



Memory and forgetfulness in tourism crisis research

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ABSTRACT

Even though academic attention has been paid on the tourism-memory nexus, the concept of forgetfulness in tourism has been largely overlooked and remains unexplored. The aim of this research note is to introduce the concept of forgetfulness alongside memory within tourism scholarship to discuss the way in which it may be integrated with future research. In so doing, the discussion focused on a tourist crisis context as tourists' post-crisis behaviour often reflects forgetfulness as evidenced by their travel resumption patterns. Overall, by linking the concepts of forgetfulness and tourism, this research note contributes to knowledge advancement on tourism crises by shifting attention away from risk perceptions towards an understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes influencing tourist behaviour. The research note also illuminates understanding of how crises are forgotten; hence, contributes to the improvement of crisis management strategies. The research note concludes by proposing an agenda for future research.

“Memory only becomes interesting through its struggle with forgetfulness”

Adrian Forty

1. Introduction

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, which brought international travel at a standstill, exemplifies the vulnerability of the tourism industry to crises. Indeed, disasters and crises of all types have long-lasting effects on travel patterns, tourist demand and destination image (e.g. Chew & Jahari, 2014; Cró & Martins, 2017; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Rossello et al., 2020), highlighting the importance of resilience-based crisis management strategies (Paraskevas & Quek, 2019). Specifically, extant literature acknowledges that tourists' risk perceptions and attitudes towards destinations are greatly impacted by a crisis, leading to a change of travel plans by avoiding visitation to a particular destination or travelling altogether (Lutz & Lutz, 2020). In this context, some tourist segments have been recognised as exhibiting less sensitivity to external risks or even resistance to crises (Hajibaba et al., 2015).

Despite the immediate and adverse effects of crises on tourism, in most cases a destination will recover as people's needs, desire and motive to travel makes the memory effect of the crisis not permanent (Seabra et al., 2020), particularly when crisis management strategies are

in place (Alonso-Almeida & Bremser, 2013). Indeed, pertinent studies show that tourists and unaffected tourism suppliers forget about the crisis as time passes (e.g. Rittichainuwat, 2013). Nonetheless, the concept of crisis forgetfulness remains underdeveloped and largely unexplored in tourism research. While memory was previously examined in terms of post-travel purchase intentions (Yin et al., 2017), destination loyalty (Agapito et al., 2017), tourist experiences (Ballantyne et al., 2011) and post-crisis tourist demand (Gil-Alana, 2005; Lanouar & Goaid, 2019), the interface between tourism and memory's antipode – forgetfulness – is yet to receive academic attention especially within the context of tourism crises.

Following calls for the theoretical advancement of crisis management literature (Pennington-Gray, 2018), this research note aims to invite tourism scholars to consider forgetfulness in tourism crisis examinations. In so doing, the paper introduces the concept of forgetfulness alongside memory within tourism scholarship to discuss the way in which it may be integrated with future research to enhance understanding of tourists' post-crisis behaviour. Hence, this paper offers important implications to both theory and practice. First, by linking the concepts of forgetfulness and tourism and proposing an agenda for future research, this research note may contribute to knowledge advancement on tourism crises by shifting attention away from risk perceptions towards an understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes influencing tourist behaviour. Second, the research note may be of practical value to destination planners and industry practitioners

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as, by illuminating understanding of how crises are forgotten, the effectiveness of crisis management strategies may be improved.

2. Theoretical background

The concepts of memory and forgetfulness are inextricably linked. Perhaps, the memory-forgetfulness nexus is best described in Greek Mythology wherein reference to memory (*Mnemosyne*) and forgetfulness (*Lethe*) is made. Specifically, *Mnemosyne* and *Lethe* represented two parallel rivers in the underworld of Hades as well as the personification of the goddesses of ‘memory’ and ‘oblivion’ respectively. While the souls of the dead were required to drink from the waters of *Lethe* to forget their earthly life before being reincarnated, initiates were encouraged to drink from its counterpart *Mnemosyne* to stop the transgression of the soul as they would remember everything and achieve omniscience. Memory and forgetfulness represent, thus, two opposite yet inextricably linked concepts. Evidently, in order to understand the relationship between forgetfulness and tourism, it is first necessary to comprehend how memory is formed and what causes it to be forgotten.

Memory refers to an assemblage of mental representations of past experiences and is, as such, a dynamic entity that has the potential to manifest behaviourally the effects of prior experience (Wixted, 1998). Cognitive psychologists identify three phases of memory: sensory, short-term and long-term memory with information processing occurring eventually through all the three stages as information is encoded, stored and retrieved if and when needed (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). Sensory memory enables people to retain impressions of sensory information and, although pieces of this information may be retrieved by short-term memory for further process, sensory memory is not involved in higher cognitive functions as it is not consciously controlled. Short-term memory can hold a few items of information and lasts only for a few seconds whereas long-term memory has a large storage capacity and may include information acquired over a long period of time. Hence, the two types of memory differ in duration and capacity (Cowan, 2008); while in short-term memory information is stored sequentially, in long-term memory it is stored and retrieved by association. Thus, as long-term memory represents a key aspect of human learning that guides behaviour (Friedman et al., 2018), it is often regarded as the most important phase by psychologists.

Long-term memory is categorised into ‘explicit memory’ which is intentionally and consciously recalled and ‘implicit memory’, referring to a sub-conscious memory that affects behaviour (Brewer & Pani, 1983). There is also ‘procedural memory’, a type of implicit memory mostly concerned with the performance of specific tasks, and ‘declarative memory’ which represents a sub-set of explicit memory, referring to facts and events that are consciously recalled (Eichenbaum, 1997). Generally, explicit memory tends to receive great attention in psychology as it deals with the knowledge and experiences of a person that can be consciously remembered (Stangor & Walinga, 2014). Declarative memory is further divided into ‘episodic’ and ‘semantic’ memory; while the first deals with specific experiences and events in a person’s life, the second refers to the storage of general factual knowledge independent of personal experience. Therefore, it may be argued that in a crisis situation, it is declarative memory that matters with episodic memory being recalled in case of a personal experience with the crisis and semantic memory being evoked when an individual has heard of a crisis but not necessarily experienced it.

The opposite of memory is forgetfulness and occurs when there is a loss or modification of the information encoded and stored in a person’s memory. While forgetfulness is often attributed to ageing or physical injury, it most often arises due to psychological causes. Building on the work of Hermann Ebbinghaus, memory loss is explained by trace decay theory which identifies time as a main cause for memories fading (Brown, 1958). Likewise, interference theory suggests that forgetting emerges as a result of old and new memories interfering with each other (Postman, 1963), particularly in cases of similar events occurring.

Forgetfulness has also been attributed to ineffective encoding as people often process information that does not develop into long-term memory (Nickerson & Adams, 1979). Moreover, in what is known as cue-dependent forgetting or retrieval failure, individuals often fail to retrieve information in the absence of cues associated with the memory (Tulving, 1974). Such cues include: a) the emotional state of a person during encoding which, if relived, may evoke a memory, b) semantic cues that link a memory with another memory and c) context-specific cues related to the environment and/or situation. Additionally, forgetfulness may arise in the form of repression due to an effort to forget a traumatic experience (Becker-Blease et al., 2011). While much pertinent discussion on forgetfulness relies on individual perspectives, collective forgetting has also been noted as a process of (re)shaping collective memory and identity (Harrison, 2013), mostly observed in emotionally loaded situations (i.e. difficult heritage) wherein ‘public silence’ (Stone & Hirst, 2014) often exists.

In the event of crises, tourists face various options; they either cancel or postpone the trip, visit an alternative destination instead or travel to the destination regardless. While the effects of a crisis on the cancellation or alternation of a trip are well-documented, there is less research on the decision of tourists to continue or resume travelling once conditions allow so. Travel resumption behaviour post-crisis is acknowledged in most studies as indicative of the return to normalcy and a sign of destination recovery (e.g. Seabra et al., 2020). Generally speaking, travel resumption has been argued to emerge as a result of resistance to change or willingness to undertake the associated risk (Hajibaba et al., 2015). Also, tourists may resume travel as a means of solidarity to show support to the affected destination (Beirman, 2003). More frequently though, travel will recommence when adequate time has passed from the occurrence of the crisis, leading to tourists to forget about it (Rittichainuwat, 2013). It is to this point that this research note now turns in an attempt to encourage the examination of forgetfulness and tourism in crisis contexts.

3. Discussion and further research

Drawing from cognitive psychology, it appears that the passage of time increases the likelihood of tourists forgetting about the crisis and resuming travel, particularly when effects are indirect. This likelihood is reinforced by tourists’ needs, desire and motive to travel despite the presence of emotional factors (Farmaki et al., 2019) such as in the case of visiting family and friends (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Similarly, the longer the time interval the more likely it is that other events, either internal or external to the tourist, will interfere with the memory of the crisis causing it to gradually fade. In any case, interference is more probable when events similar to the crisis (i.e. other similar crises) take place whereas the higher the frequency and severity of the interfering events (Chew & Jahari, 2014), the greater the forgetfulness probability. Tourists may also achieve crisis forgetfulness when they fail to retrieve memories related to a crisis, a possibility when associated cues pertinent to the tourist or the crisis context are absent or when there is no prior experience of the affected destination. Likewise, tourists are more prone to forget a crisis when they have initially failed to store relevant information about it; this may happen if they become aware of the crisis from non-personal information sources (i.e. media), if the destination and travel intermediaries are responsive to crisis management (De Sausmarez, 2013) and/or if tourists remain largely unaffected by its effects (e.g. pre-booking stage). Last, crisis forgetfulness may occur willingly as a resistance-to-crisis mechanism by tourists who are personally impacted by the traumatic effects of a crisis and try to suppress the memory of it by continuing travel to acquire new positive experiences.

The link between forgetfulness and tourism is illustrated diagrammatically in Fig. 1. Specifically, the various causes of forgetfulness as shaped by numerous influencing factors (e.g. frequency of crises) lead to semantic or episodic memory to fade depending on whether the influence from the crisis is personal and direct or impersonal and indirect. As

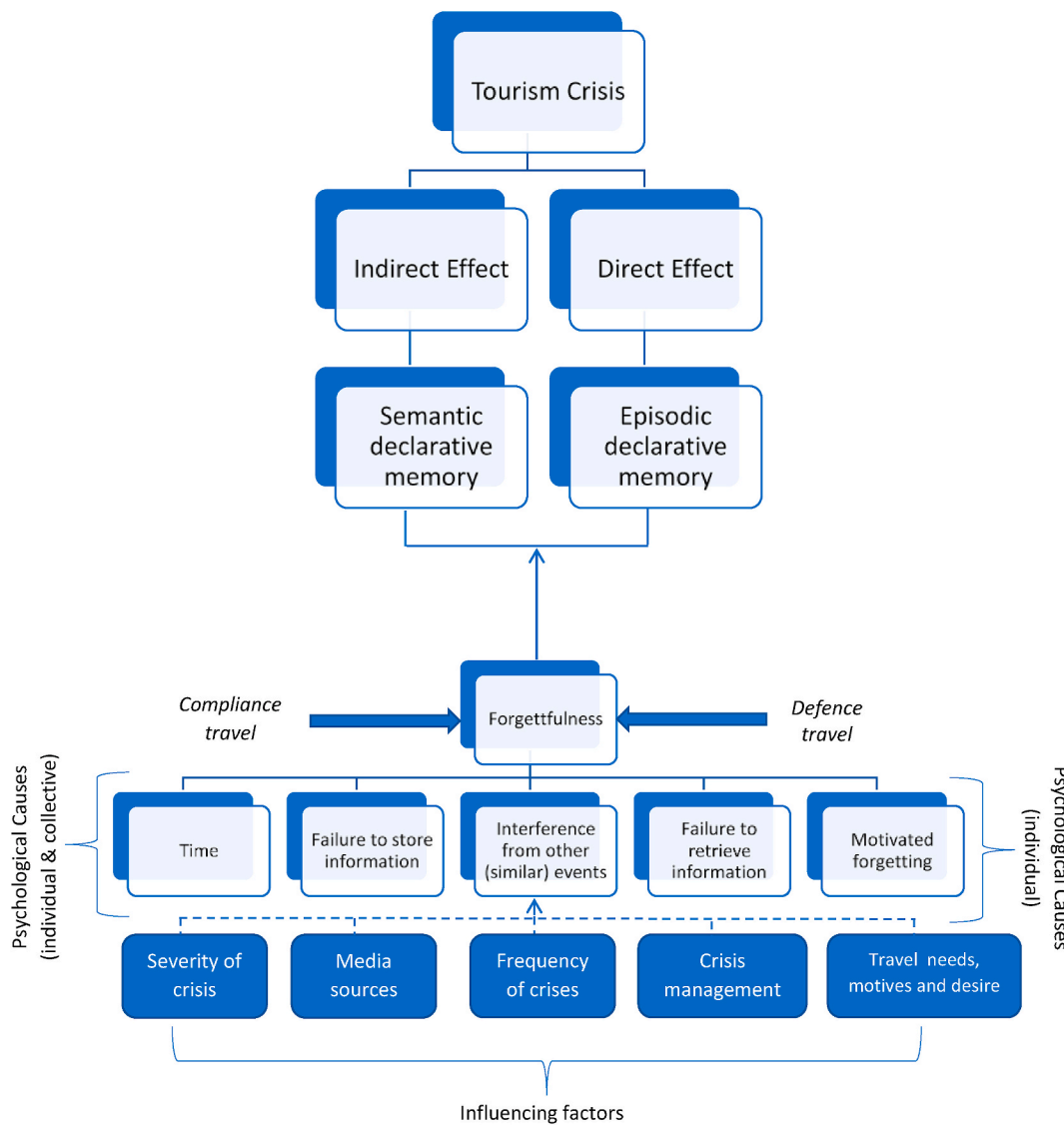


Fig. 1. The tourism forgetfulness nexus.

such, forgetfulness drives travel which may evolve either as: a) compliance mechanism predisposing tourists to travel to satisfy their hedonic needs or b) defence mechanism to deal with the traumatic experience of a crisis.

Based on the above discussion, future research avenues are proposed. First, tourism crisis research should consider the emotional and cognitive impacts of crises on tourists beyond risk perception theorising. Such acknowledgement should be shared by destination planners who need to adapt their marketing campaigns and destination branding efforts in acknowledgement of the needs and motives of various tourist segments including risk-sensitive and risk-taking travellers; thereby, identifying those segments that may be more appropriate for recovering destinations such as domestic tourists (Kock et al., 2019). Second, given the complexity characterising post-crisis travel behaviour, studies could look beyond travel resumption behaviour into travel group composition, group size and expenditure data whilst employing appropriate theories for revealing non-linear relations (Zenker & Kock, 2020).

In addition, although this note centred discussion of the forgetfulness-tourism nexus within a crisis context, insights may be offered to other subject areas including destination marketing, tourist experiences and the tourist activity itself as a means of forgetting. Hence, future research could delve into the causes and outcomes of forgetfulness within a general tourism context. In particular, travel as a

means of forgetting should be empirically examined from a mental and experiential perspective. Likewise, considering the contextual nature of crises and the subsequent different levels of negative effects on destinations and tourist behaviour, future research could also examine crisis forgetfulness in relation to sustainable tourism development issues (i.e. economic, socio-cultural, environmental) both short-term and long-term. Indeed, scholars have highlighted the opportunities emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic for escaping the unsustainable global tourism path (Ioannides and Gyimothi, 2020). Last, by integrating forgetfulness and tourism, this research note may inform examinations of post-crisis experiences of stakeholders beyond tourists such as the local community and industry practitioners. For example, the potential biases of locals against tourists after a crisis may be examined (Qiu et al., 2020). Similarly, the practices and viewpoints of industry stakeholders are worthy of investigation as their behaviours post-crisis may inhibit the sustainability efforts of destinations.

Notwithstanding, this research note is not without limitations. The discussion focused on the concept of forgetfulness in tourism crisis and, as such, potentially diminished the important influence that other travel motives may play in travel resumption. For instance, travelling post-disaster for dark tourism (e.g. Tucker et al., 2017) often reinforced by dark place marketing (Medway & Warnaby, 2008) is acknowledged in the literature as a travel motive. Likewise, empathy and the charitable

behaviours of tourists might reinforce travel post-crisis (Zenker & Kock, 2020). As such, the conclusions drawn in this research note should be treated with caution by researchers and in acknowledgement that other factors (i.e. destination recovery activities and policies) need be considered as foci in future tourism crisis investigations.

Impact statement

This research note sets out to examine the concept of forgetfulness in tourism, drawing from the tourism crisis context. As such, the study contributes both theoretically and practically in numerous ways. First, it draws from cognitive psychology to underpin the discussion of the tourism-forgetfulness nexus which has not been previously examined. Secondly, it responds to calls for the theoretical advancement of crisis management literature as by enacting the concept of forgetfulness within tourism scholarship, it enhances understanding of tourists' behaviour post-crisis. Thirdly, it offers a tourism-forgetfulness nexus framework which may be used as a steppingstone for further research on the concepts of memory and forgetfulness in tourism, beyond the crisis context including destination marketing, tourist behaviour and experiences. As such, the note may be of practical value to destination planners and industry practitioners leading to improved crisis management approaches.

Credit author statement

Anna Farmaki: Conceptualization; Investigation; Visualization; Roles/Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104210>.

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