

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

1.0 Introduction

Recent political crises such as Bali bombings, prolonged Thai political protests, the Arab Spring or China-Japan Island dispute warrant the need for the tourism industry to study their impact and to develop effective crisis management strategies. Since the September 11 terrorist attacks and the 2004 tsunami, awareness of and research into terrorism, crises and disasters have increased on the part of the tourism industry (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006; Scott, Laws & Prideaux, 2008; Ritchie, 2009). However, less attention has been paid specifically to the impact of political crises upon the tourism industry and how tourism stakeholders responded to them. A significant number of crisis and disaster tourism studies have been conducted at affected destinations; yet only a few studies have been conducted in tourism generating countries (Hall, 2012). Given the recent increase in international political conflicts, there is a need to understand the effects of political crises on the tourism industry, in order for tourism organisations to be better prepared in future.

This paper begins by setting out definitions of political crisis and the impact of such crises on the tourism industry. The next section looks at methodology. The third section presents the findings of this study, categorised into three main themes: (1) characteristics of political crises; (2) effects of political crises on tourism organisations; and (3) the implementation of crisis management response by tourism stakeholders. Finally, the conclusion is drawn up, together with a discussion and recommendation for future study.

2.0 Political crisis definitions

The term 'crisis' originates from the Greek word, *krisis*, which means differentiation or decision (Glaesser, 2003, p. 1). Historically, the term was first commonly employed in medicine, before being introduced into British politics as early as 1659 (Starn, 1976). Definitions of the term crisis range from 'turning point for better or worse' (Fink, 1986, p. 15); to 'a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, and its existential core' (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992, p. 15). For Coombs (1999, p. 2), a crisis is 'an

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly'.

There is a lack of clarity in the academic literature when it seeks to define the term 'political crisis'. Zimmermann (1983, p. 189) was amongst a few who suggested that 'political crises are a wider sense than government crises; they call for and possibly lead to substantial changes in policies or the political order, not merely a replacement of personnel'. He added that some forms of political crisis were the consequences of economic or societal crises, as seen in the 1970 riots in Poland where an economic crisis immediately led to a political one. Little consideration has been made to define the term of 'political crisis' in the context of the tourism industry.

Accepting that politics is concerned with the exercise of power and influence in a society, and specifically with decisions over public policy (Hall, 1994), the value of understanding the interplay of tourism and politics, and consequently the related impacts of political instability, is emphasised in this study.

The complexity of the term is such that it can be used to refer to an internal political issue which may have only small degrees of resonance for the tourism industry, such as the formation of a coalition government in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2010. Equally, the tourism industry can suffer more directly from an internal conflict between opposing parties, such as the events in Thailand in 2010. Given the important roles and perspectives of national and international stakeholders, it is essential to determine whether, and how, political crises affect the tourism industry.

2.1 Political crises and tourism

The first and central requirement of tourists is not scenic or cultural attraction, but political stability (Ritcher and Waugh, 1986). A number of scholars have studied the effects of political instability on the tourism industry (Hall & O'Sullivan, 1996; Sonmez, 1998; Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006); among these, Sonmez (1998) comprehensively demonstrated the effects of diverse political events and terrorism on tourism.

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

Other such studies include research by Schwartz (1991) on the case of Tibet during martial law, where tourists who witnessed violent demonstrations, in which the police killed civilians, were urged by local citizens to carry their message to the outside world. In China, the tourism industry suffered from the worldwide coverage of the 1989 Tiananmen Square conflict and subsequent massacre (Gartner & Shen, 1992).

A considerable number of researchers have examined the effects of war, and confirmed its wider impact on tourism. Teye (1986) demonstrated the effects of Zimbabwe's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on Zambia's tourism industry: Zimbabwe's war of liberation affected tourism in surrounding areas. Mansfeld (1999) suggested that tourists did not return immediately to the Middle East after the 1990-1991 Gulf War ended, because they had already booked their holidays elsewhere.

Moreover, terrorism has profound impacts on the tourism industry, as illustrated by time-series analyses of the effects of terrorism, conducted by Enders, Praise and Sandler (1992) on the period between 1968 and 1988. Their study identified how the generalization effect deters tourists from one country when its neighbour experiences terrorism. Tourism was found to react to terrorism after a period of 6-9 months. Moreover, a growing numbers of commentators on religious terrorism, such as Hipple (2002); and Krueger and Malekova (2002), suggested that terrorist acts are often rooted in deep social, political and sometimes religious motives and confirmed that the growth of religious terrorism worldwide appears to account for an increased severity of terrorist attacks. According to Santana (2003), the globalisation process provides the right conditions and environment for terrorism to flourish and become ever more deadly.

Recent studies include the work of Cohen and Neal (2010) on the cumulative effects of Thailand's multiple economic and political crises on the Thai tourism industry. Moreover, Campiranon, Laws and Scott (2011) analysed how the Thai government responded very differently to the impact on the country's tourism industry of the 2004 Tsunami and the 2008 Bangkok airport closure crisis. They concluded that in the case of the 2004 Tsunami, the response benefited the tourism industry; while in the case of

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

the 2008 Bangkok airport closure crisis, the response was detrimental to the tourism industry.

Academic literature confirms that the tourism industry has suffered from various political crises such as war, coups, terrorism, strikes, riots and political unrest all impact upon the image of a destination. They cause re-orientation of tourist flows, and leave the affected destination suffering long after the crisis has abated, due to the negative image caused. These incidents may also occur in direct response to tourism development. It is clear that for crisis management in these cases to be effective, detailed planning is required to compensate for both shortfalls in foreign demand and long recovery times after a crisis is over.

It emerges from the literature that the proportion of research that is focused on political crises is comparatively small and of that, very little is concerned with managing the effects of political crises in the tourism industry. The question remains as to whether all of these works shed sufficient light on the current understanding of how the tourism industry can be protected from political crises.

2.2 Political crises in Thailand

Thailand is considered a suitable destination in which to study the impacts of political crises on tourism: the country has a vibrant tourism industry, and has suffered numerous crises since it became a tourism destination in the 1960s. These have included world economic recessions (1983, 1990-1993, 2008-2010); the Asian financial crisis (1997); two Gulf wars (1990, 2003); the outbreak of SARS (2002-2003); the tsunami (2004); and frequent political crises. More specifically, since the removal of absolute power from Thailand's monarchy in 1932, the country has experienced ten successful coups and a greater number of abortive takeovers. Recent political crises have included a military coup in 2006, the Bangkok airport closure crisis in 2008, large-scale political protests in 2009 and 2010. A growing body of research publications have studied their effects (Cohen, 1988; Campiranon & Arcodia, 2007; Pearce, Focken, Kanlayanasukho, Smith & Semone, 2009; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). Recent research has predominantly focused on crises and crisis

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

management within the tourism industry; less attention has been paid to the effects of political crises on tourism.

The UK has been a significant source of tourists to Thailand, with approximately 800,000 British tourists travelling to the country each year (Office of Tourism Development Tourism Authority of Thailand [OTD], 1998 - 2011): thus, by better understanding the UK tourism industry's responses to political crises in Thailand, we can add a further dimension to the findings of this study.

3.0 Methodology

In the context of crisis management, studies have invariably employed quantitative research methods (such as forecasting, risk analysis, scenarios). However, in seeking to capture the views and opinions of key stakeholders and industry experts, this study applies a qualitative approach, which enables interpretations and meanings of findings that are not directly measurable.

The sample is drawn from UK tourism stakeholders associated with Thailand as a tourism destination. This includes 2 travel agents, 13 tour operators, 3 travel consultants, and 2 destination organisations. Purposive sampling (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009) was regarded as appropriate for use in this study. As the sample of tourism stakeholders associated with Thailand as a destination is relatively small, heterogeneous samplings enabled the researcher to collect data to describe; any patterns which emerge are likely to be of particular interest and value in representing the key themes (Patton, 1990).

Twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken with high-level executives of UK tourism organisations who had had experience with the Thai tourism industry. Interview questions were developed by applying the concepts from crisis and disaster management frameworks (Fink, 1986, 2000; Faulkner, 2001). A qualitative thematic analysis of the data was performed (Boyatzis, 1998). The analysis was conducted manually in order to develop inductive codes for data derived from the

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry’s management responses to political crises in Thailand

interviews regarding managers’ attitudes and opinions of the effects of political crises on their organisations, and their responses to those affected.

4.0 Findings

The following discussion presents the findings from the interviews, regarding which, three themes have emerged: (1) characteristics of political crises; (2) effects of political crises on tourism organisations; (3) crisis management response.

4.1 Characteristics of political crises

The interviewees were asked their opinions of the term, ‘political crisis’. The responses suggested variable levels of understanding of this term. Different interviewees employed differing forms of identification: Table 1 sets out how political crises were identified by the interviewees. Those characteristics include the root of conflicts, management control, disruption and cultural differences.

Table 1 – Characteristics of political crisis

Identification	Understanding of political crisis	Examples of interviewees’ comments
Root of conflicts	Originated from politically unstable government.	‘[A] political crisis is some unrest like a protest or some incident where ... the government may not be stable’ (TO2)
Management control	Uncontrollable incident or event.	‘[A] political crisis is like what happened in Thailand and the airport got shut ... things got out of control’ (TC2)
Disruption	Disruptive, from individual to the economy.	‘When it happens, it affects people’s normal life, disrupts the economy’ (TO6)
Cultural differences	A destination’s cultural background affects the perception of political crisis.	‘Tourists will never be affected by political crises in the UK. Politicians have very few interactions with people in this country, whereas in Thailand, a political crisis is more important because it affects everyone. Political crises in Thailand can have a much bigger impact’ (TO7)

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

Ten of the 20 interviewees commented that the root of conflicts is considered as a main characteristic. When a crisis originates from a politically unstable government or an internal conflict between two opposing parties, the situation is regarded as a political crisis. Another way in which a political crisis is viewed concerns how it is controlled. Most interviewees clearly suggested that a political crisis is, by definition, an uncontrollable event. In such a scenario, when an incident occurs, no tourism stakeholders can control it, leaving it to spiral rapidly into a crisis. An example was the Bangkok airport closure crisis in 2008 (Interviewee TC2, Table 1). Another characteristic identified is that it causes disruption to normal life, the tourism industry, or the economy as a whole (Interviewee TO6, Table 1).

Moreover, a political crisis may or may not affect the tourism industry, depending on factors relating to cultural differences. Three interviewees consider that their understanding of cultural differences affects their perception of the impact of political crises. One incident may be viewed as a political crisis in some areas, but not in others. Interviewee TO7 (shown in Table 1) provided a comparison between political crises in the UK and Thailand: positing that Thai people are more directly affected by politics, especially when there is an internal conflict between two opposing parties, or the government is guilty of serious mismanagement. These scenarios can turn into full-blown political crises; whereas as British people are less directly affected by politics and internal political conflict, any crises are far less likely to impact upon the tourism industry.

Moreover, when an environmental crisis occurs, such as floods in Thailand in 2011, incompetence on the part of the country's government can also lead to such an event being regarded as a political crisis. Interviewee TO8 suggested that: 'I think the Thailand floods in 2011 were a political problem ... Flood prevention is a political issue, and things are certainly not perfect in terms of political protest'.

From the primary data, this study collates interviewee responses in order to arrive at a definition for the term 'political crisis' as follows: *Any incident or event originating from the management shortcomings of a destination's government where any such incident or event negatively impacts upon organisations and people's daily lives,*

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

thereby also potentially affecting the tourism industry; however, the effects of such situations can vary considerably, as a result of cultural differences. This definition of the term 'political crisis' is adopted by this study in order to enhance the ability of the tourism industry to deal with such situations.

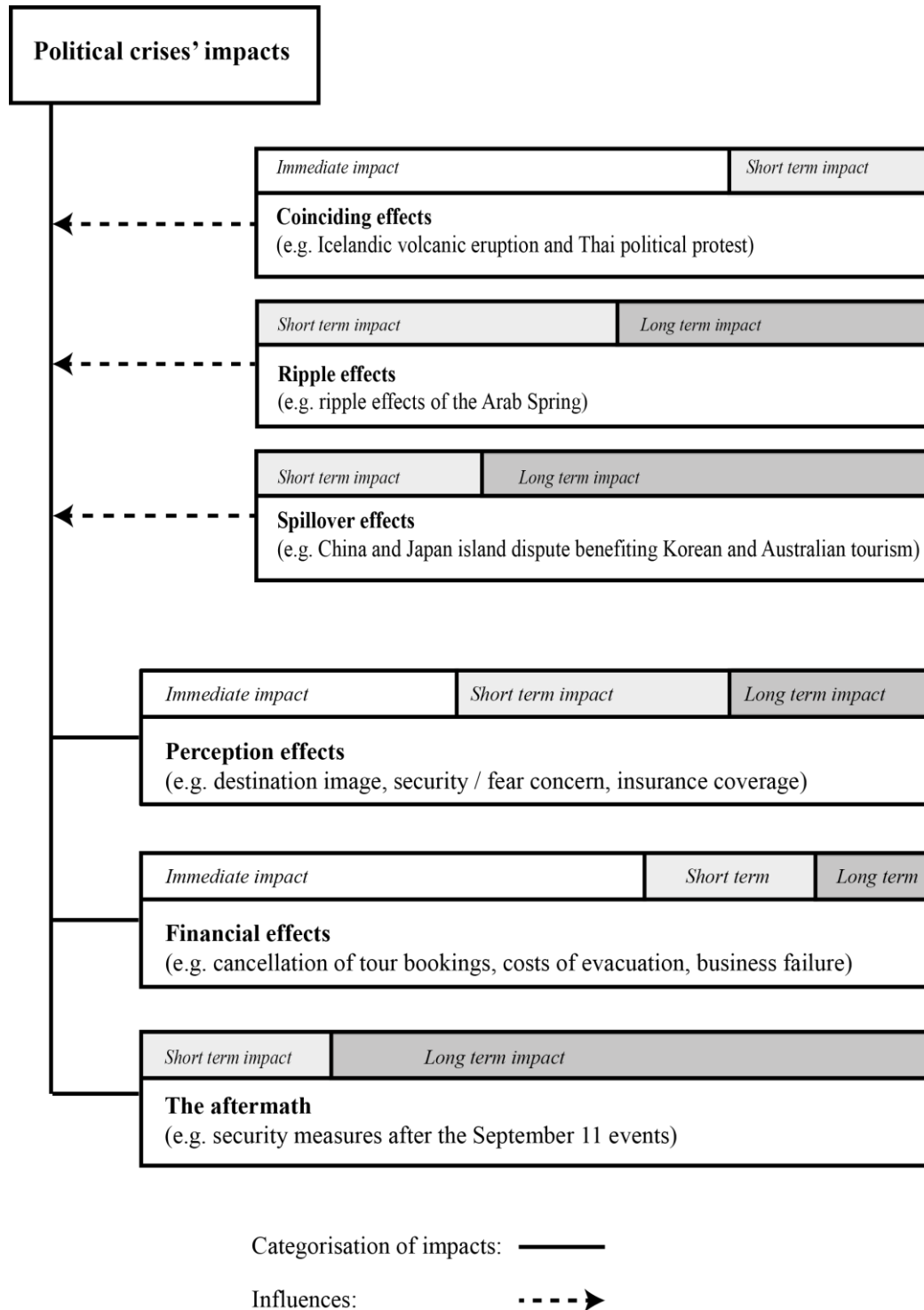
4.2 Effects of Political Crises

This section addresses the effects of political crises confronted by the 20 tourism stakeholders interviewed by this study.

Each political incident has distinguishable impacts and repercussions, dependent on several factors. The 20 interviewees were asked what the effects of political crises on their organisation were. The responses indicated that those effects can be categorised into two perspectives. First is the effects of political crises on their tourism organisations. Those include perception effects, financial effects and the aftermath. They are influenced or magnified by other effects, which are coinciding effects, ripple effects and spillover effects as shown in Figure 1. The six effects are depicted under immediate, short-term, or long-term impacts.

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

Figure 1 – Effects of political crises



Most interviewees agreed that each political crisis carries a different impact. However, from the data analysis, twelve interviewees agreed that the characteristics

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

of the immediate effects may be largely the same such as cancellations of new and advance bookings, loss of tour demand and loss of tourist confidence, but that the extent of these effects differs according to each particular crisis.

Stakeholders' perception in times of political crises is immediately affected by the unsafe image of the affected destination. The media plays a role by broadcasting visuals and reports about political crises which can reduce any sense that the destination is safe or secure, resulting in loss of stakeholder confidence with growing security or fear concerns. Eight interviewees agreed that perception effects have a profound impact on their organisations. When political crises happen, their customers lose confidence in the safety of the destination as stated by interviewee TO3, in the case of Thailand in 2010, 'Customers lost all confidence in the country at one point, due to large media coverage of images of violence and clear loss of control by the government, and there was nothing the industry could do in the face of this'.

This issue directly impacts upon tourist confidence. Tourists are not confident that the affected destination will be safe to travel to, even after the crisis period has passed. A few interviewees also noted that such problems of perception can linger over the longer term, with the interviewee TO7 emphasising that, in the case of certain destinations such as Thailand or Indonesia, tourists are far less confident in booking in advance. Instead, they prefer to wait and see if any similar incidents recur before confirming their bookings.

Four interviewees agreed that lack of demand for affected destinations greatly impacted upon their organisations. This factor is directly related to the period and degree of the political crisis in question; for example, the Libyan revolution and the Sri Lankan civil war affect the entire image of these countries. The tour operator interviewees therefore stopped selling holidays to these destinations even when receiving requests.

The duration of the perception effects is of particular importance. If the perception effect is more long-term, even if it does not involve much violence, demand is driven down, and tourism organisations are forced to absorb the costs of this on a daily basis.

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

Regarding financial effects, most interviewees agreed that when the political crisis involves violence and is disruptive to the destination's infrastructure, tour operators need to evacuate their customers out of the affected areas. As a consequence, additional costs are incurred when flights are cancelled, leaving tour operators to fly customers with different airlines. For example, in the case of the 2008 Bangkok airport closure crisis, many tour operators had to fly their customers, scheduled to depart from Bangkok airport, either from other airports in Thailand or even Malaysia, thereby incurring yet further costs. Two tourism consultants interviewed suggested that political crisis can even result in outright business failure, especially in cases of those tour operators which specialise or focus on a particular destination.

Having discussed the perception and financial effects of political crises, another important factor requires consideration: What happens in the aftermath. This involves repercussions of the effects of political crisis, after the incident itself is over, it could, for example, be an amendment of government policies, resulting in security measures which hamper tourists. Most interviewees considered that the aftermath of a political crisis has an impact on the tourism industry. For example, the aftermath of the 1997 massacre in Luxor: 'Security measures taken by the Egyptian government made it far more difficult for tourists to travel around, and had an inevitable psychological impact on the quality of their holidays' (Interviewee TC2).

From the data analysis, the interviewees identified three effects to be taken into consideration. Those include coinciding effects, ripple effects, and spillover effects.

The ripple effect is a situation upon another which was directly been affected by the initial situation. Once the news of one political crisis spreads, typically in the same region, other regions happen to be indirectly affected from that political crisis even if they are not directly affected by each other. Ripple effect reduces tourism organisations' confidence in doing business, or in organising tours for customers in certain regions. The ripple effect magnifies the perception effects of the affected destination to the surrounding region, and as a consequence a financial effect follows. In the case of the Arab Spring, tourism organisations avoided sending tourists to

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

Middle Eastern countries with the ripple effect impacting Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Libya.

The term coinciding effects refer to two or more incidents occurring within the same time frame resulting in greater impact than a single incident. Four interviewees commented they had been affected tremendously by the coinciding effects of the Icelandic volcanic eruption in April 2010, and the Thai political protests in May 2010. The interviewee TO7 also suggested that the compound impacts of the UK economic crisis and prolonged Thai political protests had profound effects on consumer behaviour. Booking behaviour has changed, where unlike previously, tourists are no longer inclined to purchase a holiday six months to twelve months ahead of travelling. Instead, such is their perception of economic and political uncertainty; they opt for a window of three months or less. Therefore, the coinciding effect can exaggerate perception and financial effects and have a profound effect on the tourism industry directly on tourism generating countries, and indirectly on tourism receiving countries.

Notably, three out of the 20 interviewees commented that the spillover effect needs to be considered as tourism organisations can take the opportunity of spillover effects to actually increase sales of certain tourism products. The China and Japan Island dispute in 2012 had a positive spillover effect on certain destinations such as Korea and Australia. This addresses the effects of political crises that have positive and negative spillover effects upon the interviewees' organisations. However it is the role of tourism managers to examine the effects of political crisis situations thoroughly.

The findings demonstrate various effects of political crises upon tourism. The interviewees commented on phenomena such as the ripple, coinciding and spillover effects. The findings reveal that these effects can magnify its other effects on tourism such as public perception, financial effects, and the aftermath.

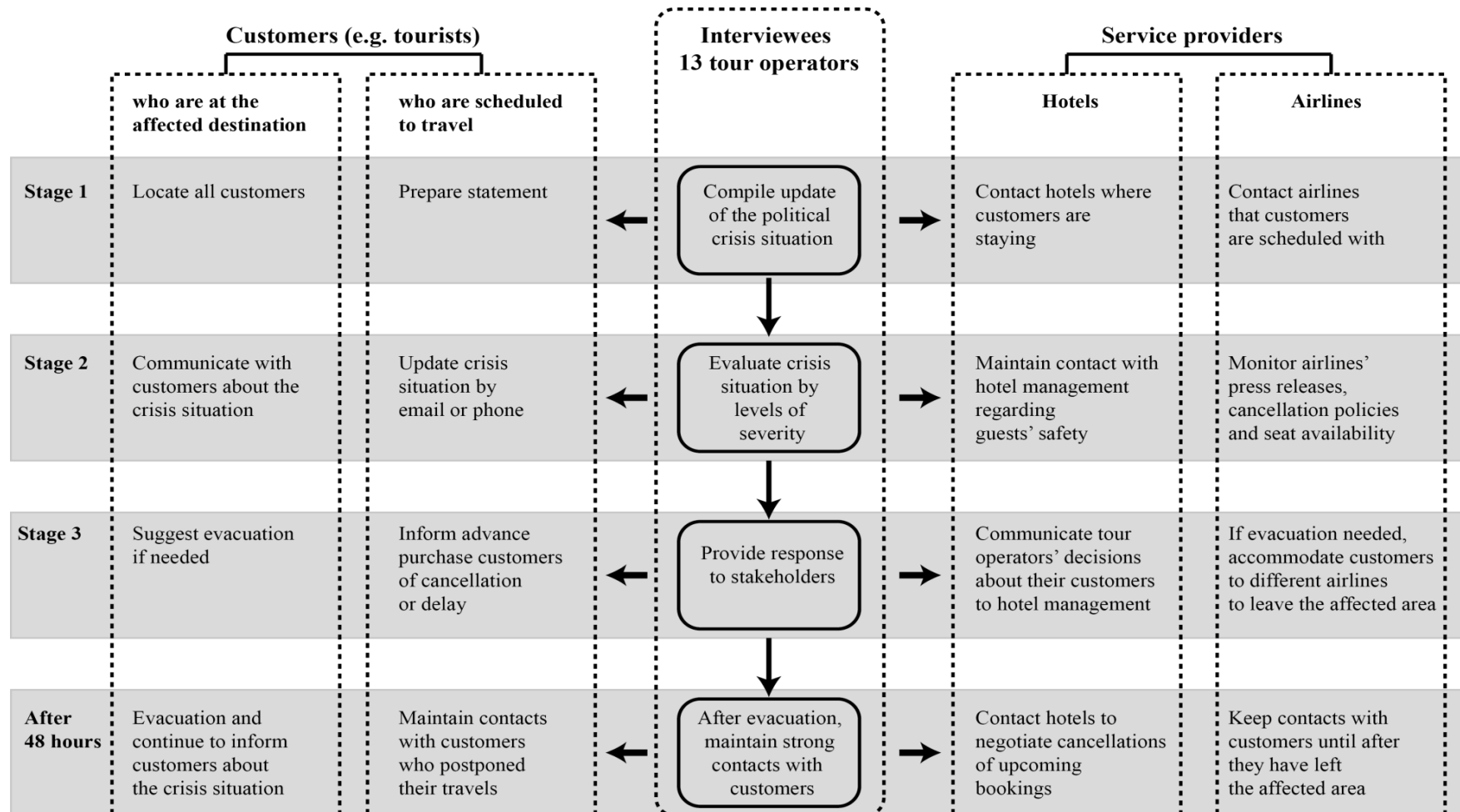
4.3 Crisis management response

When a political crisis occurs at a tourism destination, the interviewees agree that crisis management must be implemented in response. Twelve interviewees concurred that operational response strategies help alleviate the immediate effects of political crises on their organisations. Significant courses of action, summarised by fifteen interviewees, have been implemented at different phases of a political crisis, in order to ensure the safety of customers, and minimise companies' financial exposure.

The interviewees were asked which strategies they had immediately implemented to deal with the effects of political crises. The responses were that operational response had been implemented immediately, with regards to their customers' safety. Different sectors have implemented different strategies in response to the effects of political crises. Notably, thirteen tour operators and two travel agents detailed their immediate responses to such crises (as summarised in Figure 2). However, three tourism consultants and both destination organisations responded that they were only indirectly affected through their customers (who are tour operators or travel agents).

Figure 2 demonstrates significant courses of action for operational response, as implemented by tour operator and travel agent interviewees in the UK.

Figure 2 – Crisis operational response



Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

Regarding the first stage, most interviewees agreed that once a political crisis occurs, they need to compile an update of the political crisis situation from different sources of information, such as ground operators, news channels, media, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and travel blogs. In this stage, twelve interviewees commented on the need to locate all customers, which hotels they are staying in, and which airlines they were scheduled to fly. Three interviewees commented that they had prepared statements of crisis information to inform those customers scheduled to travel to the affected destination of what was going on.

During the second stage, after the interviewees had received updated crisis information from different sources, four interviewees suggested that they then reconciled this information with travel warnings from the FCO website, in order to make a final decision on how best to help their customers. Most interviewees viewed FCO advice as an essential source of crisis communication, as it directly impacts upon insurance coverage for their customers. After the crisis situation was evaluated, the interviewees then issued a letter to explain the crisis situation from their perspectives and communicate with their customers, both those currently at the affected destination, and those scheduled to travel to it. At the same time, four interviewees stated that they would contact hotel suppliers with regards to guests' safety, and track airline press releases, to update their announcements and crisis plans. At this point, the interviewees also track changes in airlines' cancellation policies and seat availability, to plan ahead if evacuation or flight re-scheduling are required.

During the third stage, eight interviewees agreed that after the crisis information has been assessed and the interviewees have fully evaluated the situation based on this, their actions beyond this point depend upon the severity of the crisis and any financial constraints. Five interviewees suggested that they would continue to provide responses both to customers at a crisis destination, and those scheduled to travel to it. With regards to those in the former category, a few interviewees discussed the alternatives available with them. If evacuation is advised and customers decline this, a waiver of disclaimer letter needs to be signed by customers at this stage: 'Interestingly, many times, customers wished to continue their holiday rather than be evacuated, as they were aware that the situation did not affect them. Thus we would

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

request them to sign a waiver of disclaimer letter' (Interviewee TO6). During this stage, six interviewees suggested that for those customers scheduled to travel to the affected destination, they negotiated cancellation charges with their service providers (such as airlines and hotels), in order to minimise their financial exposure.

The last stage is after 48 hours. Most interviewees agreed that once 48 hours had passed since the outbreak of the political crisis and implementation of the operational response, they would simply ensure that their customers were safe. Eight interviewees suggested that they maintained very strong levels of contact with all customers to provide crisis situation updates.

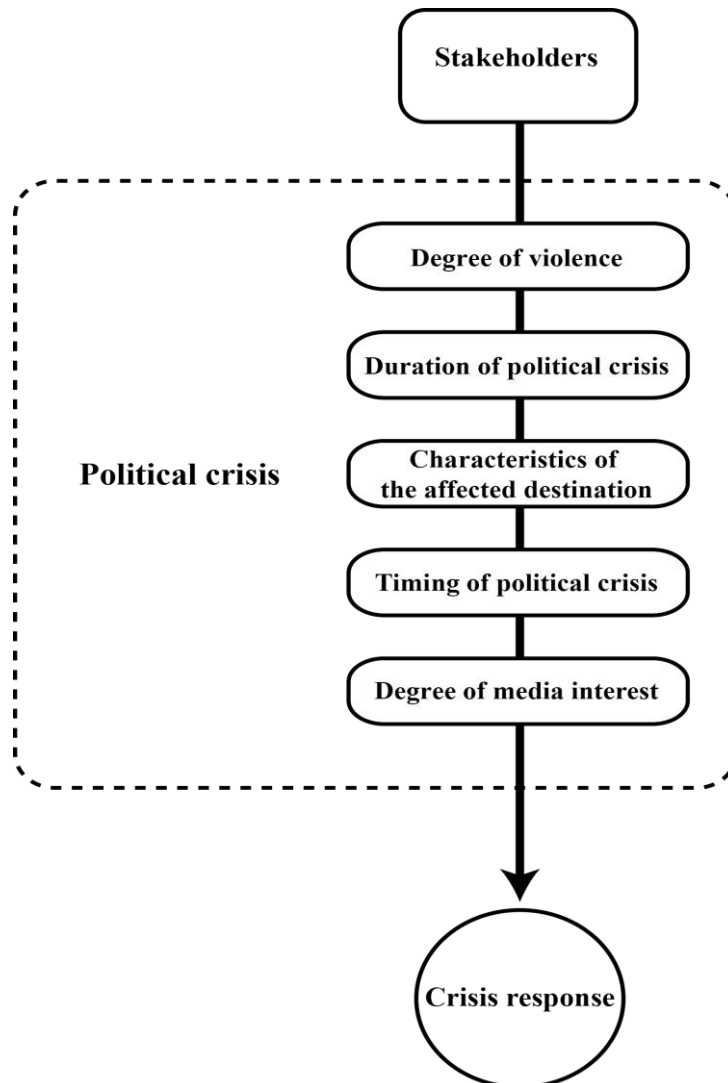
Following the first 48 hours, most interviewees agreed that the operational response had been immediately implemented. Beyond this point, the interviewees evaluate operational response and their actions into different crisis solutions. The purpose of operational response is to allow tourism organisations to deal with the effects of political crises; and also the opportunity to mitigate the impacts. The interviewees suggest that if a proper crisis management response has been implemented by this point, both short and long term effects can indeed be minimised.

After a political crisis, most interviewees agreed that they work with other stakeholders in the tourism industry, such as tourism boards, airline partners or other tour operators. Twelve interviewees considered that no major players could help reduce the impact of a crisis recovery period. Most interviewees agreed that all tourism stakeholders need to contribute through their particular roles as stated by the interviewee TO6, 'I think that is a collaborative effort between the government of the destination through the tourism board, and commercial partners who support tourism in the destination'.

4.4 Factors affecting management responses

This study has identified key factors which have influenced management responses on the part of tourism stakeholders to the effects of political crises. Eighteen interviewees agreed that their responses would differ depending upon various factors. As shown in Figure 3, such factors include degree of violence, duration of political crisis, characteristics of the affected destination, timing of political crisis, and degree of media interest.

Figure 3 – Factors affecting management responses



Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

Sixteen interviewees used the degree of severity to determine the effects of a political crisis by violence or non-violence as they agreed that the degree of violence is the main factor that determines their response to political crises. For example, during the Arab Spring or Thailand demonstrations, the interviewees implemented crisis responses strategies by immediately evacuating their tourists from the affected destinations.

Six interviewees agreed that attention should also be paid to the duration of political crises, given that non-violent political crises could become violent over time and that the effects may appear later. An example has been given of the Thai political protest in 2010 where the incident initially started with non-violent protest. However, the protest had been on-going for a few months and finally an incident in May 2010 triggered the worst political crises in Thailand for the past decade. This case illustrates that non-violent situations can become violent at times and there is a need for tourism organisations to be well aware of such situations and be prepared to deal with the effects of such political crises.

The characteristics of the affected destination, such as the historical roots of political crises or the infrastructure of an affected destination must be considered. Interviewee TO1 notes the importance of Thailand's infrastructure as a main contributor to support the tourism industry after a crisis has ended.

Another important factor identified was that of timing. Six interviewees agreed, for example, that the effects of a crisis are greater if it occurs during the holiday season, as compared with off-peak times. Finally, ten interviewees believed that higher degrees of media interest in a particular crisis resulted in higher possibilities of that crisis being reported. Sixteen interviewees also concurred that such reports tend to exaggerate the effects of these crises.

This study reveals five major factors affecting the interviewees' responses to the effects of political crises, regardless of the type of political crisis that has occurred.

5.0 Discussion

From the findings, the interviewees revealed various characteristics of political crises that they identified with different political crisis situations and considered to be fundamental elements of dealing with the effects of political crises on tourism. The findings presented in Table 1 reveal four characteristics of political crises which need to be considered: the roots of conflicts, management control, disruption, and cultural differences. These were the aspects by which the interviewees were led to understand political crises within the context of the tourism industry. As there is a lack of clarity in tourism literature when it seeks to define the term 'political crisis' as it applies to the tourism industry, the definition 'political instability' has been widely used instead of 'political crisis' because political instability is one of the fundamental elements that can lead to a political crisis (Hall, 1994). This study suggests the importance of including the characteristics of political crises in the general study of crises in tourism, in order to help understand political crises in different situations. Three issues have emerged from the findings that appear to support this choice. Firstly, the findings reveal that the interviewees do not consider terrorism to constitute a political crisis. Secondly, the interviewees felt that environmental crises such as the floods in Thailand in 2011 ought to be considered as political crises because of the management control aspect. Thirdly, this study has shown that the issue of cultural differences is highly important when it comes to how interviewees perceive the importance of political crises.

On the subject of the first issue, the interviewees suggested that they did not consider terrorism to be a political crisis, because terrorism tends to originate from factors which are external to the country, while political crises are classified as originating from conflicts within the population of the country. Nevertheless, given that the effects and crisis management response to terrorism are in many ways similar to those of political crises, this study retains terrorism within its scope.

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

Regarding the issue of environmental crises, Zimmerman (1983) argues that environmental or economic crises can precipitate political crises. While Zimmerman does not cite mismanagement by a destination's government as a factor in this process, the interviews suggested that the floods in Thailand were regarded as a political crisis because their effects were compounded by the mismanagement of the destination's government. This confirms the value of understanding the characteristics of political crises, which are investigated by this study.

Where cultural differences are concerned, this study suggests that this factor is highly important, as the interviewees confirm that a political incident may be perceived as a political crisis in one country whilst it may not in another. This factor also confirms one of the reasons why tourism studies have lacked understanding of political crises in the past as, historically, not all destinations have been affected equally by political crises. The three issues discussed here reconfirm that the interviewees provided an in-depth understanding of political crises and their effects on their tourism organisations.

Focus has been placed upon crisis management response, as the response period should be implemented immediately. The findings support the view of Anderson, Prideaux and Brown (2007) that there is a need for tour operators to provide excellent customer service, especially during troubled times. Another key area is the crisis recovery period, where the interviewees suggest that tourism stakeholders should also set out to collaborate with each other. Communication needs to be established for action to be implemented effectively.

While a crisis management response plan is beneficial for tourism managers, the findings suggest that the interviewees do not currently have specific plans in place in their organisations for political crises, and that the introduction of these would be highly beneficial.

6.0 Conclusion

Although there remain a number of unresolved issues, this study offers a foundation on which to base further study. The key issue arising from this study is the importance of the context in which tourism managers respond to, and deal with the impacts of political crises upon the tourism industry.

Moreover, the study has identified the most effective forms of crisis operational response utilised by tour operators, based in tourism generating countries, at a time that a crisis occurs in a tourism destination. There is a need for effective communication between stakeholders and for good, reliable networks within the industry.

This study's findings suggest three recommendations. First, businesses require inside information from trusted sources. The findings suggest that businesses should have or cultivate a set of private and highly trusted relationships, enabling them to access knowledge beyond local media sources. Such access can also help reassure customers of their trustworthiness and thereby maintain their customers' businesses. The way to build these special, informative relationships could be through social media, email or direct telephone contact.

Second, the findings suggest that simple clear messages to customers are important. A code of conduct or set of promises could be established by all operating businesses. This could be built into promotional material and documents, so that customers know that their service provider has thought about likely troublesome situations, and has clear methods with which to respond.

Third, crises are global in nature: thus, in order to implement immediate responses effectively, the question of time difference needs to be addressed. In cases when a crisis occurs and tourism generating countries are located in a different time zone, this invariably renders the situation more challenging for tourism managers. It is recommended that this issue is incorporated into crisis management, with a view to further research.

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

This study has presented the perspective of a tourism generating region that has experienced various impacts on its organizations as a result of wars, riots, coups, uprisings, protests or terrorism. However the scope of the work could be arguably considered as broad, so specific areas, for example the impacts of coups, warrant further study. Also, the findings of this study clearly demonstrate that cultural differences do affect the perception of political crises depending on geo-cultural differences, indicating that further research on cultural differences needs to be pursued. This could be achieved by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach would be required to understand perception and to measure cultural attitudes towards political crises. The qualitative approach is would be required to develop strategies to address cultural differences in terms of crisis management for particular tourism destinations.

Kanlayanasukho, V. (2013). An analysis of the tourism industry's management responses to political crises in Thailand

7.0 Reference

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