SCARY CRISES: EARLY PERCEPTIONS OF RISK AMONG FIVE-STAR TOURISTS

Diego Rodríguez-Toubes
José Antonio Fraiz Brea
University of Vigo, Spain

ABSTRACT

Whether natural or of human origin, a crisis affecting a geographic area can impinge unfavourably on the consumers' confidence and drive their decision-making processes to discourage visiting the region or even any location whatsoever within the affected country. An appropriate management of the impression projected by a potential destination of tourism involves the provision of information to travellers. In this way, travellers' perception of risk can be modulated through their information-searching habits. The combination of the above elements makes for a strong case in considering the drivers of risk perception as key aspects in the field of tourism marketing. In this work, we introduce and discuss the results of a study focused on the way that crises and disasters happening as early in the year 2011 as February and March drove the perception of a group of travellers in regard to the affected countries as potential summer destinations. The study was conducted among customers of a five-star hotel located in the Spanish coastal town of Vigo. We have discerned also in what ways the travellers' sex and age, as well as the different nature of the origin of perceived risk such as crime, natural disaster, political upheaval, riots, and health-related issues, drove their impression of those countries.

KEY WORDS

Crisis, Decision-making, Risk category, Risk perception, Travel destination

---

INTRODUCTION

Any potential destination can be affected by some unfavourable event or internal crisis hurting the country's projection on the consumer market through its impact of the undesired circumstances on the travellers' perception of the affected area. The unfavourable events leading to a crisis can have a natural origin (disasters such as earthquakes, floods, volcano eruptions, etc.), or appear as an effect of humankind's actions (crime, terrorism, or political upheaval, among others). Even though they affect very specific and well-located spots within a country's territory, the travellers' perception of risk can extend to the entire country.

The perception of unsafety -or even of hazard- thus built in the travellers' mind becomes a factor driving their decision-making processes when choosing a country of destination. Such a driving factor is the stronger when the travel is being planned within a short-term scope, to the point that the competitiveness of a country affected by a crisis, whether it is still going through it or it is

already past, becomes endangered. It follows from the above that it is a primary need to gain as much insight as possible into the factors modulating the travellers' perception of risk, with particular stress on the short-term drivers. Such is the overall problem that we tackle in our contribution.

Academic research on this topic has been scarce so far, even though lately a number of authors have considered this subject-matter and hinted at the travellers' perception of safety and of risk as being major drivers of their destination choices (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006). Thus, according to Fink (2002, p. 15), the essence of the management of a crisis in the field of tourism boils down to the acknowledgement that "[C]risis management – planning for a crisis, a turning point – is the art of removing much of the risk and uncertainty to allow you to achieve more control over your own destiny". Or, taking the idea one step further, "risk handling is largely information handling" (Slevitch & Sharma, 2008, p. 87). Consequently, all those with some responsibility on the tourism area must learn how to properly manage the information provided to the travellers in order to shape their perception so as to make it accurately tuned to the factual reality, as opposed to some subjective perception of it. This means, disclosing as much as possible what is subjective in their judgmental elements from what it is not and effectively communicating this to the travellers; i.e., conveying the actual circumstances of the destination.

The overall framework of our approach is embedded in a case study methodology. This is well-suited to our topic because, the literature on this subject-matter being so scarce, there is still much empirical work to be done. Hence, any valid data collection is currently a valuable addition. We have been very careful in choosing a representative sample in order to elaborate a sound observation-based inductive theory. Besides, since risk perception - even though resilient - is expected to be particularly strong as a decision-making driver in the short term, this has been done by collecting data reflecting the travellers' perception at a point in time as close as possible to the largest impact on the potential destination.

To be more concrete, we have chosen as our unit of analysis an exclusive five-star hotel located in the south of Galicia. There, we conducted a series of interviews with the guests using an enquiry form just a short time after unfortunate events of different nature hit four regular international tourism destinations. The form addressed in a most direct way the following items: (1) the travellers' perception of risk in terms of a discrete quantitative assessment, (2) the risk category that was perceived as the strongest choice-driver from among a fixed and small number of categories, and (3) its effects on the short-term range and on a one-year time lapse, which, in our scenario, can be considered a fiducial instance of "the long-term".

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Despite both the importance of the travellers' perception of risk for the area of tourism, and the acknowledged need to implement appropriate marketing measures in order to ease the travellers' concerns by providing an impression of safety, so far only scarce attention has been focused on risk perception as a decision-making driving factor (Sönmez, 1998). Fortunately enough, in late years it has been noticed that an increasing threat for tourism comes from the consumers' lack of confidence on their safety during their travel and perceived risk is starting to be merited with the long-due attention it deserves. At last, it is acknowledged as being a major decision-making driver, something to be properly managed from every destination of tourism.

Thus, Law (2006, p. 290): "[...] perception of risks is a key factor that influences travellers to make their travel decisions".

Moreover, the travellers' perception of risk is particularly sensitive, displaying an elasticity index per unit-level of perceived risk higher than in any other field. This is mostly due to the presence of hedonistic elements that consumers usually associate with services belonging in the area of tourism. In this way, something seemingly trivial such as news on the cancellation of reservations, can contribute to raise the perception of danger or unsafety over the actual values of the corresponding indices (González-Herrero & Pratt, 1998). Travellers choose safe destinations because positive expectations and nice remembrances are major elements in their decision-making processes (Schluter, 2008).

Consumption in broad terms - and particularly in the field of tourism - is an act of the will sensitive to negative publicity. Hence, risk perception is dependent on mass media - currently including social networks, too. Even though a country tries to conceal information about any kind of unappealing circumstance such as inner conflict or strife, or any other kind of disaster within the reaches of its territory, it is sooner rather than later that the facts will make their way to public knowledge. This, of course, impinges unfavourably on the travellers' demand of the affected country as a destination (Levantis & Gani, 2000).

According to Dolnicar (2005), the perception of risk and the fear of buying a *product* run along parallel lines. Nonetheless, in the field of tourism it is necessary to make a clear distinction between risk as it is actually measured by well-established objective indicators, and a traveller's own, subjective, perception of risk, even if only because the latter can reach much further and last much longer than the former as a decision-making driver. The SARS crisis affecting the Hong Kong hotels in February 2003 makes for an enlightening case in point: according to Lo Cheung and Law (2006, p. 66), "[...] it was the fear of SARS rather than the virus itself that caused social unease, hesitancy to travel and economic losses".

Law (2006) puts forward the following as the three major sources of increased risk awareness: (1) infectious diseases, (2) terrorist attacks, and (3) natural disasters. Chen and Gursoy (2001) identify health and hygiene-related issues as being both the most usually acknowledged and the most influential types of risk. According to González-Herrero (1998), most travellers take safety and comfort as two essential aspects to consider at the time of making a decision on their destination, and the most frequently cited items related to risk perception are, sorted according to decreasing importance, (1) crime, (2) flight safety, (3) terrorist threat, and (4) availability of health assistance. Maser and Weiermair (1998) make a classification of the risks that a traveller is about to face in terms of four categories, namely, (1) natural disasters, (2) health and hygiene, (3) crime, and (4) accidents. Slevitch and Sharma (2008) argue for the manifold nature of perceived risk and go as far as putting forward not any less than eight different categories, to wit: (1) health or life hazards, (2) financial hazards, (3) lack of personal satisfaction, (4) lack of social satisfaction, (5) possibility of the journey becoming a waste of time, (6) technology-related risks, (7) politics-related threats, and (8) terrorism. According to the latter authors, the perception of risk drops so deep as the quality of the available information rises high, although there are also those types of threats that can contribute the further to a heightened perception of risk the higher the available

information's quality - one case in point being those threats related to a possible lack of social satisfaction.

Lepp and Gibson (2003) consider a three-variable dependence of the risk perceived by international travellers: (1st) traveller's sex, (2nd) past experience as a traveller, and (3rd) motivation for travelling. They conclude that the last variable is the most significant: those tourists considering only or mostly the well-trodden destinations are those displaying a strongest risk aversion. The more experienced travellers display a trend to think as if they considered that the past occurrence of a crisis entails a smaller probability for its occurrence again in the same geographic area (Pechlaner et al., 2007). Law (2006) states that risk perception depends, to a large measure, on the travellers' country of origin and on the extent to which they are acquainted with the destination country.

The travellers' reaction may be different depending on the type of crisis, or, to be more accurate, on the nature of the risk factor. Some studies support the idea that travellers are more sensitive when facing stealth risks than in front of isolated, even though high-level, risk sources (Moreira, 2010). The former, having as their main feature a steady rise of negative circumstances (such as crime rate) and a steady drop of those which are neutral or favorable - entailing the continuity in time of the risk situation - are stronger drivers of the travellers' perception than the latter, which concentrate their impact and effects in a short time-period.

The organizations involved with the promotion of tourism in the destination area must spare no expense in sustaining the travellers' confidence in their safety. Uncertainty and the consequences of one's own choices are the most significant components of perceived risk, but only the former is amenable to be kept under control to some extent, an appropriate management of information being a particularly well-suited tool to do so (Slevitch & Sharma, 2008). Consequently, the development and implementation of an appropriate management of the different types of uncertainty is an ineluctable need, and a number of joint strategies to this end have been suggested (Holloway, 2004, p. 122):

(1) Letting the consumers become well acquainted with the product's features in order for them to develop some sense of familiarity with it, thus reinforcing their confidence and strengthening the stability of their purchase choices.
(2) Lowering the consumers' expectations on the product. This is not an easy task, though, since travellers usually display a trend to idealize their consumption choices.
(3) Maximizing the consumers' knowledge of the facts about the product, thus lowering their uncertainty.

METHODOLOGY

A first goal of this paper is to provide the empirical results of a study about the influence that negative events affecting potential destination areas have on the travellers' choices. A discussion of the understanding gained under this light is within the scope of our aims and is therefore included in this paper, too. We have adopted a case study approach to tackle our subject-matter because in this way our conclusions are supported by a theoretic sample, in sharp contrast to a sample that is thought of as significant with respect to a given population.

The benefits of having a theoretic sample lie on the possibility it opens up to choose cases with some probability to replicate and provide grounds for an emerging theory, and to which further cases can be appended until the theory reaches a saturation stage (Eisenhardt, 1989). In this way, the relevance of the case does not need to rely on any statistical attributes, but on the presence of certain logical features and relations. The features of a given case, or instance, under study are extended to others through the theory's explanatory power (Mitchell, 1983). Based upon study, observation, and the compilation of data, a number of hypotheses can be put forward, transforming claims into statements through logical inference, and eventually gaining a full-fledged theoretic framework. Thus, it provides a way for new theories to emerge and develop.

The data on which we support this work were collected by means of interviews using a brief enquiry form a short time after the strongest impacts of an assortment of fateful events entailing a situation of crisis in four countries, to wit: Japan, Egypt, Morocco, and Mexico. The interviews were made to guests of *Pazo Los Escudos & Hotel Resort*, an exclusive five-star hotel located in Vigo (Spain), the only one of its category in the south of Galicia except for the *Gran Hotel* in the La Toja island. We have focused on this hotel as our unit of analysis because it provides us with a representative environment. In particular, the affluence of its regular customers, entailing a more realistic possibility in the guests' minds to travel to the destinations in our study, was a strong motivating consideration for us in that it provided the added value of a higher likelihood that the guests were actually contemplating an honest, true to life, "what if" in their minds. The large coverage - by both conventional mass media and social networks - of the events affecting those countries while we were conducting our enquiry, granted that the participants in our study were acquainted with the events. All of the above made their answers the more valuable as bearers of information on the travellers' early reactions to a crisis circumstance in a potential destination.
The collection of data was made at a time in the year when the travellers were planning their summer holidays. Closeness in time is a fundamental feature for our study because previous research has unveiled that, more often than not, the impact of negative events on the choice of a travel destination does not survive the short-term, the main reason for this being apparently the fact that this is the usual time scope for travellers to plan their journeys (Pechlaner et al., 2007). Mass media reported about the events affecting all four countries on an almost daily basis for at least the months of February, March, and April 2011. The enquiry was conducted on the first week of May that year.

From all of the above, we can state that, at the time of filling our enquiry, the participants had fresh information about the events, and that their answers reflected their early perception of the plausible consequences on their safety would they travel to any of the contemplated countries. The enquiry was comprised of five short, test-like, questions, which addressed the following topics:

(1) Perception of risk regarding each country, assessed quantitatively in terms of a discrete Likert scale ranging from one to five.

(2) Risk type perceived as the major driving force regarding each country. We provide a five-categories classification: (a) crime, (b) pandemic, (c) disasters, (d) political upheaval, and (e) terrorism.

(3) Risk category perceived as the absolute strongest driver; "absolute" meaning, disregarding the destination.

(4) Reasons to not travel to each country in the short-term.

(5) Same as above, but considering a one-year time lapse.

Lastly, we collected personal data regarding age, studies, sex, and country of origin. We were able to retrieve 80 correctly filled forms, a number large enough for our study.

CASE STUDY ITEMS

Between the months of January and April 2011, a number of fateful events with dire consequences affected four countries, namely, Japan, Egypt, Morocco, and Mexico. The year's high season wore the sign of their tragic effects and impact on the travellers' choices of destination, driven by the daily headlines-filling safety threats and hazards in the affected countries that mass media had been reporting about intensively, exhaustively, and relentlessly. Nonetheless, the nature of the events affecting those four countries was different from any one to another. The origin of Japan's crisis was a natural disaster - the combined effect of an earthquake and a tsunami - triggering a nuclear crisis due to the hazard of radiation losses through the damaged structure of a nuclear power plant. Egypt was suffering from the political upheaval and public riots related to the so-called *Arab Spring*. Morocco - a destination country of particular significance to Spanish travellers due to geographic closeness - was under the impact of several *jihaddhist* attacks to western travellers. Lastly, Mexico was beaten by a blast of crime and violence exceeding every international crime rate, and this was particularly visible in some of its most regularly visited states. In what follows, we provide a more detailed, even if brief, relation of the events involved in the circumstances of each country.

Japan: Natural Disaster

Since 1973, Japan has been affected by nine earthquakes with a Richter magnitude not any less than seven. But on March 11, 2011, Japan was shaken by an earthquake with a magnitude 8.9, the highest in the last 140 years. Fortunately - or so we might initially think - its epicenter was located in the sea. Unfortunately, it had as its foremost immediate consequence a tsunami with waves reaching heights of up to 10 meters, which brought upon havoc on the East coast, precisely where several nuclear power plants were located. To the figures accredited by the Japanese National Police Agency (15845 dead people, 3380 missing, and 5893 injured) throughout the 18 Japanese Districts (National Police Agency of Japan. Emergency Disaster Countermeasures Headquarters, 2013), we must add the structural damages to the nuclear plants, causing radiation losses to the environment, and enforcing the Japanese Government to adopt major safety measures.

Egypt: Political Upheaval

The year 2011 marked the beginning of the riots and popular revolts known collectively as the "Egyptian Revolution." Starting on January 25, massive demonstrations extended throughout the entire country for 18 days until Prime Minister Mubarak resigned. The popular claims and demonstrations were frequently staged in the midst of heavy strife and violence, including street fights between those against and those for the government. The upheaval included attacks to police stations and the occupation of governmental buildings. Airports were closed to the traffic and museums closed their gates - including, as a foremost case in point, *The Museum of Egyptian*

Antiquities, or *Museum of Cairo*, which was the object of burglary, bringing the very preservation of some of Egypt's most valuable historical legacy and treasures under jeopardy.

Morocco: Terrorism

On April 28, 2011, in a suicidal attack, an artifact was exploded in the Argana coffee shop at the popular square Yemaa al Fná, in Marrakesch. This event brought about the death of 17 persons, including 14 international tourists. The Argana coffee shop was a regular meeting place for tourists, located in the most visited square in Morocco (ABC, 2011). In the last ten years, the country has been the target of six attacks against western travellers, even though the latest has been the most serious terrorist action in that country in terms of blood spill since Casablanca's suicidal attacks in the year 2003, when 45 people were killed.

Mexico: Crime

Crime, and more particularly, organized crime, is one of the most urgent problems currently faced by Mexico. The spiral of increasing violence and every conceivable - and sometimes, almost inconceivable - kind of criminal act in that country is simply out of any scale. The number of people killed by organized bands on the year 2011 reached up to 15273, a rate that amounts to an increase of the 58% with respect to the year 2009. Just two years before, on 2007, the number of killings had been 2826 (El Universal, 2011). A fraction as high as one half of the above figures concentrate in states such as Chihuahua, Sinaola, and Tamaulipas, but the perception of the international community at large is that the country as a whole is under a blast of violence that the Government is not able to bring to an end.

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this section we provide a description and a discussion of the results we have obtained from our enquiry, proceeding one question at a time.

Personal Data

Let us first describe the personal data collected in our sample. Women comprise the 53% of the total sample, men therefore reaching up to the 47%. The most populated age range extends from 40 to 59 years, and is comprised by the 41% of the participating women and the 50% of the men. The second most representative age range lies between 25 and 39 years, with the 32% of the participating women and the 34% of men.

Risk Assessment for Each Country

The resulting statistics about risk assessment according to each destination is displayed on Figure 1. In order to discuss the resulting data we focus on the two upper-end evaluations, labeled "quite" and "high." We can see that the 48.75% of the participants locate the risk regarding Japan on the high end. Nevertheless, the destination affected to a greatest extent is Egypt, adding up to the 63.75% of the participants. The perceived risk regarding Morocco and Mexico is on both cases located mostly on the medium range, although the former country reaches up to the 38.75% of the participants assessing risk on the high end, and the latter, the 41.25%.

Results are similar if data are split in terms of sex and age range, although there seems to be a particular feature regarding, on the one hand, men older than 60 and, on the other, women between 25 and 39: the former consider Morocco and Mexico as the most dangerous destinations, whereas for the latter it is Japan.
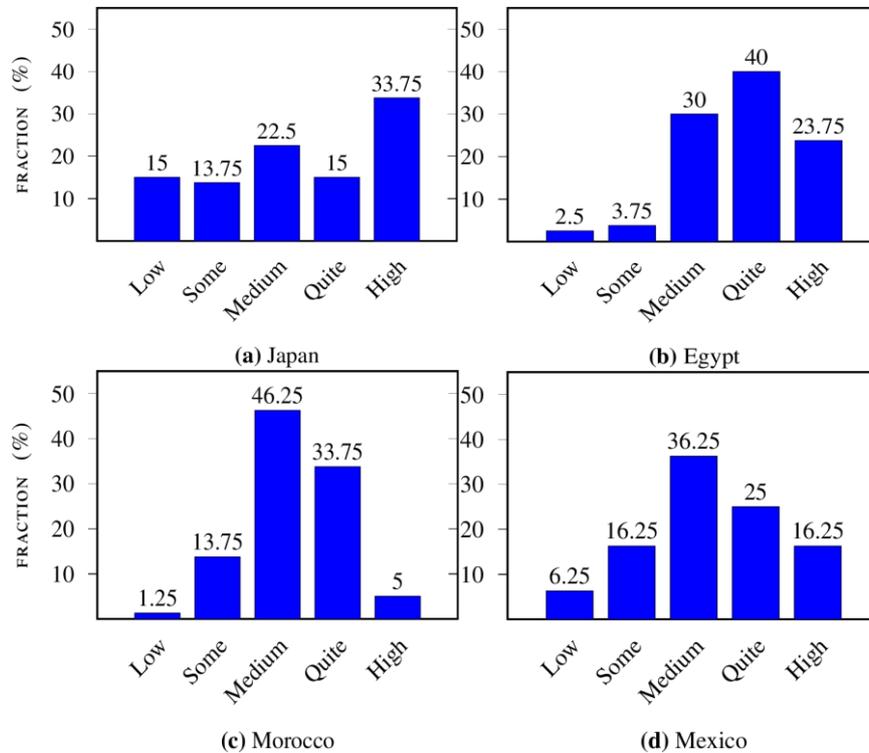
Figure 1: Risk perception in the short-term for each country

Strength of Risk Category for Each Country

Figures 2 and 3 provide a visual display of the risk category that is perceived as being the most relevant to each country. We have considered a five-category classification: (1) crime, (2) pandemic, (3) natural disasters, (4) political upheaval, and (5) terrorism. Our intention with this question was learning about the type of risks most frequently associated with each of the destinations in the mind of the participants in our enquiry. As we expected, the type of risk that Japan is most frequently associated with is natural disaster: the 65% of the members in our sample locate that risk category on the high end ("quite" for the 50%, and "high", for the remaining 15%). The pandemic category ranks on the high end, too, with the 35%. The remaining types of risk are not considered relevant for the case of Japan.

As for Egypt, it is clear that perceived risk derives mostly from the country's politics-based upheaval: the 82.5% of our sample locate the corresponding category on the high end. Terrorism is perceived also on the same levels by the 56% of the participants. Pandemic and crime are perceived as mid-scale categories, and natural disasters are assessed as low-significance threats by the majority.
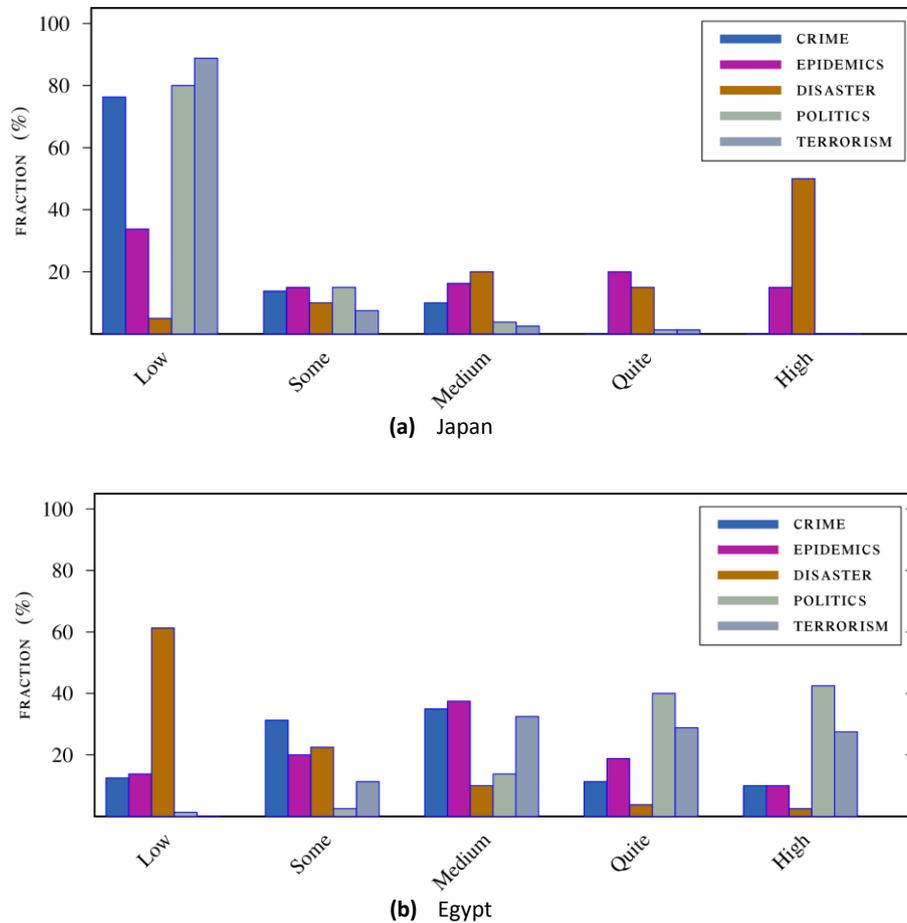
(a) Japan

(b) Egypt

Figure 2: Risk perceptions per risk category for Japan and Egypt.

In the case of Morocco, the results display a larger spread. On the one hand, and in a likeness to Egypt, the risk category perceived as being the most significant relates to politics-based upheaval: the 57.5% of the participants think that it ranks on the high end of our scale. Terrorism is the next most important source of perceived risk, with the 47.6% locating it on the same end as politics-based threats to safety. Crime is thought of as ranking mid-scale, and lastly, pandemic and disasters are thought of as low-significance risk categories.

Let us observe at this point in our discussion that the attack of April 28 in the most visited and best-known spot in Marrakesch has not impressed so much the perception of the participants in our enquiry, who do not locate terrorism on the high end of our scale. This came as a surprise to us, if only because such a fateful event was still fresh in our minds at the time we were conducting our enquiry, plus it was the most recent event from among those considered for all the four countries in our study.

Splitting the results in terms of the participants' sex, let us say that terrorist threats seem to impress women more than men. In particular, women in the age range from 40 to 59 years consider this one as the top-ranking category.
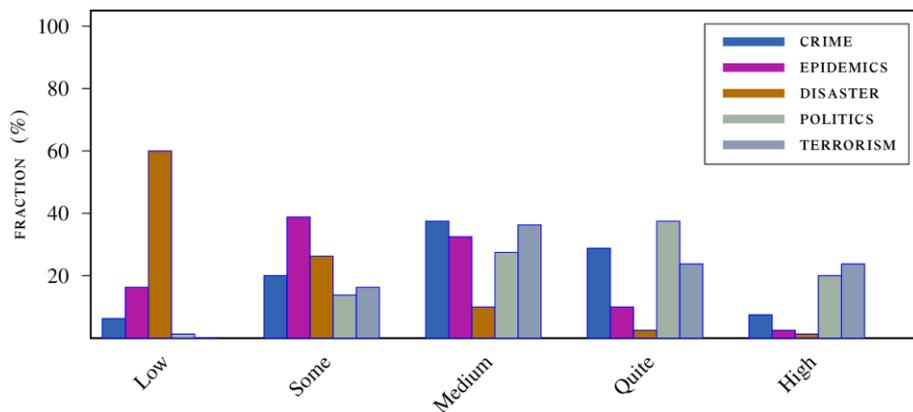
(a) Morocco
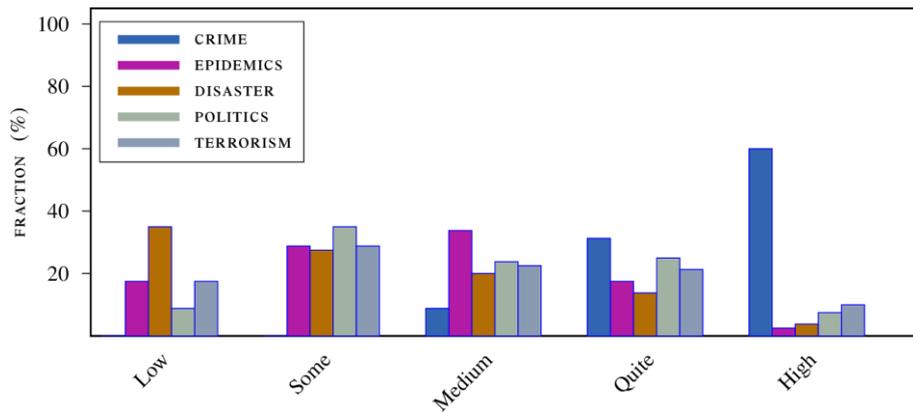
(b) Mexico

Figure 3: Risk perceptions per risk category for Morocco and Mexico (The Authors).

In full accordance with our expectations, the top category regarding Mexico is crime: the 60% locates it on the highest end of our scale, and the 31.3% on the next to the highest level. That is to say, the 91.3% of the participants locate crime on our scale's high end. The impact that media coverage of organized crime and violence has on the travellers' mind is clear enough.

The remaining risk categories are perceived as being much less relevant: political upheaval, terrorism, and pandemic, are all concentrated mid-scale, with disasters on the low end. Despite the frequent presence of hurricanes in the country from August to October, and its coverage by mass media, only the 3.6% of the participants considered that natural disasters should rank high, with a figure as large as 62% locating them on the low end. This result provides further support to the theory put forward by Moreira (2010) regarding the way that stealth risks - in sharp contrast

to big isolated threats - impinge on the travellers' perception of risk (crime-related risks belong in that category).

Absolute Driving Strength for Each Risk Category

In Figure 4 we display the influence, or driving strength, that the five risk categories considered in our study have on the travellers' decision-making process. On a scale from one ("little") to five ("much"), we observe that, with independence of the particular contemplated countries, pandemic and terrorism are the strongest drivers in what relates to risk perception when choosing a destination: the 62.5% of the participants classify the first as strong drivers of their decisions, and the 60.1% do so for the second. This is a statistical fact that becomes the more surprising when we look at it under the light of the participants' mild reactions to the terrorist attack in Morocco that we described above. We can only think that the participants in our enquiry had not yet fully perceived that Morocco is a country where terrorism is a true major threat.
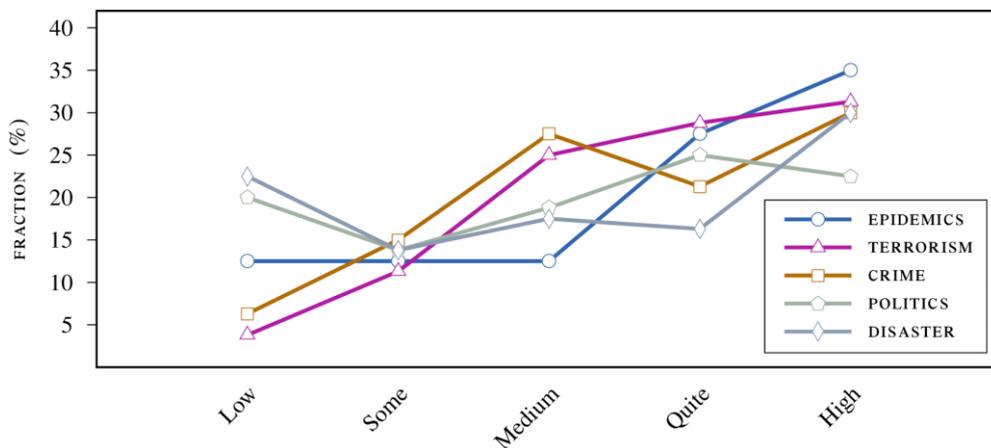

Figure 4: Driving strength on the choice of destination for each risk category.

The weakest drivers of the travellers' choices in terms of risk perception are political upheaval and natural disasters. A majority of the participants classify the strength of those risk categories in the range from low to medium.

Since it is more likely that travellers avoid those destinations with an attached high-risk perception, sorting out the driving strength, or concern arising, of our risk categories becomes a task of utmost importance. From the data collected through our enquiry, the five risk categories considered can be sorted out according to decreasing strength as follows: (1st) pandemic (35%), (2nd) terrorism (31.3%), (3rd) crime and disasters (30% each), and (4th) political upheaval (22.5%).

Travellers' Choices

In Figure 5 we display the results of the final - even though twofold - question in our enquiry. The participants are queried about their destination choices within the scope of the four contemplated countries. We split the question in two separate test items: the first queried about

their choices for that very summer (short-term choices), whereas the second did so regarding a one-year time lapse (long-term choices). In this way, we can gain insight into the participants' perceptions of risk evolution in terms of each country and risk category. Lastly, we study the extent to which the perception of risk affected the entire country or was focused on the particular geographic spots where the threats-arising events occurred.
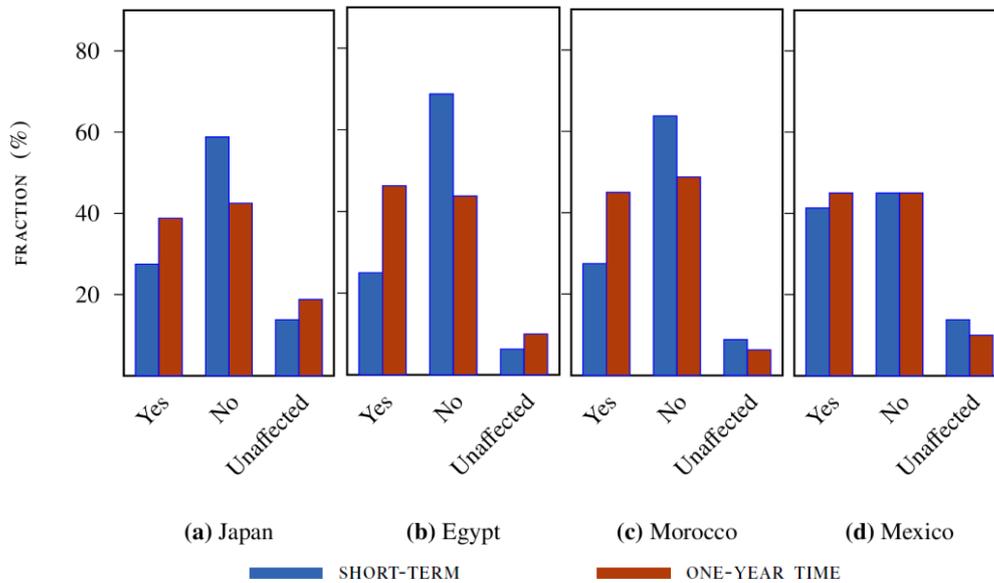

Figure 5: Condensed statistics about travelling decisions in the short-term and in a one-year time lapse. Further data are included displaying the average discrimination between affected and unaffected areas.

The big picture obtained from the data can be summed up by saying that most participants would not even consider travelling to any of the contemplated destinations that summer in spite that all the circumstances were favorable to their doing so. The rejection figures are distributed as follows: Japan, the 58.8%; Egypt, the 68.8%; Morocco, the 63.8%; and Mexico, the 45% - this is the only country with a balanced statistics, since the 41.2% might choose it as their destination. Egypt shows the largest gap between the short and the long terms. From the 25% that would consider the country as their destination that summer, the figure rises to the 46.3% for next year's summer, whence we conclude that the participants' expectations about the recovery of safety conditions in the country are quite favorable.

Similarly, it is expected that the trouble situation affecting Morocco changes for the better within a one-year time lapse: the figures rise up from the 27.5% to the 45% in such a period. Nevertheless, there is a strong divergence about this country when we split the statistics in terms of sex: no matter the age range we consider, most women would not choose Morocco as their destination in any of the contemplated time scopes. On the other hand, men within 25 and 39 would seriously consider that country as their destination in the short-term, and men older than 60 do not show either acceptance or rejection. This fact may be the result of the deeper

perceptivity on the part of women regarding the actual terrorism threats in the country that we had mentioned above.

As for Mexico, there seems to be no perceptual shift from the short to the long term. Given that Mexico's major perceived problem is crime, no clear resolution in the short-term is expected; it is rather the other way around: circumstances are expected to worsen.

We also query the participants about whether or not they would travel to other areas in each country - areas not affected by the events arising the perception of risk. Georeferences and time stamping regarding the affected areas is a major topic to be on the focus of the authorities in charge of tourism and one of the World Tourism Organization's top priorities in regard to crisis management (WTO, 2011). Even though the area affected is sharply bounded, travellers may have the impression that the entire country's territory has been impacted and, consequently, that their safety is under threat anywhere within it. The provision of accurate information about the affected area is thus an absolute necessity in order to preserve the travellers' inflow (Huang & Min, 2002).

Within the scope of our enquiry, the countries displaying the highest contrast regarding how the travellers make a difference from the affected to the unaffected areas are Mexico and Japan. The 13.8% would consider travelling in the short-term to unaffected areas in Mexico or Japan. As for Morocco and Egypt, the rates for unaffected areas are smaller: the 8.6% in the former case, and the 6.3% in the latter. Such a result can be understood in terms of the main tracts of the different major categories of risk perception for each country. In Japan (natural disaster) and Mexico (crime), they are concentrated in a number of states and well known bounded areas. On the opposite, political upheaval, the major cause of concern regarding Egypt and Morocco, is spread throughout the entire country.

Conclusions

Authorities in charge of tourism management in a destination country have among their chief duties the development of a solid knowledge about the spectrum of threats to safety within their country's territory, together with a good understanding about the way that those threats shape the travellers' mindset regarding their perception of risk on travelling to the country.

It is also necessary a big effort in the direction of the development of a sense of responsibility on the part of mass media regarding the broadcast of fair, unbiased, accurate and well-informed news about the circumstances of the destination country, including data about the boundaries of the areas actually affected by unfavourable events entailing a threat to the safety of travellers. In this way, the travellers' uncertainty can be minimized and they will be able to make a sound choice regarding their next destination.

At the time of conducting our enquiry, it was Egypt, followed by Japan, the country that arose the highest risk perception. Mass media seem to act as a reinforcing supply in that regard. It is highly likely that the exhaustive media coverage has increased the travellers' awareness and strengthened their perception of risk. In order to remain appealing to travellers and reinforce their sense of security, the official agencies of tourism in every destination country should implement the appropriate measures according to the risk category that is most frequently attached to their geographic area by travellers.

The major risk category attached to Egypt and Morocco as destinations of tourism is politics-based upheaval and strife, followed closely by terrorism. For Mexico, the homologue category is crime and violence. The well-known fact of the hazards derived from summer tropical storms and hurricanes seems to have hardly impinged on the travellers' perception. This is in agreement with the statement that a category whose elements entail a steady rise of risk - the case of crime - makes a deeper impression on the minds of travellers than those concentrating their impact and effects in a short time span - such as a natural disaster.

We have observed also differences about risk perception in terms of the travellers' sex and age. For both men and women beyond 60, there is a perceptible reinforcement of crime and political upheaval as drivers of their choices. Nonetheless, through the data compiled in our case study, we can fairly say that the most influential risk categories regarding the travellers' choices of destination are pandemic and terrorism.

Let us conclude by restating that in this contribution we have followed a case study methodology for whose application we have chosen a theoretic sample. It would be interesting to add as many case studies as possible in order to see what happens once we have reached the theory's saturation stage. This would enable us to extend the resulting hypotheses in order to be able to pursue a quantitative approach. We suggest to probe into the possible causal connections between the exposure of a crisis situation to mass media coverage, and the travellers' perception of risk. It would also prove worthy to discern the sources from where the travellers' retrieve the information on which they elaborate their destination choices, and to do so in terms of their sex and age.

REFERENCES

ABC. (2011). *Once extranjeros los 16 muertos del atentado de Marraquech.* Retrieved April 29 2012, from http://www.abc.es/20110428/internacional/abci-explosion-marrakech-201104281238.html

Chen, J. S., & Gursoy, D. (2001). An investigation of tourists' destination loyalty and preferences. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 13*(2), 79-85.

Dolnicar, F. S. (2005). Fear segments in tourism. *Sharing Tourism Knowledge. 14th International Research Conference of the Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education (CAUTHE),* Australia. *, CD Proceedings.*

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(4), 532-550.

El Universal. (2011). 2010, El año más violento del sexenio. Retrieved April, 16, 2012, from http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/36178.html

Fink, S. (2002). *Crisis management: Planning for the inevitable*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Backinprint.com.

Fuchs, G., & Reichel, A. (2006). Tourist destination risk perception: The case of Israel. *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing, 14*(2), 83-108. doi:10.1300/ J073v07n04_06; M3:10.1300/J073v07n04_06;21

González-Herrero, A. (1998). Comercialización de productos y planificación de crisis en el sector turístico: Imagen corporativa y marketing centrado en el consumido. *Papers de Turisme, 24*, 6-45.

González-Herrero, A., & Pratt, C. B. (1998). Marketing crises in tourism: Communication strategies in the United States and Spain. *Public Relations Review, 24*(1), 83-97.

Holloway, J. C. (2004). *Marketing for tourism* (4th ed.). Essex: Pearson Education.

Huang, J., & Min, J. C. H. (2002). Earthquake devastation and recovery in tourism: The Taiwan case. *Tourism Management, 23*(2), 145-154.

Law, R. (2006). The perceived impact of risks on travel decisions. *International Journal of Tourism Research, 8*(4), 289-300.

Laws, E., Prideaux, B., & Chon, K. S. (2007). *Crisis management in tourism*. Wallingford, UK; Cambridge, MA.: CABI International.

Lepp, A., & Gibson, H. (2003). Tourist roles, perceived risk and international tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research, 30*(3), 606-624.

Levantis, T., & Gani, A. (2000). Tourism demand and the nuisance of crime. *International Journal of Social Economics, 27*(7/8/9/10), 959-967.

Lo, A., Cheung, C., & Law, R. (2006). The survival of hotels during disaster: A case study of Hong Kong in 2003. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 11*(1), 65-80.

Maser, B., & Weiermair, K. (1998). Travel decision-making: From the vantage point of perceived risk and information preferences. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 7*(4), 107-121. doi:10.1300/J073v07n04_06;M3:10.1300/J073v07n04_06;21

Mitchell, J. C. (1983). Case and situation analysis. *The Sociological Review, 31*(2), 187-211.

Moreira, P. (2010). Stealth risks and catastrophic risks: On risks perception and crisis recovery strategies. In N. Scott, E. Laws & B. Prideaux (Eds.), *Safety and security in tourism* (pp. 15-27). New York: Routledge.

National Police Agency of Japan (2013). Emergency Disaster Countermeasures Headquarters. Damage situation and police countermeasures associated with 2011 Tohoku district - off the Pacific Ocean earthquake.

Pechlaner, H., Abfalter, D., Raich, F., & Dreyer, A. (2007). Crisis management and tourism organizations: A comparative study in the European Alps. In E. Laws, B. Prideaux & K. S. Chon (Eds.), *Crisis management in tourism* (pp. 157-170). Wallingford, UK;Cambridge, MA.: CABI International.

Schluter, R. (2008). *Turismo: Una versión integradora*. Buenos Aires: CIET.

Scott, N., Laws, E., & Prideaux, B. (2010). *Safety and security in tourism*. New York: Routledge.

Slevitch, L., & Sharma, A. (2008, February). Management of perceived risk in the context of destination choice. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, 9*(1), 85-103. doi:10.1300/J073v07n04_06;M3:10.1300/J073v07n04_06;21

Sönmez, S. F. (1998, April). Tourism, terrorism, and political instability. *Annals of Tourism Research, 25*(2), 416-456.

WTO. (2011). Recommendations on the use of georeferences, date and time in travel advice and event information. Retrieved May 20, 2012, from http://rcm.unwto.org/sites/all/files/ docpdf/ recommendationsontheuseofgeoreferencesdateandtime.pdf

AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS
Diego Rodríguez-Toubes
University of Vigo, Spain
drtoubes@uvigo.es

José Antonio Fraiz Brea
University of Vigo, Spain
jafraiz@uvigo.es