



Examining newspaper articles on tourism and crime in South Africa

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Abstract

Tourism may be seen as a catalyst for economic growth and government's job creation drive in South Africa. Regrettably, however, crime in the country constitutes a threat to a thriving tourism industry. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the threat posed by crime to tourism growth, a thematic analysis of relevant newspaper articles was conducted. The analysis revealed that crime, in particular robbery, is a threat to tourists. This article provides guidelines for the South African government on how to deal with the issue of crime against tourists. The article specifically recommends the empowerment of local communities to enable them to act as capable guardians in deterring crime where it raises its ugly head.

Keywords: Tourism, crime, safety, tourist destination, robbery, guardians

Introduction

Tourism plays both a major and an increasingly important role in global economic growth and development. In support of this view, Rahmatnia, Vejdan and Ekskandarpour (2012:139) state that "tourism is very important in the world economy and it is one of the important resources of income both for developed and developing countries". In the same vein, Dieke (2003:287) asserts that "tourism is expected to foster economic growth and improve people's well-being in areas such as job creation, revenue and balanced regional development". It is, thus, clear why a growing number of nations are coming to depend on tourism in an economic sense (Ryan & Silvanto, 2011:306). In addition, as Spiriajevas (2008:120) states, "the economic impact of tourism is efficient in the regions that have limited possibilities for economic development". This assertion of Spiriajevas highlights the fact that that the development of tourism is a perfect economic development strategy for the poor regions of the world. Unfortunately, despite the increase in popularity of South Africa as a tourist destination, the country is increasingly becoming seen as an unsafe place to visit (George, 2003).

Researchers such as Levantis and Gani (2000) and Pizam and Mansfeld (1996) have focused on crime and safety problems, while George (2003) conducted research into tourism and safety in South Africa with special reference to Cape Town. However, a literature search revealed that no studies in this context have analysed newspaper articles on tourism and crime as such, in South Africa. It is against this background that the goal of this paper was to conduct a thematic analysis of newspaper articles on tourism and crime in South Africa. This paper is divided into three main sections, namely, a literature review, the methodology used and a presentation and discussion of the results.



Literature review

Raina and Agarwal (2004:4) define tourism as “a human desire to make a round of places of interest – religious, spiritual, natural, beautiful places, monuments, ancient cities, historical sites, pilgrimage centres and places that arouse curiosity”. Raina and Agarwal (2004:4) highlight that natural and cultural attractions are the reasons why people choose to travel. Tourism in South Africa makes an important contribution to the economic growth and development of the country. It is expected that it will continue to grow and that South Africa's market share of world tourism will reach 1% by 2020. In addition, tourism is one of the industries in South Africa that has consistently created jobs and contributed meaningfully to the gross domestic product (Ivanovic, 2008:71).

South Africa offers a diversified tourism product range and this is reflected in the various forms of tourism that are available. These forms of tourism include cultural tourism, medical tourism, adventure sport tourism, ecotourism and business tourism. Business tourism is continuing to grow in South Africa and, since the dawn of freedom and democracy, the country has numerous attracted large, multinational companies. As a result of these developments, the number of international events, conferences and trade shows held in the country has increased dramatically. One of the main contributory factors to the increase in business tourism is the availability of world-class facilities and infrastructure (SA Yearbook, 2009/2010:492). These include state-of-the-art, international convention centres for conferences and exhibitions (Rogerson & Visser, 2007:88).

Heritage sites are also an important tourist attraction. According to Bandarin et al. (2011:18), world heritage sites are often a catalyst for economic growth as they generate revenue and create employment opportunities for the communities concerned. South Africa boasts a number of heritage sites, some of which are included in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) register of world heritage sites. UNESCO promotes the preservation of world heritage "by bestowing international prestige on sites of unique historic and natural value". The World Heritage List was established in terms of the 1972 World Heritage Convention (Chhabra, 2010:70).

There are eight world heritage sites in South Africa. These include the Cradle of Humankind, the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, Robben Island, the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, the Cape Floral Kingdom, the Vredefort Dome and the Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape (Ivanovic, 2008:82; George 2007:30). The Robben Island World Heritage Site is the most visited heritage site in South Africa, followed by the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site (Ivanovic, 2008:255).

Safety is one of the non-negotiable issues in the tourist industry with tourists wanting a guarantee that, when they visit a destination, they will be safe from criminal activities. This clearly poses a serious challenge to both tourism marketers and governments (Heath, 2002:340) as safety is one of the most important attributes of a tourist destination and is, in fact, one of the major considerations when tourists select destinations. In the words of Pizam and Mansfeld (1996:1) “safety, tranquillity and peace are necessary conditions for prosperous tourism”. Pizam and Mansfeld's assertion points to the fact that it is not possible for tourism to thrive amidst acts of criminality, as the travel and tourism industry is particularly sensitive to such acts (Dwyer & Kim 2003,). Brown, Esbensen and Geis (1996) identify three types of crime, namely, violent crime, economic crime and victimless crime. Violent crimes include murder, assault, rape and robbery. The most prevalent crimes against tourists are theft, violent crimes, terrorism and the violence resulting from political instability. Entorf and Spengler (2002) point out that crime often costs tourists significant amounts of money. This assertion highlights the fact that many tourists fall



prey to robbery and this leads to the loss of both goods and money. Harper (2001), Mawby (2000) and De Albuquerque (1999) all point out that theft is the most prevalent crime against tourists.

The routine activity theory suggests that, for a predatory crime to occur, there must be a suitable target, a motivated offender and the absence of capable guardians. Tourists are often vulnerable because they tend to carry large amounts of money while they also unwittingly often enter areas that the residents themselves consider to be dangerous. The offenders are often motivated to attack tourists because they view themselves as the “have nots” and the tourists as the “haves”. In addition, many tourist destinations often do not have capable guardians or law enforcement agencies to deter tourist crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Thus, tourists take risks when they visit such places (Weber & Botton, 1989).

The situation is often exacerbated by the fact that many tourist destinations are silent about crimes that occur in and around these destinations (Kathrada, Burger & Dohnal, 1999). However, Crystal (1993) cautions that media attention on crime in a tourist destination may be blown out of proportion. This assertion highlights the fact that the media does not always play a proactive role in educating communities about safety tips and, instead, they sensationalise crime incidents, thereby scaring away tourists.

Methodology

In order to achieve the goal of the study, a thematic analysis was conducted. According to Sandelowski and Leeman (2002), content analysis and thematic analysis are similar and thus it is possible to use them interchangeably. Cole (1988) defines content analysis as a method that may be used for examining communication messages. However, while there is some convergence between content analysis and thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that content analysis is an independent qualitative descriptive approach which they describe as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data”. Braun and Clarke’s view (2006) is echoed by DeSantis and Ugarriza’s assertion (2000) that thematic analysis is a process of identifying common threads within data. In other words, thematic analysis is a process of determining categories or themes in data.

For the purposes of this study, 14 newspaper articles on tourism and crime in South Africa were analysed. The articles were published between 2007 and 2014 and were selected for both their relevance and availability. In line with Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005) advice, the articles were perused and headings (themes) noted to describe aspects of the content on each page. The analysis was done according to two categories namely, impact of crime on the tourism industry and strategies to deal with crime in the tourism industry. This section outlines the research approach that was adopted, while the following section present the results and a discussion of these results.

Results and discussion

Impact of crime on the tourism industry

As indicated previously, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the themes that emerged from newspaper articles on tourism and crime. As Pizam and Mansfeld (1996) suggest, safety is an important consideration when tourists choose a destination. South Africa, like other tourist destinations in the world, faces a serious challenge with crime. The analysis revealed that crime remains one of the constraints to tourism growth. The chief executive officer of South African Tourism, Mr Sam Nzima, as quoted by Maqutu (2014:2), admitted that crime is a problem but further argued that it is not all doom and gloom by stating that “the country hosted the 2010 World



Cup 'incident free' and 'crime-free'. However, Boynton, as quoted by Mangxamba (2007:22), stated, "How ironic and how sad it is that South Africa's alarming crime statistics are now having a profound effect on tourism". This statement suggests that crime remains a threat to South Africa despite it being a destination with huge tourism potential. The tourism potential is obvious in the diversity of its product offering, with the country's natural and cultural attractions being the main driver of its tourism growth. However, if the problem is not resolved, Boynton (in Mangxamba, 2007:22) suggests crime may drive away tourists and this, in turn, would kill the government's job creation drive and also constrain the country's economic growth prospects. According to the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Ms Rejoice Mabudafhasi, "with crime under close scrutiny in the media, and news spreading at an alarming speed, tourists who fell victim to crime within a matter of hours damage our reputation" (*Business Day*, 2008: 2).

As indicated in the literature review, the most prevalent crimes against tourists include theft, violent crimes, terrorism and the violence resulting from political instability. In particular, crime against tourists in South Africa takes the form of robbery. In line with this view, Jones (2007:4) states that ongoing attacks on tourists by gangsters are having a negative impact on tourism growth. This statement is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Alleyne and Boxill (2003) to the effect that high crime rates have a negative impact on tourism arrivals. The South African Police Provincial Commissioner in Gauteng province asserts that armed robbery remains a serious issue (*City Press*, 2012). On 24 March 2008, 14 tourists from Canada, Britain and the United States of America were robbed at gunpoint of their money, cameras and cell phones by three men. On 24 January 2008, two German tourists were robbed in the Johannesburg City Centre. In another incident "a gang stripped staff and tourists of their belongings and locked them up before making off in five vehicles owned by the lodge" (Jones, 2007:4). In addition, 15 tourists were the victims of several armed robberies reported in three days on Cape Town's Table Mountain (Hartley, 2007).

These incidents and others involving tourists to South Africa all serve as a distinct disincentive to tourists visiting the country. As the literature review suggests, safety is an integral aspect of the tourism product. A survey conducted by Cape Tourism revealed the tourists' main concern was crime (Sheldon, 2011). As already mentioned, robbery remains of the most prevalent crime against tourists. This is in line with routine activity theory's assertion that many destinations do not have capable guardians or law enforcement agencies to deter tourist crime.

A report by the World Economic Forum claims that South Africa is in 60th place in the global tourism rankings as a result of the high level of crime and inadequate access to health and sanitation. The main reason for South Africa's drop in the rankings is, in the main, the low standards of safety and security. This report paints a gloomy picture of South Africa as a tourist destination. Surprisingly, the report also indicates that South Africa now lags behind countries such as Mauritius in the tourism rankings (Khumalo, 2008).

Mackay (2008:20) asserts that "South Africa's poor ranking on safety and security is compromising the country's attractiveness as a travel destination". In addition, Da Costa (2007:5) states that "South Africa's strengths included its significant number of world heritage sites and its infrastructure which was relatively developed". However, on a negative note, safety and security was of serious concern, with the negatives perceptions about the safety and security of tourists in South Africa constituting a hindrance to tourism growth (*Eastern Cape Herald*, 2007). Clearly, all the indications are that crime creates a negative perception of any tourist destination and also that South Africa is dropping in the world rankings as a result of concerns about safety and security.



Strategies to deal crime in the tourism industry

The threat posed by crime to tourism calls for a collective effort between the government and the private sector. In other words, it is vital that private companies and government agencies pool their resources and their expertise in a collective effort in order to deal with the crime in South Africa (Mangxamba, 2007). In order address the issue of crime against tourists, the government has introduced “tourism specific interventions which include the Department of Justice’s fast tracking of prosecutorial processes of cases involving tourists” (*City Press*, 2012:37). Through this initiative, the government is seeking to deter criminals from attacking tourists.

As part of the strategy to deal with crime against tourists, government is considering the possibility of “a designated policer officer in every police station to deal with tourism crime-related issues” (Cole, 2007:5). While the strategy may appear to be effective in theory, the chances are that government will be unlikely to translate it into reality as a result of, among other things, resource constraints. As a tourist destination, Cape Town’s Table Mountain has introduced 50 armed rangers to fight crime (Prince, 2011). In addition, the police are embarking on nationwide operations, including, among other things, measures which are aimed at increasing visible policing especially in crowded areas and tourist hotspots (Stander, 2010). This section presented the results of the study, as well as a discussion of these results.

Implications for the South African government

The evidence strongly suggests that the South African government authorities must strive to successfully stop crime against tourists in order to save such an important economic resource for South Africa. Crime remains a serious issue in the tourism industry in South Africa. In order to address the problem, it is recommended that the South African government embark on the process of developing an industry-specific crime strategy. This strategy should be developed and implemented by a cross-functional team comprising individuals from both the private sector and relevant government agencies. The strategy should also be funded jointly by government and the private sector. In addition, the strategy should include a strong element of public education in order to heighten awareness about the value of tourism and the role that local communities should play in protecting tourists, thereby empowering these communities to function as capable guardians.

Tourism is a vital part of the South African economy. The Police in particular should be charged with the tough task of protecting those tourists who are easily identified and unthinking. It is a fundamental notion that the most vital aspect of a strong tourist trade is the belief that the visitor will be safe to have a good time in a destination of their choice.

Conclusion

In order to achieve the goal of this article, a thematic analysis of relevant newspaper articles was conducted. The analysis revealed that crime remains a threat to tourism, with robbery as the most prevalent crime. Crimes against tourists can undoubtedly impair a destination's reputation. This problem is also often exacerbated by the media's often disproportional reporting of tourism crimes. Thus, government and the private sector must work in concert to keep tourists safe and ‘good’ news stories should also be reported in the media as much as possible. As the tourist season approaches various government departments and the private sector need to start thinking of ways to prevent crimes against tourists. Brochures and other documents can be printed in foreign languages to facilitate understanding by especially the international tourist. This article provides guidelines to the South African government on how to deal with the issue of crime against tourists.



It is recommended that an industry-specific strategy be developed by all relevant stakeholders and that the empowerment of local communities to enable them to operate as capable guardians should be at the centre of this strategy.

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