Mamoon Allan
The University of Jordan

Suzanna Alkushman
The University of Jordan

Exploring the impacts of the Arab Spring on tourism in Jordan: Perspectives of the public and private sector

This study explores the impact of the Arab Spring on the public and private sectors of tourism in Jordan and the ways of dealing with the repercussions of this crisis by the various tourist authorities in Jordan. The study employed the qualitative method through the use of direct interviews with a sample of public and private tourism bodies in Jordan. The study findings indicate, on one hand, the presence of negative effects on the tourism sector in Jordan, especially with regard to regulations applied on tourism bodies and dealing with tourists such as rising entry fees for tourism destinations, delays in the issuance of documents and visas for inbound tourists, as well as the weakness of tourism promotion in the media. On the other hand, the study pointed to the positive results that have enriched the tourism sector as a result of the Arab Spring crisis. For instance, many international tourists have preferred to travel to Jordan instead of other neighbours' countries in the region due to best practices of crisis management in Jordanian tourism authorities and the availability of trained tourism staffs that have experiences in safety procedures and crisis management. Finally, the study showed the need to broaden the practices and procedures in the revitalization of the tourism sector to encounter ongoing challenges. The study also suggests performing more effective procedures to develop the Jordanian tourism sector to be able to deal with the consequences of the Arab Spring.

Key words: The Arab Spring, tourism industry, politics, stakeholders, the Middle East, Jordan

Mamoon Allan
Faculty of Archaeology and Tourism
The University of Jordan
Amman 11942 Jordan
Jordan
Email: mamoon1073@yahoo.com

Suzanna Alkushman
Faculty of International Studies
The University of Jordan Amman
11942 Jordan
Jordan
Email: suzanna_khaled_92@yahoo.com

Mamoon Allan is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Archeology and Tourism at the University of Jordan in Amman. He completed his Ph.D. in Tourism Marketing at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. He conducts international research in the field of geotourism, accessible tourism, tourist behaviour, and e-tourism.

Suzanna Alkushman has a master degree in Sustainable Development. Her main research interests are sustainable tourism and tourism and politics.

Introduction

Overall, the non-oil Arab countries depend on tourism income to enhance their economical states (Tang & Abosedra, 2014). Accordingly, the tourism industry has played a vital role in improving the Jordanian economy that manifests itself in the recent remarkable growth in tourism revenues, which rose by 9% in the first quarter of 2010. The tourism industry in Jordan is considered as the centerl of economic development and the second fastest of the growing sectors. Jordan is characterized by abundant and diversified tourist attractions and the ability to provide holistic tourism experiences (Allan, 2014). The tourism industry in Jordan is considered a significant source of employment for the local community. According to the statistics of MOTA (2018), the number of employees in different tourism activities has been raised from 29. 384 in 2005 to 50.359 in 2016.

However, from 1990 until 2010, the tourism sector has suffered from many crises that emerged in the Arab world. It has been affected by the succession of sporadic terrorists' attacks on tourism destinations in many Arab countries, such as countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Hillali, 2014). The phenomenon of the so-called Arab Spring began in 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen events and then spread to Syria. The Arab Spring uprisings had an important impact on economic activity in the region, and one of the most immediate effects was a severe decline in tourism to most of the countries in the MENA region (Masetti et al., 2013). While these events had a negative impact on the tourism sector in these respective countries, many other countries have benefited, in return, from the revival of their tourism activities such as the Gulf countries. Recently, Debate continues about the potential impacts of the Arab Spring on the tourism industry in the Middle East. However, the concept of the 'tourism crisis' is common to the tourism industry in the Middle East. The area has witnessed wars, political instability and violent conflicts which impede tourism over long years (Steiner, 2007).

The number of tourist flows in the five main tourism destination

in the area – Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and Lebanon – fell noticeably. The decline was most severe in Egypt and Tunisia, by almost 40% in both countries. Furthermore, international foreign investment in the tourism industry also dropped considerably (Perles- Ribes et al. 2018).

The Arab Spring has profoundly influenced the tourism industry in the Middle East, in general, and Jordan, in particular. More specifically, such phenomenon turns to be a serious and a major challenge for the policymakers of tourism in Jordan. Thus, this study seeks to explore the different strategies and mechanisms employed to confront the impacts of the Arab Spring on different dimensions of the tourism industry in Jordan. Furthermore, it aims to bridge the gap in the literature to clarify the ways of responses for different tourism stakeholders in Jordan to deal with the repercussions of the Arab Spring on the Jordanian tourism sector.

Literature review

Tourism and Arab Spring

Crises and their management establish a subject of interest for tourism researchers, and a plethora of studies investigated the characteristics of the different crises and the responses required to overcome them (Henderson, 1999). According to Hall (2010) in tourism, crises in tourism are generally accompanied by economic, political or social events or elements relevant to natural and energy resources.

The demand and supply of the tourism industry are vulnerable to severe terrorism or political violence actions, and the absence of violence mostly helps to develop the tourism destination (Araña & León, 2008). Consequently, it is obvious that the relationship between the tourism industry and issues of safety and security has evoked substantial interest and research, particularly since the mid-1980s (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2015). In the same vein

Richter and Waugh (1986) postulate that the relationship between terrorism and tourism is of great significance as economic impacts are large and will maximize in the future. Collectively, studies on analyses of tourism arrivals, tourism expenditure and events of political violence indicate that terrorism and political instability negatively affect tourism development (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998).

According to Mansfeld and Winckler (2015), the tourism crisis resulting from the Arab Spring is considerably different from other previous tourism crises for three reasons: First, the long duration of the crisis and it seems there is no sign of it ending. Second, the image factor as in the current crises the new regimes are perceived as the core of the problem itself, whereas before the Arab Spring, several Arabic secular regimes were perceived as the victims of the Islamic fundamentalist attacks. This generated empathy, which helped the recovery process. Third, the lack of available foreign aid to support and re-activate tourist flows.

Tomazos (2017) has examined the nature and scope of the impact of the Arab Spring on the tourism industry in Egypt. He concludes that "It became apparent that Egypt has for a long time been associated with terrorist events and/or political turmoil. As a result, the performance of the tourism industry has suffered at different times, but it always bounced back" (13). Salman et al. (2017) provide a new marketing mix model to rescue the hospitality industry in Egypt after the Arab Spring. Allan (2018) argues that Jordan hosted the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in 2016 to confront the repercussions of the Arab Spring and its consequences on the tourism industry in Jordan. Albattat et al. (2013) indicated that minimal studies have been investigated the impacts of the Arab Spring on the tourism industry. Levin, Ali, and Grandall (2017) apply remote sensing and big data to quantify conflict intensity in the case of the Arab Spring.

Elsewhere, Ivanov and Stavrinoudis (2018) examine the impacts of the 2015 refugee crisis on the hotel industry on four islands in Greece (Lesbos, Kos, Chios, and Samos) and the responses of the hotel industry toward such crisis. Consequently, they conclude that the hoteliers seek to decrease the negative impacts of such crisis mainly by augmented marketing efforts, and cutting costs and prices, rather than by using fewer employees, delaying payments to suppliers or requiring more payments. Afonso-Rodriguez and Santana-Gallego (2018) investigate the connection between international tourist arrivals in Spain and terrorism in Arab Spring countries namely (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain). They suggest that the Arab Spring and violence in the region has diverted tourists from the MENA region to Spain, although this impact could be temporary and it might disappear when terrorism and geopolitical tension vanish in the region. Ivanov, Sypchenko, and Webster (2017) assess the impacts of the international sanctions on Russia's hotels and the actions undertaken by the hoteliers to lessen the negative impacts of the sanction. They further postulate that the hoteliers applied different methods to confront the economic crisis such as developing marketing efforts and cutting cost. Whereas, Llorca- Vivero (2007) evaluates the impacts of terrorist activities on international tourism. The study indicates that domestic victims and international attacks are related factors when foreign tourists make their choice to travel. Additionally, the impact of terrorism on tourism flows is more severe in developing countries.

However, despite the breadth of studies on the relationship between the Arab Spring and the tourism industry in the pertinent tourism literature, studies about how tourism stakeholders in the Middle Eastern countries respond to the consequences of the Arab Spring are uncommon. Therefore, this study seeks to shed light on the responses of the Jordanian tourism stakeholders to such phenomenon.

Methodology

Researchers have used qualitative methods for exploratory studies. Since there is a lack in the availability of data available on this topic and the limited research axes, this approach is appropriate when the researcher needs to take note of the participants and build new knowledge-based mainly on their ideas. On the other hand, the qualitative approach includes quantitative digital data collection. According to Mujis (2004, p.1), the main objective of a quantitative approach is "to explain phenomena through numerical data that needs to be analyzed using existing mathematical methods (in certain statistic).A qualitative approach is used to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of the Arab Spring and its impact on the tourism sector in Jordan in terms of causes and possible solutions to reduce the negative impacts of this phenomenon. In-depth interviews and observations are used to achieve the purposes of this study.

In this study, interviews were semi-structured, since the questions were more open on the current situation of the region. The answers are recorded and contain more details, leaving enough space for unexpected issues that arise from the context of the interview (Patton, 1990).

The interviews have been written by listening to digital files which were recorded and compared with field observations to ensure accuracy and truth. Then, after reading these texts led to a broad understanding of the subject and then categorize the information, sub-topics, and discussion.

It has been identified the main themes in which a re-reading of each text has been done to determine the sub-themes and make sure theyre accurately represent the information that has been obtained from the interviews. After several readings of the texts, it has been revised and selected the appropriate sub-topics with each other and to add notes and

related issues and verify them. Also, the data were collected from the beginning of May until the end of September 2016.

The interviews covered both the capital Amman and the province of Aqaba. Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with (6) employees and directors of the offices of Travel and Tourism. (3) Interviews, however, were conducted with journalists, activists, and researchers in terrorism, political affairs, and the Arab Spring and its impact on tourism. In addition, interviews were conducted with the (4) officials in institutions of governmental tourism, namely: the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA), the Jordan Tourism Board (JTB), tourist police department, the authority of the Aqaba Special economic zone Portal (ASEZA), and (7) Interviews were conducted with the staff at three hotels in Amman, and 3 hotels in Aqaba Governorate.

The study included a series of interviews with a sample of officials and specialists staff in a number of institutions and bodies concerned with government and private tourism sector. The participants of this study have been selected randomly from the managers of six hotels with a 5-star, six manager's offices of Travel and Tourism, three journalists and two officers in the tourist police department in the provinces of Aqaba and Amman.

The data collected from the target sample to get a deeper understanding of the crisis management in selected tourist bodies in Jordan helped especially in determining the plans and procedures that contribute to the reduction of the impact of the Arab Spring on the local tourism economy. For example, tourist office managers suggested reducing charges on entry to tourist sites to promote tourism. However, to carry out the implementation of sustainability plans for the bodies of tourism policy, it is suggested to address the gap on strengthening the domestic tourism through the development of programs to enhance the flow of the local tourists to compensate the reduction of inbound tourism.

Interviews have been conducted in Arabic, and the researchers then have translated the information into English. Interviews have been conducted in a researchable way in the form of a questionnaire to detect steps and specifications with one difference is that it is a dialogue between the researchers and the respondents to obtain information, opinions, attitudes, and expressions on the topic of the study.

Participants

Table 1 below summarizes the main characteristics of the respondents, including gender, location and their current profession:

Table 1: Demographic profile of the interviewees

Category	Frequency
Gender	
Male	15
Female	6
Location	
Amman	14
Aqaba	7
Current profession	
General manager	5
Owner manager	3
Departmental manager	10
Journalist	3
Total	**21**

Four themes have been identified in regard to the responsiveness of tourist agencies in Jordan to the repercussions of the Arab Spring and its impact on the tourism sector, as follows:

Theme One: Understanding the Concept of the Crisis and managing it by the Concerned Institutions of Tourism:

The first step to recognize the size of understanding of the concept of "crisis management" with its various dimensions for decision-makers and officials is to know the extent of the understanding and application of the term in their organizations.

The answers to both questions, "in your opinion, what is meant by the term" administration of the crisis?", and "do you see that there is an application of the concept of crisis management in the institutions?" formed the axis of the subject. Most of the participants manage the values of the crisis in a positive way, considering it a necessity in the sectors of the state, which ensures the survival of their good. For example, most of the participants have considered that crisis management in their institutions is done at a high degree of readiness to deal with emergencies. Seven of the participants define the crisis management as a group or a series of preventive measures taken by the administration to provide a safe environment for tourists by tourist security. Eight participants have pointed to the importance of applying the concept and procedures for the crisis in the tourism institutions and bodies. These procedures are taken in cases of political instability, wars, the spread of disease, and disasters in their various forms either in Jordan or in other tourism countries of which have a negative impact on tourism in Jordan. While 12 respondents consider the crisis management as a good preparation and appropriate response to mitigate the negative impact of the emergency crisis on the tourism sector and to minimize or avoid as much as possible the occurrence of any damage to properties or tourists. Two staffs defined crisis management as "a series of measures that are related to the management of public response to the crisis and proper planning to alleviate the negative impacts of the crisis on the tourism sector".

In addition to the ones responsible for giving instructions and the necessary steps in the emergency especially during the Arab Spring crisis; they were so aware, serious and cautious in dealing with this exceptional circumstance, which is consistent with the result of the study (Bazzaz, 2001). The latter concluded that the crisis passed through several key stages of the administration and require each stage to deal with it positively, where highlights the importance of the leader and his role in determining the course of the crisis and developments in the pre-crisis, during and beyond. Muhammad (1998) shows how the role of a leader is growing during the occurrence of crises as they occur leading to an escalation of decision-making power by the leader (where it is the greater the severity of the crisis has increased the degree of centralized decision-making in the hands of a political leader).

It is worth mentioning that the first crises management plan for Jordan's tourism industry developed in 2006 in line with the overall national plan to deal with disasters. It contains measures to deal with crises caused by terrorism and political crises. Additionally, it includes responsibilities for the protection of the tourism sector from the negative impacts caused by crises. The crises management plan for the tourism aims to provide appropriate and safe tourism experience in Jordan which would strengthen the policies and applied procedures relying on the Ministry of Tourism and in coordination and cooperation with the concerned tourism authorities. The plan includes a bunch of policies and measures for any possible future crises to overcome it (MTOA, 2018).

Theme Two: The Degree of Awareness of the Importance of Crisis Management and the Most Important Applied Procedures Integrated in the Selected Tourist Bodies

Table 2: The degree of awareness

The degree of awareness about	Great	Medium	Low	Very Low
Provide sustainability plans	17	3	1	0
The application of standards Crisis Management	19	2	0	0

The second theme focuses on the extent of awareness among workers in the tourism sector in relation to the issue of crisis management. The findings are the outcome of the answers of the following questions: Is there enough awareness among tourism bodies on the application of the concept of crisis management standards? What are the most important measures taken to ensure a proper awareness among people working in the tourism sector?

Seventeen participants have had a great level of awareness while three of them were average. This finding reflects the importance of providing plans for sustainability; especially Jordan has suffered from terrorist attacks on three hotels on November 9, 2005. Those incidents led to increased awareness over the importance of the sense of security probably because the hotel sector is among the most growing sectors in the tourism industry in Jordan.

A tourist police directorate states that "it is committed to hold courses in the field of tourism security within the Tourist Police Units in addition to courses in public security institutes in order to have a sufficient degree of skill in dealing with any action (a terrorist event or an emergency)." The main courses are civil defence, first aid, safety and security, and also infectious   diseases.

Henderson (1999, p.108) states that "National Tourist Organizations with their responsibility for general destination marketing, research and development have an important role to play in the process of travel and tourism crisis management, representing and acting on behalf of the industry as a whole".

This quote emphasizes the importance of having national tourist organizations to respond to crises, as well as the implementation of communication strategies during the crisis and design marketing campaigns to revive the tourism market.

Theme Three: The Foundations of Cooperation between the Bodies and Tourism Institutions Concerned with the Tourism Sector in Times of Crises and Emergency

Table 3: The Foundations of Cooperation

The Foundations of Cooperation	Excellent	Very good	Good	Bad
Between the public and private sector	1	13	6	1
Commitment to implement crisis management procedures	2	16	3	0

The third theme emerged from this question: Is there cooperation between the bodies in the field of crises management and what are the main areas of this cooperation?

Interviews have shown that there are major channels for cooperation between the various tourist bodies. According to an officer in the Tourist Police Department, "One of these channels is the presence of cooperation with tourist agencies such as (travel and tourism offices) and which in turn inform the tourist police department before 48 hours about the upcoming tour groups". This is a precautionary measure followed by tourist installations to maintain the safety of visitors and provide a safe atmosphere during their visit. The administration has updated information regularly for various tourist installations in

Jordan. The second channel for cooperation with the local community is that any culture is built on a set of community values and this is the focus of the administration as it seeks to educate the local community about the importance of tourism security to become shared values for the community.

For example, a consultant at MOTA sees that "the application of crisis management plans is designed to make appropriate structural measures that would strengthen the policies relying on the employees of MOTA and in collaboration with the private tourism sector and other concerned ministries and departments." Whereas, the training manager at a five star hotel in Aqaba, said: "the hotel management is committed to security and safety standards to ensure the best stay for hotel guests in terms of recurrent security checks of employees and to take the necessary security precautions to prevent any aggression, conduct workshops and training sessions for employees to ensure their ability to deal with any emergency crisis in addition to processing reports on a regular basis (daily, monthly, yearly) including the data about the guests and inform the security authorities about them."

In Aqaba, an employee in the Office of Travel and Tourism asserts that there is a need to facilitate travel procedures for tourists, such as the issuance of entry permits and visas, as the delay in issuing disrupts the office to complete his work. Another director of post office of tourism stressed on: "the high cost of tickets to tourist sites prevent domestic tourists visiting the areas of tourism because of the prohibitive cost and the expulsion of internal and external tourism workers both, for example: a ticket to enter the city of Petra (one of the seven wonders) is the highest in terms of 50 dinars for tourists."

However, these findings reflect those of McKercher and Chon (2004) who also found that coordination and collaboration between key stakeholders seem to be critical for the effective and efficient management of a crisis situation.

Theme Four: The Degree of Satisfaction and Responsiveness for Following Sustainability Plans and the Measures to Reduce the Damage Caused by the Arab Spring Crisis

This theme focused on possible measures to reduce the impact of emergency crises on the tourism sector by answering the following question: What is the degree of satisfaction with the commitment of tourist agencies in the implementation of crisis management procedures and compliance with sustainability plans, regulations, and instructions?

The interviews agreed that accuracy in following the instructions is a very sensitive issue for tourism security. These instructions and regulations are being updated and developed regularly to suit the current circumstances and political events in the region. All the interviewees have shown their satisfaction toward the services of the tourism bodies, particularly during the Arab Spring crisis. Thus, the crisis has enhanced the clients' satisfaction with the services provided (Singh 2006). Also, this study identifies several factors that affect customers' satisfaction. These factors include the speed and the quality of the services, satisfying the needs of the customers and price competition.

The director of training in a five stars hotel in Aqaba said that "the size of the losses suffered by our hotel was not great because a lot of tourism movements that were destined for neighboring countries turned to Jordan and became a popular tourism destination due to the availability of security and safety." Furthermore, the hotel management has attracted tourists through providing special offers on accommodation and increasing recreational activities. According to an employee at JTB, "the good preparation and appropriate response of tourist bodies contribute to mitigate the negative impact of the Arab Spring on the tourism sector and to promote tourist groups to visit Jordan".

Consistent with the literature, most participants have agreed on the importance of the role of the media for promoting tourism, particularly during the crises which require constant development of marketing plans for tourism destinations in Jordan. According to Santana

(2004), Media plays an important role in the associated information management and communication processes in the consequences of a crisis. Whereas, Beeton (2005) asserts that mass media is considered a crucial element in the recovery phase.

All journalists in the study stressed that much attention should be paid to the tourism sector through the audio-visual media in the promotion and marketing to encourage domestic and inbound tourism. As for the procedures to minimize the damages of the events of the Arab Spring crisis, a female journalist argues that they are inadequate such as the government's decision to raise entry fees to tourism sites which affects the tourists' flows. In her view, the tourism authorities should undertake policies that would improve the tourism sector in line with the current circumstances such as providing the required services for visitors".

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore the strategies and responses of the local tourism authorities toward the consequences of the Arab Spring on the tourism industry in Jordan. Four themes were determined as a result of the qualitative analysis. The findings showed that there was a high sense of security among the local community and awareness about sustainable tourism practices. This finding seems to be consistent with other research Zhang, Zhou, and Nunamaker (2002) which found that ongoing situation awareness is essential after the trigger of the different types of crises. Therefore, situation awareness concerns the need to make sense of the environment and create a complete picture of such an environment. Accordingly, Susmayadi et al. (2014), the sustainability of crises-risk reduction in the tourism industry relies significantly on awareness and perception of the locals toward the management of such crises. Also, the findings indicate the need to strengthen cooperation and communication among various tourism stakeholders and to provide alternative plans to take advantage of emergency events. In accordance with the present results, previous

studies have demonstrated that there is a definite need to increase collaboration between the government and the private sector. For example, Nguyen, Imamura, and Iuchi (2016) noticed the significance of the increasethed need for collaboration in Japan as a result of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. While Srivichai, Supharatid, and Imamura (2007) emphasize on such need in the context of disasters in the case of Khao Lak, Thailand. In the same vein, Radović and Arabska (2016, p.71) state that "Tourism industry has to recognize the importance of security in its daily activities and in these efforts needs to closely cooperate with security services on the local and national level." Furthermore, this study confirmed that tourism bodies worked to overcome the consequences of the Arab Spring. However, Pforr and Hosie (2008) suggest that 'preparedness' and 'sensibilization' and the 'initial response' to crises are central themes where communication, information, and confidence in the destination are critical to efficiently managing a crisis. Whereas, Ritchie (2009) postulates that tourism planning literature revealed that much of the current disaster plans in tourism are concentrated on post-disaster phases, and should move from response and recovery to decrease and readiness.

As depicted in the literature review, minimal studies have explored the responses of tourism authorities toward the repercussions of the Arab Spring. Thus, this study lays the groundwork for future research into the role of tourism authorities in the effective responses and crisis management for the consequences of the Arab Spring.

The insights gained from this study may be of assistance to tourism managers and planners in Jordan to manage a potential crisis in the local tourism sectors and provide secure tourism experiences for local and international tourists. The study demonstrates the need for tourism authorities to provide and implement alternative plans for crises to take advantage of emergency events. Moreover, the data collected from the targeted tourism authorities

could help to better understanding the role of Media during the crisis to promote a positive

image of tourism destinations in Jordan and help the tourism sectors in the recovery phase.

It is recommended to conduct future studies on the role of marketing and promotion

campaigns on the tourists flow during and after the political events and crisis. More broadly,

research is also needed to compare the responses of the tourism authorities for the consequences

of the Arab Spring among different Arab countries.

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