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# The effects of socio-political context on Tourism

Effects of  
socio-political  
context on  
Tourism

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of tourists' perceptions of political and economic instability and risks of terrorism on their intentions to travel to countries associated with various risks.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A total of 648 Greek, Israeli and Portuguese students completed a questionnaire focusing on their perceptions concerning factors that shape their travel decisions.

**Findings** – The findings showed that among tourists from Greece and Portugal, the experience of economic crisis and the salience of economic and political hardships mitigated their intentions to travel to destinations with similar problems. These factors had no effect on Israelis, who have not experienced such problems in their country. Frequent terrorist incidents diminished the intentions of Greek tourists to travel to destinations marked by terrorism, such as Israel. Thus, different factors affect tourists' travel-related decisions in each of the three countries.

**Originality/value** – The study sheds light on how potential tourists construe the risks of traveling to specific destination countries based on hazards in their home countries, a topic that to date has received little research attention.

**Keywords** Risk perception, Young tourists, Political instability, Economic crises

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and accounts for seven percent of global exports. Indeed, tourism has a major impact on a country's GDP (10 percent: Why tourism?, n.d.) and significantly affects its balance of payments. Natural hazards and exogenous events such as terrorism, wars, political instability and health or economic crises are presumed to have major effects on tourism. Such effects are especially pronounced due to globalization and the media, which turn every isolated incident into an event with global impact (Keller and Bieger, 2011). Hence, countries that wish to increase the number of incoming tourists must seek to understand tourists' behavior and the factors that influence



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their destination-related decisions. The objective of this study was to examine how economic and political crises (political instability and terrorist attacks) in potential tourists' countries of origin affect their decision to travel to destinations marked by political or economic crises. Specifically, the study sought to illuminate how potential tourists construe the risks in destination countries based on specific hazards in their home countries.

During the last decade, international crises that affect tourism, such as epidemics, political unrest and economic crises, have become more frequent and their influence has broadened, such that most countries have experienced the consequences of such events (Keller and Bieger, 2011; Neumayer, 2004; Teitler-Regev *et al.*, 2014; Yang and Wong, 2012a; Hugo and Miller, 2017). Wolff and Larsen (2016) contend that the influence of such extreme events depends on their salience in the tourists' awareness: As these events become more prevalent, they exert a stronger impact on tourists' choice of destinations.

Destination choice may also be shaped by the socio-political and economic context in the tourists' countries of origin as well as by their actual experiences. Hence, it is important to understand the mechanisms underlying tourists' selection of travel destinations, and particularly their perceptions of crisis-related events and the impact of the socio-political and economic context in their countries of origin. The current study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by examining the interrelationships among tourists' perceptions of political and economic instability and terrorism risks, their own experiences of crises and their intentions to travel to countries with various risks. The study targeted student tourists from three countries – Israel, Greece and Portugal. In recent years students have begun traveling more extensively, not only for educational purposes but also due to expanded tourism possibilities such as low-cost flights. Today about a fifth of international tourism is based on young people, especially students, with young tourists constituting the fastest growing segment of foreign travelers (Promsivapallop and Kannaovakun, 2017).

These particular three tourist destinations were chosen due to their many similarities. All three countries place emphasis on the importance of the family and to a large extent are collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 1983). All are well known for sea and sun vacations while also offering historical and religious sites as well as agricultural tourism. In addition, during the last decade all three countries have experienced a variety of crises. Portugal and Greece have experienced economic crises. Moreover, since the economic crisis in Greece was accompanied by rioting in the streets, the country has an international image of political instability. Israel's security problems (including terrorism) also contribute to its international image of political instability. Thus, because we sought to examine the relationship between intention to travel and tourists' perceptions of economic and political instability and terrorism, we chose three countries marked by one or more of these problems. In addition, a research partnership was established between colleagues in the three countries who share an interest in the antecedents and factors shaping the destination choices of young students.

## 2. Literature review

Previous research has examined the effects of adverse events on tourists' perceptions and on the actual numbers of tourists traveling to areas affected by different types of crises. For example, Yang and Wong (2012a, b) found a decline in tourist numbers in the wake of terrorist incidents. Yet, Liu and Pratt (2017) found that from the global perspective, in the long-run terrorism does not have an adverse impact on tourism demand. Teitler-Regev *et al.* (2014) examined the effects of three types of crises – economic crises, terrorism and epidemics – on tourists from five countries (USA, Germany, UK, Japan and France) traveling to three destinations (Singapore, Spain and Vietnam). The findings showed that the positive effects of economic crisis in the destination country and the negative effects of exchange rates significantly exceed the effects of terrorism or epidemics on the number of tourists.

Theocharous *et al.* (2018) used monthly arrival data from 1987 to 2012 to measure the effect of political instability in four Eastern Mediterranean countries: Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and Israel. The results showed that political instability had a strong negative impact on tourist arrivals in all four destinations, accompanied by a significant increase in volatility. Isaac and Velden (2018) used a self-administered survey to examine intentions to visit Turkey among a sample of German tourists over the age of 18. The results of the survey indicated that the political situation in Turkey was an influential factor in the travel behavior of German tourists. Overall, the findings pointed to a strong tendency to perceive Turkey as an unsafe destination together with low chances of traveling to Turkey in the coming 12 months.

In a review study, Karl and Schmude (2017) concluded that tourist characteristics (e.g. age, gender, education and income) and subjective perceptions of risks have the greatest influence on destination choice. This finding is in line with the results of other studies (e.g. Reichel *et al.*, 2009; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009; Scorrano *et al.*, 2018).

Ritchie *et al.* (2017) identified homogenous segments of outbound travelers according to their risk perceptions and the risk-reduction strategies they adopted, as well as socio-demographic data and travel-related behavior. The researchers contended that travelers' psychological attributes contribute more significantly to traveler profiles than situational or socio-demographic features and that individuals who have lower risk perceptions tend to be older and are generally unlikely to seek out any travel health and safety information.

A review study by Perpiña *et al.* (2017) also indicated that risk perception is related to the decision to travel. This study reviewed 62 studies that focused on the attributes and perceived risks of touristic destinations. The study found that the attributes used to assess destination image perception usually overlap the cognitive attributes used to assess risk perception. Hence, risk construal conceivably shapes destination choice and intention to travel.

In addition, many studies focused on the effects of different crises on tourism. The researchers identified five risks that potentially affect tourists' intention to travel: terrorism (Floyd *et al.*, 2003); natural disasters (Pearlman and Melnik, 2008; Specht, 2006); political instability (Ioannides and Apostolopoulos, 1999); crime (Pizam and Mansfeld, 2006); and health hazards (Leggat, 2006; Wilks, 2006).

In a study of risk perceptions among tourists, Cui *et al.* (2016) examined subjective and objective factors that affect perceptions of tourism risks. The subjective factors were related to physical characteristics and psychological processes. Among the objective factors influencing risk perceptions were physical risk, economic risk (such as the risk of losing money because tourism products were priced far beyond their cost), equipment risk (i.e. dangers caused by equipment failures, such as traffic accidents), social risk (i.e. experiencing social insecurity, political turmoil, terrorism or crime while enjoying tourism products), psychological risk (insecurity when confronted with foreign languages and cultural barriers), time risk (excessive use of time while consuming tourism products) and opportunity loss (the risk of missing out on an alternative product after purchasing one tourism product).

Carballo *et al.* (2017) studied risk perception among tourists from Germany and the UK. The main conclusion was that tourists perceived risks that are beyond their control (e.g. insufficient health care if needed, assaults involving physical violence, traffic accidents, adverse weather conditions or natural disasters) as more influential on their tourism decisions than risks that are more controllable (e.g. animal-transmitted illnesses, excessive exposure to the sun, hotel robberies, fires or human-induced disasters).

Larsen *et al.* (2011) compared risk perception before and after two major terrorist attacks, one in Madrid in 2001 and the other in London in 2005 and found that these terrorist attacks had a direct and immediate effect on the number of tourists and their risk perceptions. Nevertheless, over the long run the terror attacks caused no changes in tourists' general intention to travel or in their risk perceptions regarding destinations. Similar results were found by Wolff and Larsen (2014), who compared perceived risk in traveling to Norway before

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and after the July 22, 2011 massacre. The results indicate a small but significant change in tourist risk perceptions with respect to Norway. On the other hand, Gray and Wilson (2009) compared different types of risks and found that terrorism was perceived as more risky than other risks such as physical and social hazards (high crime rates and social unrest).

Prior research has concentrated on the effects of the social, cultural and political context on tourists' perceptions of destinations, claiming that past events affect how people living in a specific country construe their perceptions of risk (Garg, 2013). For example, Urry and Larsen (2011) contended that people look at the world through the filter of ideas, skills, expectations, cultural background and demographics, such as age and gender. Therefore, individual backgrounds and experiences create a unique tourist focus that influences the perceptions of culturally diverse visitors. In a study of Chinese tourists to the UK, Lin *et al.* (2015) found that the Chinese tourists are influenced by culture-specific rather than destination-specific factors. Similar results were obtained by Kapiki *et al.* (2015), who studied Chinese tourists to Greece. The findings of Veréb *et al.* (2018) suggest that traveler profiles are based on individual characteristics such as personal values rather than on nationality or on socio-demographic features. The personal value preferences of cosmopolitan travelers were found to be a stronger predictor of their travel preferences than their nationality or socio-demographic characteristics.

Indeed, travelers' background, past experiences, lifestyle and sociocultural characteristics shape their risk evaluations regarding various destinations (Desivilya *et al.*, 2015; Hawkins *et al.*, 2001; Rittichainuwat, 2013). For instance, in a comparative study of the intentions of Israeli and Polish students to visit tourist destinations marked by different types of hazards (health, economic and terrorism), Desivilya *et al.* (2015) showed that young Israelis were less willing to travel to destinations with possible risks of terrorism than were young Poles. Israelis' frequent experiences of terrorist attacks presumably made such incidents highly salient in their perceptions, hence enhancing their reluctance to encounter such adverse events while traveling abroad. In contrast, terrorism is not prominent in the perceptions of their Polish counterparts due to the paucity of such incidents in Poland. Thus, such incidents had only a marginal impact on their choices regarding destinations where terrorism is prevalent.

Similarly, research examining the influence of crime on destination selection showed that tourists who had encountered criminal activity in the past were more concerned about this type of risk (Seabra *et al.*, 2013). In addition, a study of the effects of hazardous weather conditions on subsequent risk judgments indicated that personal experience with extreme weather enhanced perceptions that climate change poses a considerable risk (Van Der Linden, 2014).

The above research strongly suggests that for potential tourists, harsh and perilous incidents in their home countries are more vivid in their memories, making them more likely to avoid such experiences when selecting travel destinations.

As indicated by Voltes-Dorta *et al.* (2015), more empirical research is needed to acquire an in-depth understanding of how different crises at home, such as economic crisis, political tensions and terrorism, influence the risk perceptions of potential tourists and how these perceptions in turn affect their destination choice.

Previous research clearly showed that crises of various sorts tend to lower the number of potential international tourists traveling to an affected area. Moreover, prior studies indicated that the specific nature of these effects depends on the type of crisis. Yet, the question of how potential tourists' past experiences in their countries of origin affect their travel intentions remains in need of further explication.

The current study attempted to expand the knowledge base in this domain. The effects of the socio-political and economic context were investigated, especially the impact of economic and political crises (political instability and terrorist attacks) in the potential tourists' countries of origin on their risk perceptions and choice of destinations. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to examine how the following factors affect the risk perceptions of potential

tourists and their intention to travel to each destination: perceived importance of economic crisis; perceived significance of political instability; perceived significance of terrorist incidents; perceived significance of health hazards; image of destination country; and potential tourists' attitudes toward risks.

Our hypotheses are based mainly on the Social Amplification of Risk framework (SARF) (Kasperson *et al.*, 1988). According to this framework, a major event (e.g. terrorist incident) will interact with psychological, institutional and cultural processes in ways that may amplify (or attenuate) people's responses to the event. Such processes can capture how individuals experience major events, such as economic hardships, living in a politically instable country and security issues resulting from terrorism. When such an event occurs, information flows through various channels to the public and its various cultural groups. This information is interpreted largely based on its interrelations with the above processes.

Based on the SARF model and previous empirical findings, our hypothesis is that tourists' experiences of crises in their home countries contribute to the salience of such hazards in their construal of risks in potential travel destinations and their selection of such destinations. The following hypotheses are proposed:

*H1.* Greater perceived importance of economic crises will mitigate the intention to choose a destination marked by economic crises.

This hypothesis is based on the findings of Cui *et al.* (2016) regarding perceptions of physical and psychological risks related to tourism in an individual's decision-making:

*H2.* Higher perceived significance of political instability will mitigate the intention to travel to destinations marked by political instability.

This hypothesis is based on the findings of Isaac (2019) and Theocharous *et al.* (2018). These studies found that political instability in a destination country had a strong negative impact on tourist arrivals:

*H3.* Greater perceived significance of terrorist incidents will mitigate the intention to choose destinations marked by terrorism.

This hypothesis is based on the results of Desivilya *et al.* (2015) indicating that young people were less willing to travel to destinations with possible risks of terrorism:

*H4.* There will be a difference in the factors influencing tourists from different countries of origin to travel to destinations marked by crises (e.g. economic crisis, political instability).

This hypothesis is based on the results of Garg (2013) and of Urry and Larsen (2011) indicating that cultural difference factors influence respondents' risk perceptions.

### **3. Methods**

#### *3.1 Research participants*

*3.1.1 Characteristics of young tourists from the three countries of origin.* Young Israelis, Portuguese and Greeks exhibit different patterns of travel, mainly as a result of their country of residence. Portugal and Greece are members of the European Union. This membership offers the residents of these countries a great deal of mobility across the continent of Europe for purposes of vacation, study and work. On the other hand, Israel is surrounded by hostile countries, such that travelling to most neighboring countries in the Middle East is not recommended, as well as it is virtually impossible. This is why Israelis, and especially young people, travel to faraway destinations. Upon completing their military service, many young Israelis take long trips abroad. This is considered a normative pattern and a widely studied social phenomenon (Noy and Cohen, 2005).

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*3.1.2 Sample profiles.* Since the research aim was to examine the factors affecting young people's travel decisions, the focus was on undergraduate and graduate students at various academic institutions in Israel, Greece and Portugal. The sample consists of students, since today young people, many of them students, account for about a fifth of international tourism. In addition, students constitute a convenience sample since the researchers in the three countries are affiliated with higher education institutions. The entire sample encompassed 648 participants: 277 Israeli students (43 percent), 200 Portuguese students (30 percent) and 171 Greek students (26 percent).

### *3.2 Research instruments and measures*

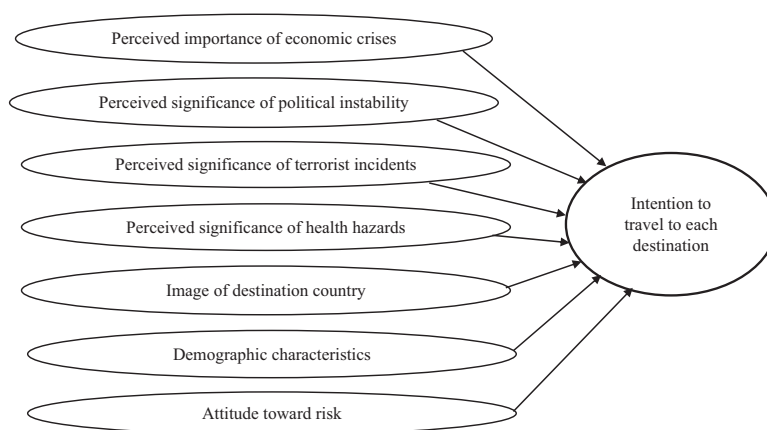
Since the objective of the study was to examine potential tourists' attitudes and perceptions, a questionnaire was chosen as the research tool. Such research instruments are commonly used in social psychology and behavioral economics as they are designed to gauge how the study participants construe their experiences. The research tool was partially based on the questionnaire developed, tested and validated by Desivilya *et al.* (2015). The perception section of this questionnaire was used since it contains statements regarding various perceived travel risks (including economic and political instability, terrorist incidents and health hazards). The original version of the questionnaire was in English and was translated into each of the languages by two researchers from each of the three research teams using the back-translation method (Cha *et al.*, 2007). The questionnaire included the following sections:

- (1) Questions about risk perceptions regarding travel to destinations with various risks, measured on a Likert type five-point scale ranging from 1 ("do not agree at all") to 5 ("very much agree") (e.g. "It is recommended to avoid traveling to destinations with health risks such as diseases").
- (2) Questions concerning intentions to travel to each of the destinations, measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("definitely do not want to go") to 5 ("definitely want to go").
- (3) Questions concerning perceptions with respect to each of the destinations, measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("definitely do not agree") to 5 ("certainly agree") (e.g. "Travel is risky now"). For each country the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for the statements "nature attractions and scenic landscapes" and "a country for sea, sun and sand vacation" ranged from 0.74 to 0.77. (with regard to Israelis' intentions to travel to Greece, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was less than 0.6 and was not included in the final analysis).
- (4) Socio-demographic data.

The dependent variables were the levels of intentions to travel to each of the destination countries. The independent variables were as follows: perceived importance of economic crisis, perceived significance of political instability, perceived significance of terrorist incidents, perceived significance of health hazard, perceived image of the destination country, the individual's risk-taking tendencies and socio-demographic characteristics. Figure 1 schematically depicts the research model.

### *3.3 Procedure*

The questionnaire was distributed among undergraduate and graduate students at various academic institutions in Israel, Greece and Portugal. This procedure was chosen to enhance the response rates of young people in the three countries. The data collection procedure at the academic institutions in the three countries was similar. Before handing out the



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**Figure 1.**  
Factors affecting the  
intention to travel to  
countries with  
hazards

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questionnaires, the researchers described the purpose of the study and indicated that completing the questionnaire was voluntary. Most of the students completed the questionnaire. The questionnaires were handed out at the end of class and collected at the break. Students that did not complete the questionnaire mentioned lack of time as the reason.

### 3.4 Data analyses

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the following variables: gender, age, employment and number of trips abroad. In addition, the dependent variable (intention to visit each of the destinations) is displayed for participants from each origin country. Multivariate tests were used to determine the relationships between selected categorical variables and the dependent variable – intention to travel to each destination. *t*-Tests were used to determine the statistical significance of the difference in the means found for various risk perceptions between those who do intend to travel to each destination and those who do not.

In addition, linear regression was used to examine the impact of the explanatory variables on the dependent variable – intention to travel to different destinations. The explanatory variables were: perceived importance of economic crisis, perceived significance of political instability, perceived significance of terrorist incidents, perceived significance of health hazards, perceived image of the destination country, the individual's risk-taking tendencies and socio-demographic characteristics. SPSS 22 was used to conduct the statistical data analyses.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table I displays the descriptive statistics for the three samples: Israeli, Greek and Portuguese students. Most of the study participants were women (60 percent), and the average age of the respondents was 23.5. Of the total sample, the majority (83 percent) had traveled abroad previously: 81 percent of Greek students, 92 percent of Israeli students and 79 percent of Portuguese students.

As indicated in the Section 3, the students in Greece and Portugal are relatively young compared to their Israeli counterparts. This is because most young Israelis complete their mandatory military service prior to beginning their academic education, delaying the start of their studies two to three years. In addition, Greek universities have no tuition fees and in Portugal the tuition fee is about half the fee in Israel, so that potential Israeli students often have to work to save money for tuition. Table I indicates that in the last three years the



Variable	Greece ( <i>n</i> = 171)		Israel ( <i>n</i> = 277)		Portugal ( <i>n</i> = 200)	
	<i>n</i>	Percentage	<i>n</i>	Percentage	<i>n</i>	Percentage frequency
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	64	37.6	126	46.2	62	31.0
Female	106	62.4	147	53.8	138	69.0
<i>Employment</i>						
Unemployed	118	69.8	73	27.2	129	64.5
Employed	41	24.3	193	72	71	35.5
<i>Age</i>						
Average	21.35		26.27		22.27	
<i>Trip abroad</i>						
Average	1.9		1.9		2.27	

**Table I.**  
Descriptive statistics

Portuguese students traveled abroad on average more times than did the Israeli and Greek students.

More Israeli students work than do Portuguese or Greek students (72 percent of the Israeli students work vs 24 of the Greek students and 35 percent of the Portuguese students), presumably due to the higher tuition in Israel than in Portugal and the absence of tuition fees in Greece.

#### 4.2 Hypotheses tests

Table II compares the intentions of Israeli, Portuguese and Greek students to travel to each of the other two countries. Questions concerning intentions to travel to each of the destinations were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("definitely do not want to go") to 5 ("definitely want to go"). Table II shows the percentages of those who intend to go to each country (Categories 4 and 5) vs the percentages of those who do not intend to go (Categories 1 and 2). The ambivalent Category 3 was omitted.

The results in Table II indicate that most of the Israelis intend to visit Greece and Portugal (82 and 71 percent, respectively). The majority of the Portuguese students intend to visit Greece (92 percent), while only 41 percent intend to visit Israel. Among the Greeks, the majority (75 percent) intend to visit Portugal, while most (85 percent) do not intend to visit Israel.

Table III displays the results of the *t*-test conducted to examine potential differences in various risk perceptions between those who intend to travel and those who are unlikely to travel to each of the destination countries.

The results in Table III indicate that Portuguese students who do not intend to travel to Greece, a country embroiled in economic crisis, view economic crises as highly important, as opposed to those who intend to travel to Greece (2.71 vs 2.11, respectively,  $p < 0.05$ ). This result is in line with *H1*, which posited that greater perceived importance of economic crises

Origin country	Israel		Greece		Portugal	
	Greece (270) (%)	Portugal (269) (%)	Israel (167) (%)	Portugal (167) (%)	Israel (200) (%)	Greece (200) (%)
<i>Intention to travel</i>						
Intend to travel	82	71	15.0	75	41	92
Do not intend to travel	18	29	85	25	59	8.0

**Table II.**  
Intentions to travel to each of the other two countries

Origin country Destination	Greece		Israel		Portugal		Greece		Israel		Portugal		Greece	
	No Mean (STD)	Yes Mean (STD)	No Mean (STD)	Yes Mean (STD)	No Mean (STD)	Yes Mean (STD)	No Mean (STD)	Yes Mean (STD)	No Mean (STD)	Yes Mean (STD)	No Mean (STD)	Yes Mean (STD)	No Mean (STD)	Yes Mean (STD)
Intention to travel	3.71 (1.09)	3.75 (1.18)	3.91 (1.09)	3.65 (1.19)	3.72 (1.43)	3.53 (1.47)	3.96 (1.40)	3.63 (1.48)	3.96 (1.40)	3.72 (1.43)	3.53 (1.47)	3.96 (1.40)	3.63 (1.48)	3.71 (1.20)
Travel to destinations where there were terrorist incidents during the current year should be avoided	2.32 (1.27)	2.58 (1.10)	2.67 (1.14)	2.51 (1.13)	2.58 (1.21)	2.47 (1.47)	3.00 (1.41)	2.49 (1.23)	3.00 (1.41)	2.40** (0.97)	1.86 (0.77)	2.71* (1.38)	1.86 (0.86)	2.11 (0.86)
Travel to destinations with political unrest should be avoided	3.53 (1.24)	3.60 (1.14)	4.16 (1.05)	3.51** (1.14)	3.11 (1.28)	2.16* (1.50)	3.27 (1.43)	3.01 (1.34)	3.27 (1.43)	3.50** (0.94)	2.82 (1.06)	3.93* (0.83)	2.82 (1.06)	3.14 (1.00)

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table III.**  
Means and SDs of  
attitudes toward  
various types of travel  
risks according  
intention to travel to  
Israel, Greece and  
Portugal

would mitigate intentions to choose a destination marked by economic crises. Furthermore, Portuguese students who do not intend to travel to Israel, a country not marked by economic crisis, perceive economic crises as highly important, as opposed to those who intend to travel to Israel (2.40 vs 1.86, respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ). For Israeli and Greek participants, no significant relationships were found between perceived importance of economic crises and intention to travel to countries with economic instability.

The results in Table III also indicate that Portuguese and Greek students who do not intend to travel to Israel, a country with security issues (presumably interpreted as political instability), view political instability as highly important, as opposed to those who intend to travel to Israel (for Portuguese students: 3.50 vs 2.82, respectively,  $p < 0.01$ , while for Greek students: 3.11 vs 2.16, respectively,  $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, Israelis who do not intend to travel to Portugal perceive political instability as highly important, as opposed to those who intend to travel to Portugal (4.16 vs 3.51, respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ), while Portuguese students who do not intend to travel to Greece perceive political instability as highly important, as opposed to those who intend to travel to Greece (3.93 vs 3.14, respectively,  $p < 0.05$ ). Portugal and Greece are politically unstable countries. These results are compatible with *H2*, which claims that greater importance attributed to political instability will mitigate intentions to travel to such destinations.

Finally, as can be seen in Table III, Portuguese students who do not intend to travel to Israel, where there are many terrorist incidents, view terrorism as highly important, as opposed to those who intend to travel to Israel (3.96 vs 3.46, respectively,  $p < 0.05$ ), as predicted by *H3*.

#### 4.3 Analytical model result.

Next, regression analyses were conducted to examine the analytical model. The dependent variable for each of the three countries of origin was the intention to travel to the other two destinations, as measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 indicates lowest intention and 5 indicates highest intention). The independent variables were gender (1 – male, 2 – female), age, perceptions of the destination measured on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 – do not agree, 5 – very much agree), perceived travel risks (on a scale from 1 to 5, ranging from 1 – do not agree to 5 – very much agree) and self-assessment of risk tendencies (on a scale from 1 to 10, ranging from 1 – avoid risks at all costs to 10 – engage in high-risk behavior).

Tables IV–VI display the results of the regression analyses for each of the three destination countries.

In line with *H4*, the results in Table IV show that no common factors affect the intentions of Israeli and Portuguese tourists to visit Greece. This is probably because the two countries have very different economic situations. The economic situation in Israel is stable. Therefore, Israeli students do not consider the economy a curtailment factor in their

Origin country Variable	Israel (277) (adjusted $R^2 = 0.191^{***}$ )				Portugal (200) (adjusted $R^2 = 0.093^{***}$ )			
	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>T</i>	Sig.	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>T</i>	Sig.
Constant	1.82	0.51	3.56	0.00	5.21	0.83	6.27	0.00
Gender	0.10	0.15	0.65	0.52	0.29	0.14	2.07	0.04
Travel to destinations with unstable economic conditions should be avoided	0.06	0.08	0.84	0.40	-0.16	0.07	-2.24	0.03
Greece is a country with historical sites	0.14	0.08	1.83	0.07	-1.51	0.67	-2.26	0.03
Greece is an exciting and thrilling site	0.33	0.08	4.06	0.00	-0.12	0.21	-0.56	0.58
Greece is a health-oriented site	-0.13	0.07	-1.89	0.06	0.00	0.13	0.01	0.99
Risk-taking in everyday life	0.07	0.04	1.97	0.05	0.07	0.04	2.04	0.04

Note:  $***p = 0.000$

**Table IV.**  
Effects of demographic characteristics and perceptions on intentions of Israeli and Portuguese students to visit Greece

choice of destination. Conversely, Portugal is undergoing an economic crisis. Hence, the Portuguese students conceivably see the economic situation as one of the factors influencing their intention to visit a destination. Among the Portuguese students, a stronger perception that traveling to a destination with economic crises should be avoided negatively affects their intention to travel to Greece, compatible with *H1*. Moreover, Portuguese students who perceive Greece as a country with historical sites are less likely to visit there. This result is in line with the study's hypothesis that the perceived image of the destination country has an impact on the intention to travel there (see Figure 1). In addition, Table IV shows that Portuguese women are more likely to visit Greece than are Portuguese men.

Among the Israelis, those who perceive Greece as an exciting and thrilling destination exhibit a stronger intention to travel to there. This result is also in line with the study's hypothesis that the perceived image of a destination country has an impact on the intention to travel there. In addition, Israelis who exhibit a greater tendency to take risks in everyday life are more motivated to visit Greece.

The results in Table V show that among the Greek participants, those with stronger perceptions that travel to destinations with political unrest and with risks of terrorism should be avoided display weaker intentions to travel to Israel, probably because Israel is perceived as a country marked by political unrest. These results support *H2* and *H3*. In contrast, those who more strongly perceived that traveling to destinations with health hazards should be avoided expressed greater intentions to travel to Israel, presumably because Israel is perceived as a destination with no health problems. In addition, those who view Israel as a country with religious sites exhibited stronger intentions to travel to Israel.

In line with *H2*, among the Portuguese students, those who perceived more strongly that travel to destinations with political unrest should be avoided exhibited lower intentions to travel to Israel, probably because Israel is perceived as a country marked by political unrest. Moreover, those with stronger perceptions that traveling to destinations with health hazards should be avoided exhibited lower intentions to travel to Israel. Portuguese students who indicated higher levels of risk-taking in everyday life are more likely to visit Israel.

Israel is generally perceived as a politically unstable country. Presumably, Israel's wars and military operations are perceived by students from other countries as political unrest. Interestingly, terrorism was not perceived as a significant risk factor for the Portuguese. This may be because terrorism is not unique to Israel but rather is prevalent all over the world.

Origin country Variable	Greece (171) (adjusted $R^2 = 0.126$ )				Portugal (200) (adjusted $R^2 = 0.203$ )			
	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>T</i>	Sig.
Constant	2.05	0.63	3.28	0.00	4.22	0.68	6.20	0.00
Travel to destinations where there were terrorist incidents during the current year should be avoided	-0.17	0.09	-2.03	0.04	0.01	0.09	0.11	0.92
Travel to destinations with health hazards should be avoided	0.22	0.10	2.22	0.03	-0.25	0.09	-2.89	0.00
Travel to destinations with political unrest should be avoided	-0.22	0.07	-2.93	0.00	-0.31	0.09	-3.48	0.00
Israel is Inexpensive	-0.07	0.07	-1.07	0.29	-0.07	0.18	-0.41	0.68
Israel is a religious site	0.17	0.07	2.53	0.01	-0.19	0.31	-0.60	0.55
Risk-taking in everyday life	0.010	0.05	0.20	0.84	0.13	0.05	2.77	0.01

**Table V.**  
Effects of  
demographic  
characteristics and  
perceptions on  
intentions of Greek  
and Portuguese  
students to visit Israel

The results in Table VI indicate that Israelis who perceive Portugal as a destination with sea and sun and natural sites display higher intentions to visit there. This result is in line with the study's hypothesis that the perceived image of the destination country has an impact on the intention to travel there (see Figure 1). Moreover, those that are more willing to take risks in everyday life are more willing to visit Portugal.

## 5. Discussion

Tourism is an important and highly competitive economic branch. Therefore, countries make efforts to attract potential tourists, including young students. Selection of tourist destinations is affected by many factors, including exogenous events and particularly extreme episodes such as political and economic crises. Very few studies have examined how such events in tourists' countries of origin affect their perceptions of risks in destination countries and their intentions to travel to those destinations.

The current study examined how the socio-political and economic context in the home countries of potential student tourists affected their selection of travel destinations. The main focus was to elucidate how the salience of various crises (economic and political) in tourists' perceptions as a result of their experiences at home color their construal of destinations affected by similar risks and influence their travel intentions. In addition, this study sought to explicate in greater depth the factors shaping how young student tourists from different socio-political and economic contexts choose their travel destinations. The study focused on student tourists from Israel, Greece and Portugal. Greece and Portugal are in the midst of economic crises, while Israel is not. In addition, Greece and Portugal have experienced political instability, while Israel has security-related problems (including terrorist incidents).

The results indicate that over half of the Israeli participants intend to visit Greece or Portugal. The majority of the Portuguese participants intend to visit Greece, while less than a third of them intend to visit Israel. About half of the Greek participants intend to visit Portugal and most of them do not intend to visit Israel. The findings suggest that Israel is not an attractive destination in the eyes of Greek and Portuguese students. While one possible explanation for this lack of appeal may be geographic similarity as Israel is a Mediterranean country, the main interpretation rests on the risks associated with this destination's unstable political situation.

The research results support *H1*, which contends that greater perceived importance of economic crises mitigates the intention to travel to destinations with economic crises for tourists from origin countries that are also marked by economic crises, such as Greece and Portugal. However, for tourists from Israel, a country with a relatively stable economy, issues related to the economy barely affect their intention to travel to the other two countries. This finding suggests that economic crises at home make potential tourists more sensitive to and concerned about economic crises and consequently less likely to select destinations marked by economic hardships. These results are in line with

**Table VI.**  
Effects of  
demographic  
characteristics and  
perceptions on  
Israelis' intentions to  
visit Portugal

Origin country Variable	<i>B</i>	Israel (277)		
		<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Constant	2.35	0.53	4.48	0.00
Travel to destinations with unstable economic conditions should be avoided	-0.04	0.09	-0.46	0.65
Portugal is a country with sea and sun and natural sites	0.29	0.09	3.10	0.00
Portugal is inexpensive	-0.06	0.08	-0.79	0.43
Risk-taking in everyday life	0.01	0.04	2.17	0.03
		(Adjusted $R^2 = 0.11^{***}$ )		

previous findings that tourists who were involved in criminal incidents were more concerned with this type of risk (Seabra *et al.*, 2013) and that people who had personally experienced extreme weather tended to believe that climate change was a considerable risk (Van Der Linden, 2014).

In line with *H2*, our findings suggest that Greek and Portuguese students who are highly concerned about political unrest are unlikely to select Israel as a tourist destination as they conceivably view Israel as a country with political unrest. The results also support *H3* for the Greek students. According to this hypothesis, strong apprehension regarding terrorism impedes the intention to travel to destinations marked by terrorist incidents, such as Israel. However, such an impact was not found among tourists from other countries, presumably because nowadays terrorism is quite prevalent in many parts of the world and is not unique to Israel. Another plausible explanation could be that Greek tourists are more familiar with the situation in Israel due to the geographical proximity between the two countries, whereas Portuguese tourists are less familiar with Israel because it is a relatively distant destination. The distinct perceptions of the Greek and Portuguese student tourists with respect to terrorism vs political unrest as deterrents to potential foreign travel corroborate the findings of a recent study on the UK leisure tourists (Kapuściński and Richards, 2016), as well as Isaac's (2019) study on tourism in conflict-ridden areas. The researchers found that tourists considering foreign travel construed the risks associated with terrorism differently than those associated with political instability.

The students in Greece, Israel and Portugal are affected by different factors when choosing a travel destination. This finding supports *H4* and is in line with earlier research on tourists to Malaysia from different countries, among them India, China, Indonesia, Australia and France (Garg, 2013), indicating that cultural differences influence tourists' risk perceptions.

The current research also suggests that students in each of the three countries have partial knowledge about the other two countries and that their perceptions of these destinations are based on general images. For example, the Portuguese students see Israel as a country with health hazards despite the fact that there are no health issues in Israel.

The results of the current research contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the impact of travelers' previous personal experience with crisis on their risk perceptions and, in turn, on their intentions to travel to countries with similar risks. In the context of tourism, our study empirically validates the SARF. According to SARF, "perceptions of risk and risk-related behaviors may amplify the social, political, and economic impact of disasters well beyond their direct consequences" (Burns and Slovic, 2012, p. 579). These scholars argue that major events enhance an individual's vulnerability not just due to the scale of such events, but also because of the complex manner in which people respond to risk and especially because personal experience causes these events to be more salient. Therefore, in a world where such incidents are on the rise, countries that wish to increase the numbers of incoming tourists must understand tourists' risk perceptions and behavior and the factors influencing their destination-related decisions (Ritchie *et al.*, 2017).

## 6. Conclusions

The research findings indicate that people from Portugal (a country marked by economic crisis) who attributed greater importance to economic crises have lower intentions to travel to Greece (a country also marked by economic crisis). In addition, people from Greece and Portugal (politically unstable countries) who attributed greater significance to political instability have lower intentions to travel to Israel (possibly because Israel is perceived as a country with political unrest). In addition, those among the Greek participants who felt more strongly that travel to destinations with terrorism risks should

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be avoided have lower intentions to travel to Israel (a country marked by terrorism). Finally, differences were found in the factors that influence tourists from each of the three origin countries in deciding whether to travel to destinations marked by crises (e.g. economic crisis, political instability).

The findings of the current research shed new light on the perceptions of student tourists with regard to different destinations, and particularly on the effects of the socio-political and economic context in the tourists' home countries on their risk construal. The study suggests that young tourists (students) base their judgments about destinations on partial information and are affected by different factors in evaluating the risk factors vs the attractors of a particular destination. Their judgments are mainly related to the salience of their experiences in their countries of origin (such as economic crises, political instability and terrorist attacks) and to some extent linked to the generalized information projected in the media.

### *6.1 Limitations and future research*

The current research contributes to the body of knowledge on factors affecting the perceptions of young educated tourists regarding destinations afflicted by various crises and hazards. Nevertheless, the study has some limitations. One is the relatively limited representativeness of the study samples, which were composed of students who do not necessarily represent the young population in these countries. In addition, although the researchers attempted to ensure similar conditions in distributing the questionnaires among students in higher education institutions in the three countries, the conditions may not have been identical and some bias might have occurred. Another limitation is that the study was based on three specific countries.

Future research is warranted that extends this study to other populations and age groups, and to other countries, possibly on different continents, marked by economic or political instabilities or terrorism as well as to countries and regions afflicted by health problems or natural hazards. Future research is also needed, both quantitative and qualitative, to expand our understanding of the emotional and cognitive mechanisms that shape the images of destinations and in turn the way young and older tourists select their travel destinations.

### *6.2 Practical implications*

Nowadays many countries worldwide are experiencing economic crises, political instability and terrorist events. Moreover, health hazards and natural disasters continue to prevail in many regions, potentially affecting tourists' travel intentions. The recently growing number of terror attacks in various countries across the globe is likely to have a negative impact on the intention to travel to popular destinations that are considered riskier in terms of terror attacks. Therefore, policymakers should consider not only security issues to prevent such attacks but also ways to improve the image of their country's safety in the eyes of potential tourists.

When preparing tourism marketing strategies, policymakers need to address each origin country differently. They need to know the specific risks in the country of origin and plan their marketing efforts accordingly. In addition, in accordance with the above results marketing efforts should emphasize the perceived image of each destination country. For example, strengthening the image of natural sites in Portugal may raise the intentions of young Israelis to visit there. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence the destination-related decisions of potential tourists is crucial for countries that wish to increase the number of tourists who visit them.

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#### **Further reading**

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