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TOURIST PROFILE AS AN INDICATOR OF PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S POLITICAL CLIMATE CONDITIONS

Danie Ferreira 

Corresponding Author: Nelson Mandela University, South Africa
Email: danie.ferreira@mandela.ac.za

Sandra Perks

Nelson Mandela University, South Africa
Email: sandra.perks@mandela.ac.za

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Abstract

Tourism is seen as complexed and unpredictable. The industry does not operate in a vacuum and is sensitive to change in the environment in which it operates. The political climate of a tourist destination can influence the risk perception by tourist. The aim of this study is to explore if tourists' variables can predict the role the political climate play in selecting South Africa (SA) as a tourist destination. A quantitative research design was utilized with 512 domestic and foreign tourists travelling within or to South Africa participating in an online survey. Multiple Analysis of Variance, Post-hoc Tukey tests and Cohen d tests were conducted to analyze the data. Of the six statistically significant mean variances, five practically statistically significant effect sizes were identified between the tourism profile variables excluding employment status. Of these practically significant effect sizes, only age seems to be an indicator of how travelers view SA's political climate conditions. The SA government should purposefully strive to create a positive risk-free image of being a safe politically stable country. To increase travel to and within SA, marketers must apply a differentiated marketing approach for younger travelers (between 18 and 25 years) and those in the age group 56-65 years to reassure them about the absence of travel risks in the country. It is further suggested that destination marketing organizations compile specific travel packages for these two age groups to ease their travel risk fears and increase tourist demand to and within South Africa.

Keywords: Tourism Profile, Risk Aversion, Perception, Political Climate, South Africa

1. Introduction

Tourism studies are based on a multidisciplinary traditional scientific research approach and can be traced back to the 16th century. Tourism is a "complex, nonlinear and chaotic" field of study as it can be described as "lifelike or organic, having multiple, often unpredictable outliers that initiate instability" (Johnston and Aday, 2015, p. 147). As noted by Lepp and Gibson (2003), tourism as a field of study calls for two contrasting propensities: the quest for novelty and risk aversion. This paper will focus on risk aversion, as the focus will be on the avoidance of harmful situations,

especially if considering visiting foreign countries with prevailing uncertain circumstances or environments (Prince and Kim, 2021). High risk aversion involves avoiding fearful situations in general and extends to evading cognitive fear (Verma and Sharma, 2013). In the tourism context, risk aversion can be related to risk perceptions of tourists about the destination that makes them feel nervous, uneasy or fearful (Prince and Kim, 2021). Risk perception can be explained as beliefs when humans mentally react to situations when finding themselves in danger or when somebody else's life is in peril (Isaac and Van den Bedem, 2021). Tourism and tourism related studies on the risk perception theory have gained major recognition (Williams and Balaz, 2013).

Tourism safety at a destination can be associated with absence of risk. Tourists need to feel safe in the country visited without being subjected to an unstable political environment, acts of violence and/or war (Almuhrzi *et al.* 2017; Hudson, 2008). These political conditions were classified in a study by Ferreira and Perks (2016) as political climate. Rosi *et al.* (2021) indicate that demographic variables such as gender, employment status, and level of education have a strong effect on the risk perception that tourists will have about a destination. Sun and Sun (2019) indicate that few studies have been conducted to determine tourists' risk perceptions of a destination based on age. Various authors (Donaldson and Ferreira, 2009; Ferreira and Perks, 2016; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022; Llorca-Vivero, 2008) indicate that an unstable political climate in a country can negatively influence tourist arrivals, specifically if these conditions are present for a significant time period and more so if it is occurring in a developing country, such as South Africa.

It is thus clear that there is a gap in research on the role that demographics can play in the risk perception of tourist destinations, and not much information is available considering all demographic variables. As political climate can cause high risk aversion in tourists, this research study has explored which demographic variables can predict the role the political climate in South Africa plays in it being selected as a tourist destination.

In the section to follow a literature review on risk aversion, as well as how the demographic profile of tourists' behavior influences how they react to risk. The methodology of the study will be outlined followed by conclusions and recommendations.

2. Risk aversion

Risk aversion and risk perceptions of tourist destinations are important international travel considerations (Al Riyami, 2021). According to Chew and Jahari (2014), any incidents that can be perceived as hazardous will influence which country tourists will select to travel to. Political instability is a major international travel barrier, as it leads to high-risk aversion and reduces tourism country appeal (Chauhan and Khanna, 2009). SA has been experiencing risk aversion conditions such as political instability and xenophobia, amongst others, which discourage international tourist arrivals and economic growth in the country (Manaliyo, 2021). In July 2021, SA experienced one of the most violent uprisings when highways were barricaded, and property looted and set alight. Approximately 300 people died as a result thereof (Neethling, 2021). The Global Peace Index placed SA's cost of violence at 19% of the country's GDP; this relates to the 16th highest rate in the world (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022). The Fund for Peace (2022), showing a country's fragility and political risk, has moved SA from a perceived stable country in 2006 to a warning country in 2021.

Unrest, such as xenophobia, also contributes to tourists' perception of an unsafe country. Xenophobia can be described as an unexplainable cognitive fear of foreign nationals that leads to discriminatory tendencies towards them and can turn into full-on violent attacks on foreigners (Azindow, 2007). Kock *et al.* (2019) denote that most tourists are only exposed to low levels of xenophobia in the form of some residents' distaste for foreigners. Severe levels of xenophobia in a country leads to travel booking cancelations and decreases in international tourist arrivals. In SA, xenophobia is directed at foreign small to medium enterprises (SME) owned and run by immigrants who are perceived by residents as a threat to their jobs, opportunities and livelihoods. In an attempt to scare these foreign SME owners off to return to their home countries, local residents loot their shops and attack their families (Vegter, 2015). The United Nations (2022) has condemned the increasing xenophobic attacks in SA, "especially against low-income, African and

Southeast Asian migrants and refugees". Tourists misinterpret these xenophobic attacks as attacks against all foreigners, including tourists (Vegter, 2015). The United Nations (2022) has called for the South African Government to intervene and limit these attacks.

3. Influence of demographic profile of tourists' behavior

In the seventies, Plog (1973) had already indicated that tourists' personality traits could predict travel behavior. This finding is confirmed in several studies (Ferreira *et al.* 2015; Lepp and Gibson, 2003; Nazir *et al.* 2021; Prince and Kim, 2021; Seong and Hong, 2021), which suggest that tourists' risk perceptions differ based on their gender, travel experience, level of education, ethnic group affiliation, nationality and personality traits. Risk perception is thus perceived differently by different demographic groups. Reisinger and Crofts (2009) assert that, in general, males will display more risky behavior while traveling than women will. Al Riyami's (2021) findings confirm that female travelers' risk perception is higher, and they would avoid destinations that are perceived as risky especially if it is in a developing country. Lepp and Gibson (2003) indicate that more experienced travelers are less concerned about risks at a tourist destination than less experienced travelers. Lu *et al.* (2021) hold the view that there are differences in tourist preferences, based on their education level with less educated people preferring to engage in domestic travel, while more educated people will more likely travel abroad. This finding could be interpreted as less educated people having a higher risk aversion to travel than educated people. Ferreira *et al.* (2015) indicate that there are differences in destination selection based on ethnicity. Preko and Gyepi-Garbrah's (2021) findings suggest that nationality of a tourist has a noteworthy influence on the risk perception of a destination selection. Ferreira and Perks's (2018) findings suggest that people of African descent seek destinations with high dissatisfiers, whereas people of European and Australian descent do so to a lesser extent. Cooper *et al.* (2000) find that personality traits influence risk perception, with extraverts being more likely to engage in risky activities while traveling.

Most of the previously mentioned studies had similar findings. It must, however, be noted that certain risks are directly associated with specific destinations. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) should identify the risk aversion factors related to a destination and implement risk reducing tools to regain the tourists' trust. Furthermore, there is a no "one size fits all" approach to risk reducing strategies. The risk reducing strategies must be specific to the destination and tailored to the target market to attract travelers. The following section elaborates on the research design and methodology adopted in this study.

4. Methodology

This study followed the positivistic research paradigm whereby quantitative data was sourced from tourists using convenience and snowball sampling. The tourist respondents had to be older than 18 and have travelled to or within SA. South African tourism affiliated organizations such as The Department of Tourism, SA Tourism and tourism companies were approached for assistance in sourcing an appropriate sample. The contact persons at these institutions circulated the Google Forms web link to their staff requesting completion. In addition, respondents were recruited using convenience sampling by sending the web link to friends, family and the researchers' Facebook contact lists. These respondents were then requested to forward the web link to their friends and family, thus utilizing snowball sampling. The web link was also shared on tourism related Facebook pages with the consent of the owner of the page. Based on literature, the e-questionnaire was developed. Ten items were developed to test political climate conditions using a 5-point Likert scale varying from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). After data cleaning, 512 questionnaires were statistically analyzed using the statistical computer package STATISTICA 16. The measuring instrument was validated by conducting exploratory factor analysis (EFA), only considering factor loadings above 0.5 with no evidence of cross loadings. A Cronbach's alpha cut-off point of 0.7 was regarded as confirming factor reliability (George and Mallery, 2003). Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to examine whether there is evidence of significant mean variances between tourist groups to and within SA regarding the

political climate conditions. Statistically significant variance between groups was capped with a probability (p-value) of less than 0.05. Six separate sets of MANOVA were performed. The following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: Gender has a positive influence on tourists' perceptions of SA's political climate conditions.

H₂: Age has a positive influence on tourists' perceptions of SA's political climate conditions.

H₃: Ethic affiliation has a positive influence on tourists' perceptions of SA's political climate conditions.

H₄: Employment status has a positive influence on tourists' perceptions of SA's political climate conditions.

H₅: Education level has a positive influence on tourists' perceptions of SA's political climate conditions.

H₆: Marital status has a positive influence on tourists' perceptions of SA's political climate conditions.

To overcome the limitation of MANOVA, which only considers whether the population means are the same, the Post-hoc Tukey Honest Significant Difference test was used to identify where specific significant mean group differences occur (Lund Research, 2013). Cohen's d values indicated the practical significance of the mean scores with Cohen's d values of 0.2 < d < 0.5 considered as a small' effect size; 0.5 < d < 0.8 as an average effect size and d > 0.8 as a large effect size (Cohen, 1988).

5. Empirical results

Table 1 represents the demographic information of the respondents. The sample comprised of 63% females and 37% males. One percent of the tourists were of Arabic descent, while 2% were Asian, 30% Black, 59% Caucasian and 8% of mixed ethnicity. The age profile of the tourists was: 18-25 years (14%); 26-35 years (24%); 36-45 years (16%); 46-55 years (30%); 56-65 years (11%), and Above 65 years (5%). Sixteen percent of the tourists were at school leavers certificate level, while 11% had a certificate, 22% had a diploma, 19% had a degree and 32% had a post graduate qualification. The tourists were full-time employed (53%), part-time employed (17%), self-employed (13%), unemployed (4%), retired (6%) or students (7%). Fifty two percent of the tourists were married, with 30% being unmarried and 9% living together. Seven percent of the tourists were divorced and 2% were widowed.

Table 1. Demographic information of the respondents

Variable	Levels	Percentage
Gender	Male	37
	Female	63
Age group	18 – 25	14
	26 – 35	24
	36 – 45	16
	46 – 55	30
	56 – 65	11
	66 +	5
	Ethnic affiliation	Arabic
Asian		2
Black		30
Caucasian		59
Mixed ethnicity		8
Employment status	Full-time employed	53
	Part-time employed	17

Table 1. Continued

Variable	Levels	Percentage
Employment status	Self-employed	13
	Retired	6
	Student	7
	Unemployed	4
Level of education	Grade 12 (school leavers certificate)	16
	Certificate	11
	Diploma	22
	Degree	19
	Post Graduate Degree/Diploma	32
Marital status	Divorced	7
	Living together	9
	Married	52
	Unmarried	30
	Widowed	2

5.1. Validity and reliability

It must be noted that this study was part of a bigger study. Political climate was tested with 10 variables. However, four items loaded onto two other tested factors tested in the large study, while two items with cross loadings were disregarded. Table 2 summarizes the results of the EFA, which extracted the four items for the variable political climate conditions.

Table 2. Summary of the validity and reliability of the variable political climate conditions

Statements	Factor loading	Item correlation	Cronbach's alpha
Country is politically stable	0.628	0.598	0.765
Country is absent of xenophobia	0.697	0.620	0.757
Country's government has consistent decision making	0.594	0.595	0.779
Country is perceived as a peaceful nation	0.720	0.694	0.721

As displayed in Table 2, the factor loadings of the four valid items that loaded onto the variable, political climate conditions, ranged between 0.594 and 0.720. Political climate conditions have a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.804, which signals high reliability. Based on the EFA results, *political climate conditions* are defined as appealing political country conditions, such as being a politically stable, peaceful nation without xenophobia and with a government that is consistently making sound political decisions.

5.2. Descriptive statistics

Table 3 depicts the descriptive statistics of the political climate conditions variables.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the political climate conditions variables

Political climate conditions variables	Mean	Standard deviation
Country is politically stable	4.63	0.69
Country is absent of xenophobia	4.71	0.65
Country's government has consistent decision making	4.30	0.85
Country is perceived as a peaceful nation	4.67	0.68
Overall mean	4.58	0.72

As can be seen in Table 3, overall, there is a high level of agreement that the four identified political climate conditions are important travel risk considerations for traveling in and to SA. The most prominent political climate risk condition for travelers in and to SA seems to be that SA should be free of xenophobic violence. When considering the standard deviations, travelers had the most diverse opinions of whether having a political governing body that makes consistent decisions in SA will entice travel in and to the country.

Table 4. Results of the MANOVA testing

Tourist profile	F-value	p-value	H no.	Outcome
Gender	8.48	0.003	H ₁	Accepted
Age	2.99	0.011	H ₂	Accepted
Ethnic affiliation	2.92	0.013	H ₃	Accepted
Employment status	2.71	0.013	H ₄	Accepted
Education level	2.61	0.034	H ₅	Accepted
Marital status	2.87	0.022	H ₆	Accepted

Note: p < 0.05.

As depicted in Table 4, a statistically significant relationship exists between the observation for gender (0.003), age (0.011), ethnic affiliation (0.013), employment status (0.013), education level (0.034), marital status (0.022) and political climate conditions at p < 0.05 significance level. Therefore, hypotheses H₁ - H₆ are accepted. There are preference differences between female and male respondents with regard to destination selection as confirmed in two studies (Ferreira *et al.* 2015; Meece *et al.* 2006). Eby and Molnar's (2002) findings suggest that age influences the risk taken by different age groups, with respondents 65 years and older being more concerned about their safety than younger respondents. Mahika (2011) states that the ethnic affiliation and culture of a tourist will influence the destination that they select for a holiday. Hallab (2006) signposts that a tourist's employment status can affect their travel behavior. Lu *et al.*'s (2021) study suggests that individuals with different levels of education have different perceptions of what is regarded as travel risks. Jonsson and Devonish's (2008) findings suggest that socio-economic variables such as marital status affect the destination selection process. Table 5 depicts the results of the post-hoc Tukey and Cohen's d testing.

Table 5. Results of the post-hoc Tukey and Cohen's d testing

Tourist profile	Post-hoc Tukey (groups with effects)	Cohen d	Effect size
Gender	Females > Males	0.30	Small
Age	56 to 65 > 18 to 25	0.63	Average
Ethnic affiliation	Caucasian > Black	0.26	Small
Employment status	None	n/a	n/a
Education level	Post-graduate > High school certificate	0.35	Small
Marital status	Married < unmarried	0.28	Small

The post-hoc Tukey test was not powerful enough to detect any specific mean group differences based on tourists' employment status. The post-hoc Tukey tests for the other demographics tested for valid political climate conditions revealed several significant specific mean group differences. Gender plays a role as females ($\bar{x} = 4.630$) had a higher mean score than males ($\bar{x} = 4.478$) with females regarding SA's political climate conditions of utmost importance to consider for risk free traveling in or to SA whereas males only regard it as a very important consideration. Age is a determinant factor as respondents in the age group 56 to 65 years ($\bar{x} = 4.759$) had a higher mean score than respondents in the age group 18 to 25 years ($\bar{x} = 4.396$). Older (56 to 65 years) respondents deemed SA's political climate conditions of utmost importance to consider for risk free traveling to and in SA, whereas younger (18 to 25 years) respondents deemed it only as important. Ethnic affiliation of respondents plays a role as the Caucasian ethnic group ($\bar{x} = 4.626$) scored a higher mean than the Black ethnic group ($\bar{x} = 4.437$). The Caucasian ethnic group thus perceives SA's political climate conditions as of utmost importance to consider for risk free traveling to and within the country while those from the Black

ethnic group regard it only as an important consideration. Based on education level, respondents with post-graduate qualifications ($\bar{x} = 4.640$) had a higher mean score than respondents with school leaver certificates ($\bar{x} = 4.412$). Although respondents with post-graduate qualifications regard SA's political climate conditions as of utmost importance for risk free traveling to and in the country, those with high school certificates only rate it as an important consideration. Married respondents ($\bar{x} = 4.624$) scored a slightly higher mean score than unmarried respondents ($\bar{x} = 4.458$) with married respondents regarding SA's political climate conditions as of utmost importance to consider for risk free traveling in and to the country, whereas unmarried respondents regard it as only a very important consideration.

Based on the Cohen's *d* small practical significance findings for gender ($= 0.30$), ethnic affiliation (0.26), education level (0.35) and marital status (0.28), there is not adequate justification to pay attention to these findings. The average Cohen's *d*-value of 0.63 for age thus suggests that SA tourism organizations should pay attention to what is perceived as risk free travel conditions if they want to increase tourist demand in and to SA.

6. Conclusion

Tourist demand of a country like SA is related to its political climate conditions. This study confirmed that of the ten political climate conditions aspects tested, domestic and international travelers value risk-free travel conditions such as lack of xenophobic violence in SA, being a peaceful and political stable country with a political governing body that make consistent decisions. It is further confirmed that tourism profiles based on gender, age, ethnic affiliation, employment status, education level, and marital status can predict which political climate conditions travelers to and within SA associated with being relatively risk-free conditions. These empirical findings were in congruence with extant literature findings although not necessarily in the political climate conditions context. However, all these studies to some extent confirm the MANOVA results, it did not further explore the extent of the mean difference between the groups.

This study found that there are no mean group differences that can be observed for employment status and SA's political climate conditions. The study results confirmed that specific mean group differences can be observed between gender, age, ethnic affiliation, education level, marital status, and SA's political climate conditions. However, specific mean group differences are only meaningful if of practical significance. When considering the Cohen's *d*-values, small practically significant effect sizes were observed for gender, ethnic affiliation, education level, marital status, and SA's political climate conditions. The Cohen *d* test for employment status and SA's political conditions was not powerful enough to yield results. Only age presents an average practically significant effect size with SA's political climate conditions.

Based on the political climate conditions results, to increase travel demand in and to SA, the country should manage its political climate, especially what can be regarded as travel risks. SA should be promoted as a safe country, free of xenophobic violence, without friction between residents, as well as between residents and foreigners. Political parties should at all costs avoid creating an image of political instability as it signals to travelers that there is risk involved in traveling to the country, which may impact them, such as weak service delivery or a possible interruption in the supply of products and services. To be regarded as a politically stable country, there should be emphasis on government unity, being a democratic country and legislation in place to prevent and manage wrongdoings. This will provide travelers with reassurance that they will have protection if needed. Corruption in government should be eradicated to signify that the government can be trusted to make consistent, sound decisions. DMO's such as Department of Tourism and South African Tourism must work closely with other bodies of government to implement mitigating strategies for events such as xenophobic attracts, inconsistent government decisions and act of riots. This should be implemented as these acts have a devastating influence on tourist arrivals as the country will be consider a high-risk country to visit.

Based on the average practically significant effect size, it is further recommended that tourism marketers use a differentiated approach for younger travelers (18-25) and those in the 56 to 65 age group to present SA as a relatively risk-free, politically safe nation. When marketing the country to younger travelers, the focus that SA as a politically safe nation should be mentioned

but there is not a need to go into elaborate explanations for reassurance. It appears these younger travelers are motivated to travel to and within SA by considering other country conditions too, which is outside the scope of this article. It is acknowledged that the findings of this study are time bound as a country's political climate can change over time. However, the findings are noteworthy from a tourism marketing viewpoint.

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