Fake News or Real: Analysis of the Impact of Travel Alerts in Mexico's Sun and Sea Main Tourist Destinations

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this document is to analyze the possibility of a negative impact due to the travel alerts issued by the State Department of the United States to the most important sun and sea tourist destinations in Mexico, such as Cancun, Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, and Acapulco. In recent years, it has been observed some issues have affected the tourism industry such as increased violence, insecurity, and crime. Due to that, most of the international visitors to Mexico come from The United States so The State department feels committed with their citizens and decide to publish and disseminate the aforementioned alerts; however, these alerts, even with an end to good intentions, can become a double-edged sword with which tourism destinations are affected, mainly in their influx of visitors. With the present analysis, we intended to have a reach with experts in the subject such as authors who have studied the phenomenon, national information as reference material.

The method in the research and analysis was carried out through the documental and, in the same way, statistical data were compiled as a study guide within official platforms, such as DATATUR. INEGI and UNWTO. In particular, an attempt was made to address a range of ten years on the dates of the consultation material (2007-2017) to study the situation.

The findings were that these alerts cause the decrease flows of American tourists to main Mexico's sun and sea tourist destinations, as consequence, the local population might be affected for all the lack of income.

Keywords: *State Department, Travel Alerts, Sun and Sea Destinations, Violence, Security.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the industries or sectors that has been growing since the last influenza pandemic we have faced in 2009, it has been a steady growth every year, in 2017 there was an increase of +7% with 1,326 total international tourist arrival (UNWTO, 2018); it is not only the flow of visitors or how much money they spend in the destinations, but also other positive effects, such as employment, buying local´s souvenirs and positive effect in local communities.

To speak of tourism as an important factor in the growth of the economy, a generator of jobs and drag impacts; We can name Mexico as one of the main examples; Since in the last five years, its attraction of international tourists has increased, positioning itself in the sixth place of the most visited countries in the world; for the year 2017 Mexico received 39.3 million tourists which generated 21.3. (UNWTO-UNWTO, 2018)

Forbes Mexico magazine states that "GDP in Mexico in 2016 received 166 billion dollars from tourism, both leisure, and business, which is reflected in 16% of the country's GDP. This places this industry as the sector that offers the most contributions. " (Parcerisa, 2017)

As part of a visionary exercise for the period from 1995 to 2020, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) described a series of important factors and influences that could affect international tourism activity, one of them being travel safety. to the degree of asserting that: "tourism will not flourish in destinations with social unrest, at war or where tourists perceive that their health or personal safety is threatened" (OMT, 1999: 9 cited by Flores, Leyva & León, 2017, p .153).

On the issue of insecurity in the tourism industry, the World Tourism Organization states that there are negative scenarios in the industry from terrorism to insecurity in destinations, where the same Organization asserts that

"tourism will not boom in destinations with social turbulence, at war or where tourists perceive that their health or personal safety is threatened "(OMT, 1999: 9). However, regardless of the emphasis or context, it is clear that most tourists will not visit a destination where safety and well-being may be in jeopardy (Pizam&Mansfeld, cited by Dimanche &Lepetic, 1999).

Table1. *International tourist arrivals, 2017 (million)*

Country	Million people	Rank 2017	Rank 2016
France	86.9	1	1
Spain	81.8	2	3
USA	76.9	3	2
China	60.7	4	4
Italy	58.3	5	5
Mexico	39.3	6	8
UK	37.7	7	6
Turkey	37.6	8	10
Germany	37.5	9	7
Thailand	35.4	10	9

Source: Own design with information of World Tourist Organization (UNWTO)

The government of the United States (EU) has as a security strategy for its nationals who are going to travel abroad, it issues two types of warnings: the travel warning, formulated for short-term events, for example, elections during demonstrations or social turbulence, in the event of a health alert or the presence of evidence of a high risk of a terrorist attack; and the travel warning, which has greater weight and is generally issued in the long term (Department of State, 2016).

Although a recommendation or warning technically applies to an entire nation, the dangers and precautions may be specific to certain destinations or regions (Friend, 2011).

The weakening of the image of Mexico and the negative perception that is generated from the acts of violence and insecurity projected towards the world through the media causes a decrease in both tourism and economic indicators, and this, in turn, generates a decrease in the competitiveness of the country.

In particular, in 2006, as a strategy, the government of Mexico declares war on drug trafficking, unleashing countless criminal acts, mainly homicides, and therefore, the indicators corresponding to this issue soar. The country's negative image spreads around the world, projecting an image of crime and insecurity, which makes it an unattractive country for tourists to visit.

The United States and Canada, the main country that sends tourists to many tourist destinations in Mexico, has taken preventive measures towards their citizens, and issue travel alerts and recommendations in the case of people who, either for work or leisure, wish to travel to Mexico, in These alerts, governments classify the country as unsafe and dangerous (Silvestre Flores Gamboa, 2018).

In context, among the main Sun and Sea destinations that we find in Mexico for American visitors are Cancun, Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, and Acapulco de Juárez, but; a phenomenon, which is not recent, has influenced the perception of tourists about these destinations over the years, the travel alerts issued by the United States Department of State. According to the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR, 2018) one of the causes that these alerts are spread, is the violence and crime that are experienced in Mexico.

Travel alerts issued by the United States, mainly to some states of Mexico, are due to the violent image that they generate due to the security problems that arise as a result of criminal organizations.

The alerts are issued due to the country's commitment to protecting its citizens if necessary and do not project bilateral relations with the country at all (ADN40, 2017).

According to data from the United States Travel and Tourism Industries Offices, in 2017 the number of US tourists who traveled to Mexico grew by 51% compared to 2013, and in 2016, 38% of the tourists who left the American Union headed to Mexico, which also meant a growth compared to previous years (Reportur, 2017).

Table2. *United States visitor arrivals by air*

County	THOUSANDS	Variation	
	January-April 2017	January-April 2018	Jan-April 17/18
Cancun	1538.2	1530.9	-0.5%
Puerto Vallarta	444.0	412.0	-7.2%
Los Cabos	547.1	557.6	1.9%

Source: Own design with information from Sistema Integral de Información de Mercados Turísticos (2018)

The issue of safety for travelers to national and international destinations has hardened after some terrorist demonstrations that occurred in different countries of the world, specifically the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001.

Security: Important Variable to Consider

According to The Travel & Competitiveness Index (2017), Mexico was set in 22nd place overall in Enabling environment, one of the pillars that this organization establishes to make a report, but in the sub-pillar of safety and security got the score of 4.2 being Canada with the highest score in American Continent with a score of 6.2. This reflects the need to have an effective public policy regarding safety and security to have pleasant destinations to visit and overturn the insecure perception in the world over Mexico.

Projecting a good image for a country undoubtedly represents great benefits, both economic and social. The insecurity problems that arise in Mexico, and that are disseminated through television, national and international newspapers, create an image of an insecure and dangerous country, thus having a negative influence on the opinion of both tourists and foreign governments, and although the problems of insecurity have decreased, the effects it has had in terms of tourism, especially in some states, since the number of international tourists arriving in Mexico has been significantly reducing in recent years. years due to this problem (Adriana Castillo Quiñones, 2018).

Various calls for attention constantly arise in the United States as if to awaken the notion of the fragility of the Mexican political system and its failed condition. Thus, for example, the United States government constantly issues various alerts for its citizens to avoid visiting Mexican cities or the entire country, suggesting that students cancel their trips for Spring Break, which produces many cancellations and extends the feeling that Mexico is an unsafe destination. Several universities canceled their programs in and with Mexican universities and others

prohibited their students and academics from traveling to Mexico (Schmidt, 2012).

Guerrero is the only state in Mexico that has a travel ban by the United States for U.S. government employees, however, if travel is necessary, they are allowed to do so only by air (Orsi, 2016 cited in Ruiz Segura, 2016, p. 53)

The image of a country directly influences the decisions that a person makes when choosing a destination, who will surely rule out a destination that represents any danger. Most of the travel alerts to Mexico that have been issued are towards the northern part of the country, suggesting that tourists take special care in these places, that even Mexicans also sometimes avoid these northern states due to fear. However, it must also be recognized that the media tend to exaggerate the events that occur, even tourists manage to realize this when visiting places (Adriana Castillo Quiñones, 2018).

An Approach to the Analysis of Violence in Mexico

Mexico is a country that stands out for its levels of violence and crime, and this implies a series of impacts on society and in various areas in general. Tourism for its part is related because those who receive the consequences of the lack of security in the destination are visitors (foreigners and nationals); the impression that tourists take from the destination is a starting point for the place to obtain promotion and growth of arrivals or for it to have a decrease in the influx of its visitors, some experts have studied the phenomenon

More than a decade after starting the security strategy in the administration of former President Felipe Calderón in 2006, the problem of insecurity has ceased to be focused. kidnappings, intentional homicides and robbery with violence have been on the increase (Mejía, 2018)

In 2017, the International Institute for Strategic Studies announced that Mexico was in the second place of the most violent countries in the

world, after Syria. In 2016 alone, official statistics from the Mexican National Public Security System estimate that the number of deaths from intentional homicides was 20,824.

The general director of the IISS (International Institute for Strategic Studies), John Chipman, mentioned that the number of deaths in Afghanistan and Somalia was exceeded by the number of deaths in Mexico, a delicate situation since in the case of Mexico most of the deaths are attributed to small arms (DW, 2017).

In this regard, the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, took the conclusions of the IISS to declare that the wall would be built. However, after that statement, and the rejection of the results by the Mexican government, the IISS, released a statement accepting that the methodology used to carry out the study in which Mexico was positioned as the second most violent country, had some flaws, however, it would continue in the ranking of the 10 most lethal countries in the world, statements that were rejected by the SRE (Secretary of Foreign Relations of Mexico) for the second time, admitting that although there is a significant problem regarding security, Mexico is far from being one of the most violent countries (Milenio, 2019).

Table3. *Crime incidence rate by federal entity of occurrence per hundred thousand inhabitants (2010-2017)*

State	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Baja California Sur	25,779	28,884	31,049	23,747	34,700	25,577	29,939	25,690
Guerrero	33,467	27,040	33,762	35,366	42,690	53,875	47,392	45,006
Jalisco	32,980	29,351	49,083	47,278	43,076	49,317	41,874	43,023
Quintana Roo	41,093	37,725	40,279	35,245	41,381	35,639	32,862	33.269

Source: Own design with information from National Institute of Statistic and Geography

Despite the Situation of Insecurity in the Country,

the new travel alert scheme of the United States government for its citizens has been seen as good news for the main Mexican beach destinations (…) this is because the United States United places the destinations in the new scheme in a category of travel precaution, and not of alert for insecurity". (Valle, 2018)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was documentary, with a qualitative research technique within the materials and methods used to carry out the research were articles and books of a scientific nature (in addition to being in an electronic version) were one of our reliable sources of information, making from the principles of the writing of this document a work of recapitulation and data analysis. On the other hand, important sources and statistical databases such as the UNWTO, SiiMT, INEGI, and DATATUR were fundamental for the development of this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Unfortunately due to phenomena such as the increase in violence and the influence of travel alerts issued by the United States Department of State, the main sun and beach destinations in Mexico, in general, have been affected in terms of tourism, the decrease in visitors is noted in the statistics; however, it should be noted that Los Cabos, BCS shows an exception in its arrival results, despite being considered in 2017 as the "most dangerous city in the world" (CCSPJP, 2018) and, unlike the other study destinations, has remained more stable.

Together with the alerts issued, we found that the constant growth of violence in the country generates problems in the tourist influx, for this reason, we consider that the alerts are, indeed, how the image is presented to tourists, in this case, the refusal of the country and in turn generates the unfavorable impact of visiting the destinations mention before.

CONCLUSIONS

Action must be taken on the matter due to the significant number of cases of violence that occurred in Mexico, especially because of how this factor affects tourism in destinations; it is as if it were a domino effect since the root of the impact is affecting the tourists' destinations, as we have already seen the insecurity that exists in the country. On the other hand, it would be prudent to prepare another study on the case of Los Cabos, BCS, as it has managed to maintain the statistics of its tourists in a more consolidated way and apply the destination security management method in the others that are presenting bigger problems.

It would be prudent to call on the Mexican government to take the necessary actions to put an end to the wave of violence, at least in the beginning that it diminishes, otherwise, the travel alerts will not stop; in turn, the most viable thing to deal with in the matter of the US government is that the department issuing the alerts be requested to show the situation of the country as it is, without exaggerations and objectively, because in many cases the situation is not so chaotic as shown by the alerts and tourists can make their trip without any problem.

The beaches of Mexico are the ideal place to vacation in spring for many young Americans, however, each year, the United States department issues travel alerts at different levels, although the trend in recent years is that the crime and insecurity in Mexico are on the rise, despite this, every year thousands of "Spring Breakers" travel to the beaches of Mexico and their staying are usually pleasant and safe.

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