Vulnerable Hotels to Emergencies: Did We Learn the Lesson

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ABSTRACT

Hotel guests facing emergencies in stricken destinations far from home are more vulnerable and require effective emergency planning and recovery. This poses a great challenge to any hotel business. Emergencies affecting the hotel industry become more frequent and complex than before. By using secondary data, this paper aims to shed light on hotels’ vulnerability to emergencies and the points which may increase this vulnerability. Lessons learnt from these emergencies will be explained further. The findings revealed that still there is a gap between what was planned and what happens during emergencies. Poor emergency planning leads to poor emergency management. Initially, there is a failure to recognize the difference between the emergency planning and emergency management principles. Several lessons could be learnt from the literature which proposes effective planning for emergencies to help overcome the impacts of disasters. Furthermore, studying and practicing emergency management in the hotel industry will answer the important question, did we learnt the lesson?

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality experts have argued that experiencing a local emergency would be undesirable but as a guest or a tourist visiting a stricken area experiencing an emergency far from home would be worse. While hotel guests originate from anywhere and speak a different language, emergency planning and recovery could be a challenge for any business and constitute acute tasks for hotel stakeholders. Low, Liu [1] argued that hotels as a risky business receiving employees and guests from different nations and cultures with a tendency for disasters and emergencies also cause unwanted damages. Scholars discussed the impacts of terrorism on the tourism industry. It was argued that terrorism and instability have a considerable bad effect on the tourism industry [2]. Johnston, Paton [3] explored the impacts of natural disasters on the tourism industry and argued that such events disturb destinations having negative impacts on the local community, stakeholders, and the economy. Cashman, Cumberbatch [4] argued that globalization and over development cause a negative change in the world and habitats with a greater impact on hotels and tourism.

As one of the most vulnerable industries for emergencies, the hospitality industry has become hit more frequently and become more complex than before. Both the hospitality industry and other related industries have been effected [5]. Whether it is man-made or a natural disaster, the importance is high to be well prepared in order to mitigate the impacts of emergencies and minimize loss. There is no doubt that safety and security are two of the most important issues concerning guests. Rittichainuwat [6] asserted that low-cost destinations could not motivate tourists to visit, especially hazardous destinations. Organizations should establish cross relationship between media and government authorities to avoid unnecessary information and transmit a clear message to avoid ambiguity [7].

After exploring the literature, it was found that researchers unfortunately focus on successfully managing disasters and emergencies and immediate recovery rather than the state of readiness [8]. The urgent need for the hotel industry is to plan better for emergencies, react to such events, mitigate damages, and recover quickly to a normal situation. The literature focuses on pre-emergency planning and agrees the need to plan. The best ways to employ planning is not a one way task, it is an ongoing process. Disasters are accurately viewed as a social phenomenon. Damages tend to be due to natural hazards, people altering the surrounding environment, doing...
what they can do to mitigate the chance of problems, and making certain areas are safe for people. Emergency, by nature, involves human impact [9]. Taleb [10] argued that the natural studied patterns have been recorded for many ages. The most recent occurrence scholars should focus on studying is the accurate and reliable data. The universe is governed by the laws of physics but chaos remains as a normal variation that exists due to a temporal governing nature of the universe [11]. The Chaos Theory is one of the major frameworks to view and analyse disasters and emergency management and the ever present differentiation between actions and experiments. The Chaos Theory will benefit when clarifying the weaknesses of the control and command model. Only then can it be replaced with the development of the problem solving model which provides a conceptual foundation for studying emergent behaviour during disasters and emergency situations [12].

Methodology:

By using a secondary data, this study aims to explore the existing literature on emergencies which have occurred in hotels. It also investigates hotel preparation for emergencies and identifies its vulnerabilities. Exploring future plans to manage and overcome the impact of such emergencies is also considered. To strengthen the discussion, the results of former studies have been used.

Findings and Discussion:

The concept of vulnerability is the key to emergency planning. Vulnerability can be the junction between risk aggravation and mitigating factors. The possibilities of emergency events in hotels are an indemnity to a variety of factors determined by the resilience of the staff and guests as well as the level of emergency preparedness done by the hotel. Hotel vulnerability to emergencies comes from four points: events, effects, resilience, and preparation. A hotel in the mountains is not vulnerable to a tsunami, for example. A small motel is not vulnerable to a high-rise commercial hotel fire. Since vulnerability is constantly increasing, more people are becoming more vulnerable. Eshghi and Larson [13] mentioned that when vulnerability meet hazards a disaster occurs.

Unfortunately, research scholars showed that there is often a big gap between what was planned and what actually happens in major disasters, crises, and emergencies. The reasons may propose that the preparedness planning may be poor and, therefore, encourages poor emergency management. Another reason comes from the failure to recognize the principles of emergency preparedness plans are different from the principles of emergency management. It is incorrect to assume that because emergency preparedness planning exists, management of emergencies will only require plan implementations. But preparedness planning and emergency management are not the same. Quarantelli [14] continued his predictions based upon emergencies and which disasters have occurred. He came to the conclusion that the future is not the past repeated, and due to the rise social changes the probability for more disasters in the 21st century has increased. Furthermore, scholars found that organizations plan for the future based on their experience with emergencies. The assumptions about disasters could be expected but never exactly repeated as in the past. This will lead to the first lesson: planning is not managing.

Quarantelli article shed light on the increases in the standard of living, accessing time and money which has fuelled the resort construction in hazardous destinations. The aging of western population also contributed to the overall vulnerability of people to disaster. This trend will be more acute when viewing the heart of hospitality. There are more adventurous tourists travelling internationally to the hazardous destinations. The very old and very young are always more vulnerable to risk during disasters. Hotels in large populous cities will face an increased risk of disaster. This may be due merely because of increased population and further social diversity, though bureaucracy will tend to aggravate the impact of disasters. During an emergency, a homogenous community are less vulnerable and easier to help and evacuate. The risk cannot be eliminated but society must take a realistic approach to disasters. This will lead us to the second lesson learned: the future is not a repeat of the past.

Drabek [15] examined the level of preparedness and evacuation planning in 185 tourist businesses to identify reasons that impact the planning and preparedness and the forces which impede successful preparedness. He found that tourist businesses should plan and take the appropriate action needed in the case of emergencies. They should resist threat denial, assign a person in charge improve communications with their employees and customers. They would also be required to expect the needs of special populations and recognize the special need for the handicapped, children, the elderly, and families while establishing a good relationship with the media. Several lessons were learned from the research of Drabek [15]; such as planning the appropriate actions when needed. Do not plan regarding to threats but according to action. He clarified that organizations should plan for what action could be done not based upon what can happen. In general, the hospitality industry is not ready for a disaster due to inadequate planning in line with improper management structures. The third lesson learned: plan for action, not for situations. Quarantelli [16] clarified that disaster studies based on statistical data and conceptual disagreements are plagued. Furthermore, many theories which lettered in the field
failed to highlight the lack of established disaster criteria. This leads us to the fourth lesson learned: study and teach disaster and emergency management in the hospitality industry.

Vulnerability is a core element for emergency planning. It can be described as the crossroad of risk aggravation for mitigating factors. Risk can be defined as a dangerous chance to experience a liability [17]. Being in a hazardous destination means the hotel is more vulnerable to disasters and emergencies. For a better understanding of the formulation, disasters occur when a hazard meets vulnerability [18]. Laws and regulations reflect the fact that hospitality has a duty to ensure guest safety. Emergency management should maintain guest safety by enhancing and developing the emergency requirements. Hotel guests need more help and services during and immediately following a disaster than in a normal situation [19]. Emergency planning must provide the necessary basis for damage reduction. The levels of potential damage and the factors for such damage must be identified along with the action that must be taken to reduce future damage. This brings the fifth lesson learnt: more people are becoming vulnerable to emergencies. Vulnerability is increasing.

Conclusion:
Vulnerable hotels towards emergencies currently tend to be an important issue. The emergencies affecting the hotel industry are becoming more frequent and complex than ever before. Emergency planning proves to be a big challenge for all businesses. In many cases hotel guests stand to visit risky destinations when far away from home which entail using different languages. Matters which raise the issue on how hotels could understand their responsibility is to recognize the principles of emergency planning before disasters occur. The principles of emergency management in order to mitigate the impact of events on hotels and guests are essential. Exploring the literature guides the researchers to several lessons which could be learned from the past to overcome the future emergencies. Particular facts which have been revealed from the literature: Planning is not managing, the future is not the past repeated, and risk must be identified along with the action that must be taken to reduce future damage. This brings the fifth lesson learnt: more people are becoming vulnerable to emergencies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
This research is fully funded from Sustainable Tourism Research Cluster USM, grant entitled ‘Tourism Planning’ [Grant No. 1001/PTS/8660013], and USM fellowship Scheme.

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