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## **Theoretical foundations for the study of image and reputational management in tourism and hospitality**

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Risk and reputation recovery in tourism should not be viewed as independent or isolated from other discipline areas. Frameworks, processes and theories cited in studies that explore tourism crisis recovery often include those from service recovery, public relations (PR) and communication, marketing, branding and consumer psychology. Many of the contributed case studies in this book demonstrate the use and application of these concepts, all of which are introduced and explored in this chapter. This chapter is organised into five sections. First, an understanding of the psychology behind consumer behaviour in times of crises is important to organisations and destinations seeking to maintain or recover their reputation. This chapter then begins by exploring the consumer behaviour concepts commonly employed by those seeking to better understand the impact of crisis and disasters on tourist demand. Following this, the influence of the media on the formation of tourists' image perceptions and subsequent behaviour is discussed. The next section discusses the role of marketing communications strategies and branding to the recovery process and in then we introduce the relationship between resilience and reputation and image recovery, a phenomena that features in two of our contributed cases yet remains understated in the current academic literature. The chapter concludes with a discussion on service recovery and its importance to image and reputation recovery within the tourism and hospitality sector.

## Consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour literature, theories and concepts have been used across the entire spectrum of crisis and disaster research to provide explanations for why tourists behave and respond the way they do. Crises and disasters are complex, diverse and variable in terms of extremity and their likely impact on consumers. On the other hand, how consumers respond is dependent on a wide variety of factors including personality, demographic background, cultural background, risk perception and previous experience or involvement in similar events – just to name a few. Of specific relevance to reputation and image management are consumer psychology concepts such as consumer emotion, consumer involvement, risk perception, image formation and information seeking behaviour. These are discussed below.

## Emotions

How a tourist feels about a crisis or disaster will have a significant effect on their perceived image of the destination (Walters et al., 2015) and subsequent visitation intentions. One should note, however, that emotions can work for and against the image or reputation of a crisis-inflicted destination or organisation. For example, in the case of a terrorist attack, fear is a common response among tourists that then taints a destination's image in terms of its safety status (Walters, et al., 2018). Airline disasters provoke the traveller to question the safety of air travel and instil feelings of fear and even anger towards the airline involved (Henderson, 2006). Consumer anger is possibly the most detrimental emotion when it comes to reputation damage as angry consumers are more likely to vent their emotionally laden frustrations publically (Demeter et al., 2019). We learn however from research by Van der Meer and Verhoeven (2014) that that the use of emotional cues in an organisation's crisis response enhances the public's acceptance of messages, reduces feelings of anger, and subsequently minimises any damaging effects on the organisation's reputation. Sadness, on the other hand, despite being a negative emotion, does not necessarily lead to a negative evaluation of the destination/organisation. In the case of the Black Saturday bushfires that occurred in Victoria, Australia in 2009, the empathy and sadness felt among the tourist market towards the affected communities actually increased tourists' willingness to visit the region. The authors of this study, Walters and Mair (2012),

therefore also advocate for the use of empathetic messaging when attempting to restore destination image following a disastrous event.

A commonly applied theory in the study of consumer emotions is cognitive appraisal theory (CAT). The idea behind this theory is that emotions are adaptive responses to environmental circumstances that directly relate to an individual's well-being (Moors et al., 2013). An appraised benefit can lead to positive emotions, whereas an appraised harm can lead to negative emotions. The felt emotions are determined by the interactions between events, an individual's perception about their own well-being, and the individual's expectations regarding his/her own ability to deal with the event (Moors et al., 2013). These variables, or appraisal criteria, play an important role in differentiating the kinds of emotions that occur in response to a crisis or disaster and subsequent behaviour (Watson & Spence, 2007).

It is important to note is that emotions overwhelm any rational mental processes necessary to fully evaluate a given situation (Etzioni, 1988). The occurrence or non-occurrence of an emotional response will depend on the level of exposure to the event and how important or relevant it is to the consumer – referred to in the consumer behaviour literature as involvement. How consumer involvement influences image formation and reputational status is discussed in the following.

## Consumer involvement

Research indicates that the level of involvement consumers feel when processing information will influence the amount of effort, attention and cognitive elaboration towards the issue at hand (Celsi and Olson, 1988). In a general consumer behaviour context, product involvement is defined as “an unobservable state reflecting the amount of interest, arousal or emotional attachment evoked by the product in a particular individual” (Bloch, 1981: 12). According to Cai et al. (2004) how involved people are in their search behaviour will have a significant influence on their purchase decision. According to Teare et al. (1994), product involvement is likely to affect information search activities in particular as variables are inclusive of the consumer's receptivity to advertising and the type of cognitive responses generated during exposure to the available information sources. One of the key aims of tourism marketing communications is to evoke rich mental imagery that stimulates a desire within the target market to take a holiday at the featured destination. Depending on the level of involvement, these