

Chapter 9

Electronic Word of Mouth Effects on Middle East Destination Overall Image and Behavioral Intention: An Empirical Study in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship among e-WOM, overall destination image, and European tourist behavioral intention to revisit and recommend Jordan as a tourism destination. The study examined the mediating effect of destination overall image on the relationship between e-WOM and tourist behavioral intention. A total of 339 questionnaires were collected from European tourists who visited Jordan in 2018 through a self-administered questionnaire. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used. The result of SEM identified that e-WOM has a positive influence on the overall destination image and on the tourist behavioral intention. The overall image positively influenced the tourist behavioral intention. Overall destination image partially mediates between e-WOM and behavioral intention, and thereby, the positive impact of e-WOM on behavioral intention could be aggravated through the mediating effect of destination overall image. The findings have implications on the tourism industry, especially for key players in the Jordanian tourism board and travel companies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since we have begun to witness new tourism destinations that shape the way we choose our preferred tourism attractions, we began encountering new challenges and difficulties, particularly in the Middle East and specifically a country surrounded by an abundance of conflicts and disputes, such as Jordan. From a marketing point of view, the destination must hold a strong and positive image that ensures its popularity with tourists, as well as creating an accommodating atmosphere that positively influences both tourists' re-purchase and intention to recommend the destination to other tourists (El-Said and Aziz, 2019). However, this image may be distorted by negative Word-of-Mouth (WOM) especially by the new electronic WOM (e-WOM) that potential tourists started to rely more and more on it in searching for information about any specific destination (El-Said and Aziz, 2019). Since the tourism industry is service-oriented which is intangible in its nature, potential tourists depend on reliable communication sources of information such as WOM to reduce risks associated with their purchase decision (Gruen et al., 2006). As such, the present study attempts to empirically examine the relationships between e-WOM and tourists' overall image of Jordan towards tourists' behavioral intention. The current study argued that it is necessary to examine the relationship between these factors which will assist a destination with future marketing campaigns designed to increase market share by correct the negative perception and reinforce the positive perception. However, few studies -to the best of the researcher's knowledge- have examined the relationship between e-WOM, destination image, and intention to travel especially in the case of European travelers to Jordan. In addition, studying tourist's behaviour intentions whether by their desire to revisit or their willingness to recommend the destination and separate positive WOM is very essential (Ren and Hong, 2017), as it can help to forecast whether the target customers will become long-term customers and bring more profits to the enterprises by building up an attractive destination image and expand their marketing effort to maximize their use of resources (Su and Fan, 2011). The study focus on tourists who visited Jordan and getting ready to go back to their countries, therefore, this study inspects tourists' perceptions of relevant and real destination attributes instead of general assessments which consider an important strategy to develop and recover the destination image.

2. TOURISM IN JORDAN

In Jordan, the tourism industry is considered as a paramount economic sector that contributed a considerable 7,632.8 million USD to its GDP in 2017 and was ranked as number 69 out of 185 countries worldwide by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) as of 2017. According to the same report, the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (JMTA) is hoping for the total contribution of travel and tourism to rise by 23.5% of GDP in 2028 to reach 13,563.6 USD Million WTTC, 2018). To achieve this, the tourists must perceive Jordan as a safe, secure, attractive and worthy destination since, in deciding to travel to a certain place; tourists must consider a multidimensional culture that involves a wide range of different factors (Farajat et al., 2017).

Jordan as a tourism destination offers a wide range of cultural and natural touristic attractions, varying from the virtually untouched landscape of the protected area of Wadi Rum, to the ancient rosy-red city and designated UNESCO World Heritage Site of Petra, and the mineral lined shores of the Dead Sea (Al-Oun and Al-Homoud, 2008; Liu et al., 2016). However, Jordan has recently been struggling with surrounding conflicts in neighboring countries and is no stranger to disturbances. In particular,

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