

Key Factors Influencing Tourist's Destination Image: A Perspective From International Tourists in Jordan

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Abstract

Objectives: This paper highlights the significant role of key factors in the formation of tourist destination image. From the perspective of international tourists who represent the major target market in Jordan, this study explores the potential influence of destination image on their travel intention and repeat visitation. Understanding factors that motivate tourists to travel to a specific destination can lead to predicting their future decisions.

Methods: This study adopts a quantitative approach based on the analysis of selected items of questionnaire responses collected from 180 international tourists who visited Jordan post-COVID-19 pandemic.

Results: Findings reveal that the destination image of international tourists is significantly affected by internal and external factors. Perception of tourist attractions, travel experience, interaction with the local community, and feeling of safety and security are crucial in enhancing the image of international tourist destinations.

Conclusions: Tourism planners, policymakers, and stakeholders can benefit from the results by using the positive image of Jordan tourism to apply a suitable marketing strategy, investing in security and safety, and preserving the country's tradition of hospitality. That, in return, will allow tourist destinations to provide a unique experience for visitors, contributing to the growth and development of the economy.

Keywords: Destination image, travel experience, local community, safety and security, tourist attractions.

العوامل الرئيسية المؤثرة في صورة الوجهة السياحية من منظور السياح الدوليين في الأردن

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ملخص

الأهداف: تسلط هذه الورقة البحثية الضوء على دور العوامل الرئيسية في تشكيل صورة الوجهة السياحية من وجهة نظر السياح الدوليين الذين يُعدون أكبر سوق سياحي في الأردن. وتوضح التأثير المحتمل لصورة الوجهة على نية السفر وتكرار الزيارة للوجهة. حيث إن فهم العوامل التي تدفع السياح للسفر إلى وجهة محددة، يمكن أن يؤدي إلى توقع قرارات سفرهم المستقبلية.

المنهجية: اعتمدت هذه الدراسة المنهج الكمي، وذلك بالاستناد إلى تحليل بيانات مجموعة مختارة من أسئلة الاستبانة التي تم جمعها من 180 سائحاً دولياً، زاروا الأردن بعد جائحة كورونا.

النتائج: كشفت النتائج أن صورة الوجهة لدى السياح الدوليين تتأثر بشكل إيجابي بالعوامل الداخلية والخارجية. ذلك أن إدراك معالم الجذب السياحي، وتجربة السفر والتفاعل مع المجتمع المحلي والشعور بالأمان والسلامة تعد من العناصر الحاسمة في تعزيز صورة الوجهات السياحية الدولية.

الخلاصة: يمكن أن يستفيد المخططون السياحيون، وأصحاب القرار وأصحاب المصلحة من نتائج هذه الدراسة، من خلال استثمار الصورة الإيجابية للأردن. حيث يمكن تطبيق استراتيجية تسويق مناسبة، والاستثمار في الأمان وتعزيز السلامة والحفاظ على تقاليد الضيافة في البلاد. وبالتالي، يمكن لوجهات السياحة أن تستمر في توفير تجربة فريدة للزوار، مما يساهم في نمو وتطوير الاقتصاد.

الكلمات الدالة: صورة الوجهة، تجربة السفر، المجتمع المحلي، الأمان والسلامة، الجذب السياحي.

1. Introduction

Destination image is described as a subjective representation of a location maintained in the mind of tourists that influences their behavior (Agapito et al., 2013). Destination image has been observed to impact travel intention post-COVID-19 pandemic. Investigating destination image contributes to creating strategies to overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic (Ren & Sánchez-Aguilera, 2022). In travel research, It was noted that destinations would negatively impact tourist travel intention if they are highlighted as risky or unsafe (Schroeder et al., 2013). Moreover, the perceptions of a variety of risks, including safety and security concerns, have a considerable impact on international tourists' travel intentions (Lu & Atadil, 2021). In May 2021, as a response plan for tourism recovery, the government of Jordan declared that the lockdown would be gradually lifted, enabling all economic sectors to reopen under tight physical distancing and safety protocols. Countries that have eased travel and tourist restrictions have begun to apply several creative strategies for keeping customer confidence by putting safety first (Harchandani & Shome, 2021). In this context, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) has launched the National Tourism Strategy (NTS), including action plans for tourism recovery because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the tourism income in Jordan depends basically on international tourists, travel restrictions were eased.

According to MOTA statistics, as shown in table 1 below, Jordan welcomed a total of 1,494,449 international tourists In 2021, with a considerable arrival through airports in Amman and Aqaba, recording 613,314 arrivals. Air transport signifies its significance in facilitating international tourism, likely due to the country's well-connected international airports, notably Queen Alia International Airport in Amman. Moreover, the majority of tourists arriving by land transport showcases the importance of overland connections and border access, emphasizing Jordan's accessibility and popularity among travelers from neighboring countries with 827,258 arrivals. Conversely, sea transport contributed the least to the influx of tourists, with 53,877 arrivals, indicating that maritime entry points were less utilized, potentially due to Jordan's inland location without direct access to major bodies of water. Therefore, this study analyses feedback from international tourists. It explains their perception regarding a set of factors related to their destination image to understand their travel intention. The study demonstrates their judgments on how these factors can push them to visit and revisit a specific destination, which is crucial for practitioners in the field of tourism and marketing.

Table 1: Total number of international tourists. Source: (MOTA, 2021)

Mode of transport	International Tourists arrival in 2021
Sea	53,877
Air	613,314
Land	827,258
Total	1,494,449

2. Background

Jordan is a rich destination of tourist attractions which have contributed to an increase in the number of international tourists since the 1990s (Barham et al., 2007). The variety of attractions enables for the practice of several sorts of tourism, such as adventure, ecotourism, and culture tourism. The country is also known for its unique destination image as it is the Middle East's leader in health tourism (Al-Azzam, 2016). The country's most significant attractions range from natural, to historical, religious, and medical attributes. For example, Petra is an ancient civilized city carved in sandstone mountains and listed as one of the World Heritage Sites (WHS) by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1985 (UNESCO, 2022). In addition, Jordan is the cradle of many shrines of famous Muslim leaders, and many great historical battles took place on the land of Jordan as well. Also, the Jordan river is a religious destination for Christians because it contains the baptism site. Located at the lowest point on the earth, about 450 meters below sea level, the Dead Sea is an ideal place for medical tourism. In the north of Jordan, forests and natural reserves are good places for eco-tourism (MOTA, 2022). This unique diversity allows doing activities that can suit the requirements

and desires of a wide range of international tourists. Overall, Jordan has a rich legacy exhibited in historical monuments introducing several important eras that left its mark in the region, including the Nabatean, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic civilizations (Goussous & Al-Jaafreh, 2020).

3. Methodology

This study used quantitative methodology. A cross-sectional online questionnaire was created by (Google Forms) and distributed between 4th and 31 December 2022. A convenience sampling method was used in this investigation. The questionnaire measured four significant variables which are "interaction with the local community, perception of attractions, travel experience, and perception of safety and security". Moreover, the questionnaire focused on specific questions: "The people of Jordan are friendly", "Jordan has a diversity of natural and historical attractions", "visiting Jordan is a pleasant experience", and "Jordan is a secure country". A total of 180 questionnaires were collected from international tourists located at hotels and international airports in Amman, Petra, and Aqaba. As well as through several social media platforms of official tourism representatives such as Jordan Tourism Board. This study adopted statistical results of an online questionnaire based on feedback from international tourists who visited Jordan. The items allowed multiple-choice answers and utilized a Likert-type scale, by which respondents determine their level of agreement with each statement along five anchor points: (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) neutral; (4) agree; and (5) strongly agree.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Demographics

The results indicate that the total percentage of respondents who replied to the questionnaire was 60% males and 40% females. This significant participation of both genders indicates that the sampling method and the data collection process were properly selected. In addition, more than 55 % of the respondents came from Europe and North America, while the rest were from Asia and Arab countries (Figure 1). The information lends support to the observations that the majority of international tourists who visited Jordan post-pandemic came from Western countries. According to MOTA official statistics, tourists from Europe and the United States represent the main target market of Jordan tourism (MOTA, 2021).

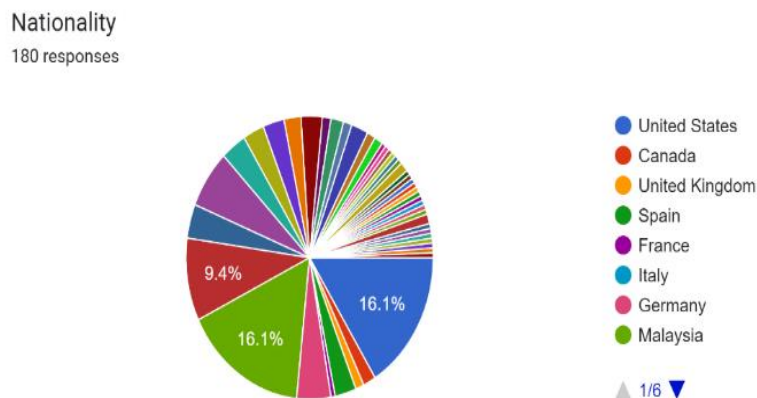


Figure 1: Main nationalities of respondents (Google Forms)

4.2 Interaction with the local community

Results revealed a percentage of 67% of respondents agree with the statement "The people of Jordan are friendly" with tourists, which is an important factor in attracting tourists to the country (Figure 2). A recent study carried out by Styliadis et al., (2022) revealed that the interaction with the local community influenced visitors' destination image. This leads tourists to gain better knowledge about locals, places, and attractions. Moreover, being warm and friendly to tourists can help visitors feel safe and secure when visiting the country. Governments and tourism stakeholders need to work together to promote a positive image of the country and to ensure that visitors feel welcome and valued during their stay. By promoting a welcoming and hospitable environment for visitors, Jordan can continue to attract and retain loyal tourists, contributing to the growth and development of the economy and society.

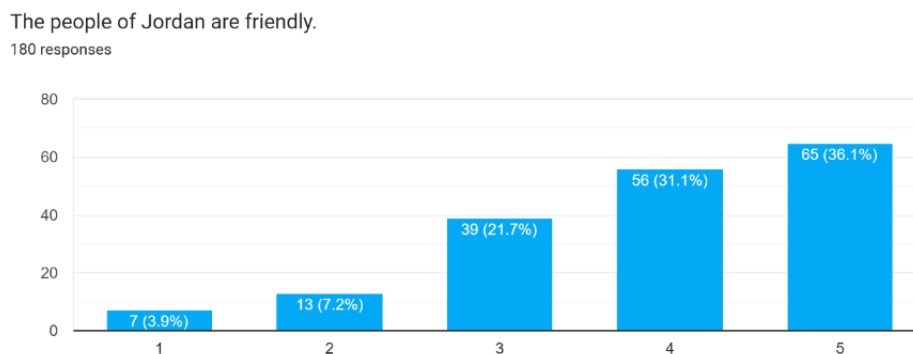


Figure 2: Respondents' feedback (Google Forms)

4.3 Perception of attractions

Perception of attractions is considered a significant factor in formulating a tourist destination image (Styliadis et al., 2022). The present study highlights that 77% of respondents agree with the statement "Jordan has a diversity of natural and historical attractions" (Figure 3). These attractions are classified into stationary (i.e., Petra, Jerash, and Um Qais) and seasonal (Baptism site). The classification of tourist attractions leads to understand the connection between the nature of tourist attractions and the destination performance indicators (Ćorluka et al., 2021). The country offers a diverse range of attractions that appeal to visitors' needs. The perception of Jordan as a destination that is rich in natural, cultural, and religious sites is a significant factor in attracting and retaining tourists, as it can influence their decision-making and overall satisfaction.

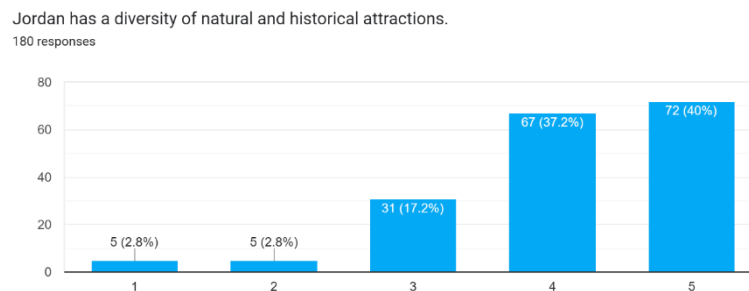


Figure 3: Respondents' feedback (Google Forms)

4.4 Travel experience

Past travel experience is considered a significant factor in the formation of the destination image and future travel intention (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Gomis-I & Pablo, 2021; Nazir et al., 2021). Based on questionnaire responses, it was revealed that 72% of respondents agree that "visiting Jordan is a pleasant experience", and this can lead to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Figure 4). However, maintaining a pleasant visitor experience requires ongoing efforts and investment. Stakeholders in the tourism industry must continuously monitor visitor feedback and make adjustments to enhance the visitor experience.

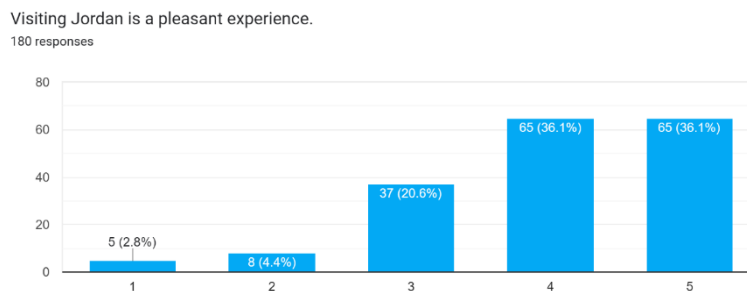


Figure 4: Respondents' feedback (Google Forms)

4.5 Perception of safety and security

Several studies have investigated perceived risks in tourist destinations (i.e., Carvalho, 2022; Zhan et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Safety and security at the destination are considered key factors that influence travel intention (Lu & Atadil, 2021; Mheidat & Marzuki, 2023). Jordan is perceived as a safe destination for visitors from around the world, and the perception of safety and security is a crucial factor in attracting and retaining tourists. The government has implemented various measures to address security concerns including increased police presence, surveillance technology, and border controls. Additionally, the country has established a tourism police force to further guarantee the safety and well-being of the tourists. However, it is essential for stakeholders in the tourism industry to continuously monitor safety and security issues and make necessary adjustments to enhance visitor safety and security. The analysis of the present study indicates that 67% of respondents agree with the statement that "Jordan is a secure country". This is a positive sign for the country's tourism industry (Figure 5). It highlights the importance of maintaining a safe and secure destination to attract and retain tourists. In 2020, Jordan was awarded the "Safe Travels" stamp by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in recognition of the Kingdom's successful response to the COVID-19 pandemic (JordanTimes, 2020).

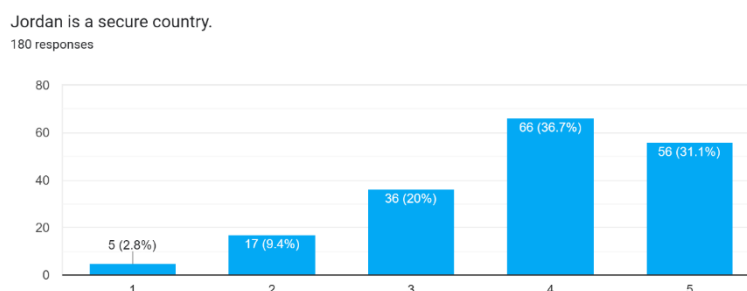


Figure 5: Respondents' feedback (Google Forms)

5. Conclusion and implications

This research sheds light on the significance of key factors in the destination image. The analysis of the feedback provided by international tourists who visited Jordan post-pandemic demonstrates that tourists' destination image is affected by the perception of attractions, travel experience, interaction with the local community, and perception of safety and security. The country's warm and welcoming hospitality, coupled with its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, creates a cognitive and affective image that appeals to a wide range of tourists. Moreover, the country's emphasis on safety and security ensures that tourists feel safe and secure while exploring its numerous attractions. The destination attractions provide tourists with unique experiences that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. These factors, combined with the country's strategic location and accessibility, make Jordan a must-visit destination for anyone looking forward to exploring a diverse range of cultural and natural attractions in a safe and welcoming environment. As such, the continued development and promotion of these factors are essential to sustain and enhance Jordan's position as a premier international tourist destination. This study shows that tourist boards and destination marketing groups should make special plans to tell people about a place's unique things and fun stuff to do. They should do this in a way that matches what the tourists want. Also, destination management should team up with local communities to make good times for tourists. They should help tourists connect with locals and learn about their way of life. Making tourists happy and setting up friendly places for them is important too. This study emphasizes the need of continuously analysing tourists' views of a destination throughout time. Destination management organisations should gather and analyse data on tourist satisfaction, destination image, and other critical indicators regularly. This will assist them in identifying areas for improvement and adjusting their plans accordingly.

6. Recommendations

To enhance the destination image of Jordan, it is recommended that a comprehensive strategy be formulated based on the findings of this study. Firstly, destination management authorities must develop targeted promotional campaigns that highlight the unique attractions, cultural richness, and natural beauty of Jordan. These campaigns should align with tourists' preferences and emphasize the country's warm hospitality and emphasis on safety and security. Moreover, fostering collaborations between destination management and local communities is crucial to facilitate positive interactions and authentic cultural experiences for tourists. Continual assessment of tourists' perceptions is essential, necessitating the regular collection and analysis of data on tourist satisfaction, destination image, and safety perceptions. This ongoing evaluation will aid in identifying areas for improvement and adapting strategies to meet evolving tourist preferences. Therefore, a sustained effort in promoting Jordan's distinctive features while prioritizing safety, local engagement, and tourist satisfaction is essential to solidify its position as an attractive and safe destination on the global tourism map.

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