International Tourists’ Risk Perception towards Terrorism and Political Instability: The case of Tunisia

by

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INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS’ RISK PERCEPTION TOWARDS TERRORISM AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY: THE CASE OF TUNISIA

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The purpose of this study was to find out changes in international tourists’ risk perception towards Tunisia during the period from 2010 to 2015. Content analysis was employed to analyze posts of (potential) tourists in TripAdvisor forum. The findings showed tourists mostly heightened awareness during the time of the Arab Spring Revolution & the three terrorist attacks in 2015, and only during the first month after an incident. Terrorism-related risk received higher attention than political risk did. Risk perception of tourists towards terrorism and political instability in term of travelling to Tunisia was also revealed. The study emphasized the role of social media in influencing and reflecting tourists’ risk perception. The influence of government issued travel advisories on tourist’s risk perception and decision to visit was marked. Practical implication of the study is the suggestions for the Tunisian government and DMOs to mitigate negative impact on tourism industry.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Safety and security concerns have always received much attention by governments and citizens. They cause chaos in most aspects of life including tourism, especially when tourists are involved or are the main target of the incidents. Safety and security become an essential condition for travel and tourism, influencing destination choice (Kovári & Zimányi, 2011). Even in the case in which tourists are not the target of the incidents, they are still more vulnerable to any chaos in the destination than the locals (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006; Korstanje & Clayton, 2012). Destinations going through the incidents have suffered a significant loss in visitor arrivals, and have taken a long time to return to the levels enjoyed prior to the incidents.

Safety and security concerns in a destination can include a wide range of issues from wars, civil unrest, terrorism, and crime, to diseases, natural disasters, and unsafe travel conditions, especially for adventure tourism (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006). The scope of this study, however, is limited to safety and security-related issues caused by political instability and terrorism issues. In the last decade, the world has witnessed numerous cases of political unrest in developing countries (Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Myanmar, etc.) and many terrorist attacks in both developed (Spain 2004, the U.K 2005, the U.S 2013, France 2015, etc.) and developing countries. Political instability and terrorism have a strong impact on the tourism industry, and therefore have attracted considerable attention from researchers (Poirier, 1997; Sönmez, 1998; Steiner, 2007).

Among the many factors that determine destination choices, tourists’ risk perception is considered as the most important one. This topic has been researched (Sönmez & Greafe, 1998; Pizam & Fleisher, 2002; Lepp & Gibson, 2003) with the aim of comprehending the pattern of travelers. Tourists tend to avoid rather than choose to go when they perceive risks in the destination (Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, & Tarlow, 1999), and therefore it is critical for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to understand and mitigate these perceptions in order to manage and develop appropriate marketing strategies.

The outburst of Web 2.0 and the rapid growth of user-generated content make social media become a valuable source of information (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012). The role of social media in influencing the public’s opinions has been increased significantly (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Nevertheless, the impact of social media on tourists’ risk perception has not been mentioned. Similarly, even though public’s opinion and people’s experience on social media has been researched in previous studies in both tourism and other fields (Blackshaw, 2006; Mitchell, 2014; Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2015; Pennington-
Gray, Stepchenkova & Schroeder, 2015; Okolie-Osemene & Okoh, 2015), the role of social media in reflecting tourists’ risk perception has not been brought up. Therefore, it calls for a study of the importance of social media in both affecting and reflecting tourists’ risk perception.

This study extends the existing research by investigating the risk perception of international tourists towards a destination that is faced with political instability and terrorism, the role of social media and the impact on tourists’ intention to visit. Tunisia was chosen as the case study since a series of events between 2010 and 2015 represent a prime example of a country in crisis. Prior to the ‘Arab Spring’ Revolution in late 2010, Tunisia recorded over 34 million tourist nights, which dropped precipitously to 19.5 million in 2011. After the coup d’état in late 2010, Tunisia continuously has had military actions along the border with Algeria and Libya, although tourist nights recovered somewhat over the intervening years to 30 million with 61% of nights by Europeans in 2014 (Tunisia Ministry of Tourism, 2015). However, a number of terrorist attacks targeting tourists that occurred in Tunisia (with the two most recent ones in March and June 2015) have created an image of a country faced with severe security issues and global nights dropping once again, this time to 16.1 million at the end of 2015.

This study employs content analysis to analyze the posts of tourists in the Tunisia forum on the TripAdvisor website. Posts are analyzed to determine how tourists react to the events, how their risk perception is formed, which risks tourists feel warrant greater caution and therefore try to avoid, etc.

The objective of the study is to understand international tourists’ risk perception towards terrorism and political instability in Tunisia. To achieve the objective, the study was designed to answer the overarching research question: “How did international tourists’ risk perception change towards Tunisia during the period from 2010 to 2015?” In order to answer this research question, the study sets out to address three sub-questions (sub-RQ):

- **Sub-RQ1:** To what extent tourists are aware of political unrest and terrorism in Tunisia as it relates to the actual events? (Types of risk-related events that generate response, type of response generated, and length of time after the events)
- **Sub-RQ 2:** What is tourists’ risk perception towards political unrest and terrorism in term of travelling to Tunisia?
- **Sub-RQ 3:** What is the role of social media in a) influencing and b) reflecting tourists’ risk perception?

From the findings of the above sub-RQs, the study provides some suggestions for Tunisia’s government and DMOs to mitigate the negative impacts on tourism from events related to political unrest and terrorism.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Political Instability, Terrorism and Tourism

The strong influence of political instability and terrorism, especially where tourists are the main target, on the tourism industry has been analyzed and explained in numerous previous studies (Poirier, 1997; Sönmez, 1998; Steiner, 2007; Moreira, 2008; Saha & Yap, 2014). Tourists are considered as ambassadors of peace (Richter & Waugh, 1986) and their freedom of movement is the political signal that a country represents a safe destination. The government uses tourism not only as an economic tool but also to enhance its image. When foreign tourists are attacked, the government cannot censor the news. Therefore, terrorists achieve several purposes when attacking tourists: deteriorating the economy, weakening the government’s image, and gaining more attention from global media (Sönmez, 1998).

Terrorism and political instability both impact negatively on the tourism industry, even though the affection is different (Sönmez, 1998). Terrorist attacks occur in a short time but receive much public attention due to media amplification, whereas political instability taking place in a long time affects tourism industry and creates negative destination image for international tourists. The most common reaction of tourists in these crisis situations is the cancellation of planned travel to the destination where terrorist attacks occur (Sönmez, 1998) and to avoid countries with political instability (Saha & Yap, 2014). The response time of tourists to terrorist attacks is still controversial since Enders, Sandler, & Parise (1992) believed that tourists’ reaction was delayed by a few months, that is to say that the number of tourists started decreasing six to nine months after the attack. Meanwhile, Pizam and Fleisher (2002) believed that the decline in tourist numbers happens immediately after the attacks, and that tourists slowly return to the destination within six to 12 months. Similarly, whether neighboring countries of the terrorist victim destination or politically instable country will experience a “generalization effect” (Enders et al., 1992) or “spillover effect” (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006) is still debated. The generalization effect, or “neighborhood perception” (Hollier, 1991), suggests that when terror attacks happen in one particular destination, tourists tend to perceive risks also in the surrounding areas. Trips to the whole country or the whole region will be cancelled as a result. This description can also be applied to political instability. On the other hand, the spillover effect indicates the safe neighbor countries gain more tourists as tourists switch to calmer surrounding destinations. Nevertheless, tourists’ intra- and inter-regional movements are widely admitted (Sönmez, 1998; Steiner, 2007). For example, after 9/11, European tourist numbers to the United States and the Middle East declined, but increased within Europe. Similar trends were observed in other regions.
2.2 Risk and Risk Perception

Reactions of tourists during and after the crisis are the consequences of their risk perception (Sönmez & Greife, 1998; Pizam & Fleisher, 2002; Lepp & Gibson, 2003). Therefore, the intensity of reactions depends on the severity tourists feel about the crisis. Besides, all the internal and external elements surrounding the incident and tourists are the antecedent factors in the risk perception forming process. In order to understand this process, factors of risk and risk perception should be studied.

2.2.1 Risk and Risk Perception Definition

Risk is considered a hazard, potential adversity or threat (Slovic & Weber, 2002), in which the probability and consequences are the core dimensions. Jones and Hood (2002) added that risk is seen as the source of potential loss. There is no “real risk” or “objective risk” but people invent risk in order to understand and cope with dangers and uncertainty in the future (Slovic & Weber, 2002). In the context of tourism, risks come from the lack of knowledge about touristic destinations and the future conditions from natural to societal hazards (Chang, 2009). Risk is an explicit component that tourists use in their decision-making process (Moreira, 2008). It acts as a unique factor in the touristic experience, especially for first time explorers.

Risk perception is the perception of a threatening scenario (Moreira, 2008). It is the intuitive evaluation (Slovic, 1987) that determines a person’s behaviors (Weinstein, 1988). Moreira (2008) synthesized this by stating that “the perception of the future affects decisions and decisions affect the future” (p. 16). Three important components of risk perception are: subjective assessment made by individual people, (un)certainty that is intrinsic to that assessment, and the potential negative outcome (Guasti & Mansfedova, 2013). In tourism field, it is noticed that not all tourists are influenced the same way. Different types of customers respond differently to the same reality (Siomkos, 2000). For instance, business travellers have a higher tolerance for risk than pleasure travellers (Moreira, 2008).

2.2.2 Types of Risk

Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) first presented seven types of risks:

- Equipment risk – the possibility of mechanical or equipment problems
- Financial risk – the possibility of not receiving value for the money spent
- Physical risk – the possibility of physical danger
Psychological risk – the possibility of not reflecting personality and self-image
Satisfaction risk – the possibility of not being satisfying
Social risk – the possibility of affecting others’ opinion of me
Time risk – the possibility of wasting or consuming too much time

Sönmez and Graefe (1998) added three more risks to this list: health risk, political instability, and terrorism. Lepp and Gibson (2003) presented their own list of seven types of risks as perceived by international tourists: health, strange food, political instability, terrorism, cultural barrier, a nation’s political and religious dogma, and crime. They also discovered that women tended to have more concerns with respect to health and food, whereas experienced travellers downplayed the risk of terrorism. Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, Kim, Liu, & Stepchenkova (submitted for publication) added international relations between home and destination countries as a new risk factor.

2.2.3 Risk Perception Influencing Tourists’ Behaviors

People usually fear risks to their families and friends more than for themselves (Nellis & Savage, 2012). Especially elderly people tend to worry more about their children and grandchildren. Younger people are usually more worry-free and show less concern for other people than themselves. They also concluded that women have a higher risk perception than men. Minority groups fear more significantly than Whites and people who have previously experienced crime or terror attacks fear more than those who are just exposed to terror attacks via TV or newspapers.

Risk perception of tourists towards crime and terrorism is not the same (Korstanje & Clayton, 2012). Even though crime happens more often and kills more people than terror attacks, risk perception towards crime is lower than towards terrorism. Terrorism creates a greater emotional impact and is considered as more difficult to foresee and prevent. In contrast, crime is considered as an evident part of any society; therefore, it is more likely to be accepted by tourists. Also, political instability and terrorism were perceived differently by tourists (Saha & Yap, 2014). Political instability imposes more negative effects than one-off terror attacks. A country will attract less international tourists even when it has less than average terrorist threats but high political instability. On the other hand, the influence of terrorism-related events on the tourist numbers is minor in a country with stable political situation.

2.2.4 Risk Negotiation

Sönmez (1998) explained the risk negotiation process whereby tourists consider risks as cost. Tourists compare the cost they will incur when taking a risk and the benefit they will gain from the trip. If
the cost outweighs the benefit, they will eliminate the trip or change the destination. If the risk perception is higher than the personal threshold, an individual will try to reduce exposing him/herself to risk by either cancelling the trip or changing the destination (Norton, 1987).

When there is risk perception, tourists are more likely to avoid the destination rather than still choosing to go there. The more risks are perceived, the fewer visitations there are (Sönmez et al., 1999). The influence is even greater when the negative incident in that destination is recent. Travel purpose is also believed to influence the responses of tourists. Business travellers and tourists visiting friends and family tend to merely postpone the trips when an incident happens and risk is perceived in the destination. Meanwhile, leisure tourists tend to change their destination (Wall, 1996). However, Sönmez (1998) pointed out three explanations for those who still decide to go. First, tourists depend on their own safety network such as friends and family members living in that destination. Second, tourists are hopeful that the same destination will not be attacked twice. Last but not least, tourists rely on the destination’s government to effectively handle the risk. The role of destination government in tourists’ risk negotiation was again emphasized in Beirman’s study (2003). The effectiveness of government’s crisis management help reduce tourists’ risk perception.

### 2.3 Role of Media

#### 2.3.1. Mass Media Amplification

Mass media are believed to influence travel patterns because they form the public’s perceptions of destinations or issues (Beirman, 2003). Since risk in tourism results from the lack of understanding about destinations (Chang, 2009), mass media, one of the sources of information, have a significant impact on risk perception of tourists. However, mass media usually exaggerate risk and report news in a selective and biased way, emphasize drama, and focus on rare but dramatic events while ignoring the more common ones (Beirman, 2003). Because shocking/negative news usually gain more public attention (Nellis & Savage, 2012), especially when it is related to the more popular people, or destinations, the media are very biased in the way they only pick some incidents in well-known destinations rather than rural areas or less developed countries (Frey, Luechinger, & Stutzer, 2007). This bias creates the misleading perception that risk takes place in some areas more frequently than in others. These distorted ideas will strongly affect the destination choices of tourists and harm the destinations. Steiner (2007) suggested that tourists used the images and information supplied by the media to anticipate the security level at the destination, while Taylor (2006) blamed the destination government’s slow reaction and crisis
management in contrast to the quick reaction of the media.

Terrorism becomes familiar due to mass media rather than due to the nature of the violent acts themselves or the number of casualties and actual property losses (Richter & Waugh, 1986). Mass media heighten the fear and the intensity of terror attacks by incessantly repeating the news (Taylor, 2006). The intensity of the coverage of terror attacks in mass media made tourists appear to be the more likely victims, which is a misleading perception (Fielding & Shortland, 2009). The frequency of terrorism-related news also causes tourists to perceive terrorism to occur more frequently than it actually does. Because terror attacks did not usually occur everywhere, most of the world got information only from media (Nellis & Savage, 2012), people tend to believe what is covered by media channels.

Agenda-setting theory (Glaesser, 2003; Schroeder et al., submitted for publication) explains the significant influence of mass media on guiding the public’s opinions and setting public agenda. When the same news is duplicated by different newspapers or media channels to reach audience around the world 24/7, the public receives repeated contents; they will consider them as important news or information. Therefore, media lead to public awareness and attention to specific issues. Public’s concern mirrors the network news coverage which in turn influences the reaction, topic concern, and opinions of people (Norris & Ken (2003). Mass media tell readers what to think about and leads public awareness and attention to specific issues (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, & Vermeuler, 2009).

2.3.2 Social Media Amplification

The 21st century has witnessed the explosion of social media. Along with mainstream media, social media increasingly influence the public’s opinions (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Social media play an important role in creating a social network and exchanging internet-based messages from daily life to social issues. In marketing, information perceived as coming from electronic word-of-mouth on social media has higher credibility than that coming from official tourism websites and mass media marketing (Fotis et al., 2012). Therefore, social media increased their role in travel-related search engines (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). They even played a significant role in the G20 protests (2009), Iranian street protests (2009), the Arab Spring Revolution (late 2010 and 2011), etc. (Newman, 2009).

Unlike mass media, the difference between producers, publishers and consumers is blurred away in social media (Nanabhay & Farmanfarmaian, 2011). Audiences do not only receive the news passively like from mass media but actively share their information, distribute experiences and exchange opinions (Mitchell, 2014; Blackshaw, 2006). Thus the audience is gaining more power in the production and distribution of the news (Friedman, 2006). There is no single power user controlling the distribution of
the content but a diversity of users let the opposite voice to be heard. Meanwhile, information in mass media is easily under the control of a single entity. In the Iranian election protests (2009) as well as the Arab Spring Revolution in Tunisia (late 2010) and Egypt (2011), social media became the critical platform for citizen journalism. Nevertheless, not all voices have equal impact; some of them gain more public’s attention, become the mainstream, and influence the social movement (Nanabhay & Farmanfarmaian, 2011). This characteristic of social media makes it able to reflect the public’s viewpoints, perception, and emotions, something that mass media are unable to do.

Social media have gained trust and are more valued as information sources (Starbird, Palen, Hughes & Vieweg, 2010). Although traditional media remain important in distributing official information, they are becoming complementary as more people prefer to believe in eyewitness accounts when sourcing information. In Egyptian uprising in 2011, videos initially brought up by citizens to Youtube (social media) were broadcasted again by mass media. In Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian’s study (2011), Egyptian citizens were believed to be able to reprogram the agenda setting of media through social media when mass media did not match the audience’s interest. Mass media are believed to take up an issue more slowly and drop it more quickly while social media quickly take up memes and discuss them for longer (Macnamara, 2014). Social media enable users to post the content within minutes of events’ occurrence while traditional media take more time to publish and distribute.

Social media are able to reach many people because of the interactive social network of each user. Social media users have three ways to receive information (Nanabhay & Farmanfarmaian, 2011). First, users can actively search or browse for the content. Second, users receive the content shared through social network (peer recommendations). Third, users have the content placed in the front page or in their news feed. Within a click of button, the content can be easily copied, reproduced and distributed. Users are not limited to passively receive the content but are able to give their own thoughts, share, like, dislike, etc. For each time the content is reposted by another user, it reaches more people in his/her network. As in agenda-setting theory, the more the content is brought up, the more important it is in audiences’ eyes (Glaesser, 2003). The instantaneous distribution of the content and a variety of internet users’ opinions help amplify the content in social media platforms.

2.4 Integrated model of tourists’ risk perception

A proposed model is necessary to help the study stay within the scope, to narrow down the units of analysis and to set the direction of the study (Yin, 2013). This integrated model of tourists’ risk perception is the summary of theories of risks (Fischhoff, Slovic, Lichtenstein, Read & Combs, 1978;
Pizam & Fleisher, 2002), risky decision-making (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Calvek, 2002; Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Moreira, 2008), crisis management (Cavlek, 2002, Beirman, 2003) and protection motivation theory (Rogers, 1983; Rippetoe & Rogers, 1987).

Internal, external factors and event factors are considered affecting people’s risk perception (Fischhoff et al., 1978; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Calvek, 2002; Pizam & Fleisher, 2002). Event factors include 9 characteristics of risk, the frequency and severity of the event (Fischhoff et al., 1978; Pizam & Fleisher, 2002). External factors are information coming from different sources such as government travel advisories, travel agents, word-of-mouth and mass media (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Calvek, 2002, Beirman, 2003). Internal factors include tourists’ personal threshold, experience from previous trips, travel purpose, etc. (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Sönmez, 1998; Lepp & Gibson, 2003).

Nine risk characteristics influencing risk perception are presented in the following table (Fischhoff et al., 1978). Those factors have a great effect on the level of perceived risks of each individual. For instance, when a person realises the possibility of risk but still decides to take it voluntarily, the risk perception of that person is considerably reduced compared to the risk perception level of the one that is being forced to take risks. Similarly, a chronic and/or common risk will be perceived to be at a lower level compared to a rare catastrophic and sudden risk.

### Table 1: 9 risk characteristics influencing risk perception (Fischhoff et al., 1978).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voluntary</th>
<th>Involuntary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronic</td>
<td>Catastrophic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common</td>
<td>Dread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences not fatal</td>
<td>Consequences fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known to exposed</td>
<td>Not known to exposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate</td>
<td>Delayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known to science</td>
<td>Not known to science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not controllable</td>
<td>Controllable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>Old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The magnitude of risk perception is further influenced by whether or not there are fatalities as a result of the event. Continued exposure to risk will affect both risk tolerance and risk perception. If the risk is known to happen immediately, risk perception is higher than when the risk is delayed. Understanding the risk and the ability to control it plays an important role in reducing risk perception. A new risk or unusual risk is approached more cautiously than usual or recurrent ones (Fischhoff et al.,
The two most important reasons for high risk perception are catastrophic consequences of the event and the imposition of risk compared to risk taken voluntarily (Shrader-Frechette, 1991). People’s current and future risk perception is influenced by the frequency of a risk event’s occurrence in the past (Moreira, 2008).

Also, consequences extending for a long time can increase the perception of risk compared to consequences that extend for a short time. The severity of terror attacks is not as influential on tourists’ perception as their frequency (Pizam and Fleisher, 2002). Therefore, if the frequency of attacks in one destination is small, the destination can recover from the attacks more quickly.

Figure 1: Integrated model of factors influencing tourists’ risk perception and tourists’ intention to visit

External factors are features influencing the way people perceive risks (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). Relatives and friends living in the destination can help negotiate the risks (Sönmez, 1998). Travel advisories (Cavlek, 2002) by the government of the tourists’ country of origin are able to increase or
decrease tourists’ risk perception towards a certain destination. At the same time, tour operators and
insurance companies refer to government travel advisories to alter their services. Travel agents are an
important source of information also because they work directly with potential tourists. Tour operators
can create the destination image and influence international tourists’ flow (Cavlek, 2002). Mass media are
believed to magnify the crisis and create a greater awareness of risks in their audience (Beirman, 2003;
Taylor, 2006; Fielding & Shortland, 2009).

Internal factors consist of psychological and social factors. Psychological factors comprise types
of tourists (Plog, 2001; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992), travel attitude (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998), destination
image (Steiner, 2007; Kozak, Crotts, & Law, 2007; Yarcan, 2007), destination motivation interest, and
motivation. Social factors comprise familiarity with the destination (Milman & Pizam, 1995; Wong &
Yeh, 2009), prior knowledge which includes subjective knowledge and prior experience of the destination
(Sharifpour, Walters & Ritchie, 2014), ability to speak the destination’s language (Sönmez, 1998),
demographic factors (age, gender, income, education level, children in household, religion, cultural/ethnic
background) (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Kozak et al., 2007; Nellis & Savage, 2012; He et al., 2013),
international travel experience and travel purpose (Sönmez, 1998; Moreira, 2008).

Responses from the tourism industry and destination’s government impact directly tourists’ risk
perception and their intention to visit. The availability of tour packages to a certain destination not only
impacts package tourists but also a large number of fully independent tourists (FIT) (Cavlek, 2002). FIT
tourists consider the cancellation of packages to a destination as the signal that the destination is not safe.
Besides, tourism industry can offer tourists such incentives as reduction in flight tickets,
accommodations, etc.

There are many actions that a government can take in order to mitigate the negative influence on
tourism. The destination government can isolate the country’s region that has come under attack or unrest
from the rest of the country and maintain the peaceful image of the destination in tourists’ mind (Yarcan,
2007). This action helps tourism in the whole area or the whole country to be not influenced because
when one city is attacked, tourists tend to perceive risk in the whole area and avoid travelling there. Local
emergency managers and touristic representatives should be involved in the crisis management planning
process (Beirman, 2003). Recovery marketing for the destination is necessary which includes portraying
itself as a peaceful place which is suitable for tourism. Working with media in order to promote the
destination, turning media’s attention on to positive facts about the country, broadcasting the steps taken
in the country to address the problem, inviting journalists to come so they can see the real situation, etc.
will bring about positive results for tourism (Cavlek, 2002). Besides, intergovernmental and public-
private partnerships should be built. When governments publish travel advisories that a certain country is
not safe to visit, many of their citizens will follow the advice and cancel their trips (Cavlek, 2002). Therefore, without the support from other governments, it is hard for the tourism industry to recover quickly. Also, the government needs to support tour operators or incentivize them to reduce prices and costs. By working with airlines to reduce prices, reducing the price of visas and entry tickets, destinations can be more appealing to tourists (Sausmarez, 2013), which can help in the short-term. Initiatives that stimulate domestic tourism, develop new touristic products and look for new markets are helpful in mitigating the negative influence on tourism.

The protection motivation theory (Rogers, 1983; Rippetoe & Rogers, 1987) describes how people perceive risk and how people engage in coping behaviours in order to reduce the perceived risk. According to the theory, people perceive risk as both perceived susceptibility (the likelihood it will happen) and perceived vulnerability (will it happen to them). One’s protection motivation is influenced by his perception of how severe a threat is, the perception of how vulnerable he is to the threat, the effectiveness of recommended coping behaviours, and his ability to perform those behaviours. Then, adaptive behaviours (or maladaptive ones) will be applied in order to reduce the risk. In term of safety and security in tourism, the role of insurance is emphasized as an important factor influencing tourists’ intention to visit (Cavlek, 2002). Tourists buy travel insurance with the aim of reducing the fear arousal and perceived risk. Besides, other adaptive behaviour applied when risk is perceived in the destination is that tourists register with their embassy in their country of origin to have the latest information or emergency contacts. Tourists tend to hesitate to continue going to the destination when insurance companies do not cover their potential loss there. However, both tour operators and insurance companies do not want to risk their business by selling their services in the destinations perceived to be at risk.

The previous studies emphasized the role of mass media in the process of forming tourists’ risk perception (Beirman, 2003; Richter & Waugh, 1986) but have not yet mentioned the impact of social media. Social media are believed to reflect a truer and more recent situation of the destination (Macnamara, 2014; Starbird et al., 2010). Social media also play an increasingly important role in travel-related search engines (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). As social media increase their influence on internet users and become one valuable source of information for tourists, it is time to take social media into consideration. This study contributes to the knowledge of risk perception in tourism field by adding social media exposure as one factor influencing risk perception of tourists as well as emphasizing the ability of reflecting public’s risk perception of social media.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Background of the Case Study

Located in northern Africa, Tunisia covers 165,000 square kilometres and is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north and east, Algeria to the west and Libya to the southeast. Prior to the Arab Spring Revolution in late 2010, Tunisia was under the authority of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali for 24 years. After a young graduate burnt himself to death to protest police harassment and unemployment, riots as part of the so-called “Arab Spring”, spread quickly across the country and the Arab world. Under the massive popular pressure, Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia in January 2011 and Tunisia’s citizens had their first free election in October 2011. After the election, the country continuously has had military actions along the border with Algeria and Libya. Although some terrorist attacks occurred since 2011, they have not received much attention because they mostly targeted military and police with few or no fatality. However, the two attacks on Bardo Museum in March 18, 2015 and Sousse beach in June 26, 2015 targeted international tourists explicitly. Twenty-one people were killed and 50 were injured in the Bardo Museum attack. Thirty-eight tourists were killed and a further 39 were injured in the Sousse attack.

![Figure 2: Global tourist nights in Tunisia. Tunisia Ministry of Tourism, 2016](image)

Tunisia attracts tourists to its cosmopolitan capital city of Tunis, the ancient city of Carthage, the Muslim and Jewish quarters of Jerba, and coastal resorts outside of Monastir. Before the Arab Spring
Revolution in late 2010, Tunisia recorded over 34 million tourist nights, which dropped precipitously to 19.5 million in 2011. Since then, tourist nights have been gradually increasing even though they did not reach the level before the coup d’état with 30 million nights in 2012. After that, the number of foreign tourists remained steady in 2013 and 2014. However, because of the two bloody incidents in March and June along with one more terrorist attack on public transportation in Tunis in November 2015, the total number of global tourist nights in 2015 dropped to 16.1 million (Figure 2). After three consecutive terrorist attacks in 2015, Tunisia declared a state of emergency throughout the country and a curfew in Tunis in November 2015. During the period of time from 2010 to 2015, a state of emergency was declared and a curfew was imposed twice. The first time was during the Arab-Spring Revolution in late 2010. Figure 3 shows the monthly global tourist nights of Tunisia during the same period of time. The two terrorist incidents happening right before the travel season of Tunisia, which usually starts from June to September each year, caused a dramatic drop in the total number of foreign tourists in 2015. Monthly statistics of global tourist nights in the period of 2010 to 2015 were synthesized based on available information provided on the Tunisia Ministry of Tourism’s website and publications (National Institute of Statistics – Tunisia, 2016; Tunisia Ministry of Tourism, 2015).

![Number of global tourist nights by months](image)

**Figure 3: Monthly global tourist nights of Tunisia. Tunisia Ministry of Tourism, 2016**

### 3.2 Research design

This study employed content analysis to analyze the posts of tourists from 2010 to 2015 in the Tunisia forum on the Tripadvisor website. This method calculates the frequency of keywords, identifies
the important themes in tourists’/potential tourists’ reviews, and probes the formation of tourists’ risk perception and the influence exerted particularly by social media in this process. The text data in TripAdvisor users’ own words provides more informative points of views, feelings, and experiences. This unobtrusive measure also provides researchers a naturalistic setting that does not interfere or influence participants (Trochim, 2005). In other words, content analysis can reduce the biases resulting from the involvement of researchers in the study design. Additionally, content analysis provides a longitudinal design (Trochim, 2006). By collecting posts of tourists in the Tripadvisor forum, the data can be tracked consecutively from 2010 to 2015. Changes in tourists’ risk perception towards travelling to Tunisia in that period can be explored in detail. A cross-sectional study, e.g. survey, interview, etc., on the other hand, is carried out at only one time point or over a short period (Trochim, 2005; Levin, 2006). Hence, its results illustrate tourists’ risk perception at that specific moment but do not represent the changes over months and years. Otherwise, that observation would have to be repeated at different times. Even if the observation is conducted over a longer time period, for example one year, if an event were to occur during that time, the respondents will have inconsistent answers before and after the event. Therefore, content analysis was considered as the suitable research method to conduct this study.

The platform of this study is the English language TripAdvisor travel forum. TripAdvisor is the world’s largest travel site with more than 70 million emailable members worldwide, reaching 350 million unique monthly visitors, and more than 290 million reviews and opinions covering more than 5.3 million accommodations, restaurants, and attractions (TripAdvisor, 2015). The website facilitates travellers’ planning and booking their trips by providing previous travellers’ reviews and advice. More than 190 new contributions are posted on the TripAdvisor website every minute. On average, nearly 2,600 new topics are posted every day to the TripAdvisor forums (TripAdvisor, 2015). This study focused on English-speaking forums only. It is estimated that more than 85 percent of questions posted to TripAdvisor’s English-speaking forums are replied to by other users within 24 hours (TripAdvisor, 2015). The TripAdvisor website was chosen as the platform for this study due to the sampling issue. Since Tunisia is the focus of the analysis, the sample should be tourists who are interested in visiting that country. By accessing the Tripadvisor forum, it can be presumed that most of the posters have intentions to visit or are at least interested in Tunisia.

### 3.3 Data collection

Information about political unrest and terrorism-related events in Tunisia was collected from the Global Terrorism Database (START, 2015) as well as from the mass media (Tunisia profile – Timeline,
All events were synthesized and then tracked over the timeline period of 2010 to 2015 (Figure 4).

TripAdvisor organizes its content under separate categories including hotels, flights, vacation rentals, restaurants, award winners of the year, holiday ideas, travel forum, etc. Data were collected from the travel forum site in order to help eliminate unrelated reviews about hotels or places to go. In the Tunisia Travel Forum, 51 specific sub-forums with more than 18,365 topics and 124,270 posts are divided by the locations. All posts related to tourists’ risk perception towards terrorism and political instability in Tunisia Travel Forum were collected based on the predetermined list of keywords regardless of the sub-forums.

In order to reduce the effect of false negatives (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015) (i.e., relevant posts that are not found), besides the main keywords directly related to terrorism and political instability such as political, bomb, bombing, shooting, terrorism, terrorist, terror, attack, revolution, unrest, protest, riot, kidnap, kidnapping, safety and security-related keywords were also included, for example, risk(y), threat, violence, (un)safe, safety, (in)secure, security, worry, fear, concern. All keywords that appeared either in the topics or in the posts under those topics were collected.

To avoid the effect of false positives (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015) (i.e., posts that have only a tangential relation to the focus of this study), the main idea of the post should relate to safety and security. Because each keyword is searched independently, some topics/posts come up twice or more often as they contain more than 2 keywords. Those duplicated topics/posts were included only once. Only topics in which keywords appeared in the opening post were collected. Those topics containing keywords in the latter reply string were eliminated. The topic was not included if the opening post had been removed by TripAdvisor’s administrators or the post’s author even if the string of the replies are still available. Posts which are purely about political opinions but not related to tourism were not included. Those containing keywords but whose main focus is not related to risk perception were also rejected.

Only posts which were posted within the period of January 1st 2010 to December 31st 2015 were included. It means the opening post of the topic should be posted on or after January 1st 2010 and any later posts in that topic should be posted by December 31st 2015. The opening posts of each topic were speed-read in order to assess and select the suitable topics and posts to this study. The search resulted in the selection of 324 topics with 1544 individual posts. Since this study focused on the risk perception towards terrorism and political instability, those topics related to other issues in safety and security such as crime, diseases, natural disasters, etc. were not included in the second step of analysis. Besides posts directly related to terrorism and political instability, posts related to concerns about general physical safety were also included as tourists usually experience increased concerns about their physical safety.
after any political unrests or terrorist attacks. The final sample size is 250 topics with 1335 posts. For each post collected, the date and the review content were gathered. The date of each post is very important for cross-checking the changes in tourists’ risk perception against the incident dates (politically related events and terrorist incidents) in Tunisia. Even though parts of TripAdvisor users provide their personal information such as age, gender and location, a number of users in the forum do not. Besides, many users just provide the name of the city where they live without directly referring to the country. However, many cities are named similarly in different English-speaking countries. It is highly likely lead to the misleading of the users’ locations. Therefore, in order to avoid the inconsistency of the data, demographic factors were not collected.

3.4 Data analysis

In the first step, keywords in 324 safety and security–related topics were counted for their frequency and tracked over the timeline of events in Tunisia during the period from 2010 to 2015 (Figure 4). The keywords were grouped into three main categories: “safety and security”, “terrorism” and “political instability”. Safety and security can be understood as the absence of a threatening factor in the subjective experience of individuals as well as social relations (Niemisalo, 2013). In tourism, these terms cover a diversity of topics from terrorism, political instability, crime, to natural disasters, diseases, etc. (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006). Terrorism was defined as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.” in the Global Terrorism Database (START, 2015). Political instability describes “the condition of a country where the government has been toppled, or is controlled by factions following a coup, or where basic functional pre-requisites for social-order control and maintenance are unstable and periodically disrupted” (Cook, 1990, p.14).

In this stage, word frequency was recorded in all topic areas, regardless of the scope of the topic (terrorism, political instability or other issues related to safety and security). This step helps address the first sub-RQ of the study by assessing the relationship between tourists’ risk perception towards the incidents and the actual events. It can also compare the magnitude of tourists’ concerns about terrorism, political instability and general concerns about safety and security in Tunisia through different periods of time. Next, the posts related to terrorism and political instability (1335 posts in 250 topics) were tracked for the posted dates and compared with the events’ dates to determine how long tourists’ concerns last after the events.

In the second step, a coding scheme was established to examine 250 terrorism and political
instability-related topics with 1335 posts of TripAdvisor users. A combined method was used to develop the coding scheme. The first 60 posts in the dataset were analyzed in order to develop a consistent theme. Then the scheme was compared to the model presented in Figure 1. The coding scheme was then reviewed independently by a third party to ensure validity of the approach and decisions made. Based on the integrated model and available information in the dataset, six main themes were identified: tourists’ concerns; tourists’ intention; level of safety; sources of information; advice about how to stay safe while in Tunisia; and reactions after reading the responses on TripAdvisor. This step helps address the second and third sub-RQ of the study.

Main themes and sub-themes of the coding scheme (Table 2) refer either directly or indirectly to specific components of the integrated model. The theme ‘tourists’ concerns’ in the coding scheme reflect the risk perception of potential tourists. Almost all topics in the forum were opened by a potential tourists’ expression of concerns about safety and security-related issues in Tunisia. Then they asked for more information about the destination at that moment as well as previous tourists’ points of view and suggestions. For that reason, the questions/ opening posts of each topic usually referred to potential tourists’ concerns and reflect their risk perception. The findings of this theme address the second sub-RQ (tourists’ risk perception towards political unrest and terrorism in term of travelling to Tunisia) and the second part of the third sub-RQ (the role of social media in reflecting tourists’ risk perception) of the study.

Table 2: Main themes and sub-themes of coding scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compared with the model</th>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Sub themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Risk perception of potential tourists | Tourists’ concerns | **General physical safety**  
(safe in general, safe for women, safe for children, safe for going alone, safe for walking out of hotels, safe on public transportation) |
|                         |                   | **Terrorism**  
(refer to incidents, Westerner/ Christian targeted, tourist targeted) |
|                         |                   | **Political instability**  
(curfew, protest / unrests) |
|                         |                   | **Other**  
(atmosphere after the incidents, availability of insurance, reimbursement) |
| eWOM                    | Level of safety   | **Safe** |
|                         |                   | **As safe as anywhere** |
|                         |                   | **Safe with precautions** |
|                         |                   | **Unsure** |
### Influence on tourists’ risk perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction of questioners</th>
<th>Unsafe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reassured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased worry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reflect of tourists’ risk perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice on how to stay safe while in Tunisia</th>
<th>Dress like locals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Register with embassy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid specific areas/times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask for security help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid groups/demonstrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stay within tourist areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buy insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### eWOM, Social Media exposure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of information</th>
<th>Locals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience by previous tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reference to Foreign Office and government travel advisories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tour agents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Government travel advisories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tourists’ intention to visit Risk negotiation</th>
<th>Tourists’ intention to visit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change destination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay/ Cancel/ Don’t want to go</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue going/ Want to go</td>
<td>(Risk negotiation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This coding scheme refers directly and indirectly to the integrated model in Figure 1. Not all elements in the model were included in the coding scheme due to some unavailable information in the dataset.

In the reply posts, many tourists who had previously visited Tunisia provided their opinions about the safety level of the country. This theme represents an external factor influencing potential tourists’ risk perception. Depending on the evaluation of previous tourists, potential tourists might increase or decrease their risk perception about Tunisia. The next theme reveals how potential tourists reacted after reading the responses from previous tourists, whether they felt reassured or increased worry. These two themes together address the first part of the third sub-RQ (the role of social media in influencing tourists’ risk perception).

Sources of information, advice on how to stay safe while in Tunisia, and tourists’ intention to visit were also provided in the posts. Tourists’ intention to visit, risk negotiation and sources of information directly come from the integrated model. Information provided in the forum reflects tourists’ destination risk perception, which helps determine what Tunisia government and DMOs can do to mitigate the negative impact on tourism industry.
Compared to the model, all internal factors such as types of tourists, travel attitude, demographic factors (age, gender, income, education level, etc.), travel purpose, international travel experience, destination familiarity and knowledge, ability to speak destination’s language, etc. were only included in the coding scheme indirectly. Generally speaking, these topics did not come up often enough to provide sufficient and consistent data. Although the event factors were not brought up in the coding scheme, the frequency and severity of the incidents in Tunisia during the period of time from 2010 to 2015 were still evaluated independently throughout the study.

To evaluate the soundness of the themes, a formal reliability analysis (Pennington-Gray et al., 2015) was conducted. A random set of topics and posts was checked for reliability and consistent themes between the coder and the third party. There had been some variations in classifications between the coder and the third party, but those posts were discussed until an agreement was reached. All themes should be exhaustive; however, each post did not need to fall into one mutually exclusive theme. Given that each post might reveal multiple themes, one post did not necessarily belong to a specific theme but rather fall under multiple themes.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Assessments to what extent tourists are aware of political unrest and terrorism in Tunisia as it relates to the actual events

Each topic in the TripAdvisor forum consists of two parts: a question or an opening post and replies or answers to that question. In the first step, the frequency of pre-determined keywords was counted in both question and answer posts. Those keywords cover three major themes: safety and security, terrorism and political instability. Table 3 illustrates the number of each keyword in the question and answer posts as well as the total number of keywords in each theme. This first step is to compare the tourists’ concerns about terrorism and political instability versus tourists’ general concerns about safety and security. The total number of keywords in the terrorism field (n = 405) was one-third of that of safety and security field (n = 1306). Keywords in the political instability field (n = 281) were one-fifth of that of safety and security field.

Table 3: Frequency of keywords in the dataset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Key words</th>
<th>Question/Opening post</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>safe</em></td>
<td>303</td>
<td>437</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>secure</em></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>191</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>concern</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>risk*</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>worry</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>fear</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>attack</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>136</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>terror*</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>kidnap*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>threat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>bomb*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>shooting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>politic*</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>unrest</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>revolution</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>protest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>riot</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>violence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* including all the derivatives of the root words)
The keywords *safe, secure, concern, risk, worry,* and *fear* refer to general safety and security issues regarding tourism in Tunisia. All derivatives of those keywords (for example, *unsafe, safety, insecure, security, risky,* etc.) were also counted. In terrorism field, besides the words *terror/ terrorist/ terrorism,* which clearly refer to terrorism, such words as *kidnap/ kidnapping, bomb/ bombing, shooting, attack,* and *threat* were also brought up by TripAdvisor users in this context. The words *politics/ political, unrest, revolution, protest, riot, violence* were found under political instability – related topics and posts.

In order to relate the tourists’ awareness to the terrorism-related and political instability-related events, the total number of keywords in three main themes, safety and security, terrorism and political instability, was tracked month by month over the entire period from 2010 to 2015 (Figure 4). Some major events during this time were also marked in Figure 4 so as to illustrate the correlation between the frequency of topics mentioned in the TripAdvisor forum and the incidents that occurred in Tunisia. See Appendix A for all events in Tunisia as well as their descriptions.

![Figure 4: Number of keywords under 3 main themes and timeline events in Tunisia (2010 to 2015).](image-url)
From 2010 to 2015, three phases with significant differences in the number of keywords can be clearly identified in Figure 4. The first phase is 2010, the second one covers January 2011 to February 2015 and the third one started March 2015 to the end of that year. In the first phase, only a few keywords related to safety, security and terrorism were found and none mentioned political instability. The “Arab-Spring” Revolution that took place in December 2010 started the second phase, in which the number of keywords under the three themes increased and decreased repeatedly. The former government was overthrown in January 2011. During this time, the number of keywords related to political instability as well as safety and security increased significantly. After that, the increase in the number of keywords under the political instability theme matched events such as street protests and the imposed curfew in May 2011, clashes between protesters and police in November 2012, the assassination of a politician in February 2013, the Chaambi Mountain attack in June 2013 and the border war with Libya in July 2014, etc. Meanwhile, the increase in the number of keywords under the terrorism theme matched the attack on the US Embassy in September 2012 and the bombing on Sousse beach (tourist area) in October 2013. The terrorist shooting in the Bardo Museum in March 2015 initiated a series of terrorist attacks on tourists, marking the third phase. Keywords under safety and security as well as the terrorism theme surged tremendously. The shooting in Sousse in June 2015 and the bombing in Tunis in November 2015 also raised the number of safety, security and terrorism–related keywords but not to the level encountered after the March 2015 incident at the Bardo Museum.

**Figure 5: Numbers of posts and events in Tunisia (2010 to 2015).**
Further analysis of the 250 topics related to terrorism, political instability, and general physical safety showed that there were 116, 70 and 64 topics, respectively, referring to general physical safety, terrorism and political instability. The whole dataset was cross-checked with the events occurring in Tunisia over the timeline (Figure 5).

The pattern of distribution of posts in Figure 5 was similar to that of the keywords under the three main themes in Figure 4. The highest number of posts occurred during the beginning of the Arab Spring Revolution in December 2010 and the three terrorist attacks in March, June and November 2015. Although there were many incidents related to political instability and terrorism during the period from 2012 to 2014, the increase of tourists’ posts during this time was fairly insignificant. The result also showed that tourists’ awareness only reached a peak in the same or one month after the incident occurred. Starting from the second month after the incidents, the number of posts dropped quickly.

4.2 Tourists’ risk perception towards political unrest and terrorism in term of travelling to Tunisia.

At this point, a more in-depth approach was necessary to reveal the content of the posts as well as tourists’ risk perception. Many topics were opened by a question “Is it safe to go to Tunisia?” [695] or directly stated tourists’ concerns related to the recent incident, for example, “We booked to go to Hammamet on the 3rd May - how safe is it given the recent problems in Tunis? If it was just me I wouldn’t have a problem but we have our 18 month old son with us this time. I feel concerned…” [593] (This topic posted on April 24, 2015, after the Bardo Museum terrorist attack). From available information provided in the dataset, four main concerns of tourists were revealed, as captured in Figure 6. Concerns about terrorism received the most attention by tourists, revealed by the highest number of posts (n = 270), followed by general physical safety (n = 150), political instability (n = 145), and other (n = 133).

A perceived risk/threat is understood as the subjective assessment of the probability of the danger and how much people are concerned about the potential consequences (Sjöberg, Moen, & Rundmo, 2004). The uncertainty of the assessment as well as potential harmful outcomes (Guasti & Mansfedova, 2013) leads to the anxiety. And through that concern, people’s risk perception is also revealed.
Among the concerns about terrorism (n = 270), most of tourists’ posts referred to past incidents (n = 239) (Figure 7). Tourist expressed their fear (n = 105), assessed the security level in the destination (n = 78), showed their empathy (n = 31), expressed their personal viewpoints (n = 13), and reported factual happenings of the attacks (n = 12). They expressed their fear about a reoccurrence of attacks to themselves or to their family members while they were in Tunisia (n = 63). Some tourists were still worried for their safety even though they knew the chance that attacks would happen again was small. The increase in the number of terrorist groups in the area was a secondary fear among tourists (n = 19) with 13 out of these 19 posts indicating that the fear related to the growth and influence of Islamist State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on Tunisia. Tourists even expressed concern about the future of Tunisia’s tourism industry and feared great losses because of those attacks (n = 13). For example, one of the posts stated “... it is an economic disaster for Tunisia and especially for the tourism industry...” [806]. While another read “… I shudder to think what will happen to the hotels and staff over there if this dreadful situation gets worse” [191]. Tourists also fear the “indiscriminate” [241], “unpredictable” [380], inevitable, etc. (n = 10) nature of terrorism. As one said: “Terror is a very powerful tool. Whether there’s another attack is
imminent or not, nobody knows where, when, or how. That's what terror's all about. Terrorists don't wear uniforms, you don't know who they are, where they are, what'd they're planning, or when. They don't even have to do anything, because the threat is always there. The terrorists know they have a huge psychological advantage, and will always be one step ahead…” [1461]

Figure 7: Content of tourists’ posts referring to the past incidents in Terrorism.

Among 78 posts that mentioned security levels in Tunisia, only 5 of them praised the security forces for being helpful or completing their mission, whereas 17 posts criticized them for intervening late, being irresponsible or incapable on the incident days. On the other hand, local Tunisians were acclaimed for their bravery and quick reactions. One post claimed “It praised the locals who did their best, but criticised the fact that no police arrived until 38 minutes after the shooting began...” [543] Another also agreed “Tunisia has a lot to do to improve security there before large numbers of tourists will return there or visit for the first time.” [545]. After the incidents, most of the posts mentioned the changes in the level of security after the attacks (n = 56). Most of tourists feel safer with the significant increase in the presence of armed police/security as one stated “Security is incredible, they do all to protect everything, yes, you will see a lot of police EVERYWHERE but this even makes me feel safer than anywhere else in the world now... The only thing now is tightened security at Tunis airport, only passengers can get inside the airport, nobody else, lots of security checks, but all was great and safe.” [268]. Only two posts indicated that tourists felt worried because of the increasing security: “What worries me is- people say it is safer because of police presence guards etc. The fact that they are needed makes me worry more” [37].

Tourists expressed much empathy for victims of the terrorist attacks and their families (n = 31).
As one stated “Obviously the horrific events of last Friday left us devastated for all the people involved and the country itself” [25]. But they were also fearful when they knew the attacks happened so close to them: “I was shocked to see the recent terrorist act on the beach where my kids were playing volley ball just the week before. I am now in a quandary ...” [87] People brought up their viewpoints (n = 15), for example, their strong will to not let terrorists interfere in their lives or surrender to terrorism. They supported Tunisia by continuing to go there. People also hoped the specific incident would be a one-off attack and would not happen again.

Other concerns about terrorism were Westerners (n = 16) and tourists being targeted (n = 15). Nationality played a role as for instance U.S. tourists reacted more to the attack on the U.S Embassy in September 2012, while British tourists were afraid of being targeted after their government increased its participation in the war on Libya. Besides, tourists worried because “This attack was, it appears, specifically aimed at tourists and not random. So the concerns are very much valid” [148]

In general, risk perception of tourists towards terrorism in Tunisia related to the reoccurrence of terrorist attacks, the possibility of attacks happening to their family and themselves, the effectiveness of force of security, and the increasing influence of ISIS in the region. Being a Western and/or a tourist makes people’s fear of encountering terrorist attack rise. The improvement in security leads to a positive change in tourists’ risk perception.

Even though political instability in Tunisia did not receive as much attention by tourists (n = 145) as terrorism (n =270), concerns of tourists about political unrest still reveal risk perception of tourists. The two main concerns in this category were related to protests/unrest (n = 124) and the imposed curfew (n = 21). Posts mentioning protests/unrest (Figure 8) focused on there being more unrest (n = 85), border wars (n = 11) and the weak government in Tunisia (n =5). Tourists were not only afraid that more unrest would occur during their stay in Tunisia but also how it would affect their holiday. During the election, tourists’ concerns increased (n = 18) because they believed unrest was more likely to happen should Tunisians be dissatisfied with the election results. Strikes during this time were believed to cause inconvenience for tourists (n = 5), such as delayed public transportation, facilities being cut- off, etc. Beside the demonstrations inside Tunisia, some people also worried about the border wars with Libya and Algeria (n = 11). Tunisia’s new but weak government was another worry (n = 5) because it was felt that it would not be able to adequately protect its citizens or international tourists. Nevertheless, there were some positive outlooks towards the unstable situation in Tunisia (n = 23). Tourists believed the unrest was purely political and tourists were not targeted. A previous tourist reported “There were women and children protesting along with the men. People then marched peacefully ... I never felt afraid or in danger” [826]. Besides, people hoped for a new beginning for Tunisia with democratic institutions.
The curfew was imposed in Tunisia in 2011 as part of the State of Emergency. Tourists usually asked for more information about the curfew and complained about their discomfort as a result of it (n = 21). The curfew affected tourists’ time schedule negatively. For instance, tourists that arrived at Tunisia’s airport in the evening could not go to their hotels because the curfew was in effect from 8 pm to 5 am (the exact times of the curfew were changed several times during the period when it was imposed).

Risk perception of tourists towards political instability in Tunisia linked to the fear of more protests, demonstrations, and strikes inside the country, and border wars. Specifically, tourists increased perceived risk before and during election time. Some tourists also perceived that the Tunisian government was unlikely to be able to protect its citizens and foreign tourists. The political situation in Tunisia, however, was positively and optimistically considered by other tourists.

As concerned physical safety (n = 150), tourists asked about safety for their children (n = 47), only second to safety in general (n = 60). Tourists also worried about their safety while walking outside of hotels/resorts (n = 19). Women, especially single moms with children or single women going independently, felt vulnerable (n = 15). Safety for tourists going on their own and safety on public transportation was expressed in 7 and 2 posts, respectively.

The atmosphere in the destination after the incidents raised concern among tourists (n = 46), as they felt it was not right to holiday where many other tourists had lost their lives. They found it hard to overcome the shadow of the past incidents or were unable to be totally relaxed there. Empty and quiet resorts were not an ideal place for a holiday, either. For example, one post stated “It’s not the security...
aspect giving me second thoughts but whether there would be any atmosphere and ambiance in the resorts. I was in Djerba beginning of June, before the incident. The area I stayed resembled a ghost town - partially filled hotels, empty cafes and restaurants and very few tourists venturing out of hotels. If this is a reflection of how all resorts may end up then not my idea of holiday…” [34]

Other concerns of tourists related to the reimbursement of their tour package/tickets (n = 63), and the availability of travel insurance (n = 24). It appeared that tourists were usually unable to get any refund for cancelling trips or changing destinations. Only if the government advises not to go to Tunisia, will travel agents refund tourist deposits. Tourists also encountered difficulties obtaining valid travel insurance to Tunisia because of government travel advisories.

4.3 The role of social media in influencing and reflecting tourists’ risk perception

The influence of exposure to media messages via social media on tourists’ risk perception was illustrated by the way potential tourists were influenced by information provided in the forum. When they expressed their concerns about safety in Tunisia, responses from people who previously visited Tunisia or those who had knowledge about the country addressed safety levels. After reading the posts, the reaction of potential tourists/questioners revealed how their risk perception about Tunisia changed.

In particular, five levels of safety in Tunisia, from safe to unsafe (Figure 9) were assessed. Posts indicating Tunisia is a safe destination (n = 313) outnumbered all others by a ratio of 2:1. Based on their travel experience in Tunisia, previous tourists indicated that during their time in Tunisia they felt very safe. Resorts/hotels’ premises were confirmed to be safe “with lots of security around” [92]. Similarly, outside of the premises also stated to be safe, as one post claimed “…we went out and about freely in the evenings and felt totally safe at all times. the Tunisians gave us a very warm welcome and are happy to see tourists…” [369] Tripadvisor users based on information from different sources to evaluate the safety level in Tunisia, for example, one post stated “I spoke to the Tunisian Embassy and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and both confirmed no reason I should not fly to Tunisia in two weeks, as other posters have mentioned, the situation is much calmer now, and friends I have in Tunisia have said that PEK, Sousse, Monastir and Skanes are virtually protest free” [358]. Some tourists relied on information provided by their travel agent to assess: “Our travel company (Thomas Cook) have said that they have no concerns whatsoever, and would not let us fly if they thought that it (Tunisia) was unsafe” [382]. Potential tourists were encouraged to visit Tunisia and enjoy their a worry-free holiday.

Meanwhile, only 61 posts raised concerns over safety in Tunisia. Those posts suggesting the country was unsafe mostly appeared after the major incidents (Arab-Spring Revolution in late 2010, three
terrorist attacks on tourists in 2015). For example, one post stated: “...I've been saying for a long time, at least since the revolution, that Tunisia is not ready for a resumption of tourism. There are just too many problems...” [198]. Along with warning about the unsafe situation in Tunisia, people also recommended not visiting the country in the short term “…An opinion on whether or not to go to Tunisia. I was advised not to go in 2011…” [202] or “Please do not go there thinking it is ok. You will be mistaken. There definately is an un easy in the atmosphere. To think it has some what calmed I can assure you, you may think it has but it really is an unsettled place. I would still advise others to seriously think about a visit…” [304]

54 posts compared Tunisia with other countries (usually the poster’s home country or famous tourististic destinations) and concluded the safety level was the same or similar in both destinations. Either Tunisia was considered to be as safe as other destinations, for example, “...Found it (Tunisia) to be as safe as anywhere you could go on holiday...” [83] or “I feel more safer out in Tunisia than I do walking down the street at night in my hometown...” [480] or other destinations were considered to be just as unsafe as Tunisia “Like people are saying it's not safe in so many places now...as dreadful things can happen everywhere including here in the UK...” [31] and “…in this day and age terrorism could occur anywhere from London to Paris to Sydney” [86]. Therefore, potential tourists were advised to keep going to Tunisia and enjoying their lives because “…These monsters (terrorists) will attack anywhere. If we live our lives in fear of them, we would never leave the house!” [147].

![Figure 9: Number of posts indicating Tunisia’s level of safety.](image)

After a series of incidents that caused many tourists’ death, people became more cautious when mentioning the safety level. As one explained “you felt safe then suddenly the incident happened and it became not safe anymore” [734]. Therefore, people felt it was hard to confirm whether Tunisia was safe or not (n = 35). They did not pronounce themselves clearly whether others should keep visiting Tunisia or
not. Potential tourists or people who were interested in Tunisia were told to decide for themselves, for instance, “I would not advise anyone it’s ok to visit and say it’s fine. Who knows where is fine, in the current climate we live in. But if you want to go. That’s your decision alone” [800] or “No one can tell you whether it will be safe - only you can make that decision based on media and your own governments information...” [1322]

Others mentioned potential tourists would be safe in Tunisia as long as they respected common precautions when travelling (n = 8). One post stated “…We have no concerns about safety there, though we take precautions with valuables just as we do in any other country....” [528]. The safety issue was more related to crime than to terrorism or political unrest. In this case, potential tourists were still advised to visit Tunisia.

There were three distinct types of reactions by TripAdvisor users after reading the responses. These were 1) to be reassured (n = 62), 2) to increase their level of worry (n = 2) and 3) to express neutral opinions (n = 17). Usually when potential tourists were considering travelling to Tunisia, they sought advice from previous tourists, locals or people who have knowledge about the destination in the forum. 62 posts indicated that after receiving the responses, potential tourists felt reassured in their intention of travelling to Tunisia. As one stated “Thank you everybody you have put my mind to rest... After reading your replies I won't be changing my plans to go there (Tunisia)....” [910] or “Thank you so much....and you are right, there are safety issues to be found anywhere...but a modicum of common sense is probably all that is needed.... I was a little nervous but feeling so much better about going now...appreciate the answer” [486]

Nevertheless, 2 posts expressed increased worry after reading the responses and one of them decided that “Maybe (it is) not the right time (to go to Tunisia) then...” [1325]. Other people did not express a clear opinion (n = 17). They just gave polite thanks for people’s responses.

Many different people evaluated of the safety level in one topic. At the very end of the topic, the questioner reacted after reading all the replies. For that reason, the number of posts indicating reactions of questioners/ potential tourists is not equal to the number of posts providing an evaluation. The result shows that due to the exposure to social media, many potential tourists changed their destination risk perception. Specifically, they changed their assessment of the safety level and of the possible negative events that might happen to them during their holiday.

The role of social media in reflecting tourists’ risk perception was shown in the findings of the theme “tourists’ concerns”. Tourism-related forums, such as the one in TripAdvisor, are good platforms to collect perceived risks of potential tourists towards a destination. People’s concerns, assessments, and uncertainties about the destination are revealed in messages posted on social media. Tourists’ risk
perception can be captured by analyzing the content of those messages.

Potential tourists were also provided advice on how to stay safe while in Tunisia (Figure 10). The majority of posts related to avoidance of specific locations and periods. Tourists were advised to avoid any rallies, demonstrations, or even political small talk (n = 19). Areas considered as dangerous were borders with Algeria and Libya, big city centers including Tunis, Hammamet, Sousse, Monastir, etc. and the desert (n = 15). It was suggested to avoid Ramadan and other religious holidays (n = 4). On the other hand, tourists were encouraged to stay within hotels/resorts or tourists’ areas (n = 5), use all-inclusive tour packages or a tour guide (n = 6).

The second type of advice was related to registration with the embassy of the home country for emergency contact (n = 7), to following government issued travel advisories (n = 7) and to asking for security help from hotels/resorts or travel agents (n = 6). Appropriate dress was the third most frequently mentioned topic. Because the majority of Tunisians are Muslims, women were highly concerned about how to dress (n = 14). Only a few people suggested dressing like locals and mingling with them to reduce the chance of being targeted (n = 3). Another way of avoiding troubles was to take a taxi instead of using public transportation (n = 4) since the latter is more likely to be targeted. Other common travel advice concerned buying travel insurance (n = 4) and not carrying lots of cash or the original of the passport (n = 2).

![Figure 10: Advice for tourists when coming to Tunisia.](image-url)

(p = number of posts)
Besides border areas with Algeria and Libya and the desert, which were already marked as dangerous zones by government, it was shown from the advice that tourists perceived more risk in big city centers including Tunis, Hammamet, Sousse, and Monastir. Similarly, religious and other special holidays were perceived to possibly be problematic for tourists. They were afraid of more protests, demonstrations or strikes by Tunisian citizens on the occasion of those special days. Clashes between police and protesters might lead to injuries and fatalities if protests got out of control. Hotels/resorts were considered safer than other non-tourist areas. Many people suggested all-inclusive tour package not only because of their convenience but also because of safety reasons. An organized trip with a professional tour guide and a well-developed system was believed to have better responses in case of emergency. It was also indicated in the advice that tourists highly relied on the security and support provided by their home country governments as well as the destination government and travel agents, hotels, etc.

Posts of TripAdvisor users also reveal the sources from which tourists and potential tourists sourced their information. There were six sources defined: experience by previous tourists (n = 234), reference to Foreign Office and government issued travel advisories (n = 169), mass media (n = 77), social media (n = 72), locals or residents in Tunisia (n = 49) and travel agents (n = 47) (Figure 11). Based on these results, the two main sources of information were social media and Foreign Office/government issued travel advisories.

To reply to questions in the TripAdvisor forum, previous tourists mostly referred to their own experience in Tunisia (n = 234), not only because their knowledge is based on this real experience but because questioners also wanted to know about the situation in the destination from a tourist’s point of view. This is the reason for people, especially potential tourists, to the experience of previous tourists in such forums as TripAdvisor. Therefore, it emphasizes the influence of exposure to social media on tourists’ risk perception.

![Figure 11: Number of posts indicating sources of information.](image-url)
The secondary source was the Foreign Office and government issued travel advisories (n = 169). The frequency of the number of posts referring to travel advisories increased considerably during the political unrest in 2011 and the three terrorist attacks in 2015. Based on these travel advisories people made their decision. For instance, one post declared “...think I’m just going to keep my eyes open to see what else is said and to see what the Foreign Office advise ect...” [210] while others provided comments such as: “...the Foreign Office advice is do not travel to that region. Take note of that and go elsewhere to be on the safe side...” [3] This result highlighted the importance of the influence that governments can have on tourists’ decision-making.

From the posts in TripAdvisor, the intention of tourists after the incidents also became clear (Figure 12). The number of posts indicating tourists cancelled or delayed their trips (n = 35), changed the destination (n = 38) or hesitated to go (n = 45) was small compared to the number of posts by tourists who still decided to go or wanted to go to Tunisia while fully being aware of the risk (n = 157). Among the latter, 16 tourists still planned to go unless told not to by their government or travel agents and 3 tourists stated they would go regardless of the government travel advisories.

For the most part people hesitated, changed destination or even decided to delay or cancel their trips right after the occurrence of the incidents (less than one month after the incidents happened). Among potential tourists who were hesitating to decide, the reimbursement of costs associated with the tour package/travel flights was considered as one risk negotiation factor more frequently than destination visitation interest.

![Intention of tourists](chart)

**Figure 12: Number of posts indicating intention of tourists.**

There were 34 posts explaining the reason that made tourists rationalize or negotiate the perceived risks, for example, the beauty of Tunisia and the high quality of the resorts’ services, the warm welcome of locals, wishful thoughts that incidents would not happen again, trust in the government and security,
and the fact that other places were not safe, either. For instance, one tourist posted “I still went to Tunisia after the museum attacking and we had a fantastic time oh and nothing compared to Spain. In Tunisia there is so much to do and the beaches are gorgeous. I understand that you are worried but these things can happen anywhere these days even in the UK … the Tunisian people are so nice and friendly and they work so hard and do so much. That’s another reason we will be going back next year. It won’t stop us from going, these people (terrorists) shall not win…” [50].
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study examined TripAdvisor posts using content analysis. The most interesting finding is that tourists’ awareness only heightened during the first month after an incident. By the second month, tourists’ attention to the attacks drops significantly. Pizam and Fleisher (2002) concluded that tourists declined to go to victim destinations immediately after the attacks, but that they slowly returned to the destination within 6 to 12 months after an incident. The statistics of global tourist nights in Tunisia (Figures 2 and 3) showed the negative correlation with tourists’ awareness of the incidents. When tourists became more aware of the incidents, they decreased their travel to Tunisia. When the first political unrest in late 2010 occurred, the number of tourists dropped instantly. One year later, the number of tourists gradually increased though it did not reach the previous level. The consequence of three terrorist attacks in 2015 was immediately shown in the decrease in the number of tourist arrivals. Therefore, this study confirms the findings of Pizam and Fleisher (2002). At the same time, it contrasts with the findings of Enders et al. (1992), who suggested that tourists’ reaction was delayed by a few months, and the number of tourists started decreasing six to nine months after the attack. One advantage of TripAdvisor’s English forum is that more than 85 percent of questions posted are replied to by other users within 24 hours (TripAdvisor, 2015). This almost instantaneous communication among tourists, potential tourists and locals, made possible through platforms such as TripAdvisor, is likely the reason why tourist behaviour has changed so dramatically since Enders et al.’s study.

The findings also indicate a relationship between the increase in the number of tourists’ posts and the terrorist attacks and political instability-related incidents in Tunisia. Except for the year 2014 when there were Ebola outbreaks in Africa, the amount of posts usually coincides with the incidents during the period of 2010 to 2014. However, the increases in the quantity of posts are not the same for every event. One political event in late 2010 (the Arab Spring Revolution) and three terrorist attacks in 2015 received the highest attention by tourists. Between 2012 and 2014, many other incidents related to terrorism and political instability occurred but the increase in the number of posts was quite small compared to the above four events. One explanation could be that tourists were not the target of those terrorist attacks and the political unrest happened far from areas popular with tourists (borders with Algeria and Libya). The terrorist attacks which mainly targeted tourists made a much greater impact than that targeted police, military or government (Sönmez, 1998).

Saha and Yap (2014) presented their study of the effect of political instability and terrorism on tourism in 139 countries for the period 1999-2009. Their results indicated that political instability impacted much more negatively on tourism than terrorism. They even suggested that terrorist attacks
helped increase tourism demand for low to moderate-political risk countries. In contrast, this study’s found that terrorist attacks received much more attention by tourists than political unrest. This is confirmed by the statistics of global tourist nights in Tunisia from 2010 to 2015 which dropped precipitously after the terrorist attacks in 2015, far more than as a result of the political instability in late 2010. Quite likely the magnitude of the effect of political unrest and terrorism on tourism also depends on the characteristics of each event. Firstly, Tunisia’s political unrest in late 2010 was short-lived, breaking out in December 2010, resulting in the resignation of the former president and dissolution of his government in January 2011, and leading to the election in October 2011. During that time, there were no significant numbers of fatalities compared to neighboring countries which also experienced similar political unrest. Secondly, these events in Tunisia were considered promising, with the hope to bring about a more democratic institution and justice for Tunisians. The same positive outlook was shared by foreign tourists. Thirdly, the terrorist attacks that occurred in Tunisia in 2015 targeted mainly tourists, especially from Western countries, who constituted more than two-thirds of all tourists coming to Tunisia in 2014 (National Institute of Statistics, 2015). Last but not least, foreign tourists related those terrorist attacks to ISIS, the terrorist group that had claimed responsibility for an increased number of attacks in Europe, the Middle East and parts of Africa. Therefore, in the case of Tunisia, terrorism has caused more loss for tourism industry than political instability.

The findings reveal a strong influence of government issued travel advisories on both tourists’ risk perception and their decision to visit. It is not only because travel agents and insurance companies work closely with these advisories (if the government advises not to go, tour agents will not send tourists to that destination and travel insurance to that place becomes invalid) but also because tourists trust their home country’s government to keep them safe.

In the last two decades there has been a significant increase in terrorist attacks targeting Westerners. Whereas being a Westerner had meant more privileges, it now makes them more vigilant as tourists and cautious about standing out. Mixing with locals is more likely to ensure their safety. Dressing like locals or mingling with them is a suggestion in order to stay safe for Western tourists.

The posts indicating tourists continuing to go to Tunisia after incidents outnumbered other posts. It means other reasons in risk negotiation outweighed tourists’ risk perception. The explanations stated by tourists are similar to those found by Cavlek (2002) and Beirman (2003). Tourists usually have wishful thoughts that the incidents will not happen twice in one place. Or they trust the destination’s government to increase security levels and manage the crisis. Besides, foreign tourists return to Tunisia because of their love for this country and satisfaction with its tourism services. To persuade others coming to Tunisia, they suggested that nowhere is totally safe from terrorism, even in their home country.
However, the number of posts indicating tourists continuing to go to Tunisia does not correlate with the actual global tourist nights in Tunisia. In fact, they dropped by 15 million nights after the political unrest in late 2010 and decreased 13 million after the terrorist attacks in 2015. Therefore, the number of posts presents a misleading picture as to the actual response by tourists. There are four explanations: first, people who firmly decided to cancel their trip to Tunisia may not need to look for further advice from social media and so did not post their question and decision. Only people who really want to go to Tunisia and somehow think that the safety level in Tunisia is still within their personal threshold look for further advice and opinions on social media’s platforms to re-confirm their pre-existing beliefs. In psychology, it is known as confirmation bias (Scott, 1993), the tendency to look for information which can reconfirm people’s pre-existing beliefs but to less consider other possibilities. The second explanation might be that the forum has a group of active users who strongly support Tunisia. Those users are more engaged in replying to posts and giving advice. Consequently, the number of posts by this group of users constitutes for a large portion of the total posts in the TripAdvisor forum. The third explanation is only English site of TripAdvisor forum was studied but British tourists were only the third largest group of foreign tourists, constituting for 15.3% of total global tourists (Tunisia Ministry of Tourism, 2015). The result might be different if posts in other language site of TripAdvisors forum were counted together. Lastly, it can be explained that social media amplification does not appear to be at a level where it counteracts other sources of information. Therefore, potential tourists who were influenced by information provided by different sources then decided not to visit Tunisia outnumbered people who stated they would still visit the country in TripAdvisor forum.

One advantage of taking social media as a source of information is getting a diversity of opinions. Potential tourists not only hear from local people but also previous tourists about their own experience and thoughts. Therefore, social media gradually becomes more trustworthy than mass media or travel agents (Starbird et al., 2010). Nevertheless, some posts in the forum indicate that a number of topics and posts was closed by TripAdvisor or were reported by other users. It seems that those closed topics and posts expressed negative opinions about Tunisia. Some TripAdvisor users are not in agreement with the closing down of topics because they believe people should be allowed to hear from different voices to get a full picture of the current situation in Tunisia. This also questions the objectivity of the forum.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to uncover the changes in international tourists’ risk perception towards Tunisia during the period from 2010 to 2015. In order to reach the objective of the study, one overarching research question and three sub-RQs were set out. The findings showed that the research objectives, the research question as well as all three sub-RQs were fulfilled.

The results showed that tourists mostly heightened awareness during the time of the Arab Spring Revolution in December 2010 and the three terrorist attacks in March, June and November 2015. Although there were many incidents related to political instability and terrorism during the period from 2012 to 2014, the increase of tourists’ posts during this time was fairly insignificant. One explanation could be that tourists were not the target of those terrorist attacks and the political unrest happened far from areas popular with tourists (borders with Algeria and Libya). The terrorist attacks which mainly targeted tourists made a much greater impact than that targeted police, military or government (Sönmez, 1998). The study also indicated tourists’ awareness heightened only during the first month after an incident. In the case of Tunisia, terrorism-related risk received higher attention by potential tourists than political risks did.

Risk perception of tourists towards terrorism in Tunisia related to the reoccurrence of terrorist attacks, the possibility of attacks happening to their family and themselves, the effectiveness of security force, and the increasing influence of ISIS in the region. Being a Western and/or a tourist makes people’s fear of encountering terrorist attack rise. The improvement in security leads to a positive change in tourists’ risk perception. Risk perception of tourists towards political instability in Tunisia linked to the fear of more protests, demonstrations, and strikes inside the country, and border wars. Specifically, tourists increased perceived risk before and during election time. Some tourists also perceived that the Tunisian government was unlikely to be able to protect its citizens and foreign tourists. Tourists also concerned about the State of Emergency and the curfew because of the lack of official information. The political situation in Tunisia, however, was positively and optimistically considered by some other tourists.

It was shown in the findings that by exposure to media messages via social media, potential tourists’ destination risk perception could be changed. Potential tourists were influenced by information provided by previous tourists, locals/residents in the destination as well as people who had knowledge about the destination on social media. Potential tourists want to know about the situation in the destination from a previous tourist or a resident’s points of view. Therefore, they seek experience and advice in such forums as TripAdvisor. The results showed that tourists who concerned and hesitated about
their future trips felt reassured and decided to continue going to Tunisia after reading advice and experience given by previous tourists, and locals or residents in Tunisia. At the same time, social media also reflected tourists’ risk perception through their concerns and their assessments about the destination. Besides, it pointed out the remarkable influence of travel advisories issued by home country’s government on tourist’s risk perception and decision to visit. Not only because the availability of insurance and tour packages depends on these advisories, but because tourists trust their home country’s government to keep them safe. In social media messages, tourists also indicated their intention to visit.

6.1 Implications

6.1.1 Theoretical implication

This study has two implications, a theoretical and a practical one. From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the knowledge of risk perception in the tourism field by adding social media exposure as one factor influencing risk perception of tourists. Referred to the integrated model of tourists’ risk perception (Figure 1), social media exposure has not been considered as an influencing factor in tourist’ risk perception in previous studies. The role of social media in reflecting tourists’ risk perception was also emphasized in the results.

6.1.2 Practical implications

Based on the findings from this study, several suggestions for Tunisian DMOs were determined to help mitigate the consequences of terrorism and political instability on the country’s tourism industry.

First of all, the Tunisian government should localize the incidents by redirecting tourists to other destinations. The study of the generalization effect, or “neighborhood perception” was first introduced by Hollier (1991) who emphasized that when terror attacks happened in one particular destination, tourists tended to perceive risks also in the surrounding areas. Trips to the whole country or the whole region will be cancelled as a result. In the case of terrorism, attacks usually do not happen throughout the country. Even with political instability, there are still some areas in the country invulnerable to the unrest. It is essential for the government to localize the incidents/unrest in one particular area. It should be clearly stated that other parts of the country are not impacted by terrorism/political unrest and are safe for tourists. In case one tourist destination is attacked, the government can redirect tourists to other areas of the country and officially state that the other destinations are better protected. In fact, the Turkish
government has been very successful in applying this approach. Similar to Tunisia, Turkey has suffered from an unstable situation and many terrorist attacks recently. However, Turkey still received more than 36 million foreign tourists in 2015 and ranked 6th among the world’s top international tourism destination (UNWTO, 2015). The Tunisian government and DMOs should work closely with foreign expertise from Turkey, as one example, to learn from their experience and success.

Then, the DMOs should take advantage of social media amplification. An official account/page of the DMOs on social media networks such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, etc. is an effective marketing tool. Due to social media amplification, information and/or official announcements by DMOs can reach more people, including potential tourists, and more quickly. Compared to traditional websites, in which tourists need to actively look for information, social media have the significant advantage of bringing information to tourists. Specifically, people can receive the content shared through social networks (peer recommendations) or users have the content placed on the front page or in their news feed. With the help of social media, DMOs are able to actively provide tourists with information they need or are interested in. Any time DMOs update new information, make a statement or upload pictures or videos on social media sites, the content automatically appears on the users’ newsfeed. Besides, social media also provide the DMOs with a more effective communication system to interact with tourists and potential tourists. The DMOs should follow travel forums, such as TripAdvisors, to capture the concerns of current tourists, among other issues. DMOs can answer/address tourists’ questions/issues much faster via social media than via more traditional methods.

Next, the government needs to provide tourists with clear and sufficient information about where it is safe to go, and at what time of the year (if any). For the suggested destinations, the government should stress how secure they are and reassure tourists that they will be safe. Analysis of the posts in TripAdvisor show that terrorist attacks on government, police, military, etc. (during the period of time from 2012 to 2014) did not raise the awareness of tourists as much as attacks targeting tourists (2015). When tourists are the target of terrorists, it greatly influences tourists’ risk perception (Sönmez, 1998). Therefore, governments should highlight the purpose of the terrorist attacks as well as the number of tourists involved since it will reduce tourists’ risk perception if they know they are not the target.

A state of emergency throughout the country and a curfew in the capital has been imposed since November 2015. Both were also imposed during the Arab-Spring Revolution. At that time, many tourists were confused about what a state of emergency and a curfew implied. This time, the DMOs should clearly define that a state of emergency just means heightened security throughout the country and also be specific about the curfew hours in Tunis. Posts in the TripAdvisor forum reflected the difficulty tourists encountered with curfew hours. Because tourists arrived at the airport after the curfew started, they could
not go to their hotels but had to stay overnight in the airport. Since the curfew has been imposed in Tunis again, the DMOs should pay attention to this difficulty for tourists. Either flights should be changed so that they arrive before the curfew starts or services (accommodation, food and beverage, etc.) in the airport should be improved. If a large group of package tourists arrive at the airport after the curfew hour, the DMOs should arrange with police that they can proceed safely to their hotels.

Local emergency managers and tourist representatives should be involved in the crisis management planning process (Beirman, 2003). Based on the perspectives of previous tourists, the emergency management system is not effective enough. There was a lack of appropriate involvement and collaboration among security forces, ambulances and other support from local authorities during the crisis. Local Tunisians were highly praised for their helpfulness, while local authorities were blamed for their slow reactions in the TripAdvisor posts. Foreign tourists demand a more active and effective crisis management from local and national governments. Tour operators should be supported by the government and DMOs to reduce prices and costs, as a short-term strategy. Initiatives that stimulate domestic tourism, develop new touristic products and look for new markets are helpful in mitigating the negative influence on tourism in the long-term.

After the incidents in 2015, the Tunisian government immediately increased the number of police on the beach and provided their security force with better arms. Hotels and resorts also increased the number of their security guards at the entrance gates and inside the premises. It was an appropriate move and resulted in a very positive response in a short time. Tourists felt more secure during their holiday and when they came back, told others (either online or offline) about the improvement with an optimistic outlook. However, the Tunisian government should also understand the importance of military/police discipline. The posts revealed that the tourists’ perception of the security forces before and during the incidents was not good. The Tunisian police was blamed for their irresponsible and unprofessional reactions during the crisis. Those images destroy tourists’ confidence in the security force and question the ability of destination government to protect its foreign tourists. Moreover, the visible presence of heavily armed police does not always bring about a positive outcome, especially for a touristic destination. Tunisia’s government can ensure that security remains high while easing the public’s concern by increasing the number of undercover police officers instead of uniformed ones. It is also worth noting that a significant portion of WOM and e-WOM comes from locals and residents in the country. If Tunisian residents feel insecure and threatened, they will speak out about it in many ways. Foreign tourists can hardly trust a destination government when its own citizens do not.
CHAPTER 7: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study contains two limitations. First, the number of posts is not equal to the number of people. The forum has a group of active users who are more engaged in replying and giving advice than others. Consequently, the number of posts given from this group of users constitutes for a large portion of total post numbers in TripAdvisor forum. Therefore, the findings only reflect the mainstream of the forum (tourists’ intention and level of safety in Tunisia). Second, the scope of this study was limited to the English forum site only. In fact, according to the National Institute of Statistics – Tunisia (2015), British were the third largest group of tourists coming to Tunisia in 2014, constituting 15.3% of total global tourists. Germans and French were the largest and second largest markets, making up 19.6% and 15.4% of foreign visitors, respectively. Furthermore, Tunisia was a French protectorate from 1881 to 1956 which has created many connections between the two countries. French is one of three primarily languages used in Tunisia, which also includes the local Tunisian dialect and Arabic. Therefore, German and French forum sites, and especially the latter one, could reveal different attitudes, concerns and motivations.

Future researchers should pay more attention on the selection of the platform so that the number of posts is close to or equal to the number of people. In that case, an individual idea weighs equivalently to each other. The mainstream of platform will be more likely to present the factual statistics. Also, TripAdvisor’s German and French sites should be studied in order to obtain a comprehensive view of the main groups of tourists travelling to Tunisia.
REFERENCES


44


Newman, N. (2009). *The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism: A study of how newspapers and broadcasters in the UK and US are responding to a wave of participatory social media, and a historic shift in control towards individual consumers*. The Reuters Institute for the
Study of Journalism. Retrieved from:


### Appendix A:
Timeline events in Tunisia from 2010 to 2015 (Tunisia profile-Timeline, 2016; START, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec-2010</td>
<td>Protests break out over unemployment and political restrictions, and spread nationwide – Arab Spring started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-2011</td>
<td>President Ben Ali goes into exile amid continuing protests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-2011</td>
<td>Prime Minister Ghannouchi resigns, responding to demands by demonstrators calling for a clean break with the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-2011</td>
<td>Curfew imposed amid fresh street protests/ Attacks on police and military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-2011</td>
<td>Violence erupts in Sidi Bouzid after results of Tunisia's first free election are announced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-2012</td>
<td>The government imposes an overnight curfew in eight areas following riots by Islamists against an art exhibition. One man died after being shot in the head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-2012</td>
<td>Four attackers killed in clashes at the US embassy amid protests over an anti-Islam film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-2012</td>
<td>Clashes between police and protesters in Siliana, southwest of Tunis. More than 150 people injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-2013</td>
<td>Prime Minister Jebali resigns after Ennahda party rejects his proposals to form a government of technocrats after the killing of an opposition anti-Islamist leader. Ennahda rejects opposition allegations that it was behind the killing of Chokri Belaid, whose death prompted violent protests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-2013</td>
<td>Armed confrontations between fugitive groups and security forces in the Chaambi mountains. Tunisian Security Forces are conducting a security operation. There have been reports of violent clashes between security forces and Salafist groups in several towns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-2013</td>
<td>Assassination of opposition politician Mohamed Brahmi prompts mass demonstrations, a general strike and calls for the government to resign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-2013</td>
<td>Attack on police in Tunis and attack on military in Kasserine, 9 people dead and 7 injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-2013</td>
<td>Attack on military in Kasserine, 1 dead, 7 injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-2013</td>
<td>Attack on military in Sidi Ali Bin Aoun, 8 people dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-2013</td>
<td>Bombing on Sousse beach and in Monastir, 1 dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-2013</td>
<td>Bombing on Sousse beach, 1 dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-2014</td>
<td>The suspected Islamist assassin of Belaid is killed in a police raid, one of seven heavily armed terrorists slain in an operation launched at a house in a Tunis suburb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-2014</td>
<td>Violent clash between an armed group and security forces in Fermana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-2014</td>
<td>Gunmen attacked a house belonging to the Minister of the Interior in Kasserine, killing 4 policemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-2014</td>
<td>A series of attacks attack in the Chaambi mountains which killed 16 and injured 18 Tunisian soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-2014</td>
<td>Attack on military in Sbeitla, 1 dead, 5 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-2014</td>
<td>Attack on military and police in Nebeur and Tourief, 6 dead and 10 injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-2015</td>
<td>Attack on tourists in Bardo Museum in Tunis, 21 dead, 50 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-2015</td>
<td>Attack on tourists on Sousse beach, 38 dead, 39 injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-2015</td>
<td>Bombing in shopping mall in Tunis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B:

Examples of topics and posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic ID</th>
<th>Post ID</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Questions/ Opening posts</th>
<th>Answers/ Replies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>April 16, 2015</td>
<td>Hi, me and my boyfriend both 20 have booked to go to Tunisia, Sousse, in September for 9 days. We booked this trip in December however since the trouble in Tunisia recently we (mostly I) are worried about our safety. We are staying in a resort but were planning on going on Thomas cook trips to the Sahara, the zoo and Mediana. The travel agents have assured us that it is still safe to visit however I just want some advice from people who have visited or are going on holiday to Tunisia whether or not you think it’s safe and still worth going to?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>April 16, 2015</td>
<td>As safe as any other country in the world, does the UK not have shootings? Riots? Bomb explosions? Muggings? Rape?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>April 17, 2015</td>
<td>There are a few regulars to the forum who have visited in recent weeks and all their comments here have been uplifting and positive regards the situation now. One or two regulars are there at the moment and at least two others are due to go this week. A couple of hospital appointments this month have prevented us going! So.....If all that doesn't re assure you. I don't know what will ;-)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>April 17, 2015</td>
<td>Thanks very much for reassuring me! Was just bit nervous about the situation and the fact we are young and it’s our first holiday together. I do feel a lot better now about going and feel very excited again :). Hope you have a great holiday!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>April 17, 2015</td>
<td>Go and enjoy Tunisia, beautiful, and</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>April 17, 2015</td>
<td>Just for more reassurance! Nobody would be going tomorrow or any time soon. If it was deemed unsafe ;-) The airlines would be grounded! Like during the Revolution of 2011, when our holiday to the Marhaba Salem was cancelled.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>April 17, 2015</td>
<td>We have been to Tunisia often, we went include last Sept, end of march, we are booked for June (which can’t come quick enough) and also taking our granddaughters who are 6 &amp; 4 next year, so..... We feel safe, I would say safer than most of Spanish Costas. Though not sure next year with two young ‘uns will be too relaxing!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>April 20, 2015</td>
<td>I returned last night with my family from our 1st time in Tunisia, there were 8 of us ranging from 10yrs to 63yrs &amp; i can honestly say we all had the most fabulous holiday &amp; can’t wait to go back. We made some great friends (locals) &amp; got a great tan :) You go &amp; enjoy yourself xxx</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>August 17, 2011</td>
<td>Riots/ violence. Anybody can comment about country internal issues and also in relation with neighbor Libya. Going to Skanes in October. Thanks!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>August 17, 2011</td>
<td>You should be fine in Scanes South Tunisia there have been reports of fights in the streets. There will be elections during October not sure of the dates. If you are there at that time the towns might be noisy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>August 17, 2011</td>
<td>When I saw the topic title, i thought for a second I had strayed into the London Forum! The elections take place during the last week of October. I am sure you may witness political meetings /rallies if you are in the towns Monastir is &quot;next door&quot; to Skanes. It’s difficult to say how things will &quot;pan out&quot;. It’s just a situation I suppose you should monitor leading up to your visit. The situation in Libya as I write has</td>
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</table>
changed dramatically. I was planning a visit to Tunisia in November, but who knows? I have been twice already this year and had a great time. You will be made very welcome. I might add that during the Revolution at the beginning of the year, although tour companies brought people home, the resorts were ok. My brother was there then (his first visit) and he intends to return. Just keep checking "returnees” comments on this forum. For general info you might wish to also check this site http://www.nomarmiteintunisia.co.uk/

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>August 17, 2011</td>
<td>It could be there is now less demand for Skanes as the new airport is quite a distance compared to the other resorts. Also First Choice is only going to feature hotels offering all inclusive - perhaps Skanes hotels not offering AI during winter. Just my thoughts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>August 17, 2011</td>
<td>I think if you look at Thomas Cook, holidays are there. They and Thomson have been sharing flights since April. I booked twice this year with Thomson, but flew with Thomas Cook Airlines Star makes a relevant point regarding winter schedules. However, I intend to go back soon, if not November, then maybe early spring next year. TC has a lot of deals at the moment for this period. There are lots of packages for these times. Don’t worry ,enjoy your stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>August 7, 2013</td>
<td>Unrest in Tunisia. Hi my family and I are visiting Tunisia in September have been reading some of the political unrest is it still safe to visit? I believe we are staying in the holiday village Manar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>August 7, 2013</td>
<td>You are ok in the Tourist areas. In the towns avoid any large gatherings protests etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>August 7, 2013</td>
<td>I would jump on the next plane to Enfidha given the chance!! Your tour company wouldn’t send you unless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 7, 2013</td>
<td>It's deemed unsafe to. It's not tourists that they have a problem with. Enjoy Tunisia. 126 days till I go back, can't wait!!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 7, 2013</td>
<td>The tour operators are guided by the FCO and also by their people who are based there. I will be going in September unless Thomas Cook tells me otherwise. There have been a couple of recent very small demos in Sousse and Madhia but these things can happen anywhere. I think it's a case of having your wits about you if you are out and about. To be honest, there was a demo in Huddersfield the other week and I just walked in the opposite direction - exactly the same would apply if I was abroad. Is anyone seriously thinking of cancelling at this point?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 7, 2013</td>
<td>Hi, we were there last year a week after some trouble, the curfews where only on for a few days, but were lifted before our arrival, didn't affect our holiday at all. Some excursions may be cancelled to troublesome areas, but your rep should advice on them...Going in 24 sleeps...can't wait.........</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 7, 2013</td>
<td>Go and enjoy. We are in Sousse at the minute and nothing happening. Tunis is in the news but they are reporting nothing major just Tunisians protesting against government. Avoid Tunis (though things could change by the time you get here) and any protests, but wouldn't you in the UK?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 8, 2013</td>
<td>The major protest of the opposition is not in Downtown Tunis but it's in Bardo city west of Tunis. I was in the protest and haven't seen any violence, just citizens shouting, flags rising and people having good times in Ramadan! It's completely safe and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>Date: December 23, 2014</td>
<td>We are looking into a trip to Tunisia in early February, but the recent article in Huffington Post regarding the political and safety situation there has me concerned. We will be traveling with a reputable company but I would like some independent information regarding that. I am particularly interested in photography and historical and cultural areas. Also, my father was captured at Kasserine Pass and I wanted to view that area as well.</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>Date: December 23, 2014</td>
<td>In general there are no problems with safety in most parts of Tunisia. Sunday they had elections and there are chosen a president. Some area's like the desert near Libya was always an area forbidden for tourists. Now they also give negative advice for some mountain areas on the border with Algeria because the Tunisian army fights against the rebels there. Which company are you travelling with and what is the itinerary of your journey? Is Kasserine part of the tour or would you do that on your own (as it is in the unsafe area on the border)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>Date: December 23, 2014</td>
<td>Rather than take advice from a Huffington post journalist, take advice from the US state dept., or log on to the UK FCO website. These sites offer current information, and have no interest in grabbing headlines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>Date: December 26, 2014</td>
<td>My dear I can tell you as a Tunisian American that you are more than safe in Tunisia. You can find articles that make you think twice about visiting even beautiful peaceful Des Moines Iowa if dig deep enough :) I am of course kidding but, I can tell you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
actual facts and let you decide on your own: Tunisia Had a full/True authentic revolution about 4 years ago. As clearly a very educated person yourself, you must know revolutions are a bloody mess even when they are needed to free nations. Yet Tunisia managed to have a revolution in a peaceful way. How many. Tourists were hurt since the height of the revolution till now? The answer is Zero! How many days did Tunisia lose power or water or any essential services like hospitals during the revolution? Zero days, Zero Minutes. You are as a tourist a guest of our Nation and you will understand how much we value that soon after your arrival in Tunisia. Sure it’s a touristy country only recently seeing the economy come back, so sure you'll get the typical price hike for being a tourist or the occasional annoying sales guy but your safety is not something you should worry too much about. Yes Tunisia's Army is fighting Islamic Terrorists like we all are around the world, the fact that Libya and the frontiers are so close should not make you scared rather aware and informed. Register with the US Embassy as they suggest and feel free to contact me if you need any further info or help!

Thank you so much....and you are right, there are safety issues to be found anywhere...but a modicum of common sense is probably all that is needed....appreciate the answer.

We have visited twice this year and around 7 times since the Revolution of 2011 I would have no qualms about visiting the resorts tomorrow. If it’s the holiday resorts you plan to visit. No problem what so ever. I would not though visit the Kasserine Region at this time. Unless you are sure about what you are doing and
where you want to go. Take advice when you arrive on safety re your trip. There are of course US Cemetery’s and Commonwealth Cemetery’s you may wish to visit to pay respects. Advice on here would be forth coming if you wish further assistance on that. But of course these places (War memorials) do have websites for more information on access times to go, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>129</th>
<th>997</th>
<th>June 13, 2012</th>
<th>I'm traveling to Sousse on Sunday with my family including my 6yr old daughter and will be her first time away, am now really worried with the trouble that has gone on this week, what would you guys and girls do if it was you? Is it safe to travel or shall I contact my travel agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>June 13, 2012</td>
<td>Your best bet is to contact your travel agent. There are no travel restrictions shown on here which is usually pretty accurate, so it can’t be that bad. I returned from Sousse yesterday having been there for a week, and we didn’t hear or see any trouble that is now being portrayed in the news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>June 13, 2012</td>
<td>The curfew probably will be finished by then but that is the problem. If flight does land and you not clear customs until after curfew starts, what is situation getting from airport. Not seen any posts yet from anyone who has been in that situation. The retimed B.A. flight will arrive around 7.15 pm which still tough going getting out of airport before 8pm curfew. Passengers on the Tunisair flight arriving 8.40 pm - and considering Tunisair not been on time for month or so - will have even more difficulty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>June 13, 2012</td>
<td>I’d contact travel agent and see if there’s a possibility of changing destination if things worsen then I’d sit tight at the moment and see what develops over the next couple of days. Travel companies won’t send</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
you if there’s a risk. Personally the UK had riots last year and it was confined to the cities and burnt itself out within the week. Yep I’d wait a couple of days; if it severely worsened I’d look to changing destination. Awful that it is, you’re supposed to be having a holiday and are responsible for children. Shame for the Tunisian tourist industry. If I was going just with a party of adults unless it got really bad, I’d risk it. Less hope it settles quickly, good luck.

Cheers all, were going to sit tit for now and see what the developments are, I will not take any risk with my daughter or my nephew or myself at that :)

If you follow the law you are not even allowed to leave the hotel during the curfew, so in theory you cannot go to other hotels. Just read somewhere else curfew should only start at 22 today, so maybe it will be lifted soon, and it seems they needed it to arrest the salafists that caused the troubles...

Note: Keyword searched for Topic ID 3: safety, bomb
  Keyword searched for Topic ID 26: riots
  Keyword searched for Topic ID 27: unrest
  Keyword searched for Topic ID 39: concern
  Keyword searched for Topic ID 129: safe