

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER DEMAND FOR TOURISM CRISIS READINESS
CERTIFICATIONS

By

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To my family for their unconditional support

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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The combination of an increase in global tourist arrivals and increased disasters has had dramatic impacts on destinations. As a result, tourists have become more aware of the importance of safety when traveling, thus emphasizing the necessity for destinations to be prepared for any type of crisis. In recent years there has been an onslaught of voluntary certification programs in the tourism industry. However, none of these certifications have focused on crisis preparedness. Understanding consumers' responses to certifications has been a preliminary step in the growth of programs globally. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to examine tourists' perceptions of crisis preparedness certifications based on demographic characteristics (age, gender, and presence of children).

The benefits as a result of crisis certification, confidence in the certification process, and perceptions of safety of certified destinations were the dependent variables measured in this study. Moreover, the likelihood of travel to a certified destination was used to summarize these perceptions. The survey of 2,257 U.S. travelers investigated the four areas surrounding tourism crisis preparedness certification perceptions. A quantitative analysis of the questionnaire was conducted in

order to understand the differences and relationships between the demographics and dependent variables. The results of this study show that older participants, males, and families with children were more supportive of crisis preparedness certifications than other travelers were. To conclude, it is hoped that this study will provide a benchmark for destination management organizations to better understand the potential for crisis preparedness certifications or labeling.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

International Tourism

Tourism is a social phenomenon and an essential factor in the fast growing economy, according to the World Tourism Organization (2012a). For a long time, the tourism industry has been one of the largest business sectors in the world (Mansor, Ahmad, & Mat, 2011; World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2011). In January 2012, the current President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, addressed the travel industry and supported the notion of making America a top global travel destination. President Obama asserted that growing international tourism will result in job opportunities and growth in the national economy (Office of Travel & Tourism Industries [OTTI], 2012). With continuing growth, it is estimated that the tourism industry will support 328 million job opportunities by 2022 (WTTC, 2011). In other words, out of every ten jobs, one will be tourism-related (WTTC, 2011).

The tourism industry not only has increased numbers of job opportunities, but also increased value. In 2011, the tourism industry contributed 9% of the global GDP, or a value of over 6 trillion U.S dollars, and accounted for 255 million jobs (WTTC, 2011). The value is expected to grow by an average of 4% annually for the next ten years, increasing to 10% of the global GDP or the equivalent of 10 trillion U.S. dollars (WTTC, 2011).

The impact to the economy is tied to the number of tourist arrivals to a destination each year. According to the latest World Tourism Barometer report released by The World Tourism Organization (2012b), after the world recession in 2009, international tourist arrivals reached 980 million in 2011. That is a growth rate of 4.4% compared to

the arrivals from 2010. Additionally, it is estimated that there will be 1.8 billion international tourist arrivals in 2030 (Kester, 2012).

In the near future, tourism may have an especially significant impact on the individual national economies of countries that can manage their destinations properly (Mariani & Baggio, 2012). Managing a destination properly entails keeping economic benefits in balance with social and environmental impacts (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b; Fairweather, Maslin, & Simmons, 2005; Font, 2007). Political turmoil and catastrophes greatly affect tourism destinations (Kozak, Crofts, & Law, 2007). As a result of these crises, destinations need to find ways to maintain visitor numbers in the long term. If tourists' perceptions of safety are affected in the long-term, then visitor arrivals will decline (Santana, 2004).

One way to manage these declines is to manage the perception of safety of the destination. Management has typically occurred through the creation of crisis management plans. Thus, creation of a certification process may aid in mitigating and minimizing the impact of these crises (Sasidharan, Sirakaya, & Kerstetter, 2002). The tourism industry has already adopted certifications to ensure standards and aid in maintaining impacts (mainly environmental impacts) (Bien, 2004; Buckley, 2002; Chafe, 2005; 2007; Chester & Crabtree, 2002; Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; 2010b; Fairweather et al., 2005; Font, 2001; 2002; 2007; Font & Harris, 2004; Font, Sanabria, & Skinner, 2003; Foster, 2003; Harris, 2007; Honey & Stewart, 2002; Kozak & Nield, 2004; Overdeest & Rickenbach, 2006; Parsons & Grant, 2007; Sasidharan et al., 2002; Toth, 2002). However, there is a need for certifications in other management as well.

There is a particular need for certifications which monitor standards and maintain impacts related to disasters or crises.

Certifications and the Tourism Industry

Certifications are not only designed to standardize components of the industry, but have also been used as a way to differentiate a destination from its competitors (Kozak & Nield, 2004). Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in 1992, over 100 certification schemes have been established (Font, 2002). In fields outside of academia, a certification is also known as an independent or third party “stamp of approval,” which is shown by giving labels, certificates, marks, or Trademarks (Buckley, 2002; Harris, 2007). It is a series of assessments and standardized processes which can guarantee consumers that the products and/or services from any enterprise can meet certain conditions or measurable criteria (Dodds & Joppe, 2005). Honey and Stewart (2002), for example, report that in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, logos or seals are granted to facilities, services, processes, products, or management systems once they meet the standards of tourism certification programs.

The definition of certification has differed depending on location, times, and scenario. One common definition used by academics in North America and other areas is the measure of a certain body of knowledge (Morrison, Hsieh, & Wang, 1992).

Tourism certification programs can be divided into two types of methodologies: process-based and performance-based (Honey & Stewart, 2002). Process-based programs involve the utilization of internally generated management systems that monitor procedures and practices in order to improve them. On the other hand, performance-based programs use externally determined socio-cultural and economic

criteria or benchmarks. Because both methodologies have their own unique drawbacks and advantages, there has been an increasing number of programs that include a mix of both (Honey & Stewart, 2002).

In contrast to mandatory certification programs, such as those in construction and food handling, tourism certification programs are completely voluntary. The primary purpose of voluntary standards is to go beyond obligatory standards to achieve best practices, and such standards usually include training manuals to help companies achieve the requirements (Dodds & Joppe, 2005). Visitor satisfaction and health and safety conditions form the foundation of many voluntary certification programs (Honey & Stewart, 2002).

A wide variety of tourism certification programs have been developed in the industry within the past decade (Morrison et al., 1992). Tourists invest a lot of time and money on vacations, so they want to ensure the best possible return in terms of quality from their investments (Chafe, 2007). Tourism certifications can, to some extent, ensure the quality of tourists' vacations since tourism entities have to go through a procedure that audits and gives written assurance that the destination meets or exceeds the baseline criteria or standards of the program. Therefore, these certification processes are commonly completed with the aim of maintaining or growing customer satisfaction (Tari, Heras-Saizarbitoria, & Dick, 2012).

Theoretical Framework: Customer Satisfaction as the Basis for Tourism Certification

Within the certification literature, customer satisfaction has been the foundation for the creation of certifications and its impetus (Toth, 2002). Customer satisfaction has, at its core, three fundamental and critical areas: sustainability, quality of the experience

and hygiene/safety (Toth, 2002). Toth (2002) has suggested that customer satisfaction can be likened to a “three-legged stool,” where if one leg collapses, then the stool will collapse. Traditionally, certification has concentrated on only sustainability (Bien, 2004; Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; Font et al., 2003; Font & Harris, 2004; Harris, 2007; Rivera, 2002; Shrivastava, 1993). However, more recently, some destinations have started to regulate quality (Bien, 2004; Chafe, 2007; Kozak & Nield, 2004; Tarí et al., & Dick, 2012; Terlaak & King, 2006). The third leg, health, hygiene, and safety, has all but been ignored in the certification process.

The purpose of needs theory is to investigate how consumers’ choices and decisions are made (Asgary & Wills, 2002). According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the priority of safety needs comes right after essential physiological needs (Tikkanen, 2007). Safety needs are described as the desire to keep away from danger (Pearce, 1988). When physiological needs are well satisfied, the needs of safety will consequently rise up (Benson & Dundis, 2003). Applying this to the tourism field, it has been discovered that travelers who travel in unfamiliar destinations where they are less acquainted with the environment, customs, and cultures of the area, become easy prey for criminals and are more prone to be in danger compared to locals (Chiu & Lin, 2011). As a result, perceptions of safety can heavily influence how travelers make decisions regarding destination choice (Kozak et al., 2007). Destinations can demonstrate their commitment to safety by engaging in ongoing preparedness (Cavlek, 2002). This can be done through training, updating contingency plans, and allocating resources to be able to respond in the event of a crisis (Pforr & Hosie, 2008; Santana, 2004). These things form the bases of a certification program for crisis preparedness.

Why Destinations May Engage in a Crisis Preparedness Certification

As tourism rapidly grows globally, the continuously rising numbers of crises around the world significantly influence the tourism industry adversely (Prideaux, Law, & Faulkner, 2003; Racherla & Hu, 2009; Ritchie, Molinar, & Frechtling, 2010; Seneral, 2009; Shen & Zhao, 2009; Sönmez, 1998). This makes the importance of understanding tourists' safety perceptions more vital than ever (Carlsen & Liburd, 2008; Huang, Tseng, & Petrick, 2008; Pennington-Gray, et al., 2010). In addition, on the supply side it is more important than ever that destinations engage in an ongoing preparedness process.

Global tourism arrivals have allowed for growth in new destinations all over the world. In addition, as air travel and access has become easier, traditional destinations have had to find ways to maintain visitor numbers and attract new visitors. In all, competition for tourists has become extremely fierce (Baum, 2010).

As a way to maintain numbers, destinations have had to come up with solutions to differentiate themselves from the competition. One of the ways destinations have focused on differentiating themselves is through quality standard awards (Kozak & Nield, 2004). Such awards come as a result of achieving certifications that demonstrate the destinations' commitment to certain standards (Buckley, 2002; Harris, 2007). This process has traditionally been achieved through a certification process (Buckley, 2002; Harris, 2007).

Tourism has seen certifications in the areas of quality (Terlaak & King, 2006), eco-labels (Buckley, 2002; Overdevest & Rickenbach, 2006), and environmental quality. The focus of these areas have been mainly to indicate that the destination has engaged in a commitment to environmental sustainability (i.e., Blue Flag, Green Globe Hotel

Certification), quality assurance (i.e., star system in hotels), and customer service (i.e.,zagat rated in restaurants). There has been, however, no certification to crisis for preparedness of destinations safety to date.

Crisis management certifications should be established to ensure that tourism destinations are properly prepared and ready for crises. Certifications can serve to essentially lower or eliminate the chance of occurrence of a crisis, minimize damage, and quickly and efficiently recover from the aftermath in the event of a crisis. In detail, this is typically done by making sure that tourism organizations have a well-constructed crisis management plan in place and the proper personnel with the needed skill sets to play their role in the plan (Shrivastava, 1993). These plans can include steps for before, during, and after the occurrence of a crisis, while personnel can include communication/public relations teams, marketing/promotion teams, information coordination teams, and finance/fund raising teams (Sönmez, Backman, & Allen, 1994). Once certification baseline criteria are met, organizations may be qualified to apply and enjoy all of its benefits, including market advantage and competition differentiation.

Demand Indicators of Certification

With the impact of past crisis being one of the various factors that affect tourists' perceptions of destinations, the effectiveness of a certification geared towards preparedness may warrant examination (Sirakaya, Sheppard, & McLellan, 1997). Although many studies have explored travelers' perception of risk, no research has been found that focuses on travelers' perception of safety related to destinations which have engaged in an ongoing preparedness program. The present study is the first to examine perceptions of safety of certified destinations, the benefits of crisis certification, and confidence in a crisis certification processes. Additionally, the present study further

examines the effects that having a crisis preparedness certification may have on the likelihood of travel to a destination.

Conceptual Framework

Tourists' perceptions of the certification process are the conceptual foundation of this study. The conceptual foundation outlines the relationship between the independent variables (demographic factors) and the dependent variables related to tourism crisis preparedness certifications. Related academic research on crisis preparedness certifications is nonexistent and the concept of crisis preparedness is arguably innovative. Thus, this study integrates research from the fields of quality management, ecotourism, and business (i.e., Bien, 2004; Buckley, 2002; Chafe, 2005; 2007; Chester & Crabtree, 2002; Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; 2010b; Fairweather et al., 2005; Font, 2001; 2002; 2007; Font & Harris, 2004; Font et al., 2003; Foster, 2003; Harris, 2007; Honey & Stewart, 2002; Kozak & Nield, 2004; Overdeest & Rickenbach, 2006; Parsons & Grant, 2007; Sasidharan et al., 2002; Terlaak & King, 2006; Toth, 2002).

Figure 1-1 displays a model with demographic factors, independent variables, and the three dependent variables: benefits as a result of tourism crisis certification, confidence in the certification process to increase safety for tourists, and perception of safety as a result of being a certified destination. Finally, an analysis is conducted to determine if demographic factors (age, gender, and presence of children) influence tourists' likelihood to travel to a certified destination.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore whether crisis preparedness certification contributes to greater consumer interest and increased likelihood of traveling to a crisis certified destination. Specifically, the study explores the relationship

between age, gender, and presence of children and perceptions of safety as a result of certification, the benefits of certification to multiple stakeholders, and confidence in certified destinations among U.S. travelers.

Research Questions

The present study was designed to address the following research questions:

- 1: What are the differences in age, gender, and presence of children of tourists with regard to the benefits of tourism crisis preparedness certifications?
- 2: What are the differences in age, gender, and presence of children of tourists in terms of their confidence in the tourism crisis preparedness certification process?
- 3: What are the differences in age, gender, and presence of children in terms of tourists' perceptions of safety as a result of tourism crisis preparedness certifications?
- 4: What are the relationships between demographics (age, gender and presence of children) and the likelihood of travel to a tourism crisis prepared destination?

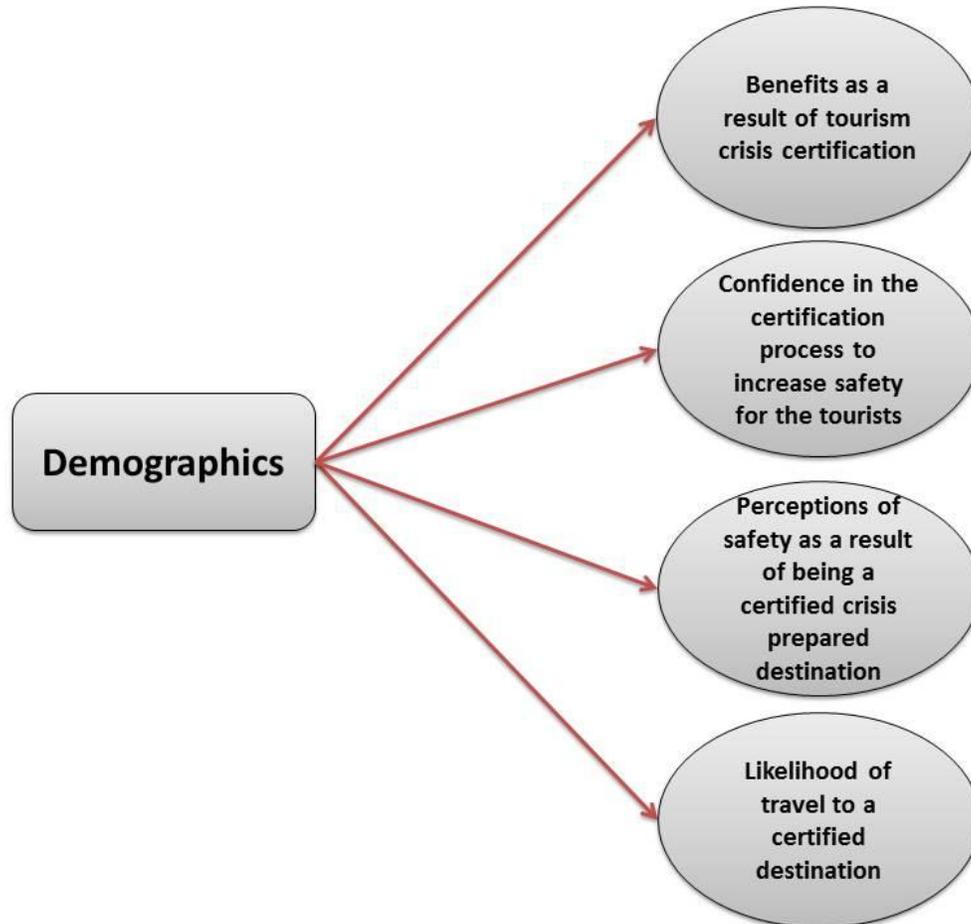


Figure 1-1. Conceptual model of research

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores literature related to this study. It is divided into four sections. The first section of this chapter discusses the overview of tourism crisis management by defining “crisis,” as well as providing examples of tourism crisis events and existing crisis management planning. The second section addresses the benefits of tourism crisis preparedness certifications by using sustainable tourism practices. The third section explores the demand of tourism certification in general. The last section reviews tourists’ likelihood to travel to a certified destination.

An Overview of Tourism Crisis Management in Tourism Literature

The tourism industry can be highly impacted by occurrences of crises. Crises include medical epidemics, political unrest, and natural disasters. Due to the worldwide financial crisis in 2009, political changes in the Middle East and North Africa, and natural disasters in Asia in 2010, there has been a stall in the growth of tourism and the global economy (Kester, 2012). In the last decade, two major crises occurred in the U.S.: the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Both of these events had a great impact on domestic and international tourism (Banipal, 2006; Blake & Sinclair, 2003; Bonham, Edmonds, & Mak, 2006; Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray, & Thapa, 2004; Goodrich, 2002; Vigdor, 2008).

Crises which have had an impact on the tourism industry include the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2002; destructive floods in South America in 2008; the swine flu outbreak in Mexico (BBC, 2009) and deadly earthquakes in New Zealand in 2011 (CNN, 2011). Undeniably, as global tourism arrivals increase in concert with global crises, the tourism industry is at risk (Santana, 2004).

To better prepare for crises, it is essential to clearly understand the definition of crisis. Crises are commonly described as “the possible but unexpected result of management failures that are concerned with the future course of events set in motion by human action or inaction precipitating the event” (Prideaux et al., 2003, p. 478). Coombs (2007, p. 2) defined crisis as “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes.” Mostly, people consider a tourism crisis to be an occurrence that threatens normal tourism related business. Harm done to tourists’ perceptions of the destination can negatively affect and interrupt the continuity of business operation for the local travel and tourism industry (Santana, 2004).

In the early 1980s, companies were more reactive to crises and treated them as they emerged (Shrivastava, 1993). However, there has been a movement towards having more proactive approaches to crises (Shrivastava, 1993). In the book *The Management of Tourism*, Sharpley (2005) proposed a framework for management of a tourism crisis that shows a crisis management lifetime includes five process stages. The five stages were designed in this order: pre-event (planning), crisis detection, emergency, containment, and post-event (recovery) (Sharpley, 2005).

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA, 2012) proposed a contrast to the five stages that has a four Rs’ approach to tourism crisis management. This framework simply demonstrates how destination and tourism business sectors can effectively manage the four phases of a crisis: reduction, readiness, response, and recovery (Wilks & Moore, 2003). The following descriptions further explain these ‘four Rs’ in detail. First,

'reduction' is identifying any possible crisis which may occur and the early warnings of any potential crisis. Second, 'readiness' is preparing plans and running exercises. Third, 'response' is executing operational and communication plans in a crisis situation. Finally, 'recovery' is returning the organization to normal after a crisis (Wilks & Moore, 2003). This model has been adopted by several agencies because it clearly focuses more attention on the pre-incident phase of the crisis through both an identification of any possible crisis as well as laying out a clear plan (Wilks & Moore, 2003).

The first step to being 'ready' for crises is to have the proper personnel with the necessary skill sets (Shrivastava, 1993). For instance, in the past, companies allocated little internal capacity in skills and resources to crisis management (Shrivastava, 1993). Instead, they mostly hired external consultants to cope with crisis related issues. However, now companies are putting more and more effort into increasing crisis management capacity in their organizations (Shrivastava, 1993). These in-house personnel are expected to respond more quickly to crisis occurrences. Furthermore, organizations now also put more emphasis on crisis management skills than on crisis management procedures. Although the procedural approach is still valuable in many ways, multiple incidents in the past have shown the limitations of such an approach. While plans are constant, the execution can be dynamic with the correct crisis management skills (Shrivastava, 1993).

Organizing a crisis management task force and developing a guidebook are recommendations offered in *Managing Tourism Crises, a Guidebook* (Sönmez, et al., 1994). The task force should be comprised of community leaders, local government officials, and local travel and tourism industry professionals assigned to delegated

tasks, such as: (1) a communication/public relations team that disseminates accurate information to the media and public; (2) a marketing/promotion team that analyzes past and potential visitor data to conduct plans to attract visitors; (3) an information coordination team to accurately estimate and convey disaster and recovery information to all teams; and (4) a finance/fund raising team to track costs and raise funds (Sönmez, et al., 1994). Additionally, the crisis management guidebook serves the purpose of providing a guide to the task force which allows them to know proper actions for pre-disaster and post-disaster times in the form of a checklist. It is recommended that detailed responsibility delegation also be included in this guidebook (Sönmez et al., 1994).

Besides following the guidelines discussed above, Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, and Tarlow (1999) suggest that crisis management planning be incorporated into overall tourism planning, marketing, and management strategies. These plans would be expected to expedite the recovery of tourism in the event of a crisis by reestablishing the attractiveness and functionality of the destination, reassuring area safety to possible visitors, rebuilding an image of attractiveness and safety, and aiding local tourism industry members when they are recovering from a struggling economy. Having a plan can generally save time and costs during and after the crisis. Without proper planning, the consequences could include permanent damage to a destination's image and loss of visitor confidence and revenues (Sönmez et al., 1999).

The tourism industry has experienced numerous unexpected incidents in the past. These crises served not only to raise public consciousness of the risks and activities related to tourism but also provided evidence of the negative impact on economic

activities and the related severe effects such an impact has on the tourism industry (Santana, 2004). Furthermore, places affected by a crisis or disaster often encounter a negative destination image which can influence a customer's destination choice (Santana, 2004). As a result of such events, the economy can be negatively affected by the resultant downturn in local tourism activities (Santana, 2004).

Tourism Crisis Preparedness Certification: Overview and Benefits to the Industry

In reviewing a certification process that has been widely used in the industry and the usual participants in such processes, Font (2001) illustrated how the certification assessment process works in terms of the progress, process and prospects for tourism environmental certification. As the funding body seeks to improve the industry's performance, it contracts with a team or company that has expertise in lobbying, marketing, project management, and experts in the criteria of the label, in order to form the awarding body. It builds the standards and criteria for labels and has the verifying body develop the verification method for assessing the applicant. Then, the awarding body promotes the labels to applicants and the industry to create a demand. Once the applicant applies and qualifies, the awarding body accredits the certification. The applicant also promotes himself by going through the certification process, hence building more awareness and demand. Finally, the certificate value is recognized and accepted in the industry (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b; Font, 2002).

The certification process used in the tourism industry known as eco-labeling (Sasidharan et al., 2002) proceeds in six steps:

- Step (1): tourism sector selection
- Step (2): environmental impact evaluation
- Step (3): criteria development
- Step (4): final criteria selection
- Step (5): eco-label award

Step (6): periodic re-certification.

Being labeled or certified by impartial third party organizations can assure the quality of a service or product in order to meet consumers' requirements (Font, 2002; Sasidharan et al., 2002).

As an example, Chester and Crabtree (2002) noted that the Australia Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) is a voluntary certification scheme that aims to not only provide nature and ecotourism businesses with the ability to ascertain best practice principles in order to continue to improve their products, but also to provide consumers, such as tourists, tour wholesalers, and local communities with the means of genuine tourism and ecotourism product recognition. Due to geographical distance, for small businesses, on-site independent audits are cost-ineffective (Chester & Crabtree, 2002). The NEAP has developed an approach which relies on self-assessments backed by periodic, principle-focused audits. Those who are interested in being certified can learn about the criteria and then adjust and assess operations at their own pace without any cost in order to have the luxury of controlling their own budget and timeframe. Once they are ready, they then submit the fee with the application. Independent referees check the submitted data for discrepancies. In addition, occasional on-site audits also take place. The operator is eligible to display NEAP logos next to their certified products once the application is successful (Chester & Crabtree, 2002).

Benefits of tourism crisis preparedness certification: Certification is beneficial to businesses, consumers, governments, local communities, and the local environment (Bien, 2004; Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; 2010b). Conaghan and Hanrahan's (2010a) research, for example, determined that tourists receive a benefit when certification is

implemented. Overall, certification usually adds value to companies and influences consumer intentions in terms of destination (Font, 2002).

Certification further shows good practices and encourages voluntary improvements. According to several studies (i.e. Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; Font & Harris, 2004; Honey, 2002), tourists tend to benefit the most with a 20% improvement. The environment comes second with 19%, while local communities are third with 15%. Others that benefit from certifications, according to the research, included but are not limited to certified businesses, consumers, and governments (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a).

More specifically, the benefits of eco-tourism and sustainability certifications are presented in the literature (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b; Parsons & Grant, 2007; Toth, 2002). One benefit is the satisfaction of the feeling that there is a need to protect the environment and conserve energy in order to be a responsible community member (Toth, 2002). Another benefit is sustainability to ensure that the environment and the business will be around for a long time to come (Toth, 2002). Researchers have indicated that tourism businesses benefit from achieving certification because it is possible for businesses to decrease customer complaints, gain greater popularity, improve reputations, and overall improve the public image for a business (Toth, 2002). Additionally, businesses may operate more efficiently, reduce those costs, build a marketing advantage, and obtain more customers (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b). Certification programs often allow hoteliers to meet with environmentalists and health professionals to work together and share knowledge and experience (Toth, 2002). Banking and insurance institutions usually have better impressions of certified entities

and have a higher chance of granting better rates (Toth, 2002). Liability is lowered since certification programs decrease risk and reduce the chance of accidents (Toth, 2002). For consumers or tourists, better quality services are provided while using fewer resources efficiently (Parsons & Grant, 2007). In addition, certifications aid governments to maintain market position, increase market standards, and offer benefits to the economy (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b). From the standpoint of local communities, the advantage of certification is that they are protected from damage and certified businesses respect the local communities which, in turn, get long term economic benefits (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010b).

Overview of Demand for Tourism Certification in General

Concerning consumers' or tourists' attitudes toward certified tourism businesses, products, or even destinations, a substantial number of surveys have been conducted (i.e. Chafe, 2005; Fairweather et al., 2005; Rivera, 2002). Rivera (2002) showed that certified hotels located in Costa Rica were able to command price premiums due to superior environmental performance. Moreover, international visitors to New Zealand indicated that tourism certification was necessary in New Zealand even though a small minority actually knew about tourism certification (13%) (Fairweather et al., 2005). Additionally, visitors to New Zealand indicated they were more likely to choose hotels which were certified over those which were not when given the chance (Fairweather et al., 2005).

Font (2007) claims that being certified does not equal higher quality products. In general, tourists cannot tell the difference between a certified tourism product and one that is not certified. Therefore, he argues that since profit is relatively low in the tourism industry, demand for premiums due to certification is not high due to the lack of

meaning to tourists (Font, 2007). In contrast to Font's work, Chafe (2005) found that consumers' demand for responsible tourism from Germans, Italians, and Australians, was high and they were more likely to select certified businesses and products than uncertified products.

Confidence in the Certification Process

Since consumer and supplier confidence in certification processes plays a significant role in the certification life cycle, research that focuses on this topic can be found in various fields including business, ecotourism and responsible tourism. Specifically in the tourism field, certifications provide socially and environmentally responsible choices to boost consumer confidence. Furthermore, organizations recognize that high levels of expertise in the certification process add higher levels of confidence when certification programs are robust, open, and transparent (Font et al., 2003).

Tourists' Perception of Safety in Destination

It is often suggested that socio-demographic profiles have a significant influence on choice of travel destination (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). For instance, concern for safety increases with age and may have a higher influence on travel decisions for married travelers, whereas women tend to be less interested in risk-taking activities than men (Arch, 1993). However, research shows that demographic variables such as age, gender, education, income level, and presence of children in households have a limited effect on risk perception level (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). The extent of the impact that these independent variables have on perceptions of crisis certifications that lower such risks is to be determined.

Lepp and Gibson (2003) also studied the relationship between perceived risk factors and gender, previous travel experience, and tourist roles within a sample group of young American adults. One of their survey results indicates that males generally perceive less risk than females in the health-related perceptions for risks associated with international tourism. Additionally, according to Lepp and Gibson's study (2008) of sensation seeking in tourism and its relationship to gender and associated tourist roles, perceptions of risk and destination choice, even though gender was not a significant predictor of tourist role or international travel experience, men were shown to have higher sensation seeking personalities than women during travel.

In an examination of the influence of risk perceptions on travel intentions post September 11, 2001, Floyd et al. (2004) found that safety concerns, perceived social risk, travel experience, and income level were related factors influencing the likelihood of travel for pleasure purposes in the subsequent 12 months. Among the demographic variables investigated in the study, income was the most statistically significant predictor of travel intention. In particular, travelers with higher incomes were found to be more likely to take pleasure trips in the following year (Floyd, et al., 2004).

Simpson and Siguaw (2008) examined the relationships between perceived risk types and demographic characteristics. Gender was the only variable that was not significantly associated with perceived risk. Nevertheless, single and young travelers both perceived monetary concerns and travel service provider performance as factors related to major risk. On the other hand, the higher income groups and middle-aged groups, as well as married travelers were most concerned about crime (Simpson & Siguaw, 2008).

Kellens, Zaalberg, Neutens, Vanneuville, and Maeyer (2011) stated that household composition can be defined by the number of children present in the household. While the extent on how risk perception is affected by this factor is a controversial discussion, the presence of children in the household is a significant factor in the level of perception of nuclear threat (Houts, et al. as cited in Kellens, et al., 2011). Additionally, although families with children have been evaluated as perceiving more risks, their probability of withdrawing because of a hurricane was essentially the same as families without children (Matyas, et al., 2011).

Likelihood of Travel as a Result of Certification

When travelers are choosing from a wide variety of destinations to travel to, they pick locations that interest them according to their personality (Lepp & Gibson, 2008). Destination certification is a factor that also influences this choice (Foster, 2003; Goodwin & Francis, 2003).

According to a study of consumers in the United Kingdom, respondents possessed high levels of perception of ethical and responsible tourism (Goodwin & Francis, 2003). The study showed that 52% of those consumers were more likely to book a trip to a destination with a written code guarantee to ensure good working conditions, protect the environment, and support local charities (Goodwin & Francis, 2003).

On the other hand, with the rapidly rising volume of tourism certifications, there has been increasing difficulty in explaining each certification's effectiveness since they cannot be frequently evaluated (Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a). Consequently, consumers and the travel industry are likely to face confusion on which certifications are legitimate (Honey, 2002). With this lack of recognition, it may be hypothesized that a

certification's influence on a consumer's likelihood to travel has yet to reach its full potential.

While the present study focuses on tourists' opinions of traveling to certified destinations, Foster (2003) proposed a relevant study focusing on an analysis of consumer awareness of accreditation and what results it had on their purchasing behavior in Victoria, Australia. In the study, researchers obtained results from 155 participants. Nearly 61% of tourists stated that certification or tourism accreditation had no meaning for them. However, after they learned about the certification, 71.4% of tourists said they would choose a certified tour operator for their next trip (Foster, 2003).

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses research methods in the remainder of this study. There are four sections covered in this chapter: (1) data collection, (2) survey instrument, (3) operationalization of all variables including independent and dependent variables, and (4) analysis of the data.

Data Collection

For this research, data was obtained from MMGY Global (formerly Y Partnership), a travel and hospitality integrated marketing firm. Sixteen questions were purchased to be used and structured for this study. Only ten questions were used for this study. All questions were included in the MMGY's Travel Horizons™ Survey, which is a nationally representative online survey that is co-authored with U.S. Travel Association quarterly. The 20 minute survey is part of the Travel Horizons™ research program, which is a tracking survey designed to determine the impact of current events on the travel intentions of American adult travelers among a nationally representative sample. Data collection took place in February 2012. The respondents were tourists who focused mainly on either travel for leisure purposes in the past 12 months or intended to take at least one leisure trip during the following six months. Based on income, gender, and age quotas that are comparable to the U.S. population, surveys were sent to adults living in the U.S. Until all quotas were met, the survey was to stay in the field.

Survey Instrument

A scenario was created in order to have the respondents respond to research questions. The scenario read:

We are interested in getting your feedback on a new program travel destinations in the U.S. are considering. Some U.S. destinations are

considering implementing a certification process which would better prepare the destination, its guests and its travel and tourism industry to better handle a crisis if one were to occur. The destination after completing a rigorous certification process would display a logo and signage which indicates to the traveler that the destination they are visiting is “crisis ready.” Using a scale from 1-5 where 1=“strongly disagree” and 5=“strongly agree” to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

The questions were developed based on certification issues identified in the literature and consisted of ten questions representing four constructs used in certification perceptions. In addition, the questionnaire included demographic characteristics (age, gender, and presence of children) of the respondents.

Operationalization of Variables

In this study, all questions are based on a five-point Likert-type scale (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree) with an added 0= No opinion/ Not sure category for cases in which the participants did not know the answer. The independent variables used in this study were: age, gender and presence of children (all demographic variables). Four dependent variables were used: benefits of crisis certification, tourists’ confidence in the crisis certification process, tourists’ safety perceptions to certified destinations and likelihood to travel to a certified destination.

Independent Variable

Demographics: The demographic variables used in this study were: age, gender and presence of children. Age was coded as four groups (ages 18-30, 31-50, 51-70, and 71 and higher); gender was coded as 0= male, 1= female; presence of children was asked as a dichotomous variable (yes or no).

Dependent Variables

Benefits as a result of tourism crisis certification: The first construct was the benefits as a result of tourism crisis certification. Four related items were presented in

the questionnaire. Based on Conaghan and Hanrahan's (2010a; 2010b) research, four stakeholders that benefit from crisis certification were examined in terms of tourists' perceptions: visitors, local governments, the destination's tourism businesses, and local communities (Table 3-1).

Confidence in the certification process to increase safety for tourists: In order to determine tourists' confidence in crisis certification processes, one question was included in this survey (Table 3-1).

Perceptions of safety as a result of being a certified crisis prepared destination: The construct "perceptions of safety" used four questions to measure tourists' safety perceptions based on crisis certified destinations. Items focused mainly on how crisis prepared destinations make tourists feel during their trips (Table 3-1).

Likelihood of travel to a certified destination: The content of the field of certification is an important issue due to the unpredictability of the tourism industry, though it has generated relatively little discussion in the considerable amount of literature on crisis management. In order to understand the likelihood of travel to a crisis certified destination, one question from a study on British consumer attitudes toward ethical and responsible tourism (Goodwin & Francis, 2003) was adapted for this study (Table 3-1).

Data Analysis

The analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS®) version 20.0. The demographic data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as percentages, frequencies, and means.

For the research questions, multiple t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted in order to examine the relationship between each independent

variable (age, gender, and presence of children) and tourists' perception of crisis readiness certifications. ANOVAs with post hoc Scheffé were used to test for significant difference among the age groups.

Table 3-1. Survey questions

Questions	Reference
Benefits of crisis certification	
1. The crisis prepared certification benefits the visitor.	(Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; 2010b)
2. The crisis prepared certification benefits the local government.	Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; 2010b)
3. The crisis prepared certification benefits the destination's tourism business.	Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; 2010b)
4. The crisis prepared certification benefits the local community.	Conaghan & Hanrahan, 2010a; 2010b)
Confidence in crisis certification process	
5. I have a great deal of confidence in such a crisis certification process.	(Toth, 2002)
Perceptions of safety to certified destinations	
6. A certified crisis prepared destination would be safer to visit than one that is not certified.	(Sönmez et al., 1999)
7. A certified destination would be better prepared to handle a crisis than a destination that is not certified.	(Sönmez et al., 1999)
8. A certified crisis prepared destination would be in a better position to handle a crisis than a destination that has not completed the certification process.	(Sönmez et al., 1999)
9. Response to a crisis by a certified crisis prepared destination will be better than response by destinations that have not gone through the crisis certification process.	(Sönmez et al. 1999)
Likelihood of travel to a certified destination	
10. How likely would you be to travel to a destination which is certified over one which is not?	(Goodwin & Francis, 2003)

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

In this chapter, the results are presented in five sections: (1) description of the sample, (2) Research question 1: what are the differences in age, gender, and presence of children of tourists with regard to the benefits of tourism crisis preparedness certifications? (3) Research question 2: what are the difference in age, gender, and presence of children of tourists in terms of their confidence in the tourism crisis preparedness certification process? (4) Research question 3: what are the differences in age, gender, and presence of children in terms of tourists' perceptions of safety as a result of tourism crisis preparedness certifications? (5) Research question 4: what are the relationships between demographics (age, gender and presence of children) and the likelihood of travel to a tourism crisis prepared destination?

Description of the Sample

In this sample (Table 4-1), 52.1% of participants were female, and 47.9% were male. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 74 years. The majority (37.6%) of participants were in the age group of 51 to 70 years old, followed by the age group of 31 to 50 which made up 37.5% of the entire sample. Additionally, about 90% of participants claimed that there was no child present in their household, while only about 10% of participants had children. Most of the participants had a high school diploma (29.8%), followed by 1-3 years of college (28.6%). In their most recent posted household annual income, 39.7% of participants stated their income fell between \$50,000 and \$124,999. Finally, most participants went on leisure trips less than five times last year (88.8%).

Based on the percentages cited, out of a total of 2,257 participants, the number of males and females was about the same. Most of them did not have children present in

their households, and the majority of these participants were between 31 to 70 years of age. The majority of respondents had a high school diploma or 1-3 years of college degree with annual incomes in the range of \$50,000 to \$124,000 U.S dollars and they had less than five leisure trips last year.

Research Question 1: What Are the Differences in Age, Gender, and Presence of Children of Tourists With Regard to the Benefits of Tourism Crisis Preparedness Certifications?

Respondents were more likely to agree that crisis certification benefited the local community and the local tourism businesses. For the statement “prepared certification benefits the visitor” the mean score was 3.47, indicating a neutral feeling about the benefits to visitors (Table 4-2). Similarly, respondents felt neutral about benefits to the government about certification.

In addition, ANOVA and T-tests were used to analyze the differences among demographics and participants’ benefits of tourism crisis preparedness certifications. As shown in Table 4-3, significant differences were found between different age groups with regard to all four statements. Participants aged 18-30, 31-50, and 71 years and higher differed significantly in their agreement with the statement “the crisis prepared certification benefits the visitor” compared to participants aged 51-70 years old. Those that were aged 18-50 agreed more with the statement “certification benefits the local government” than those aged 51-70. Participants in age groups 31-50 and 71 and higher considered that crisis prepared certification benefits the destination’s tourism businesses more, than 51-70 year old participants. Finally, more participants aged 31 to 50 reported that certification benefits the local community than the ones aged 51 to 70 years of age.

Two statements showed significant differences among males and females (Table 4-4). For the statement “certification benefits the local government” and “certification benefits the local community” males indicated stronger agreement with both of these statements.

Finally, among the four benefit statements, there was no significant difference found among the four statements with regard to presence of children.

Research Question 2: What Are the Differences in Age, Gender, and Presence of Children of Tourists in Terms of Their Confidence in the Tourism Crisis Preparedness Certification Process?

With regards to descriptive of confidence in the process, the majority of participants were neutral (46.2%). Although the second most chosen answer was “agree” (18.2%) (Table 4-2), this shows that participants did not particularly have confidence in the certification process.

Both ANOVA and T-tests were used to examine the differences among demographics and participants’ confidence in the tourism crisis preparedness certification process. With regard to confidence in the certification process, all three independent variables indicated significant differences.

As displayed in table 4-6, participants aged 18-30, 31-50 and 71 years old were significantly different from those in the 51 to 70 age group on the variable “I have a great deal of confidence in such a crisis certification process.”

Males were more likely to have confidence in the certification process than females (male $M = 3.08$; female $M = 2.93$) (Table 4-7).

Finally, families with children were more likely to agree with confidence in the certification process than families without children (with children $M = 3.24$; no children $M = 2.98$) (Table 4-8).

Research Question 3: What Are the Differences in Age, Gender, and Presence of Children in Terms of Tourists' Perception of Safety of Tourism Crisis Preparedness Certifications?

Participants generally perceived certified crisis prepared destinations to be somewhat safer than ones that are not which displayed in Table 4-2. In the statement “A certified crisis prepared destination would be safer to visit than one that is not certified”, a high percentage of 40.7% of participants chose “neutral”. However, the total number of participants that chose either “agree” or “strongly agree” was 41.9%. Participants that disagreed to some extent represented 17.4% of the total number.

The rest of the perception statements share very similar results with the first one. However, in comparison to the results of the first question, there were fewer participants who chose “neutral” and more who chose “agree” and “strongly agree”. The mean of the question “Response to a crisis by a certified crisis prepared destination will be better than response by destinations that have not gone through the crisis certification process” was 3.39. Overall, respondents were neutral in their agreement with the certification process; however, more respondents indicated a positive agreement than a negative agreement.

ANOVA and T-tests were used to explore the differences among demographics and participants' perception of safety of tourism crisis preparedness certification. With regard to the four statements, all three independent variables indicated significant differences. As shown in table 4-9, the perceptions of safety as a result of a certification process indicated significant differences between those who were aged 51 to 70 compared to participants who were 71 years old or older on the following variables: “A certified crisis prepared destination would be safer to visit than one that is not certified”, “A certified destination would be better prepared to handle a crisis than a destination

that is not certified” and “response to a crisis by a certified crisis prepared destination will be better than response by destinations that have not gone through the crisis certification process.” In addition, respondents aged 18-30, 31-50 and 71 years old were more likely to agree that “A certified crisis prepared destination would be in a better position to handle a crisis than a destination that has not completed the certification process” compared to people aged between 51 and 70.

Males had a significantly higher mean score than females (male $M = 3.57$; female $M = 3.38$) with regards to “A certified crisis prepared destination would be in a better position to handle a crisis than a destination that has not completed the certification process” (Table 4-10).

Respondents with children ($M = 3.55$) were more likely to agree than respondents without children ($M = 3.37$) to the statement “Response to a crisis by a certified crisis prepared destination would be better than response by destinations that have not gone through the crisis certification process” (Table 4-11).

Research Question 4: What Are the Relationships Between Demographics (Age, Gender and Presence of Children) and the Likelihood of Travel to a Tourism Crisis Prepared Destination?

In determining the relationship between demographics and the likelihood of travel to a tourism crisis prepared destination, all three independent variables indicated significant differences.

Participants aged 18 to 30 were significantly different from those aged 31-50 and 71 or higher on the item “I would be likely to travel to a destination that is certified over one that is not certified.” Those between ages 51-70 were more likely to agree that they would travel to a destination that is certified over one that is not (Table 4-12).

Females were significantly more likely to choose traveling to a certified travel destination than males (male $M = 3.25$; female $M = 3.35$) (Table 4-13).

Families without children in the household ($M = 3.33$) were more likely to agree with the statement “Travel to a destination that is certified over one which is not” than families with children in the home ($M = 3.07$). The ones without children in the household seem to be more likely to travel to safer destinations or travel while there is no potential crisis (Table 4-14).

Table 4-1. Profile of respondents (N=2257)

	Frequency (N)	Valid percent (%)
Age		
18-30	355	15.7
31-50	846	37.5
51-70	848	37.6
71+	208	9.2
Gender		
Male	1081	47.9
Female	1176	52.1
Presence of Children		
Yes	230	10.2
No	2027	89.8
Education		
Not specified	6	.3
Less than high school	253	11.2
High school graduate	672	29.8
1-3 years college	646	28.6
College graduate	445	19.7
Post graduate	235	10.4
Household income		
Less than \$17,500	393	17.4
\$17,500 - \$29,999	316	14.0
\$30,000 - \$49,999	430	19.1
\$50,000 - \$124,999	896	39.7
\$125,000 or more	222	9.8
Frequency of leisure trips (times)		
Less than 5	2004	88.8
6-10	174	7.7
11-15	57	2.5
16-20	6	.3
21 or more	16	.7

Table 4-2. Descriptive statistics for the dependent variables in percentage (%)

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neutral	4 agree	5 strongly agree	M
Benefits of Certification						
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the visitor.	7.1	4.1	31.3	26.9	16.0	3.47
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the local government.	6.8	3.1	31.1	29.3	13.4	3.48
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the destination's tourism business.	7.6	3.7	35.7	34.3	18.7	3.53
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the local community.	7.5	3.8	34.8	38.4	15.6	3.51
Confidence in Certification						
• I have a great deal of confidence in such a crisis certification process.	12.7	12.8	46.2	18.2	10.1	3.00
Perceptions of safety as a result of certification process						
• A certified crisis prepared destination would be safer to visit than one that is not certified	9.6	7.8	40.7	28.5	13.4	3.28
• A certified destination would be better prepared to handle a crisis than a destination that is not certified.	8.0	5.4	36.5	32.4	17.7	3.47
• A certified crisis prepared destination would be in a better position to handle a crisis than a destination that has not completed the certification process.	8.4	5.2	35.0	33.3	18.1	3.47
• Response to a crisis by a certified crisis prepared destination will be better than response by destinations that have not gone through the crisis certification process.	9.0	5.1	38.9	31.9	15.1	3.39
Likelihood of travel to a certified destination						
• How likely would you be to travel to a destination that is certified over one which is not?	5.4	10.8	45.9	22.1	14.8	3.30

Table 4-3. Results of ANOVA indicating differences in benefit of certification by age group

	18-30	31-50	51-70	71+	F value	Sig.
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the visitor.	3.59 ^a	3.52 ^a	3.32 ^b	3.70 ^a	9.10	.000*
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the local government.	3.57 ^a	3.56 ^a	3.34 ^b	3.53	6.15	.000*
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the destination's tourism business.	3.55	3.59 ^a	3.41 ^b	3.71 ^a	5.45	.001*
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the local community.	3.52	3.59 ^a	3.40 ^b	3.58	4.51	.004*

* $p < .05$.

Different superscripted letters indicate numbers being different, e.g., ^a is different from ^b.

Table 4-4. Results of t-test indicating differences in benefit of certification by gender

	Male	Female	t-test	Sig.
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the visitor.	3.52	3.43	1.73	.083
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the local government.	3.55	3.40	3.02	.003*
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the destination's tourism business.	3.55	3.50	1.15	.250
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the local community.	3.56	3.46	2.24	.025*

* $p < .05$.

Table 4-5. Results of t-test indicating differences in benefit of certification by presence of children

	No children	Yes children	t-test	Sig.
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the visitor.	3.46	3.57	1.26	.209
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the local government.	3.47	3.55	-1.17	.242
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the destination's tourism business.	3.53	3.51	.210	.834
• The crisis prepared certification benefits the local community.	3.50	3.57	-1.03	.305

* $p < .05$.

Table 4-6. Results of ANOVA indicating differences in confidence in certification process by age group

	18-30	31-50	51-70	71+	F value	Sig.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a great deal of confidence in such a crisis certification process. 	3.14 ^a	3.07 ^a	2.81 ^b	3.22 ^a	11.78	.000*

* $p < .05$.

Different superscripted letters indicate numbers being different, e.g., ^a is different from ^b.

Table 4-7. Results of t-test indicating differences in confidence in certification process by gender

	Male	Female	t-test	Sig.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a great deal of confidence in such a crisis certification process. 	3.08	2.93	2.90	.004*

* $p < .05$.

Table 4-8. Results of t-test indicating differences in confidence in certification process by presence of children

	No children	Yes children	t-test	Sig.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have a great deal of confidence in such a crisis certification process. 	2.98	3.24	-.260	.002*

* $p < .05$.

Table 4-9. Results of ANOVA indicating differences in perceptions of safety as a result of certification process by age group

	18-30	31-50	51-70	71+	F value	Sig.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certified crisis prepared destination would be safer to visit than one that is not certified. 	3.38	3.28	3.19 ^a	3.46 ^b	4.04	.007*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certified destination would be better prepared to handle a crisis than a destination that is not certified. 	3.51	3.49	3.37 ^a	3.68 ^b	4.58	.003*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certified crisis prepared destination would be in a better position to handle a crisis than a destination that has not completed the certification process. 	3.58 ^a	3.52 ^a	3.31 ^b	3.73 ^a	9.91	.000*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response to a crisis by a certified crisis prepared destination will be better than response by destinations that have not gone through the crisis certification process. 	3.47	3.39	3.30 ^a	3.56 ^b	3.57	.014*

* $p < .05$.

Different superscripted letters indicate numbers being different, e.g., ^a is different from ^b.

Table 4-10. Results of t-test indicating differences in perceptions of safety as a result of certification process by gender

	Male	Female	t-test	Sig.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certified crisis prepared destination would be safer to visit than one that is not certified 	3.33	3.24	1.91	.056
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certified destination would be better prepared to handle a crisis than a destination that is not certified. 	3.51	3.42	1.91	.056
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A certified crisis prepared destination would be in a better position to handle a crisis than a destination that has not completed the certification process. 	3.57	3.38	3.68	.000*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response to a crisis by a certified crisis prepared destination will be better than response by destinations that have not gone through the crisis certification process. 	3.41	3.38	.583	.560

* $p < .05$.

Table 4-11. Results of t-test indicating differences in perceptions of safety as a result of certification process by presence of children

	No children	Yes children	t-test	Sig.
• A certified crisis prepared destination would be safer to visit than one that is not certified.	3.27	3.35	-.898	.369
• A certified destination would be better prepared to handle a crisis than a destination that is not certified.	3.45	3.58	-1.55	.121
• A certified crisis prepared destination would be in a better position to handle a crisis than a destination that has not completed the certification process.	3.46	3.62	-1.93	.054
• Response to a crisis by a certified crisis prepared destination will be better than response by destinations that have not gone through the crisis certification process.	3.37	3.55	-2.19	.014*

* $p < .05$.

Table 4-12. Results of ANOVA indicating differences in likelihood of travel to a certified destination by age group

	18-30	31-50	51-70	71+	F value	Sig.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How likely would you be to travel to a destination that is certified over one which is not? 	3.08 ^a	3.25 ^b	3.44 ^c	3.31 ^b	11.61	.000*

* $p < .05$.

Different superscripted letters indicate numbers being different, e.g., ^a is different from ^b and different from ^c.

Table 4-13. Results of t-test indicating differences in likelihood of travel to a certified destination by gender

	Male	Female	t-test	Sig.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How likely would you be to travel to a destination that is certified over one which is not? 	3.25	3.35	2.31	.021*

* $p < .05$.

Table 4-14. Results of t-test indicating differences in likelihood of travel to a certified destination by presence of children

	No children	Yes children	t-test	Sig.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How likely would you be to travel to a destination that is certified over one which is not? 	3.33	3.07	3.60	.000*

* $p < .05$.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the relationship between demographic characteristics, namely age, gender, and presence of children in a household, along with perceptions of crisis preparedness certifications. Although kinds of tourism certification have been addressed in the literature (i.e., Buckley, 2002; Chester & Crabtree, 2002; Font, 2001; 2002; 2007; Honey, Stewart, 2002; Morrison et al., 1992), no research to the best of the author's knowledge, has been conducted on crisis preparedness certification. Findings from this study may be used as a guide for the tourism industry to develop and extend such research.

The results and conclusions of this study are presented in this chapter in five sections: (1) discussion of the findings, (2) theoretical implications, (3) managerial implications, (4) limitations of the study, and (5) recommendations for future research.

Discussion of the Findings

This study has provided some interesting findings. First, with regard to gender, males were more likely to indicate agreement with the majority of statements related to benefits, confidence and safety. Perhaps this is because research has suggested that gender is related to cognitive evaluation of risk. Some studies have suggested that males are more likely to indicate a stronger relationship between beliefs and perceived value. This is particularly true in a study related to green hotels (Cometa, 2012).

Moreover, our results suggest that women are more likely to indicate they would travel to a certified travel destination over one which is not certified. This may be because women tend to be the decision-makers in travel decisions (Zalatan, 1998) and assume the role of the "caregiver." In this role, women may perhaps assume

responsibility for the safety of the group and thus may be more likely to indicate that they would choose a “certified” destination over an uncertified destination in order to maintain safety. Mottiar and Quinn (2004) found that women tend to dominate the initial discussion phase of the travel decision-making process, and they dominate the early stages of the process with regard to collecting information and discussing issues. This phase seems to be consistent with the phase in which safety and security would be part of the decision-making criteria.

This research also found that those who were most likely to indicate agreement with the benefits, safety perceptions and confidence in the certification process tended to be older than 71 years of age. This age group is dominated by the Silent Generation (those born between 1925 and 1942) who have been affected by WWII and the Great Depression (Strauss & Howe, 1991). This generation is said to be most influenced by large institutions (i.e., government, universities, and military) and tends to be “risk-averse” (Lehto, Jang, Achana, & O’Leary, 2008). Thus, our finding that this generation sees a certification process as impactful (makes the destination more prepared or can respond better in the event of a crisis) seems to make sense.

Moreover, it seems more understandable that the younger generation (51-70) was more likely to indicate that they would prefer to travel to a certified travel destination compared to the older generation. This may be because the older generation is “risk-averse” and, therefore, may be less likely to travel to a destination which might be risky in the first place.

Additionally, the presence of children also had an influence on confidence in the certification process, preparedness of the destination and response by destination. Our

findings match the research of Houts, et al. (as cited in Kellens, et al., 2011) and Matyas, et al. (2011), which shows that families with children have higher levels of perceptions of risk than families without children. Findings in eco-labeling and green travel have suggested that in general, the presence of children does not have an impact on certifications (Gordy, 2002). Thus, sharing the same logic, households with children may be less likely to choose certified destinations since they may be perceived as riskier (as indicated by the fact that they have to go through a certification process).

Finally, the neutral responses from most participants may have been an indication of their lack of comprehension of the concept of crisis certification. Crisis readiness certifications are a relatively new concept may be one of the reasons contributing to participants not fully understanding these questions. Nevertheless, having significantly more positive responses permeate the results shows the promising demand for crisis readiness certifications.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides additional understanding about consumer demand for tourism certifications. The findings from this study indicated support for the customer satisfaction model (Toth, 2002). Our results indicated high levels of perception of safety are important when deciding to travel. Particularly, for women, this element in the travel decision making phase is important to final decisions. Our study indicated that women would chose a certified destination over one which is not certified more frequently, supporting the notion that if “lower level needs are not met” than higher level needs may not be achieved (Maslow, 1943). Unfortunately our study would not allow us to fully understand the three legged stool due to lack of measurement of the other two legs.

An additional implication that results from the findings in this study is future support for Kozak and Nield's (2004) research showing that tourism certifications can be utilized by destinations to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Three of the four survey questions in this study that compare certified destinations with non-certified destinations have significant positive results, showing that indeed destinations could be differentiated through the use of tourism certifications. While Kozak and Nield (2004) had demonstrated this concept in traditional quality and ecotourism certifications, this study further extends the concept to crisis readiness certifications.

Managerial Implications

Although the neutral to positive results of tourists' likelihood to travel may not indicate a very high demand for crisis readiness certifications, the mostly positive responses on other certification perceptions show the promising potential for growth of such demand. It is quite possible that survey respondents did not have much past experience with the concept of crisis certification and this caused the more neutral response sets. This could be considered as similar to Font's (2003) research which the likelihood of participants to choose certified products increased significantly once they learned more about the certifications. Therefore, it seems likely that if travel destinations were to increase customers' awareness and knowledge of crisis certification, the responses would have more variability across the categories.

There are many different methods for educating travelers about crisis preparedness and certification. The use of travel websites, social media and travelers' blogs may be effective sources of educating the public on the benefits of crisis certifications. Travel agents, newspaper columns, and magazine articles can also have an impact on awareness to certification. Other methods for raising crisis awareness

regarding certifications may include working with the local or national government to promote the importance of safety and the positive effects of committing to preparedness.

The results of this study show that those who are more likely to choose crisis readiness certified products were female travelers, those without children, and the younger generation (ages 51 to 70). Thus, these categories of travelers can be targeted for educational campaigns surrounding crisis readiness certified products.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of the present study. First, respondents were not asked what their main type of travel was nor the purpose of their trips. We know from previous studies (Chiu & Lin, 2011; Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992) that different types of tourists may be either more risk averse or more of risk takers. Thus further investigation of tourist types and perceptions of tourism crisis preparedness certification may be a natural extension of those previous studies.

Secondly, in this study we did not examine the correlation among independent variables and, therefore, we were unable to determine the correlations between age, presence of children and gender. As a result it was not possible to determine how these variables interact with one another or how they influence perceptions, confidence in and the benefits of certification. Thus, a multiple regression analysis would allow us to better understand these correlations among the independent variables and their influence on the dependent variables.

Another limitation was the measurement of age. The broad categories of age may not have allowed for distinct differences between groups closer in age. With only four age groups, many of the groups range more than 20 years apart. It can be expected that, although in the same age group, 31 year olds would have many different behaviors

and perceptions than those of 50 year olds. This limitation can be attributed to the fact that the purchased data provided these age groups with broad ranges. If this data was provided with smaller age groups, perhaps the data analysis could be more accurate.

The constraints from the purchased data also limited this study with having much more survey respondents without children (89.3%) than ones with children (10.7%). This large difference may also been a limitation to analyzing the data.

Suggestions for Future Research

Extending this study to examine income may be revealing in that income has been shown, in the past, to be related to past travel experiences which may be a driver of the likelihood of travel to a certified travel destination. Floyd et al. (2004); Simpson and Siguaw (2008); and Sönmez and Graefe (1998) have all investigated the role of income and risk perception. Their findings indicate mixed results on risk perception. Thus, further investigation of the perceptions of crisis preparedness certification and income would be a logical extension of that research.

Previous research has additionally indicated that consumers are confused by certified tourism products (Honey & Stewart, 2002). With crisis certifications being a relatively new concept, there is a high possibility that the lack of awareness by travelers is what drove the neutral responses to questions. The influence of awareness and knowledge of certified tourism products on the likelihood of people to travel would make a fascinating topic for future research. Likewise, travelers' past experiences with crises could also provide an interesting future topic for research.

In this study, we have measured the differences between tourists' demographic characteristics (age, gender, and presence of children) and their perception of crisis certification. Our results show that travelers' perceptions of crisis certifications are

generally neutral to positive. Increased education for tourists may result in more positive responses regarding destination crisis preparedness certification in the future. However, continued research is necessary to determine this impact over time.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Pei-Yu Wu was born in 1985 and grew up in Taipei, Taiwan. Her bachelor's degree in International Business was obtained from Shih Chien University of Taiwan and has facilitated her ability and expanded her ability to do research in the tourism field of study. Before attending the University of Florida for her master's degree, she had two years of work experience in the hospitality industry.

As an international student studying in the United States, her multicultural experiences have made it easier for her to adapt to various unfamiliar environments. Her goal is to apply her classroom expertise to real world situations and fully devote herself to building a bright future for the tourism industry.