AN INVESTIGATION INTO NATURAL DISASTERS AND THEIR ABILITY TO ALTER HOW SAFE TOURISTS PERCIEVE AFFECTED DESTINATIONS TO BE. SPECIFIC FOCUS UPON TOURISTS WHO HAVE BEEN TO FLORIDA AND THEIR OPINIONS REGARDING ITS SAFETY AFTER HURRICANE MATTHEW.

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DECLARATION

“I declare that this Dissertation has not already been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. It is the result of my own independent research except where otherwise stated.”

______________________________
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project is to explore the link between natural disasters and the perceived safety of destinations which have been affected by them. Investigating this has enabled recommendations and suggestions to be made regarding how destinations may limit the negative impact of a natural disaster.

To enable the project researcher to successfully answer the research questions of this study, both primary and secondary research has been carried out. The primary research was based around semi-structured interviews which resulted in qualitative data; the secondary research involved the analysis of multiple literature sources around relevant topics and themes.

This research project contains an introduction to the subject matter and the study; as well as why the project researcher deems this project to be appropriate and worthwhile. Following this is a literature review which has enabled the project researcher to gain a depth of knowledge and understanding on relevant academic literature. A methodology section is included after the literature review to explain in detail all the methods of data collection and how it has been analysed. The results section enables the project researcher to discuss all findings from the semi-structured interviews and the literature review. Finally, there is a conclusion which summarises the key findings of this study, limitations which have been encountered, recommendations to the industry and suggestions for further research.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE........................................................................................................................................1

DECLARATION.......................................................................................................................................2

ABSTRACT............................................................................................................................................3

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS........................................................................................................................4

TABLE OF CONTENTS...........................................................................................................................5-7

LIST OF FIGURES..................................................................................................................................8

CONTENTS OF INTRODUCTION.........................................................................................................9

INTRODUCTION.......................................................................................................................................10-15

1.1 BACKGROUND...............................................................................................................................10-12

1.2 PURPOSE OF STUDY.......................................................................................................................12-13

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS..................................................................................................................13

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES..........................................................................................13-14

1.5 METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE..............................................................................................14

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY............................................................................................................14-15

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY...............................................................................................................15

CONTENTS OF LITERATURE REVIEW.................................................................................................16

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW....................................................................................................................17-25

2.1 INTRODUCTION............................................................................................................................17

2.2 THE TOURISM INDUSTRY.............................................................................................................17-18

2.3 NATURAL DISASTERS....................................................................................................................18-19

2.4 PREVIOUS DISASTERS EFFECTS ON TOURIST NUMBERS..........................................................19-21

2.5 PERCEIVED RISK AND DECISION MAKING.............................................................................21-23
2.6 TYPOLOGIES THEORY, WHICH TOURISTS ARE MOST OR LEAST

2.7 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

CONTENTS OF METHODOLOGY

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.21 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

3.3 INTERVIEWS

3.31 INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

3.32 INTERVIEW SAMPLE

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

CONTENTS OF RESULTS

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.2 OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS

4.3 TYPOLOGIES THEORY, WHICH TOURISTS PERCEPTION OF SAFETY ARE MOST EASILY INFLUENCED

4.4 PREVIOUS DISASTERS EFFECTS ON TOURIST NUMBERS

4.5 PERCEIVED RISK AND DECISION MAKING

4.6 HOW CAN DESTINATIONS STOP TOURISTS FROM PERCEIVING THEM AS UNSAFE

4.7 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

CONTENTS OF CONCLUSION

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION
5.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS ................................................................. 52
5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS/ CONCLUSIONS ..................................... 52-54
5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ................................................................. 55-56
6.0 REFERENCES .................................................................................. 57-63

CONTENTS OF APPENDIX ..................................................................... 64

7.0 APPENDIX ....................................................................................... 65-106
  7.1 ETHICS FORMS ........................................................................... 65-71
  7.2 PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET ..................................... 72-73
  7.3 TRANSCRIPTS .............................................................................. 74-107
    7.31 PARTICIPANT ONE’S TRANSCRIPT ........................................ 74-77
    7.32 PARTICIPANT TWO’S TRANSCRIPT ........................................ 78-81
    7.33 PARTICIPANT THREE’S TRANSCRIPT ..................................... 82-86
    7.34 PARTICIPANT FOUR’S TRANSCRIPT ........................................ 87-90
    7.35 PARTICIPANT FIVE’S TRANSCRIPT ......................................... 91-94
    7.36 PARTICIPANT SIX’S TRANSCRIPT ............................................ 95-98
    7.37 PARTICIPANT SEVEN’S TRANSCRIPT ..................................... 99-102
    7.38 PARTICIPANT EIGHT’S TRANSCRIPT ...................................... 103-106
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.0: Hurricane Matthew Storm Activity and speeds........................................12
CONTENTS OF INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.2 PURPOSE OF STUDY

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.5 METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY
1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Robinson (2012) describes tourism as the activity of visiting destinations for a wide variety of reasons, but not the actual individuals who are participating. Tourists are people who partake in the activity of tourism. The tourism industry is of great significance due to its ever-increasing presence across the globe and the benefits it allows businesses, individuals, and destinations. The industry can be affected by many factors it has no control over, this can include weather patterns such as hurricanes, tornadoes and flash floods. Between the years of 1851 and 2015 there have been 1619 tropical storms in the United States alone, a destination known to have an extensive tourism infrastructure (Hurricane Research Division, 2016). Due to the evident importance of the tourism industry it must do everything it can to manage the impact these factors have or other related industries could suffer (Robinson, 2012).

Watts (2006) explains how natural disasters are an inevitable part of life over which people have no means to control; landslides, forest fires, tornados, earth quakes and tsunamis are all good examples of this. It has been proven by scientists that whilst natural disasters are inevitable, certain events carried out by humans contribute to the severity and regularity of disasters, such as the burning of fossil fuels. Over 700 natural disasters occur around the world every single year and these have an effect on roughly one in every thirty people. All natural disasters cause real danger and account for the loss of many lives every year, as well as destroying wildlife, property and uprooting normal life. World Tourism Organization and World Meteorological Organization (1998) explain how tourism is being developed in regions that are at risk and are vulnerable to natural disasters. These include costal development, river gorges and mountain regions. According to the Academy of Costal Tourism 2016 report, costal tourism is worth £8 billion to England’s economy. It is estimated that 13.7 million trips to the seaside account for nearly one third of all overnight stays in England (Crossman, 2017). World Tourism Organization and World Meteorological Organization (1998) further state that
when developments within these vulnerable areas are hit by any sort of natural disaster it has negative impact on the image of the destination and alter how tourists can perceive the area. This can be disastrous in terms of how successfully tourist destinations recover when they have been involved in an incident because many tourists may then be reluctant to visit the area again.

Florida is a destination which has to deal with different natural disasters on a fairly regular basis; this is apparent from the multiple websites designed to help warn and prepare local inhabitants or those visiting the region of the most dangerous pending weather conditions. Hurricanes, natural fires, tropical storms, severe freezes and flooding occur on an annual basis and can cause mass destruction (Floridadisaster, 2017). Hurricane Matthew occurred from September 29th 2016 until October 10th 2016; the hurricane caused the most damage in Haiti where nearly 900 people were killed and up to 90% of areas involved were destroyed. Matthew went on to impact upon many parts of America including South Carolina, North Carolina and Florida, fortunately the degree of damage was less severe in these areas. Florida was mainly effected by Hurricane Matthew between the 7th and 8th of October 2016; it caused severe flooding, damage to property and infrastructure, and power shortages throughout the state. At the worst point of the storm over 1 million people had to make do without any power
whatever. Hurricane Matthew led to the loss of 5 people’s lives in Florida causing grief to the families involved (BBC News, 2016).

Figure 1.0: Hurricane Matthew Storm Activity and speeds (Weather Underground, 2016)

1.2 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to discover if there is a link between natural disasters and how safe tourists perceive destinations to be after they have been hit by a natural disaster. Specific areas for review/discussion include natural disasters, tourism, the impact of previous disasters effects on tourist numbers, perceived risk, decision making and typologies theory. Information on these areas will be used throughout and called upon when forming the conclusion of the study. Primary research involving semi-structured interviews will help the researcher to understand if those who have visited the destination of Florida, in areas affected by Hurricane Matthew, have been put off re-
visiting and whether they now perceive it as a less safe destination. An additional purpose of this study is to determine if there are measures that destinations can take to prevent tourists from perceiving them as unsafe. Suggestions of how they can do this will be taken from the perspective of the tourists being interviewed.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The background information of this study raises important questions, which are addressed throughout this study. The salient questions are outlined as follows:

1. Do tourists perceive destinations as being more unsafe if a natural disaster has recently occurred there?
2. Are tourists put off from visiting destinations which have recently been effected by a natural disaster?
3. Do tourists think about the risk of natural disasters when choosing a location to visit?
4. Are certain types of tourist more likely to be effected by natural disasters?
5. Is there anything destinations can do to stop tourists being put off from visiting following a natural disaster?

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research project is to explore the effects of a natural disaster on the perceptions of tourist’s own safety. To achieve this specific aim, the researcher formulated three key objectives:

1. To critically review the literature on natural disasters and how they impact on destination competitiveness and perceived safety.
2. To analyse the views and opinions of tourists who have been to Florida in the past and to understand whether they would return following Hurricane Matthew: research using semi-structured interviews has been used for this purpose.
3. To make recommendations and conclusions based on natural disasters and to identify how destinations affected by them can increase tourist’s perception of safety.

1.5 METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE

This study includes both primary research and in depth document analysis. Document analysis within the literature review allows the researcher to gain depth and understanding into all themes of this project including the tourism industry, natural disasters and perceived safety. Only one method is being used to collect sufficient and relevant data for the primary research; this method is semi-structured interviews. This methodology is preferred by the project researcher as it enables a deep investigation of issues surrounding natural disasters and the tourism industry. The semi-structured interview questions are designed to collect detailed and in depth qualitative data which is crucial to addressing the aims and objectives of the study.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Tourismembassy (2014) explains how the tourism industry is well known for encouraging and welcoming new business opportunities and overall economic development due to the number of visitors it can draw to one destination. It is apparent that the impact of natural disasters negatively affects destinations; for example, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis and tornados. All of the afore mentioned have the ability to damage the infrastructure and economy of destinations. This along with tourists developing a negative view of a given region will in most cases result in reduced tourist numbers. For example, in 2000 Greece experienced huge fires which lead to over 50% of tourist bookings being canceled in 2001 (Scott and Lemieux, 2009). Kvaloy, Finseraas and Listhaug (2012) explain why this is why it is important to better understand the reason tourists are put off a destination affected by a natural disaster and how destinations can discourage this from happening. It has been suggested that climate change has and will continue to make weather patterns more extreme and that more
natural disasters will occur across the planet; another reason the study is of such relevance at this time.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The limitations of a study are defined as

“those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research. They are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which you initially chose to design the study and/or the method used to establish internal and external validity” (Price and Murnan, 2004. P66-67).

The researcher considers that the main limitations of this study lie within the primary research itself. The limited sample size (8) restricts the capacity to answer the research questions to some extent due to the lack of sufficient detailed information. Therefore, although interesting conclusions can be drawn, the findings may not necessarily be representative of the Florida tourist population. Furthermore, challenges can arise in attaining lengthy discussion where apprehension from participants to be open and honest with their answers, out of fear of being judged, leads to short-ended answers. Consequently, semi-structured interviews are limited by the degree to which participants engage. Additional limitations could revolve around the incapability to answer the research questions due to the perceived lack of adequate literature surrounding relevant topics; however, the literature available the subject matter is extensive.
CONTENTS OF LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................................................17-25

2.1 INTRODUCTION .....................................................................................................................17

2.2 THE TOURISM INDUSTRY ....................................................................................................17-18

2.3 NATURAL DISASTERS ..........................................................................................................18-19

2.4 PREVIOUS DISASTERS EFFECTS ON TOURIST NUMBERS .............................................19-21

2.5 PERCEIVED RISK AND DECISION MAKING .................................................................21-23

2.6 TYPOLOGIES THEORY, WHICH TOURISTS ARE MOST OR LEAST EFFECTED BY
    NATURAL DISASTERS ...........................................................................................................23-24

2.7 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................25
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Oliver (2012) suggests that when embarking on writing anything academic, a literature review plays one of the most crucial and important roles. Part of its importance is its ability to lay the groundwork into an informative and well-written report or paper; it enables the writer to gain a more detailed understanding of the subject they are focusing on and therefore allows their work to be of a higher standard. It is stated that there is no new knowledge being discussed around the world because all of it is partially based on previous knowledge. Regardless of the subject or topic being written about, a literature review can provide this previously discovered information. Oliver (2012) further clarifies how writing a literature review requires certain skills; it can also help an individual to develop new skills. These include the ability to plan and structure work effectively, to think analytically, search for information effectively, efficiently summarise information and the expertise of writing in a clear and informative style. This literature review will discuss and review the following themes: the tourism industry, natural disasters, previous disasters effects on tourist numbers, perceived risk and decision making and typologies theory.

2.2 THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Wall and Mathieson (2006) define tourism as when people move to a destination which is not where they work or live. They also consider what events they participate in when they are at these destinations, the accommodation and facilities developed for them and services provided to meet their needs. Tourism used to be restricted to the wealthy and was seen as being luxurious; however, the development of more travel options, accommodation and inclusive tours has resulted in all socio-economic groups accessing affordable travel options and destinations. Thus, a significant proportion of the “developed” world and an increasing number of people from developing nations will experience tourism during their lifetime. Tourism is now something which is expected to be incorporated within most lifestyles for many people (Burns and Novelli, 2008).
The tourism industry can be said to have a profound influence on both economic and social movement and development.

“More than 720 million tourists spend $480 billion (US) annually in places outside their own countries (World Tourism Organisation 2004) This is one of the largest items in the world’s foreign trade. With a world growth rate in international visitor arrivals of approximately 5 per cent per annum” (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

The tourism industry has proven to be one of the fastest growing economic sectors currently in the world, showing great resilience to both natural disasters and political upheaval. When these factors occur, tourism has proven to recover within a surprisingly quick period of time. Increasingly tourism has been recognized by both developed and developing nations as a major growth contributor to their prosperity. Any factor that has a negative impact on tourism, especially in the developing world, could be disastrous for the country’s economic outlook (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

2.3 NATURAL DISASTERS

Siegel (2016) suggests that there are many different factors which have an influence on where, why and when natural disasters can occur; they have the ability to make any population vulnerable as man has no real defence against the sheer power and force of nature. A natural disaster can have far reaching negative consequences; these include injuries, death, property damage and the exposure of people to disease, which if not acted upon can turn into an epidemic with the threat of even greater loss of life.

“These include geologic environments (tectonics and rock/soil types), geographic settings (coastal and inland zones), and topography (highlands, lowlands, valleys, plains-landforms). In addition to these mainly physical conditions. Meteorology plays a major role in hazard events and their impacts on people (climatic zones, storm tracks, wind direction- global warming/climate change)” (Siegel, 2016, pp. 1)

World Tourism Organization and World Meteorological Organization (1998) suggest that although people and regions cannot stop natural disasters, some can be partially
predicted. This can enable precautions to be taken such as evacuation; some natural disasters however occur without warning, these often have the most negative impact.

2.4 PREVIOUS DISASTERS EFFECTS ON TOURIST NUMBERS

Thanawood, Yongchalermchai and Densrisereekul (2006) elucidate how by studying natural disasters which have had a negative impact on certain destinations in the past, it can be established if they have had any effect on the number of tourists visiting after the event. Thanawood, Yongchalermchai and Densrisereekul (2006) further explain in detail how Southern Thailand was hit by a Tsunami on boxing day in 2004, it had catastrophic effects on the southern coast; the Tsunami occurred at approximately 9:30am and came without any pre-warning for local people and tourists. There was a total of 5,395 deaths from 6 areas along the Andaman coast, half of these were tourists and a further 2,822 people were reported as missing. Phang Nga was the worst affected area, 4,224 people lost their lives there and a huge amount of land was destroyed. The popular tourist area of Takua Pa, which has multiple beach resorts filled with tourists all year round, was hit the worst within the Phang Nga district. The Tsunami reached heights of up to 10-12 meters; these waves caused extensive damage to local properties, tourist hotel and resorts, fishing equipment and boats, crops and therefore many people’s livelihood. When comparing the amount of money certain areas of Thailand contribute via tourism there was a significant drop. In 2004 Phang Nga contributed 500 million dollars to the economy, in 2005 however it contributed approximately 200 million. This decline was due to the decrease in tourists wanting to visit the destination after the natural disaster occurred. The risk of Tsunamis was highlighted and as it occurred on Boxing Day, a very busy time for tourism in Thailand, there were more deaths than there would have been if it occurred within a different month.

Walters, Mair and Ritchie (2015) additionally describe a natural disaster which has had negative impacts impact upon a destination. Queensland, Australia, was unfortunate enough to experience multiple floods from December 2010 until January 2011; this lead
to a drastic 75% of the state being underwater. These floods were caused by long periods of heavy rainfall and bad management of waterways, they caused 33 deaths and 29,000 homes and businesses to be under water. More than 2.5 million people were effected in some way by this disaster and over 5 billion Australian dollars were spent to reduce negative impacts. Walters, Mair and Ritchie (2015) further state how the floods cost Queensland’s tourism industry a total of 590 million Australia dollars; this huge reduction was due to a decrease in the amount of people who were visiting after the events occurred. The department responsible for marketing Queensland as a destination were aware that the largest challenge to face was the damage to tourist’s perceptions after 3 days of flooding and the constant stream of these events via numerous media outlets.

Walters, Mair and Ritchie (2015) deliberate on further destinations which can be used as examples of how natural disasters reduce visitor numbers; one is Victoria, after the Black Saturday bush fires the number of visitors decreased significantly. The area of Christchurch in New Zealand experienced a decline in tourist numbers of 35% after they experienced an earthquake in 2011.

Likewise, Chyi-Rong et al., (2013) focused on the study of the effect natural disasters have had on visitor numbers and also found there to be a negative correlation. Xitou Nature Education Area (XNEA) is a forest activity and education destination located in Taiwan and is normally very popular with both locals and tourists. How popular a destination is can be easily altered by factors including how accessible it is, the weather there and any natural disasters which occur.

“(1) Typhoon Herb reduced tourist arrivals by an estimated 530 thousand over three years; (2) the Chichi earthquake caused a 2.59 million loss in tourist arrivals over seven years; (3) Typhoons Toraji and Nari resulted in a 360 thousand reduction in tourist arrivals over three years; and (4) Typhoon Mindulle reduced tourist arrivals by 80 thousand over a one year period” (Chyi- Rong et al., 2013, pp. 47)
These statistics are examples of how environmental changes and natural disasters can alter both short and long term changes on tourist numbers. These findings can be compared to the data drawn from the semi-structured interviews to see if they support or contradict each other within the upcoming results section.

2.5 PERCEIVED RISK AND DECISION MAKING

Walters, Mair and Ritchie (2015) suggest that the image a tourist holds of a destination is recognised as being of high importance, this is due to the influence it has on the destinations a tourist chooses to visit. There are many different factors which effect how a potential visitor will see a destination; these may include information found in advertising and that obtained by word of mouth. When it comes to disasters specifically, a large factor influencing the image of a destination in a tourist’s mind is the global distribution of information via the media. This can lead to a negative impression of locations affected by natural disasters. Furthermore, Maser and Weiermair, (1998) describe how although it has been discovered that some tourists will happily visit a destination which has recently been struck by a natural disaster, it is hard to know exactly why tourists choose to visit, or completely avoid disaster prone areas. This is because every tourist’s reasons are likely to differ depending on their personality or the amount of knowledge they have gathered via word of mouth or the media.

Maser and Weiermair (1998) explain that there are different factors which a tourist will consider when forming an opinion of a destination and deciding whether they think it is safe. These factors make the decision-making process of where to travel often very complicated. Risk factors include both financial and personal risk as well as uncertainty. Many tourists will search for different information on the safety of a destination from multiple sources so that they may then try and reduce any risk; however, if a destination has been negatively portrayed within the media to be dangerous it will likely increase the perceived risk of the destination for the potential tourist. If they perceive it to be too dangerous they will make the decision that they do not wish to visit the destination.
Sharifpour, Walters and Ritchie (2014) also suggest that perceived risk is of high importance to tourists and is known to be one of the major influencers on travel plans and where tourists choose to visit. There are multiple types of risk which range in seriousness, such as not receiving a good deal and losing money to being involved in a serious crime or a disaster. The extent to which the perceived risk effects a tourist’s decision depends on many things but is increased when the travelling is to international destinations.

“Further research indicated that risk perceptions can be situation specific, and as a result, various destinations may be associated with different types of risks. Risks associated with a destination can potentially create enduring images in a traveler’s minds and be prevalent in tourists’ decision to visit or avoid certain destinations” (Sharifpour, Walters and Ritchie, 2014, pp. 113).

Although there is a definite link between perceived safety, the general decision making process and the decision to travel, it is hard to draw conclusions. This is because the risks will affect different people in different ways; a certain individual may find the danger of a destination exciting and draw them in whereas it may repel a different individual who is trying to avoid it at all costs and wants a peaceful trip (Sharifpour, Walters and Ritchie, 2014).

Elaine Chaio Ling and Vikneswaran (2014) explicate how studies have found that certain events in the past have altered how safe a destination is perceived to be by tourists, this backs up the proposals already made via authors within this section on perceived risk and decision making. Some of these events include the 9/11 attack in 2001, bombings in Bali and the 2004 boxing day Tsunami in Thailand; they have all been found to have increased the travelers view of how dangerous a place is. Although in some cases this is not always seen as negative as some tourists seek out danger for their own pleasure.

Questions within the semi-structured interviews have been designed to find out whether the eight participants involved within this study perceive destinations to be less safe after a natural disaster has occurred. The answers from participants allow a
comparison with these findings on the literature around this topic. This will be included within the results section of the study.

2.6 TYPOLOGIES THEORY, WHICH TOURISTS ARE MOST OR LEAST EFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS

Hosnay and Prayag (2011) suggest that the classification of tourists or any other group of individuals is to develop the research into social sciences. The earliest studies into tourism have suggested that tourists are unitary types; this changed in the late 1970’s when research adapted and researchers were more interested about understanding them as separate groups. Cohen (1972) was the founder of four individual tourist types; they are designed around different tourist’s cravings for either extreme and different experiences or ones they are familiar with. The four types are made up of the explorer, the drifter, the organized mass tourist and the individual mass tourist.

Hosnay and Prayag (2011) elaborate on these typologies, they suggest that organized mass tourists are the least daring and stay within a protective bubble during their travels. Travel agents put together a pre-arranged travel schedule corresponding to the conventional tourist image. Even though individual mass tourists also go to travel agents to help with bookings, this group favor to have some aspect of power over their travel itinerary. Tourists who are explorers often like to make all of their travel arrangements themselves, they like to explore places which the less adventurous travelers would find daunting. The drifters wish to experience things which most people do not on their travelling expeditions and become easily immersed in new cultures.

Hosnay and Prayag (2011) further define how the characteristics of both drifter and explorer types would enable them to better handle a disastrous or negative situation more successfully and calmly than organized mass tourists and individual mass tourists. Explorer and drifter type tourists would be less likely to be put off a destination because of the perceived risk, in some cases it may be this risk factor which attracts them to the destination in the first place. Hosnay and Prayag (2011) also explain how storm chasers are tourists who mostly fall within the drifter category; they deliberately visit a
destination because they wish to be as close as possible to the storm, which puts them in a lot of danger. The perception of them being in danger is what they crave.

Plog (1974) is a researcher who likewise acknowledges the importance of grouping tourists so that they can be studied and better understood within the tourism industry, this is why he developed a different set of subgroups for all tourists to fit within.

“Plog (1974) proposes a cognitive-normative tourist typology based on a personality continuum ranging from psychocentric to allocentric. The author identifies five distinct types of tourists: the allocentric, near-allocentric, mid-centric, near-psychocentric, and psychocentric. Allocentrics are novelty seekers, adventurous, active and risk-takers preferring exotic destinations and unstructured vacation itinerary. In contrast, psychocentrics prefer familiar destinations with virtually no element of adventure or risk-taking during their travel” (Hosnay and Prayag, 2011, pp. 732).

Hosnay and Prayag (2011) questioned this model for both its applicability and reliability, it is suggested that Cohen’s four individual tourist typologies are the most well developed and successful subgroups for tourists to be grouped within. These are the subgroups the researcher will use to categorize the individuals being interviewed for this research project.

Dunkley, Morgan and Westwood (2011) explicate how ‘dark’ tourism and the types of tourists who wish to be involved in this type of tourism can be used as an example of the type of tourists least effected by natural disasters. Those who are interested in dark tourism are often seeking a novelty and life changing experience which is closely linked to the culture and past of a certain destination; meaning that they fall into the category of being drifters. Dark tourism can include visiting destinations which have been involved in a natural disaster to experience and witness the aftermath (Dunkley, Morgan and Westwood, 2011). Those who visited a destination such as Florida after a natural disaster, may define themselves as drifters, more likely to seek out danger.
2.7 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature around the tourism industry makes it clear that it is a very important sector which is currently in a cycle of continuous growth and development, and at the same time is having a positive effect on most countries’ economies. There are certain types of natural disasters which are inevitable; the tourism industry often has no control over them even though it is frequently affected. There are precautions the industry must take to try and overcome the negative impact of natural disasters. The literature around natural disasters and tourist numbers most definitely suggests that there is a decline in tourists in destinations after they have been hit or effected by a natural disaster. The literature around perceived risk and decision making suggests that risk is something considered by tourists before they go somewhere and in previous cases has put some tourists off visiting. However, it is hard to understand why exactly they have been put off as the reasons will often differ depending on the tourist’s characteristics. Some of the questions within the semi-structured interviews are designed to find out exactly why some tourists may be put off a destination after a natural disaster has occurred.

Tourists are split up into typologies and groupings as this makes them easier to study and comprehend, this is usually done by understanding their different characteristics and their preferred way to travel. Those interviewed by the researcher will be questioned to understand what tourist typology they best fit within. Cohen (1972) is the founder of the four typologies within which the participants will be organised; characteristics of the different typologies will be explained and participants will be best asked to select which they believe they fit within. This enables the researcher to note if there is a theme or any links between what type of tourist group the participants think they reside and how much their perception of safety is altered by natural disasters.
CONTENTS OF METHODOLOGY

3.0 METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................. 27-31

3.1 JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS .......................................................... 27

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN ......................................................................................................... 27-28

3.21 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH .............................................................................................. 28

3.3 INTERVIEWS ...................................................................................................................... 28-29

3.31 INTERVIEW PROCEDURE ............................................................................................... 29-30

3.32 INTERVIEW SAMPLE ....................................................................................................... 30

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY ........................................................................ 30-31
3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This section of the research project is devoted to explaining which methods were used during the research process and an explanation as to how efficient and successful they were. Welman et al., (2005) describes methodology as the methods used to collect data and how these methods are linked to addressing the proposed outcome of a study, or in this case the research questions. It additionally involves how the data collected has been analysed by the researcher; this is crucial as it allows the research process to be re-done or altered if deemed appropriate.

This particular research project is about natural disasters and trying to discover if they have an effect on how safe tourists perceive destinations to be. A collection of qualitative data was used to try and draw conclusions throughout the project. The data set used has been drawn from both semi-structured interviews and the analysis of relevant literature within the literature review. What data samples and how they were used will be discussed within this section.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Before commencing any research related to a project it is crucial to create a clear progress plan for how all data is going to be collected. Data can be found within two forms, qualitative or quantitative, which will be discussed in more detail by the researcher. These two different types of results can be very effective at adding value to a study but may not always be required or necessary (Creswell, 2014).

The approach to this research project is a singular method, this means that only qualitative data will be gathered and reviewed. Although this may be seen as a limitation, this was the only data to be seen as relevant to the study because it is the detailed opinions of participants that is required and not numerical data. Involving additional research methods to result in quantitative data would have been time
consuming and irrelevant (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews have been held with individuals who have visited Florida before Hurricane Matthew occurred to gain in-depth answers on their opinions surrounding the topics of natural disasters and perceived safety.

Thematic analysis is the method which has been used to analyse the primary data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Boyatzis (2009) explains how this method is commonly used by researchers to effectively draw conclusions and make new discoveries and findings on a multiple range of subjects. This form of data analysis involves acknowledging, reviewing and discussing any recurring or noticed themes or similarities within collected data.

3.21 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Gibbs (2008) explains how this form of research can be very useful to those conducting studies if done in the correct manner; it creates the opportunity to gain an understanding of how participants think and their in-depth opinions. This can highlight patterns in behaviour to be examined or pick up on certain behaviours or characteristics which may be relevant to the study. Gibbs (2008) further discusses that there are multiple methods of how qualitative data can be collected, these include field notes, focus groups and one on one interviews. The researcher of this project has used one on one semi-structured interviews to collect the desired data. Anderson (2010) further suggests that data collected via human experience is influential and can be more fascinating than quantitative data. Complex areas of research studies can be missed by data of only numerical value.

3.3 INTERVIEWS

Wilson (2016) elucidates how interviews can be very effective ways of collecting relevant data for a study, they are usually formed by face to face communication in a location suitable to the sensitivity of the subject. In interviews designed to collect
qualitative information the participants are given the opportunity to develop their answers and memories of past experiences/ thoughts and feelings. Qualitative interviews will usually involve the interviewer explaining certain aspects of the topics being discussed as questions being asked. The project researcher should not assume that those being interviewed know many details or much information on the relevant topics before the interview is conducted. Wilson (2016) additionally clarifies how Interpretation often plays a role in trying to understand how and why a participant feels a certain way. Rather than seeking facts or one word answers, semi structured interviews are designed to gather data which is very descriptive; other interviews will typically go into detail about deeper and more sensitive aspects of a participant’s life.

3.31 INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

The interviews being undertaken by the researcher of this project were held in a public place, a local public library, to ensure the safety of the interviewer and interviewees at all times. Being in a public place should have ensured that the participants felt comfortable and at ease. The researcher has additionally always had a mobile phone to hand and ensured family members have known their location at all times as an additional precaution.

There were 8 participants in total and of these all participants have been to Florida before Hurricane Matthew occurred. The interviews were intended to last between 30-45 minutes to gather as many opinions as possible. Although they weren’t as lengthy as envisioned, the information and data gathered was of the expected standard. Participants have been asked a range of questions based around their general thoughts and opinions on natural disasters and whether they affect how safe tourists perceive impacted destinations to be. Other questions have been more specific to their trip to Florida and their desire to return or not after Hurricane Matthew.

The style of the interviewer was passive when the participants were answering questions to try and get them to go into as much detail and to discuss the subject for as
long as possible; it was changed to directive if the intended subject was changed or seen to be irrelevant (Keats, 2001).

3.32 INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Those interviewed by the researcher have been chosen through convenience sampling. Kennedy (2008) explains how this means they have been selected because they are the most convenient and suitable individuals; they make up 8 interviewees who are known to have visited Florida before Hurricane Matthew. The fact that they are acquaintances of the researcher makes for a safer environment than meeting with complete strangers. A minimum of 8 to be selected is to ensure that there will be varied opinions and experiences of trips to Florida. All of those involved were not aware of the interview questions before they were interviewed, this is so they did not have time to prepare/plan and possibly to ask the opinions of individuals not involved in the study. The sample is of mixed ages and genders to ensure the findings of the study have a diverse representation given the small sample size. It is vital that a suitable sample of participants are selected for any research; a sample which is unsuitable may not result in varied and relevant data.

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

Marshall and Rossman (2006) explain how when commencing any research project it is likely and expected that there will be some issues or limitations encountered. When collecting any data desired it is necessary that these limitations are noted and overcome as best as possible. The researcher must ensure that they remain neutral throughout the interview process and the data analysis as their opinions and preferences must not become involved. To overcome this potential limitation the project researcher ensured that their opinion was never given or used to make the results bias in any sense and remained neutral. Marshall and Rossman (2006) define a further limitation as those being interviewed not going into depth or detail throughout their answers, this could be for a number of reasons such as them not feeling comfortable or having an opinion
which they may feel they will get judged for. Although some participants needed a little encouragement, they all seemed comfortable and were willing to give detailed opinions and statements around the intended subject. Anderson (2010) states that a small number of participants are often involved in studies, therefore meaning some studies may not have varied or relevant data due to not enough people being involved. Eight participants were chosen to interview by the project researcher of this study as conducting more would have been too time consuming, however interviewing more participants may have created more varied results.

Fortunately, no real limitations were found throughout this study, although the semi-structured interviews conducted for the secondary research process weren’t as lengthy as first intended. Even with the shorter interviews, enough information and opinions were gathered from the questions used for the study to make the conclusions drawn relevant.
CONTENTS OF RESULTS

4.0 RESULTS..........................................................................................................................33-49

4.1 INTRODUCTION..................................................................................................................33

4.2 OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS..........................................................................................33-36

4.3 TYPOLOGIES THEORY, WHICH TOURISTS PERCEPTION OF SAFETY ARE MOST EASILY INFLUENCED..................................................................................................................36-38

4.4 PREVIOUS DISASTERS AFFECTS ON TOURIST NUMBERS.............................................38-43

4.5 PERCEIVED RISK AND DECISION MAKING....................................................................43-46

4.6 HOW CAN DESTINATIONS STOP TOURISTS FROM PERCEIVING THEM AS UNSAFE.................................................................................................................................46-48

4.7 SUMMARY OF RESULTS......................................................................................................48-49
4.0 RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The results section reviews the data found from the 8 interviews conducted, it analyses the views and opinions of tourists who have been to Florida in the past to discover if they would return following Hurricane Matthew. Thematic analysis has been used to analyse the data in order to recognise themes and patterns in participant’s opinions. These patterns and recurring themes allow specific research questions to be answered and discoveries to be made. Themes recognised will be linked to the themes discussed within the Literature Review, including the impact of previous disasters upon on tourist numbers, perceived risk and decision making and typologies theory. The findings from the interviews will be compared to see if they back up the findings of the literature or contradict them. To make thematic analysis successful within a research project, time must be spent becoming accustomed to the data, this allows the beginning of patterns and trends to be noted. Themes found can then be discussed and their relevance to the study explained, from these conclusions can be drawn and recommendations can be made (ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, 2007). The recommendations to be made from this particular study are for destinations which have been affected by natural disasters and how they can increase tourist’s perception of safety to maintain visitor numbers.

4.2 OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS

To introduce this results section there will be a brief description of the age, travel background and general interests of each individual participant, this may make it easier to draw together themes and conclusions which are seen to be relevant by the researcher. The participants will not be identified by name to ensure they are protected and cannot be identified, their identity has no relevance to the study and its findings.

Participant one is a 21-year-old female with an extensive and varied background in travel. She has been to 25 different countries within Asia, America, Africa, Europe and
Indonesia, these countries were visited by participant one for various travel motivations, including working on yachts for two years and holidays. Previous travel undertaken by this participant has been with family, solo travel, a range of friends and back packing experiences. The travel she enjoys varies from party holidays to safaris and mountain climbing. She last visited Florida in 2012 when she went there with family and went for a total of three weeks at the age of 14; when they were there they visited the parks but she wishes they had seen historical sites and been to the beaches. Although currently studying a business degree, her main interest is to travel as well as pursuing outdoor activities such as riding and scuba diving.

Participant two is a 21-year-old female who is also well traveled, she has been to 19 different countries within the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa and America. Her reason for travelling has been for holidays, volunteering or backpacking; whilst visiting these destinations she has either been with family, different friends or solo when volunteering and traveling around Thailand and Vietnam. She has visited Florida once in 2011 when she was 17 for one week; this was with a friend and their family and they visited a different amusement park every day. Participant two is currently working for a finance company and is in charge of admin, her main interest is to travel although she enjoys running and reading.

Participant three is a 61-year-old male who has travelled to 12 different countries within Europe and America. His motivations to travel have either been for holidays or for work, he spent a 6-month period living in Los Angeles for work duties. He has been on holidays with a variation of different family and friends and alone for business. When visiting Florida in the summer of 1996 it was for a period of three days, although it was a business trip with work he was allowed to spend the last day on the beach and socialize in the evenings. Participant three currently works in the IT department coding and fixing software problems for a printing company, his interests include tennis, badminton and table tennis.
Participant four is a 21-year-old male who has visited 6 different countries within America and Europe; his sole motivation to travel has been for holidays and he has either travelled with family, friends or a girlfriend. Participant four has visited Florida twice in the past, the last time was 9 years ago, when he was 12; both times were with family for a two-week period and entailed spending the first week in theme and water parks and the second week visiting a range of beaches. He is currently studying for a degree in Sports Science and his main interests are fitness, weight lifting and spending time with his 1 year old son.

Participant five is a 31-year-old male who has visited 18 different countries within Europe, America and Australia. His incentives to travel have been either for a holiday or for employment. He has always travelled with his parents and brother, friends, a partner or solo for the one year period he spent in Australia working on farms. Participant five has been to Florida three times in the past, the last visit occurred in 2004 when he was 18. The trips have been with either family or friends for either two or three weeks, activities have been Disney and Universal theme parks, NASA and multiple beaches. He currently works for a family run electrical company and spends his free time socialising with friends, family and his partner.

Participant six is a 21-year-old female who has been to 23 countries within her life time. These have been in Europe, South America, North America and Russia; her motivation for travelling has been either for holidays or to temporarily live in different locations for her father’s job but she has plans to backpack later this year. When she has travelled, it has either been with family or friends. Participant six has spent a significantly larger amount of time in Florida than any other participants. She has visited approximately 10 times, the last time being in the summer of 2016 when she was 20, she has also lived there for a period of three years. She is currently studying the same degree as the project researcher, International Tourism Management and states travelling is one of her main interests. Additional hobbies include gymnastics and running.
Participant seven is a 22-year-old male who has visited 11 countries within America, Europe and Asia. He has always travelled with friends and family and made it apparent he would never travel alone. His reasons for travelling are always for beach holidays or theme parks and he has no interest in any form of adventure travel. Participant seven has been to Florida three times in the past, the last time was in 2012 when he was 17; all visits have been with friends and family and activities included theme parks, beaches and pool days. He is currently studying a degree in Drama and his interests are socialising with friends and basketball.

Participant eight is a 20-year-old female who has visited 5 countries within Europe and America. The majority of times she has been abroad she has been with her family and she has travelled abroad with friends on one occasion. When she goes abroad she hopes to have a beach holiday and she has never been tempted to travel for any other reason. Participant eight has been to Florida twice, the last time was in 2011 when she was 16 which was with family and friends. When they were there they went to theme parks and NASA. She is studying for a degree in Law and Business Management and activities she enjoys include dog walking, going to the gym and cooking.

4.3 TYPOLOGIES THEORY, WHICH TOURIST’S PERCEPTION OF SAFETY ARE MOST EASILY INFLUENCED

As previously discussed, Cohen (1972) created four different types of tourists who are all said to have different personality traits and therefore fit within different tourist groups (Hosnay and Prayag, 2011). All eight participants have had these four groups of characteristics explained to them, each set of behaviors and characteristics were linked to one of the tourist typologies; they were then asked which group out of the four best described them and therefore which category of tourist they reside within. By understanding what type of tourist each participant is it can be reviewed by the researcher to see if there is a link between tourist typologies and a destination not being considered because of perceived risk. Participants one and two described themselves as being drifters; both of these tourists are well travelled and have travelled alone, they
seek adventure and not just standard tourist activities. Both of these participants stated they would visit Florida shortly after Hurricane Matthew had hit and showed no signs of fear of anything happening if they were to do so. Additionally, neither of these participants would be put off any destination because of a natural disaster.

Participants four and six both described themselves as explorers; both of these participants also said they would go back to Florida shortly after the Hurricane Matthew. However, participants four and six stated that they could potentially be put off certain destinations due to occurrences of natural disasters.

When asked if he would be put off a destination because of a natural disaster participant four states that he is put off to an extent; his answer suggests that destinations which have recently been hit by a natural disaster may be more off putting to him than a destination which has not experienced a natural disaster for a long time.

“Yes, to an extent, I think people must be put off because it reminds them of the risks of going to a certain destination, they may not have been aware that disasters could even occur there or at least not have it cross their mind. I would however visit destinations such as Thailand as the Tsunami which hit was such a long time ago and nothing has occurred like that since” (participant four).

Participant three, five, seven and eight all describe themselves as individual mass tourists; participant five is the only individual within this category to state he would defiantly return to Florida after Hurricane Matthew occurred. Participants three and eight both stated that they would consider returning but are uncertain and state it depends on the situation and time of year. Participant seven however is completely put off the destination because of the hurricane and when asked if he would return to Florida after Hurricane Matthew states

“No I wouldn’t. it would make me feel unsafe and I wouldn’t be able to relax when I was there because of the fear something may happen again” (participant seven).
Participant seven is clearly fearful of Florida and perceives it as no longer a desirable holiday destination.

By examining the eight participants and what tourist typologies they believe they fit within it is clear to see a pattern which supports the findings of the literature review. Participants falling in the explorer and drifter categories seem less fearful of Florida as a destination following Hurricane Matthew and would all return recently despite the disaster. The rest of the participants within the individual mass tourist category seemed more cautious of Florida and natural disasters in general throughout the interviews.

4.4 PREVIOUS DISASTERS EFFECTS ON TOURIST NUMBERS

Participants one, two, four, five and six all answered yes when being asked if they would re-visit Florida after the Hurricane Matthew disaster; these participants had heard of Hurricane Matthew although none had extensive knowledge, information or specific facts relating to the disaster. Participants three and eight would consider re-visiting but would need to consider multiple factors before doing so and participant seven stated he would not return; these participants were aware of the extensive damage caused by the hurricane but this was the extent of their knowledge. Participant seven was the least informed on Hurricane Matthew, his reasoning for not returning is out of fear it would happen again and therefore spoil his holiday experience.

When being asked if he would return to Florida after Hurricane Matthew participant five stated he would, even though he had previously experienced being in a hurricane; his willingness to return is in part due to his experience and the management shown during Hurricane Charley in 2004.

“Yes, although I haven’t visited the state since we were caught by Hurricane Charley, the preparation from the Florida authorities over radio, tv and signage showed us what to do and where to go in an emergency. It made my family, and myself feel safe and informed. Although the experience was scary, I wouldn’t hesitate to go back or even recommend Florida for a Holiday. During the first part of the trip we were originally staying in Tampa (about 1 1/2 hours from where the Hurricane hit land in Port
Charlotte) but moved to Orlando to complete the second part. The Hurricane eventually moved towards, and hit, Orlando” (participant five).

Participant three’s answer contradicts the opinion of participant five,

“ I would consider a visit to Florida following the recent hurricane. Unless you have experienced hurricane conditions especially a level 1/2 hurricane I think most people in the UK would not let the possibility of a hurricane influence their travel plans” (participant three).

Participant five would consider returning to Florida after Hurricane Matthew but believes that if you have experienced the conditions it would be unlikely you would want too.

These findings challenge the findings from the literature review which suggest that natural disasters do put people off visiting after they have occurred and therefore have a negative impact on destinations. Thanawood, Yongchalermchai and Densrisereekul (2006) described the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami and how there was a decline in visitor numbers and how much tourism contributed to the economy following the event. However, this could be due to the lack of detailed information the participants knew about Hurricane Matthew and how well known the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami was. Six out of the eight participants named the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami as the natural disaster they recalled the most. When questioned about the natural disaster she remembered the best, participant two answered

“ The 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami...I think it is because of the way it was portrayed in the media and it hit other destinations as well. Maybe because it was on Boxing Day and a lot of people were at home and could watch the story on the news all day. I have also seen the movie which was made about it” (participant two).

This shows the potential link between how many details are known about a specific disaster and how put off people are to visit the destination it has affected. All participants who would return to Florida state that travel is an important factor in their
lives and something which they enjoy and peruse; this could perhaps suggest a link between individuals desire to travel and how they would not be put off because of natural disasters.

Participants were additionally asked to finish either one of these sentences ‘I would visit Florida either during or immediately after Hurricane Matthew because….’ or ‘I would not visit Florida either during or immediately after Hurricane Matthew because….’.

Participant one, three, five and six stated that they would visit the state immediately after Hurricane Matthew had occurred. Participant one stated

“immediately after yes but not during. I think if there is a hurricane it is very unlikely for it to happen immediately after so it is almost safer to go straight after than to wait for a long time. Have to take every chance” (participant one).

Participants one, three, five and six showed no signs of severe worry for their safety if they had intended to visit immediately following the disaster.

Participant two finished the ‘I would not’ statement, however stated it would depend on what her travel motivations were.

“I may not be able to do what I wanted to travel there for, it depends why I was visiting and who with; if I wanted to go to the theme parks there would be no point. However, if I was going for work I would consider it” (participant two).

Participant two’s reasons for not going would be because of not being able to do certain activities due to the damage from a hurricane and not out of fear of another disaster.

Participants four, seven and eight stated they would not visit during or immediately after. Participant seven stated that

“I would constantly be on edge that something could happen and if I am going to be uncomfortable when visiting somewhere there is no point in going at all. I do not think anyone would want to go during the storm unless they were interested in storm chasing” (participant seven).
All of these participants expressed their fear that either another hurricane or pattern of bad weather would repeat itself shortly after. These findings additionally contradict what the literature suggests about the impact natural disasters have on tourist numbers, only 50% of participants seemed hesitant about returning to Florida immediately after Hurricane Matthew occurred. Walters, Mair and Ritchie (2015) use Queensland in Australia as a case study of a destination which lost 590 million Australia Dollars, most of which was due to visitor numbers plummeting after the floods in 2010 and 2011. There is nothing which participants four, seven and eight obviously have in common to suggest why they are more fearful of a recurring natural disaster, they are not within the same tourist typology grouping. Out of the eight participants they have the smallest count of countries visited, therefore a link may exist between the occurrence of new countries experienced and how fearful participants are of a given destination. A possible reason they have not visited more countries may be because they have been too fearful of perceived risks to certain destinations and would prefer the safety of known destinations.

When questioned about their opinions on whether they think natural disasters influence tourist numbers, all eight participants thought there would be a decline in tourist numbers in a destination following a disaster. This does however contradict some of the participants own opinions about visiting Florida after Hurricane Matthew. The extent of the assumed decline of tourist numbers varied between participants, some thinking there would be drastic long term effects whilst others thought the decline would be short lived only lasting whilst repairs were carried out to the areas infrastructure.

Participant one’s answer contradicts her willingness to return to Florida

“Yes, because some people definitely would be put off because they could be going out of their comfort zone already by travelling and a natural disaster just makes them more worried that destinations far from home maybe just aren’t for them. It could put them off for life. If someone had been in one as well they most likely would not want to go somewhere one could happen out of fear” (participant one).
However, participant one could be referring to less adventurous travellers within the organized mass tourist or individual mass tourist category and not to the drifter and explorer groups. Additionally, participant one could be discussing more serious natural disasters and destinations which are worse hit, it further contradicts participant fives willingness to return to Florida after he experienced a hurricane himself. Participant one believes that the reason visitor numbers would decline after a natural disaster is because of fear.

Participant five agrees that there would be a decline in visitor numbers after a disaster, however goes into more depth of how.

“‘Yes, but only in some places. I think Florida is largely unaffected because of the want to go there. Although I would guess flights would be cheaper in a hurricane season so that would have an effect. In less advantaged places where the buildings are not as substantial or the preparation is not as good, I think it would be more so. I found that on the 3 occasions we were in Florida, the amount of people in the parks were about the same. We were only in a hurricane season once’” (participant five).

Participant five has had firsthand experience of a hurricane, this could perhaps be the reason he believes that it is areas which are less prepared for disasters which would be more affected. Regions with no disaster contingency planning will experience higher levels of damage and therefore the disaster will be perceived as being more dangerous. Participant five additionally highlights how cheaper flights in hurricane season in Florida could be why it appears visitor numbers do not seem to decrease during this time. This is a good suggestion of how destinations who are regularly affected or have been effected in the past by natural disasters can influence visitor numbers to a region using economic incentives.

Chyi- Rong et al., (2013) uses Xitou Nature Education Area in Taiwan as an example of a destination which has experienced constant drops in visitor numbers after the occurrence of a natural disaster. The forest is normally popular with locals and tourists
but natural disasters in the region have made access to the area more difficult therefore reducing visitor numbers. This could be one of the reasons some destinations are more affected than others, destinations where accessibility and infrastructure are easily damaged will likely witness a larger impact on visitor numbers than Florida which is built to withstand severe weather conditions. The findings from the question ‘do you think natural disasters have an effect on tourist numbers?’ does back up the literature surrounding the subject, as all eight participants stated that they believe natural disasters will have a negative impact on visitor numbers.

4.5 PERCEIVED RISK AND DECISION MAKING

The literature around the subject of perceived risk and decision making strongly suggests that risk is reviewed by individuals before deciding whether to visit a destination. Many individuals would consider the image of a destination and how risky they perceive it to be before making the decision to visit or not. How safe it is perceived to be can be influenced by a multitude of different factors, one of these factors and the one considered as having the greatest influence is the media and how it portrays a natural disaster across the globe (Maser and Weiermair, 1998). Although it is suggested that perceived risk is definitely considered by individuals before travelling it is hard to know why destinations perceived as dangerous are completely avoided or actually chosen above less dangerous ones; this is because everyone’s reasons will be different depending on traits of their personality, knowledge of a disaster or how it has been portrayed within the media (Maser and Weiermair, 1998). The 8 participants interviewed had varied answers when asked ‘do you think about natural disasters when thinking of a location to visit? Why/why not?’. Participants one, three, five, six and eight all stated that they did not think about the threat of natural disasters when contemplating visiting a destination; this contradicts the literature suggesting that as natural disasters cause risk they would be considered by most people.

Participant one makes it apparent she gives no thought to the risk natural disasters cause, she visited Ko Phi Phi only two years after it experienced a severe hurricane and
travelled to Thailand knowing it was expected to experience storms and potentially hazardous weather.

“No I went to Ko Phi Phi 2 years after there was a hurricane there, and I did not think of it. New Zealand have earth quakes all the time and I have plans to go there in 2017. I am going to Thailand next week and haven’t even thought about it and I am aware Thailand is expected to experience some pretty bad storms whilst I am there” (participant one).

Participant seven’s answer couldn’t be more different and opposes participant ones;

“Yes, all the time. If something bad has just struck up in that country, I think it is of a much higher percentage that something bad would be too happen again. If a destination has natural disasters all the time I do not think I would want to go. I know that New Zealand experiences earth quakes all the time and for that reason I will never visit; it just seems too dangerous and if I am worried about somewhere being dangerous why would I want to go? I go on holiday to relax” (participant seven).

Participant sevens answer clearly demonstrates how someone will consider how safe they perceive somewhere to be before visiting, in this case he completely rejects New Zealand as a potential place to visit; this is due to the recurring earth quakes and how this alters the destinations image and appeal.

With two such varied opinions there must be something different between individuals which either makes them more prone to worry about the safety of a destination or not, by comparing participants one and five the researcher can try and understand what this is. Participant one fits within the typology drifter, she is very well travelled and enjoys multiple kinds of holidays including ones based around outdoor activities and adventure, she has also travelled alone. Participant seven however falls within the less adventurous individual mass tourist typology, he is less well travelled and his sole motivation to travel is to relax with friends and family; this suggests that tourists who fall within the individual mass tourist category are more likely to consider how safe they perceive somewhere to be before visiting than a drifter.
To be able to compare their opinions to the findings and suggestions of the literature, participants were asked ‘do you think tourists perceive destinations as less safe if they have been hit by a natural disaster?’ Participant one, two, four, seven and eight stated they strongly believe that tourists do perceive destinations as less safe if they have been hit by a natural disaster; participant three and six stated they think tourists could perceive a destination to be less safe but it is dependent on multiple factors.

Participant one clearly discusses her belief that natural disasters have the power to change how safe a tourist perceives a destination to be in their mind, this not necessarily how safe it actually is, just their own personal belief.

“Yes, I do think tourists would perceive a destination as less safe just because some of the destination may be ruined. For example, if buildings are being broken and the city may not be the same. People may get the wrong perception and the destination may be okay to travel too” (participant one).

Participant six states that how safe a tourist perceives somewhere to be will be dependent on many factors, it is to simple to say all destinations affected by a natural disaster would be perceived as less safe.

“It depends on the place, some places are used to natural disasters and cope well with them, have plans in place. For example, Bermuda is always very prepared and aware of the effects that might happen. Whereas smaller Caribbean islands where natural disasters are less prone will be a lot less prepared. I think how well a destination is prepared will affect how safe tourists seem them to be. If somewhere is hit with a bad natural disaster and there was no safety procedure in place a tourist will now assume it is very unsafe” (participant six).

Participant six suggests that destinations better prepared for disasters will be seen as safer and more appealing than unprepared destinations; Florida is well prepared for such events and this could be why it does not seem to defer the majority of tourists from visiting. Even with the risk factor. With most participants stating that they do
believe tourists perceive destinations as being less safe after a natural disaster, their answers back up the findings from the literature review.

Maser and Weiermair (1998) state that the media plays a large role in altering individual’s perception of a destination; if the media portrays a natural disaster in a certain way this will make the destination seem much more dangerous. In answer to the question “do you believe the media is to blame for why some people perceive destinations as being unsafe”. Participant three was the only individual to state they do not believe the media has the power to alter someone’s perception of a destination. Participant two’s answer strongly contradicts this,

“most definitely, the media wants people to tune in and watch the information they are providing so I think they like to make it as dramatic as possible a lot of the time. They also probably make events which happen rarely somewhere into a much bigger deal than places which experience smaller natural disasters all the time. News is only big news if it’s a rare event” (participant two).

This answer and the similar answers of participant one, four, five, six, seven and eight all support the findings of the literature surrounding the subject.

4.6 HOW CAN DESTINATIONS STOP TOURISTS FROM PERCEIVING THEM AS UNSAFE

Destinations which are seen to be less safe will often experience reduced visitor numbers following a natural disaster as previously discussed (Walters, Mair and Ritchie, 2015). These destinations can find ways in which to alter how safe individuals perceive them to be and therefore limit the negative consequences they experience following a natural disaster. All eight participants were asked the question ‘how do you think destinations can stop tourists from seeing destinations as unsafe because of natural disasters?’. By reviewing the answers of a sample of travellers, ideas/plans can be suggested to make destinations perceived risk factor less of an issue. Some participant’s answers are similar and some are very different.
“In New Zealand the houses are built to withstand earthquakes, however there is nothing you can really do if there is an earthquake which causes a random Tsunami, maybe make tourists aware how small the chances are of that happening” (participant one).

Participant one suggests that destinations should have procedures in place to minimize damage should a natural disaster occur. Participant one also acknowledges that some natural disasters are completely unpredictable but all destinations can do is educate tourists on how rare this is.

“It would be very difficult, all they can do is highlight how rare it is for them to occur, if it is that rare that is. Or they could make sure tourists are aware of how well they are prepared to manage any effects of a natural disaster which could happen” (participant two).

Participant two’s answer is fairly similar to participant ones; it simply reiterates that destinations should educate tourists on how scarce natural disasters are and should a disaster occur what “disaster planning” procedures are in place for that given destination.

“People responsible for promoting holiday destinations obviously only concentrate on the positives that a destination has to offer. It is well known that the west coast of America (San Francisco) has experienced earthquakes and that they occur on a fairly regular basis albeit small tremors. However, I cannot recall anyone ever deciding not to visit California in fear of a disaster. Therefore, I do not believe tour operators ever think of natural disasters when promoting holiday destinations” (participant three).

Participant three gives a different perception to the question; he discusses how tour operators can alter how safe a tourist perceives a destination to be and this is down to them focusing on the positives of visiting somewhere and not even acknowledging the possibility of natural disasters.
“I do not really think they will be able to because it’s someone’s own opinion rather than facts that they know. Unless a destination shows how well they deal with the situation and that they have a successful disaster management plan in place. If you are travelling there is no real deals you can get for going to a specific destination, however destinations can lower prices to encourage tourists to go after a disaster” (participant four).

Participant four gives a contradictory opinion again; stating that he does not think destinations have any real control over being able to alter how safe a destination is perceived to be by a tourist. The only thing a destination can do is to lower prices and make the destination more appealing for those who may be travelling on a budget.

“Have some kind of influence on the way that the disaster is portrayed in the news; such as getting them to include statistics of how many natural disasters have happened there before or get less media coverage on them” (participant seven).

Participant seven makes the link between the media and the effect it has on people’s beliefs. The media can influence the perceived safety of a given destination to potential visitors, if destinations can make disasters seem less dramatic via the media this can limit how unsafe the destination is portrayed to be to potential visitors.

The answers above highlight a number of steps that destinations can employ to minimize the loss of visitors to a given region following a natural disaster. D’Hauteserre (2015) explains how it is crucial that destinations put effort and time into making them seem attractive and safe, as this plays a large part in how many tourists are drawn to a given destination. Time should also be taken to study similar destinations that share the same challenges to ensure safety procedures already identified are put into place.

4.7 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The data gained during the eight interviews has been sufficient to analyze and therefore identify themes and patterns to be used within this results section. It is clear there is a link between tourist typologies and how easily tourists alter their perception of the
safety of a given destination due to a natural disaster. The two participants categorized as drifters are much more adventurous and less fearful when traveling to new places or destinations affected by natural disasters. Surprisingly, five participants stated they would return to Florida following Hurricane Matthew which is contradicting to the findings in the literature review. Five participants also stated they did not think about natural disasters when looking for new travel destinations, this furthermore contradicts the literature on perceived risk and decision making. Participants suggest that destinations should have procedures in place to manage a natural disaster as this will to some degree give tourists a feeling of perceived safety and not put them off from visiting the given destination. Other suggestions of how to do this include educating tourists on how uncommon disasters are for a given destination, and that all necessary precautions have been put in place should a disaster occur. Having some influence over how the media presents natural disaster to the public would also help in minimizing the perceived danger.
CONTENTS OF CONCLUSION

5.0 CONCLUSION ..................................................................................................................51-56

5.1 INTRODUCTION ...........................................................................................................51

5.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS .........................................................................................52

5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS/ CONCLUSIONS .................................................................52-54

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ...............................................................................................55-56
5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

To conclude, the tourism industry is vast and of great importance to multiple economies across the globe; the industry is affected by many factors which it has no control over. Due to its importance to the global economy, the industry must do everything in its power to handle and overcome any negative situations these factors may cause. The tourism industry is forever developing to keep up with technology and the changing desires and motivations of tourists (Robinson, 2012). Natural disasters are one of the unpredictable factors the industry must try and handle; they can be unpredictable but destinations can put measures in place to minimise the damage caused to life and infrastructure if and when they occur. Natural disasters can change how tourists perceive destinations and how safe they are; this will differ depending on factors such as the degree of destruction caused by the disaster, how recently it occurred and the tourist’s personality. The researcher used Florida because it’s a popular tourist destination and has had to deal with natural disasters fairly regularly; they currently have a number of precautions in place to educate and warn both local people and tourists about hurricanes, natural fires, tropical storms, severe freezes and flooding (Floridadisaster, 2017). Hurricane Matthew was the chosen subject for the case study due to the popularity of the destination where it occurred, the fact that it was relatively recent and the availability of appropriate interviewees. The disaster was also at a national level and had a high profile via numerous media sources, it was responsible for nearly 900 deaths and a great deal of destruction to the infrastructure of the area (BBC News, 2016). Therefore, the project was thought to be relevant and of significance to the project researcher.

Due to the importance of the tourism industry to all countries and economies, it is crucial for the industry to understand how natural disasters have a dramatic effect on visitor numbers following a disaster. It is with this in mind that the study has been conducted in an effort to try and answer the given research questions.
5.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The method of the study has included both primary research completed by the project researcher and secondary research of literature surrounding natural disasters, the tourism industry, previous disasters effects on tourist numbers, perceived risk and decision making and typologies theory. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the preferred secondary research process; qualitative research enabled the researcher to gain insight into the thoughts and opinions of eight different participants who have all visited Florida in the past. The interviews were intended to collect relevant information to help answer the research questions, the answers were then studied using thematic analysis. This analysis has allowed the researcher to notice relevant themes and correlations between the eight participant’s answers.

5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS/ CONCLUSIONS

The first research question was designed to understand if tourists perceive destinations as being more unsafe following a natural disaster. It is suggested within the literature study that there is a definite link between natural disasters and how safe tourists perceive destinations to be after the event. Elaine Chaio Ling and Vikneswaran (2014) use multiple destinations as examples where this has been the case; such as the 2004 boxing day Tsunami in Thailand. Research into the event and studies concluded that Thailand was perceived as a less safe destination after the Tsunami occurred. Although this increased the dangerous image of the destination it was found to not always be a negative thing as a small number of individuals seek out and are drawn to this danger. Some tourists wish to visit destinations which have been effected so they can witness the aftermath. The secondary research conducted is based on finding an answer to this question, the findings are varied however and the majority of participants, five out of eight, strongly believe that tourists will perceive a destination as being less safe after the occurrence of any form of natural disaster. One participant acknowledged how this perception is sometimes effected by the media and how they choose to present a natural disaster in the broadcasting and news outlets around the world. The media can
portray a destination as dangerous and make it seem off putting to potential tourists; this is something destinations must consider.

The second research question sought to discover if tourists are put off from visiting destinations that have recently been effected by a natural disaster. Literature around the subject shows a strong correlation between destinations being effected by a natural disaster and there being a decline in visitor numbers afterwards. Thanawood, Yongchalermchai and Densrisereekul (2006) use multiple examples of destinations where this has been the case; they state that the decline can be for multiple different reasons. Some destinations will not be visited because of the damage to infrastructure or the natural environment. Additionally, some destinations will have become less accessible following a disaster and sometimes tourists are simply too fearful to go in case the same thing or something similar will occur during their visit. However, the findings from the secondary research on this subject and the answers the eight participants gave in the semi-structured interviews is contradicting to this. Five out of eight participants stated they would re-visit Florida shortly after Hurricane Matthew. Two participants stated they would consider returning depending on the reason for the visit (holiday/business) and the time of year, only one participant stated they would defiantly not return shortly after out of fear that a similar or the same event would occur. A number of the participants who would return had little knowledge on Hurricane Matthew, if they had been better informed to the severity of the disaster it may have altered their decision-making process.

The third research question was structured to gain information about whether tourists think about the risk of a natural disaster when choosing a location to visit. Maser and Weiermair (1998) explain how the majority of tourists will consider how risky they think a destination is before deciding whether to visit it or not. Most tourists will consider both financial and personal risk factors; this is often seen as a more important process if the destination being considered is abroad. Natural disasters influence a person’s
assessment of risk and if this is seen as too high some tourists will be put off visiting; it is hard to conclude how many individuals are put off a destination because of the risk of a natural disaster. Five out of the eight participants interviewed stated that they do not think about natural disasters when they are looking to visit a destination; this is challenging to the literature which suggests that as natural disasters cause a risk factor they are something which should be considered. Two participants however did suggest that natural disasters are something they think about when considering visiting somewhere. One participant showed considerable interest in such events and this led them to feel fearful of visiting places.

The researcher was able to gain a better understanding through this project of tourist typologies and if there are there certain types of tourists more likely to be affected by natural disasters, and potentially more fearful of them. Cohen (1972) defines four different types of tourists and how they all have a different set of characteristics and travel motivations to each other. These are the explorer, the drifter, the individual mass tourist and the organized mass tourist; the drifter and explorer are suggested to be the two types of tourist better able to handle negative situations and be less put off a destination because of its perceived risk. These suggestions are supported by the findings of the semi-structured interviews, both participants describing themselves as drifters showed no signs of being fearful of Florida following Hurricane Matthew. Additionally, they are very well-traveled and are looking for adventure when considering a travel destination. The two participants who believed they fit within the category of being explorers would also return to Florida after the natural disaster and were not fearful of a similar event occurring during a visit. The other four participants are individual mass tourists, in general throughout the interviews they seemed less adventurous travelers and slightly more fearful of the risk natural disasters present.
5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The final question the project researcher wanted to answer whilst conducting this study was to better understand from a tourist’s perspective if there is anything destinations can do to stop travellers being put off from visiting following a natural disaster. All eight participants have given their opinions and made recommendations on how they believe destinations can try and limit this happening. Suggestions include ensuring that there are as many procedures in place as possible to handle a natural disaster if it was to occur and educating tourists to make them aware of such procedures. Furthermore, destinations should highlight how uncommon natural disasters are throughout the world. Florida should ensure that as a destination it promotes how it is prepared for the extreme weather it sometimes receives. The researcher additionally believes that as drifter and explorer type tourists are least likely to be put off destinations because of perceived risk, Florida could increase the marketing of activities which appeal to these tourist groups. It is also suggested by one participant that it is also the responsibility of those promoting the holidays, i.e. travel agents and tour operators, to focus on the positives of a destination whilst also being able to answer any questions regarding risk with a degree of confidence and understanding.

Within the literature review the topic of perceived risk and decision making is discussed; the literature around this subject suggests that there is most defiantly a link between natural disasters and tourists avoiding destinations which have been affected by a disaster. However, there does not seem to be a clear explanation for this conclusion, possibly due to the varied opinions and characteristics of tourists. More research in this area has the potential to educate destinations on these reasons and therefore enable them to try and reduce visitor numbers declining after a natural disaster occurrence.

The main limitation of this study is the size of the project, due to time constraints and the length of this dissertation, it was decided that eight participants was an appropriate number to be interviewed. Although a lot of information was gathered and some
interesting findings have occurred, the findings would have more scope and be more valid if 100 people who had visited Florida could have been interviewed. If the project researcher or another individual was reconstructing this study it would be worthwhile conducting this on a much larger scale.
6.0 REFERENCES


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