DESTINATION IMAGE AND TOURIST RETENTION IN JERUSALEM

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Abstract

Tourism industry plays a vital role in the economic development of a country by attracting local and foreign tourists. The turbulent situation in Jerusalem occasioned by Israeli Palestinian crisis put euphoria in the mind set of tourists visiting the country. Thus, this paper aims at examining the effects of destination image on tourist loyalty in Jerusalem, mediated by political stability. A quantitative methodology was applied in this study and primary data was collected from 384 tourists who had visited Jerusalem. Results of the structural equation modelling found that destination image has a significant relationship with tourist loyalty, but there is a negative relationship between destination image and political stability. Political stability does not act as a mediator in the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty. Tourism practitioners should focus on improving Jerusalem's image as a destination to increase influx of tourists, revenue and sustainability because successful tourism development is closely related to reduction of risks and stability. The results of this study will help Israeli-Palestinian tourism sector to undertake more efficient planning, marketing, advertising, and enhancing the overall management of their resources in Jerusalem.

Keywords: Destination Image, Political Stability, Tourist Loyalty, Jerusalem

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INTRODUCTION

Palestine is one of the most ancient countries in the Middle East with a long history of religious sites with a very strategic location because it connects the Middle East, Africa and Asia (Çakmak and Isaac, 2016). Since 1967, Israel has embarked on a campaign to colonise the occupied Palestinian territories by illegally confiscating Palestinian lands and natural resources while confining the indigenous Palestinians population in enclaves (Isaac et al., 2016). Tourism in Jerusalem along the years has been gaining an increasingly important profile due to its religious and economic importance, and the substantial role it plays in Israeli-Palestinian relations, depicting the Palestinian statehood and identity, and the Middle Eastern politics in general. Jerusalem is considered as a sacred location for the people following the three great religions: Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Accordingly, pilgrims visit this city from all over the world. Both Israelis and Palestinians are demanding that Jerusalem be recognized as the capital of its state. Today, the sacred city is controlled by Israel. The international legal status of the city has never been definitively determined (Pipia and Pipia, 2020). Jerusalem, like most of the Middle Eastern countries, remains highly underrepresented in tourism literature. The roots of tourism in Jerusalem rest in religious pilgrimages undertaken by the three great monotheistic religions which were born in the region.

Being home to the world's three main religious, international Muslims visit Jerusalem for the sacred mosque that has been in Jerusalem for decades called Aqsa Mosque, while Christians visit Jerusalem due to the historic churches and monasteries, and the Jews regard Jerusalem as a founding state for the Abrahamic religion (Suleiman and Mohamed, 2011). Jerusalem is not the only centric religious site in Palestine, other cities surrounding Jerusalem include villages and districts such as Bethlehem and Nazareth (Isaac et al., 2016). Aside Jerusalem being known for its ancient religious history, Palestine in general holds tales to a lot of deep ancient history, culture and heritage where discoveries are made from monuments found that provided a lot of knowledge to historians.

The political instability in Jerusalem caused by the Israeli-Palestinian crisis discourages tourists from visiting the country. To calm the feelings of despair among tourists who think that the on-going conflict might be a barrier to explore the sites in the country, this study will bring up debates and possible issues to be resolved. Indeed, the conflict over Palestine is unarguably one of the most complicated problems that the international community has faced. Israeli-Palestinian conflict is deeply embedded in history, and the conflict is primarily motivated by conflicting quests for national identity and self-determination by the Palestinian people and the Jews. This paper aims at examining the effects of destination image on tourist loyalty in Jerusalem, mediated by political stability.

THEORETICAL GAP AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Gap

The theoretical gaps in this study are extensive and some of these gaps involved the suggested consequences of threat and confidence in local tourism relations which are based on current studies. Due to the decade long of political instability in Jerusalem, Palestine, many research studies conducted have mainly focused on the political situation and a minimal work has been conducted to identifying how the on-going political situation in Palestine is negatively affecting the tourism industry. Therefore, the research findings are necessary for the authorities in Jerusalem to take steps to strengthen the safety aspect of the state in order to revive the tourism sector. A gap in this research is to understand how Jerusalem's tourism industry is able to maintain some level of tourist loyalty even during many years of political instability. Thus, conducting further studies in this area will give weight to this study because there will be a clear understanding of what has worked over the years in Jerusalem to maintain a decent floor of tourists and what needs to be done by looking into the recommendations highlighted in this research.

Destination Image

The image of a location or a tourist destination has been considered a critical factor in evaluating the overall performance of the tourism industry (Kandampully and Hu, 2007). This statement is centered on the fact that the image of the destination is central in the mind of tourists and forms the benchmark used by tourists to measure the efficiency of service providers (Bravo et al., 2009; Nguyen, 2006). While image of a location has been considered a significant selling tool that the destination should keep, there is no global concept of what defines these unique selling points of locations, according to Pina et al. (2006).

  In the tourism industry, the image of a destination plays a significant role in its relevance and Jerusalem as a city ensures this through its distinctive existence, and ancient history which makes the city a travel choice for many historians and religious groups (Dhillon, 2013). Image represents a perception of the idea created by tourists based on experience and memories created in that location, and that is actually what tourists think when they reflect on the location or it crosses their minds (Saleem and Raja, 2014).

  In the study conducted by Mohajerani and Miremadi (2012), the authors contended that image refers to the overall impression imprinted in the public's minds regarding something. They added that image of a service industry such as the tourism sector is diverse, with every customer having different expected impressions, experiences and contacts regarding the destination, leading to various image acceptance.

As a result, attaining a positive image for a tourist destination is a strategic tool in gaining edge over competitors. Hence, it is difficult to attain a positive image in the tourism industry; it is a process that requires time and financial investment to eventually get to that level (Akın and Demirel, 2011). Thus, the opposite is equally true. In the tourism industry, a lot of hard work and tourism marketing is done to protect the image of a destination from negative associations, and as a result, governments and the private sector invest heavily to protect their brand image from any negative publicity (Akın and Demirel, 2011).

Primarily, destination image directly influences tourist decision making process and their perception towards that destination is shaped as a result. The destination image of Palestine significantly influences tourist satisfaction levels and tourist intention to visit Palestine. Thus, the perceived image tourists develop towards a travel destination is based on a process of evaluation of the pros and cons of tourism, which in turn influences the choices tourists make on which locations to visit (Krippendorf, 1982). Furthermore, tourists are attracted to a destination if their perception towards the destination is positively and highly influenced by individual tourist's experience and through tourism marketing. This in turn shapes tourist behavior towards the destination and their choice of travel destination.

Political Stability

This paper has indicated that political stability, as a mediating variable, is a key determinant that influences tourist behaviour towards a travel destination because generally, if a travel destination is politically stable, it is easier to influence tourists to visit and to even retain tourists (Gefen and Straub, 2003). However, political instability is a great setback for travel destinations because tourist emotion, perception of the destination (destination image) is negatively influenced. To support this notion, findings from the literature indicate that destination image positively influences political stability while perceived risk negatively influences political stability. These findings indicate that when a tourism destination is politically stable and safe, it influences the rate of tourists visiting the destination. Political stability has also been described in politics as the orderliness of the channels of political exchange, so any divergence from such a line is called political instability (Ake, 1975). Political instability occurs when normal procedures of governance are challenged by other groups operating outside the government legitimate circle, and this challenge disrupts the usual, stable functions of the sitting government; this occurs in varying levels and the impact is also felt differently. When a country's level of political instability attracts international media attention, it directly impacts the tourism image, thus building a negative perception by tourists.

Political instability of any form affects the economic growth of industries in a particular country or region. Therefore, a key determining factor for ensuring a sustainable tourism industry in Jerusalem is for the government to ensure the highest level of stability in the environment in order to positively influence destination image and loyalty. Aside making Palestine unsafe for tourists, the inflation rate will further discourage tourists from choosing Palestine as a travel choice.

Tourist Loyalty
The study's proposed dependent variable is tourist loyalty. According to Oliver (1999), tourist loyalty is a firmly held determination to regularly repurchase or re-patronize a favourite product or service in the future, resulting in repeated purchases of the same brand or brand package, considering situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to trigger switching behaviour. One of the most important aspects of tourist loyalty for potential tourists is that keeping current visitors is more attractive and less expensive than attracting new ones (Loureiro and González, 2008). For several tourist sites, tourists with a high degree of loyalty serve a significant segment of the market, since they are more likely to remain at a destination longer than the first-time tourists, prefer to convey helpful news by word of mouth and engage more rigorously in consumer activities (Li *et al*., 2010; Zhang *et al*., 2014). Also, these frequent visitors may lower the cost of marketing relative to obtaining first-time visitors (Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999).

Research Questions, Hypothesis Development and Methodology
Research Questions
1) Does destination image have a significant influence with tourist loyalty in Jerusalem?
2) Does destination image have a significant influence with political stability in Jerusalem?
3) Does political stability influence tourist loyalty in Jerusalem?
4) Does political stability mediate the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty in Jerusalem?

Research Hypothesis Development
H1: Destination image has a significant positive influence on tourist loyalty.
H2: Destination image has a significant positive influence on political stability.
H3: Political stability has a significant positive influence on tourist loyalty.
H4: Political stability mediates the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied a quantitative method to achieve the objectives of research and answer the research questions. A research questionnaire was developed and distributed to 384 tourists who visited religious sites in Jerusalem at four different places namely Qubbat As-Sakhra, Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Tomb of the Virgin Mary. Cluster and non-probability purposive sampling technique was used in this study and data were analysed using SPSS version 22 and IBM AMOS 22.0 version 22.

RESULT

Hypothesis Testing Result of Direct Relationship of Variables

The direct relations of the hypotheses were examined using Structural Equation Modelling. As presented in Table 1, direct connection paths by 2 out 3 were found to be approved as their p-values were less than 0.05, which shows that the connections are significant. In contrast, only 1 out of 3 paths was found to be insignificant because the p-value was greater than the 0.05 cut-off. This is thus unsupported. Table 1 below explains the paths together with their statement type.

Table 1: Results of Direct Hypotheses				
	Estimate	P-value	Bootstrapped (P-value)	Label
H1: Destination Image→Tourist Loyalty	.220	.000	.000	Supported
H2: Destination Image→Political Stability	-.009	.840	.840	Unsupported
H3: Political Stability→Tourist Loyalty	.188	.004	.005	Supported
Note: *p<0.05				

Testing the Mediating Effect

The mediating variable in this research study is political stability. The term mediating variable in a research refers to the variable that connects the independent variable and the dependent variable identified in the study. This research is to test whether political stability construct is mediating or not, the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty. In this regard, this study obtains the standardised regression weight and the probability values which indicate the required information about the estimate indirect effect and bootstrapping result, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Bootstrapping Summary of Mediation Effect

HYPOTHESES	ESTIMATE (INDIRECT EFFECT)	Bootstrapped	HYPOTHESES
H4: Destination image → Political stability→Tourist Loyalty	-0.002	0.840	Unsupported

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS
Research Question 1
The findings from this research have indicated that destination image has a positive influence on tourist loyalty. The tourism destination image refers to knowledge, beliefs, emotions, and the overall understanding of tourists toward the destination. Tourists perceive destination image through media (pre-visit) and their direct experiences (post-visit) can differ from reality since the image is formed from reality and personal perception. This clearly means that if the tourism industry in Jerusalem positively manages all the variables mentioned in this study, the industry has an opportunity to influence and retain tourist loyalty. Tourist loyalty in general can be attained if tourists are satisfied with the general destination image, and that is based on a number of factors such as the location, the environment setup, the culture, the people, service delivery and a lot more. If all these elements are positively nurtured, the level of tourist loyalty towards Jerusalem will increase and that will positively influence the number of visitations the city will experience.

In the context of Palestine, the tourism industry has not fully recovered from the negative image perceived by tourists due to the Israel-Palestine conflict, and conflict negatively influences the image of any tourist destination (Lopes, 2011). Therefore, this research hypothesis has clearly indicated that a positive image needs to be maintained in order to attain tourist loyalty. When tourists uphold a good image or perception of loyalty, the higher their chances to revisit the location and to spread a positive word of mouth to friends and family about the destination and their experience. Therefore, it is highly essential that tourists have a great travel experience as it guarantees tourists revisiting the destination. Tourists have a negative perception on the level of political stability in Palestine. In order to rectify these negative perceptions, the tourism sector in Palestine will have to consider destination branding to ensure that the other variables, image are properly represented each time tourists visit the city. The political instability in Palestine has resulted to a dent in the country's image and that has greatly affected its tourism industry. However, Jerusalem due to the city's rich ancient history, the city has a unique selling point to ensure the revival of its lost image through extensive tourism marketing to recreate a positive destination image. In the

process of reviving destination image, international tourists rely on the global media to build their perception regarding the tourism industry in Jerusalem. To be able to achieve this, it is essential to understand the impact image has on tourism. It is also important to ensure that tourists have a positive image through their experiences in Palestine to gain tourist loyalty. According to Kozak and Decrop (2009), maintaining a positive destination image is crucial in the tourism industry to attain tourist loyalty. Tourists are naturally loyal to destinations where they had an excellent experience, and when the destination met tourist expectations at all levels, then it becomes easier for tourists to visit the same destination or location again.

Research Question 2
The results indicate that political stability significantly impacts tourist perception of a destination. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to ensure that tourism locations maintain political stability in order to gain positive perception of the tourist location. Destination image directly influences tourist emotion, and these factors are negatively influenced when a destination is politically unstable.

The result of this study has indicated that political stability has a link with tourist level of satisfaction regarding a travel destination, which in turn influences tourist intention to revisit a destination. This clearly reflects the impact tourist perceived image on a destination has on their level of loyalty. The conclusion drawn shows that generally, the tourism sector is negatively affected when tourists hold a negative perception on the political environment due to the level of threat posed on their security. In the case of Palestine, the country is well known in the international community as a conflict zone because of the Israel-Palestinian political conflict which has a direct political interest on Jerusalem. Additionally, the media has done a bias reporting on the current situation of Jerusalem. Tourists have a negative perception on the level of political stability in Palestine. In other words, political instability will result to a negative influence on destination image.

Research Question 3
Political stability has a positive relationship with tourist loyalty. What is important for economic growth is political stability over time, because any violation of a stable environment threatens market stability and leads to a lower economic growth rate. Political instability poses a negative influence on tourist loyalty. Tourists are very careful when planning their next travel destination. When making a travel decision, tourists rely greatly on information available to them through various news platforms and the findings gained from these platforms influence their decision making. Tourists tend to critically assess the possible risk involved in a politically unstable travel destination, and in most cases tourists prefer an alternative destination with a stable and safe environment.

Some tourists are an exception to this rule; political instability can be a reason for tourists to visit a location if political unrest has become a thing of the past, and in such situations tourists will like to revisit a location that underwent conflict in order to feed their curiosity and to get an opportunity to explore the affected locations due to political instability. In situations like this, tourists would like to revisit the location to understand the impact of conflict in that destination (Isaac, 2018).

Political stability plays a key role in positively influencing on dependent variable of this research, and the result directly influences tourist loyalty. Several researches have discussed how political instability negatively affects the growth rate of the tourism industry. Conflict hinders growth in this industry, therefore maintaining political stability results to growth because it allows the tourism industry to create a positive brand image (destination image). If an industry can determine political stability for visitors, the possibility of gaining tourist loyalty becomes much easier. Therefore, political stability positively influences tourist loyalty.

Research Question 4
The research has hypothesized that political stability does not directly influence the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty. Political stability is not an important variable in the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty in Jerusalem. Thus, the research findings have strongly concluded that political stability between destination image and tourist loyalty is not supported. Previous studies maintain that reports of political stability will negatively affect the image of the destination as well as the intention to recommend it (Alvarez & Campo, 2014). Previous research (C Michael Hall, Timothy & Duval, 2004) has found that destination image affects travellers' behaviours and intentions.

Jerusalem welcomes millions of travellers for religious purposes; therefore, the findings also suggest that there needs to be a much deeper reason for tourist travel to a destination not just leisure travels. The findings also have strongly indicated that tourist travel is negatively influenced by the political situation of a destination if the travel is leisure based solely (vacation etc.); however, if the travel is for religious purposes and business transactions, the impact is very less due to the traveller's high level of motivation for the travel.

IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY
Theoretical Implication
In relationship marketing theory, new customer attraction incurs more costs compared to the retention of existing ones. In the field of tourism management, researchers revealed that a slight increase in tourist loyalty leads to a significant increase in profitability in the industry (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998).

Nevertheless, the development and sustenance of tourist loyalty is quite challenging as evidenced by Wang et al. (2006). This is what urged the researcher to conduct this study in order to provide a relationship marketing model that can effectively be utilized to secure tourist loyalty in Jerusalem. The present study specifically extends literature on destination image by examining their effect on political stability and tourist loyalty. Such relationship indicates the requirement to shed light on whether or not the variables improve tourist loyalty in the tourism industry. Literature argues that the measure of destination image is reflective of the overall evaluation of visitation to Jerusalem. The findings of this study indicate that image is not an important determinant in this context.

Managerial Implication
Based on the perspective of management, several significant implications can be derived from the research findings. In the tourism industry, there is a keen focus on improving the positive image of Jerusalem to increase influx of guests, more revenue and sustainability.

This research emphasizes the importance of developing and maintaining relationship with tourists through activities that lead to tourist loyalty in Jerusalem. The significance of the study variables is to improve political stability and keep in mind that the benefits from destination image has to be enhanced through quality interactions. This is because tourists are also aware of the benefits offered by travel destinations. Thus, it is important for tourist destinations to establish a strong relationship and to maintain it with tourists. The study findings confirm that when tourists are convinced of the high-quality relationships with their service providers, they have a higher tendency to be loyal to them.

According to Crosby et al. (1990), relationship quality is the best determinant of the likelihood that the customer seeks future contact with the same destination service provider. This supports the notion that in order to revive the tourism industry in Jerusalem, destination image should be integrated to remain competitive in the market because in doing so, they will maintain their offers effectively, particularly when offering financial incentives through holiday discounted packages.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH
The results of the structural equation modelling, found that destination image has a significant relationship with tourist loyalty, but there is a negative relationship between destination image and political stability. Political stability does not act as a mediator in the relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty. Tourism managers should focus on improving the positive image of Jerusalem to

increase influx of guests, more revenue, and sustainability because successful tourism development is closely related to lower risk at a destination.

Future studies may also extend the understanding of the study constructs by employing a different methodology. For example, future studies may examine the role of satisfaction in different service settings to determine whether or not the results can be generalised to attain excellent service.

Moreover, the findings may differ when they are considered in other cultural groups. This indicates a need for future studies to conduct cross-cultural research to determine whether or not premium customers have the same behaviour all over the globe, or whether tourists who visit Jerusalem are unique due to their culture. Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995), stressed on culture as a significant issue in consumer-business relationships. The findings attained during this study are relevant for tourism service providers globally because it is not limited to Jerusalem alone as a tourist destination. Added to the above recommendations, it may also be useful to examine the differences between tourist places in Palestine and their inferior counterparts. Despite the fact that the study model provides an effective relationship marketing, several other areas may be examined by future studies. For instance, the results of this study are confined to tourist places in Jerusalem; future studies can include other tourist places in Palestine and conduct a comparison.

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