Tourism Crisis Management Strategies: the Case of Travel Agencies in Egypt

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Abstract
The economic and political events of the last few years stand as a stark reminder that we are living in a rapidly changing and turbulent world which affect the performance of tourist enterprises and require readiness of these organizations to implement crisis management strategies efficiently and effectively. This paper attempts to identify crisis management strategies the managers pursue to help manage through turbulent and uncertain times, and explore the strategies used by travel agencies in Egypt. The research methodology depends on a survey designed to explore the crisis management culture and strategies in the Egyptian travel agencies. Results reveal that travel agencies in Egypt do not have complete knowledge about crisis management and limit crisis management to handling crisis when occurs. Most of the Egyptian travel agencies adopt a defensive crisis management strategy to wait and react later on. And the major percentage of the agencies use price policy as a crisis handling or coping instrument. The paper concludes with recommendations for development of crisis management in the Egyptian tourist agencies and future research.

Keywords: Travel agencies; Crisis management; strategy

1- Introduction
Crises have become inherent in every sphere of life. Today crisis may break out anytime and anywhere, and no matter the level of the crisis, it will have a detrimental effect and cause damage on the enterprise. Crisis which affects the subsistence and development of an enterprise is the worst enemy of enterprise. Evidence in recent years proves this reality, some famous enterprises went belly up swiftly for wrong crisis management, and other companies grow up in crisis (Wang, 2009; Efficiency Unit, 2009). Crisis gives managers painful lessons, thus it has been put on their daily management agenda. The previous practices of Fire-fighting and reliance on emergent solutions when looming crisis forces reconsideration of the organization's current direction should be replaced with strategic thinking and strategic planning for crisis management (Spence, 1999; Collison and Parcell, 2001; Ford and Angermeier, 2004; Kim 1998).
According to Henderson (2006) it is vital that managers within the tourism industry are equipped with superior knowledge of crisis management strategies, decision making skills and expertise necessary to deal with crisis conditions. Tourism is very important to Egypt's economy; According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2013) it accounts for about 14% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and gives employment to about 13% of the Egyptians workforce.
The Egyptian tourist enterprises have been affected badly for the previous years as a result of the economic and political instability, they have been struggling to remain in the businesses under this unfavorable business environment adopting different crisis management strategies. However, in spite of the fact that crisis in tourism attracts the attention of many researchers from different perspectives including types, causes, impacts, and management knowledge, the literatures on crisis management strategies in tourism are very rare, and need more scholars research on it. (Faulkner 2001; Ritchie, 2004; Laws and Prideaux, 2007; and Scott and Laws 2005; Pforr, 2006)

This research aims at:
1- Identifying crises management strategies that the managers pursue to help manage through uncertain and turbulent times
2- Exploring the strategies used by Egyptian travel agencies to manage crisis in the Egyptian context.

It also aims to contribute to the literatures related to crisis management within the tourism context.

To achieve the aims of this research data was collected through:
- Literature Review and,
- A questionnaire presented to managers of a sample of travel agencies members of The Egyptian Travel agencies Association (ETAA).

2- literature Review

(2-1) Crisis management definition and importance

Over the years several authors have attempted to define a crisis and crisis management and have come up with a variety of terms and concepts often used synonymously to crisis (e.g. Pizam, 1999; Faulkner, 2001; Glaesser, 2003, Pforr, 2006).

Earlier crisis researches and literatures focus on the characteristics of crisis as a way to differentiate it from times of hard problems, so as it was defined as " it presents a threat to core values, it introduces a high degree of uncertainty, and it requires urgent decision-making" (Hermann 1963, 1972; Rosenthal, Charles & Hart 1989). Later literatures focus on two additional characteristics for crisis abruptness, and dynamic tendency that put managers under a challenging situation (Wang, 2009).

Crisis management definition depends heavily on its function (Henderson, 2004, 2006; Norman & Augustine, 2000, Glaesser, 2003)

Glaesser (2003) defines crisis management as "changes of tasks and process when a crisis occurs"

Santana (2004) suggests a more encompassing interpretation of the concept. He states that crisis management can be defined as "an ongoing integrated and comprehensive effort that organizations effectively put into place in an attempt to first and foremost understand and prevent crisis, and to effectively manage those that occur, taking into account in each and every step of their planning and training activities, the interest of their stakeholders".
In literature, the division of an active from a reactive crisis management approach predominates. The proactive approach entails the anticipation of a negative event both mentally and in terms of preparation however the reactive crisis management approach concentrates on activities when crisis has already occurred and been detected. (Glaesser, 2003)


Roting (1967) argues that crisis management approaches depend on the phases of the crisis process. He differentiates between the preventive crisis management strategy to anticipate and compensate further crisis and active crisis management strategy to allow the prompt identification of events and reactive crisis management to deal with compensating active strategies (cited in Glaesser, 2003).

Glaesser (2003) further agrees with Roting (1967), He divides the crisis management strategies according to the three phases of crisis process under two categories crisis preventive strategies and crisis coping or handling strategies. Preventive strategies include both crisis precautions and crisis avoidance strategies for aims to be prepared for future damage or negative image and lowering the extent of damage. However crisis handling strategies includes employing of instruments to cope with crisis already occurred.

In our research this division of Glaesser (2004) will be kept. Diagram 1 portrays the strategies of crisis management adapted in this context.

Diagram 1: Strategies of crisis management

The importance of crisis management for tourist enterprises was highlighted according to many reasons overall the vulnerability of Tourism to crisis that can have disastrous consequences on the travel agencies if they are not managed effectively (Timothy, 2006).

Crisis management helps tourist enterprises to maintain performance and profitability and at the same time prevents loss of resources. A complete management of crises...
aims to protect not only the value already created by the organization but also its future opportunities and supporting secure growth (Neitlich, 2009).

(2-2) Crisis management Strategies
(2-2-1) Preventive crisis management strategies
The aims of preventive management strategies within the frame work of enterprise strategy are to lay the foundations for the long term success of the organization. According to (Gleasser 2003) preventive strategies enable “survival and prosperity of the firm”

According to (Bernstein, 1996) Crisis prevention costs are always a tiny fraction of the losses that are typically incurred as a result of crises for which there had been inadequate preparation.

Porter (1989) defines Generic Competitive Strategies as firm preventive strategies based on market positions that are most appropriate to the firm. They are called generic strategies because they are not firm or industry dependent. Generic Strategies include cost leadership, differentiation, and focus strategy.

Glaesser (2003) further refers to other preventive strategies to lower the negative impacts of crisis including diversification, transfer, and self-bearing

(2-2-1-1) Cost leadership
According to cost leadership strategy the enterprise should provide a comparable standard product at lower price than its competitors (Porter 1989).

Cost leadership strategy isn’t applicable for all cases and all markets, also other enterprises may be able to lower their costs as well. Additionally, several firms targeting various narrow markets may be able to achieve an even lower cost within their segments and as a group gain significant market share (Ibid).

(2-2-1-2) differentiation Strategy
A differentiation strategy calls for the development of a product or service that offers unique attributes that are valued by customers and that customers perceive to be better than or different from the products of the competitors (Ibid).

The value added by the uniqueness of the product may allow the firm to charge a premium price for it. However, the risks associated with a differentiation strategy include imitation by competitors and changes in customer tastes. Additionally, various firms pursuing focus strategies may be able to achieve even greater differentiation in their market segments (Glaesser, 2003).

(2-2-1-3) Focus Strategy
The focus strategy concentrates on a narrow segment of customers and within that segment attempts to achieve either a cost leadership or differentiation (Porter, 1989).

The premise of this strategy is that the needs of the group can be better serviced by focusing entirely on it. An enterprise using a focus strategy often enjoys a high degree of customer loyalty, and this entrenched loyalty discourages other enterprises from competing directly. Enterprises pursuing a differentiation-focused strategy may
be able to pass higher costs on to customers since close substitute products do not exist (Ibid).
However, because of their narrow market focus, enterprises pursuing a focus strategy have lower volumes and therefore less bargaining power with their suppliers. Furthermore, it may be fairly easy for a broad-market cost leader to adapt its product in order to compete directly. Finally, other focusers may be able to carve out sub-segments that they can serve even better (Glaesser, 2003)

(2-2-1-4) Diversification
According to this Strategy through the distribution of activities on several profit sources a balance is created that can compensate for the harming of one source (Gleasser, 2003).
Horizontal diversification refers to changing the sales program through products or services that are complementary to the existing activities. It offers the enterprise opportunities to expand product offerings or expand into new geographical areas (Venhor, 2007).
Vertical diversification refers to the preceding or succeeding stages in the organization production process. This helps the enterprise to achieve self-sufficiency which helps in the avoidance of crises (Ibid).
The downside of the diversification strategy is that resources of the enterprises are not used efficiently in the normal situations. In addition there is a danger that a distinctive personal image achieved through specialization will be watered down. Finally, the complexity and difficulty of coordinating different but related businesses should be considered (Glaesser, 2003).

(2-2-1-5) Transfer strategy
Transfer strategies aims to transfer the impacts of the crisis that seems to be difficult to prevent or calculate to other partners. Transfer Strategies may include different strategic instrument including insurance and contracts (CAN, 2011).
**Insurance** is an effective and widely used crisis preventive strategy (Ibid). Taking out the right insurance will help to protect a business from financial loss and minimize its exposure to crisis. Limitations to the use of insurance as a strategic action includes that the speculated crisis which can be counted as functional cannot be included in the insurance contract for example the loss of future positioning is not insurable. Also some negative events according to legal conditions are not insurable. (CAN,2011; Gleasser, 2003).
Crisis transfer can also be accomplished through non-insurance agreements such as **contracts**. These contracts often include risk sharing and contractual risk limitations. Risk sharing includes either splitting the risk and negative impacts or risk alliance where financial success is also shared (CAN,2011).
In the framework of contractual risk of limitations the consequences of a negative impact is transferred silently onto the business partner without going into risks in details (Gleasser, 2003).
Transferring the risk to a business partner in addition to its financial advantages it strengthens the onset of the partners and keeps the consequences of negative events low. However, success in transferring the risks onto a market partner is determined by general competition conditions; above all, the market power and negotiation strength of the enterprise (CAN, 2011; Gleasser, 2003).

(2-2-1-6) Self – Bearing Strategy
This strategy can be adopted for areas of crisis that can only be borne by the company itself. Security measures can be made by forming liquid and non-liquid reserves. Glaesser (2003) emphasizes that it should be taken into consideration that it concerns purely passive measures that are besides cost intensive.

(2-2-2) Crisis Handling Strategies
The crisis handling or coping strategies aim to influence the development of the effects resulting from the negative event to neutralize this effects, and gradually eliminate the crisis causing the problem.
In literature there are different strategies to handle different crisis. Glaesser (2003) differentiate between two handling strategies offensive and defensive strategies

(2-2-2-1) Offensive handling Strategy
Offensive strategy aims to find a solution through the implementation of measures that eliminate and contain the causes and related effects of an identified problem areas.
Glaesser (2003) argues that this strategy requires a functioning early warning system that defines despite not imprecise the potential negative effect and aid the implementation of reaction measures.
He defines different measures and instruments than can be used within this strategy including the following: (Ibid)

-Product policy
It aims to adjust the product in line with the reaction strategy in order to alleviate the consequences of negative events. It includes product development to re-establish the original conditions and benefits on offer, and offering guaranteed services to lessen the risk of a tourist making a mistake in destination selection including the organization recoverable or documented commitment.

-Price policy
It aims at the fixing of sales prices and enhancing the number of sales. This includes price policy decisions in the narrow sense as well as condition policy measures. Price policy in the narrow sense can be used towards the end customers, it may include price discrimination, and special offers to lower the selling price within a short period of time. Condition policy can be used towards end consumers as well as service mediators; it is concerned with the formation of discounts, commissions, Cancellations and changes to booking and terms of payment.
- Distribution policy

It is concerned with the agreements and regulations regarding the route a product takes to customer. Decisions should be made about direct and indirect distribution channels from primary or secondary distribution organs, and finally the distribution channels within or outside the tourism sector.

- Communication Policy

It has the preventive character as it should start in the pre-event phase. It is also considered as an effective handling policy of negative events to lessen their consequences. Communications should be sustained with the customers and wholesalers. The approach of Integrated Marketing Communications should be applied. However, the effectiveness of each policy will depend upon the type of the crisis and its expected impacts. For the financial crisis, price policy can be more effective, but it may not be effective with political or safe and security crises. Anyway, as Glaesser (2003) points out these policies are not used separately but always combine.

The advantages of the offensive strategy include first raising the credibility among customers as a result of providing the complete information that is overcome uncertainty. This credibility works as a basis for future use of marketing instruments. Second, with offensive strategy the enterprise still has strong communicative control to a relatively large extent thus the facts provided by the organization are used and speculation is mainly avoided. Finally, offensive strategy also contributes essentially to shortening a crisis since there is no staggered publishing of 'new revelations' that stimulate public interest (Ibid).

The disadvantage of offensive strategies could be the unfavorable intensification of the crises accompanied sometimes by a negative image of the enterprise (Ibid).

(2-2-2-2) Defensive handling Strategy

Defensive strategy attempts not to act but wait to react later on. It aims to evade the crisis as far as possible and not to identify the situation with one's own action. All activities of the enterprise are put off until the end of the active point of the crises (Ibid). The only advantage of this strategy is that the intensification of the crises by the company's own actions is avoided. However, defensive strategy can lead to image loss and also, in contrast to offensive strategy, it may lead to credibility loss, as when the organization gives up its basic rule as a leading information provider it loses a fundamental advantage and boosts the importance of other information sources including competitors. Finally, with defensive strategy the duration of the crisis will be longer (Ibid).

3- Research Methodology

(3-1) Data collection

In order to explore the importance and usage of the strategies, a crisis-management survey using Likert scale was constructed. It was made up of two parts, the first part examines the crisis management culture of the enterprise and the level of importance
managers assign to crisis management which are expected to influence the strategies that travel agencies adopts, and the second part includes questions about the importance and actual usage of crisis management Strategies and instruments. The questionnaire was pre-tested by four experienced executives. A non-random “purposive” sample of enterprises within the tourism industry in Egypt was selected to collect information providing that the enterprise should be:

1- Member of the Egyptian Travel agencies Association (ETAA).
2- Working in the Egyptian market for at least 10 years.
3- Serving both local and international markets

The total population of the study is estimated to encompass 1020 travel agencies (ETAA, 2014)

Data was collected through two stages:

Stage one: a mail questionnaire was sent to 585 managers of travel agencies in Egypt (57.352% of the population). As the first round resulted in no responses, three follow ups were conducted, the total of completed surveys were 115.

Stage two: a series of 152 interviews were conducted with major travel agencies' managers in Cairo, Giza and Alexandria in order to enhance the level of response.

The number of respondents has increased substantially after two follow -ups and the interview to reach 267 enterprises which represents 26% of total population. The number of valid questionnaires reached 258 respondents that represent 25.3% of total population, and this percentage is considered acceptable for this type of studies (Cooper & Fletcher, 1999; Shaw 2010). The Survey was conducted during the period of November 2012 – March 2013.

(3-2) Results and findings
(3-2-1) Crisis management culture
This section seeks information about the crisis management culture of the Egyptian travel agencies. It was apparent from the interviews that managers have not sufficient knowledge about crisis management and its importance to the enterprise. This was really surprising under the current turbulent situations in Egypt.

Crisis management definition:
When the respondents were asked to define crisis management 58.9% of the managers limited crisis management to the defensive measures that should be considered when facing a crisis, 26.3 % of the managers added to the previous definition the corrective measures taken after the end of the crisis to restore the position of the enterprise. While only 14.8% of the respondents encompassed the preventive measures before the occurrence of the crisis. These responses reflect the apparent lack of understanding of crisis management and this is expected to reflect on strategies applied in the Egyptian travel agencies.

Importance of effective crisis management
24% of the respondents ranked the importance of effective crisis management to the enterprise between important and very important, 10% ranked it as with medium
importance, while 66% of the managers ranked crisis management with the organization as less or not important. As the respondents were asked to justify their responses the main reason for being of high importance was to reduce the expected negative effects of the crisis. While the main reason for being of less importance was that crisis management seems to be not effective or useless when a crisis occurs. This is also expected to reflect on applying plans for crisis management in the travel agencies.

**Crisis management plans**

Almost all the respondents (97%) consider the level of crisis faced by the organization in the last 5 years has increased, and this was expected according to the current situations of political unrest, economic recessions and the decrease in the number of tourists arriving to Egypt. However, despite considering the high level of crisis intervention, the availability of crisis management plans appears limited in the Egyptian travel agencies, 66% of the respondents reported that they don’t have crisis management plans, while only 34% have crisis management plans. These responses comply with the responses of the previous question concerning the importance the managers assign to crisis management, and also emphasize the lack of knowledge and appreciation of the importance of crisis management.

30% of the respondents clarified that their enterprises are able to allocate appropriate resources in support of crisis management policy and practice; the remaining part clarified that their enterprises are unable to allocate appropriate resources in support of crisis management policy. The main barriers to the provision of adequate resources in support of crisis management are both budgetary and cultural. In fact the budgetary barriers have always been major obstacles affecting travel agencies performance in Egypt.

The respondents highlight that the most important methods to determine and evaluate crisis in the enterprises is turnover (82%) followed by physical inspection (74%), and analyzing future trends did not appear in the first choice (13%). These results confirm that crisis management practices in the Egyptian travel agencies are concerned with the crisis only when it is in occurrence. Thus the decrease in the turnover was considered as the most important method to determine and evaluate crisis in the enterprises while analyzing future trends appeared of less importance. These results are also expected to reflect on the strategies and policies applied for crisis in the Egyptian travel agencies.

**(3-2-2) Crisis Management Strategies**

This section seeks information about crisis management strategies Importance and usages in the Egyptian tourist agencies. In this part of the questionnaire managers were asked to assign first the level of importance of crisis management strategies and instruments and then the extent to which the agencies use these strategies and instruments. Pearson correlation analyses were employed to measure the correlations between the importance and usage of each strategy/ instrument.
It was evident from the interviews that the crisis management strategies importance and usage are concerned mostly with crisis occurrence stage or crisis handling strategies. These results confirm the effects of the crisis management culture of the Egyptian travel agencies that limits crisis management to crisis firefighting when it is already on occurrence. The results are shown in table (1).

Table 1: Strategies and instruments mean and standard deviation for importance and usage and Pearson correlations for importance and usage (all correlations are significant at .05)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Usage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rank</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Cost leadership</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.7422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Differentiation Strategy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.7656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Focus Strategy</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.6523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Diversification</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.7695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Insurance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.9961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Risk sharing/transfer contracts</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.6680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Self-bearing (liquid and non-liquid reserves)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Product development</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.6875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Guaranteed Services</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.6094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Price discriminations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.8264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Special offers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Discounts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.7773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Free cancellation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.8164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Considering distribution channels</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.6445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Communications with customers and retailers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.7266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Wait to react later on</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8438</td>
</tr>
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Crisis management strategies and instruments importance
According to the managers insurance has the highest level of importance (3.99) followed by self-bearing (3.90), wait and react later on (3.84), special offers (3.84)
and price discriminations (3.82). While the lowest level of importance was assigned to guaranteed service (3.60). Preventive strategies rather than insurance have lower levels of importance; focus strategy (3.65), risk sharing/transfer contracts (3.66), cost leadership (3.74), differentiation strategy (3.76), and diversification (3.76). Alpha Cronbach coefficient was 0.788 this means that the questionnaire has a high reliability, the validity was 0.887.

*Crisis management strategies and instruments Usage*

Table 1 indicates the great focus on crisis handling strategies in the practices of the Egyptian travel agencies. Egyptian travel agencies use insurance the most as an instrument for crisis management (3.91). The majority of the Egyptian travel agencies adopt defensive strategy to wait and react later on (3.89) as Glaesser (2003) argues this strategy may lead to credibility loss in addition to the duration of the crises will be longer.

Price policy is also used extensively as a crisis handling strategy with its various instruments especially special offers (3.78). Self-bearing (liquid and non-liquid reserves) came at the fourth level in the usage (3.77), this strategy as Glaesser (2003) emphasizes should only be used for the crisis that has not any other handling strategy and thus should be borne by the company itself.

The lowest level of usage was for guaranteed service (3.57). Preventive strategies rather than insurance have lower levels of usage; Risk sharing/transfer contracts (3.62), focus Strategy (3.64), differentiation strategy (3.65). Alpha Cronbach coefficient was 0.752 this means that the questionnaire has a high reliability, the validity was 0.867.

*Pearson correlations for importance and usage*

In general, all the correlations were positive and statistically significant (at p 0:05), suggesting that there is a certain level of consistency in the crisis-management behavior of managers. The highest correlation (0.724) was for discounts, for this strategy, average importance (3.777) was higher than usage (3.773). For the two following strategies with the highest correlation, average importance was higher than average usage. These strategies were special offers (correlation 0.710, average importance 3.84, average usage 3.78) and communications with customers and retailers (correlation 0.702, average importance 3.72, average usage 3.67).

The lowest correlation was for Free cancellation, with respect to this strategy; average importance was higher than average usage (correlation 0.40, average importance 3.81, average usage 3.73). For the two following strategies with the lowest correlation, average usage was higher than average importance. These strategies were product development (correlation 0.42, average importance 3.68, average usage 3.69) and Considering distribution channel (correlation 0.442, average importance 3.64, average usage 3.71).

Alpha Cronbach coefficient was 0.890 this means that the questionnaire has a high reliability, the validity was 0.943.
Conclusion
This study has provided a significant insight about crisis management culture and strategies in the travel agencies in Egypt. Results have revealed a disturbing trend in crisis management readiness in the travel agencies in Egypt. The culture of crisis management in Egyptian tourist agencies affects the strategies adopted by the agencies that focus on crisis handling when it is on occurrence. Insurance was the first crisis management strategy used in the Egyptian travel agencies and they perceived it as the most important strategy too. Most of the Egyptian travel agencies adopt a defensive crisis management strategy to wait and react later on. And the major ratio of the agencies use price policy as a crisis handling or coping instrument. In general, all the correlations for importance and usage were positive and statistically significant (at p<0.05), suggesting that there is a certain level of consistency in the crisis-management behavior of managers. However respondents continue to point at the budgetary barriers to the provision of adequate resources in support of crisis management in their enterprises.
In such a turbulent time crisis management should be a strong focus of travel agencies in Egypt regardless of the enterprise size or type. The crisis management practices in the Egyptian travel agencies are immature and require major strategic planning actions from both the governmental tourist organizations and private travel agencies. Travel agencies and companies need to develop crisis management practices based on the right and complete understanding of crisis management as an approach not only to firefight crisis when occurs but also to prevent and avoid crisis. They need to understand the importance of crisis management to reap the full advantages of crisis management. They need to integrate crisis management within the strategic planning for the enterprise. They also need to use more preventive and handling strategies to sustain their performance under the times of uncertainty. The role of the tourist governmental authorities is very important for improving crisis management practices in the tourism industry in Egypt. The governmental authority should provide technical support for the travel agencies in the context of crisis management. It is strongly recommended to activate the role of the Disaster Fund under the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Egyptian Tourism Federation (ETF) and to establish an organization that takes over crisis insurance in the tourism sector.

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