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Adapting to Political Activism in the Destination: General Strike (Hartal) and Tourism in Kerala

Abstract

The way of protest through hartal (general strike) has sparked heated debates about its impact on the tourism industry in Kerala. This paper is aimed in the viewpoint that political activism has adverse consequences on tourism in the state of Kerala which is seamlessly propagated through the Media. Through a thematic analysis of online texts published on trip advisor, this paper explores tourists' perceptions and opinions of the implication of hartal on tourism in Kerala. Overall, our analysis reveals that hartal would not discourage tourists to visit Kerala, although many regarded that certain level of challenges at the destination will enhance the visitor experience. Importantly, our study also contends that the narratives about the 'hartal' produced and propagated online were often representative of political structures of power, which linked tourism to hartal irrespective of the real impact on tourism.

Keywords: politics, governance, hartal, strike, tourism, Kerala

1. Introduction

In the past ten years, an increasing number of studies have focused on the relationship between politics and tourism, departing from the view that several political interventions have adverse consequences on holiday experience. Tourism scholars have explored whether and how national political situations moderate tourism. Several studies have been conducted focusing on varied tourism setting to investigate the political intervention on tourism and its implications. Most of these studies are based on some largescale political issues such as terrorism on tourism (Yap & Saha, 2013); political instability and tourism (Leung et al., 1996; Ioannides & Apostolopoulos, 1999; Yap & Saha, 2013; Avraham & Ketter, 2015); political demonstrations (Sonmez, 1998); terrorist attack (Fletcher & Morakabati, 2008); uncertainty about personal safety (Neumayer, 2004; Fourie, Nadal & Gallego, 2019). It tends to concentrate mainly on life threatening largescale sensitive political issues that are occasional to a specific geographical region. Politics and tourism interface have been studied specifically in the context of an extreme pattern of political unrest, such as in the complex planning issues in Cyprus (Altinay & Bowen, 2006); shaping tourism based on internal and external political issues in Myanmar (Henderson, 2003); prolonged political unrest in Indonesia (Soemodinoto et al., 2001). Another study by Nassar (2012) indicates the negative impact of political unrest affected the tourism industry and overall economy of Egypt. Furthermore, Fletcher and Morakabati (2008) pointed that terrorism has adverse impact on tourism industry in the commonwealth region specifically in Fiji and Kenya. These studies were focused on how political instability could impact on the tourism industry. Despite this, the relationship between frequently occurring general strikes and its impact on tourism provide limited perspectives on tourism, politics and holiday experience. Tourism in a destination is constructed in a political sphere, therefore tourism 'cultures' with the influence of a politically stimulated 'tourism space' and assimilates all political traits that then blend with tourism. It is important to stress that an ongoing politically motivated general strike that become part of the destinations' social settings, its implication in the view point is not studied

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in scholarly researches. Several emerging destinations are yet refined in blending national or states political interventions whether to support or oppose tourism, therefore this research largely attempts as a first step preliminary study to investigate the relationship between a general strike and its influence on tourism in the view point of tourists through an interpretive approach.

Although, the current studies are largely skewed towards the negative implications of political unrest on tourists' experience (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Tsaur et al., 1997; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Lepp & Gibson, 2008), impact of a conventional general strike on tourism has not been studied at destination level. Risk associated with international tourism varies depending on the tourist role and tourists' preferences for familiarity or novelty, therefore the risk perception at the destination is not persistent, yet situational to a destinations' set image and consumption of the image by the tourists. Previous studies also documented that in some situations, a certain level of challenges is acceptable for tourists in a destination as some tourists look for thrill seeking experiences while some are interested in sensational experiences (Lepp & Gibson, 2008; Fuchs, 2013; Thomas et al., 2019). Moreover, with few exceptions (e.g. studies on the politics of tourism in Asia), less has been written on Asian political scenario in emerging and a growing tourist destinations such as India.

This study differs from earlier literatures as hartal is potentially not a life-threatening protest, however, it will have implications on tourist mobility, travel plans, pleasure seeking experience and risk perception. Therefore, this work focuses on how tourists are responding to such situation.

The primary goal of this study is to contextualize the views of tourists on their outlook on destination political scenario in an emerging destination. Indeed, the risk is essentially seen as the antipathy of pleasure, and mass pleasure seeking tourism in particular is constructed in the apparent absence of risk and risks impinge upon the 'normal' state of pleasure seeking tourism (Williams & Baláž, 2015; Singh, 2011). On the other hand, recent studies shed light on the rationale and behavioral approaches of tourist, which identified financial, psychological, satisfaction, time, health, political instability, and terrorism risks as important deterrents to tourists (Williams & Baláž, 2014). Although there is a continuum of risks, from the moderately stimulating to the life-endangering, tourists anxiety must be based on the magnitude of perceived risk and familiarity of the destination (Cohen, 1979; Lee & Crompton, 1992). Based on this premise, this study also focuses on whether a moderate risk during hartal is an accepted norm for the tourist experience in a destination.

The state of Kerala is popular for its over politicization (Jacob et al., 2016; Sandhya & Bindi, 2017; Biswas, 2010). General strike (hartal) is an example of such extremes. This political activism for important and unimportant social and political matters causes uneasiness to public life as well as several sectors of the state's economy. Since there is no objective evidence of a success of such political activism, hartal is solely criticized as a politically charged event. Although political interests are not directly targeted to tourism, political activism has a direct impact on destination performance (Lisle, 2007; Thomas, 2011; Buda, 2016), which examines how tourism, tourists, and ongoing socio-political conflicts are connected in a dynamic ways. By its very nature, tourism is not resilient to any mobility hardships, and at the tourist destination, mobility interruption can be one of the worst enemies of the tourist experience. Usually, hartal does not have any direct association with tourism. However, hartal impacts several essential services of tourism such as transportation, restaurant services and other conveniences. Hartal also contemplates safety and securities, which are also the important enablers of tourism. This hegemonic discourse generates a separation between socio-political conflicts and tourism through the necessity of safety and security in tourism (Hall et al., 2003; Pizam & Mansfeld, 1996; Buda, 2016). Tourists want to travel to safe places clearly, if they see a risk of injury or death, or even just becoming involved in a stressful situation, they will avoid that destination (Neumayer, 2004) as they occur in a strange physical, cultural, and social surroundings (Cohen, 2009). Based on this premise, in this research, we are scrutinizing this complex interconnection on how hartal implicates the tourist experience in Kerala through the perception of tourists.

2. Politics and tourism

Politics is an essential part of the mix of legislating tourism. Therefore, there is an important relationship exists between government and tourism (McGehee & Meng, 2006). The existing body of knowledge concerning politics and tourism provides rather a limited perspective on legislative implications on tourism. Hall (1994) and McKercher et al. (2002) illustrated the idea of legislative relationship and tourism and observed that government not only plays these important roles in tourism administration and policy development, but also needs to balance power among the people and/or businesses involved (McGehee & Meng, 2006). Although the importance of legislation to the success of the tourism industry is inherently realized among many tourism scholars and practitioners, a very little research has been explored to examine this relationship (McGehee & Meng, 2006). On the tourist side, the 'right' to travel is increasingly mediated by heightened concerns of risk and security and that the politics of security of a destination is dictated by political environment (Thomas et al., 2019). More recently, many other relevant factors are also well explored in the tourism literature, on several political involvement influences visitor decisions for instance, travel risk (Fischhoff et al., 2004), tourist worry (Larsen et al., 2009). Within an increasingly complex socio-political environment, further explorations of the connections between conflicts and danger in tourism can lead to understanding the greater politicization of tourism (Suntikul et al., 2010). The emergence of new destinations, especially across the emerging economies, as comparatively a new phenomenon, the political situations interface tourism development and the position of tourism in political agendas are influenced by different interests at the local, regional, and national level (Bowen et al., 2017).

3. Hartal in India

Regardless of state political borders of India, the hartal has been historically an accepted event in the Indian democratic system. India has been witnessing hartal in the past hundred years. The principle of such protest was with stricter condition that 'none should be harmed and help the needy' and 'all protesters were asked to observe fasting' (Skaria, 2016). Although, that is not the case at present, as hartal in Kerala always recorded with destruction to the life of people, public and private properties (Kerala to bring ordinance, 2019). Despite intense debates on the impact of hartal in people lives and economy, political parties declare 'hartal'. The Kerala High Court in 2019 passed an order banning hartals in the state without a notice of seven days. The most recent hartal was declared on 8th, 9th of January 2020 and one hartal conducted on 22nd February 2020 to protest against the government's alleged anti-worker policies, which was supported and opposed by several trade unions in India. Based on the report, one full day strike causes an economic impact of INR 25,000 to 300,000 million (USD 3,517- 4,221 million) in the nation (Sarin & Thakur, 2016; Kerala tourism industry, 2018). Although, there are no several national wide hartal prevalent in India, its magnitude varies from one state to another. The principles behind the general strike also deviated significantly from its original idea of '*none should be harmed*'.

3.1. Recorded adverse consequences

There are several incidents that have been paralyzing human life and the economy (Biswas, 2010), and the general publics are annoyed with the inconveniences caused by hartal. Missing flights, stagnant at the airport and mobility hubs, loss of jobs, death and injury due to violence, as well as interruption of medical services and finally property loss are the direct recorded implication of the hartal (Radhakrishnan, 2013). Hartal also affects the livelihood of many daily wage laborers, disrupts the education system, and affects commercial activities, tourism and heavy loss of the exchequer. The public in general observes that every hartal is called without any sincerity to the issue (Kerala tourism bears brunt, 2019). Based on the statistics, Kerala suffers 1 hartal every 4 days, each one creating a loss of INR 2,000 million (USD 28 million) in the State's economy

(Kerala suffers 1 hartal, 2019). In general, hartal is essentially a political activism rather serving the society for better. Although, these news is flooded in Media, including tourism and tourists are affected from the hartal, seldom there is news on tourist annoyance due to the hartal is reported by any authentic media sources. More importantly, the media propaganda is mainly on the tourism industry is affected by hartal (Kerala tourism industry, 2018; Continuous hartals, 2019; Kallungal, 2018; KTM appeals, 2018; Kerala suffers 1 hartal, 2019; Express Web Desk, 2018). Therefore, the effects of hartal on the tourism industry and tourist experience have to be treated in two different scopes.

3.2. Movement against hartal

A public opinion poll conducted by 'anti-hartal' movement in Kerala showed that 85 per cent of the respondents were against hartal. An anti - hartal movement represented by 45 tourism related organizations held in Kochi (Kerala), decided not to observe hartal anymore and not to vote for those political parties and stop giving any kind of donation to support the party (Bandh banned, 2007). This movement received greater participation from the general public and various organizations followed by an anti-hartal movement named 'Say No to Hartal' formed. This is further promoted through peoples' participation in the social Media such as Facebook and Twitter. Despite this, political activism is still prevalent in Kerala with a different scale.

3.3. Exclusion of tourism from (hartal)

From 2005 to 2012 Kerala observed 363 hartals. There were 97 hartals called off in the year 2018 and 86 hartals called in 2017 (Kallungal, 2018). In 2019, the number of hartal has reduced to 12 due to the enforcement of a court order. "Tourism stakeholders, related associations and unions observed that frequent strikes in Kerala were a huge dampener of tourism industry" (KTM appeals, 2018). In 2018 Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) set a special task force and passed a resolution to ensure that "services to the tourism industry are not to shut down during hartal" (ET Bureau, 2018). Although, accepted generally, this viewpoint has also several logistic constraints to practice tourism during the hartal, as many of the essential services such as shops, restaurants, taxis and other public transport system are dysfunctional during this uncertain risky period. Also, tourists as a foreigner doubtfully having the courage to mobilize during political uncertainties. Therefore, such exclusions are purely a social inaptness. While in certain cases the hartal situations differ from one place to another due to the inconsistent spread of political parties across the state. Exclusion of tourism from hartal is not practical and has been proven with the recent incident of 'stopping the noble laureate, the 2013 Nobel Prize winner in Chemistry 'Michael Levitt' during the national 'bandh' on 8th January 2020 at Alappuzha in Kerala (HT Correspondent, 2020). With all these occurrences, thus far there is no solid objective data available on the measured success rate of hartal, and the success is merely measured by 'how much the objective of the hartal has been accomplished' rather than what it was meant for.

Table 1
Major themes raised in the literatures

Author(s)	Focus
Altinay & Bowen (2006)	Politics and tourism interface
Yap & Saha (2014)	Terrorism and tourism
Leung et al. (1996); Ioannides & Apostolopoulos (1999); Yap & Saha (2014)	Political instability and tourism
Sonmez (1998)	Political demonstration
Fletcher & Morakabati, 2008	Terrorist attack
Neumayer (2004); Fourie et al. (2019)	Uncertainty about personal safety
Nassar (2012)	Political unrest affected the tourism industry in Egypt
Jacob et al. (2016); Sandhya & Bindi (2017); Biswas (2010)	Over politicization in Kerala

Table 1 Continued

Author(s)	Focus
Lisle (2007); Thomas (2011); Buda (2016)	Politics in destination and destination performance
Hall et al. (2003); Pizam & Mansfeld (1996); Buda (2016)	Politics, safety and security
Hall (1994); McKercher & Du Cros (2002); McGehee & Meng (2006)	Balance of power
Bowen et al. (2017)	Influence of politics over tourism
Skaria (2016)	Origin of hartal
Kerala to bring ordinance (2019)	Destruction of hartal to life and properties in Kerala
Biswas (2010)	Hartal paralyzed human life and economy
Kerala tourism bears brunt (2019); Sarin & Thakur (2016); KTM (2017)	Hartal is called without any sincerity to the issue Economic loss of hartal in Kerala
Kerala tourism industry (2018); Continuous hartals (2019); Kallungal (2018); KTM appeals (2018); Kerala suffers 1 hartal (2019); ET Bureau (2018); Express Web Desk (2018)	Media propaganda on impact of hartal on tourism
Say no to hartal (2020)	Anti-hartal movement
Express Web Desk (2018); KTM (2018); ET Bureau (2018); Radhakrishnan (2020)	Exclusion of tourism from hartal
Polanyi (1966); Cohen (1972)	Novelty and familiarity experience of tourists
Neumayer (2004)	Negative association between human rights violations, conflict, and other politically motivated violent events and tourist arrivals
Baláz & Williams (2014)	Risk seeking tourists
Warner (1999)	Traveling to a place of political disputes
Saha & Yap (2014)	Severity of impact of politics on tourism

3.4. Hartal in Kerala – Damaging tourism?

In 1994, the High Court of Kerala, declared hartal as "illegal and unconstitutional (Radhakrishnan, 2013). Although, it was stated that the hartal should not affect human life, the strike metaphor was in place by intervening essential services and restrict mobility. In view of the above facts, In order to mitigate the issue to reduce the impact of hartal on tourism, a taskforce created by 28 tourism organizations in Kerala during the Kerala Tourism Mart (KTM) in 2018 and observes that;

"Hartal tarnishes the image of the state, which is famous for its tourism and travel industry. The mental and physical ordeal endured by the tourists will result in negative propaganda for the state and will impede future tourism opportunities" (ET Bureau, 2018). They also release a resolution demanding the government for police protection for tourists.

"A resolution adopted by the meeting demanded the government to provide police protection for the safety and security of tourists and tourism sector and uninterrupted functioning of institutions and services during hartal"

However, not surprisingly the political 'tug of war' has played a role in making these attempts unsuccessful and hartal continuous with its disruptive principles. Based on the disruptive nature of hartal, a general assumption can be set that the hartal may have certain implications on tourism and tourists. A BBC report by Biswas (2010), for example, has pointed out that 'a major part of Kerala's income comes from tourism, and experts say the hartal had badly hurt the industry'. Also, several Media reported claims related to the adverse effect of hartal on tourists, specifically because it discourage tourists to visit Kerala and possible dissatisfaction on their visit at the destination. Regardless of these hypothetical views and propagated media news, studies on the real reflection of the tourist about hartal has not been conducted. Therefore, the question arises as to whether and how the politically charged hartal in Kerala has an impact on tourist experience. This study is an attempt to fill this knowledge gap as it explores the perception and opinion of tourists who visited and interested to visit Kerala.

4. Analysis and results

This qualitative paper is driven by an interpretivist paradigm, whose main beliefs contemplate the existence of multiple/constructed/socio-culturally situated realities and subjective ways of knowing. As reflexivity has been regarded as an important tool to make interpretivist practices and research processes more transparent (Pritchard et al., 2011; Mura & Sahrif, 2015), authors' reflexivity of the hartal is also taken into consideration as a parameter of interpretation of the event. The author's reflexivity is one of the main reasons to conduct this study at the state of Kerala in India. The authors have been closely following the impacts related to the 'hartal and its implication on social life in Kerala for many years. As this paper focuses on tourists' perceptions and opinions about the hartal and how its impacting tourist mobility and experience, the first step of the research process was to identify a strategy to obtain tourists' views. The authors collected texts produced and published online as the introduction of the hartal in Kerala, which has sparked heated debates among Indian and non-Indian netizens in online forums and social media on their leisure experience during hartal. More specifically, we focused on the views shared on TripAdvisor as this online platform is considered to be the 'World's largest travel site' with 500 million reviews and opinions. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) have quoted TripAdvisor as the top frequently used domain name among other social media. TripAdvisor is also regarded as the most important information source for travel planning (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). Moreover, Chua and Banerjee (2013) have contended that TripAdvisor reviews could be largely reliable. Using the search terms "hartal", 'tourism', 'Kerala', 'Kerala hartal', 'General strike' we found top hits generated by TripAdvisor. With the keyword related to 'hartal' and 'tourism', there were three forums generated in the TripAdvisor namely "Boycott Kerala", consists of 57 reviews, "Kerala riots", consists of 47 reviews and "hartal random wildcat strikes (name as given in the online text) consist of 324 reviews at the time of empirical material was collected in November 2019.

Each topic related to hartal / strike had several reflections discussed on visiting Kerala, which were organized based on a chronological order from the most recent to the oldest. Each topic consists of different discussions, which ranged from 2-10 replies. For each reply, we recorded the available information about the writer, such as nationality, age and gender. However, this information was not consistently available with all samples as netizens have the choice of disclosing those information to the public. Therefore, it was not possible to analyze the information based on domestic or foreign tourist. It was also set the assumption that the difficulties of mobility can be generalized as issues of mobility due to strike have a common understanding among tourists without categorizing them (although the interpretations took into account these aspects when the information was available). Despite this, the authors believe that the narratives and the discussions among netizens confined in these texts provide detailed information about tourists' perception and experience of 'hartal'.

A thematic analysis of the selected discussions was conducted. More specifically, following Lofland and Lofland (1994) the empirical materials were coded and arranged into homogeneous categories and traditional form of coding, namely, open, axial and selective (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), were employed. While doing so, we reviewed the existing research on the topic of discussion to have insights about the data under analysis. Moreover, discussion on interpretations emerging from the coded empirical materials were conducted upon agreeing and disagreeing about the meaning behind the texts. Since the paradigmatic belief of this research bound within the subjective nature of interpretations, the discussions helped us to find consensus and provided appropriate moments to reflect upon our interpretations. This event led to the emergence of main themes and then the themes were further discussed among the researchers and then refined in relation to the existing literature on hartal and tourism.

4.1. A muted point of uncertainty

Although, one forum unveiled the view of a foreign tourist to boycott Kerala, this viewpoint was not supported by the most as such the responses were concluded that there is no such aggressive situation exists in the state during hartal.

"It is time for tourist to boycott this state. Kerala state is one place with a lot of political parties and each of them is notorious in declaring shutdowns in the state. The life of public comes to a standstill. If you decide to travel you may get hurt. Check the news from Kerala and decide yourself if it is worth wasting your money" (Sonny).

In an ideal situation, leisure tourists avoid conflicts places and expect a relaxing holiday experience and therefore they are sensitive to events of violence in holiday destinations. Such tourists are only willing to travel to foreign places in mass numbers if their journey and their stay are safe and shielded from events that threaten a joyous holiday experience (Neumayer, 2004). However, this viewpoint has also been questioned by the respondents. All eleven reviews opined that the scenario in Kerala is not as mentioned, but more safe.

4.2. The quest of risk taking

The interface between knowledge and risk also informs novelty versus familiarity seeking among tourists (Cohen, 1979). The way tourist perceive on risk at holidays differs based on their familiarity and tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966; Cohen, 1979), therefore, tourist perceives less risk at the destination than their familiar local settings as the tour is intrinsically embedded with leisure and that is to enjoy. Evidently hartal will have certain implications of the daily routine of the public system, unrushed roads, quite streets and town perhaps ideal for travellers to ease their mobility, although the situation is adverse, touring at hartal may be a different experience for tourists.

"Visit Kerala before talking about what you don't know. I am here now and haven't been affected at all and honestly feels much safer here than in my own home country!" (Maggie).

One of the points emerging from the analysis of the empirical material concern the transformative power of tourists' travel experiences and the important role of these intense experiences (both positive and negative) for inner growth and better self-esteem (Thomas & Mura, 2019). Previous studies have documented the motivation of tourists to visit politically turbulent destinations, politically oriented tourists (Brin, 2006), conflict tourists (Warner, 1999), danger zones (Adams, 2001), tourists who travel "to places made interesting for reasons of political dispute" (Warner, 1999, p. 137). In this respect, this work support previous study (Adams, 2001; Warner, 1999; Brin, 2006; Buda, 2016). These studies have already emphasized the risk-taking orientation tourists in conflict areas. They are interested in travel to areas of danger "for" and "during" the conflict, show interest in the ongoing political clashes of a region, and experience ongoing conflicts firsthand (Buda, 2016). Though, the magnitude of a hartal area is not like a war zone in a conflicted area, the intrinsic motivation of tourists is still skewed towards a risk taking experience for seeking travel pleasure. Although there are instances in which netizens perceived that it is safe to travel during hartal in Kerala, and in certain cases occasional political unrests during their trip in Kerala add eccentric values to their holiday experience. As certain level of risk enriches holiday experience, such threats are treated as mild and bring forward as a holiday experience.

4.3. Sensational media interruptions

A BBC report by Kelly, the co-founder of Wired Magazine, reported in the BBC that "The major new challenge in reporting news is the new shape of truth" (Kelly et al., 2017, p. 2), specifically in the contemporary 'post – truth' era. Reporting of isolated incidents is able to reach worldwide. The adversity of political events has been always sensational and picked up by visitors for the trips to avoid interruptions. Media propagandas interpreted by the tourists in the following way;

"We are in Kerala/Varkala at the moment, everything is fine as usual the press sensationalize matters" (Ita).

"This is away from the tourist spots, nothing to worry about come and enjoy" (Ita).

"There are difficulties when it comes to hartal and travelling during that day other than that things are peaceful. Though, there are travel advisories we would like to say that it is safe travelling here as more is media coverage about the issue as it is a politically active state as well as the issue is so sensational" (Decan).

Political situations are always a prime interest for Media and Media is a main source of information for tourist, yet Media capture and telecast isolated, yet factual news, tourist at the destination pursue it seriously. Individuals may tend to believe the story, or fake story, because of the implied "social contract" (Anderson & Rainie, 2017). Although, the hartal has an isolated impact on tourist mobility, Media coverage and related speculation could impact on perceptual understanding of such safety related issues. This also indicates that tourists are well aware about Kerala's political activism as the hartal is not a strange political event in Kerala, while it has a strong rooted history.

4.4. The normality of unsafety

Although, the forum underline that political uncertainties have an impact on pleasure seeking tourist experiences, several posts opined an exaggerated account of its impact on tourist mobility. While in several posts indicates that the hartal and tourism in Kerala go hand in hand and the tourist are less emphasized the impact on their mobility and leisure experiences.

"I am in Munnar and on Wednesday experienced a hartal (state wide strike) that was announced at 4pm the previous evening. I also experienced these events two years ago when in Kerala" (Turner).

"Oh, not state run, then, that is a surprise. Strikes and Kerala go hand in hand: Hope you are enjoying your travels anyway" (Oheo).

"There were some strikes happened over the past few weeks in Kerala. But it never affected any tourist or tourism industry" (Delta).

Hartal in Kerala is a historical ongoing event, although it is not new, while at the increasing importance of tourism, it assumes that there must be a probable impact on tourism while increasing the numbers. However, it seems that tourists are in aware of the political activism and since historically there is no evidence of violence reported to the tourists that paves the way for an extra confidence and Kerala is even an ideal place of tourists' choice during such political extremism.

5. Discussion

Neumayer (2004) finds a negative association between human rights violations, conflict, and other politically motivated violent events and tourist arrivals. However, it is mainly a short-run shock since "if the violence stops and the country manage to reverse its negative image in the international media, then tourism can bounce back". Previous studies have tended to focus on tourism and political unrest through terrorism using panel data models, based on this, Liu and Pratt (2017) find that terrorism has no long-run effect on international tourism demand, and the short-run effect is quite limited from a global perspective. Saha and Yap (2014) studied the effect of political instability on tourism is more severe than the effect of a one-off terrorist attacks. Furthermore, our study also concentrates on a broad range of tourist types which includes tourist in different age groups and genders. Our study differs from such aggressive situation at the destination, and shifts the focus towards a political activism within a state which is more regulated by law and how tourists are reacting to the situation in Kerala. Every other state in India has the same issue, but no other state in India has hartal on the same magnitude. Hartal in Kerala is truly a 'Kerala phenomena'. As such, perhaps it is not surprising that within the context of our study general strike (hartal) is not perceived as causation to visit destination Kerala. Rather, based on the netizens view hartal was regarded by many as a political event, yet not an indispensable part of the holiday experience. Several forums concerns the mitigating narratives produced lower

overly exaggerated accounts of violence during hartal and reassure the tourists that such politically driven event does not have any physical assault to the tourists and retain their personal freedom while traveling.

Another point emerging from the analysis is that despite the occasional (but sometimes frequent in Kerala), tourist mobility in Kerala cannot transcend the issue of physical violence across the state and no netizens reported that they were in any occasion affected by the hartal. In another context, forum discoursed the issue of safety in these days in any destination is an ideal condition that can subjectively occur at any time of their journey as such Kerala should not be perceived as an extraordinary destination with risk due to political activism. Within this line of thought, the forum seems to 'normalize' the condition as a rule where tourists always pass through 'normal risks' and reassure the safety in Kerala during hartal.

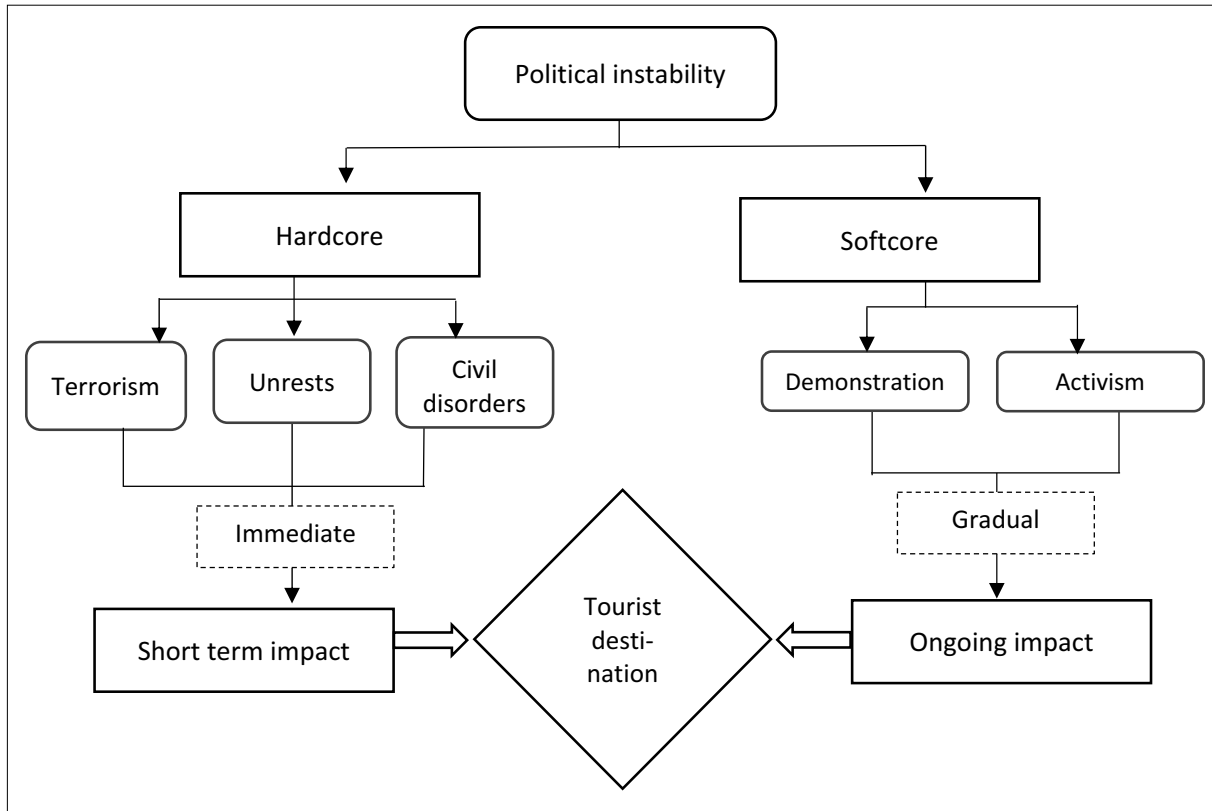
Despite the hartal in Kerala sparked a congruous number of heated debates and discussions among netizens, potential tourists and the general public, while several discussions were driven by 'seeking additional information' curiosity in adverse situation, reflecting on the fear to travel, netizens engaged in discussion on the interruption of their itinerary, which indicates that the potential visitors does not perceive Kerala as a risky tourist destination due to a momentary shutdown of the state due to hartal. While some panels in the blog interestingly debated on 'risk taking' as a thrill seeking experience in the 'destinationscape'. Indeed, this is consistent with the view of risk-seeking tourism has recently attracted considerable interest (Baláz & Williams, 2014).

Some minor challenges are value added opportunity to their trip in a destination. One of the previous studies have documented that if personal freedom is suppressed, people may search for their own personal freedom in other countries through traveling (Saha et al., 2017). However, this viewpoint has also been questioned by some scholars as tourists pursue the thrill seeking experience in places with a certain level of challenges and in general the notion of competence is perceived as high in tourism as a result of extensive previous travel experience (Williams & Baláz, 2014). In a rationalistic and behavioural approach of tourists, this again highlights the knowledge–risk interface, but focusing here on perceptions of the risks, rather than competence to manage those risks (Williams & Baláz 2014), therefore, perceived risk interface varies based on a perceived risk situation. Strikes and activism in this regard are considered as mild and hence having less perceived importance of considering it as a risk related event at destination to differ travel plans.

Although a debate on 'boycott' Kerala was initiated, however, which was not encouraged by both tourists and potential tourists, and frenzied by the view of a Netizen in one country and strong disagreement on such statement were voiced in the online platform. In this respect, our findings do not seem to support the assumed negative impact of hartal predicted by several stakeholders saying that 'hartal will discourage tourists to visit Kerala'. In general, most of the debates replicated that the hartal would not affect their travel plans. Our study also contended that the narratives about 'hartal' discussed and propagated online often representative of political structures of power, which linked to 'political activism' (hartal) and tourism irrespective of the real impact of its effect on tourism.

In addition to the heaps of thoughts propagated in the online forum that the negative aspects of implication of hartal on tourism is a media speculation and is more idealistic and hypothetical having less realities of the actual situation. Several occasional cases are viral in nature, both in visual, printed and social Media, which perhaps create a 'panic'. Media coverage of political instability can be intense, especially when it is associated with politically associated irregularities (Yap & Saha, 2013). This study unveils the context of tourism in a mild politically driven adverse situation, yet it also sparked debate on hardcore political unrest leading to tourism development in a destination. Therefore, for a future research, the following hypothetical modelling propose to further the research in different context.

Figure 1
Segmenting extreme and ongoing political instability pattern and tourism



6. Conclusion

This paper explicitly explored tourists' perception on touring Kerala during the hartal. More specifically, through a thematic analysis of online texts published in TripAdvisor, this study has attempted to assess whether and how the political activism in Kerala influenced tourist decision to visit Kerala and their perception about the destination. Overall, our analysis reveals that hartal would not discourage tourists to visit Kerala, although many regarded a certain level of challenge at the destination will enhance the visitor experience. India is generally perceived as a risky and in Kerala while such political activism in place. Although the State of Kerala is ranked one in terms of Human Development Index in India, safety and cleanliness which are some major enablers of tourists' choices. Instability related to politics may impede tourists' intrinsic interests. However, our study critically examines the reason that some of the obstacles in many cases are leading to memorable experiences, which will not impede tourists' movements.

The contribution of this paper to the body of knowledge is threefold, first, this work expands our understanding of tourists' perception on politically charged adversities at the destination and how they are responding to such occurrences. A study driven by an interpretivist approach by understanding the netizen's view is a preliminary study to explore the context, which is a scenario in several destinations to fits the blend of politics and tourism to support. This study therefore pave a platform for several empirical research in exploring tourist destinations. Secondly, this paper focuses on an Asian destination and India, a country is known for diversity, between 'states' the differences are greater than the similarities, other states of India also conduct hartal, however in varied intensities and impositions, this study will also a guide map to interpret the implications of hartal and tourism in other Indian states.

Thirdly, this study also contributes to our knowledge concerning the power structures underpinning tourism and their related politically stimulated narratives, of tourism industry stakeholders to legitimize or disapprove political decisions. Finally, the intervening capacity of Media such as online, printed, visual and social media on how several incidents are propagated and influence peripheral perception in general and how tourists perceive it in different capacity that are more skewed towards the reality of the destination settings. This preliminary study, paves a platform to stimulate empirical studies in destinations, where several political act can moderate tourism development. Also, the intervention capacity of power to regulate tourism and tourist experience without disturb and resist the total tourism image of a destination.

However, this research limits to the perception in the viewpoint of tourists, who truly seen as less affected due to hartal. We are leaving a research gap that perhaps need to study in the view point of industry stakeholders, though this study frames the viewpoints through the lenses of tourists are, actual efforts taken by the industry to overcome with the adversity perhaps be argumentative as they are the one who seeing the issues at the ground level. In addition, future studies could focus on other contexts and settings specifically, other states of India, since India is the largest democratic country of the World, several political activism in different shapes and forms are seen in other states. Furthermore, the political structures underpinning the discussions between tourism and hartal could be further explored as they could provide important information about the power structures that are shaped by and shape tourism.

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