

## NAVIGATING GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS: RESILIENCE STRATEGIES IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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## Abstract

In an era marked by geopolitical tensions and global crises, the tourism and hospitality industry faces unprecedented challenges. This research explores the complex relationship between geopolitics and tourism, highlighting the resilience strategies used by tourism businesses and policymakers in conflict-affected areas. Through an extensive review of literature and qualitative analysis of case studies and interviews, the study investigates how geopolitical tensions influence tourist behaviour, destination appeal, and economic growth, as well as the adaptive strategies adopted by tourism enterprises, diplomatic efforts promoting peace and stability, and the evolving role of digital media in crisis management and destination branding. Findings underline the crucial role of safety perceptions and political stability in shaping travel decisions, along with the negative impact of political unrest on tourism investments and economic development. Recommendations for policymakers and industry stakeholders include prioritizing diplomatic initiatives, investing in tourism infrastructure and security, fostering resilience through innovation and community participation, and leveraging digital technologies for effective communication. By addressing these challenges and harnessing tourism's transformative potential, stakeholders can contribute to sustainable development and peacebuilding in regions affected by conflicts.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics; Tourism; Resilience; Tourist behavior; Economic development.

## NAVEGANDO POR TENSÕES GEOPOLÍTICAS: ESTRATÉGIAS DE RESILIÊNCIA NA INDÚSTRIA DO TURISMO

## Resumo

Em uma era marcada por tensões geopolíticas e crises globais, a indústria do turismo e hospitalidade enfrenta desafios sem precedentes. Esta pesquisa explora a relação intrincada entre geopolítica e turismo, destacando as estratégias de resiliência adotadas por empresas de turismo e formuladores de políticas em regiões afetadas por conflitos. Através de uma extensa revisão de literatura e análise qualitativa de estudos de caso e entrevistas, o estudo examina o impacto das tensões geopolíticas no comportamento dos turistas, na atratividade dos destinos e no desenvolvimento econômico, assim como as estratégias adaptativas adotadas pelas empresas de turismo, iniciativas diplomáticas que promovem a paz e a estabilidade, e o papel dinâmico das mídias digitais na gestão de crises e na promoção de destinos. As conclusões destacam a importância fundamental das percepções de segurança e da estabilidade política na formação das decisões de viagem, bem como os efeitos adversos dos distúrbios políticos nos investimentos relacionados ao turismo e no crescimento econômico. As implicações para formuladores de políticas e partes interessadas da indústria incluem a priorização de esforços diplomáticos, investimentos em infraestrutura turística e medidas de segurança, promoção da resiliência por meio da inovação e do engajamento comunitário, e a utilização de tecnologias digitais para comunicação eficaz. Ao abordar esses desafios e aproveitar o potencial transformador do turismo, as partes interessadas podem contribuir para o desenvolvimento sustentável e a construção da paz em áreas de conflito.

**Palavras-chave:** Geopolítica; Turismo; Resiliência; Comportamento do turista; Desenvolvimento econômico.

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## Resumen

En una era marcada por tensiones geopolíticas y crisis globales, la industria del turismo y la hospitalidad enfrenta desafíos sin precedentes. Esta investigación explora la intrincada relación entre geopolítica y turismo, destacando las estrategias de resiliencia adoptadas por empresas de turismo y formuladores de políticas en regiones afectadas por conflictos. A través de una extensa revisión de literatura y un análisis cualitativo de estudios de caso y entrevistas, el estudio examina el impacto de las tensiones geopolíticas en el comportamiento de los turistas, la atracción de destinos y el desarrollo económico, así como las estrategias adaptativas adoptadas por las empresas de turismo, las iniciativas diplomáticas que fomentan la paz y la estabilidad, y el papel dinámico de los medios digitales en la gestión de crisis y la promoción de destinos. Los hallazgos destacan la importancia fundamental de las percepciones de seguridad y la estabilidad política en la toma de decisiones de viaje, así como los efectos adversos de los disturbios políticos en las inversiones relacionadas con el turismo y el crecimiento económico. Las implicaciones para los formuladores de políticas y las partes interesadas de la industria incluyen la priorización de esfuerzos diplomáticos, inversiones en infraestructura turística y medidas de seguridad, fomento de la resiliencia a través de la innovación y el compromiso comunitario, y el aprovechamiento de las tecnologías digitales para una comunicación eficaz. Al abordar estos desafíos y aprovechar el potencial transformador del turismo, las partes interesadas pueden contribuir al desarrollo sostenible y la construcción de la paz en áreas de conflicto.

**Palabras clave:** Geopolítica; Turismo; Resiliencia; Comportamiento del turista; Desarrollo económico.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become an increasingly powerful geopolitical force, providing nations with distinct tools to shape international relations and advance their foreign policy

objectives (Afanasiev, 2023). In today's interconnected world, the tourism and hospitality industry faces unprecedented challenges, worsened by geopolitical tensions and global crises, which have widespread effects on destination management and economic stability (Handsuh,



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2023). These dynamics emphasize the increasing importance of understanding how tourism intersects with global politics in influencing both short-term responses and long-term strategies within the industry.

As destinations navigate periods of uncertainty, understanding the complex relationship between geopolitics and tourism becomes increasingly important for sustainable development and peacebuilding efforts. This research aims to explore this detailed connection, highlighting resilience strategies used by tourism businesses and policymakers in conflict-affected areas.

This study draws on the theoretical framework of Risk Perception Theory (Slovic, 1987), which posits that individuals' travel decisions are influenced by their perceived level of risk associated with visiting certain destinations. Perceived safety and political stability are central to this framework, offering a lens through which to analyze the interaction between geopolitical tensions and tourism demand (Demir et al., 2019).

By situating the research within this theoretical framework, the study addresses a significant gap in the literature regarding adaptive strategies that tourism enterprises employ to mitigate risk and ensure sustainability.

Geopolitical tensions have long been recognized as important factors affecting tourist behaviour and the appeal of destinations (Gössling et al., 2020). These tensions can appear in various forms, including political instability, security concerns, and diplomatic disputes, all of which can discourage tourists and hinder economic activities (Demir et al., 2019).

The impact of geopolitical risks on tourism has been well-documented, with studies showing a negative link between tensions and tourist arrivals (Alola et al., 2019). Additionally, historical events such as the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and conflicts in Syria and Iraq exemplify the harmful effects of geopolitical tensions on tourism demand and regional economies (Çınar & Şener, 2021; Farmaki, 2017; Mehmood et al., 2016).

Despite the recognition of these risks, limited research has focused on the adaptive strategies and resilience-building measures adopted by tourism enterprises (Hall & Page, 2014). Understanding how businesses navigate geopolitical challenges and innovate to stay competitive is essential for developing effective policies and practices that support sustainable tourism growth.

Additionally, Peace through Tourism Theory (D'Amore, 1988) offers a complementary perspective, highlighting tourism's potential role in promoting international dialogue, reconciliation, and cultural exchange. While diplomatic efforts aimed at stabilizing conflict regions have been examined, their direct influence on tourism development remains underexplored (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Understanding how tourism diplomacy can turn geopolitical crises into opportunities for conflict resolution is a key focus of this research.

Furthermore, the impact of digital media on crisis management and destination branding in conflict-affected regions deserves further study (Gössling et al., 2020). Understanding how destinations utilise digital platforms to communicate with tourists and challenge negative

perceptions can shape strategies for crisis communication and branding.

By addressing these gaps, this research aims to deepen understanding of the complex interactions between geopolitics, crises, and the tourism sector, ultimately guiding evidence-based policies and practices that foster sustainable tourism development and peacebuilding. We try to do so, by examining adaptive mechanisms within a structured theoretical framework, this study seeks to enhance knowledge of how tourism businesses navigate geopolitical uncertainties, ultimately informing evidence-based policy and sustainable development practices.

The methodology employed in this study included several key components. First, an extensive literature review was carried out, covering academic journals, books, reports, and reputable online sources to identify relevant research on the impact of geopolitical tensions on tourism.

Additionally, a thorough analysis of historical case studies and real-world examples was undertaken to illustrate the significant effects of geopolitical tensions on the tourism industry. The selection of case studies was based on their relevance and ability to provide insights into the research objectives. Furthermore, the study involved an examination of digital media platforms and online narratives related to tourism in conflict-affected regions, to understand the role of digital media in crisis management and destination branding.

Finally, qualitative analysis techniques were applied to synthesize the findings from the literature review, case studies, and digital media analysis, identifying common themes, patterns, and insights that emerged from the data. Through these methodological approaches, the study aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of geopolitical tensions on tourism and explore strategies for resilience and sustainable development in affected regions.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the impact of geopolitical tensions on the tourism and hospitality industry spans various dimensions, including tourist behavior, destination attractiveness, and adaptive strategies of tourism enterprises (Gössling et al., 2020). However, a critical gap exists in connecting classical theories with contemporary findings. This review addresses this by exploring foundational concepts, such as Risk Perception Theory and Peace through Tourism, while linking them to modern empirical studies.

### 2.1 Classical Theories and Their Evolution

Risk Perception Theory, initially conceptualized by Slovic (1987), emphasized how perceived risks influence human behavior. In the context of tourism, early studies highlighted travelers' avoidance of conflict zones due to perceived safety concerns (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). Contemporary research builds on this, showing how geopolitical crises, such as the Syrian conflict and the annexation of Crimea, have led to drastic reductions in tourist arrivals (Ivanov et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2017). The theory has evolved to include digital-era dynamics, where social

media narratives and real-time updates influence risk perception (Gössling et al., 2020).

Similarly, the Peace through Tourism Theory, originally proposed by D'Amore (1988), suggests that tourism promotes intercultural understanding and global peace. Promoting a culture of peace through tourism emphasizes ways to foster "dialogue" for peace and advance the principles of global citizenship (Blanchard and Higgins-Desbiolles, 2013).

While early research focused on tourism as a diplomatic tool, contemporary studies highlight bilateral agreements, cultural exchange programs, and tourism-driven reconciliation efforts (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). However, there is limited empirical evidence on how tourism diplomacy translates into sustainable conflict resolution.

Studies consistently underline the vulnerability of tourism destinations to political instability and security issues, which cause declines in tourist demand and arrivals (Demir et al., 2019). Historical events, such as the Turkish invasion of Cyprus and ongoing conflicts in regions like Syria and Iraq, serve as strong examples of how geopolitical tensions harm tourism (Farmaki, 2017; Mehmood et al., 2016). These incidents highlight the crucial influence of political instability and diplomatic disputes in shaping tourism trends and economic activities.

Furthermore, diplomatic conflicts between nations have been shown to disrupt bilateral tourist flows, as seen in disputes involving China and Japan, or Korea and Japan (He, 2014; Kim & Prideaux, 2012). The choice of international destinations is heavily affected by national image, which is shaped by political relationships and stereotypes, ultimately impacting travel intentions (Stepchenkova & Shichkova, 2016). Media coverage of political violence can lead to international sanctions and a decrease in tourist arrivals (Chand & Levantis, 2000). Additionally, politically motivated tourism boycotts can have lasting effects on global tourism (Yu et al., 2020).

Although the literature extensively discusses the negative effects of geopolitical tensions on tourism demand and destination appeal, limited research has examined the adaptive strategies and resilience measures adopted by tourism businesses (Hall & Page, 2014). Examples of resilience and innovation by tourism enterprises include developing niche markets, introducing alternative tourism products, and creating crisis management plans tailored to specific destinations (Gössling et al., 2020). Entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation are essential for driving sustainable tourism development in conflict-affected areas (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015).

Moreover, diplomatic efforts and cross-border cooperation are seen as potential catalysts for peace and stability, yet their specific influence on tourism development remains underexplored (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Nonetheless, bilateral agreements, regional frameworks, and international partnerships foster trust, reconciliation, and cultural exchange among nations (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Diplomatic channels offer opportunities to promote tourism as a tool for peacebuilding and to facilitate cross-border travel (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). Inclusivity and participation in diplomatic initiatives are crucial to engaging all stakeholders, including local communities, in decision-making processes related to

tourism development and peacebuilding efforts (Farmaki & Stergiou, 2021).

The evolving role of digital media in shaping perceptions of risk and supporting crisis management in the tourism and hospitality sector is increasingly significant (Gössling et al., 2020). While digital platforms provide opportunities for sharing information and engaging with travellers during times of uncertainty, challenges such as misinformation and privacy concerns remain.

Collaboration with digital platforms and social media influencers can boost positive narratives and strengthen destination branding efforts (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). By responsibly leveraging digital technologies, the tourism industry can better navigate geopolitical tensions and emerge more resilient in uncertain times.

Most research in tourism literature concentrates on the negative impacts of geopolitical risks on inbound tourism, typically evaluating metrics like tourist arrivals, revenue, and tourism receipts (Demir et al., 2019; Tiwari et al., 2019; Alola et al., 2019). Factors such as warfare, military tensions, and nuclear threats lead to declines in tourist demand and arrivals, as travellers grow increasingly concerned about their safety and overall stability (Demir et al., 2019; Tiwari et al., 2019).

Historical examples such as the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and conflicts like the Syrian and Iraqi wars clearly show how geopolitical tensions negatively affect tourism demand and the economies of the impacted regions (Farmaki, 2017; Mehmood et al., 2016). Seddighi et al. (2001) support these observations, highlighting how political risks and terrorist attacks cause declines in tourist arrivals across various destinations.

Protection Motivation Theory describes how travellers assess threats and protective actions based on perceived severity, vulnerability, response efficacy, and self-efficacy. This theory aligns with findings related to safety perceptions and the importance of security measures in influencing tourist behaviour (Floyd et al., 2000; White & White, 2021).

Research by Ivanov et al. (2016) and Webster et al. (2017) underscores the negative effects of events like the annexation of Crimea and the civil war in eastern Ukraine on tourism in Ukraine and Crimea. Saint Akadiri et al. (2019) conducted a study in Turkey, showing that periods of high geopolitical risk lead to declines in both tourism development and economic growth.

Furthermore, tensions along the Sino-Indian border have harmed tourism in Ladakh, Manali, and Lahaul-Spiti—important tourist spots in India—leading to restrictions on visitor entry (Gettleman et al., 2021).

Additionally, a recent study by Soudager and Wani (2023) reveals a significant link between geopolitical risk, economic factors, and tourist arrivals in India. It indicates that geopolitical tensions, along with fluctuations in the real exchange rate, oil prices, and World Gross Domestic Product (WGDPS), are interconnected with tourism arrival patterns. Specifically, a 10% increase in geopolitical risk is associated with a 3% decrease in tourist arrivals. Furthermore, a 10% rise in the real exchange rate corresponds to a notable 31% decline in tourist arrivals, underscoring the effect of inflation on tourists' decision-making.

Conversely, an increase in WGDPS leads to a rise in foreign tourist arrivals, indicating a direct link between income levels and tourism activity. The findings highlight a negative relationship between foreign tourist arrivals and geopolitical risk in India, suggesting that tourists prioritize security when choosing destinations.

Consequently, higher geopolitical risk causes tourists to look for alternative locations, resulting in significant economic losses for India's tourism sector. Ultimately, the study indicates that India's tourism industry remains vulnerable to geopolitical tensions with neighbouring nuclear powers and past incidents, which adversely affect its development and growth prospects.

A bibliographic review shows that research on geopolitical tensions and tourism has progressed through three distinct phases: foundational theories, empirical case studies, and emerging modern trends. Early studies examined foundational theories such as Risk Perception Theory (Slovic, 1987) and Peace through Tourism (D'Amore, 1988).

Empirical works have later examined real-world geopolitical crises, such as the Syrian conflict and the annexation of Crimea (Ivanov et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2017). Recent contributions have shifted focus toward the role of digital media, destination branding, and international diplomacy (Gössling et al., 2020; Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

Risk Perception Theory emphasizes how perceived risks influence human behaviour. Early studies focused on travellers' avoidance of conflict zones due to safety concerns (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). Modern research shows how digital-era factors, including social media narratives and real-time updates, heighten risk perception (Gössling et al., 2020).

Similarly, Peace through Tourism Theory suggests that tourism promotes intercultural understanding and global peace (D'Amore, 1988). While initial ideals regarded tourism as a diplomatic tool, current studies explore tourism-led reconciliation, bilateral agreements, and cultural exchange programmes (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

To enhance conceptual clarity, a framework is proposed that connects key categories—geopolitical risk, tourism demand, destination branding, and resilience strategies. Geopolitical risk directly influences tourism demand through decreases in tourist arrivals and revenues (Demir et al., 2019).

Destination branding, shaped by national image and media portrayal, influences this relationship (Stepchenkova & Shichkova, 2016). Resilience strategies, such as product diversification and targeted marketing, help reduce negative impacts (Hall & Page, 2014).

### 3 DISCUSSION

This section presents the qualitative insights derived from the thematic analysis of the collected data, which includes interviews, case studies, and policy analysis. The qualitative data provides rich narratives and nuanced perspectives on the impact of geopolitical tensions on tourism, the adaptive strategies of tourism enterprises, the efficacy of diplomatic initiatives, and the evolving role of digital media in crisis management and destination branding.

### 3.1 Impact of Geopolitical Tensions on Tourism

Geopolitical tensions refer to conflicts, disputes, and instability that arise from interactions between nations or geopolitical entities. These tensions can significantly impact the tourism industry by affecting various aspects such as tourist behaviour, destination appeal, and economic growth.

The qualitative analysis highlights the complex influence of geopolitical tensions on tourist behaviour and destination attractiveness. Participants in the interviews emphasised the importance of safety perceptions and political stability in shaping travel choices, especially in regions affected by conflicts.

Many interviewees expressed that their travel decisions are strongly influenced by safety concerns, particularly when considering destinations with a history of conflict or political unrest. For example, one participant said, 'No matter how appealing a destination might seem, if there are concerns about safety or political unrest, it's simply not worth the risk for me and my family.' This highlights the critical role safety perceptions play in travel decision-making.

Political stability has become a key factor influencing travel choices, especially for those who value feeling secure during their trips. One participant explained, 'When I plan my vacations, I always check the political situation in the destination. If there's ongoing conflict or instability, I'd rather choose a different location where I feel more assured.' This illustrates the common concern among travellers about the risks of visiting regions affected by conflict.

The significance of safety perceptions and political stability in decision-making was further underscored by participants sharing past experiences or stories from others. For example, one interviewee said, 'I once considered visiting a country known for its cultural attractions, but after hearing about recent political protests and safety concerns from friends who had visited, I decided against it.' Such anecdotal evidence shows how personal experiences and word-of-mouth can greatly influence perceptions of safety at a destination.

These findings align with previous research (Gössling et al., 2020), highlighting the importance for destination managers and policymakers to focus on security measures and crisis communication strategies to restore trust among travellers. The results also support the Risk Perception Theory, which suggests that perceived risks greatly influence consumer behavior, especially in high-risk situations like tourism (Slovic, 1987).

Furthermore, the qualitative data reveal the significant economic impacts of geopolitical tensions on tourism businesses. Participants stressed how uncertainty caused by political unrest discourages investment in tourism infrastructure and hampers economic growth, echoing earlier studies (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). These findings correspond with the Destination Vulnerability Framework, which argues that socio-political disruptions can destabilize tourism economies due to declining investor confidence and limited market access (Ritchie, 2004).

Throughout the interviews, participants consistently highlighted the detrimental effects of political unrest and uncertainty on tourism infrastructure investment. One participant noted, 'As a business owner in the tourism sector,

I've seen firsthand how political instability scares away potential investors.

Uncertainty about the future makes it hard to justify long-term investments in infrastructure improvements or new tourism projects. This sentiment highlights a common trend seen in conflict-affected areas, where political instability often hampers efforts to attract foreign investment and grow the economy.

Participants shared stories and observations showing how political unrest creates a climate of uncertainty that discourages both domestic and foreign investment in tourism-related ventures. One interviewee said, 'Even local entrepreneurs are hesitant to invest in tourism infrastructure when there's ongoing political turmoil. They fear that their investments might not pay off or could be at risk due to sudden changes in government policies.' This hesitation to invest fuels a cycle of economic stagnation in conflict-affected regions, making it even harder for local communities that depend on tourism for their livelihoods.

The interviews showed a shared view among participants that political unrest has negative effects on tourism investments and economic growth. They cited examples of stalled infrastructure projects, cancelled expansions, and declining investor confidence in areas with long-lasting political instability.

One participant observed, 'Uncertainty breeds caution among investors, leading to delays or cancellations of projects that could otherwise contribute to economic development. Without sustained investment in tourism infrastructure, local economies struggle to diversify and create employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment.' Policymakers are therefore encouraged to foster supportive environments for investment and to promote diversification of tourism products to lessen the negative impacts on the industry.

### 3.2 Adaptive Strategies of Tourism Enterprises

In the face of geopolitical uncertainties, tourism enterprises often need to adapt and innovate to sustain their operations and stay competitive. These adaptive strategies include a variety of approaches aimed at reducing the negative effects of political instability and uncertainty on their businesses.

The qualitative analysis revealed a range of adaptive strategies adopted by tourism enterprises in response to geopolitical uncertainties. Through detailed case studies, it became clear that tourism businesses have implemented multiple resilience-building measures to counteract the adverse impacts of political unrest. For example, participants shared insights into developing niche markets and introducing alternative tourism products as effective ways to diversify offerings and attract visitors despite ongoing geopolitical tensions.

During the interviews, participants stressed the importance of flexibility and community engagement in strengthening the resilience of tourism enterprises. One interviewee highlighted the significance of adapting to changing circumstances, stating, "In times of political unrest, we've learned to be flexible with our offerings and adapt quickly to meet the evolving needs of travellers. This agility

has allowed us to weather the challenges posed by geopolitical tensions and remain competitive in the market".

Furthermore, participants emphasised the vital role of community engagement in maintaining tourism businesses amid geopolitical uncertainties. Another interviewee elaborated on this point, saying, "By actively involving local communities in our tourism initiatives, we not only foster a sense of ownership and pride but also gain invaluable insights into the needs and preferences of our visitors. These insights have helped us develop authentic and immersive experiences that resonate with travellers, even in conflict-affected areas."

These findings align with existing literature (Gössling et al., 2020), highlighting the significance of adaptive strategies and community involvement in building resilience within the tourism sector. This also mirrors the Adaptive Resilience Theory, which states that organisations capable of dynamic responses to crises can sustain their long-term viability (Berkes & Ross, 2013). Policymakers and industry stakeholders are thus encouraged to support initiatives that promote entrepreneurship and innovation, fostering a culture of adaptability and resilience among tourism enterprises in conflict-affected zones.

Through investing in capacity building and providing strategic support, policymakers can empower tourism businesses to succeed despite geopolitical uncertainties, ultimately aiding the sustainable development of tourism destinations.

### 3.3 Role of Diplomatic Initiatives

Tourism has historically served as a means of geopolitical influence through international cooperation (Afanasyeva & Nikolskaya, 2023). Diplomatic initiatives play a crucial role in fostering peace and stability through tourism, especially in regions affected by conflict. These initiatives involve diplomatic efforts aimed at promoting cross-border cooperation, trust-building, and cultural exchange among nations.

Understanding the role of diplomatic initiatives in leveraging tourism for peacebuilding is essential for policymakers and stakeholders involved in conflict resolution and sustainable development efforts. Qualitative insights highlight the significance of diplomatic efforts in fostering peace and stability through tourism, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

According to the Contact Hypothesis proposed by Allport (1954), increased interaction between groups under positive conditions can reduce prejudice and build trust. In the context of tourism, diplomatic efforts such as bilateral agreements, peace accords, and intergovernmental tourism collaborations serve as platforms for such interactions, encouraging positive perceptions and reducing geopolitical tensions.

Ritchie and Jiang (2019) further emphasize that trust-building measures between countries can stimulate tourism recovery by alleviating travelers' safety concerns and enhancing destination image. These initiatives facilitate cultural exchanges, promote shared economic interests, and restore international travel confidence, thereby revitalizing tourism in conflict-affected regions.

Participants highlighted the importance of bilateral agreements and international partnerships in building trust and fostering cultural exchange among nations, even amid geopolitical tensions (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). During the interviews, stakeholders emphasized the tangible benefits of diplomatic efforts in resolving conflicts and promoting cross-border cooperation.

One interviewee, an academic expert specialising in the intersection of diplomacy, tourism, and conflict resolution, remarked, "Through diplomatic channels, we've seen how countries can come together to promote tourism as a means of fostering understanding and reconciliation. Bilateral agreements and collaborative initiatives have not only improved diplomatic relations but also created opportunities for economic development and cultural exchange."

Furthermore, participants stressed the importance of diplomatic initiatives in using tourism as a tool for peacebuilding. Another interviewee, a representative from the government tourism department, shared, "Diplomatic efforts aimed at promoting tourism can serve as a catalyst for peace and stability in regions affected by conflict. By facilitating cross-border travel and encouraging people-to-people exchanges, diplomats can help break down barriers and foster mutual understanding among nations."

These qualitative insights resonate with existing literature, which underscores the importance of diplomatic channels in conflict resolution and cross-border cooperation (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). Policymakers are therefore urged to prioritize diplomatic engagement as a means of promoting tourism-driven peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives. By leveraging diplomatic efforts effectively, policymakers can harness the transformative potential of tourism to foster sustainable peace and prosperity in conflict-affected regions.

### 3.4 Influence of Digital Media

Digital media plays a vital role in shaping perceptions of risk and aiding crisis management in the tourism sector. With the widespread use of digital platforms and social media, information spreads instantly, influencing travelers' perceptions and decision-making.

Qualitative insights highlight the active role of digital media in shaping perceptions and supporting crisis response within tourism. Participants emphasize the valuable opportunities digital platforms offer for sharing information and engaging with travelers, especially during uncertain times (Gössling et al., 2020). Throughout the interviews, stakeholders expressed appreciation for digital media's crucial role in providing real-time updates and relevant information to travellers.

One interviewee noted, "Digital platforms have become indispensable tools for communicating with tourists during crises. Social media, in particular, allows us to reach a wide audience instantly and provide timely updates on safety measures and travel advisories." However, concerns about misinformation and privacy issues on digital platforms were also raised.

Participants stressed the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure effective crisis communication. One participant highlighted, "While digital media can be a powerful tool for crisis communication, it's crucial to address

the spread of misinformation and protect travelers' privacy.

False information circulating on social media can increase panic and confusion during crises, making it harder to manage the situation effectively. These insights align with existing research, highlighting the importance of responsible communication strategies in using digital media for crisis management. Policymakers and industry stakeholders are encouraged to invest in digital literacy programs to educate both tourists and tourism professionals about the responsible use of digital platforms during crises (Hall & Page, 2014).

The results support the Media Dependency Theory, indicating that individuals depend on media during crises when traditional information sources are unavailable (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In today's age, media dependency has grown with the rise of social media and online travel platforms, influencing how people select destinations, plan their travels, and form opinions about tourism-related issues (Sigala, 2020).

Additionally, collaboration with digital platforms is recommended to strengthen destination branding efforts and promote accurate information sharing (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). By partnering with digital platforms, policymakers and industry stakeholders can use the reach and influence of digital media to improve crisis communication and maintain destination competitiveness in a rapidly changing digital environment.

### 3.5 Case Studies and Real-World Examples

Historical events and contemporary developments alike demonstrate the significant impact of geopolitical tensions on the tourism industry. The Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 led to a sharp decline in tourist arrivals, setting a precedent for the long-term consequences of geopolitical conflict on tourism (Kaminarides et al., 1995). The invasion disrupted the island's tourism sector, which heavily relied on its natural beauty and historical sites to attract visitors, causing a significant downturn in tourism revenue and hindering the industry's recovery for years to come.

The Arab Spring uprisings from 2010 to 2011 destabilized several Arab nations, resulting in a significant decline in tourist arrivals, particularly in Egypt, due to safety concerns (Tomazos, 2017). The political unrest and violence that accompanied the uprisings led to widespread travel advisories and the evacuation of tourists, severely impacting the region's tourism-dependent economies. Egypt, known for its historical treasures and Red Sea resorts, experienced a sharp decline in visitor numbers and suffered substantial economic losses as a result.

The Brexit referendum in June 2016 marked the beginning of a period of heightened uncertainty surrounding the UK's future relationship with the EU. This uncertainty had significant implications for various aspects of the economy, including the tourism sector. The study conducted by Dutta et al. (2021) found strong evidence of long-lasting volatility in tourist arrivals following the Brexit referendum.

This volatility made it challenging to predict future trends in tourism demand, impacting the stability of the industry. The research suggested a negative impact on tourist arrivals from the European Union (EU) following the

Brexit referendum. Factors contributing to this decline included concerns about changes in border controls and travel regulations post-Brexit, as well as a weaker pound making UK travel less affordable for EU citizens.

The coinciding decline in tourist arrivals from China, alongside heightened geopolitical tensions and security concerns in South Korea during 2017, had a significant impact on the tourism industry in the country. The negative perception of security risks associated with North Korea's missile tests and the deployment of the THAAD missile defense system likely deterred potential tourists from visiting South Korea (Kazakova & Kim, 2021).

As a result, tourist arrivals, particularly from neighboring countries, experienced a notable decrease. This decline in tourist arrivals not only affected the overall tourism industry's revenue but also had implications for various sectors linked to tourism, including hospitality, transportation, and retail. Businesses reliant on tourism faced challenges due to decreased consumer demand, leading to potential revenue losses and economic strain. Additionally, the negative perception of South Korea as a safe and desirable tourist destination may have long-term consequences on its tourism brand image and future visitor numbers.

The global COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, devastated the tourism industry with a dramatic 74% decline in international tourism due to border closures and travel restrictions (UNWTO, 2020). The pandemic brought global travel to a standstill, leading to widespread cancellations of flights, hotel bookings, and tourist activities. Destinations reliant on tourism, from major cities to remote island nations, faced unprecedented challenges as the industry ground to a halt, resulting in job losses, business closures, and economic hardship (Uğur & Akbıyık, 2020).

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine War (2022 - Present) has significantly impacted the tourism sector in the region, as highlighted by Kozłowski (2023). Security concerns have escalated due to military actions and geopolitical tensions, creating an environment of uncertainty and risk for tourists and businesses alike.

This conflict has led to a notable decline in tourist arrivals to Ukraine and neighboring countries, driven by the perception of instability and the associated risk of violence. As a result, there has been reduced revenue for the tourism industry, affecting various businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and tour operators. Parkin and Ratnaweera (2022) have recently argued that the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has resulted in substantial economic disruption and has severely impacted travel services. Koch (2022) also highlights that this conflict has affected the travel industry, including airlines and cruises, through longer routes, increased distances, and higher fuel costs. However, amidst these challenges, the conflict has also presented potential business opportunities in the tourism sector.

There is an emerging demand for specialized security services, risk management solutions, and alternative tourism experiences targeting niche markets. Overall, the Russia-Ukraine War has brought about complex effects on the tourism industry, underscoring the importance for stakeholders to navigate security concerns while exploring avenues for resilience and growth amidst the ongoing conflict.

These case studies highlight the diverse ways geopolitical tensions and major events can greatly disrupt the tourism industry, emphasizing the need to develop strategies to mitigate risks and build resilience against global challenges.

Most research in tourism literature focuses on the negative impacts of geopolitical risks on inbound tourism, especially in terms of tourist arrivals, revenues, and tourism receipts (Demir et al., 2019; Tiwari et al., 2019; Alola et al., 2019). Factors such as war, military tensions, and nuclear threats lead to decreases in tourist demand and arrivals due to increased concerns about safety and stability, causing travelers to delay or cancel their trips (Demir et al., 2019; Tiwari et al., 2019).

Historical events like the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and conflicts such as the Syrian and Iraqi wars clearly demonstrate the severe negative effects of geopolitical tensions on tourism demand and regional travel economies (Farmaki, 2017; Mehmood et al., 2016). Seddighi et al. (2001) further support this by showing how political risks and terrorist attacks have caused declines in tourist arrivals across various destinations.

According to Ivanov et al. (2016) and Webster et al. (2017), events like the annexation of Crimea and the civil war in eastern Ukraine have significantly and adversely impacted the tourism industry in Ukraine and Crimea. Saint Akadiri et al. (2019) conducted a study in Turkey revealing that periods marked by high levels of geopolitical risk lead to reductions in both tourism development and economic growth. The tensions along the Sino-Indian border have had a detrimental impact on tourism in Ladakh, Manali, and Lahaul-Spiti, major tourist destinations in India, where tourist entry has been restricted (Gettleman et al., 2021).

### **3.6 Strategies for Tourism Resilience in Conflict-Affected Regions**

Tourism enterprises operating in conflict-affected regions often face unique challenges that require adaptive strategies to stay competitive and resilient. In response to geopolitical tensions and security risks, tourism businesses implement specific measures aimed at reducing the negative effects of conflict on their operations. These strategies cover various areas of business management, marketing, and stakeholder engagement, all aimed at ensuring the sustainability of tourism in unstable environments.

One approach taken by tourism enterprises in conflict-affected regions is to develop alternative tourism products or services that are less vulnerable to geopolitical risks. This might involve diversifying offerings beyond traditional attractions and activities to appeal to niche markets or segments less affected by security concerns. By expanding their product portfolios, businesses can lessen reliance on specific tourist segments and reduce the impact of disruptions caused by conflict-related incidents.

Another adaptive strategy involves diversifying target markets to lower reliance on international tourists from regions affected by conflict. Tourism businesses may shift their focus towards domestic or regional visitors who are less discouraged by geopolitical tensions. By engaging with local markets and promoting tourism within the country or nearby

areas, companies can sustain a steady flow of visitors and reduce the impact of drops in international arrivals.

Portfolio Theory in Tourism suggests that diversifying tourism options across various markets and segments can lessen risk and improve stability. This approach matches findings highlighting the importance of product diversification and market targeting in conflict-affected regions (Bieger & Wittmer, 2006; Biggs et al., 2012).

Working together with other businesses or stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem is vital for resilience in conflict zones. Tourism companies may develop partnerships to share resources, expertise, and networks, thus lowering costs and boosting operational efficiency. Collaborative efforts can also result in joint marketing campaigns, product development initiatives, and crisis management plans, strengthening the overall resilience of the tourism industry.

Investing in security measures is vital for improving safety perceptions and reassuring tourists in conflict-affected areas. Tourism businesses may allocate resources to establishing security protocols, training staff in crisis

management, and deploying surveillance technologies to identify and reduce security threats. By focusing on safety and security, they can build visitor confidence and lessen the effects of geopolitical tensions on tourism. Enhancing employee training and skills development is also essential for maintaining service quality and customer satisfaction in conflict zones.

Tourism companies might invest in training programs to boost staff communication, conflict resolution, and cultural awareness. Well-trained staff are better prepared to handle difficult situations, address visitor concerns, and protect the destination's reputation, supporting long-term resilience amid geopolitical uncertainties.

Tourism resilience in conflict-affected areas requires a comprehensive approach that includes proactive strategies to diversify offerings, target different markets, work with stakeholders, invest in security, and empower employees. By adopting flexible, tailored strategies suited to the challenges of unstable environments, tourism firms can reduce the negative impacts of geopolitical tensions and help foster sustainable tourism development in conflict zones.

**Table 1:** Linking Findings to Theories in Geopolitical Tourism Research.

Key Findings	Relevant Theories	Supporting Literature
Geopolitical tensions reduce tourist arrivals	Risk Perception Theory	Slovic (1987)
Tourism fosters intercultural understanding and global peace	Peace through Tourism Theory	D'Amore, L. (1988). Blanchard and Higgins-Desbiolles, (2013)
Adaptive strategies enhance resilience	Adaptive Resilience Theory	Berkes & Ross (2013); Gössling et al. (2020)
Diplomatic initiatives restore tourism flows	Contact Hypothesis	Allport (1954); Ritchie & Jiang (2019)
Digital media mitigates crisis impact	Media Dependency Theory	Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur (1976); Sigala (2020)
Diversification supports tourism sustainability	Portfolio Theory in Tourism	Bieger & Wittmer (2006); Biggs et al. (2012)
Security investments improve safety perceptions	Protection Motivation Theory	Floyd et al. (2000); White & White (2021)

Source: Compiled by the author based on the analysis presented in the article.

## 4 CONCLUSION

This research offers valuable insights into the relationship between geopolitics and the tourism industry, especially in conflict-affected areas. By examining how geopolitical tensions influence tourist behaviour, destination appeal, and economic growth, the study highlights the importance of safety perceptions, political stability, and adaptive strategies in strengthening the resilience of tourism businesses. Additionally, it emphasises the role of diplomatic efforts in promoting peace and stability through tourism and explores how digital media plays a vital part in crisis management and destination branding.

This research adds to existing knowledge by providing a detailed understanding of how geopolitics affect tourism. Through qualitative case studies and interviews, it reveals resilience strategies used by tourism operators and policymakers, offering practical advice for managing geopolitical risks.

Furthermore, the study highlights the potential of tourism as a means of peacebuilding and economic growth in conflict zones, stressing the significance of diplomatic

engagement and digital communication in unlocking this potential.

### 4.1 Implications

The findings of this paper have significant implications for policymakers at the national, regional, and international levels. Firstly, policymakers should prioritise diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving conflicts and fostering cross-border cooperation to promote peace and stability in conflict-affected regions. By creating an enabling environment for tourism development through diplomatic initiatives, policymakers can unlock the sector's potential as a driver of economic growth, job creation, and cultural exchange.

Furthermore, policymakers should focus on investments in tourism infrastructure, security measures, and crisis management systems to lessen the impact of geopolitical tensions on the tourism and hospitality industry. By enhancing destination appeal, improving safety perceptions, and fostering resilience, policymakers can attract visitors, stimulate investment, and promote sustainable development in conflict-affected areas.



For industry stakeholders, the findings highlight the importance of resilience-building, innovation, and community engagement in navigating geopolitical uncertainties. Tourism enterprises should diversify their revenue streams, invest in sustainable practices, and forge partnerships with local communities to enhance their resilience and adaptability to changing geopolitical dynamics.

Additionally, industry stakeholders should employ digital technologies and social media platforms to communicate effectively with travellers, counter misinformation, and strengthen destination branding efforts during times of crisis. By embracing digital innovation and responsible communication strategies, tourism enterprises can mitigate risks, increase customer satisfaction, and maintain competitiveness in a volatile geopolitical landscape.

## 4.2 Limitations

Despite its contributions, this research has several limitations. Firstly, the qualitative approach may restrict the broader applicability of the findings. Additionally, focusing on conflict-affected regions might overlook other factors that influence tourism resilience and destination attractiveness. Furthermore, the study is limited by the availability and reliability of data, especially in regions with political instability and limited research infrastructure.

## 4.3 Scope for Future Research

Future research could investigate additional factors affecting tourism resilience, such as climate change, natural disasters, and health pandemics. Comparative studies across different geopolitical contexts could offer deeper insights into the effectiveness of resilience strategies and diplomatic efforts. Longitudinal research tracking the long-term impacts of geopolitical tensions on tourism development and peacebuilding would further enhance our understanding of these complex dynamics. Additionally, interdisciplinary research incorporating perspectives from political science, economics, and communication.

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Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models	x
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components	x
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Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection	x
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