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DOES COMMUNICATING SAFETY MATTER?

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ABSTRACT

Tourists generally prefer to visit safe destinations. However, it is rare to see safety messages in promotional materials. Does communicating safety in destination branding campaigns matter to tourists? We use an experimental design to explore the relationship between safety messages and visit intentions. Results show that the extent to which safety messages enhance visit intentions depends on tourist's risk propensity and self-efficacy in travel planning. Safety messages are more effective for low-risk propensity respondents than for high-risk propensity respondents. They are also more effective for respondents with high self-efficacy in travel planning than those with low self-efficacy. We conclude that safety messages help promote a destination but that cognitive tendencies moderate the relationship.

KEYWORDS

Safety, risk, self-efficacy, tourism, advertising

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INTRODUCTION

Travel-related decisions of an unfamiliar place are often made under uncertainty because tourist perceptions are based on piecemeal or incomplete information (Um & Crompton, 1992; Williams & Baláž, 2015). Destinations compete on perceptions (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001). Through promotional material as well as destination branding, tourism providers seek to attract tourists' attention and influence perceptions by highlighting differentiating factors between destinations that may be highly substitutable (Byun & Jang, 2015; Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002; Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). Marketer's advertising efforts can induce positive place image in the minds of tourists through powerful imagery (Gunn, 1988). They guide tourists to form travel product expectations by reducing the intangibility of the future travel experience (Buhalis, 2000).

Scholars have long recognized that destination safety is important to tourism success (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006; Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, & Tarlow, 1999). Safety contributes to the quality of travel experience which is part of destination image formation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Safety perceptions can influence tourists' emotions, feelings of satisfaction and loyalty intentions (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2007). Nevertheless, scholars have so far not studied whether marketers can use safety messages in destination advertising. Despite wide recognition that safety is important to tourists and tourism development, there is little understanding on whether or not explicit safety messages can serve as a motivator in destination selection. The question is complicated by the debate surrounding safety perceptions and visit intentions. On the one hand, research shows that tourists avoid destinations that appear unsafe and adjust their travel plans accordingly (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2007). On the other hand, there is evidence that tourists are not deterred from visiting or recommending risky destinations (George, 2010). Tourists may paradoxically feel that destinations become safer after a terrorist attack (Wolff & Larsen, 2014). They may purposely visit post-disaster sites as a form of dark tourism (Biran, Liu, Li, & Eichhorn, 2014). They may even seek risk for a sense of excitement, as documented in the adventure tourism literature (Weber, 2001).

Williams and Baláž (2015) point out that risk and uncertainty are not exceptional but inherent to the tourism experience. Sönmez and Graefe (1998) present travel risks perceptions and safety concerns as parallel concepts. Perceived travel risks have been well documented (e.g. Adam, 2015; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011) and include physical injuries from transport, activities, natural disasters, terrorism, hygiene or equipment failure, as well as financial risks and socio-psychological risks (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Sönmez et al., 1999; Tsaur, Tzeng, & Wang, 1997). Tourists are aware of risks and uncertainty when travelling. Therefore, the question is not about the inherent risks of travel, but how a potential visitor perceives a destination as safe enough to visit (Karl, 2016). This, in turn, draws attention to how a destination can promote itself as a safe place to visit. Williams and Baláž (2015) call for more research to explain the variability of individual resilience to travel risk.

Our study does not look at different kinds of destination risk but aims to evaluate the impact of a destination's safety messages on the tourist's intention to visit. We develop and test a model of tourist reaction to safety messages in destination advertising. Using an experimental approach, and drawing on categorization, risk propensity and self-efficacy theories, we test how potential tourists view safety messages about a city called Dubrovnik and the extent to which their perceptions influence their visit intentions. Dubrovnik is a medieval seaside city in Croatia and a UNESCO world heritage site. It drew 1.8 million tourist arrivals in 2017

(Croatia Ministry of Tourism, 2017, p. 31). We hypothesize that incorporating safety messages into traditional advertising enhances tourists' willingness to visit Dubrovnik. Moreover, a tourist's risk propensity and self-efficacy may moderate the impact of safety messages on visit intentions.

This paper seeks to make the following contributions to the field of tourism. First, studies have focused on destinations and how they may be perceived as being risky due to events such as crime, natural disasters, and terrorism (Brunt, Mawby, & Hambly, 2000; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Sönmez et al., 1999). This body of literature shows that some tourists may avoid crisis-ridden destinations while others may not. Sönmez and Graefe (1998) and Karl (2016) suggest that risk aversion is associated more with older adults, while those with a higher level of education are more likely to have high-risk propensity and accept risks. Nonetheless, demographic variables only partially explain individual differences. Scholars have called for more research to explain variations in individual reactions to travel risk (Williams & Baláž, 2015). We answer this call by considering individual non-demographic characteristics (risk propensity and self-efficacy) in analysing the relationship between safety messages and visit intentions.

Second, studies on destination safety tend to focus on image repair following crises (e.g. Chew & Jahari, 2014; Coaffee & Rogers, 2008; Sönmez et al., 1999) rather than on promotion in general. Notable exceptions are Enright and Newton (2004) and Hsu, Tsai, and Wu (2009), who show that tourists rank safety as a top factor when deciding between competitive destinations in Asia. However, these two studies do not look at destination promotion. Scholars have noted that using marketing tools for destination branding has helped cities and countries look attractive, but this is increasingly not enough to create differentiation (Anholt, 2008; Berthon, Hulbert, & Pitt, 1999). Given the tourists' preference for safe travel (Enright & Newton, 2004; Hsu et al., 2009), should policy makers give attention to more substantive safety messages to promote destinations? Would promoting safety increase a destination's attractiveness and help it stand out from the competition? Exploring the relationship between safety messages and tourists' visit intention is of managerial significance for designing and enhancing a destination's promotional strategy.

Third, scholars tend to examine experienced visitors' revisit intentions rather than prospective visitors' first-time visit intentions. For example, a number of scholars look at the rebranding of destinations that have been hit by events such as natural disasters and terrorism and how these events affect revisit intentions (Araña & León, 2008; Chew & Jahari, 2014; Coaffee & Rogers, 2008; Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006). Repeat visitors behave differently from first-time visitors because repeat visitors can draw on prior on-site experiences to form images and make future decisions about a destination, while the first-time visitors cannot (Chew & Jahari, 2014; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). Although it is important to use destination communication to attract repeat visitors, prospective visitors tend to be more sensitive to marketing efforts as they do not have past experience as a reference point before traveling (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Therefore, we complement previous research on safety communication by looking specifically at prospective rather than repeat visitors.

SAFETY COMMUNICATION, RISK PROPENSITY, AND SELF-EFFICACY

Safety communication has served prevention, promotional and image repair purposes across a wide range of marketing contexts. Safety communication fulfills a prevention purpose when it is used to provide warnings on product usage safety (Zuckerman & Chaiken, 1998) or

product health risks (Hammond, 2011). It serves a promotional purpose when it helps enhance the quality perceptions of a product (Aung & Chang, 2014; Tse, 1999), and increase consumer's willingness to pay higher prices (Loureiro & Umberger, 2007). Safety communication aimed at image repair is exemplified in product recalls during product harm crises (Gao, Xie, Wang, & Wilbur, 2015).

In tourism research, scholars have mainly investigated safety communication as an image repair mechanism after crises such as infection outbreak (Liu-Lastres, Schroeder, & Pennington-Gray, 2018), natural disasters (Chew & Jahari, 2014), and terrorism (Sönmez et al., 1999). Safety communication in these crisis contexts has the objective to assuage tourists and repair the negative image of a destination. Coaffee and Rogers (2008) describe the rebranding efforts of UK cities through visible security presence and messages of resilience following terror attacks. They argue that this led to a resurgence in business conferences and international investors, but fail to clarify the impact on non-business tourists. Avraham (2015) describes a number of message strategies used to revive tourism following the Arab spring risings—for example, downplaying the seriousness of events in tourism ads by specifying that the crisis is limited to specific areas, avoiding mentioning terrorist attacks altogether, or communicating that everything is back to normal. The objective of Avraham's (2015) study is to describe and classify different strategies that destination marketers use. The author does not test cause-effect relationships.

Prevention-type safety communication in tourism has been debated to a lesser extent, for instance, in relation to accidents in adventure tourism (Buckley, 2010), personal safety (Dimanche & Lepetic, 1999), safety signs in national parks (Saunders, Weiler, Scherrer, & Zeppel, in press), and sun safety (Peattie, Clarke, & Peattie, 2005). Generally speaking, research shows that tourists are prone to accidents which are preventable (Page & Meyer, 1996) and tend to be more vulnerable than residents to crime due to lack of knowledge about the area they are visiting (Chesney-Lind & Lind, 1986). Hence, the purpose of prevention-type safety studies is to discuss effective ways to reduce preventable accidents and increase awareness to travel risks. The purpose is not about understanding tourists' decision-making.

Safety communication for promotional purposes remains largely unexplored in the tourism literature. What is known is that tourists rank safety highly amongst the list of factors that drive destination choice. Enright and Newton (2004) find in their empirical study that amongst factors determining the competitiveness of Hong Kong as a destination within the Asia-Pacific region, safety is the most important. Hsu et al. (2009) present a survey of Taiwan tourists and show that safety is the second most important factor for tourists to visit Taiwan. Neither of these studies address safety communication. They are limited to surveying tourists' criteria in choosing destinations.

We draw on categorization theory (Rosch, 1978) as the foundation for our study.

Categorization is a cognitive bias theory that highlights the subjectivity of information processing and decision-making. The theory is developed on the premise that human beings are unable to assimilate all the information around them. Hence, they simplify reality by selecting information and grouping it to categories. Individuals tend to resort to categorization to make decisions especially when the information is less than complete (Palich & Bagby, 1995), which is often the case for new destinations.

Tourism studies reflect the premises of categorization theory. Moutinho (1987) suggests that tourists form perceptions of destinations through meaningful selection, organization, and interpretation of stimuli. They may have more or less positive views about how safe a destination is depending on how they categorize the stimuli. Um and Crompton (1992) argue that, for unfamiliar destinations, information will tend to be incomplete and tourists will attempt to categorize different pieces of symbolic information from the media or their social

group to form opinions. In an investigation on tourists' vacation-planning on the Internet, Pan and Fesenmaier (2006) argue that tourists plan their travel using episodes (e.g. destination, activities, accommodation). Episodes serve as manageable categories upon which individuals make decisions. As such, episodes are also an example of categorization.

A key tenet of categorization theory is that decisions are dependent on how individual categorizes information. For example, information may be categorized as an opportunity by some but a threat by others, and this can lead to either taking action or avoiding the decision (Dutton & Jackson, 1987). Certain aspects of travel may take priority over others depending on personal preferences and characteristics. Categorization highlights variations in decision-making and provides a basis for explaining why some tourists are not deterred from visiting unsafe places while others are. Brunt et al. (2000) argue that safety risks do not automatically translate into fear or concerns that would stop tourists from visiting. In other words, not all tourists categorize safety risks as threats.

Risk propensity is an individual's tolerance for risk. Risk propensity can influence how different tourists categorize the probability of travel risks differently. Seabra, Dolnicar, Abrantes, and Kastenholz (2013) highlight the heterogeneity of tourists by segmenting them into clusters based on their perceptions of risk and personal demographics including nationality. Law (2006) shows that for the same destination, Hong Kong, tourists from different countries perceive the probability of various risks differently. Differences in risk tolerance have been explained by socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, and education, with younger, male, and more highly educated tourists having higher risk tolerance (Karl, 2016; Pizam et al., 2004; Williams & Baláz, 2013). Depending on an individual's risk propensity, risk can be cognitively categorized either as an inhibitor or as a motivator to leisure-related decisions. Wolff and Larsen (2014) discover that the negative impact of a terrorist event on tourist risk perceptions exists, but it may be lower for destinations that do not have a history of attacks or violence as tourists categorize such destinations as being relatively safe. Hyde and Lawson (2003) argue that the apparent irrationality in travel decisions occurs when tourists are open to risks and wish to experience the unplanned. Overall, the tourism literature suggests that risk propensity is contingent on the individual and the way the individual categorizes risk in different situations. Therefore, it is important to consider risk propensity when exploring why tourists may react to destination safety messages differently.

Self-efficacy is a cognitive trait that explains variations in motivation and decision-making. The concept of self-efficacy is defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). Self-efficacy describes the self-regulatory bias of individuals to undertake tasks that he or she perceives to have controllable rather than uncontrollable outcomes (Bandura, 1989; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Betz & Hackett, 1986). Self-efficacy is a personal judgment about one's own ability to complete a task successfully and achieve the expected outcome. Low self-efficacy undermines the opportunity to achieve the desired outcome either due to lack of confidence about one's abilities in completing the task, or due to lack of motivation in making efforts to deal with the task, despite having the ability to do so (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). High self-efficacy individuals are more motivated to complete a task and overcoming problems in the process (Bandura, 1989). For example, individuals with high self-efficacy in information systems security would comply with an organization's security policy on changing passwords at intervals, refraining from visiting suspicious websites, or storing sensitive information on computers (Ifinedo, 2012). The level of motivation driving

self-efficacy is determined not only by the task at hand, but also by learnings from past experiences, and by positive or negative emotions towards the task (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

Within the tourism literature, self-efficacy theory has formed the basis of studies on service providers, residents in tourist destinations, and tourists. Self-efficacy has been applied to service providers in terms of creative self-efficacy (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015; C.-J. Wang, Tsai, & Tsai, 2014) and entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Hallak, Assaker, & Lee, 2015; Hallak, Brown, & Lindsay, 2012). Self-efficacy has been studied in terms of residents' perceived control over the changes brought on tourism development (S. Wang & Xu, 2015).

Tourists' self-efficacy has been explored in a wide variety of contexts. In alternative tourism, McGehee (2002) accounts how participation in paid Earthwatch expeditions (such as a trip to understand the condition of a coral reef) increases participants' sense of self-efficacy towards environmental change. In a post-crisis context, Liu, Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, and Farajat (2016) classify United States (U.S.) tourists who travel to Jordan into "risk perception attitude" clusters using a perceived risk and efficacy beliefs matrix. Efficacy beliefs includes both self-efficacy and response efficacy towards preventive actions. The authors show that safety perceptions of Jordan mediate the relationship between risk perception attitude and travel intention. In the context of social media, Y. Wang and Fesenmaier (2003) apply self-efficacy to study the extent to which an individual believes that their contributions will affect the online travel community. High self-efficacy contributors possess a sense of control vis-à-vis their ability to influence opinions and travel choices in the online travel community. Results show that high self-efficacy leads to more contributions to online travel communities. From a travel-planning perspective, Hung and Petrick (2012) refer to self-efficacy as the extent to which tourists are confident about their abilities to carry out information search, plan ahead, and choose a destination. The authors find that high self-efficacy in tourists decreases the impact of travel constraints on constraints negotiation. In a similar vein, Yoo, Goo, Huang, Nam, and Woo (2017) study self-efficacy in the use of smart tourism technologies (STTs). They define self-efficacy as "tourists' perceived ability and skills of using STTs to make travel plans and decisions" (Yoo et al., 2017, p. 334). Drawing on the elaboration likelihood model, the authors show that high self-efficacy has a positive moderating impact on the central processing route, and a negative impact on peripheral processing routes.

Overall, self-efficacy is a well-established and widely applied concept. From a categorization theory perspective, self-efficacy explains why similar tasks can be categorized as either overwhelming or manageable by different people. Our study considers a new destination in a pre-visit context. Consequently, we focus on travel-planning self-efficacy (Hung & Petrick, 2012), that is, tourists' perceived ability and skills to make travel plans and prepare for eventualities.

Hypotheses

Tourists' perceptions of destination safety and visit intentions have been studied notably in relation to risk perceptions. Authors have investigated the negative impact of terrorist attacks on destination image and attractiveness, and reaffirmed that terrorism might influence pre-visit decisions negatively: tourists react by deferring the visit or choosing a safer alternative (Araña & León, 2008; Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006). George (2003) suggests that tourists who feel unsafe or threatened are likely to avoid a destination altogether. For example, the Bali bombings in October 2002 had an immediate effect on visitor numbers from Australia, with many tourists claiming that they are unlikely to visit again or recommend others to visit. (Henderson, 2003). Sönmez et al. (1999) highlight that due to the intangible nature of

tourism, positive images are crucial. The media can create a positive or negative destination image almost instantly, through the widespread coverage of key events. Media reports of terrorism, in particular, can easily damage positive images of a destination. At the same time, Coaffee and Rogers (2008) argue that it is possible to rebrand an area with a negative safety image, implying that marketing tools are effective in changing destination perceptions.

Prospective visitors rely more on marketing efforts to make destination decisions as they have no past experience of the destination to draw from (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). However, promotional materials are problematic in that they present limited information on destinations. Categorization theory suggests that when information is incomplete, individuals will try to simplify the decision-making process by categorizing the available information (Palich & Bagby, 1995). Safety is a double-edged sword as it can have both positive and negative connotations. Safety taken at face value implies being safe (positive), but underneath, the concept encompasses the presence of risks (negative). The same safety message may have opposing meanings for different people, according to categorization theory. For example, when seeing a safety message, one person may conclude that the place is safe, while another may think it is a warning sign to take precautions. Nevertheless, as the word, 'safety' has connotations that are more positive than negative, we hypothesize that safety messages will be categorized positively and that this will lead to greater willingness to visit the destination. Therefore:

- *H1*: The inclusion of safety messages in promoting a destination has a positive impact on the visit intentions.

We argue that individuals' level of risk propensity can moderate the impact that safety messages have on travel intentions. Low-risk propensity suggests less tolerance of risk. We expect low-risk propensity tourists to err towards caution and select safe destinations as a rule. Low-risk propensity tourists are likely to be more sensitive to destination safety messages than high-risk propensity tourists are. Seeing safety messages is likely to reassure low-risk propensity tourists, and encourage them to visit the destination. Thus, we expect low-risk propensity to strengthen the relationship between safety messages and visit intentions. In addition, research on tourist skepticism underlines that tourists, in general, are more skeptical about subjective claims than objective claims, as well as to claims that relate to tourist experience rather than to product attributes (Ford, Smith, & Swasy, 1990). Safety messages, in our experiment, are portrayed as objective destination attribute claims and should be less prone to skepticism.

High-risk propensity tourists are more optimistic and open to risks. We argue that high-risk propensity tourists need less reassurance. Thus, they might be less sensitive to safety messages. High-risk propensity tourists often have a heightened awareness of risk, which encourages them to take further risk. For example, Celsi, Rose, and Leigh (1993) explain that high-risk propensity tourists will seek to increase their level of risk through repeated consumption of high-risk experiences such as sky-diving. The authors refer to this behavior as a process of risk acculturation. High-risk propensity may or may not be related to sensation seeking (Lepp & Gibson, 2008). For instance, individuals who forego safety by not wearing a helmet or who are willing to take risks to publicly challenge a decision are also considered to have high-risk propensity (Nicholson, Soane, Fenton-O'Creevy, & Willman, 2005). High-risk propensity tourists tend to be more optimistic about their own safety given their higher risk tolerance. Consequently, we expect safety messages to have a less impact on travel intentions for high-risk propensity tourists than for low-risk propensity tourists. We hypothesize that:

- *H2*: The impact of safety messages on visit intentions will be stronger for low-risk propensity tourists than for high-risk propensity ones.

High self-efficacy individuals tend to be enthusiastic and persevere to find a solution because they believe in themselves and in their ability to achieve a positive outcome (Bandura et al., 2001). In relation to travel-planning, high self-efficacy tourists are those who feel competent about planning trips. They are the ones who possess a great amount of conviction in their ability to assess travel information and who are more likely to act upon the safety messages. High self-efficacy tourists are unlikely to spend time construing negative scenarios in their minds. Moreover, they believe in they can deal with eventualities through preparation and part of the process would be to seek out safety information before deciding to visit a destination. Therefore, high self-efficacy tourists should be more sensitive to safety messages than low self-efficacy ones. We expect high self-efficacy to strengthen the positive impact of safety messages on visit intentions.

Low self-efficacy tourists feel incompetent in the task of travel planning and are likely anxious about making decisions. They distrust their ability to plan ahead based on the information available. Low self-efficacy individuals are not confident about their coping capabilities and may be reluctant to make efforts to prepare for eventualities. Low self-efficacy tourists are prone to negativity (Bandura et al., 2001) and may categorize the safety messages as unhelpful. They may not trust their own judgment enough to decide to visit a destination simply based on a promotional ad. They are likely to adopt a wait-and-see attitude and rely on others to decide for them (Bishop & Barber, 2012), due to the lack of either confidence in assessing safety messages, or motivation to make a decision (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Tourism scholars previously highlighted that some tourists have the tendency to worry in any given situation, and that their anxiety may reduce the willingness to travel, even if threats are minimal (Larsen, Brun, & Øgaard, 2009). Consequently, we expect low self-efficacy to attenuate the positive impact of safety messages on travel intentions. We hypothesize that:

- *H3*: The impact of safety messages on visit intentions will be stronger for tourists that have high self-efficacy in travel planning than for tourists with low self-efficacy in travel planning.

Methodology

The study used an experimental design with data collected in May 2018 from an online panel in the U.S. Although destination promotion can occur through different media, we chose print advertising as it is easier to manipulate. The between-subjects factor was the type of message in the advertisement (no safety message versus safety messages). Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two groups. Those assigned to the control group viewed an advertisement of a destination without any safety messages (see ad in the Appendix). For the treatment group, an advertisement with safety messages served as manipulation for safety communication (see ad in the Appendix). All respondents saw an ad for at least ten seconds before moving to the online survey. The survey included questions on visit intention based on the ad, as well as on risk propensity, self-efficacy, and frequency of traveling abroad. This was followed by demographic questions.

Destination and tourist sample. We selected Dubrovnik as the destination, and the U.S. for respondents, to reduce bias on travel intentions. Dubrovnik is geographically distant from the U.S. and not easily reached. In 2017, U.S. tourists accounted for merely 2.8% of all foreign tourist arrivals to Dubrovnik and 1.5% of tourist overnights (Croatia Ministry of Tourism, 2017, p. 26). Dubrovnik is much less prominent than European cities such as Paris, or London, and is less known by U.S. residents. Thus, respondents may have fewer preconceptions or feelings about the place. We further ensured that past experience would not

influence the responses by targeting only respondents who have never visited Dubrovnik before. We screened respondents by including a number of filter questions.

We drew our sample from one country to reduce cultural bias in risk perception (Law, 2006; Seabra et al., 2013). We selected U.S. tourists for our study because the U.S. represents the second highest percentage of tourists in tourism departures worldwide, behind China (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Although China is the leader in international tourism departures, we chose the U.S. based on research showing that tourists from the U.S., Hong Kong, and Australia are more perceptive to travel risk and give more importance to feeling safe than tourists from the United Kingdom, Canada and Greece (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006). Tourists from the U.S., Hong Kong, and Australia more anxious and reluctant to travel than tourists from the United Kingdom, Canada and Greece (idem). It is possible that Chinese tourists are similar to the U.S., Hong Kong, and Australia in terms of travel risk perceptions, but we could not ascertain this as no similar study is available for China. U.S. population's general sensitivity to travel risk and safety highlights the potential to use the U.S. as our target country. Different age groups are included to offer variability for our study, as scholars have shown that the importance of perceived safety as a factor in destination decisions increases as the tourist grows older (Lindqvist & Björk, 2000). In total, 312 individuals from the U.S. aged 18 years and above who had never traveled to Dubrovnik participated in the study, giving a response rate of 38.57%.

Measures. We operationalized visit intention using the seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) from Zeugner-Roth and Žabkar (2015). We measured risk propensity using items on recreational, safety and social risks from Nicholson et al. (2005). Respondents rated how frequently they took recreational, safety and social risks in everyday life using a seven-point rating scale (1 = never; 7 = very frequently). Following Loucks-Atkinson and Mannell (2007) and Hung and Petrick (2012), we evaluated self-efficacy by asking respondents to rate their level of confidence in coping with 12 travel-related constraints using a seven-point rating scale (1 = not confident at all; 7 = extremely confident). Demographic factors such as gender, age, education and income influence tourists' motivation for travel (Williams & Baláž, 2013) and were, therefore, included as control variables. According to Lepp and Gibson (2003), travel experience leads tourists to downplay travel risks. Consequently, we also included frequency of traveling abroad as a control variable, measured on a single item, with a seven-point rating scale (1 = never; 7 = very frequently). The appendix shows the individual items for each construct.

Model validation. The multi-item measures (visit intention, risk propensity and self-efficacy) were validated via confirmatory factor analysis using MPlus8 (Muthén and Muthén, 1998-2017). We examined convergent validity and then discriminant validity of the measures by using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) test. The purified measures displayed solid Cronbach's Alpha reliability (intention to visit $\alpha = .902$; risk propensity $\alpha = .714$; self-efficacy $\alpha = .939$). Following the cutoff values advised by Hu and Bentler (1999), we found that the purified complete measurement model showed a good fit ($\chi^2 = 222.420$, d.f. = 132, $p = .000$; comparative fit index [CFI] = .966; Tucker-Lewis fit index [TLI] = .961; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .047; and standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .040).

Results

The appendix shows the means, standard deviations, skew and kurtosis for the survey items. The profile of the sample is as follows: the average age of respondents is 45 years old, 62% of respondents are female, and 49% have a college/associate's degree or a bachelor's degree.

Manipulation check. We performed ANOVA (using bootstrapping) for the manipulation check of the perceived safety of Dubrovnik as a tourist destination after seeing the ad. We measured perceived safety using a single-item, 7-point rating scale. As expected, the control group, which does not have the safety message, exhibited lower scores on safety than the safety group and this difference was significant ($M_{\text{Control}} = 3.97$ vs $M_{\text{group2}} = 4.44$); $F(1, 311) = 9.09, p < .01$).

Main effect and moderating effect. We employed ANCOVA to test the direct impact of the presence or absence of the safety message on the intention to visit the city. ANCOVA provides the tools to analyze experimental data and enables more sensitive tests of treatment effects (Hair et al., 2014). The frequency of traveling abroad and demographics (age, gender, income and education) were included as covariates. To test the moderating effect of risk propensity we used a median split to divide respondents into high-risk propensity and low-risk propensity. We used the same procedure to test the moderating effect of self-efficacy and classify participants into high self-efficacy and low self-efficacy. The resulting mean composite risk propensity scores were significantly different between the two groups ($M_{\text{HR}} = 3.906, SD = 0.952$; $M_{\text{LR}} = 1.770, SD = 0.634, p < .001$). Similarly, the mean composite scores of the two groups were significantly different for self-efficacy ($M_{\text{HSE}} = 5.767, SD = 0.611$; $M_{\text{LSE}} = 3.786, SD = 0.857, p < .05$). We then included the interaction terms between risk propensity and main effect (safety message versus non-safety message) and between self-efficacy and the main effect in the model.

An examination of the data analysis results (see Table 1) reveal significant differences between the non-safety message and the safety message conditions for the intention to visit the destination ($F(1, 301) = 9.166, p = .003$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Furthermore, results show that there is a significant interaction effect between risk propensity and the presence of the safety message for the intention to visit the place ($F(1, 301) = 4.115, p = .043$) and a marginally significant interaction effect between self-efficacy and the presence of the safety message for the visit intention ($F(1, 301) = 3.222, p = .074$). As shown in Figure 1, high-risk propensity respondents increase their intention to visit Dubrovnik when exposed to an advertisement with safety messages. However, if the same safety messages are processed by low-risk propensity respondents, the willingness to visit the city increases even further. We hypothesized that this would be the case (Hypothesis 2) because low-risk propensity respondents would be looking for destinations that are less risky, that is, safer. Figure 2 shows that the intention to visit Dubrovnik is greater for high self-efficacy respondents than for low self-efficacy respondents after processing the advertisement with the safety messages. This supports Hypothesis 3. Low self-efficacy individuals have little confidence in coping with travel planning. They tend not to make travel decisions on their own. Thus, low self-efficacy perceptions limit the impact of safety messages on visit intentions.

[Insert Figure 1 and Figure 2 about here]

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to research on destination image, destination risk, and safety communication in tourism. We distinguish different types of safety communication – preventive, repair, and promotional— and highlight that tourism research has not focused on promotional safety communication. Drawing on categorization, self-efficacy, and risk

theories, our study shows that safety messages have a positive effect on visit intention. However, the effectiveness of safety messages depends on individual cognition and the way information is categorized. Low self-efficacy individuals categorize safety messages as information that they are unable to assess confidently. Therefore, they lack of motivation to act upon these messages. Our study shows that low self-efficacy reduces the positive effect of safety messages on visit intentions. High-risk propensity also mollifies the impact of safety messages given that safety is categorized as a low priority criterion for individuals who have a high tolerance to risk.

By showing that safety communication can be used for promotional purposes, our study complements tourism studies that look at safety communication from an image repair or prevention perspective. The results supplement past tourism studies that underline the role of safety perceptions on risk attitude and visit intentions (Liu et al., 2016), the heterogeneity of tourists' risk perceptions (Law, 2006; Seabra et al., 2013), the importance of self-efficacy in tourists' information processing and decision-making (Yoo et al., 2017), and the utility of destination branding on reducing tourists' risk perceptions (Berthon et al., 1999). Although these studies show that individual reactions to destination risk and safety differ, reasons behind individual variations are not explored (Williams & Baláž, 2015). Thus, our contribution is to offer evidence that safety messages can increase visit intentions in the pre-visit context, and that risk propensity, as well as self-efficacy, are factors that explain individual variations and moderate this relationship.

Should safety communication be included in destination promotional efforts? The primary goal of destination promotion is to make a destination more attractive to potential visitors. Safety messages can help destinations achieve this goal. Incorporating messages on destination safety in promotional material may seem impractical at first. Safety information is not traditionally used as promotional material, and marketers may not have the evidence needed to make safety claims. Consequently, it is likely that a policy initiative is required. Policy makers often invest in image repair after major crises (Avraham, 2015; Coaffee & Rogers, 2008). The insights from the present study provide a starting point for discussing safety measures outside of a crisis context. Policy makers often implement safety measures without necessarily promoting them to the public or treating them as a factor that may attract tourists to a destination. They may consider incorporating safety communication as supplementing existing tourism marketing efforts and work with tourist providers for its implementation.

Destination images, developed as part of the promotional efforts to attract tourists, should be targeted to the right audience (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). With big data and tourist analytics, it is becoming easier to profile tourists. Hence, safety communication strategies should ideally be contingent on tourists' characteristics. The results of our study imply that safety communication is more effective for tourists who have low-risk propensity and tourists who have high self-efficacy in travel planning. These tourists welcome safety signals because they are risk-averse. They possess a strong conviction in their travel planning abilities and rely on information to make travel decisions. For these tourists, safety communication should focus on information quality (Yoo et al., 2017) and use cognitive language (Byun & Jang, 2015). Indeed, Yoo et al. (2017) suggest that when targeting tourists with high self-efficacy in smart technologies, a marketer's focus should be on information quality, as it encourages the cognitive processing of information through the central route and leads to travel decision support satisfaction. Although the study by Yoo et al. (2017) is on self-efficacy in smart technologies, a parallel can be drawn to travel-planning self-efficacy as both involve extensive information search for decision-making. Moreover, Byun and Jang (2015) show that advertising messages are effective in promoting destinations when cognitive language is

used to showcase utilitarian destinations, and affective language is used for hedonic destinations. Cognitive language would be more suitable to increase information quality.

Safety messages appear to be least effective for tourists with high-risk propensity and tourists with low self-efficacy: either risk is not an issue or there is a reluctance to make efforts to act upon the safety information due to lack of confidence. Yoo et al. (2017) suggests that focusing on peripheral aspects of the technologies such as interface design and visibility in search engines can lead to higher satisfaction for tourists with low self-efficacy in smart technologies. Applying their findings to our study, marketers can target high-risk propensity tourists and low self-efficacy tourists by communicating safety indirectly through imagery, links to further information on safety, and affective language. In addition, first-time visitors tend to rely more on travel agents than repeat visitors (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). Travel agents have a crucial role to play in engaging with low self-efficacy customers on the issue of safety and fostering travel decisions.

Our study is not without limitations. First, the study focuses on an isolated decision about a single destination, in particular, a seaside destination in a developed country. Although this decision limits bias in the experiment, it raises the question as to whether or not the results apply to other destinations (e.g. cities, remote areas, less developed countries). Moreover, tourists do not usually make travel decisions in isolation. Future research can investigate how safety messages influence the choice between alternative locations as well as different types of locations. Second, we have not tested our propositions for repeat visitors who tend to focus on different types of risks (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011) and are less reliant on promotional images as compared with repeat visitors (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Our study may not be generalizable to repeat visitors who gain knowledge about a destination's safety through personal experience. Third, our study is limited because it is confined to individual U.S. tourists. The percentage of females in the panel is also slightly higher than that in the target population. Extending the range of countries may reveal location-specific issues and potential cultural differences (Seabra et al., 2013). There is also potential to go beyond the scope of this paper and explore differences in how individuals, families, and travel groups respond to safety messages. Fourth, with regards to the format of the ads, we do not explore the differences in using print and digital formats nor compare various forms of media communication. Concerning advertisement length, the safety advertisement presented to the treatment group contains more information and is longer than the control advertisement. The length might have increased the attractiveness of the destination. Previous research suggests that lengthy advertisement copy can be used as a heuristic to infer how good the brand/product is and/or how honest the advertiser is (Franke, Huhmann, & Mothersbaugh, 2004; Ogilvy, 2013), thus, increasing the attractiveness of the brand/product/advertiser. Furthermore, the safety advertisement refers to Croatia as an award-winner unlike the control advertisement. Fifth, our study evaluates the main effect of one factor with two conditions (presence or absence of the safety message). A more elaborate experimental design with additional independent variables and conditions might provide a more detailed description of the changes in the intention to visit a destination.

In conclusion, using safety messages in the promotion of a destination do matter for prospective visitors. Our study reveals that safety messages have a positive impact on visit intentions. Self-efficacy and risk propensity moderate in this relationship. Safety has become a paramount issue in today's world and will continue to be a challenge in the years ahead. Thus, marketers and policy makers should make efforts to understand its significance for tourists. We hope that our study will provide a platform for further theory development on the importance of safety communication in the promotion of tourist destinations.

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TABLES

Table 1. ANCOVA results for predicting visit intention

Source	<i>df</i>	MS	<i>F</i>-value
Covariates			
Age	1	1.232	0.826
Gender	1	0.213	0.143
Income	1	0.037	0.025
Education	1	0.059	0.039
Frequency traveling	1	15.49	10.381**
Main Effects			
Presence safety message (A)	1	13.676	9.166**
Risk propensity groups (B)	1	7.14	4.786*
Self-efficacy groups (C)	1	27.988	18.758***
Interaction			
A x B	1	6.14	4.115*
A x C	1	4.808	3.222 †
Error	301	1.492	
Total	312		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

† $p < .1$

FIGURES

Figure 1. Interaction between risk propensity and experiment condition on visit intention

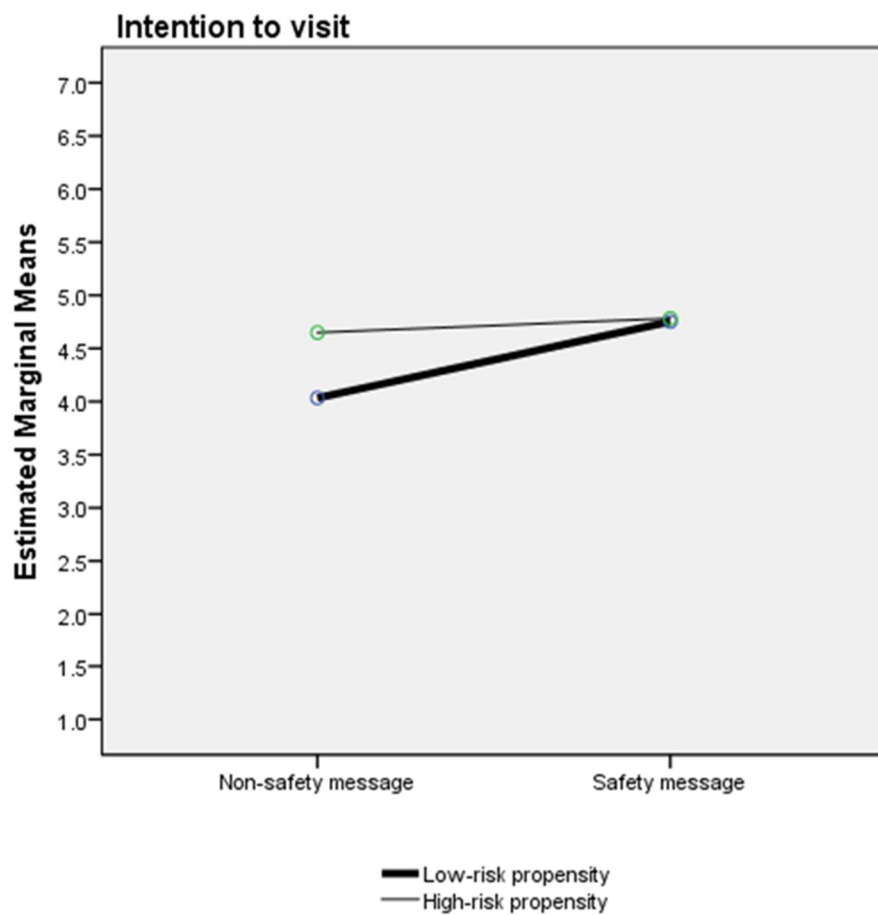


Figure 2. Interaction between self-efficacy and experiment condition on visit intention

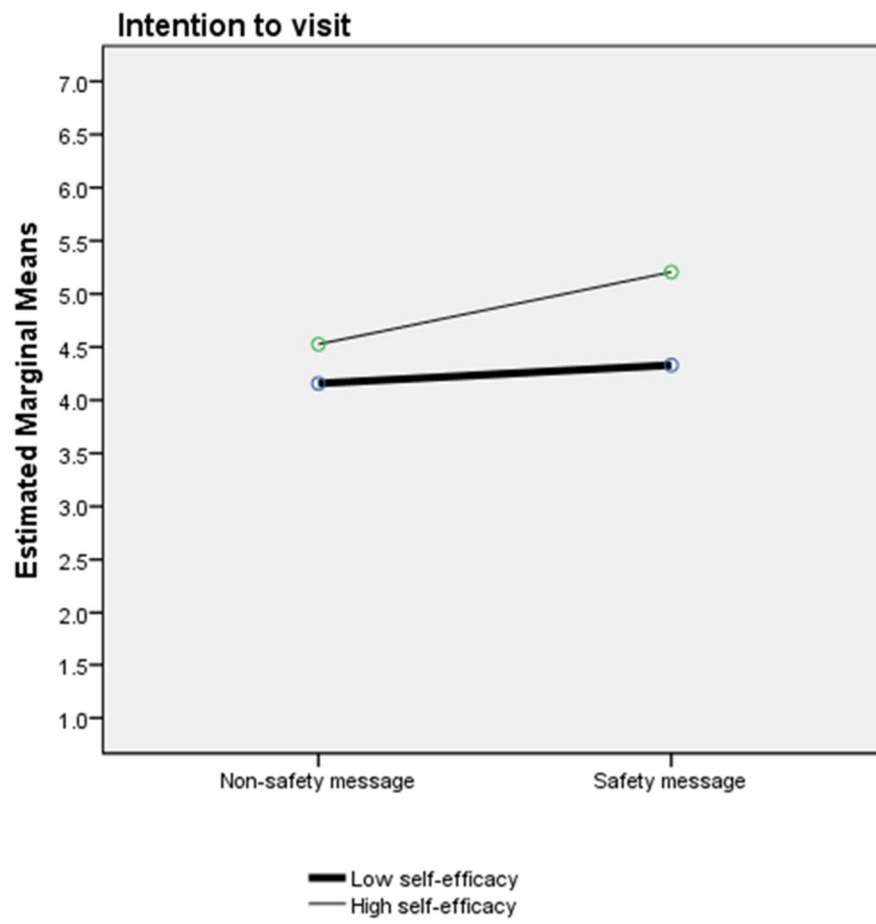


Figure 3. Exclusion of safety messages (a color version is shown in the survey)



Figure 4. Inclusion of safety messages (a color version is shown in the survey)



Appendix

Constructs and Items: Mean, standard deviation, skew, and kurtosis

Constructs and Items	7-point scale	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
<i>Visit intention</i>	<i>(Likert scale)</i>				
The idea of visiting Dubrovnik appeals to me	1= strongly disagree;	4.587	1.567	-0.671	-0.099
A trip to Dubrovnik will be a lot of fun	7= strongly agree	4.731	1.355	-0.757	0.786
I would recommend going to Dubrovnik to others		4.266	1.469	-0.358	-0.13
<i>Risk propensity</i>	<i>(Rating scale)</i>				
Recreational risk (e.g. rock-climbing, scuba diving)	1= never;	2.603	1.634	0.786	-0.303
Safety risk (e.g. fast driving, city cycling without a helmet)	7= very frequently	2.997	1.725	0.391	-0.86
Social risk (e.g. standing for election, publicly challenging a rule or decision)		2.606	1.632	0.648	-0.616
<i>Self-efficacy in travel planning</i>	<i>(Rating scale)</i>				
Find a destination that best fits within my budget	1= not confident at all;	5.022	1.57	-0.714	-0.123
Learn to live in my financial means	7= extremely	4.889	1.621	-0.647	-0.32
Find a destination that best fits my time limitations	confident	4.974	1.485	-0.703	0.003
Set aside time for traveling		4.718	1.635	-0.566	-0.401
Plan ahead for things so that I can travel		4.856	1.618	-0.662	-0.287
Be organized so that I can travel		5.045	1.573	-0.838	0.207
Prioritize what I want to do, and make traveling a priority sometimes		4.558	1.656	-0.41	-0.566
Have back-up plans (e.g. alternative activities) in case of unexpected circumstances		4.478	1.608	-0.368	-0.538
Prepare possible itineraries that can be taken depending on weather		4.542	1.504	-0.335	-0.428
Look up safety advice on the destination I am visiting		4.875	1.545	-0.537	-0.328
Join tours so I do not need to worry about anything		4.327	1.804	-0.282	-0.849
Read lots of reviews on the destination so that I know what to expect		5.038	1.603	-0.69	-0.135
<i>Frequency of traveling</i>	<i>(Rating scale)</i>				
How frequently do you travel abroad?	1= never;	3.375	1.792	-0.019	-1.317
	7= very frequently				

