# The Influence of Middle East Crisis on the Flow of Tourists to Jordan

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**Abstract:** Despite the Middle East is considered as a conflict-ridden region, relatively some major tourism destination such as Jordan is safe, however, these destinations' geographic location has resulted in tourists' misperceptions and had a negative effect on tourism throughout the Middle East. This study aimed to uncover the challenges of decreased the flow of tourists to the Jordan to restore a positive image after the crisis following the Arab Spring uprisings. Literature analysis method was applied to review previous literature on perceived risks in the Middle East. Results of the analysis revealed the issues that influence tourists' perceived risk toward the region and Jordan particularly were geographical ignorance of safe destinations, a biased coverage of the media, different culture influence personal characteristics concerning freedom, and weakness of previous experiences. Findings further revealed that studies regarding during-traveling sampling of international tourists in the Middle East are limited.

**Keywords:** Perceived Risk, Tourism Crisis, Middle East, Jordan.

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## I.  INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a main contributor to the diversity of people's lifestyles by supporting culture and creating revenues, entertainment, and jobs[1,2]. However, tourism is a service industry and the nature of its products involves experience and intangibility[3]; thus, it is susceptible to risks and threats[4]. Mitchell and Vassos (1998) noted that tourism is an intangible service that is significantly difficult to standardize[5]; thus, the perceived risk of traveling is likely to be high. Several studies have confirmed that one of the main determinants that influence tourists' decision to travel is a perceived risk[6, 7]. According to Deng and Ritchie (2016) perceived risk is a key determinant in tourism commerce because it tends to influence tourists' choice of destination[8]. Tourists avoid destinations that are usually perceived as risky, such the Middle East region; thus, destinations are negatively affected[9, 10].

The Middle East is considering as a controversial region. Despite there are several safe places in the Middle East region, but any events in the region are reflected on all the countries in this area. The generalization of the effect in the Middle East[11,] may result from geographical ignorance or biased media[12, 13]. Furthermore, scholars have confirmed that the level of tourist involvement in security situations is associated with the number of tourists who visit Middle Eastern countries[14]. Thus, the negative stereotype of Middle Eastern destinations as unsafe prompted Middle Eastern countries to devote considerable emphasis over the years to countering that notion[15].

Jordan has often found itself amid the crisis and regional conflict in the Middle East. In 2011 and 2012, Jordan, along with other countries in the region (including Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, Kuwait, Sudan, and Egypt) were shaken by violent and non-violent protests known as the Arab Spring[16,17], as well as the emergence of militant and terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)[18]. Thus, these events highlighted that the turbulent socio-political environment in the region affected the flow of tourists to the area. This article analysed previous studies from scientific journals sober in order to uncover the issues and challenges that faced the tourism industry in the Middle East in general, and in the tourism industry in Jordan particularly to restore a positive image to their countries and bring back tourists after the crisis following the Arab Spring uprisings.

## II.  LITERATURE REVIEW

**Perceived risk in Tourism**: Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world; however, tourism is not just a world activity[19]. According to UNWTO (2008, p.2), "tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes"[20]. Over time, the tourism industry has been influenced by

disaster, including political crisis, war, and terrorism. Recently, risk studies in tourism have significantly increased[21]; these studies have focused on perceived risk[22,23]. Such development is due to widespread violence and terrorism, including the London bombings (July 7, 2005), which consisted of three explosions in the subway and a bus attack, killing 56 people[24]; the terrorist attack on a bus in the tourist resort town of Kusadasi in Turkey, with 5 casualties[25]; the bombing on July 23, 2005 in the tourist resort town of Sharm-el-Sheikh in Egypt that killed 83 people[26]; and the explosion on a tourist bus in the Egyptian resort town of Taba on February 17, 2014, killing 4 people[27]. Korstanje (2009) stated that the idea of vulnerability and a lack of familiarity make tourists an easy prey for terrorist attacks and crime; therefore, perceived risk is almost defined in terms of those aspects that may endanger the well-being of tourists[28]. Henceforth, tourism scholars have recognized the impact of perceived risk on travel behaviour and decision, because tourists are likely to avoid destinations with greater perceived risk[29].

**Crisis in the Middle East:** Tourism crisis events refer to incidents that severely weaken the reputation, vision, and perception of tourism destinations and related projects and marketability[14]. Schmidt and Berrell (2007, p. 68) defined a crisis in tourism as a "high-impact event that threatens the viability of tourism and its stakeholders, either directly or indirectly"[30]. Several studies have indicated that crises can affect tourism revenues of a country[31,32]. The concept of tourism crisis is familiar in the tourism industry in the Middle East. Over the years, the region has experienced violent conflicts, wars, and terror attacks, which weakened the tourism industry[33].

The Middle East is the home of three main religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; it also offers unique sites and landscapes. Tourism can mediate peace, contribute extensively to the local economy, and establish collaborations among countries[34,35]. Avraham (2015) asserted that tourism in the Middle East is especially sensitive to crisis because of the previous image of the region as violent, dangerous, and a harbour for terrorist groups[36]. Westerners are reminded of the "danger" in the Middle East with every terrorist event. This fact compounded the damage to the tourism industry; examples of those events include the death of 38 international tourists in the Tunisia beach attack on June 26, 2015[37] and the Palm Sunday bombings of Egyptian Coptic churches on April 9, 2017[38]. When a violent incident occurs in one of its countries, people tend to perceive the entire Middle East as dangerous[14].

**Tourism Sector in Jordan:** Tourism is considered Jordan's as the second largest private sector employer, and its largest export sector[39]. Regarding the significance of tourism to the Jordanian economy, tourism generated USD1.429 billion and provided 23,544 jobs in 2005, USD3.563 billion and 29,394 jobs in 2010, and USD4.349 billion and 42,034 jobs in 2014[39]. Many tourist attractions are available in Jordan. Most of its attractions involve archaeological sites, such as Petra (one of the Seven Wonders of the World); cultural heritage sites, such as Madaba (where the old map of the Middle East can be found); health tourism sites, such as the Dead Sea; and nature tourism sites, including Wadi Rum.

Several issues are faced by the tourism policy makers in Jordan; however, the main issue is the decrease in the number of tourists, which researchers have attributed to the political instability in the Middle East[37]. Perceived risk is a main critical issue facing tourism in general, especially, in places of socio-political turmoil[40]. As shown in Figure 1, a strong growth in tourist arrivals was recorded between 2005 and 2010, where the number of international tourists who visited Jordan from outside the Middle East or non-Arab tourists to Jordan increased by 51%[39]. However, the number has been unstable since then, and decreased to 41% in 2017, as shown in Figure 1. Therefore, Jordan has been losing tourists, as well as tourism revenue[41].
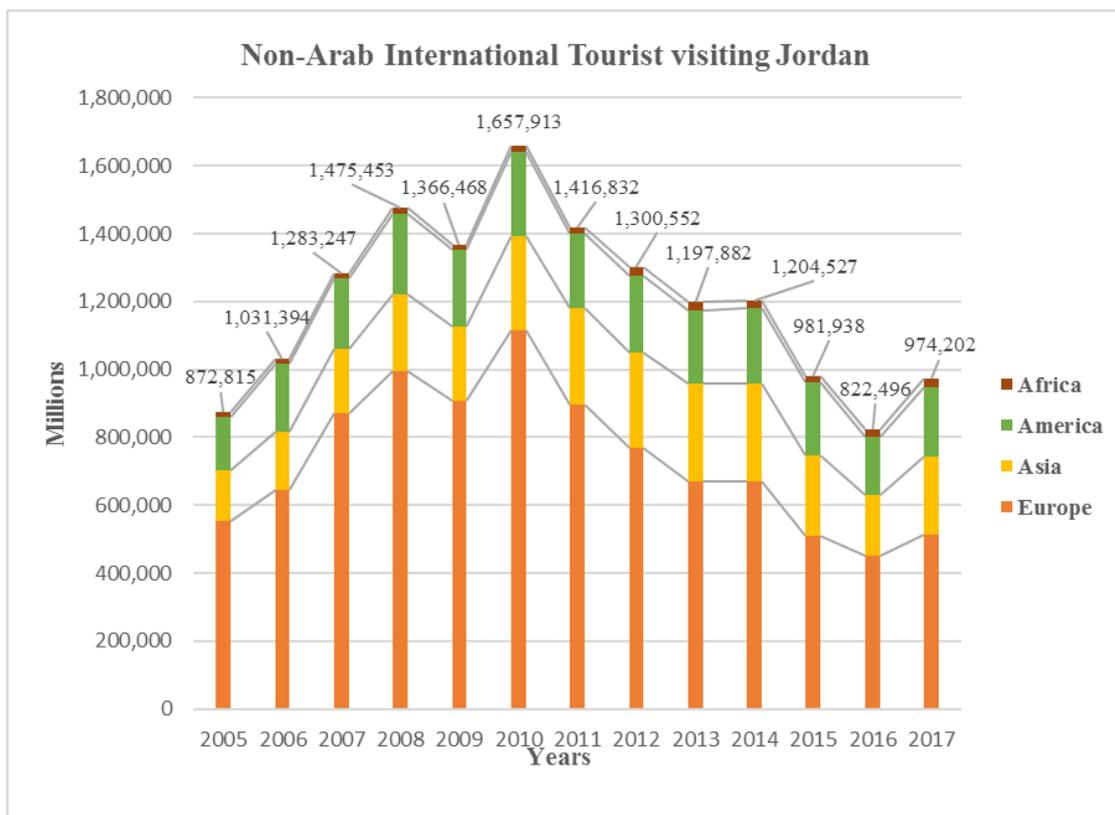
**Figure 1.** Non-Arab International Tourist visiting Jordan[39]

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this article is to investigate the issues frames surrounding Jordan as a tourist destination during unstable times in the Middle East. Previous studies considered as one of the most prominent information sources that enable the researcher to conduct literature analysis and to determine the reasons for decline the flow of tourists to the destination, therefore, the researcher conducted a review of the literature. The initial step of the literature analysis was to identify the relevant source material and review scope. Since tourism is an interdisciplinary subject, therefore, the researcher began to search for publications by examining the databases of academic journals for four publications. The following databases were searched:

- Elsevier
- Sage
- Taylor & Francis
- Wiley Online Library

Search was based on the descriptors ''Tourists'', ''perceived risk'', ''Middle East'', and ''Jordan'' that can be found in the abstract or title of the article. The researcher ruled out articles in which perceived risks of tourists in Middle East and Jordan were just a fraction of the study.

To ensure the quality of the content, the researcher selected only the papers that published in the journals that belong to Scopus index, particularly, the journals with the highest values and the second highest values, as well, has been adopted the last five years only.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Descriptive findings:** As the prior part clarified, the analysis of the literature followed criteria and specific procedures that resulted up in the classification of 8 publications. This indicated that novel studies of perceived risks of tourists in Middle East and Jordan in the qualifying journals are limited. The studies have been analysed by classification the outputs into four classifies, which are the type of study, the aim of the study, study sample, and the challenges that study focused on it. Table 1 summarizes the key review of issues and challenges of the tourism sector in the Middle East and Jordan

**The Studies Sample:** The sample is a representation and reflection of reality through which the researcher attempts to analyse and evaluate a phenomenon. The key review findings of the tourism gap in the Middle East and Jordan (Table 1) mentioned that most studies are a pre-traveling sample. For example, Sharifpour, Walters,

and Ritchie (2014) used a sample of Australian potential travellers, this research has identified the Australian tourism market's risk perceptions and their willingness to travel to the Middle East, taking into account their prior knowledge[7]. While Liu, Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, and Farajat (2016) used a sample of USA citizens, where the results show 84.1% of respondents have not been visited the Middle East[42].

Furthermore, the findings also revealed that the researchers used a qualitative method to scrutinize the tourism situation in the Middle East and Jordan. For instance, Farajat et al. (2017) used five newspapers from five countries to understand the media frames surrounding Jordan as a tourism destination during unstable times. Thus, these studies have focused on perceived risks that influence how tourists choose their travel destination[41]. Hence, research on perceived risk regarding during-traveling behaviour remains limited.

**Political Instability and Destination Image:** All the studies confirmed political instability and terrorism as the main risks to deterioration the tourism in Middle East region. Tourism image of destinations is an important element to attract tourists. However, the frequency of negative events created by regular periods of conflict, acts of terrorism and political unrest makes the Middle East region image less attractive to tourists[43,33]. However, some of the countries in the region such as Jordan is relatively safe and has been negatively impacted by the political instability and terrorism in Middle East[41]. Liu et al. (2016) confirmed that the situation in the region was reflected on a decline the number of international tourist arrivals to Jordan[42]. According to Farajat, et al. (2017), this loss is largely due to the geographical location and the unstable environment area around Jordan[41]. However, Schroeder et al. (2015) found that many US tourists tend to perceive Jordan as an unsafe destination and will exclude Jordan in their list of potential travel destination[44]. Liu, Schroeder, and Pennington-Gray (2016) claimed that under the influence of high-risk perception in relation to terrorism, safety concerns have become one of the barriers that affect tourist visits to Jordan[42].

However, in the Middle East, there are a few studies have focused on managing crisis communication and tourism crises in general[36]. This is astonishing because the knowledge accumulated around the world concerning crisis management and image repair could have been useful for decision makers and marketers in the Middle East region[36]. Where political instability and terrorism in the Middle East region affects tourism and the flow of tourists in the countries of the region is relatively stable[42].

**Culture and Knowledge of Destination:** Tourism culture is affected by the culture and actions of visitors themselves. The Middle East is usually identified with tribal characteristics, such Jordan, the Arab Gulf, and Iraq[45]; therefore, minimal compatibility is observed between the need for fun of Western tourists and the customs and traditions in these societies[33,7,46,47]. Furthermore, previous visits to a country in the Middle East influence tourists' attitude toward the entire region[43]. The weakness of previous experiences in the region negatively impacts the willingness of tourists to visit the Middle East[43,7].

Furthermore, Avraham, (2015); Sharifpour et al. (2014) and Sharifpour et al. (2014) pointed out that the international tourists have a lack of knowledge about the safe destinations in the region[36,7,46]. Moreover, political tensions in the region make the Western tourists afraid of hostile locals because of attitudes of their governments or using them as messages by terrorist groups[43,7,46].

**Influence of Media:** The mass media have been identified as an influential force in shaping perceptions about destinations[48,49]. The mass media provide information and images and help construct images of social reality and situation in that place. According to Surette (1992, p. 76), "over time, people tend to perceive things the way the media portray them"[48]. Therefore, the media play a defining and a reporting role to establish a sense of reality to the audience.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Morakabati et al. (2012) about the travel risk perceptions and attitudes of a sample of UK residents when considering travel to a group of selected countries in and around the Middle East region[43]. The findings of their research revealed that some of countries in the Middle East may be more challenging by the many negative images of these countries portrayed through the media, which affected the tourists' decision to visit these countries. Avraham, (2015), Liu et al. (2016) and Farajat et al. (2017) confirmed that the media gives a negative impact on the region[36,41,42]. As well, Morakabati (2013) and Liu et al. (2016) pointed out that the intensive media attention with any event in the region gives images deter the tourists who may potentially visit countries within the region[33,42].

**Table 1:** Summary a review of issues and challenges in the tourism sector of Middle East and Jordan

| Authors | Type of Study | Aim | Sample | Challenge |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Morakabati et al. (2012)[43] Q1 | Empirical study | select country to travel | Pre-traveling for UK households | 1. The negative influence of political instability in the Middle East region on tourism<br>2. In the case of UK nationals, attitudes towards traveling to the Middle East region is significantly negative<br>3. tourism image is negative |
| Morakabati (2013)[33] Q1 | Critical and Analysis study | investigates the weakness of tourism, and decline of tourist arrivals | examines tourism activity over a 60-year period in the UNWTO Middle East region | 1. The Middle East region is less attractive to investors because of the frequency of negative events created by acts of terrorism, regular periods of conflict, and political instability make.<br>2. images also deter the tourists who may potentially visit countries within the region,<br>3. Events and cultural differences make tourist to afraid of the reactions of terrorist groups. |
| Sharifpour, Walters, and Ritchie (2014)[7] Q2 | Empirical study | willingness to travel | Pre-traveling for Australian residents | 1. Political instability and terrorism in region influence the tourists' intentions to visit<br>2. The weakness of previous experiences in the region and geographical knowledge<br>3. Lack of knowledge about the safe destination in the region.<br>4. Have a negative image for the region because of the type of the information and the accuracy of the information about the region, |
| Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie, and Winter (2014)[46] Q1 | Empirical study | relationships among tourists' risk perceptions and associated factors | Pre-traveling for Australian residents | 1. Cultural differences lead to hostile reactions.<br>2. Tribal character, of the Middle East societies and the compatibility with the needs of the hedonistic westernized tourists, are minimal.<br>3. lack of knowledge about the safe destination in the region<br>4. Western tourists are slightly or completely reluctant to visit the middle east region specifically due to risks:<br>a) hostile residents toward westerners,<br>b) the existence of political instability in the middle east region,<br>c) risk of culture and communication differences. |
| Buda (2015)[47] Q1 | Critical and Analysis study | scrutinize interconnections between tourism, safety, and conflict | Observation and interview with local Jordanian tourism stakeholders and with international tourists by online | 1. Conflict and danger on the border with Jordan (Iraq, Syria etc) give negative image to the tourists.<br>2. Cultural differences make tourist to afraid of the reactions of terrorist groups |
| Avraham, (2015)[36] Q1 | Analysis study | uncover media strategies to restore a positive image | • Observation<br>• news reports from two international media outlets<br>• Internet and video-sharing websites<br>• global tourism news websites | 1. Arab Spring revolutions received intensive coverage and had a negative effect on tourism to the Middle East<br>2. Media gives a negative image for whole the region.<br>3. lack of knowledge about the safe destination in the region |
| Liu, Schroeder, Pennington-Gray, and Farajat (2016)[42] Q1 | Empirical study | Examine the US source and factors influence visiting intentions. | Pre-traveling for US citizens by online questionnaire | 1. number of international tourist arrivals to Jordan dropped<br>2. geographic location in a conflict-ridden area<br>3. intensive media attention and give a negative image |
| Farajat, Liu, and Pennington-Gray (2017)[41] Q2 | Analysis study | Understand the media frames surrounding Jordan as a tourism destination during unstable times | Five newspapers and news articles selected from five countries (The US, Canada, UK, New Zealand, and Australia) | 1. Jordan is relatively safe and has been negatively impacted by the political instability and terrorism in Middle East.<br>2. Media gives a negative impact on the region.<br>3. constant occurrence of geopolitical crises influences the tourists' decision-making |

## V. CONCLUSION

This research analysed issues and challenges facing the tourism industry in the Middle East and Jordan. The main objective of this article was to explore the impacts of perceived risks; in addition, the effects of crises in the Middle East of flow tourists to Jordan since the Arab Spring uprisings. Generally, the studies reveal several challenges or issues that affect tourism in the Middle East and Jordan or influence tourists' perceived risk toward the region. These challenges are influence of media, different culture, personal characteristics concerning freedom, weak previous experiences and their impact on the assessment of destinations, and lack of knowledge on the safe destinations in the region. In addition, most of the studies are a pre-traveling sample, which means focused on perceived risks that impact how tourists choose the tourism destination. Consequently, the research for perceived risks in post-traveling behaviour is still limited. Therefore, these challenges or issues can assess the perceived risk for most of the Middle East countries. Whereas it is important to strengthen Jordan's image by reassuring international tourists about Jordan as a safe destination during turbulent times in the Middle East, this article also emphasizes on the significance of marketing certain safe destinations by providing accurate promotion and accurate knowledge. Without realizing the kind of perceived risks particular to a tourism destination and its impact on flow international tourists, traditional strategies for improvement of the image of a destination may be less effective in convincing tourists to visit places that surrounding by risky. Thus, future studies have to add a deeper understanding of the relationship between tourists' future intention and perceived risks.

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