

## **IMPACT OF POLITICAL STABILITY ON THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN JERUSALEM**

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### **Abstract:**

Tourism has become a global phenomenon and money generator for investors, service providers, auxiliary support services, regions and nations involved in the tourism business. 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 political stability on tourist loyalty in Jerusalem. 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 political stability has a significant positive influence on tourist loyalty. The top contributing factor in the case of Jerusalem is Israeli risk, and as such, Palestinian tourism industry should greatly reduce the risk because tourists visiting Jerusalem are more concerned about safety and security. 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. Tourism industry 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.

**Key Words:** Political Stability, Tourist Loyalty, Jerusalem, Palestine.

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## Background of tourism in Palestine

Tourism has become a global phenomenon and money generator for investors, service providers, auxiliary support services, regions and nations involved in the tourism business. Tourism is an important economic sector that offers vast opportunities to generate profits for a country. Every year, researches are conducted in the attempt to discover new mechanisms that can enhance growth in developing nations (Chiu et al., 2016). Findings have suggested that in most developing nations, growth is supported by tourism, agriculture, capital, and energy development.

Tourism is an important industry that encapsulates distinct infrastructures and services for its growth; thus, tourism business is a top priority for destination countries among other sectors in the past few decades (Tsang, Lee & Qu, 2015). A classical review of tourism literatures has shown that governments all over the globe generally promote and support tourism because of its positive effect on the development and growth of their economies (Wong, Xu, Tan & Wen, 2018). Tourism provides opportunities for employment and it results in positive balance of payments, boosts tourism supply sector, and enhances the overall economic growth within the country (Khanna, Papadavid, Tyson & Te Velde, 2016). Consequently, a distinct literature has been developed to measure the effect of tourism on the basis of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in order to gauge its contribution to the growth of the economy of the destination countries (Ivanov, 2004).

Many countries around the globe have become dependent on tourism as a source of economic prosperity, and numerous countries regard tourism as their primary source of foreign exchange (Gössling, 2000). As a result, tourism is a force of global significance and all countries wish to access its benefits (Gössling, 2000). The tourism sector is, however, affected by external factors such as political instability, perceived risk and terrorism (Saha & Yap, 2014). Often, when safety and security are endangered by expansionist policies of others, this gives democracies an opportunity to jeopardize peace (Rawls, 1999). The concept of democratic peace implies that democracy will bring about political stability, therefore, leading to safety and security in the country. When safety and security is threatened, actions must be taken to ensure safety and security is restored. Safety and security are ranked as key factor when one is planning to go for a vacation (Ingram, Tabari & Watthanakhomprathip, 2013). In addition, Edgell, Allen, Smith and Swanson (2008) contend that if there is no safety and security at the destination, both business and leisure travel will be negatively affected. An example of this is the Bali terrorist bombings of 2005, which drastically affected tourism receipts in the short term (Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005).

The satisfaction that the tourist derived from the experiences gathered and interest developed on some the sites they visited makes tourists to revisit these places and spread the words of mouth to other potential tourists (Chinomona & Sandada, 2013). 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 & 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. An example of how the west discovered Palestine as a pilgrimage site was through the travel book, Cook's Tourists' Handbook for Palestine and Syria (1876). This book indicates how mass tourism was established around the pilgrimage sector in that era. According to the

Ministry of Tourism of Israel and the Central Bureau of Statistics, the arrival of tourists in Israel since the establishment of this state was approximately 65 million (Sannassee & Seetanah, 2015) until around 1970s, and most of these tourists were mainly from the United States. Decades later, the country saw an increase in European visitors from Germany, United Kingdom, Russia, and France. Between 2000 and 2012, Israel occupation received an annual average of two million international tourists, of which approximately a quarter identified themselves as Jewish (Hayat, 2013).

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. Although the conflict is embedded in external (superpower) and regional (Middle Eastern) contexts, it is important to note that it is determined by internal forces unique to Palestinians and Zionists (Gerner, 1991). "If the United States and the Soviet Union formed an alliance tomorrow, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would still remain" (Gerner, 1992)". With that statement, Gerner (1991) argues that it does not mean that the superpowers have not played a considerable role in influencing the conflict. Even before the United States and the Soviet Union defined and worked to enhance their interests in the Middle East, countries like Britain, through the 1917 Balfour Declaration, was instrumental in fanning the flames of a conflict whose consequences are still with us today (Sannassee & Seetanah, 2015). However, the involvement of the various actors in the Palestinian-Zionist conflict, principal and secondary, is substantially motivated by internal forces, such as the governmental and/or sub-governmental structure, public opinion and interest groups, personality traits of leaders, and religion (Gerner, 1991). Thus, it is exciting to investigate the relationships among the different variables in this study: Jerusalem image, tourist trust, tourist emotion, and perceived risk, while political stability is proposed as mediation in relation to tourist loyalty.

### **Problem Statement**

Tourism is a wealth creating industry for many countries especially when governments are able to create the right environment (political stability), and leisure cities and places will attract both local and international visitors. Jerusalem is a city that has naturally gained the attention of tourists over the past decades due to the city's historic and religious sites, thus there is huge potential within the industry for the historic city. However, a major setback the city has experienced is the political instability between Palestine and Israel, and this has resulted to a negative perception created about Jerusalem which is affecting the overall growth of the tourism industry (Caru & Cova, 2014). This study seeks to understand how the tourism industry can fully be revived and tourists can gain trust and loyalty of the locals living and settling in Jerusalem, resulting to tourist retention and economic growth and stability for the government (Sannassee & Seetanah, 2015).

Global tourism has not been fully realised in Palestine and the economy as well as the social impact tourism has on Palestine. A major setback the country has experienced over the past decades is the country's political instability with Israel and as a record the region has generally been unable to fully gain its tourism sector even though there are huge potentials in the industry. This is a research gap that study seeks to unfold, in order to understand the extent through which political turmoil in Palestine and Israel have impacted the image or perception tourists hold of the location and to what extent can these tourists

be retained. In order to draw out research findings, the researcher identified study variable that will guide in attaining findings on the research topic.

According to Hall & O'Sullivan (1996) there is a link between unstable political environment and tourist visit due to the political instability, and the findings of their study indicate that there is no connection between these two links because political unrest can lead to civil wars and terrorism. Political instability at any form can directly affect tourist in that environment. The impact political instability on a tourist destination has been greatly researched (Thomas & Tobe, 2012).

When making a travel decision, the political environment plays a critical role for an increasing tourist turnout in a specific destination. Palestine over the years has been registering a number of visits, and these tourists are known as politically oriented tourists and they are mainly visitors to cities and sites that were affected by the Israel-Palestine conflict (Lee et al., 2009).

### **Research Questions**

Does Political Stability Has a Significant Positive Influence on Tourist Loyalty

### **Research Objectives**

To examine the influence of political stability on tourist loyalty in Jerusalem

### **Methodology of the Study**

This study applied a quantitative method to achieve the objectives of research and answer the research question. A research questionnaire was developed and distributed to 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 sampling was used in this study and non-random data was collected and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences) version 22 and IBM AMOS 22.0 version 22.

### **Statistical Evidence demonstrating problem with regards to tourist loyalty**

#### **• Jerusalem Tourism Cluster Profile**

Jerusalem has for some time been an objective for guests as a result of the rich tradition of its strict locales. It profits by its overall acknowledgment as a city of unique authentic and strict importance. Drawing in many travelers, Jerusalem is a blessed city for the world's three significant religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. In 2012, 77% of all guests to Israel go to Jerusalem (about 2.5 million guests out of 3.3 million to the nation), outlining the city's proceeding with significance with regards to the country (Hayat, 2013).

Notwithstanding the moderately little size of the nation and accordingly relative straightforwardness in visiting various urban communities, Jerusalem remains solitary in the uniqueness and worth of its notable and social locales. Besides, Jerusalem is a state of section for some guests in the Israel/Palestinian locale, and is perhaps the most generally known urban areas on the planet, especially contrasted with others in Israel. Jerusalem has additionally profited with expanded interest lately by a travel industry group drive, which further recognizes the city's worth as a travel industry objective from others in Israel.

The most visited areas in the nation are inside the Old City of Jerusalem, including the Wailing Wall, the Jewish Quarter, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and Via Dolorosa (Ministry of Tourism 2012). Israel likewise has the most noteworthy number of galleries per capita on the planet. Jerusalem 's 60 galleries got over 1.4 million guests in 2010 (Hayat, 2013). Most of guests to Israel come for individual reasons, regardless of whether for relaxation (37%), journey (28%), or seeing family members (17%) (Hayat, 2013). The high number of travelers converts into a high level of guests as a feature of a coordinated visit or bundle bargain, which is in opposition to the worldwide pattern of more individualized

travel. Worldwide guests to Israel are generally from the US and European business sectors. The main five nations, USA, Russia, France, UK, and Germany represent 65% of complete guests. Following the end of the requirement for a visa to visit among Israel and Russia in 2008, the quantity of Jerusalem Tourism Cluster Microeconomics of Competitiveness 2013 17 Russian travelers has expanded dramatically.

• **Tourism Cluster Performance**

Notwithstanding the solid attractions in Jerusalem, the travel industry execution in the previous twenty years has uncovered significant shortcomings of the travel industry. Jerusalem fails to meet expectations contrasted with the country as far as overnight stays in vacationer inns. The all-out number of evenings remained expanded by 27% in Israel somewhere in the range of 1995 and 2010; however just 17% in Jerusalem. The increment in overnight stays in the country generally originates from homegrown interest development, yet homegrown interest in Jerusalem remained moderately level over this 15-year time frame. In 2012, the quantity of homegrown overnight stays has expanded marginally to 762,000 overnight homegrown stays in Jerusalem (Hayat, 2013 and Isaac, 2018). See Figure 1 below.

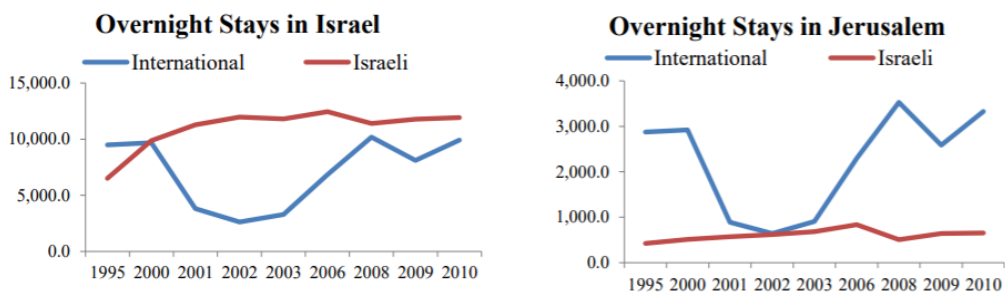


Figure 1 Overnight Stays in Israel and Jerusalem (Hayat, 2013)

Traveler appearances in Jerusalem are additionally very unpredictable and associated with security tasks that influence the view of the normal vacationer. Figure 2 shows the number of the drops in traveler appearances in the course of recent years have connected with significant military activities in the area.

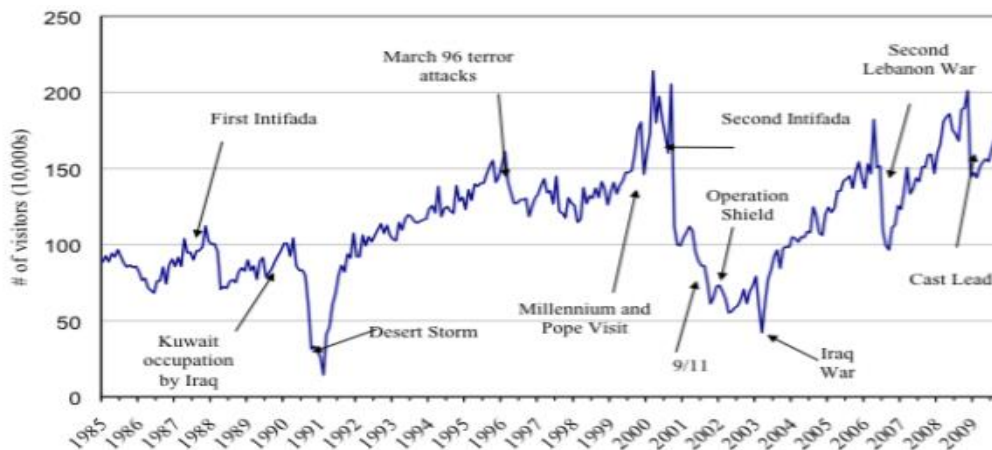


Figure 2 Changes in Tourist Arrival (Hayat, 2013)

Second Intifada prompted perhaps the least degree of unfamiliar sightseers in Israel, dropping from 2.4 million guests in 2000 to 0.9 million guests in 2002. In any case, the travel industry has consistently developed since and arrived at 2000 levels by 2008 (Suleiman & Mohamed, 2011).

### **The Relationship between Political Stability and Tourist Loyalty**

To draw visitors, governments are advised to nurture a healthy political climate. Quality and security issues directly affect tourists' choice of vacation spots, as per Ghaderi, Saboori and Khoshkam (2017), tourism industries generally are developing a secure atmosphere for tourists. Initiatives for the development and promotion of crime-free, healthy, and secure destinations should be targeted. In an earlier review, A. Ali, Arifin and Hasi (2012) suggest that the "Arab Spring" of 2011 enhanced visitor numbers in Arab nations that were considered to be stable and peaceful.

According to the working concept of Hall and O'Sullivan (1996), political instability is generally interpreted as a situation in which political authority, social order, and governance are questioned. In preparation for this to become stable again, a democratic system tries to adjust to those obstacles. Because demands for reform are not met within a democratic structure, to facilitate reform, the use of anti-legitimate actions such as illegal demonstrations, crime, or even (civil) war occurs. After that, the system of government becomes dysfunctional. Islam (2003) argues that it is not the sort of regime that makes sustainable economic growth possible, but rather its stability. A novel definition is not the notion that stable political environments are favorably related to economic growth, however it is linked to tourist loyalty in the tourism industry (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub & Limongi, 2000).

The political stability which governments enjoy is not surprising, because political stability is not attained overnight, it involves a lot of correcting and setting in the right policies to ensure that there is stability throughout a society. These efforts are what translate to peace in a country and it invites business opportunities because people are motivated to invest in a society that is politically stable. Therefore, the tourism industry grows extensively when there is trust, emotional assurance and loyalty from tourists (Sandler, 2015).

### **Political Stability and Tourism in Palestine**

As discussed by Urry (2006), a tourist is an individual that identifies a location with great plans to spend a pleasurable moment off from his/her usual daily routines, and the choice of location for a tourist is greatly influenced by the media. Thus, it is unusual for tourists to pick a destination that is politically unstable when they are seeking "time off" their normal to seek a leisure time with family, friends or alone. Hence, a destination with some level of political unrest will influence tourist choice of destination to visit. The impact political instability on a tourist destination has been greatly researched (Thomas & Tobe, 2012).

When making a travel decision, the political environment plays a critical role for an increasing tourist turnout in a specific destination. Palestine over the years has been registering a number of visits, and these tourists are known as politically-oriented tourists and they are mainly visitors to cities and sites that were affected by the Israel-Palestine conflict (Lee et al., 2009). These politically oriented tourists visit Jerusalem to show support on either side of the state (Palestine or Israel), while other tourists tend to hold a neutral stand on the on-going conflict. That particular group of tourists visit Jerusalem to learn more about the situation of the state of Jerusalem. Tourism in the city of Jerusalem is simultaneously conducted by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities and politics is a tool



used by both parties to push for personal political agendas. A clear indication of this strategy is an understanding of the difference in political approach and the level of involvement authorities are in Jerusalem than they are in other surrounding cities. Israeli and Palestinian governments as well as private tour operating companies utilize politics as a tool to push in their personal agenda (Thomas & Tobe, 2012).

Jerusalem in the 1980's has gradually been able to shift from the conventional tourist experience (pilgrim and historic experience) to a more modern approach to tourism, blending in the religious aspect, which Jerusalem was mainly known for many centuries. However, in 1987, the first political uprising occurred in Palestine and that marked the on-going conflict and political violence in Jerusalem resulting to an unstable state for many year (Loureiro & González, 2008). This first eruption of political violence has resulted into many unpredicted damages for the city in the international tourism industry. The impact was so severe that Jerusalem at some point experienced a collapsed tourism industry. Nevertheless, the situation being faced by the tourism industry forced the industry to take a completely new approach, and the conflict is not ending any time soon (McCartney, Butler & Bennett, 2008). Therefore, Jerusalem, as a city approached tourism in a way that the current situation plays a key role in attaining increasing tourist arrival (Hayat, 2013). This still goes back to our question; does political stability impact the rate of tourism in Jerusalem?

The political instability in Jerusalem results to a different tourist experience and this experience is brought together by key players in the governments and private sector of both Israeli and Palestine. These authorities order to keep the tourist industry active; they provide a range of activities and leisure experience for tourists. However, both authorities use tourism as a political tool to promote either Israeli or Palestinian political agenda (Urry, 1990). For these government authorities, tourists are seen as opportunities to promote their political propaganda and to send a favorable political message to the international community because these tourists are from different countries (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle & Mena, 2012). The concept of political driven tourism can be explained and understood in various ways. In Jerusalem, a high number of tourists visit the site for political reasons and these tourists can be short-term or long-term stays. The various forms of attractions available for tourists are created by both authorities enable each government to generate economic revenue from the tourism industry. Therefore, a wide range of attractions and sites are developed and maintained in Jerusalem to attract tourists globally both for religion, political, historical or simply for leisure and ancient discoveries. These pull factors have resulted to an increasing number of tourist visits in Jerusalem (Rinschede, G., 1992).

In politically unstable environments, tourists tend to visit such destinations for their own personal interest and investigations regardless of the uncertainty within the atmosphere. Some of these tourists visit locations or sites that are sensitive especially in the case of Jerusalem due to their curiosity regardless of the fear and uncertainty in that environment. Other tourist visits are based on political grounds not on mere curiosity and such tourists visit Jerusalem to show their solidarity to the people (Rinschede, G., 1992).

According to Hall & O'Sullivan (1996) there is a link between unstable political environment and tourist visit due to the political instability, and the findings of their study indicate that there is no connection between these two links because political unrest can lead to civil wars and terrorism. Political instability at any form can directly affect tourist in that environment. The impact political instability on a tourist destination has been greatly researched (Thomas & Tobe, 2012).

Political instability can directly delay the choice tourists make regarding a tourist destination and it can also influence tourist choices to visit based on their reason for visiting, some tourists tend to feed on media and will like to experience first-hand information regarding an issues within a country. For example, the Israel-Palestinian conflict has attracted a lot of travelers to these two regions to gain firsthand experience of the situation. Media plays a central role in influencing tourists based on the message they

share, and that will result to tourists reconsidering their decision and cancel reservations made prior to the political conflict. Tourists visiting destinations with on-going political unrest are exposed to danger which will affect their overall experience and negatively impacting their chances of revisiting and in some situations, tourists will be targeted when found in unstable political environments (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle & Mena, 2012). These situations will impact the tourism industry in a very negative manner and such impact if not managed can last a life time.

## **Discussion of Results**

### **Political Stability Has a Significant Positive Influence on Tourist Loyalty**

The relationship between political stability and tourist loyalty is found statistically significant at 95 per cent confidence interval ( $\beta=0.208$ ,  $p\text{-values}=0.004$ ), significant at  $p<0.01$ , which indicated support. This result is consistent with previous studies to examine political stability in the tourism sector (Ghaderi, Saboori & Khoshkam, 2017). Similarly, Sandler (2015) postulated political stability significantly influences tourist loyalty. Thus, the researcher can conclude that 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. It seems that studies on the effect of political stability on growth have focused mostly on government change or regime change.

## **Conclusion**

On the other hand, 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).



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