Exploring the Touristic Image of Jordan

By: Ingrid Schneider, Sevil Sönmez

*** Note: Figures may be missing from this format of the document

Abstract:
Destination image has received significant attention in recent Western travel literature. However, developing and lesser-developed countries have less research attention devoted to them despite the fact image is a key factor in determining travel decisions. This study explored current visitor images of a Middle Eastern country, Jordan. On-site interviews with tourists indicated a fairly positive image of Jordan, with improvements possible in service related areas. Marketing and research implications are suggested.
Keywords: Image; Destination decisions; Middle East

Article:
1. Introduction
The concept of destination image has commanded tourism researcher attention for over 20 years, resulting in a rich body of literature. Crompton (1979, p. 18) offers an integrative definition of image as `the sum of beliefs, impressions, ideas, and perceptions that people hold of objects, behaviors, and events.' When travelers discover a country, both their general and tourist images may be impacted. This notion is particularly pertinent to the study of international destination image because tourism may offer the best and only opportunity for countries to correct misperceptions.

Destination image is a `...critical factor' in destination choices (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Chon, 1991; Dann, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Gartner, 1993; Goodrich, 1978; Mayo, 1973). Thus, the identification, tracking, marketing, and management of image should be among the top priorities of tourist destinations as `images don't always reflect reality' (Hunt, 1975, p. 2) and may deter potential tourists. In their study of foreign tour operators' image of the US, McClellan and Foushcee (1983) note that images of the US formed by tourists during their visit, which are then carried back home, have far more weight than any type of publicity effort by the US. Destination image research focuses on a few countries around the world (Calantone et al., 1989; Crompton, 1977, 1979; Haahti & Yavas, 1983; Kale & Weir, 1986; Pearce, 1982; Phelps, 1986; Telisman-Kosuta, 1987) and states in the US (Crompton & Duray, 1985; Gartner, 1989; Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Goodrich, 1977; Hunt, 1975; Reilly, 1990; Richardson & Crompton, 1988). However, little research has been done which examines regional image. Unquestionably, the image of Middle Eastern countries is continually impacted by the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict and terrorist incidents. Recent findings by Sönmez and Graefe (in press) suggest that the Middle East is the region most likely to be avoided in the future by 61% of potential travelers in their study due to perceived risk. The Middle East region has received scant attention, despite the fact the World Tourism Organization identifies this area as among the fastest growing in the world.

Minimal research assesses the tourist image of Middle Eastern countries (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Mansfeld, 1995, 1996) and no previous research exists on Jordan's tourist destination image. As image may be `destination-determined' and formed by personal or actual experiences (Crompton, 1979), investigating and attending to current tourists provides a baseline of information from which to build and tailor marketing and service promotions. Although each country should have its own destination or tourist image, some countries are subsumed within a regional image. Related to the Middle East, Mansfeld (1996) identified an `inner-ring' (e.g., Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria) and more stable `outer-ring' (e.g., Cyprus, Greece, Turkey) and found tourist behavior shifts in the entire region due to conflicts in one area. For example, during the Gulf war, Egypt,

Israel, Jordan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates experienced a sharp drop in tourist arrivals even though they were not all equally affected (Hollier, 1991; World Tourism Organization, 1991). As Jordan hopes to capitalize on the increase in regional travelers, such assessment appears timely.

This article explores visitor images of Jordan, compares regional residents with other visitors' perceptions, and suggests methods to enhance their current image. The study data derives from a general visitor survey at the Jerash Festival in Jordan. Intraregional (individuals traveling within their own region, such as Arabs traveling in the Middle East) and interregional (individuals traveling to regions outside of their own - such as non-Arab travelers in the Middle East) visitor images were compared (Fridgen, 1991). Differences were anticipated among the groups due to proximity to, and subsequently more accurate knowledge of, the region.

2. Methods
2.1. Study site
The Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts is an annual celebration of Arabic and international culture during the summer months. Jerash is located 46 km north of the capital city of Amman. The festival site is located within the ancient ruins of Jerash, some of which date to the Roman age (63 BC); Jerash is among a group of cities collectively known as the Decapolis and is a major tourist attraction today. The 18-day festival includes a variety of cultural events such as music, drama, dance, as well as a variety of native arts and crafts. The festival events occur between 6:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. daily. Attendance is facilitated by public transportation that runs frequently between Jerash and Amman.

2.2. Measures and sampling
A three part on-site survey that focused on attendance motives, image, and demographic information was employed with the image and demographic sections the focus of this article. Image-specific questions were designed to assess visitors' perceptions about Jordan as the host nation for the festival and as a tourist destination. Following Gartner and Shen (1992) visitors were asked, using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) about Jordan's accommodations, accessibility, safety, and other similar questions. Demographic questions included education, age, and gender.

The survey was developed in English and translated to Arabic by a native Jordanian. The instrument was then translated back to English, as recommended by Dimanche (1994). Consultation with a committee of Jordanian experts suggested only minor cultural equivalence problems, which were addressed. The use of back translation and an expert committee demonstrate increased effort toward diminishing translation errors (Brislin, 1980). The fact that the instrument was not pilot-tested is a potential limitation of the study. Native Jordanians, specifically trained for the project, conducted on-site intercept interviews. Intercept interviews were conducted on five evenings of the festival, three weekend and two weekday evenings, to represent the variety of events offered throughout the festival and thus, the variety of attendees.

Subjects were selected using a systematic random sample of visitors at each location. Less than 5% of those approached refused to participate in the survey. Of the 410 usable surveys obtained during the sampling period, 65 surveys were from international attendees and the data presented here focuses on these respondents. Following an initial descriptive analysis, international visitors were divided into two groups: intraregional and interregional travelers. Differences between the two groups' visitor images of Jordan were assessed with t-tests using Levine's test to account for potential unequal variances due to the differing group sizes. The small sample size of the interregional travelers is noted as a limitation of the study and caution should be used when interpreting the result differences.

3. Results and discussion
Descriptive analysis of the study data reveals that intraregional visitors were most frequently from Saudi Arabia (46.2%) and, to a lesser extent, from regional states such as Egypt (9.2%), United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait (6.2%). The median number of nights spent in Jordan was six, with a range of 1-180. These non-Jordanian visitors were more likely to be male (75.0%) with a college education (45.2%) who had visited Jordan once

before (32.3%), with a range of past visits between 1 and 25 times. The average group size was 5.18 people and most attended the festival with a family group (57.4%).

Overall, non-Jordanian festival attendees had a fairly positive perception of Jordan as a host nation (Table 1). Visitors most strongly agreed that Jordan was both a safe and an interesting place to visit where the natives `make you feel at home.' Respondents also agreed that Jordan was a fun place to visit that offered a good variety of places to stay. Respondents were more neutral regarding tourist services offered by Jordan, such as the food, transportation, variety of things to do, and affordability. Respondents were least positive in their responses

Table 1
Jordan's image as expressed by non-Jordanian festival attendees (n = 65)

Components of Jordan's image	Mean	Interregional (n = 51)	Intraregional (n = 14)
Jordan is a safe place to visit	4.50	4.23	4.55
Jordan is an interesting place to visit	4.36	4.61	4.30
The people in Jordan make you feel at home	4.35	4.38	4.27
Jordan is a fun place to visit	4.16	3.92	4.21
Jordan offers a good choice of places to stay	4.14	3.81	4.28
The food in Jordan is good	3.92	4.08	3.93
Transportation within Jordan is convenient	3.79	3.85	3.83
Jordan offers a variety of things for visitors to do	3.79		
Jordan is an affordable place to visit	3.71	3.63	3.83
Traveling to Jordan from my county is convenient	3.67	3.58	3.74
Jordanian businesses treat visitors well	3.65	3.83	3.57
Jordan is a good place to go shopping	3.21	2.80	3.28

concerning shopping opportunities in Jordan and how businesses treat visitors. No significant differences in perceptions of Jordan were found between interregional and intraregional festival attendees. The small sample size may account for the lack of differences, but larger effects tend to be reflected even among small samples. Overall, visitors indicated Jordan was safe, interesting, and hospitable. Evaluation of Jordan's service offerings was less positive.

4. Implications and conclusions

Tourist destination image research is increasing, but still scant for particular regions, such as the Middle East. This study assessed Jordan's image by a select group of current visitors and looked for regional differences in this assessment. A generally positive image of Jordan emerged among all visitors, but service and hospitality issues appear to challenge its tourism industry.

According to respondents, Jordan needs to enhance its services sector (i.e., tourist facilities, shopping). Currently few resources exist in Jordan for service training and major hotels rely on internal training for their employees. Although the University of Jordan offers a degree in tourism, it focuses on planning rather than services, as indicated by its location in the Geography Department. In 1995, the Jordan Center for Consultation and Technical Service initiated a tour guide training and certification program and thus represents one step toward service standardization. In the recent past, hospitality-training centers have been proposed and welcomed by the industry; however, funding and staffing uncertainties impede their progress. Given the

indication by respondents that these items were of most concern, investments in the service sector appear warranted for Jordan to enhance and improve its industry offerings.

Jordan's visitors were somewhat uncertain about the offering of events and things to do. A variety of offerings extends visitor stays, expenditures and probabilities of return visits. Understandably, Jordan capitalizes on its antiquities and religious attractions; however, Jordan can easily expand its market and tourist offerings by increasing visitor awareness of its natural resources. Wildlife and nature reserves provide diverse opportunities in Jordan, from forested areas and spectacular wildlife viewing to prime Red Sea diving. Jordan may capitalize on the relatively new thrust of nature-based or eco-tourism and, with internal cooperation, attract another tourism market.

Attracting tourists is particularly challenging for Jordan due to a potential negative image of potential tourists. The influence of mass media may significantly impact future visitors. In an early study involving the Republic of Ireland, Ehemann (1977) argued that a strong link exists between destination image and the mass media. Although no research has been done, it is quite likely that the mass media influences travelers' images of entire regions (i.e., Far East, Middle East, Caribbean region). Mass media plays a critical role in destination image formation, particularly in the Middle East due to its prevalent spot in international politics and turmoil. Jordan faces a particular image challenge in that the country first needs to distinguish itself both from and within the region. People solely dependent on the media are likely to develop negative images of the Middle East and, unable to distinguish among its components, decide against future travel there. Conversely, travelers who are better informed about political events occurring in a country or region react less severely toward them (Tremblay, 1989; Wall, 1996) and are subsequently more inclined to consider travel in the area (Sönmez & Graefe, in press; Wall, 1996). Second, Jordan has a variety of offerings and needs to capitalize on this to differentiate itself from other regional competitors. Although Jordan benefits from package tour promotions of the Holy Land, it enjoys minimal economic impacts due to short stays in Jordan and the perception of limited experiences within the country. Internal cooperative marketing and planning efforts will facilitate enhanced understanding of Jordan's offerings and maximize its marketing resources.

As Jordan is in the process of developing intense domestic and international marketing campaigns, additional visitor and potential visitors research is recommended. Current efforts focus on destination planning but attention needs to be paid to potential visitors and diminishing any image barriers to their travel.

References

Alhemoud, A. M., & Armstrong, E. G. (1996). Image of tourism attractions in Kuwait. *Journal of Travel Research*, *34*(4), 76-80.

Bramwell, B., & Rawding, L. (1996). Tourism marketing images of industrial cities. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *23*(1), 201-221.

Brislin, R. W. (1980). Translation and content analysis of oral and written material. In H. C. Triandis, & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *Handbook of cross cultural psychology*: *Vol*. 2. *Methodology*. New York: Wiley.

Calantone, R., Di Benedetto, C. A., Hakam, A., & Bojanic, D. C. (1989). Multiple multinational tourism positioning using correspondence analysis. *Journal of Travel Research*, *28*(2), 25-32.

Chon, K. S. (1991). Tourism destination image modification process - marketing implications. *Journal of Travel Research*, *12*(1), 68-72.

Crompton, J. L. (1977). *A systems model of the tourist's destination selection process with particular reference to the role of image and perceived constraints*. Ph.D. dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station.

Crompton, J. L. (1979). An assessment of the image of Mexico as a vacation destination and the influence of geographical location upon that image. *Journal of Travel Research*, *17*(4), 18-23.

Crompton, J. L., & Duray, N. A. (1985). An investigation of the relative efficacy of four alternative approaches to importance-performance analysis. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *13*(Fall), 69-80.

Dann, G. M. S. (1996). Tourists' images of a destination - an alternative analysis. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, *5*(1/2), 41-55.

Dimanche, F. (1994). Cross-cultural tourism marketing research: An assessment and recommendations for future studies. In M. Uysal (Ed.), *Global tourism behavior* (pp. 123-134). Binghamton, NY: The Hayworth Press, Inc.

Echtner, C. M., & Brent Ritchie, J. R. (1993). The measurement of destination image: An empirical assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, *31*(4), 3-13.

Ehemann, J. (1977). What kind of place is Ireland: An image perceived through American media. *Journal of Travel Research*, *16*(2), 28-30.

Fridgen, J. D. (1991). *Dimensions of tourism*, Washington, D.C.: Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Motel Association.

Gartner, W. C. (1989). Tourism image: Attribute measurement of state tourism products using multidimensional scaling techniques. *Journal of Travel Research*, *28*(2), 16-20.

Gartner, W. C. (1993). Image formation process. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, *2*(2/3), 191-215.

Gartner, W. C., & Hunt, J. D. (1987). An analysis of state image change over a twelve-year period (1971-1983). *Journal of Travel Research*, *26*(2), 5-19.

Gartner, W. C., & Shen, J. (1992). The impact of Tiananmen Square on China's tourism image. *Journal of Travel Research*, *30*(4), 47-52.

Goodrich, J. N. (1977). Differences in perceived similarity of tourism regions: A spatial analysis. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *15*(3), 10-13.

Goodrich, J. N. (1978). The relationship between preferences for and perceptions of vacation destinations: Application of a choice model. *Journal of Travel Research*, *17*(2), 8-13.

Haahti, A., & Yavas, U. (1983). Tourists' perceptions of Finland and selected European countries as travel destinations. *European Journal of Marketing*, *12*(2), 34-42.

Hollier, R. (1991). Conflict in the Gulf: Response of the tourism industry. *Tourism Management*, *12*(10), 2-4.

Hunt, J. D. (1975). Image as a factor in tourism development. *Journal of Travel Research*, *13*(3), 1-7.

Kale, S. H., & Weir, K. M. (1986). Marketing third-world countries to the western traveler: The case of India. *Journal of Travel Research*, *25*(2),2-7.

Mansfeld, Y. (1995). Wars, tourism and the "Middle East" factor. In *Security and risks in travel and tourism*, *Proceedings of the Talk at the Top Conference* (pp. 109-128), Östersund, Sweden: Mid-Sweden University.

Mansfeld, Y. (1996). Wars, tourism and the "Middle East" factor. In A. Pizam, & Y. Mansfeld (Eds.), *Tourism, crime and international security issues* (pp. 265-278). New York: Wiley.

Mayo, E. J. (1973). Regional images and regional travel behavior. In *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Travel Research Association* (pp. 211-218). Salt Lake City: Travel Research Association.

McClellan, R. C., & Foushcee, K. D. (1983). Negative images of the United States as expressed by tour operators from other countries. *Journal of Travel Research*, *22*(1), 2-5.

Pearce, P. L. (1982). Perceived changes in holiday destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *9*,145-164.

Phelps, A. (1986). Holiday destination image - the problem of assessment: An example developed in Menorca. *Tourism Management*, *7*(3), 168-180.

Reilly, M. D. (1990). Free elicitation of descriptive adjectives for tourism image assessment. *Journal of Travel Research*, *28*(4), 21-26.

Richardson, S. L., & Crompton, J. L. (1988). Cultural variations in perceptions of vacation attributes. *Tourism Management*, *9*(3), 128-136.

Sönmez, S. F., & Graefe, A. R. (1998). Determining future travel from past travel experience and perceptions of risk and safety. *Journal of Travel Research*, in press.

Telisman-Kosuta, N. (1987). *Images of Yugoslavia, Greece and Romania*. Unpublished master's thesis, Washington, D.C.: George Washington University.

Tremblay, P. (1989). Pooling international tourism in Western Europe. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *16*(4), 477-491.

Wall, G. (1996). Terrorism and tourism: An overview and an Irish example. In A. Pizam, & Y. Mansfeld (Eds.), *Tourism, crime and international security issues* (pp. 143-158). New York: Wiley.

World Tourism Organization. (1991, May). *Impact of the Gulf crisis on international tourism*. Special Report. Madrid, Spain: Author.