, the largest change in sources of the public's news media consumption was the increasingly pervasive role of social media (Newman et al., 2017). During the same time period, social media was also considered to be one of the most significant "gateways" to digital news content (Newman et al., 2017). Consequently, risk management requires DMOs to identify the types of risks frequently mentioned in relation to a destination on the social media sites that individuals turn to for news. By identifying the types of risk events mentioned, DMOs can include this information in their annual risk audit and plan for ways to manage the risk in the future. Having an established plan in place can help DMOs prepare for relevant risks in advance and develop strategies to mitigate or reduce these risks, which can ultimately result in the prevention of a risk escalating into a crisis.

Based on the two purposes of risk management, this study sought to identify and analyze the types of risk mentioned in the news media's social media messages related to an international destination as a means to understand potential types of risk for the destination. Twitter is one of the top social networks for the public's consumption of news content (Newman et al., 2017). A clear majority of the public have previously followed a news event as it unfolded on the site (Pew Research Center, 2015). Twitter is also the preferred source for breaking news among social media sites (Pew Research Center, 2015). Therefore, news media tweets were analyzed in this study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Media and risk perceptions

The news media, as a major segment of mass media, serve as one of the most credible and essential sources for the general public to obtain information outside of their friends and family (Smith, 2005; Trumbo & McComas, 2003). News coverage not only contributes to the audience's knowledge and understanding of risks, but also gradually mediates its risk perceptions (Rowe et al., 2000; Smith, 2005; Trumbo & McComas, 2003). When the media report events that threaten public health or safety, the audience pays attention to these risks (Kasperson et al., 1988). Such public awareness may result in increased risk perceptions, as well as attitudinal and behavioral changes (Kasperson et al., 1988). Bakir (2010) explained that the media can influence risk perceptions in four ways: by "providing risk knowledge to inform citizens; generating and deterring public acceptability of different risks; motivating the public to take responsibility for, and action regarding, risks; and providing imaginative schemata regarding voluntarily chosen risks" (p. 5).

While the media are not the sole determinant of one's risk perceptions (Wahlberg & Sjöberg, 2000), the media do help shape them (Bakir, 2010; Rowe et al., 2000). Therefore, the significance of media coverage cannot be underestimated (Wahlberg & Sjöberg, 2000). The media have been recognized as one of the most important sources from which the public obtains risk information (Covello, Peters, Wojtecki, & Hyde, 2001; Rowe et al., 2000; Wahlberg & Sjöberg, 2000). Media content can make an issue salient in the minds of the audience, while repetition of media content can amplify the risk (Boholm, 1998; Kasperson et al., 1988; McComas, 2006). A high frequency of media coverage has been found to produce greater public awareness of a risk, as well as to negatively affect public opinion (Rowe et al., 2000; Schwartz & Woloshin, 2004). Although characteristics of an event may moderate the intensity of the media's influence on the audience's risk perceptions, it is difficult to completely change them once they are formed (Kasperson et al., 1988; Roche, 2002; Rowe et al., 2000).

The rise of digital media has produced a new communication landscape in which power has been redistributed from traditional to new media (McCombs, 2004; Meraz, 2009; Reynolds, 2006). Smith (2005) suggested that audiences are increasingly fragmented in the new media landscape and, as a result, the influence of traditional media has weakened. However, the relationship between news coverage and audiences' risk perceptions has been significant in multiple settings, including traditional and digital news media platforms (Habel, Liddon, & Stryker, 2009; Smith & Joffe, 2009; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Consequently, social media has emerged as an important force that guides public opinion, as well as sets the public agenda by telling its audience what to think about (Armstrong & Gao, 2010; Sayre et al., 2010).

2.2. Media and travel risk perceptions

Over the past several decades, risk and safety have been found to be important factors that influence tourists' decision-making (Kozak, Crotts, & Law, 2007; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998a). Sjöberg, Moen, and Rundmo (2004) defined risk as the "the probability of an adverse event and the magnitude of its consequences" (p. 7). Scholars typically approach risk from one of two perspectives: (1) focus on the real risk and assess the risk by performing technical assessments; (2) focus on perceived risk and examine individuals' perceptions of risk (Sjöberg, 2000; Sjöberg, Moen, & Rundmo, 2004). Considering that a majority of the public assesses risk on a subjective basis, most scholarly attention has been paid to the concept of perceived risk (Sjöberg, 2000; Sjöberg et al., 2004). Tourism scholars have consistently focused on tourists' interpretation of risk at a perception level (Kozak et al., 2007; Roehl & Fesenmaier 1992; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998b) and have argued that risk perceptions are specific to situations and may vary by destination (Roehl & Fesenmaier 1992; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998b).

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