

Reassurance or reason for concern: Security forces as a crisis management strategy



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Crisis security forces affects perceptions of long-term tourists about community factors.
- Security forces contribution to the destination's community affects life satisfaction.
- Perceived belongingness of security forces negatively affects life satisfaction.
- Destination life satisfaction affects migrants' intention to recommend and return.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 June 2015

Received in revised form

2 April 2016

Accepted 11 April 2016

Keywords:

Signaling theory
Crisis management
Security forces
Winter migrants
Destination security
Safety

ABSTRACT

This paper examines effects of the deployment of security forces to a popular winter migrant destination faced with a unique humanitarian crisis situation. The study surveyed past winter migrants to the region to evaluate their perceptions regarding sociocultural, economic, and psychological impacts of security forces deployed to the region. In addition, this study evaluates the deployment's impact on satisfaction with life in the region, return intention and likelihood of recommending the region to others to find that perceived safety from the security forces significantly affected community factors and that satisfaction with life fully mediated community factor effects on destination loyalty. These findings significantly add to the limited research in crisis management response effects and substantiates the use of signaling and signal crimes perspective in managing crises.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

“People in Texas are concerned about the border... not just illegal immigration, but drugs coming in, human trafficking.”

Lt. Gov. of Texas David Dewhurst (2014)

1. Introduction

In summer 2014, the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) region of South Texas experienced a dramatic surge in undocumented immigrants, with as many as 35,000 immigrants crossing into the U.S. each

month where the RGV was ground zero for the surge considered a humanitarian crisis (Hennessy-Fiske & Carcamo, 2014). As a strategic response to manage the border crisis, the state of Texas deployed 1000 National Guard troops to the region to help secure its border with Mexico. The deployment received widespread media attention that likely reached many of the region's winter migrant population raising concerns about the effects of the deployment on the tourists' return to the region. These winter migrants, known locally as Winter Texans, are primarily retirees from the northern United States and Canada who routinely spend winters in the RGV's tropical region to escape the harsh, cold weather. These seasonal migrants routinely engage in social and recreational activities available in the area. Visiting flea markets, festivals, and historical sites, attending music or jam sessions, dancing, going to the beach, and crossing to Mexico for shopping or medical/dental services are among their most popular activities. In

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2014, the estimated 100,000 winter migrants to the RGV had contributed more than \$710 million in direct spending to the economy and had come to the region for an average of 11 years where 57% owned their own home and 96.6% intended to return the following year (Simpson, 2014). These characteristics suggest that these seasonal visitors are very familiar with the region so are likely to have an interest in what happens there and are likely able to perceive and assess the effects of security forces in the community.

With research suggesting that media reports about disasters and crises can be devastating (Faulkner, 2001) and “have a lasting impression on potential travelers as they formulate decisions to travel (or not to travel) to key border destinations” (Woosnam, Shafer, Scott, & Timothy, 2015, p. 263), significant numbers of winter migrants to the RGV may decide not to return to the region, representing a potential tourism crisis for the destination. This potential is based on Information Integration Theory which suggests that people integrate new information to existing knowledge and experience to form new judgments which influences actions (Anderson, 2014). This may be especially true depending on how the winter migrants view the troop surge and its effectiveness. Would the tourists consider the troop surge a signal of reassurance that the destination is safer? Or would they consider the added troops a signal for concern about deteriorating conditions in the destination?

The purpose of this study then is to examine the effects of the well-publicized crisis management strategy of adding security forces to a travel destination experiencing a security crisis on perceptions and loyalty of frequent visitors—the winter migrants—to the region. With no known similar studies, the results of this research should contribute significantly to tourism research in three significant areas. First, this study should contribute to the tourism literature by focusing on frequent, long-term stay seasonal travelers, an important market for destinations worldwide. Second, the results should provide important insights about effects of news media coverage of the policing strategy on perceived effectiveness of the security forces and the tourists' perceived effects of the forces on the destination, satisfaction with life in the destination and loyalty to the destination. Third, and most importantly, the research adds to the nascent tourism crisis management literature by testing the signaling effects of overt policing. According to Fuchs and Reichel (2011) and Pizam, Tarlow, and Bloom (1997), further research is necessary to understand the effects of law enforcement strategies at destinations with security concerns. This gap in tourism research is unfortunate because of the potential implications of perceived security to the economic well-being of tourism destinations.

2. Tourism crisis management and policing

The mass surge of undocumented immigrants and the subsequent deployment of troops to the RGV constitutes a crisis according to Sönmez, Backman, and Allen's (1994, p. 22) definition of a tourism crisis:

“any occurrence which can threaten the normal operation and conduct of tourism related businesses; damage a tourist destination's overall reputation for safety, attractiveness and comfort by negatively affecting visitors' perceptions of that destination; and, in turn, cause a downturn in the local travel and tourism economy and interrupt the continuity of business operations for the local travel and tourism industry by the reduction in tourist arrivals and expenditures” (in Sönmez, Apostolopoulos, & Tarlow, 1999).

In the RGV, the large-scale deployment of troops as a strategy to secure the border will certainly have an effect on the destination's overall reputation for safety—either positively or negatively—that will likely impact tourism. As Hall, Timothy, and Duval (2004, p. 2) importantly note, “Tourism is irrevocably bound up with the concept of security. Tourist behavior and, consequently, destinations, are deeply affected by perceptions of security and the management of safety, security and risk.” Yet, few studies to date have examined effects of any strategic response to potential security crises (Carlsen & Liburd, 2007) other than those that have examined ways of mitigating traveler perceived risk at a destination related to terrorism and communications after a terrorism event (e.g., Paraskevas & Arendell, 2007) or about advertising and communications efforts (e.g., Floyd, Gibson, Pennington-Gray, & Thapa, 2004; Lepp, Gibson, & Lane, 2011).

A few tourism studies have proposed frameworks for understanding tourism crisis management (Faulkner, 2001; Mansfeld, 1999; Paraskevas & Arendell, 2007; Ritchie, 2004; Santana, 2004; Sönmez et al., 1999). Although all of the frameworks advise communication and coordination with destination stakeholders, Sönmez et al. (1999) crisis management framework in the context of terrorism specifically advises destinations to partner with law enforcement officials where the partnership can play a pivotal role “in managing crises and helping to restore public faith in the safety and normalcy of the destination” (p. 17). Paraskevas and Arendell (2007) research came to a similar conclusion suggesting that overt or visible security presence measures should be effective in deterring crime (terrorists) and that those efforts should be communicated to internal and external constituents.

Despite recommendations to use visible security or overt policing as a tourism crisis management strategy, research regarding the action is limited. An exception is research regarding the presence of overt security measures, such as security guards, at hotels and airports (Enz, 2009; Feickert, Verma, Plaschka, & Dev, 2006; Rittichainuwat, 2013). While some of these studies have found positive effects of overt security on guests' perceived safety, a few studies have suggested negative effects. For example Jackson (2009) and Feickert et al. (2006) suggest that increasing police forces at destinations could make tourists feel more afraid and nervous. Nevertheless, Rittichainuwat (2013) study concluded that after a destination bombing, overt security measures made in-bound tourists feel safer but that security measures considered too stringent would deter them from staying at their selected hotel. Thus, whether a policing presence in a tourism destination signals to travelers either an unsafe environment or an appropriate intervention to alleviate security concerns is yet unknown but may depend upon perceived intrusiveness of the security.

2.1. Signaling and security

Drawing from Spence (1973; 2002) works in economics designed to explain the communication of information given information asymmetry, Connolly, Certo, Ireland, and Reutzel (2011) describe signaling theory as behavior between parties when one party, the sender, sends a deliberate message to another party, the receiver. As examples, a firm might communicate quality to stakeholders through various means such as debt and dividends (Connolly et al., 2011) and a job applicant might signal that he or she is a higher quality candidate than other applicants by attending a high-quality university (Spence, 1973). Accordingly, signaling theory has been examined in a number of contexts including congressional oversight (Cameron & Rosendorff, 1993), management (Connolly et al., 2011), anthropological topics (Bird & Smith, 2005) and in marketing (e.g., Basuroy, Desai, & Talukdar, 2006).

Signaling theory has been used in tourism research as a foundation for examining travelers' reactions to communications or advertisements about price and service quality (Chiu & Chen, 2014; Schwartz, 2007), but not in a security context.

Effects of crime or disorder and efforts to control perceptions of risk at a destination may be explained by signaling theory and the closely related Signal Crimes Perspective (SCP) (i.e., Innes, 2004a; 2004b; Innes, Hayden, Lowe, Roberts, & Twyman, 2004) from the criminal justice and policing literature. SCP is a framework for understanding how 'signal crimes' and 'control signals' shape perceptions of safety and risk, fear and anxiety at a location. A signal crime is a specific incident of crime or disorder that is observed or widely-communicated, often through the news media, which affects perceptions of individual or collective security (i.e., Innes, 2004a; 2004b; Innes et al, 2004). A control signal is an intervention or "act of formal or informal social control that functions to communicate a message about the presence or absence of effective security mechanisms" (Innes et al, 2004, p. viii). In both cases, the crime or disorder event and the control signal measures must be publicized to have an impact on the public's affective response.

One such control signal that has received some empirical support is a reassurance policing strategy. Here, the visible presence of police is increased, thus sending a symbolic message of intervention to control crime and disorder (Innes, 2004b) with the intention of restoring the public's sense safety at a location. Research about reassurance policing has found that the deployment of police to an area can help improve feelings of safety (Bahn, 1974), improve perceptions related to crime prevalence (Quinton & Morris, 2008) and improve perceived security (Skogan, 2009) because a visible police presence generally deters criminal activity, reduces the number of crimes committed, and reduces fear among area residents (Di Tella & Schargrodsky, 2004; Zhao, Scheider, & Thurman, 2002, for example). In a tourism context, a visible presence of law enforcement may provide travelers with a greater sense of security at a destination or may signal a concern best avoided, but research on effects are mixed.

2.2. Study context: winter migrants and place attachment

The winter migrants to the RGV are considered tourists because they travel outside of their home residence, travel for a non-employment purposes and intend to return home (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006; Hall & Page, 1999). Further, they are considered permanent, seasonal migrants according to Hall and Williams' (2013) evolutionary process model whereby temporary tourists are transformed into permanent migrants through repeated visits to the same destination. The authors explain that repeated visits create a familiarity with the destination where favorable destination-related experiences, friendships and social networks are developed which may result in a "powerful sense of attachment to these places" (p. 11) and where many of the migrants purchase a second home for their return.

Whether owning a second home at a destination or not, the attachment of seasonal migrants to a destination has been well-chronicled (Lewicka, 2011). For example, Gustafson (2002) interview study of seasonal, retirement migrants to Spain found that the migrants tended to disassociate themselves from tourists and felt their lives in Spain were normal and ordinary and had the "desire to present themselves as integrated and knowledgeable about Spanish society" (p. 909). Research by Simpson and Siguaw (2008, p. 178) found that winter migrants had "embraced the region as an important part of their self-concept" and Stedman (2006) found that seasonal residents who had second homes in a destination had a greater place attachment to the area than did year-round residents. Although the research is mixed about whether seasonal

migrants or second home owners are more or less attached to a destination than permanent residents, a number of studies have found emotional bonding in both types of residents and that time spent at a location is a powerful predictor of place attachment and that a strong place attachment is related to overall life satisfaction (Lewicka, 2011), as are vacations/trips and trip experiences (see Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016 for an excellent review of the quality of life in tourism research). The strong emotions likely held by the long-term winter migrants suggests they care about the destination and enjoy their life while there and plan to return each year.

Despite the emotional, social, and financial ties to the area and the quality of life while there, permanent migrants could decide to winter at another destination or may decide to return home permanently for a number of reasons (Hall & Williams, 2013). Reasons include an increased concern for safety, which is especially important to seniors (Kazemini, Del Chiappa, & Jafari, 2015), and perceived deterioration in community life and well-being and economic conditions (Hall & Williams, 2013). Thus, the widespread media reports about the surge of undocumented immigrants and the dramatic increase in National Guard troops could reach the area's winter migrant population and signal a deterioration of security in their winter home and affect their likelihood of returning or it could signal the same secure and unchanged destination enjoyed for many years in the past.

2.3. Hypothesized relationships

With the uncertainty of conditions arising from the surge in undocumented immigrants and the surge in troops to enforce border security, the likely return of the significant winter migrant population with a strong attachment to the destination is unknown. However, several theories and some research hint at possible effects. First, Information Integration Theory (IIT) suggests that the information the winter migrants receive about the surges will be evaluated and considered in the migrants' decision to return or not to their winter home. IIT is a dynamic process theory of cognition that explains that new thoughts and judgments are formed toward a purpose or goal by weighing and evaluating new information in combination with internalized prior experiences, memory, judgments and so forth; which then impacts action (Anderson, 2014). The theory deals with everyday life perceptions and decision-making and has been used previously in tourism research examining effects of news stories on traveler decisions and behavior (e.g. Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, Kaplanidou, & Zhan, 2013; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998).

Second, signaling theory and the signal control perspective suggest that the presence of law enforcement, as recommended by various tourism crisis management frameworks, signals the reassuring message that the destination security is being provided so that constituents should feel safer with a visible policing presence. Finally, according to the quality of life integrated theoretical framework developed by Uysal et al. (2016), tourists are linked to destination communities from which tourists derive quality-of-life effects from various destination domains, including economic, safety and community well-being, which then affects return intention (e.g., Kim, Woo, & Uysal, 2015). The proposed relationships for testing in this study are shown in Fig. 1.

2.4. News media and security

The role of media communications in tourists' attitudes and travel decision-making has been included in a number of destination choice models in the literature (Mansfeld, 1992; Moutinho, 1987; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). That news media coverage and reports can greatly influence the perceptions of tourists about

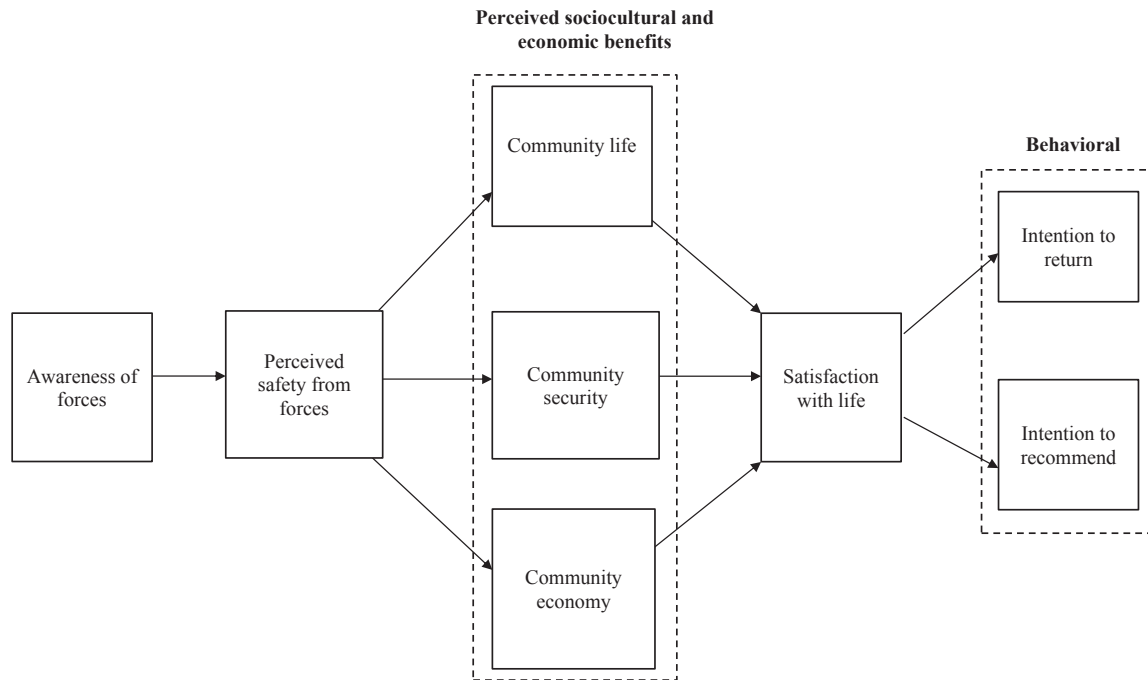


Fig. 1. Model of security forces effects.

safety and security at destinations has been empirically shown (e.g., Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). For instance, in the early 90s the tourism industry in Florida was negatively impacted by national media coverage of a crime wave against tourists (Schiebler, Crotts, & Hollinger, 1996) and a reduction in tourist arrivals in Mexico during the influenza A (H1N1) epidemic in 2009 was mainly derived from the alarmist tones of the media, not from the actual impacts of the infection (Monterrubio, 2010).

To improve tourists' perception of destinations, managers at destinations can employ mass media to disseminate information about crime/disorder controls that makes current and prospective visitors feel safer (Armstrong & Ritchie, 2008; Huang, Tseng, & Petrick, 2008). From the signaling crime perspective, the news media is important in shaping the public's response to both signal crimes and signal controls (Innes, 2004a). Thus, if visitors learn through the media about the presence of security forces at the destination under study, they may be more likely to notice and positively evaluate the intervention of security forces. Conversely, visitors who are not aware of the presence of security forces are less likely to perceive and appreciate any effects from a security forces surge. Accordingly:

H1. News awareness of the surge in security forces will have a significant and positive effect on perceived safety provided by the forces.

2.5. Security forces effects

The deployment of security forces and their perceived effectiveness in response to crime- and migration-related concerns should influence the public's perception of the safety, sociocultural, and economic outcomes of the deployment. From a signaling or SCP standpoint, by deploying security forces, the government sends a signal of greater stability to reassure the public that the area is safe. Therefore, if visitors perceive the deployment of security forces to be an effective signal that their security needs are being met, then the visitors are likely to expect an improvement in security and other destination community factors.

In their work on identifying the impact of tourism on a community, Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, and Vogt (2005) identified categories of consequences of tourism development. The study's factor analysis resulted in various specific areas of impact, including community life (i.e., belonging and culture), community problems (i.e., crime and insecurity), and community economy (i.e., jobs and tax revenues). Just as the Andereck et al. (2005) study found perceived effects of tourists on different dimensions of a community, seasonal residents of a destination may also anticipate effects of the added security forces on the destination community, especially considering the long-term, place-attached nature of typical seasonal migrants (i.e., Gustafson, 2002; Hall & Williams, 2013; Lewicka, 2011).

Research shows that crime and insecurity have a profoundly negative impact on the life of communities, reduce business' competitiveness, discourage investments, and impose burdens on governments (Detotto & Otranto, 2010; Taylor, 1995). Yet, empirical studies have demonstrated that an increase in law enforcement agents is a major determinant of crime rate decline in conflict zones (Corman & Mocan, 2000; Levitt, 2004). Particularly after the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. intensified US-Mexico border control efforts by deploying armed forces and surveillance equipment to reduce undocumented migration, drugs, and terrorism (Ackleson, 2005), an action that "reduced the visibility of border transgressions and, thus, an element significant to societal threat perception" (Rudolph, 2003, p. 615). Such reductions in criminal activity result in highly valuable, tangible and intangible benefits to society (Cohen, Rust, Steen, & Tidd, 2004; McCollister, French, & Fang, 2010).

Not surprising then, tourism researchers have argued that responses to crises should be highly visible and include support from law enforcement organizations (e.g., Sönmez et al., 1999). However, most of the tourism research on overt security effects has focused on the hotel industry because security is a top priority among leisure travelers when selecting hotels (Choi & Chu, 2000). Some of these studies of hotel security have found that uniformed security guards are a top guest-preferred security feature (Chan & Lam, 2013) and that guests are willing to pay more when they see

highly visible security measures, such as metal detectors and security guards, depending on a number of factors (Feickert et al., 2006). However, Feickert and colleagues note that the presence of security guards may actually make guests feel less secure by creating “the impression that the hotel has had security issues” (p. 241). Thus, in general, most tourists are likely to feel safer from overt security measures, such as the presence of security guards, unless the measures are considered too stringent or obtrusive (Feickert et al., 2006; Groenenboom & Jones, 2003; Rittichainuwat, 2013). The deployment of 1000 National Guard troops across a 1254 mile border between Texas and Mexico in response to the immigration crisis may be perceived as nonintrusive and appropriate to ensure destination security and well-being. Consequently:

H2a. The perceived safety provided by the security forces surge will have a significant and positive effect on perceptions of community life.

H2b. The perceived safety provided by the security forces surge will have a significant and positive effect on perceptions of community security.

H2c. The perceived safety provided by the security forces surge will have a significant and positive effect on perceptions of the community economy.

2.6. Security forces effects on satisfaction with life in the region

Satisfaction with life (SWL) is defined as “a global evaluation of the quality of life and is part of the broader construct of subjective well-being” (Hahn, Johnson, & Spinath, 2013, p. 757) and has been studied extensively in many disciplines and in many contexts (see Diener, Inglehart, & Tay, 2013; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999 for excellent reviews), including effects of community or tourism factors on life satisfaction (Uysal et al., 2016). How well security forces are perceived to fit into the community's life and enhance its image, reduce crime, drugs and vandalism, and spur the economy should influence the SWL for both residents and long-term tourists at the destination.

Researchers studying SWL of residents or tourists have generally focused on the effects of sociocultural, economic and environmental factors on SWL (Andereck et al., 2005; Poudel, Nyaupane, & Budruk, 2016). As one example, residents' perceptions of community provided services, such as public safety and economic development, were found to predict global community satisfaction and global life satisfaction (Sirgy, Rahtz, Cicic, & Underwood, 2000). This and other SWL studies were reviewed by Sirgy and Cornwell (2002) to develop a model whereby physical, social and economic neighborhood features affect life satisfaction through effects on satisfaction with the neighborhood, housing, home and community.

Community residents' perceptions of the effects of tourists on sociocultural, economic and environmental factors have been examined as well (García, Vázquez, & Macías, 2015; Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013), finding that residents perceive that tourists impact their quality of life both positively and negatively. A summary of this work appears in Andereck and Nyaupane's (2011) research designed to develop a Tourism Quality of Life measure based on different domains including community well-being (safety and cleanliness), way of life, economic strength, and crime and substance abuse. Along the same lines, Woo, Kim, and Uysal's (2015) research of residents at various tourism destinations found that overall quality of life was largely determined by material domains and non-material domains perceived as outcomes derived from tourism activity.

This prior research suggests that seasonal migrants to a destination who have a strong attachment to the destination may experience greater levels of SWL at the destination if they believe that their security and way of life is better protected, and if they believe that the protectors contribute to the destinations' economic and sociocultural environment. For example, travel experiences in different life satisfaction domains, such as the positive and negative experiences with arts and culture and negative associations with health and safety, were found to significantly affect overall SWL (Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, & Grace, 2011). Another traveler study found that seasonal migrants to a destination reported a greater overall SWL in their travel destination than in their home towns and that items related to health (cleanliness, landscaping and safety) and financial dimensions (cost of living and housing) significantly affected SWL (Simpson, Siguaw, & Sheng, 2016).

Thus, when visitors perceive greater sociocultural, safety, and economic benefits, they feel greater life satisfaction at the destination. Consistent with the evidence presented in this section, the signal sent to tourists via the added security forces and the favorable interpretation of their contribution to the community would affect their destination SWL. Accordingly:

H3a. The perceived impact of the added security forces on the region's community life will have a significant and positive effect on satisfaction with life.

H3b. The perceived impact of the added security forces on the community's security will have a significant and positive effect on satisfaction with life.

H3c. The perceived impact of the added security forces on the community's economy will have a significant and positive effect on satisfaction with life.

2.7. Satisfaction with life and return intention

Return intention is a widely used construct in tourism and in marketing based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) which maintains that attitudes, including satisfaction, affect intentions, which then affect behavior. In this way, return intention is often used as a proxy for destination loyalty. Despite the shortcomings of using return intention as a viable indication of destination loyalty for a number of reasons (Dolnicar, Colman, & Sharma, 2015; McKercher, Denizci-Gillet, & Ng, 2012), tourism researchers continue to use the measure (e.g., Jo, Lee, & Reisinger, 2014; Moufakkir, 2014). In addition, return intention has been used in past research examining effects of life satisfaction on destination selection and return to find that: the degree of life satisfaction in seniors is a predictor of where they choose to travel (Zimmer, Brayley, & Searle, 1995), that higher levels of well-being from certain travel domains impact destination return intention (Lin, 2014; Uysal et al., 2016), and that travel experience, leisure life satisfaction and quality of life impact revisit intention for elderly travelers (Kim et al., 2015). Thus:

H4. Satisfaction with life will have a significant and positive effect on intention to return to the region.

2.8. Satisfaction with life and recommendation likelihood

Reichheld (2003) writes that the only metric really needed to assess customer loyalty is customer recommendation likelihood. While some academics argue that other measures are important (Keiningham, Cooil, Andreassen, & Aksoy, 2007) or are more reliable, especially in tourism studies (i.e., McKercher et al., 2012), the

recommendation measure is still widely used as an outcome measure of consumer preferences. In tourism, recommendation or the closely related word-of-mouth, has been used in a number of life satisfaction and well-being studies including effects of negative word-of-mouth about hotels (He & Harris, 2014; Jo et al., 2014) and effects of travel experiences among the elderly (Kim et al., 2015). In line with these studies:

H5. Satisfaction with life will have a significant and positive affect on likelihood of recommending the region.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Online questionnaires are a convenient way to collect data with a low respondent dropout rate and less incomplete data (Dolnicar, Laesser, & Matus, 2009). Thus, data for this research were collected via an online questionnaire during fall 2014 after the initial troop surge in summer 2014 to members of a winter migrant panel. The panel members are respondents to 2010, 2012 and 2014 past studies designed to examine the economic impact of the migrants on the RGV and who had agreed to serve on a panel for winter migrant-related research purposes. As such, the migrants were frequent visitors familiar with the RGV and so were likely to have paid attention to news reports about the area. Although the respondents represent a nonprobability sample and thus limit the generalizability of findings, nonprobability samples are often necessary when the size of the study population is unknown as with our research (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

Respondents for this survey were recruited by an email invitation with a link to the online questionnaire sent to 1120 panel members. Of those e-mailings, 91 were returned as undeliverable. A follow-up email was sent about three weeks later and 20 more emails were returned as undeliverable. In total 1009 emails resulted in 413 survey participants for a response rate of 40.9%. Of these responses, seven had more than 15% missing data so were removed as recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010), bringing the total useable cases to 406 for the analysis. Demographic characteristics of the respondents are provided in Table 1. Most respondents were male (55%) Caucasians (97.3%) with at least some college (87.8%) and an annual household income of \$50,000US or more (69.2%). Respondents were 69.9 years of age, on average, and had come to the RGV for an average of 10.7 years and stayed an average of 146 days.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics.

| Characteristic | Category | Result |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 55.0% |
| | Female | 45.0% |
| Average age | | 69.9 years |
| Ethnicity | White | 97.3% |
| Highest educational attainment | Less than high school | 0.2% |
| | High school graduate | 11.9% |
| | Some college, no degree | 29.5% |
| | Associate's degree | 15.6% |
| | Bachelor's degree | 18.4% |
| Income | Graduate/professional degree | 24.3% |
| | Less than \$30,000 | 3.5% |
| | \$30,000 – \$49,999 | 27.3% |
| | \$50,000 – \$79,999 | 44.6% |
| | \$80,000 – \$99,999 | 11.7% |
| | \$100,000 or more | 12.9% |
| Average stay in the RGV | | 146 days |
| Years coming to the RGV | | 10.7 year |

3.2. Scale measures

Measures for news media awareness and perceived safety from security forces were created for this study while the items for the perceived sociocultural and economic benefits to the destination were adapted from a study that had previously examined perceived impacts of tourism on a community (Andereck et al., 2005). The life satisfaction measure was adapted from a widely-used and tested measure developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). As seen in Table 2, each of these scales were multi-item measures that asked respondents to indicate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Both recommendation and return likelihood were assessed on a 10-point likelihood scale where respondents were asked to indicate how likely they are to recommend living in the Rio Grande Valley to a friend or family and how likely they are to return to the Valley next year.

4. Analysis and results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for this analysis for several reasons. SEM is used by researchers studying real-life phenomenon with increasing use in tourism research (Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursory, 2013), is particularly useful for theory testing (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) and is a “quasi-standard” in marketing research for testing theoretical models (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012). Further, the sample size is adequate for an SEM analysis with a statistical power of 0.80 based on the number of constructs in the research model (Cohen, 1988; Soper, 2015) and the data were compliant with the required statistical assumptions for SEM analysis. The data approximated normal distribution with all skewness and most kurtosis scores within the range of –1.0 to 1.0 as suggested by Huck (2012). A visual examination of residual plots indicated linear relationships and the variance inflation factors (VIFs) indicated no violation of multicollinearity among the independent variables (Hair et al., 2010). The proposed measurement and structural models were then tested using SEM with AMOS 22.0.

4.1. Measurement model

Table 2 shows that all factor loadings are greater than 0.5, construct reliabilities range from 0.772 to 0.929, and Cronbach's alphas range from 0.771 to 0.929, which are sufficiently high as recommended by Hair et al. (2010) to ensure internal reliability of measures. In addition, Table 3 shows that all AVEs are greater than 0.5 and higher than the squared correlations between constructs. Therefore, the study measures share a proportion of the variance in relation to the theory constructs, but are also distinguishable from other constructs in the same research model providing evidence of convergent and discriminant validity (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the model yielded the following goodness of fit indexes: a chi-square to df ratio (χ^2/df) of 3.180, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.073, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) of 0.917, comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.928, and parsimony normed fit index (PNFI) of 0.779. These fit indexes are indicative of an appropriate measurement model (Hair et al., 2010).

4.2. Structural model

With the CFA showing a good fit of the data, the structural model shown in Fig. 1 was estimated and results shown in Fig. 2. The SEM path analysis revealed that all the hypothesized relationships are statistically significant. As reported in Table 4, the

Table 2
Study measures.

| Measure statistics | Item description | Loadings |
|---|---|--|
| Awareness of security forces CR = 0.903 α = 0.898 | About the new, added security forces: I am very aware of the new security forces through news stories in the media. The news media has frequently mentioned the added security forces in the RGV. There have been many news reports recently about the added security forces. | 0.744 0.900 0.955 |
| Perceived safety from forces CR = 0.772 α = 0.771 | Thinking about your life in the Rio Grande Valley... The RGV is much safer now with the increase in security forces. I am much less likely to be a victim of crime in the RGV with the added security forces. | 0.808 0.721 |
| Community life CR = 0.888 α = 0.885 | The crime rate has declined since the increase in security forces in the RGV. The added security forces in the Rio Grande Valley... Belong in the RGV Improve my personal quality of life Improve the RGV image Understand different cultures | 0.650 0.754 0.871 0.857 0.776 |
| Community security CR = 0.929 α = 0.929 | The added security forces in the Rio Grande Valley... Reduce the number of undocumented immigrants entering the RGV Reduce drug trafficking in the RGV Reduce organized crime and drug cartels in the RGV Reduce infectious diseases in the RGV Reduce human trafficking Reduce RGV crime and vandalism | 0.780 0.857 0.912 0.712 0.930 0.764 |
| Community economy CR = 0.911 α = 0.908 | The added security forces in the Rio Grande Valley... Lead to new jobs for residents Lead to new RGV businesses Lead to an increase in house/land values Improve RGV tax revenues | 0.868 0.931 0.810 0.776 |
| Satisfaction with Life CR = 0.923 α = 0.913 | Thinking about your life in the Rio Grande Valley... In most ways my life in the RGV is close to my ideal. The conditions of my life in the RGV are excellent. I am satisfied with my life in the RGV. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life in the RGV. If I could live my life over in the RGV, I would change almost nothing. | 0.852 0.895 0.896 0.834 0.709 |

Note: CR = composite reliability; α = Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix.

| Latent constructs | M. | S.D. | Skw. | Kts. | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. Awareness of security forces | 3.72 | 0.89 | −0.78 | 0.64 | 0.75 | | | | | | |
| 2. Perceived safety from forces | 2.94 | 0.65 | −0.47 | 1.39 | 0.53 | 0.140 | | | | | |
| 3. Community life | 3.56 | 0.80 | −0.46 | 0.44 | 0.66 | 0.180 | 0.455 | | | | |
| 4. Community security | 3.36 | 0.89 | −0.47 | 0.11 | 0.68 | 0.183 | 0.578 | 0.675 | | | |
| 5. Community economy | 3.15 | 0.78 | −0.36 | 0.89 | 0.71 | 0.161 | 0.524 | 0.633 | 0.698 | | |
| 6. Satisfaction with life | 3.66 | 0.72 | −0.90 | 1.75 | 0.70 | 0.118 | 0.325 | 0.121 | 0.266 | 0.265 | |

Note: M. = mean; S.D. = standard deviation; Skw. = skewness; Kts. = kurtosis; AVE = average variance extracted. Values below the diagonal are the bivariate correlations and all are statistically significant. Values above the diagonal are squared correlations.

directionality of the hypotheses was supported, except for [hypothesis H3a](#) which was statistically significant but in an inverse direction. Positive relationships were found between the awareness of security forces and perceived safety from the added forces ([hypothesis 1](#): $\gamma = 0.206$, $p < 0.001$) and between perceived safety from forces and the outcomes of the added security forces to the region: community life benefits ([hypothesis 2a](#): $\beta = 0.783$, $p < 0.001$), security benefits ([hypothesis 2b](#): $\beta = 0.858$, $p < 0.001$), and economic benefits ([hypothesis 2c](#): $\beta = 0.813$, $p < 0.001$). A negative, significant relationship was found between community life benefits and SWL at the destination ([hypothesis 3a](#): $\beta = -0.158$, $p < 0.05$), which could be explained by the reason the security forces are in the region in the first place. The forces were brought in because of a security crisis so the presence of the forces is a reminder of the underlying crisis, which negatively impacts the perceived community life. This is consistent with [Pennington-Gray and Pizam \(2011\)](#), who noted that the impacts of a security crises on a community's social dimension can lead to a decline in quality of life. Nevertheless, positive effects on SWL at the destination were found for community security ([hypothesis 3b](#): $\beta = 0.253$, $p < 0.01$)

and economic benefits ([hypothesis 3c](#): $\beta = 0.185$, $p < 0.05$). In turn, SWL was found to have a positive and significant effect on intention to return ([hypothesis 4](#): $\beta = 0.648$, $p < 0.001$) and intention to recommend the destination ([hypothesis 5](#): $\beta = 0.727$, $p < 0.001$) as expected.

The structural model suggests a chain of causal effects with varied effect sizes in the endogenous constructs, as revealed by the squared multiple correlations derived from the path analysis. The amount of variance explained in perceived safety from forces ($R^2 = 0.043$) and SWL were modest ($R^2 = 0.098$), but were substantial for community life ($R^2 = 0.613$), community security ($R^2 = 0.736$), community economy ($R^2 = 0.661$), intention to return ($R^2 = 0.419$) and intention to recommend ($R^2 = 0.528$).

4.3. Intervening effects

Under the perspective of signaling theory, the perceived impacts of the presence of security forces may directly influence visitors' behavioral intentions. A test of these direct effects found that the perceived benefits to the community life domain did not have a

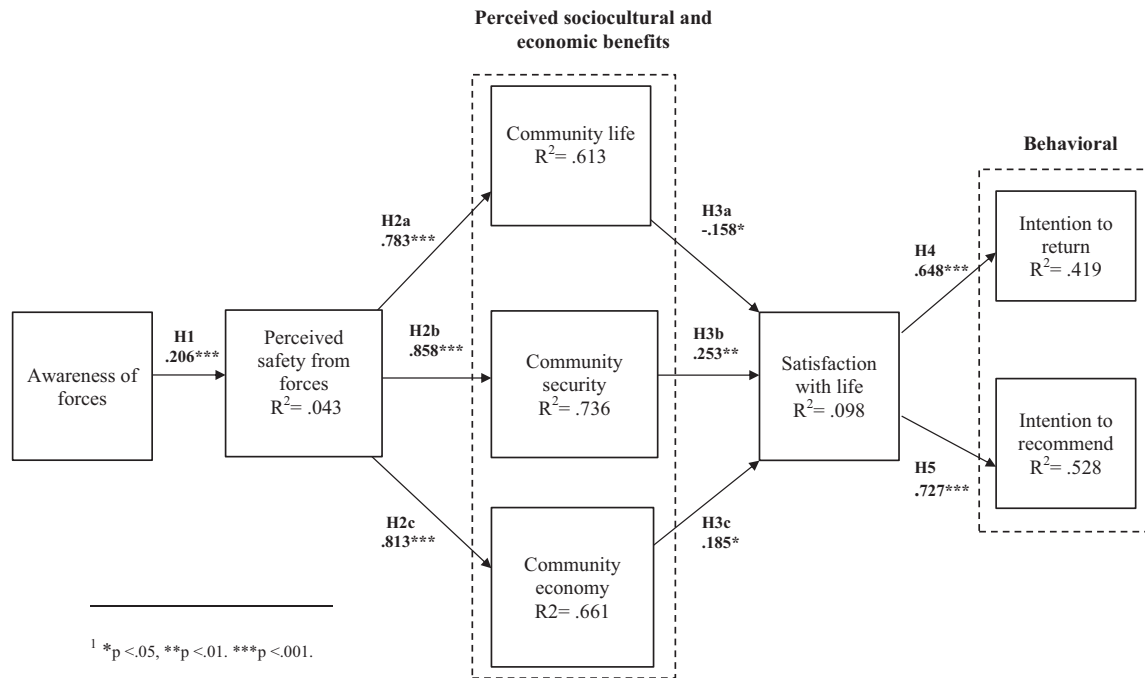


Fig. 2. Model of security forces effects.

Table 4
Path analysis results.

| Hypothesized relations | Standardized coefficient | Hypotheses results |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------|
| H ₁ Awareness of forces → Safety from forces | 0.206*** | Supported |
| H _{2a} Safety from forces → Community life | 0.783*** | Supported |
| H _{2b} Safety from forces → Community security | 0.858*** | Supported |
| H _{2c} Safety from forces → Community economy | 0.813*** | Supported |
| H _{3a} Community life → SWL | −0.158* | Partially supported |
| H _{3b} Community security → SWL | 0.253** | Supported |
| H _{3c} Community economy → SWL | 0.185* | Supported |
| H ₄ SWL → Intention to return | 0.648*** | Supported |
| H ₅ SWL → Intention to recommend | 0.727*** | Supported |

Note: Chi-square to df ratio (χ^2/df) = 3.480; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.078; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.907; parsimony normed fit index (PNFI) = 0.733.

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

statistically significant relationship with intention to return and recommend the RGV. However, perceived benefits of the added forces to the community's security and economy domains did have statistically significant effects on intention to return and to recommend, suggesting the potential intervening effects of satisfaction with life in those relationships.

Accordingly, the extent of any partial or full mediation effects were examined by, assessing the change in path coefficients and model fits ($\Delta\chi^2/df$) of the relationships of interest (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hair et al., 2010). Regression coefficients from the independent variable to the dependent variable (equation 1), from the independent variable to the mediator (equation 2), and from the independent and mediator variables to the dependent variable (equation 3) were computed as shown in Table 5 to determine mediation effects.

A model with the mediation of SWL between the perceived benefits of security forces on community security and intention to return yielded a model fit (χ^2/df) of 3.53. Then, adding a direct path between benefits to community security and intention to return provided a model fit (χ^2/df) of 3.60. According to Hair et al. (2010), this result indicates a mediation effect because the direct path did not improve the fit of the model. Similarly, the statistically

significant path between community security and intention to return in equation 1 (0.171, $p < 0.001$) becomes insignificant in equation 3 (0.002, $p = 0.958$) when SWL is included as a mediator, indicating a full mediation effect. Mediation of SWL was tested in the relationship between the benefits to community security and intention to recommend, resulting in a model fit (χ^2/df) of 3.79. A mediation effect was revealed by a model fit (χ^2/df) of 3.85 when a direct path was added between benefits to community security and intention to recommend. As reflected in the second mediation test in Table 5, the statistically significant effect between community security and intention to recommend in equation (1) (0.164, $p < 0.01$) is reduced to a non-significant statistical level in equation 3 (−0.028, $p = 0.464$), supporting a full mediation of SWL.

The mediation of SWL between the perceived benefits of added security forces to community economy and intention to return resulted in a model fit (χ^2/df) of 2.53. Adding a direct path between benefits on community economy and intention to return changed the model fit (χ^2/df) to 2.60, providing evidence of a mediation effect because the direct path did not improve the model fit. As shown in the third mediation test in Table 5, the statistically significant path between community economy and intention to return in equation (1) (0.182, $p < 0.001$) becomes insignificant in equation 3

Table 5
Mediation effects of satisfaction with life.

| Mediation results | Dependent Variable | Independent Variables | Coefficients |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Full Mediation Supported | | | |
| Equation 1 | Intention to return | Community security | 0.171*** |
| Equation 2 | SWL | Community security | 0.270*** |
| Equation 3 | Intention to return | SWL | 0.621*** |
| | | Community security | 0.002 |
| Full Mediation Supported | | | |
| Equation 1 | Intention to recommend | Community security | 0.164** |
| Equation 2 | SWL | Community security | 0.270*** |
| Equation 3 | Intention to recommend | SWL | 0.716*** |
| | | Community security | −0.028 |
| Full Mediation Supported | | | |
| Equation 1 | Intention to return | Community economy | 0.182*** |
| Equation 2 | SWL | Community economy | 0.248*** |
| Equation 3 | Intention to return | SWL | 0.615*** |
| | | Community economy | 0.031 |
| Full Mediation Supported | | | |
| Equation 1 | Intention to recommend | Community economy | 0.139** |
| Equation 2 | SWL | Community economy | 0.248*** |
| Equation 3 | Intention to recommend | SWL | 0.717*** |
| | | Community economy | −0.038 |

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01.

(0.031, $p = 0.482$) with SWL as a full mediator. Likewise, the relationship between benefits to community economy and intention to recommend produced a model fit (χ^2/df) of 2.57 when mediated by SWL. Then, adding a direct path between benefits to community economy and intention to recommend yields a model fit (χ^2/df) of 2.62, supporting the existence of mediation effects. As depicted in the fourth mediation test in Table 5, the statistically significant relationship between community economy and intention to recommend in equation (1) (0.139, $p < 0.01$) disappears in equation 3 (−0.038, $p = 0.332$), demonstrating the full mediation of SWL.

5. Conclusions

This research was designed to examine effects of the deployment of security forces to the Rio Grande Valley as a crisis management strategy to secure the borders of a destination that is home to a hundred thousand winter migrants. The findings are important for a number of reasons including its results, its contribution to the literature, its managerial implications and its theoretical implications.

The overall study results indicate that the deployment of security forces in response to a security crisis is a useful policy tool to improve perceptions of frequent visitors about the destination. More specifically, the highly publicized deployment created awareness of the deployment among the public, including the destination's winter migrants, who then formed a perception of the effectiveness of the forces. The perceived effectiveness of the security forces in providing a safe environment was important in determining the impact of the forces on the destination's well-being. The winter migrants who believed the security forces to be effective were likely to strongly believe that they improve community security and positively affect the economy of the region. Each of these factors led to a higher life satisfaction at the destination and a greater likelihood of returning to and recommending the destination to others.

5.1. Contribution to the literature and theory

This study contributes significantly to the tourism and well-being literatures and theory. In general, past research has focused on risk reduction strategies which are generally from the traveler perspective to report ways that travelers mitigate risk. Another

limited path of prior study has examined destination efforts to mitigate perceived risk of travelers but these studies are generally related to communication and promotion efforts rather than destination efforts to address the cause of the security concerns and their effects (Armstrong & Ritchie, 2008; Huang et al., 2008). Although a few of the risk reduction studies have examined effects of overt security, the studies have generally been limited to perceptions of guests about overt security at hotels and not about a destination in general. Thus, the findings from this study add to the traveler perceived risk reduction research.

Within the tourism crisis management literature, this is one of only a few studies to examine the effects of a response to a security crisis (Carlsen & Liburd, 2007), thus the results add to the tourism crisis management literature as well. Also, as recommended by Woosnam et al. (2015), this research studies the effects of the presence of security forces on tourists' perceived safety at international border areas. In addition, an important contribution to the literature is this study's examination of destination life satisfaction in tourists who are considered permanent migrants at the destination, whereas the extant literature has only addressed life satisfaction either in tourists or in residents in host communities (see the extensive review by Uysal et al., 2016). Our findings suggest that the perceived sociocultural and economic benefits derived from the government's intervention at the destination are important factors on winter migrants' life satisfaction at the destination and that satisfaction with life at the destination is important in affecting return intention and likelihood of recommending the destination to others.

Findings from this study also have significant implications to theory. Results support the tourism crises management frameworks proposed by several researchers who had indicated the importance of communication and coordination with law enforcement in a crisis (Paraskevas & Arendell, 2007; Sönmez et al., 1999). This research shows that the deployed security forces may be seen as contributing not only to the security of the community but also to the destination's economy. Findings also strongly support signaling theory and SCP as theoretical frameworks to explain the impact of crisis management strategies at a tourism destination. Thus, as urged by Ritchie (2004), this study contributes to the understanding of crisis management in the tourism industry by employing theories and concepts drawn from different disciplines.

The results of this research also confirm previous marketing

research, management and sociological findings that show that effective signaling can influence behavioral intentions. In addition, effective signaling ultimately affects perceptions related to community economic, sociocultural, and safety dimensions of the community. Because this study indicated that signaling influences behavioral intentions through satisfaction with life, destinations may find ways other than security forces to signal desired destination characteristics. For example, a destination may choose to publish crime statistics to improve destination image, assuming such statistics are favorable. Other information dissemination recommendations for destination managers are provided by Fuchs and Pizam (2011). This study's findings about the importance of satisfaction with life at a destination and its mediating effects also add to the emerging theoretical framework of quality of life and tourism (Uysal et al., 2016). Safety and security is vitally important to tourism at a destination and this study's findings provide a link between effects of security forces, destination domains, and life satisfaction at the destination.

5.2. Managerial implications

This study's results also have significant implications for destination management organizations (DMOs). The first implication is that an expanded security force presence is likely to be an effective security crises management strategy even though some DMOs resisted having an expanded policing presence in the RGV, arguing that the deployment was a symbolic political move with no real impact or need (Nakamura & Tumulty, 2014). Although DMOs may not be able to deploy security forces directly, they may be able to influence their local or state governments to implement a stronger policing presence in the face of a security crises considering this study's findings suggesting that the utilization of security forces is a viable public policy tool to improve destination image, assuming the forces are perceived to be effective in providing security.

The results of this research may seem contrary to the notion that an overt security presence has a negative impact on tourists' perceptions of the destination (Jackson, 2009). However, these findings can be explained by the characteristics of the tourist segment in the study context. Research has found that prior knowledge about a destination can mitigate travelers' perceived risk and uncertainty at a destination (Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004; Wong & Yeh, 2009). Because of their familiarity, social links, and holiday property owned at the RGV (Simpson, 2014), winter migrants are highly attached to the destination and thus very likely to perceive the deployment of security forces as a positive measure in keeping the place they expect to return to safe, as is important for mature travelers (Kazeminia et al., 2015). The presence of security forces at the destination, however, may deter other tourist segments without an emotional attachment to the destination from visiting the region.

Consequently, following a crisis, DMOs should extend their efforts towards acquiring and deploying overt security measures to reassure potential visitors, especially those who are highly familiar with the destination, that security in the area is important and that the government has placed a high priority on enforcing the laws to keep constituents safe. Considering that the deployment of security forces improves the perceived security and the economy of the region, which in turn improves life satisfaction, return intention and likelihood of recommending the destination to others; federal, state, and local governments have a stake in using overt security measures to improve destination image.

Concurrent with the deployment of security forces, DMOs should work to raise awareness about the forces' presence to make sure the traveling public is aware of the forces and perceives them effective in creating a safe environment despite the crisis. This recommendation is in line with the recommendation of Mehmood,

Ahmad and Khan (2016, p. 390) in their recent study of tourist arrivals, immigrants and crimes that "tourism department and entrepreneurs should focus on tourism promotion policies, safety and security practical measures in tourist destinations/cities and immigrants communities along with making sure the public awareness on crime prevention activities and programs." DMOs may also want to reinforce perceptions of the positive impacts of the security forces on the destination by publicizing their benefits to the community and add to the body of tourists' knowledge about a destination. This reassurance strategy could help to improve the image of other destinations with insecurity problems depending on the numbers of frequent visitors who have a stake in what occurs in the community, such as the case of second-home owners in Acapulco (Levin, 2012).

Additionally, the finding of a strong effect of life satisfaction at the destination on return intention and word-of-mouth emphasizes the need for DMOs to find ways to further enhance life satisfaction of travelers at the destination. For example, through the formation of alliances with various stakeholders (Palmer & Bejou, 1995), destinations may want to focus on factors such as providing a clean, well-landscaped environment, a low cost of living and an environment that promotes a positive health and emotional life of the community as found by prior research to affect life satisfaction (Simpson et al., 2016; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015).

5.3. Study limitations and implications for future research

Because the sample used in this research was non-probabilistic and participants were highly familiar with the specific destination context, the representativeness of study results to the broader tourist market is limited and may not be generalizable to other crisis situations or to other tourist segments, or to other destinations, creating a number of avenues for further research. For instance, this study's sample was comprised mostly of retired, Caucasian seniors who may be more concerned about their safety than the general population (Kazeminia et al., 2015), suggesting future research among a more diverse population, not only in the United States but also in other countries. Moreover, the study's sample is comprised of frequent visitors with strong social and emotional ties to the destination (Fakeye & Crompton, 1992), so research regarding effects of security forces on new visitors who are not attached to the destination is highly warranted. Future research could also replicate this study with permanent residents to understand differences in perceived security forces effects by long-stay visitors versus permanent residents at a destination.

Another promising area for future research is examining factors that may impact perceived effectiveness of security forces at a destination. For example, must travelers actually see the security forces to believe them effective? Or must the crime statistics be publicized? Future research could also examine the use of different media types including the use of new information technologies in spreading awareness about the security forces to potential travelers. Would travelers be as or more likely to believe social media reports of crises and the effectiveness of security forces? Further research could focus on studying the role of the media in influencing not just tourists' behavior, but also public policy decisions, depending on the "issue-attention cycle" effects (Hall, 2002). These and many more issues arising from this research indicate that much more research is needed to better understand responses to crises at tourism destinations and their effects.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the support of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and the Business and Tourism Research

Center in conducting this research.

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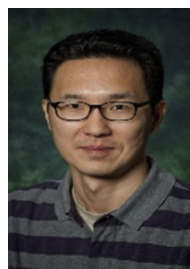
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