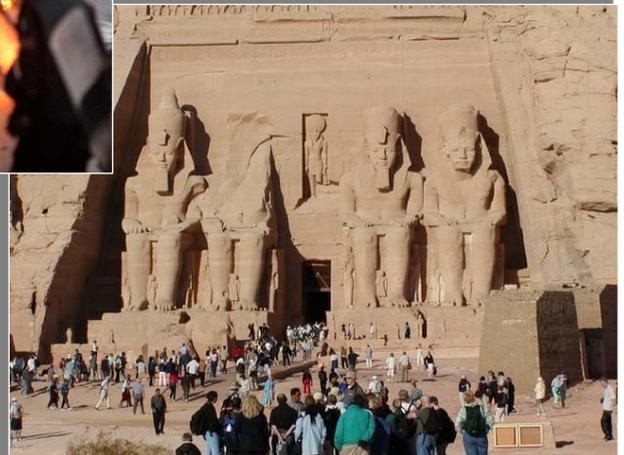


# The process of establishing risk perceptions

The case of Egypt



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BSc Tourism – Final thesis report  
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## THESIS TITLE PAGE

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## Abstract

Since the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution, the number of tourists visiting Egypt has decreased by millions. However, at the same time also millions of people continue travelling to the country despite of the unrests and the threat of terrorism. In this thesis I investigate the relation between tourists' risk perceptions of Egypt, and the willingness to go to the country. The risk perceptions are further analyzed by exploring relations with factors which are believed to be influencing these risk perceptions, namely tourists' socio-demographic characteristics, travel experience and the sources from which tourists get their information about the country. This is done by means of a directive content analysis of travel blogs and web discussions on travel forums, and two additional interviews. Low risk perceptions are found to cause people to be more willing to travel to Egypt, while high risk perceptions in many cases form a barrier for going on a holiday to Egypt. The results also indicate that especially travel experience, the used information sources each are related to the risk perceptions of tourists. Concerning the socio-demographic characteristics, only gender seems to play a role in the shaping of risk perceptions. The study does not aim to make generalizations, instead the findings function as a stepping stone for subsequent, more extensive research on (aspects of) the same topic.

**Keywords:** Risk perceptions, Egypt, directive content analysis, travel blogs, web discussions, Egyptian revolution, terrorism

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## 1. Introduction

Egypt has always been a popular tourist destination known for its historical attractions, but recently also the newly established resort areas near the Red Sea made the Egyptian tourist industry flourish during the last decade. It certainly was considered a booming destination until the Egyptian revolution in 2011. As a result of the uprisings, Egypt's tourist numbers dropped from 14 million in 2010 to a 9.5 million in 2011 (UNWTO, 2013). The country's economy is heavily dependent on tourism, therefore it was in the interest of many to restore the tourism industry as quickly as possible. Indeed, the industry seemed to show a quick recovery. In 2012 the visitor numbers started to rise again to well over 11 million, and despite the coup d'état in 2013, this number remained stable during the next year. However, visitor numbers are not providing the full story. Following the unrests in 2011 and 2013, entrepreneurs sold their services for dumping prices due to their desperate need for clients. This clearly can be seen when comparing the statistics of the relatively stable 2012 and tumultuous 2013. While visitor numbers remained more or less the same during these years, tourism revenue sank by a dramatic 41% (Reuters, 2014). Egypt's tourism industry thus has a long way to go to return to their previous state, before the Egyptian revolution.

At the same time, many Ministries of Foreign Affairs discourage their citizens to travel to Egypt, because the situation is judged as far from being safe. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for instance, currently advises to be extra cautious when travelling to Luxor and the tourist destinations around the Red Sea, it discourages non-essential travels to Cairo, and it advises against all travels to the Sinai region (Rijksoverheid, 2014). The threats of violence recently expressed by extremist groups were aimed against government targets in particular, but it must be kept in mind that Egypt also has faced several terrorist attacks that were specifically aimed at tourists. The most notable ones were inevitably the 1997 attack in Luxor and the 2005 bombings in Sharm El-Sheikh, with 63 and 88 casualties respectively (The Guardian, 2005). The travel warnings and alarming events in the past are obviously not encouraging people to go to the country, but apparently they do not keep all tourists out of Egypt: each year still thousands travel to the country that is known for the Pharaohs and the coral reefs.

My own visits to Egypt (all of which were before the revolution started), triggered my interest in the country. I have also followed the news about the political situation, and have seen the reports on the bombings and kidnappings of tourists. Neither did the announcements of travel agents withdrawing their customers from Egypt remain unnoticed. All these messages from the media, made me curious

about why some people still want to travel to Egypt, while others are deliberately staying away from the country.

As I mentioned the Egyptian revolution has negative implications for the Egyptian tourism industry, and also terrorist attacks have their share by causing governments to sharpen their travel advisories. My thesis will focus on the question why some people still want to go to Egypt while others are avoiding the destination, with a special focus on the role of the Egyptian revolution and terrorist attacks. The decision to go or not go to Egypt will be linked to the concepts of risk and risk perceptions; how do people perceive risks associated with travelling to Egypt. Tourists' risk perceptions of Egypt will be further explored by taking into account underlying factors which can influence risk perceptions. By means of doing a content analysis of travel blogs and web discussions, I will provide new insights in how risk perceptions are established and how this affects tourists' decision making process. This research does not aim to make generalizable findings, instead it aims for providing starting points for further research.

I will start with a literature review in which all relevant concepts are discussed and, if possible, are linked with each other. It will focus on risk and risk perceptions, and on the factors that have an influence on risk perceptions of tourists. In the methodology section, first the research questions of this project will be posed. These are based on what has been found in the literature, and on what seems to be lacking from existent theories or what needs further clarification. After that, I will explain the way in which the research was conducted and my rationale for that. What follows is the section in which the results of my research are being presented. These results will then be discussed and compared with what has been found in the literature, in the discussion chapter. This chapter also includes a section about the limitations of this research, and one with recommendations for future research in the same area. This report ends with a conclusion

## 2. Literature review

This section will introduce the reader with the main concepts that are relevant for this research. Being the central focus of this research, first the concepts risk and risk perception will be discussed in relation to the research topic. Since risk perceptions are crucial to tourist decision making, this concept will receive more attention by exploring the factors that are influencing the establishment of risk perceptions. Hereafter, the generalization effect and the substitution effect will be discussed, because the images that people have of other countries also influence how risk associated with Egypt is perceived. The conclusion functions as a theoretical framework, providing a starting point for which data should be collected and how it should be analyzed.

### 2.1 Generalization effect

In the previous section, the generalization effect was already briefly mentioned. It is, next to the substitution effect, an important concept associated with safety issues at tourism destinations.

The main idea of the generalization effect is that risk perceptions are not bound to the place where political turmoil or terrorism is actually present: incidents in one country can have significant effects for the entire region (Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Neumayer, 2004). Because the effects of generalization can reach far beyond the scope of the safety threat, it is important to acknowledge the industry's vulnerability to negative external events (Seabra et al., 2013). Enders, Sandler and Parise (1992) researched the effects of terrorism on tourism revenue in several continental nations in Europe, and demonstrated a significant loss in revenue attributable to terrorism all over continental Europe. They state: 'since the sum of the effects of terrorism in continental Europe as a whole is greater than the sum of the country-by-country effects, there is evidence of a strong transnational externality' (p.551). A terrorist attack in country A thus strongly influences the safety perception of the geographical region in which the country is located, and not so much only the safety perception of the individual country. Similarly, Mansfeld (1994) found evidence for a generalization effect in the Middle East, following the long lasting political conflicts there. Not only the countries of conflict, but also the eastern part of the Mediterranean was affected (including countries which never took part in major regional conflicts at all). In his 1998 article, Carter found that even entire continents (Africa and Asia) are sometimes considered to be unsafe due to health risks and political instability in certain countries.

## 2.2 Substitution effect

Another concept associated with safety issues at tourism destinations is the substitution effect. In deciding which destination to choose, tourists usually weigh the benefits of a destination against its costs. For instance, when a destination has a large number of attractions, this is seen as a benefit. But if there are hardly any attractions at all, this can be considered as a cost. Other variables which can be included in this process, are e.g. the distance from the tourist's home country, and financial aspects. When in the end a destination is thought of as having more costs than benefits, it is likely that it will be replaced (substituted) with an alternative, competing destination.

Safety is known to play a major role in determining a destination's competitiveness: research has shown that tourists consider it to be among the most important characteristics of a destination (Enright & Newton, 2004; Ferreira & Harmse, 2000). According to Crouch and Ritchie (1999), concerns about safety might even cause other competitive strengths of the destination to be downplayed in the minds of potential tourists. Even though the actual chance of being victimized by e.g. a terrorist attack is extremely small (Sönmez et al., 1999), the price paid when becoming a victim is unthinkable high. Safety is thus an important variable which can be included in the cost-benefit analysis of a destination. The threat of terrorism or the presence of political unrests will then make a destination much more 'costly' than a safer alternative (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998a).

Various studies have been conducted on the substitution effect resulting from terrorist incidents. Drakos and Kutan (2003) did research on the effects of attacks in Greece, Turkey and Israel, and found that "any increase in terrorist incidents in a particular country, causing a relatively higher risk, brings about a standard substitution effect from this country to those of low-risk locations, including Italy" (p.625). There is no evidence there is also a substitution effect between these countries and Egypt. However, in their 2001 study, Baloglu and Mangalolu found that Greece, Turkey, Italy and Egypt were perceived similar in terms of what they have to offer as a destination. Since substitution of destinations is based on precisely these characteristics, this suggests that these countries could play a role in the substitution effect of Egypt. Other countries in the same region that could also be alternative destinations for people who initially wanted to go to Egypt, are Jordan, Tunisia and Israel. All three of them have historical and archaeological attractions as well as beach destinations with huge all-inclusive resorts, like Egypt. Because of these similar 'benefits', but possibly lower risk perceptions, these countries might be preferred over Egypt.

## 2.3 Risk and risk perceptions

Risk is present in our everyday lives, ranging from the risk to lose your job tomorrow to the risk of getting hit by a car when crossing the street. Because we are facing risks 24/7, it is not strange that risk is a hot topic in research. Still, there is no single widely accepted definition of risk. However, in the various descriptions of the concept, some recurring elements can be identified: it is seen as a chance of loss or injury, or the potential of danger (Korstanje & Tarlow, 2012), whereby the chances of occurring and the seriousness and range of the effects are included as well (Weber & Milliman, 1997). By most studies risk is seen as something negative, something which needs to be avoided. Voluntary risk taking is regarded irrational behavior (Lupton & Tulloch, 2002). Tourism examples of such voluntary risk taking include off-piste skiing and, relating to this research specifically, visiting a terror-struck destination.

Butler and Crino (1992) make the distinction between hypothetical and “real” risk: “real” risk means that there is a chance of loss or injury attached to a certain activity or decision, while hypothetical risk is related to risk perception (and is thus in the eye of the beholder). Especially the latter one plays a role in tourists’ decision making process. According to Prodromiti, ‘risk perception is of crucial importance to understand the motives and reasoning behind traveler’s choices’ (2013, p. 3). She argues that whether tourists are willing to travel to a “risky” place, depends on their perceptions of risk. For this research, it is thus important to keep the distinction between “real” risk and risk perceptions in mind.

Safety and stability are considered to be crucial for the development of tourism destinations (Cavlek, 2002; Pizam & Mansfeld, 1996; Fletcher & Morakabati, 2008). The presence of political unrest or (the threat of) terrorism often increases the risk perceived by tourists, and this negatively influences the number of tourist arrivals to the destination (Blake & Sinclair, 2003; Hall, 2002; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998a; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992).

Based on the nature of risks as they are perceived by tourists, Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) made a categorization to classify tourists according to their risk perceptions of a specific destination. The first category is called risk place, and this category involves tourists who consider the destination to be very risky. In the light of this research, these are the people who think that going on a holiday to Egypt brings along a lot of risk because of the political unrests and the terrorist threats by extremist groups. The second category is functional risk: functional risk tourists are mostly worried that mechanical or organizational problems will occur during their holiday. When relating this category to the unrests in Egypt, the functional tourists would be concerned with delays at the airport or getting into a traffic jam

during their transfer to the hotel due to turmoil (thus they are not that worried about the unrest itself). The last category is called risk neutral, and includes tourists who do not think that being on a holiday in a certain destination involves a lot of risk. These would be the people who do not consider Egypt a very risky destination.

### Socio-demographic characteristics

Next to the nature of the risk perceptions, also the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists can influence risk perceptions. The literature indicates that variables such as gender, nationality (cultural background), and age are likely to affect risk perceptions in general, but also risk perceptions of tourists specifically.

Various studies have found significant differences in risk perceptions between males and females. In their 2003 article, Lepp and Gibson write that women conceive risks related to health and food higher than men. According to Flynn, Slovic and Mertz (1994), women are also more concerned about environmental health risks, such as earthquakes and floods. On the other hand, the findings of Gibson and Jordan indicate that women are not in all cases more concerned about risk than men. When looking at institutionalized tourists (individual and organized mass tourists looking for familiarity), females indeed feel more threatened by the risk of terror. But when considering drifters and explorers (novelty and adventure seekers, after the typology of Cohen, 1972), it is exactly the other way around (1998a; 1998b). However, the study conducted by Reichel, Uchs and Uriely (2007) contradicts these findings: it found that female backpackers (which belong to the category of drifters and explorers) have a higher tendency to avoid risk than their male counterparts. Sönmez and Graefe (1998a) did not find any significant differences in risk perceptions of males and females at all. Summarizing, the studies on risk perceptions and gender generated inconsistent findings. It is thus interesting to examine in this research if gender influences risk perceptions.

Cultural backgrounds, often tested by using nationalities as a variable, are also suggested to have an influence on how people perceive risks. In their sample of tourists from six different countries, Reisinger and Mavondo (2006) found that tourists from Australia, the United States and Hong Kong tend to feel less safe when travelling abroad, than British, Canadian and Greek tourists. The study by Wolff and Larsen (2014) done in Norway, following the 2011 Norway attacks, also revealed that the risk perceptions of tourists from Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands) were significantly lower than those of other international tourists. However, they acknowledge that this could also be due to the fact that Nordic tourists are more familiar with Norway

than tourists with other nationalities. Because there are similarities (e.g. cultural ones, Gesteland, 2012) between Norway and their own country, they feel as if they are familiar with the situation and therefore the perceived risk might be lower. The variable 'nationality' should thus not (only) be seen as independently influencing risk perceptions, but rather in relation to the country of which the risk is determined. This idea is supported by one of the findings of the research conducted by Fuchs et al. (2013): tourists tend to compare the risk at the destination with the risks they experience at home. There is not much difference between risk levels in Norway and risk levels of other Nordic countries (Wolff & Larsen, 2014), just as well as the risk levels of Israel and Egypt (Reichel et al., 2007) do not differ a lot. Because the perceived risk levels at the destination are being compared with the risk levels experienced at home, the tourists (the Israeli tourists going to Egypt, and the Nordic tourists going to Norway) did not feel very unsafe. The situation will then probably be different when a tourist from a low-risk country (e.g. the Nordic countries (Larsen, Brun, Øgaard, & Selstad, 2011)), has plans to visit a country that deals with political turmoil and frequent terrorism threats, like Egypt.

Also the variable age is related to how people perceive risks. In the study by Krewski, Slovic, Bartlett, Flynn and Mertz (1994), respondents of 55 years and older were more concerned about health risks than younger people. Sjöberg (2005) did research on risk perceptions of terrorist attacks, and found that these perceptions are lowest among respondents between 35 and 44 years old. People belonging to the group aged between 55 and 64, perceived the risk of a terrorist attack highest. However, the relation between the variable age and risk perceptions has received less attention in the literature than the variables gender and nationalities. Furthermore, research projects on age and risk perceptions related to food security provide contradicting results (Dosman, Adamowicz & Hrudey, 2001). Still, there are indications that there are some differences in risk perceptions among different age groups.

In short, socio-demographic characteristics influence tourists' risk perceptions. Much research has been done on risk perceptions and gender. Although these findings were inconsistent, gender might have an impact on risk perceptions and it is therefore necessary to take this characteristic into account. Next to that, the literature also indicates that tourists' cultural backgrounds (operationalized as nationalities) relate to risk perceptions. Hereby nationality should also be considered in relation to the country of which the risk is determined. When the country of origin of the tourist and the destination show similarities (e.g. in terms of culture), tourists possibly have lower risk perceptions because they feel more familiar with the situation. The relation between age and risk perceptions requires more research, but there are signals for differences in risk perceptions among different age

groups. When analyzing the travel blogs and the risk perceptions of the writers, these socio-demographic characteristics will therefore be included in the analysis.

## Knowledge and experience

The second factor to take into account when analyzing risk perceptions of tourists is the knowledge that they have about the situation at the destination. Closely related to this is the experience one has with a certain risk, and one's travel experience. This travel experience is not limited to travelling to "risky" destinations only, it also encompasses trips to destinations that are not perceived as risky.

Wolff and Larsen (2014) found that Nordic tourists had lower risk perceptions of Norway than other international tourists, and that the risk perceptions *among* Nordic tourists did not differ significantly. A possible explanation for this was that the countries of origin of these Nordic tourists, show similarities with the destination, Norway. The Nordic cultures resemble each other a lot (Gesteland, 2012): it could be that cultural background plays a role in risk perception (Reisigner & Mavondo, 2006). However, the similarities between the countries could also cause Nordic tourists to have more knowledge about the risks that they are exposed to when being in Norway, because they might be similar to what they experience in their own countries. The same line of reasoning could account for tourists from the Middle East coming to Egypt. Especially tourists coming from countries that were also part of the Arab Spring, are familiar with the turmoil that the revolution brought along. According to Richardson, Sorensen and Soderstrom (1987), repeated or continuous exposure to a hazard results in minimizing its riskiness. This would mean that people coming from countries that took part in the revolution would have lower risk perceptions of Egypt: some of the risks in Egypt are similar to those experienced in their own country.

Voluntary risk taking, which was briefly mentioned at the beginning of the literature review, receives specific attention in the literature. If someone has a lot of experience with voluntary risk taking, this person is likely to have lower concern levels (Barnett & Breakwell, 2001). Travelling to a risky destination can be seen as a form of voluntary risk taking, so that means that if a person has travelled to "risky" destinations before, their risk perceptions would be lower than those of people who have never visited a destination that they perceive to be risky. At the same time Barnett and Breakwell state that involuntary exposure to risks, results in an higher risk perception. When following this line of reasoning, people coming from countries that were involved in the Arab Spring are likely to be more concerned about safety issues. This contradicts the findings of Richardson, Sorensen and Soderstrom

(1987). Caution is thus required when making claims about risk perceptions in relation to repeated exposure to risks.

Not only travelling to risky destinations in particular has an effect on risk perceptions, even travel experience in general affects the degree to which risk is perceived by tourists. People who have less experience in travelling, are generally more concerned about safety issues than experienced travelers (Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Pearce 1996). Particularly interesting for this research is the study conducted by Reichel et al. (2007), since they investigated risk perceptions of tourists going to Egypt. Also their findings indicate that risk perceptions of experienced travelers are lower than risk perceptions of those who do not have much experience in travelling yet.

In case that there is a lack of knowledge (or experience), Prodromiti (2013) argues that this creates the need for trust: trust that governments are able to handle a potential hazard influences risk perceptions (Siegrist and Cvetkovich, 2002). Although it is not (yet) confirmed by research, it can be questioned whether people still have faith in how the Egyptian authorities are handling the situation: the sentencing of hundreds of people to death recently has caused worldwide indignation (Reuters, April 29, 2014; IPS, April 29, 2014).

Knowledge and experience are thus known to influence risk perceptions of tourists. Experienced travelers are less concerned about safety issues than people with little travel experience. The same accounts for travelling to “risky” destinations in particular, which can be regarded as a form of voluntary risk taking. But regarding previous involuntary exposure to risks, findings on relations between risk perceptions and risk experience are inconsistent. It is thus hard to predict how the risks of travelling to Egypt are perceived by tourists coming from countries which were involved in the Arab Spring. In case that tourists lack knowledge and experience, their risk perceptions might be more dependent on trust. Therefore, it is important to also consider trust as a factor influencing tourists’ risk perceptions.

### Information sources shaping risk perceptions

The majority of travelers makes use of multiple sources of information when it comes to informing themselves about their personal safety (Leggat, Mills, & Speare, 2007). Each of these sources are presenting risks in different ways (Prodromiti, 2013). In this section the most important sources will be discussed: travel agents, travel warnings issued by the government, travel books, and the mass media. This will be done in relation to how they produce risks, and how they are influencing tourists’ risk perceptions.

Travel agents are known to be popular information sources (Leggat et al., 2007). Lovelock (2004) argues that travel agents play a large role in the decision making process of tourists. They shape the destination image and in doing so, they shape tourists' opinions by the level of information that they provide, and by presenting their own opinions (Lawton & Page, 1997). These opinions and information show how risk is being communicated to intending travelers. Prodromiti (2013) states that there can be differences in risk presentation between local tour operators and larger ones. She suggests that local operators might be more willing to expose their customers to risk, while larger tour operators are able to prevent their clients from travelling to a 'risky' destination because they are not dependent on one destination only. While not being entirely the same kind of company, but still showing many similarities with tour operators, the same could account for travel agents. A smaller agency mainly offering holidays to Egypt, might be trying to downgrade the risks associated with the destination, while the bigger ones point at these risks and can offer alternative destinations instead.

Many travel agents advise their customers to consult the issued travel advice on the destination, a study among Australian travel agents showed that even 95% claims to do so (DFAT, 2005). Governments increasingly warn their citizens for the security, political, social, environmental, and/or health risks involved when traveling to a certain country (Löwenheim, 2007). While there are some reports indicating that these travel warnings are significantly influencing the tourists' decision making process (Akama & Kieti, 2003; Sharpley, Sharpley, & Adams, 1985), Löwenheim underlines the difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of government issued travel advices. There are travelers who simply are not aware of these advices, and others might disregard them for a variety of reasons. He briefly mentions that people can consider the warnings to be exaggerated, or that they travel to the country for ideological reasons (e.g. to participate in the revolution, in the same way that several Syrians living in European countries have gone back to Syria to fight against president Assad). Another reason for neglecting the travel advisories could be that some people (sensation seekers, also mentioned in paragraph 1.1) feel attracted by the risk, and they travel to the destination for adventure (Lepp & Gibson, 2008). However, it can be questioned whether the risk of terrorism is being regarded by sensation seekers as an 'adventure', since terrorism involves horrible crimes including intentionally harming and brutally murdering innocent people.

Travel books and guides were also mentioned as popular sources for information about risks at the destination (Leggat et al., 2007; Carter, 1998). According to Carter, guidebooks often present risks as if they can be controlled, by providing travelers with measures that they can take themselves in order to reduce risks (e.g. doing a health check before departure, leaving your valuable belongings at your accommodation to prevent robbery, and avoiding places of mass gathering for demonstrations). The question is what precautions tourists can take in order to prevent themselves from becoming a victim

of a terrorist attack, since tourists are often targeted just because of the fact that they are tourists. Many terrorist groups are of opinion that tourism stimulates capitalism and that tourism is a sign of 'Western dominance', and therefore every tourist is seen as a legitimate target (Sönmez, Apolostopoulos, & Tarlow, 1999). One of the measures that tourists can take during the holiday is keeping low-profile (so that it is less evident to others that you are a tourist), but that is very hard to realize if you do not want to stay away from Egypt's biggest tourist attractions. Except for the advice to avoid certain areas, it is unlikely that precautions in travel guides will significantly reduce the risk of a terrorist attack. Carter (1998) claims that travel books sometimes portray entire regions or even continents as politically unstable or having severe health risks, while the risk is in most of these cases only present in one country or region. This is called the generalization effect, which will be further discussed later on.

The above mentioned sources are used by tourists when they are seeking for information about safety issues at a specific destination. However, a destination image is not only shaped by information that is actively looked for and initially meant for shaping destination images. The power of the media should definitely not be underestimated (Lewis, 1986): especially news coverage is very influential when it comes to forming images about safety and security (Ferreira & Harmse, 2000; Hall, 2002; Akama & Kieit, 2003; Carlsson, Johansson-Stenman, & Martinsson, 2004). A long period of negative media coverage can even result in both tourists and tour operators turning to other destinations (Cavlek, 2002). According to Cioccio and Michael (2007), this is because mass media tend to exaggerate disasters such as terrorist attacks. Negative publicity sometimes causes even greater loss than the event itself. However, it can be questioned whether this comparison can be made for disasters that have caused people to die. Many would agree that loss of a human life cannot be expressed in a certain amount of money, and that it therefore would be incorrect to state that the effects of negative publicity (less people visiting a destination, thus less tourism revenue) can possibly be worse than the disaster itself (e.g. a car bomb, killing several people). Nevertheless, scholars agree that misleading publicity has severe effects for the local tourism industry. Although not yet proven by academic research, it is likely that the continuous negative news coverage on the recent happenings in Egypt also contributed largely to the drops in tourist numbers because people considered the risk too high.

Summarizing, the most important sources of information that influence tourists' risk perceptions of a destination are travel agents, travel warnings issued by the government, travel books, and the mass media. Travel agents influence tourists' risk perceptions, because of their role as opinion shapers. Many of them also advise tourists to take into account the travel advice issued by their governments. Research has shown that these advices have a significant impact on travelling behavior, but it is also argued that the effectiveness is difficult to measure: some people are simply not aware of the

presence of these advices, and others might disregard them for a variety of reasons (e.g. the advice is considered to be exaggerated). Travel books often produce risks in such a way that to the reader it seems as if risks can be controlled (reducing them by means of precautions), and sometimes portray the risk belonging to one region on the entire area, contributing to the generalization effect among risk perceptions of tourists. Lastly, the influence of mass media on shaping images of safety and security was discussed. Extensive negative publicity on disasters can result in tourists and tour operators turning to other destinations, having severe effects for the tourism industry.

## 2.4 Conclusion

It must be kept in mind that risk perceptions of Egypt, might not only be shaped by incidents within the country. Events in neighboring countries (e.g. an epidemic in Israel, or a hijacked plane in Tunisia) can affect tourists' risk perceptions as well. In turn, incidents in Egypt can also have an influence on how tourists perceive the entire region. For this reason, it is possible that despite such an event, Egypt's individual perceived safety does not differ significantly from the safety perceptions of neighboring countries since it is the risk perception of the *entire area* that increased.

It is also important to keep alternative, competing destinations in mind, since their presence could partially explain why many tourists are no longer going to Egypt. Tourists' rationale for choosing other destinations over Egypt is thus relevant for this research. At the same time it is also interesting to investigate what reasons there are for *not* going to an alternative destination and sticking to Egypt instead, since this research is not only about motivations of tourists who are avoiding Egypt, but also of those who continue to visit the country.

After discussing the generalization and the substitution effect, I have discussed the literature on risk and risk perceptions. Risk perceptions, rather than "real" risk, will be the focus of this research, since risk perceptions determine tourists' motives and reasoning. Based on the nature of their risk perceptions, tourists can be classified according to the following categories: risk neutral, functional risk, and place risk (from low perceptions of risk to high perceptions respectively). Because this research tries to find an answer to the question why some people are travelling to Egypt and why others are not, it is important to pay attention to factors that are influencing the risk perceptions of tourists. In the literature review, the following factors came forward: the tourists' socio-demographic characteristics, to what extent tourists have knowledge about the risk, and the information sources that are shaping tourists' risk perceptions. It is therefore interesting to investigate to what extent these factors play a role in my own research project.

### 3. Methodology

This chapter will show how the research has been conducted, and the rationale behind the choices that I made. It will start with listing the research questions, which are based on the literature review. What follows is a brief section about the different data sources that I have used, and how data has been collected. After that, I will discuss why I have chosen for directive content analysis as the used analysis method in this research. This chapter will end by addressing the limitations of my research.

#### 3.1 The research questions

The main issue that I will be focusing on in this thesis, is how risk perceptions of people are related to their willingness to go to Egypt. The main research question of this project is thus:

Main RQ: *How are risk perceptions of tourists related to the decision whether to travel to Egypt or not?*

In the literature review I have shown that risk perceptions are influenced by three factors: the information sources that are used by tourists, tourists' travel experience, and tourists' socio-demographic characteristics. These three factors will be integrated in the sub questions of this research, in order to get a better picture of people's risk perceptions of Egypt and to be able to provide a more complete picture when providing an answer to the main question:

Sub RQ 1: *What is the relation between the used information sources in the decision making process, and the risk perception of Egypt?*

Sub RQ 2: *What is the relation between travel experience and the risk perception of Egypt?*

Sub RQ 3: *What is the relation between tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and the risk perceptions of Egypt?*

#### 3.2 Rationale for qualitative research

For this project qualitative methods were found to be more appropriate than conducting quantitative research. As can be seen in the previous section of this chapter, all of my research questions are open. In this thesis I am not only searching *if* there is a relation between certain variables, but I also

want to see the underlying patterns of these relations. It is thus important to investigate risk perceptions in their context, since that can provide valuable insights about these underlying patterns. Because qualitative research is more appropriate to also study the context in which risk perceptions are formed by tourists and therefore better fits my research questions, I have chosen for qualitative methods in my thesis.

### 3.3 Data sources and collection

This thesis is very limited in both time and man power, therefore I have looked at narratives of risk perceptions that were readily available online. Using the readily available narratives enabled me to limit the time needed for collecting the data, so that I could include a lot of narratives in the sample and use more time for the data analysis. In addition, using these narratives does not involve interaction with people, so the presence of the researcher is not affecting the data that are collected (Adler & Clark, 2011). For these reasons, I have made use of travel blogs.

Travel blogs are increasingly popular: more and more people are keeping an online diary in which they write about their travel experiences. Often accompanied with videos and photos, these blogs contain personal stories and recommendations of the traveler (Bosangit, McCabe, & Hibbert, 2009; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). So far, travel blogs have mostly been analyzed for marketing purposes: they form great material for businesses and destinations to identify the attitudes of their markets (Wenger, 2008). However, blogs are seen as valuable sources of data: the advantage is that the information that is gained is not directed by the researcher, and at the same time this source is very accessible since it requires considerably less human and financial effort than conducting interviews or a survey.

According to Tudor (2013), blogs are believed to play a role in shaping the image of a destination. This means that they represent how tourists perceive a destination. If a destination is perceived as unsafe by a tourist, it is therefore likely that this would return in the travel blogs. My thesis will not focus on the risk that is perceived during the holiday, the project is all about how tourists perceive risk *before* departure since the aim is to relate risk perceptions to the decision to go or not to go to Egypt. Although the main purpose of a travel blog is to describe what you have encountered *during* your holiday, many blogs also include some information about how tourists came to certain decisions (such as the decision to choose for that specific destination) *before* the trip. Examples of this could be someone who expresses he or she had the long desire to visit a certain place because that person has family over there, or someone could write in his or her travel blog that watching a documentary

triggered a fascination for the country. This is the kind of information that I need for my project, since it focuses on how risk is perceived during tourists' decision making process.

However, using travel blogs also has an important downside. As I have mentioned: travel blogs serve the purpose to communicate about your experiences *during* your holiday. This implies that all travel blogs which are analyzed, are written by people who have decided to travel to Egypt. For my research I also need information about people who deliberately avoid Egypt, and it is thus highly unlikely that I will be able to get this information from the travel blogs. Therefore, some additional data sources are needed.

Web discussions are a valuable source of information since a significant part of the participants in the discussions are people who are deliberately avoiding Egypt (about whom more information was needed). Many websites where people have travel blog, also have a travel forum where travelers can ask questions to each other or discuss certain matters (such as the safety of tourists in Egypt). Web discussions can be analyzed in the same way as the travel blogs.

Despite of the use of web discussions, the sample included relatively few tourists with high risk perceptions. Therefore I conducted two additional interviews with two good acquaintances of mine, about whom I know that they consider Egypt too dangerous to travel to. The interviews were done to see if they would confirm the relations that I established from my analysis of the travel blogs and the web discussions. Since I knew both of the interviewees very well, it felt most natural to do unstructured interviews. Instead of having a list with predetermined questions that I would ask the interviewees, I held a "normal" conversation with them, making sure that all the topics I needed more information about would be touched upon.

## Data collection

In total, a number of 42 travel blogs, 14 web discussions on travel websites and data from two additional interviews have been analyzed. The travel blogs have been collected from Travelblog.org, Travelpod.com and Reiskrantreporter.nl, and were selected based on the period in which the holiday took place (which needed to be *after* the Egyptian revolution had started, so from January 25, 2011 onwards) and on the availability of information on the decision making process that preceded the holiday. The majority of the analyzed web discussions came from Thorntree (the online forum by Lonely Planet), other forums that were used are Wereldreisforum.nl, Travelpod.com, and Travelblog.org. Like the travel blogs, the web discussions were selected based on the date and

content. The collection of data from the travel blogs and the web discussions took place between May 19 and May 22, 2014. The two interviews took place at May 25, 2014.

### 3.4 Data analysis

To analyze the data retrieved from the travel blogs, web discussions and interviews, directive content analysis is used. This type of content analysis is based on the principle of *deductive category application* (Mayring, 2000): existing theories can provide predictions about variables or relations between variables, which helps making the coding scheme. Because I want to see to what extent the factors that were discussed in the literature were influencing tourists' risk perceptions in my own research, I decided to base the coding scheme on what I found in the literature.

Risk perceptions are central in this research, for that reason I made risk perceptions one of the main categories in the coding scheme. Because I wanted to investigate the relation between risk perceptions and the three factors that are believed to be influencing risk perceptions (socio-demographic characteristics, travel experience and the used information sources), I have included these factors as main categories in the coding scheme as well. These categories were then further divided into smaller sub categories. In this way I was able to gather and analyze the data needed to answer my sub questions (each of them focused on one of these categories and the category risk perceptions) in a systematic way. The data which I could not code with the help of this coding scheme, were highlighted and analyzed later to see whether the information would be relevant enough for the research to create a new (sub) category. In this way the risk of being too biased because of the in advance created coding scheme is reduced, since it decreases the chances of missing out important factors about which there were no indications that they would be important coming from the literature.

The final coding scheme that was used to process the data can be seen on the next page. During the analysis of the data I divided the main category 'Travel experience' into two sub categories: travel experience in general and experience with travelling to Egypt. The latter one was again divided into two sub categories, whether their last visit to Egypt was before or during the revolution. This was done because there appeared to be a significant difference in risk perceptions between these two groups.

Table 1: Final coding scheme

<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>	Age	
	Gender	
	Nationality	
<b>Risk perceptions</b>	Perceptions Egypt	Risk neutral
		Functional risk
		Risk place
	Perceptions related to other countries	Substitution effect
		Generalization effect
<b>Travel experience</b>	Experience Egypt	Visit during revolution
		Last visit before revolution
	General travel experience	Much experience
		Not so much experience
<b>Information sources</b>	Media	
	Travel guides	
	Travel advisories by government	
	Other travelers	
	Travel agents	

### 3.5 Limitations

This research design does bring along some limitations though. The downside of processing the data with predetermined categories instead of deriving categories after the data has been collected, is that the researcher might focus too much on the variables that have been identified in the literature and neglects other data that might be relevant for the research. This increases the chance of missing out important contextual factors. Something that is also important to keep in mind, is that content analysis remains to be a very subjective method for analyzing data. It is possible that I misinterpreted some passages, that the author wrote it with a different intention than I assumed. Because I made use of travel blogs and web discussions, it was not possible to ask people if my assumptions were correct (which would have been possible if I had decided to do interviews). Another limitation of this research

is related to the decision to make use of travel blogs and web discussions. By basing my research on these data sources, I excluded tourists who do not make use of these kind of websites from my sample. Although this thesis does not aim to produce generalizable findings, it would have been valuable to have more information about this group of tourists since it could have provided more insight in how different groups of people are perceiving risks.

Time wise, this thesis project was also very limited. In the methodology section I have already mentioned that time constraints was one of the reasons to choose for narratives that are readily available online. However, time remained to play a role in my research: the number of analyzed travel blogs and web discussions is not very high, and I was not able to do more than two interviews. This makes it harder to make rightful claims about relations between themes. A certain theme can occur frequently within my sample, but since the sample is so small the actual number of times it occurred is still very low. This means that the chance that the findings are pure coincidence because there is no real relation between two themes, are larger.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Risk perceptions

The people's risk perceptions are categorized as follows: the part of perceptions that is associated with only Egypt itself, and the part of perceptions that is being affected by people's perceptions of other countries.

#### Perceptions of Egypt

Risk perceptions associated with Egypt range from "Egypt is extremely dangerous" to "I feel there is no need to worry". The different types of risk that were created by Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) clearly came forward in the travel blogs as well as in the web discussions about whether it is safe to travel to Egypt or not. Although not appearing in the majority of the travel blogs and the opinions in web discussions, some people wrote that they did not consider Egypt to be very risky. These (potential) travelers belong to the risk neutral group. Some of them even included ironic remarks in their blogs:

*"OK so let's get a few things straight right from the start. Firstly, Egypt is absolutely safe to travel. (Disclaimer: that's just an opinion, should you get taken hostage or injured in Egypt that'd be a blow, but please don't try and sue me!)"*

These remarks are often used to support the author's view on the situation in Egypt. By making fun of (fearing) the situation in Egypt, the author wants to justify his or her opinion that the country is by far safe enough to travel to.

The second type of risk perceptions, concerned with functional risks, occurred frequently in both travel blogs and web discussions. This category encompasses people who worry about going to Egypt, but who are rather concerned about logistic and other organizational problems than about their personal safety at the destination. The following quote is from a post in a web discussion, written by someone who I classified as a functional risk tourist:

*"I am travelling to St Katherines in the South Sinai. At the moment the FCO website is advising 'all but essential travel' to the region. [...] I've phoned loads of insurance companies and they all say they will not insure me because of the FCO advice. Does anyone know of an insurance company that will?"*

Instead of expressing worries about her safety because of the travel warning issued by the UK government, this woman is concerned about the fact that she is not able to get insurance for her trip.

Although the risk of not being covered by insurance occurred was most often mentioned by functional risk tourists, also other organizational or logistic risks were mentioned, such as a change of accommodation. The author of the following discussion post is concerned about his transport mode:

*"I am considering an overland journey from Ireland to Cape Town this summer. However, I have run into a major problem before I have even started. With all the current conflicts and political tensions, getting into Egypt with a jeep seems impossible. [...] I cannot commit to the trip unless I am certain there is a way into Egypt from Europe because there is great cost involved in the preparation. Does anyone out there know of a sure fire way to get a Toyota Hilux and an Irishman into Egypt from Europe?"*

As can be seen, the people belonging to the functional risk group are not fearing for their lives, but on the other hand they are certainly not "risk neutral". Although the logistic and organizational risks are not as severe as the risks about one's personal safety at the destination, they can be a reason for cancelling the trip.

The final group of people is concerned with the (potential) tourists who consider Egypt to be an unsafe country. Not surprisingly, not much people were found when analyzing the travel blogs. Nearly all blogs were written by people who had already completed their holiday in Egypt or were there at the moment of writing, meaning that they already decided to proceed with the trip. Most people belonging to the risk place group, however, consider the situation so unsafe that they have serious doubts about going to Egypt, or that they have already decided that they do not want to go. In the web discussions and the two interviews, people expressed serious concerns about their personal safety in Egypt, often mentioning terrorism as the main reason for concern:

*"I guess my main concern is terrorism and being kidnapped."*

*"I don't want to go to Sharm [el Sheikh], you'd be crazy going there with all the bombings and stuff."*

## Perceptions related to other countries

This category is concerned with tourists' risk perceptions of other countries or regions, which are also known to influence risk perceptions of Egypt and the decision to go or not to go. The data collected on

this theme, is divided over the sub themes substitution effect and generalization effect (two concepts which have been discussed in the literature review).

### ***Substitution effect***

There were a few people who indicated in the web discussions that under the current circumstances in Egypt, they would rather visit another country instead. A Belgian woman indicated that because tourists in Egypt were discouraged by the government to leave the hotels and as a consequence they would need to stay at the pool all day, she preferred Spain as a destination. Another traveler who was on a world trip at the moment he posted his message, had cancelled his stay in Cairo because of the unrests there, and went to Amman, Jordan, instead. The political situation was also the main reason for both of my interviewees to choose for Turkey instead of Egypt:

*"We weren't going to leave the resort anyway, we were just planning on relaxing near the swimming pool. Why take the dangerous option and go for Egypt if you can do this in other safer countries as well?"*

However, when people have very specific reasons for visiting Egypt, the story becomes different. Many bloggers wrote that it was their "lifelong dream" to visit Egypt, and that seeing the pyramids was on their "bucket list". A Colombian blogger wrote the following:

*"I was so excited about the trip that I didn't really think about the country's political situation or security and its consequences on tourists. All I could see was myself in that famous sphinx and the pyramids!"*

This shows that for some people, Egypt's attractiveness can downplay the potential security risks. The benefit of seeing the pyramids and the sphinx, outweighs the cost of being in a country that brings along security risks. It also explains why these people did not choose for alternative destinations: if it is so important to visit the pyramids or the sphinx, it does not make sense for them to visit other countries like Turkey or Jordan, since these countries cannot offer these tourists what they are looking for.

### ***Generalization effect***

It was harder to find information on the generalization effect. Most people only talked about the situation in Egypt when they were discussing their personal safety, they did not talk about whether or not the situation in other countries affected their decision to go or not to go to Egypt. However, a

discussion started on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011 (three weeks before the Egyptian revolution started), did have some information on a possible generalization effect around Egypt. A 20-year-old woman wrote the following in the discussion she started:

*“I was wondering whether Egypt is a safe country to travel? I would LOVE to go there. However, as I’m only 20 and my partner is 23, I feel it’s not a very safe place as it’s near Iraq and I’ve been told it’s very dangerous. [...] We would like to take tours, but I still don’t know if it’s safe to go.”*

In the same thread, this person expresses her fears of being killed in a bombing or getting kidnapped. Despite the fact that Egypt does not even share borders with Iraq, she apparently considered this country to be a threat to her security if she would go to Egypt. When asking one of the interviewees if he would have wanted to go to Egypt before the unrests started, he also mentioned Iraq, together with Iran and Israel in explaining why he still considered Egypt unsafe at that time. It must be said however, that his alternative holiday destination in southern Turkey, is at approximately the same distance from Iraq and Iran, as Egypt is. It seems that his risk perception of Egypt is more vulnerable to getting biased by risks associated with Iran and Iraq, than his risk perception of Turkey.

Another thing that came forward was that the same interviewee did not mention Iraq, Iran or Israel when explaining why he would not go to Egypt at this moment (during the revolution). While explaining why he did not want to go, he only talked about risks associated with Egypt and not about risks associated with other countries (which were previously for him the reason to avoid Egypt). It seems that the generalization effect is *more* influential when there are no risks coming from inside Egypt (e.g. the risks associated with the Egyptian revolution), and that the generalization effect is *less* prominent when there are risks that are coming from the destination itself. This could explain why the travel blogs and the web discussions that were started after the revolution had started, did not show any signs of the generalization effect affecting people’s risk perceptions.

## 4.2 Travel experience

Many bloggers included small comparisons between the happenings during their current holiday in Egypt and experiences of previous trips:

*“Cairo is certainly less chaotic than any Indian city I visited or even Vietnam, etc.”*

*“I’d say the train I took in Thailand was much less comfortable.”*

In addition, the bloggers' profiles included a map which showed which countries that person had visited in his or her life. It was therefore easy to see if the blog was written by someone who had a lot of travel experience, or that the writer did not travel that much at all. The theme travel experience is divided into two sub themes: experience with Egypt (people who have traveled to Egypt before) and general travel experience (people who have travelled to various other countries).

## Experience with Egypt

There are differences between people who have already visited Egypt after the revolution started, and the people whose last visit to Egypt was before 2011. The majority of the people who have already been in Egypt during the Egyptian revolution argued that they did not experience many difficulties related to the unrests and that therefore, they would go back to Egypt without doubts:

*"I came back from Egypt 2 weeks ago. I travel to Egypt 2-3 times every year and I spend at least 1 month a year in the country. I hardly noticed anything dangerous in my recent trips over the last 3 years. [...] When I was there we had NO problem with electrical power in our neighborhood but I was told that the problem is growing in other cities where outage can take few hours daily. I see that as the main problem, NOT security."*

*"I have been in Egypt for three weeks. I visited Cairo, Sharm, Dahab and Mt. Sinai, Siwa, Barahya Oasis, and now Luxor. Like others say, avoid the demonstrations or mass gathering and you will be fine. I didn't see anything remotely similar to civil unrest in the other places mentioned above. Depending on which perspective you are coming from, I think this is the best time to visit Egypt. There's absolutely no crowd anywhere. You have major bargaining power and the hoteliers are much friendlier because they need your business."*

The upper message was posted in a web discussion at the end of May, 2014. This person frequently visited Egypt and never experienced any dangerous situations, so he is not concerned with safety-related issues. Instead, he is warning other people about the possible shortage of electricity. The second quote is also of a traveler who visited Egypt during the Egyptian revolution. He even states that it is a good time for tourists to go to Egypt. Many others who paid a visit to Egypt in the same period, had similar opinions. So in general, the risk perceptions of people who have been to Egypt after the revolution started, are low.

The situation is different for people who have been to Egypt before, but whose last visit was before the unrests in Egypt started. Because the situation has changed so fundamentally, some of them do not simply trust on the good experiences they had before. One of the interviewees, whose last holiday in Egypt was in 2010, confirmed this:

*“Egypt today is not the same as Egypt in 2010. It does not mean anything that our holiday in 2010 was without difficulties, because the risks back then are not the same as they are today.”*

Also several people indicated in the web discussions that they do not feel like travelling to Egypt again, despite the fact that they have been to the country before.

*“At the moment, I wouldn’t like to go to Egypt for a holiday. I’m happy I’ve seen the country already, though I would have liked to visit to Alexandria, the upcoming years I’ll be looking for other countries.”*

The risk perceptions of this group of travelers are thus dependent on one’s own experiences, but in different ways. In general, their risk perceptions are higher than the risk perceptions of people who have been in Egypt during the revolution.

## General travel experience

The vast majority of the bloggers were experienced travelers. The literature did not provide me with clear criteria to meet for being an experienced traveler, therefore I had to come up with a criterion myself. The standard for being an “experienced traveler” used in this research is that the person must have made at least two long haul trips. The criterion for a long haul trip is that the distance between the place of departure and the place of arrival must be at least 3,000 miles (roughly 4,800 kilometers), which corresponds with a flight duration of 6 hours or longer (Bowen, 2001). I chose for the standard of two long haul trips, to make sure that people who are classified as experienced travelers have travelled outside their own continent and that they have seen something of the world.

Many of the analyzed blogs were written by people who are classified as “experienced travelers”. For some people their holiday in Egypt was part of a round trip through Africa. Many of these round trips also included countries like Sudan and Eritrea, which are not considered safe either by many governments. People going on these roundtrips (and people who have visited other “unsafe” countries before) are thus used to visiting areas that are presented as unsafe by their governments. Therefore it could be that the threshold to visit Egypt, is lower for them than for people who did not visit “unsafe” countries. If experienced travelers were expressed their concerns, these concerns were mostly related to functional risks rather than safety risks. Some people expressed their concerns over whether the

planned excursions would maybe be cancelled, others were worried that they would not be able to find an insurance company that would cover their travel. On the contrary, people without much experience were more concerned about safety risks, such as the risk of being kidnapped or getting involved in a bombing.

## 4.3 Information sources

### The media

In nearly all of the travel blogs and web discussions, the way in which the media report on the protests, terrorist attacks and other unrests is mentioned. Since many of the analyzed travel blogs were written by people whose mother tongue is English, CNN and BBC were frequently named as news channels from which people get information on the situation in Egypt. The fact that the media reports were mentioned so often by bloggers, indicates that this information source has a large audience and thus reaches large numbers of travelers. People considered the image of Egypt that was produced by the media as negative, no one reported on news coverage that presented Egypt in a positive way. They all mentioned the news reports on the riots, assaults on women, and on terrorist attacks. However, this does not mean that all travelers interpret the information they get from the media, in the same way. Many people wrote that the negative news coverage that they were exposed to, made them worry about the situation in Egypt. In a web discussion, someone who had already booked his trip to Egypt wrote:

*"I need to confess that in this moment I'm worried about the situation in the country. I'm from Portugal and here, the media cover the revolution and the news are no good at all. More than 10 people died last night after the coup of the military and El Pais, a Spanish newspaper said that some groups of men raped women...more than a hundred last night in Tahrir square. I'm travelling with my girlfriend."*

Later in the discussion the same person includes a link to a news article by The Guardian about more riots and another 30 casualties, writing the following:

*"The situation seems to be more and more dangerous and at this moment I'm really considering to change my plan and avoid Egypt."*

These passages clearly show how the media can influence a tourist's decision making process. At the beginning of the discussion the person is 'just' worried, but the more negative news coverage he is exposed to, the more he gets worried and wants to cancel the trip.

But it would be wrong to state that negative news coverage always leads to increased risk perceptions. There are also people who state that they do not pay much attention to what is being said in the media, because they think their image of Egypt is strongly exaggerated: people are only presented with the negative side of the country. One of them also mentioned the recent shooting in the Jewish museum in Brussels, arguing that this event probably would not scare people out of Belgium either. Because these people think that the news reports do not accurately reflect the risk one would be exposed to when being in Egypt, they claim to base their decision on whether to go or not on other, “more reliable”, sources of information. Many of the people who do not want to base their decisions on what is being presented by the media, are experienced travelers. They had already travelled to other African countries, or countries in the Middle East, Asia or Latin America (many of them had been to countries that could be perceived by other people as unsafe, such as Yemen or Sudan).

*“Not trusting media news I (64, male) want to know what you are thinking about a trip in October this year? From my view I can’t find a reason not to do it, from the point of risks (I’ve done Iran+Pakistan in 2012 without real dangerous situations). As this will be my first trip to Egypt every hint, idea, tip is more than welcome.”*

It is likely The analysis shows that many experienced travelers are reluctant to take in (mostly negative) information from the media, because they already had so many great experiences in other countries (which might also have got negative news coverage). This can result in a decline of accountability of the media among experienced travelers, meaning that these tourists no longer trust the media as an information source for their travels.

## Travel advisories of governments

Many people indicated that they were aware of the travel advisories about Egypt that were issued by their government. In fact, the findings on this information source are similar to what has been found about the media as a source of information. All people thought that their governments presented Egypt as a high-risk country, by means of warnings like “reconsider your travels” and “we advise against all travel to the Sinai region”. Like with the media, there are differences regarding to what extent this information is taken into account when deciding whether or not they will go to Egypt. Some people get serious doubts about how safe they will be if they travel to Egypt, while others do not pay much attention to what their government advises:

*“I am considering travelling to Egypt (basically just Cairo and Luxor) this summer, and want to know people’s opinions about the security situation there right now. I know that the Canada Travel site*

*recommends not travelling there except for essential travel, but they always say this so I'm not basing my decision on that."*

The majority of the people who said that they refused to base their travel plans on warnings issued by their governments, were experienced travelers. It is possible that the same line of reasoning is followed as why experienced travelers do not trust the media. It might be that these people have travelled before to countries that were labelled by their government as unsafe, but that they did feel unsafe at all during their travels. Because during these holidays the warnings did not match the "reality" of the tourists, they might no longer believe that the warnings are accurate.

However, experienced travelers often do take the travel advisories into account when calculating one specific functional risk: e.g. whether it is possible to get travel insurance for the trip to Egypt. They are concerned that they will not find an insurance company because their government advises people against travelling to Egypt. The 'functional risk tourists' look at the travel advisories for the insurance risk rather than for their personal safety risk.

## Other travelers

From the analysis it became clear that (potential) tourists ask other travelers about their experience and for their advice on security-related issues in Egypt. In many web discussions people asked others whether it would be safe to travel to Egypt, sometimes even half a year before their planned departure:

*"Nobody in this forum can predict how safe or unsafe Egypt will be by December."* (written in May)

In addition, many said it would make more sense to ask people who are in Egypt at that moment, and to follow the news.

*"I suggest to just keep an eye on the news. A coup just occurred in Egypt and no one can say what will happen next."*

It seems that because that information coming from these sources is more up to date, it is considered more 'accurate' than any advice given several months beforehand.

But consulting other travelers does not only happen via web discussions. Many people checked tourists' travel blogs, trip advisor or asked people in person whether they had unpleasant experiences during their holiday. Usually these blogs contain positive information about the country, taking away (most of the) reader's concerns about the situation:

*"I was nervous about the political situation there, but having read a few blogs from other travelers to Egypt I decided it was safe enough."*

One of the findings is that other travelers are often consulted *after* they had seen negative news reports or to check whether the issued travel warnings might be a bit exaggerated. This can already be seen in some of the quotes that I used in the sections about mass media and travel advisories, in which experienced travelers asked about the situation in Egypt because they did not trust the media and the issued travel warning. However, consulting other travelers is not only done by people whose risk perceptions are not affected by the media and the travel advisories:

*"I arranged a tour through G Adventures a little while ago and after the civil protests and articles read online in the newspaper I began feeling quite anxious about my trip and started thinking cancelling might be a good idea. After reading some really positive and interesting posts on trip advisor, I decided that I would continue with the tour and became very excited about the journey I was about to undertake."*

This person became anxious because of the media coverage of the situation in Egypt. However, after comparing the news reports with the experiences of other travelers, she decided to go to Egypt anyway. Numerous other people described (both in the blogs and in the web discussions) how the experiences of others ultimately convinced them to go on a holiday to Egypt, despite of the negative sounds coming from the media and their governments. This shows that the opinions of other travelers, could be considered more valuable for judging the situation in Egypt than the media or the travel advisories from the government.

## Travel guides and travel agents

Some of the bloggers mentioned travel guides as a source of information. However, no clear relation was found between the use of travel guides and tourists' risk perceptions, neither it was possible to identify a certain image of Egypt's safety that was presented by guidebooks (as opposed to e.g. the media, which present Egypt in a way that is perceived as negative by the tourists). A possible explanation for this is that most guidebooks that people used were written before the Egyptian revolution took place. Thus it would have been impossible to get information on safety issues related to the political unrests from travel guides. But also if the guidebooks did report on the turmoil and the threat of terrorism, there are reasons to assume that people did not base their risk perceptions largely on travel guides. As I have mentioned in the previous section, many people regard the situation in Egypt as changing every day. It could be that for this reason travelers' risk perceptions of Egypt are

not largely based on what is written in guidebooks, because they might think information about the current safety coming from a book that was written months or even years ago, is not accurate.

Like it is the case with travel guides, also not much information was found on the use of travel agents to get information about the situation in Egypt. None of the people explicitly wrote that they made their decision based on what a travel agency advised them, or what the agency stated on their website. The current trend in tourism is that more and more people are travelling independently, but this cannot be an explanation for the fact that travel agencies were hardly mentioned as information sources because there were many bloggers who had been on a group tour through Egypt (and thus must have booked their holiday at a travel agency).

It is possible though, that tourists use travel agents in another way to judge whether Egypt is safe enough to travel to than by asking them directly or searching the website for information on the situation in Egypt. The fact that these companies are offering holidays to Egypt despite the unrests, means to them that they consider the country safe enough to do business there. This can have an influence on how potential tourists perceive the risks associated with the country:

*“We booked some flights and a tour with a good company and off we went. Now Egypt is still on the ‘essential travel only’ list and there is still tension within the government but we thought it would be ok, especially with a big travel company.”*

So despite the tensions in Egypt, the couple thought that it would be ok to travel to Egypt, (partially) because they were traveling with a good travel company. This quote suggests that travelers might trust the decision of the travel agency to continue offering holidays to Egypt, and this could be a signal that tourists might adjust their risk perceptions accordingly. This would mean that travel agencies do not necessarily need to provide concrete information about the situation to influence tourists' risk perceptions and their decision making, just the fact that they are still offering holidays in the given area can already play a role in this.

#### **4.4 Socio-demographic characteristics**

A significant difference was found between risk perceptions of women and those of men. Some females indicated they were concerned about their personal safety, because they were afraid that they would be sexually harassed by men. Not surprisingly, this kind of risk did not occur in any of the blogs

or discussion posts written by men when they were talking about their personal safety, though one man mentioned that he was concerned about the safety of his girlfriend:

*"I need to confess that in this moment I'm worried about the situation in the country. [...] Some groups of men raped women...more than a hundred last night in Tahrir Square. I'm travelling with my girlfriend."*

However, the risks associated with the political unrests and terrorism did not differ significantly between the two genders: female bloggers did not report more or less frequently about these kind of risks than male bloggers.

Sometimes when people ask others for advice on whether it would be safe to travel to Egypt or not, they write down their age, gender and sometimes nationality in the message. Because of the fact that they include these details, it seems that they think this is relevant information for the person who is going to give them advice, that it would influence that person's judgement. This suggests that age, gender and nationalities would have an influence on people's risk perceptions. However, this is not supported by the travel blogs. As mentioned, no difference in risk perceptions (regarding terrorism and/or political unrests) was found when comparing men and women, and next to gender also nationality and age did not seem to be related to the extent in which risk is perceived by tourists. Nearly all of the blogs were written by people originating from English speaking countries (Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand) and the Netherlands, but no clear differences in risk perceptions could be identified among these different nationalities. It is possible that this would have been different if other nationalities were included. The blog writers ranged from teenagers to people well in their sixties, but no clear variations in risk perceptions among different age groups could be identified.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In general, people with high risk perceptions (the “risk place” group, as named by Roehl and Fesemaier (1992)) of Egypt are reluctant to visit the country, while for people with low risk perceptions (the “functional risk” group and the “risk neutral” group) the threshold to visit Egypt is considerably lower. This is conform to Prodromiti’s (2013) statement that tourists’ risk perceptions and their decision making are related. However, it must be said risk place tourists do not necessarily avoid Egypt: there were also people who went to Egypt despite the fact that they considered the country to be unsafe. They indicated that the main attractions of Egypt (the pyramids and the sphinx) were so appealing to them that they decided to go to the country anyway.

### Information sources

There was consensus among travelers that Egypt is often portrayed in a negative way in the media and in the government issued travel advisories. However, there are differences in to what extent the information coming from these two sources is considered valuable by tourists between the different risk groups. While people belonging to the risk place group were very much influenced by the negative news coverage and the travel warnings, the risk neutral tourists found that the image of Egypt presented by these two sources is too extreme and exaggerated. The functional risk tourists generally shared the opinion of people belonging to the risk neutral group, but do not completely disregarded the travel advisories because they still used them for judging organizational/logistic risks (rather than risks related to their safety). These partially confirm earlier research on this topic: the media (Hall, 2002; Cavlek, 2002; Ferreira & Harmse, 2000) and the government issued travel advisories (Akama & Kieti, 2003; Sharpley et al., 1985) can indeed influence tourists’ image of the destination, but this is not the same for all risk groups. The information that did seem to be relevant for shaping risk perceptions of functional risk tourists and risk neutral tourists, was the information they got from other travelers. The people from these groups mainly referred to stories of other travelers with positive information about Egypt, and as such this information produced a less risky image of Egypt than the media or the travel warnings. Functional risk tourists and risk neutral tourists considered the information coming from other travelers more accurate than the news reports and the government issued travel advisories. In my project it clearly came forward that people with high risk perceptions preferred other information sources than people with low risk perceptions. This is something which has not been investigated earlier, and should certainly receive more attention in future research.

The literature also indicated that travel agents (Leggat et al., 2007; Lovelock, 2004) and travel guides (Leggat et al., 2007; Carter, 1998) influence tourists' risk perceptions, but this did not come forward in my research. I found that many people did read guidebooks about the destination, but still there were no indications that reading guidebooks had an influence on people's risk perceptions. An explanation for this is that guidebooks cannot present the reader with the most accurate information, because their content is soon outdated. I also did not find any information on the role of travel agents. It is of course possible that travel agencies are simply not used by tourists to get information about personal safety and security in Egypt, but another explanation might lie in the fact that travel agencies on their websites often refer to the travel advisories by the government. It is possible that travelers have seen these messages, were directed to the website with the travel warning, and in the end only mention the travel advisories in the web discussions or travel blogs.

### Travel experience

As expected, travel experience was also found to be influencing tourists' risk perceptions. For this project, I made a distinction between travel experience in general and travel experience with Egypt specifically. On the one hand, people with a lot of general travel experience were more likely to be in the functional risk or the risk neutral group (thus having low risk perceptions of Egypt), while on the other hand many travelers who are not that experienced often considered Egypt to be a dangerous destination. This is in line with what has been found in the literature: it was expected that people who had travelled a lot, would have lower risk perceptions than people without much travel experience (Reichel et al., 2007; Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Pearce, 1996). Concerning the travel experience with Egypt, I found differences between people who have been to Egypt during the Egyptian revolution and people whose last visit was before the revolution started. The people belonging to the first group, had low risk perceptions. They felt safe during their previous trip, and therefore had no reason to think this would be different a next time. This is different for people whose last trip to Egypt was before the revolution started, their risk perceptions were higher. Barnett and Breakwell (2001) argued that if someone has a lot of experience with voluntary risk taking, this person is likely to have lower concern levels. Travelling to Egypt during the revolution, is an example of voluntary risk taking. The findings of my research thus confirm this claim.

## Socio-demographic characteristics

Only concerning one specific risk, differences in risk perceptions of men and women were found. Various women expressed their concerns about the risk to get sexually harassed when going to Egypt, and for this reason some of them were reluctant to go on a trip. This risk was did not come forward in the concerns about personal safety of male travelers, though it is possible that some men worry about the safety of their female travel companions.

When looking at these results, it is important to keep in mind that this risk is associated with a crime that is in nearly all cases directed towards women, therefore it is logical that women are more concerned about this risk than men. But considering the risks associated with the political situation in Egypt and the threat of terrorism, no differences between risk perceptions of men and women were found. This is in line with what was found by Sönmez and Graefe (1998a), who did not find any significant differences in risk perceptions of males and females in their quantitative study about risk perceptions. However, it is important to note that there is no consensus among scholars about the (non-) existence of the relationship between gender and risk perceptions: other studies (Gibson & Jordan, 1998a; Gibson & Jordan, 1998b; Reichel et al., 2007) found different results, claiming that there is a relation between the two variables but having different findings on whether females or males generally have higher risk perceptions.

No differences in risk perceptions of old and young people were found. This contradicts the findings of Flynn and Mertz (1994) and Sjöberg (2005) that people over the age of 55 generally have higher risk perceptions than people of another age. Furthermore the literature indicated that there is a relationship between tourists' nationalities and their risk perceptions (Reisigner & Mavondo, 2006; Wolff & Larsen, 2014), but in my project these two variables seem to be not related. It must be said however, that it was not always possible to retrieve the socio-demographic data from the travel blogs or the discussion posts. It is therefore questionable whether the used data sources are appropriate to study the relation between socio-demographic characteristics and risk perceptions.

## Future research

Since most of the research on the relationship between risk perceptions and socio-demographic characteristics is quantitative, another quantitative study would probably not contribute to the existing literature. Instead, it would be interesting to study the relation by conducting another qualitative research, doing in-depth interviews instead of analyzing travel blogs and web discussions. So far scholars only have been able to state that there a relationship exists or does not exist. The right

knowledge to explain *why* this is the case, is still lacking. My own methods were inappropriate to study this relation thoroughly, but in-depth interviews can provide more insight in the underlying patterns.

Future research could also focus on the importance of information sources for people from different groups of risk perceptions and the ways in which these information sources produce risks. In-depth interviews could provide more knowledge about *why* people choose for certain information sources, and *how* these sources are influencing their risk perceptions. For a research with the aim of producing generalizable findings, it would be interesting to do a survey to check whether the relation between risk perceptions and used information sources is a significant one, and to see how strongly levels of risk and the use of specific sources of information are correlated.

## Conclusion

Risk perceptions and terrorism are very popular research topics nowadays, and the political situation in Egypt has been dominating the news since the start of the Egyptian revolution on January 25, 2011. This thesis focused on the relation between tourists' risk perceptions and the willingness to go to Egypt. It was found that people with high risk perceptions of Egypt, are more likely to avoid Egypt than people with low risk perceptions. Travel experience and the used information sources are found to be strongly related to tourists' risk perceptions, as opposed to tourists' socio-demographic characteristics. Especially the findings on the relation between risk perceptions and the used information sources provide new insights, since the importance of various information sources have never been related to different levels of risk perception.

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