“The media kill off tourism more effectively than terrorists. Discuss”

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Terrorism, tourism and the media use each other to fuel fear into audiences. This means that everyone becomes vulnerable to terrorism, which simultaneously attracts global media’s attention through attacks on tourists or the tourist infrastructure. As a result, there is an impact in the travel industry as tourists avoid destinations.

The insecurity that tourists feel just by leaving their country is magnified when a terrorist attack occurs and the overindulgence of media attention creates world-wide fear. Because the media (which determine the information society is given) produces an imaginative image within the minds of tourists, it easily manipulates a country as being violent and dangerous.

Because tourism is the main source of income for almost 50 per cent of the world’s countries, it makes the industry an irresistible object of attack. The public will witness more terrorism than ever due to the ability of the media to cover terrorist attacks (Paraskevas and Arendell, 2007). With this, terrorists secure media attention when tourists are affected by terrorism. Straight away, the terrorist attack is immediately documented by the media and becomes worldwide news. Then, it is safe to say that the effect of terrorism on the tourism industry is negative, eradicating instantly the motivation of tourists to travel. But it gets especially worse with the influence of mass media that follows terrorist attacks. Perhaps a decrease in the publicity of terrorist attacks can affect tourism to a lesser extent. However, if the media reduce the level of publicity, useful to the tourism industry, it would throw up complications through legal matters such as misinforming the public (Taylor (2006, p.170).

Thanks to technology, news can spread across continents. But this can be dangerous because media entities play a dual role when terrorist activities happen. Terrorists use the media to convey their message to international audiences, and on the other hand, the general public relies upon the media
for information (O’Connor, Stafford & Gallagher, 2008). On account of this, constant, global media coverage means that society applies their faulty probabilistic reasoning to a global supply of anecdotes. Thus, the intense media coverage has made terrorism a much powerful and effective tactic than it was in the twentieth century (Mack, 2005).

Going back in time, terrorism problem in Europe was much worse in the 1970s and ‘80s than it is nowadays (Gilbert, 2004). Taking as an example the 85 people that died in the train station bombing in Bologna (Italy), which did not enter international consciousness. Today, a bombing in a Brussels metro station is drummed into people’s heads through constant stories and vivid pictures (Hall, 2002).

It is because of this why the escalation of terrorism has been linked to mass communication and its instantaneous access to a global audience since 1970. Undoubtedly, this is vital information that will influence decisions in regard to travel. Because of exaggeration by the media, the impacts of terrorist acts on the market are often taken out of proportion. Disaster scenarios lead to misinformation, due to the disruptions to networks of communications systems as a result of an attack or overload (O’Connor et al., 2008). This, combined with the pressure of deadlines that media entities are under has them scrambling to get the publication out (even if it has misleading information).

In fact, terrorism is the weapon of the weak and its use shows a certain level of desperation. According to Sonmez and Graefe (1998), groups using terrorism seldom win concessions. It is therefore no surprise that The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) is resorting to terrorism in Europe in present days. A particularly intriguing point should be made as to whether, if terrorist attacks were to become less documented and gain less media attention, would this have any repercussion upon the number of attacks?

Analysing the most recent terrorist attacks, it should be pointed out the effect of media coverage on tourism in areas such as Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt), Sousse (Tunisia) and Paris (France). Shocking videos and images of the victims were used as front pages and key material from the press to give more real information to the public. Some suggest that modern day terrorists and the media have become inevitably linked by means of mutual benefit. Others believe that acts of terrorism provide sensational news stories that effectively boost audience figures and ratings (Wilkinson, 1997).

The killings at a Tunisian museum and on a beach; the downing of a Russian aircraft flying home from Sharm el-Sheikh; and lethal attacks in Paris on people from many countries attending a concert and a football match, made 2015 a dreadful year for the murder of tourists. According to “ForwardKeys”, a travel-data research firm, airlines reported more cancellations than bookings.
It is more than evident that there was going to be a drop in the number of visitors after all of the attacks. But what is the effect of this? Richer nations like France recover faster from terrorism, while countries such as Egypt or Tunisia suffer long-term damage. At the same time, the attacks in Paris inspired a new kind of fear. Instead of being the tourists concerned that they will be targeted simply for being tourists, the general population faces the spectre of an attack at any given time. Moreover, there are differences between the various attacks. November’s Paris attacks were aimed at the general population. The Sharm el-Sheikh and Tunisian assaults specifically targeted tourists. Therefore, the question that should be outlined is why is the media fuelling terrorism?

All of the three terrorist attacks were covered for more than the usual time. The media broadcasted description of the situation in details which brings us knowledge and a contribution to a moral panic. For over a week, newspapers, television and the internet were posting “heartbroken” information. Thanks to the real citizen photos, the public knew the event was of a high importance and everyone was following the development of the story for its own safety and knowledge. Considering terrorist motives to disrupt tourism, media coverage of violence involving tourists is likely to be extremely gratifying to terrorist groups (Mansfeld and Pizam, 2006).

When Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, she called the media the “oxygen” of terrorism. She believed that terrorists focus on societies where publicity is not controlled by the government and where their attack will be mediated around the globe. Weimann and Winn (1994, p. 152-165) added: “Media coverage of terrorist events has an especially powerful potential influence because it is frequently the only source of information on an issue available to the audience, and a source of interpretation. In particular, the general public is apt to rely to an enormous degree on media accounts for an understanding of terrorists’ motives, the implications of their actions, and the essential character of the situation.”
Historically, the impacts of similar attacks on tourism are short-lived provided authorities take the proper steps in their aftermath. According to Kepel (2002), terrorism has devastating impacts on both tourists and the destination and some destinations take longer to recover than others. David Scowsill, president and CEO of the World Tourism & Travel Council stated that people’s memories are very short about these incidents and countries take about six to nine months to recover from terrorist attacks”.

Nowadays, due to the citizen journalism, there is an argument concerning whether society has to be flooded by the mass media with such a detailed information. Media role is debatable. It plays a huge part in the contribution of travel decisions made in relation to the perceptions of terrorism on tourist destinations. The media and terrorists converge to aid each other in the effort to communicate with the audience; the media achieves higher ratings and terrorists achieve their goal of publicity (Hall, 2002). Does this mean that media wipes out tourism more effectively than terrorism?

Naturally, mass media in any form are detrimental to destination image and, as a result, to tourist flows. The mass media willingly or unwittingly are the spokesmen of the terrorists. Frey (2004) says that dramatic terrorist actions receive huge media attention. Hence, it is strongly agreed that the way in which the media present what has happened will affect tourism. If the media were to present a very negative image and show that danger is still occurring, tourists will not return (Taylor, 2006).

Furthermore, it is possible that the media’s influence can encourage tourists to visit some places. O’Sullivan (1986) states that if the media were not there to report on terrorism, then people would
not receive the messages of political and social influences caused. Because of the media, terrorist attacks are so well known across the world. Many people travel to sites of terrorism to pay respects for those that lost their lives. Without being told of these events through the media, people may not know and would not travel to such destinations. According to Essner (2003), terrorism only affects the generation of people in which it takes place. People who were keen tourists at that time may have been discouraged by terrorism. However, when they grow up and stop travelling and new younger generations start to be the main travellers, some countries may start to see more visitors again due to a lack of knowledge of what actually happened at that time.

In some cases the attention of the media to some destinations seems to be rather unfair, especially for the third world countries that are actually dependent on tourism. Western media seems to be especially keen on exaggerating the notion of danger in destinations that are politically "difficult" (for example Egypt) towards western countries (Schmid, 2004). Butler (1990) discusses the influence of oral, literary and visual media on image formation from a historical perspective, but does not delve into the effects of mass media on the destination image.

Accordingly, negative media coverage of a destination can contribute to the "outer field" of potential travellers’ perceived environment. Ehemann (1977) objects to “value-laden” statements used by print media, which can convey a value judgment about a destination and which can potentially contribute to a negative evaluation of that destination. Examining the mutual reliance between mass media and terrorists, there is a huge impact of mass media on public perceptions, concluding that a symbiotic relationship exists between terrorists and journalists.

Thus, it appears to be a mutual relationship between the media and terrorism in that they both rely on each other to achieve their goals. Terrorists want world-wide publicity and the media want
increased viewer ratings. Terrorists are becoming increasingly better known, feared by the public and admired by associates (Pizam and Fleischer (2002). Western societies are therefore targeted. Abhorrent attacks and fear is publicized with no overruling power held by bureaucracies. This helps terrorists to achieve their goals of bringing down governments, creating massive shock waves through capitalist societies and drawing attention to their causes and beliefs.
“Terrorists can do whatever to fulfil their demands, attacking tourists, tourist centres to media publicity and public attention” (White 2014, 102-126). White also specified that international tourism can attract the international media because terrorism had made it for their victim. The fear of terrorism will cease when the media stops reporting, especially when a terrorist attack takes place in a destination that has no previous incidents. However, the principal role of media in incidents of a similar kind is crucial and it can shift the attention in both ways.

Sönmez (1998) also pointed out that terrorists and media benefit from one another. “Media gets more attention and viewers while terrorist attacks take place and at the same time the people behind the attacks get their message through to larger audiences than they would without the mass media” (Sönmez, 1998, p. 434-446). Coles and Hall (2011) articulated that media also has a role in the portrayal of the terrorists and how they are stereotyped. They say that because of small groups and with the assistance of the media, the whole nation can be branded as terrorists. This leads to social exclusion in outside of their own community, making it harder for them to cross international borders and easily sparking racism.

According to Essner (2003), although terrorism is covered by the media, it could also be suggested that it depends on how bad the attacks were for the media to report it. He also suggested that it is up to how tourists perceive terrorism and its risks portrayed by the media. “The media are the cause of terrorist attacks (Kellner (2005). Media needs terrorism in order to survive through human concern reporting and terrorism needs the media to generate, as he terms ‘Weapons of Mass Hysteria’.

Following the reasoning of Korstanje (2011), mass media “echoes" the news of a particular attack, emphasizing the number of children and women died because capitalist society represents their most precious resource (women and children): threatening them is similar as attacking the legal and
symbolic scaffolding. Besides, Gorges (2007) stated that journalists should adopt an approximation which will differentiate between varieties of the Islamic politic – this will contribute to national security and the civil dialogue. Because the reality after creating a state of fear is that people become more radical towards foreigners and especially Muslims. Luis Veres (2011), a doctor from the University of Valencia, has similar thinking. He says that “We all should agree that terrorists require necessarily hype so that they can complete their purpose”. The absence of the mass media remains limited many local civil conflicts and they could perhaps be solved by political means without recurring to violence (Gil Calvo, 2003, p. 237-245).

However, due to technological progress, the speed of the media for moving news around the world is just abysmal. But the problem is not in the speed - is in the words. Words must be chosen carefully as each person gives them different meaning and, without realizing, millions agree with a comment that has not been interpreted as it was planned, or, on the contrary, the main idea from the one who wrote it was to create alarm and paranoia among the population (Johnston, 2008). But how do terrorists truly want media coverage?

It is true that media coverage helps to stimulate interest, but only up to a point. People will not click on to a story unless they really want to. Contradictory news, half-truths or widespread manipulation can be perceived for example on television or newspapers. This makes it really hard to have trust onto any information given by the mass media. What is more, contradictions could be clarified after a couple of hours or days (Howie, 2012). Yet, unarguable is the failure of mainstream media when telling clearly the truth.

One of the facts that really attract attention in relation to the Paris attacks last November 13 is the new role of the media. They not only offer the terrorist attacks live and direct – they are even capable of interviewing the main terrorists while carrying out the assault, contributing once again in creating those attacks in a huge TV spectacle. This gives room to a new retransmission field – selling media products. Perhaps, it might be now possible to produce any kind of drama in order to originate more spectacle and morbid interest: a new advertising dose for society to increase emotional impacts in regard to the future (Carvajal, 2015).

In social media, Facebook members posted that the media hype surrounding the deplorable events in France should not distract us from the fact that these things happen all the time all over the world. Others had a supportive go, turning their profile pictures to the “Tricolore”. When language narratives and Facebook encourage flag filters in solidarity with one tragedy, why they did not react in the same way with Sousse or Sharm el-Sheikh?
Media landscape is not equitable. One cannot avoid the impression that “white” victims are being humanized in a way Arab victims are not. It is not enough to blame readers who show less interest in news from Sharm el-Sheikh than from Paris – they do not write headlines. Until stories are crafted with similar intentions, claims of neutrality on the part of the media ring hollow (Boniface, 2012).

The media make viewers change. The mentality on social media in modern days is “share now to show you care, think later”. Recently, the Office of Communications (Ofcom) released a report which found an increasing number of children believe everything they read on the internet. Eight per cent of youths surveyed said they now go to YouTube to find out what is going on in the world, while only a third were able to identify paid-for adverts (Carvajal, 2015).

When talking about the media and the direct impact this can have on people's travel decisions, the “word of mouth” should also be mentioned because it influences tourist's behaviour. For instance, if any friends or relatives have had a bad experience or have strong negative views on a destination, this will discourage and influence travel decisions (Page and Connell, 2009). To some degree media is also responsible for building such views.
The main reasons why tourism is such a favourable target for terrorism is because of the camouflage, safety for terrorists and a desire of perpetrators to be provided with a higher profile in the media (Cooper et al., 2008). Tourism is dependent on positive images and publicity as the negative image of any holiday destination results in reduced tourist activity and economic damage to the tourism industry (Page and Connell, 2009).

In essence, the media appear to help terrorists achieve their goals, producing more fear and further reducing tourism rates by damaging a destination image of safety. Media is one of the most important factors in regard to helping tourism industries develop and plays a vital role promoting the destination image toward the people (Hall & Wiley 2002). It should reduce its attention on terrorism in order to prevent more attacks.
References


