

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT AS A DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN JORDAN: EVALUATING PERFORMANCE OF JORDANIAN TOURISM PUBLIC POLICIES DURING CRISIS - BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19

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**Abstract :** This paper evaluates the policies taken by Jordanian tourism sector before and after COVID-19; it is divided into two parts: the first dealt with the period 2011-2019 which followed the events of Arab Spring, the second focused on the post-COVID-19 period. A mixed methodology was used as for the Arab Spring case a quantitative approach that aimed at measuring the satisfaction of 54 travel agents about policies taken by public tourism sector was used. A Structure Equation Modelling analysis was conducted to test the relationship between specific satisfaction about promotional and economic policies as independent variables, and the general satisfaction as a dependent variable. As for the case of COVID-19, a different approach was used where the Tourism National Strategy 2021-2025 and reports on the influence of COVID-19 on Jordanian Economy were referred to make an evaluation of governmental performance. There was an obvious absence of the concept of “Crisis Management” in tourism national strategies (MOTA, 2003 ; 2010 ; 2015) ; where the focus was on diversifying the tourism product, enhancing the image of the country and increasing competitiveness

**Keywords:** crisis management, public policies, satisfaction, Arab Spring, political crisis, tourism in Jordan

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### INTRODUCTION

Since December 2010, revolutions known as “Arab Spring” took place in the Arab world, starting in Tunisia and Egypt and shortly after spread in some other Middle Eastern and North African regions. Fall of presidents and drastic political and social instability events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen were witnessed after decades of hard life conditions and corruption, while monarchies of Morocco and Jordan, which continued to be politically stable adopted gradual political reforms (Masetti and Körner, 2013). Deteriorations were recorded for economic indicators as GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and employment in Middle East and North Africa region (OECD, 2011). For the tourism industry; there was a decline in the volume of inbound tourists, revenues, and hotels occupancy rates. Jordan was one of the countries that were badly influenced by the instable political situation; especially for tourism sector, this was seen in the cancellation of trips by visitors from Europe and America, the drop in the number of tourist arrivals from 8,078,380 in 2010 to 6,812,438 in 2011 (15.7% decrease); and the decrease of package tours from 707,735 to 419,571 (Statistics of Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities [MOTA], 2010/2011); all were indicators for a real crisis. Considering that tourism is the largest export sector of the country, its second private sector employer, and a major producer of foreign exchange (MOTA, 2003), and that it accounts for approximately 10.50 % of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Central Bank of Jordan [CBJ], 2019), such decline in tourism indicators is critical to the Jordanian economy. There was a clear drop in some markets; these are mainly the tourists from the Gulf Council countries (particularly from Saudi Arabia), medical tourists (especially patients from Sudan, Libya, Yemen and Iraq). Moreover, the country is suffering from the pressure caused by receiving enormous groups of Syrian refugees (Khawaldah and Alzbou, 2022). It was only in 2015 when the tourism sector started to recover (as indicated from statistics by MOTA, 2016).

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The location of the country in the region of the Middle East is exposing it to the influence of turbulent events since decades (e.g. Palestinian Israeli conflict, terrorism attacks on tourists during 1990s in Egypt, Gulf War 1990-1, Iraq War since 2003, and finally the Arab Spring); such location is causing a misperception and a negative image of the country as a tourism destination. The Jordanian Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities and Jordan Tourism Board have declared preparing an emergency plan (not formally published) to target markets as Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates), Turkey and Far East (China, Japan and South Korea) (Jordan Times, 2015). Different promotional and economic policies were used to recover from this crisis and bring back tourists; these included launching online and offline campaigns to attract more of French, British, and German markets by linkages with European tour operators, advertisements on TV channels, taxis, and billboards. Promoting the country as a film destination was another action (i.e. the Martian movie was filmed in Wadi Rum, which was featured as Mars), promoting the usage of "Jordan Pass", which is a single ticket that allows tourists to access archaeological sites and museums while waiving entry visa fees for pass holders, waiving visa fees for packaged groups and individual travelers with a minimum stay of two consecutive nights, reduction of visa fees for all land borders, waiving the departure tax for both Aqaba International Airport and Marka Civil Airport (Abu Tayeh and Mustafa, 2018).

The formal website of Jordan Tourism Board gave access to live streaming cameras to experience views of distinguished locations; through videos, broadcasting tourists' commentaries about their experience in Jordan; also posting travel bloggers to recommend Jordan as a travel destination (Jordan Tourism Board, JTB 2017). Agreements with charter flights firms by Jordan Tourism Board were signed to bring weekly flights from Europe to Jordan, A summer brochure "Jordan: the family destination" was launched and distributed in airports and at border crossings, enhancing attributes and tourism services in some historical sites, and supporting with marketing information technology training for small businesses, also reducing taxes on hotels (UNWTO, 2017). That is in addition to organizing and participation in different events and exhibitions (e.g. events news posted on ETurbonews website on different dates).

### **Crisis in Tourism Context**

A crisis is "a change, which may be sudden, or which may take some time to evolve, that results in an urgent problem that must be addressed immediately" (Efficiency Unit, 2009). The Arab Spring influence on tourism sector is a multi-type crisis; it's economic since tourist arrivals and revenues decreased; and reputational since it had dramatically caused the misperception of the country as an unsafe destination due to its location. This signifies the need of "Crisis Management" approach, which "seeks to prevent or lessen the negative outcomes of a crisis and thereby protect the organization, stakeholders, and/or industry from damage" (Coombs, 2022: 4). Crisis management is: "the preparation and application of strategies and tactics that can prevent or modify the impact of major events on the company or organization (Şen, 2015).

According to Faulkner (2001), crisis management takes the following phases: the pre-event phase (contingency plans and assessment studies are developed); prodromal phase (plans are activated after the occurrence of the crises; emergency phase (actions conducted to protect people and property); intermediate phase (media communication and rebuilding affected areas and infrastructure); and resolution phase (evaluation of crisis management process). The above-mentioned phases include different policies or actions that were discussed and expanded in literature (e.g. proactive crisis management (Mustafa, 2021, Hayes and Patton, 2001; Retchie, 2004; Carlsen and Liburd, 2008), integrating crisis management with strategic planning processes (Al Rousan et al., 2023; Retchie, 2004; Evans and Elphik, 2005), adapting a comprehensive research agenda and market recovery (Carlsen and Liburd, 2008); communication in crisis (Retchie, 2004; Marianna, 2011), preparing detailed contingency plans (Evans and Elphik, 2005), integration of stakeholders (Retchie, 2004; Blackman and Retchie, 2008; Marianna, 2011). It can be indicated in the case of Jordanian tourism crisis that formal authorities concentrated on taking communication and containment actions to recover from drastic deterioration in tourism arrivals and revenues; unfortunately, no clear strategic planning approach nor a post-crisis research or SWOT were declared or formally published when deciding these actions. Such actions are referred to as policies, which are defined as public responses to perceived public problems, of these are promotional policies which promote desirable behaviours, regulatory policies which discourage undesirable behaviour, and redistributive or macroeconomic policies which aim at changing individual behaviours by transforming the economic context in which people act (Lowi et al., 2007). For the purpose of this study promotional and economic policies were the selected as they fit the context of crisis. The effectiveness of these policies undertaken by public authorities can be evaluated not only by tourism levels (revenues, volumes of tourists.... etc), but also by the level of satisfaction by private enterprises about them; inbound travel agencies were selected since they were the mostly influenced businesses by the crisis of Arab Spring.

### **Satisfaction Theoretical Framework & Hypothesis:**

Many definitions were given to the concept of satisfaction; generally, it is a feeling generated from an evaluation of the Ouse experience (Parker and Mathews, 2001); Mittal et al., (2023) defined it as the judgement that a provided product is of a pleasurable level of consumption. It was also recognized as the "consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption (Al Rousan et al., 2023, Hunt, 1991) while Fornell (1992) and (Dalla Pozza, 2014:11) stated that satisfaction is "an overall post-purchase evaluation". The concept of satisfaction is found in the contexts of purchase, consumption, information and business consumption; overall, satisfaction represents the response of the end user (Giese and Cote, 2002). Overall, satisfaction is an evaluation process, regardless of the context or targeted group. Most of satisfaction research focused on motivation, carrying capacity, social impacts, perceptions and behaviour (Latu and Everett, 2000). Very few studies analysed the relationship between specific and overall satisfaction in different contexts; for example: measuring attribute

and overall satisfaction with destination experience (Chung and Petrick, 2012), the relation between transaction-specific satisfaction, overall satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Jones and Suh, 2000), the specific satisfaction and dissatisfaction-based evaluations of destination by sun and sand tourists' and their relations to both overall satisfaction and intention to return to the destination (Alegre and Garau, 2010), and the specific site attributes and their relation to visitors' overall satisfaction with their experiences (Ibrahim and Al-Zboun, 2021; Yuan et al., 2018). The general finding by these studies is that specific-attribute satisfaction is a strong predictor of overall satisfaction. In this context, travel agents' satisfaction was measured in both specific and general levels regarding promotional and economic policies taken by Jordanian government to deal with tourism crisis caused by the events of "Arab Spring". The following model was proposed (Figure 1).

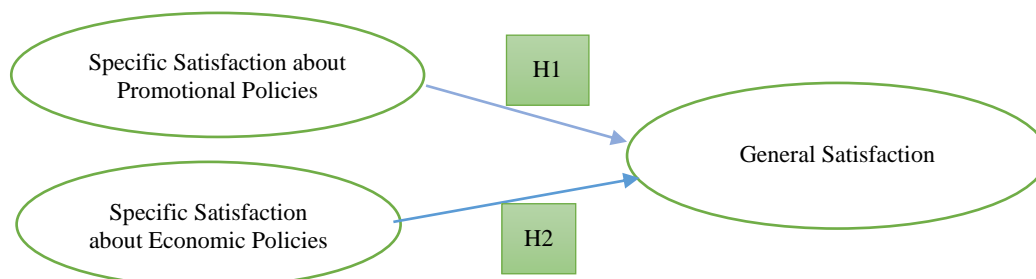


Figure 1. Specific Public Policies Satisfaction– General Satisfaction Proposed with hypothesized relationships (in this model it was hypothesized that satisfaction about specific policies adapted by tourism public sector would contribute to the general satisfaction about its performance)

The following research hypotheses were formulated to test the relations among variables in the proposed model; these were:

Hypothesis 1:

**H<sub>0</sub>**: Specific Satisfaction about Promotional Policies do not have a positive significant effect on General Satisfaction.

**H<sub>1</sub>**: Specific Satisfaction about Promotional Policies have a positive significant effect on General Satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2:

**H<sub>0</sub>**: Specific Satisfaction about Economic Policies do not have a positive significant effect on General Satisfaction.

**H<sub>1</sub>**: Specific Satisfaction about Economic Policies have a positive significant effect on General Satisfaction.

According to Market Directions (2019), there are inconclusive results by survey design research on scales to be used in measuring satisfaction; though, the most common scale used to measure such concept is the classical Likert scale, which has numeric values describing the range of possible attitudes held by respondents from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. The use of such scale helps in discovering performance problems, taking actions, and looking for performance improvements. Therefore, this scale was used in this context, the following section explains the methodology and instrument used.

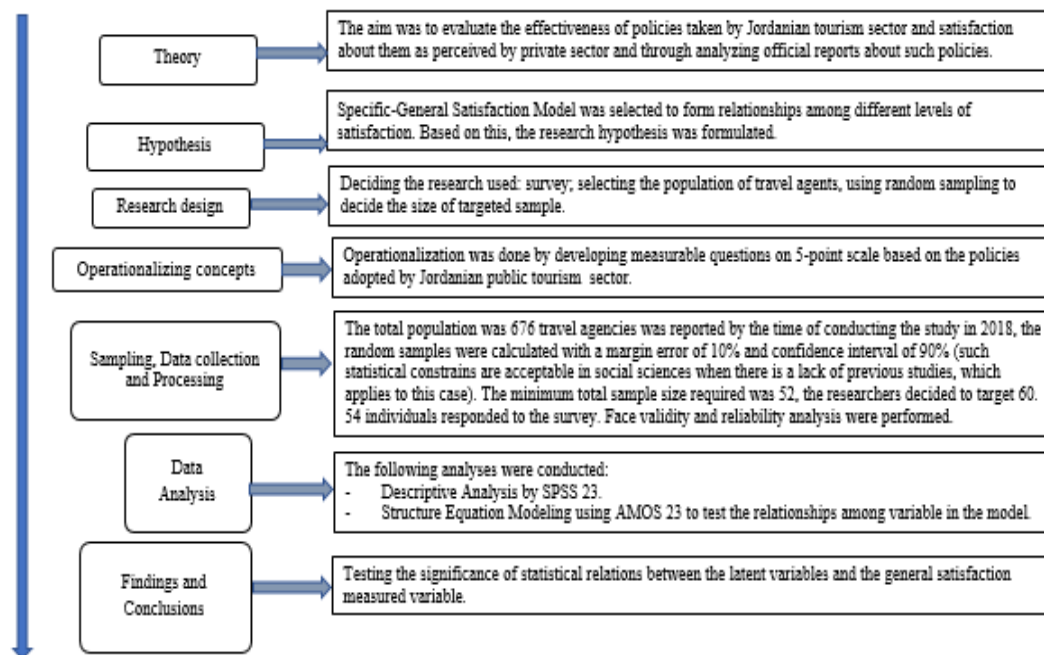


Figure 2. The steps followed in this research to evaluate the satisfaction about different policies taken by tourism public sector to deal with crises and test relation between specific satisfaction and general satisfaction

## METHODOLOGY

A random sample of 60 travel agents was targeted in April and May 2018 to fill a questionnaire that was designed for this study, travel agencies of types A (running Inbound, Outbound and Domestic Tours) & B (Running Inbound Tours)

were selected as a population since these were mostly affected by the crisis in terms of tourist volumes (Type C & D organize domestic and pilgrimage tours respectively); both types A and B have the total of 210 (out of 676 in Jordan for all types in 2018) according to the statistical data provided by the Jordan Society of Tourism and Travel Agents (JSTA, 2018). By calculating the sample size needed with a confidence level of 90% and a confidence interval of 10, it came out to be 52 (such statistical constrains are acceptable in social sciences when there is a lack of previous studies). 54 travel agents responded to the questionnaire, data collection took place at the cities of Amman, Zarqa, Jerash and Irbid during October 2018. The characteristics of the sample respondents are shown in Table 1. A flow chart of Methodology used is presented in Figure 2. The research instrument (written in Arabic) was designed to include the following 2 sections: the demographic section (age, gender, and educational level); the second section was of variables measuring the satisfaction on policies taken by tourism public sector (Table 2), it included 17 variables (16 were for specific policies and 1 for overall satisfaction), these were measured on a five-point scale (1: Not satisfied at all; 2: Somehow dissatisfied; 3: Neutral; 4: Moderately satisfied; and 5: Very satisfied); Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis for these variables.

### Analysis & Results

For the specific policies, these were grouped into promotional and economic; the internal consistency for the group of variables was measured through reliability analysis; the overall Cronbach's alpha value was 0.814 for the 5 variables forming economic policies' group ( $M = 3.1972$ ,  $SD = 0.97101$ ), and 0.895 for the 11 variables forming promotional policies' group ( $M = 3.0519$ ,  $SD = 0.87748$ ). It is noticed that specific policy observed variables had mean scores between 3 (Neutral) and 4 (Moderately satisfied); though, some variables had lower mean scores (between 2 (Somehow dissatisfied) and 3 (Neutral)), such results indicate a general low level of satisfaction (Table 2).

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents in the sample

Characteristics		Frequency
Gender	Male	39
	Female	15
Total of valid answers		54
Age	21-30	21
	31-40	20
	41-50	9
	51 or more	4
Total of valid answers		54
Education	High School	6
	Community College or BA Degree	44
	Masters or PhD	4
Total of valid answers		54

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of observed variables in study

Specific Policy Satisfaction Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Promotional policies</b>			
Encouraging domestic tourism through marketing and promotional campaigns in Jordan	51	2.7255	1.15028
Encouraging inbound tourism through marketing and promotional campaigns in Jordan	54	2.7593	1.09777
Promoting Jordan abroad as a safe tourism destination	54	3.1111	1.36902
Launching wide promotional campaigns on space channels	53	2.8113	1.22563
Concentrating on family tourism through publishing special promotional material for this type of tourism	54	2.8704	1.15000
Different multimedia used on the website of JTB to show feedback of tourists who visited Jordan	53	2.9623	1.22415
Organizing trip to gulf countries to attract markets	53	3.2453	1.09027
Promoting Jordanian festivals as Amman Citadel and Jerash festivals	54	3.2963	1.26833
Holding conferences and workshops abroad to attract tourists	51	3.1765	1.42416
Signing contracts with airlines abroad to bring more tourists	54	3.1667	1.28489
Making Jordanian tourism product familiar to investors through different economic services	54	3.2963	1.31220
<b>Economic policies</b>			
Reducing entrance fees to archaeological sites	53	3.132	1.3873
Reducing visa fees in land borders	54	3.1481	1.25002
Using Jordan pass for entering touristic sites	54	3.2593	1.16854
Weaving visa fees for travelers staying for 2 nights or more	53	3.4906	1.15397
Reducing taxes for hotels	54	2.9444	1.41976
<b>General Satisfaction Level</b>	54	3.2963	1.00244

A Structure Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted using Amos 23.0 to test the relationships among variables in the model of specific policies and general satisfaction (Figure 3 and Table 3). All the observed variables were of standardized regression coefficients above or close to 0.50 and of significant p-values; the regression coefficient between the latent variables of promotional policies satisfaction and general satisfaction was .575, while it was -.249 between economic policies satisfaction and general satisfaction with being nonsignificant for both relations. The measures of goodness of fit were as follows: the chi-square/df (or CMIN/DF as put by AMOS 23.0) gave a value of 2.771 (Chi-square = 371.292, Degrees of freedom = 134 (CMIN/DF is usually satisfactory when  $< 2$  in small samples ( $N < 100$ )), p value was  $< 0.05$ ; NFI "Normed Fit Index" = .501, TLI "Tucker-Lewis Index" = .541, RFI "Relative Fit index" = .430, and CFI "Comparative Fit Index" =

.598. These measures are usually considered satisfactory when > 0.90, though, such values are acceptable since these measures are sensitive to sample size (which is 54 in this study); the same can be said about RMSEA "Standardized Root Mean Square Residual" = .183, which is considered satisfactory when < 0.05, this measure is positively biased, such bias is greater for small sample size. It can be indicated that the model still fits the data and explains the relationships among the theoretical concepts.

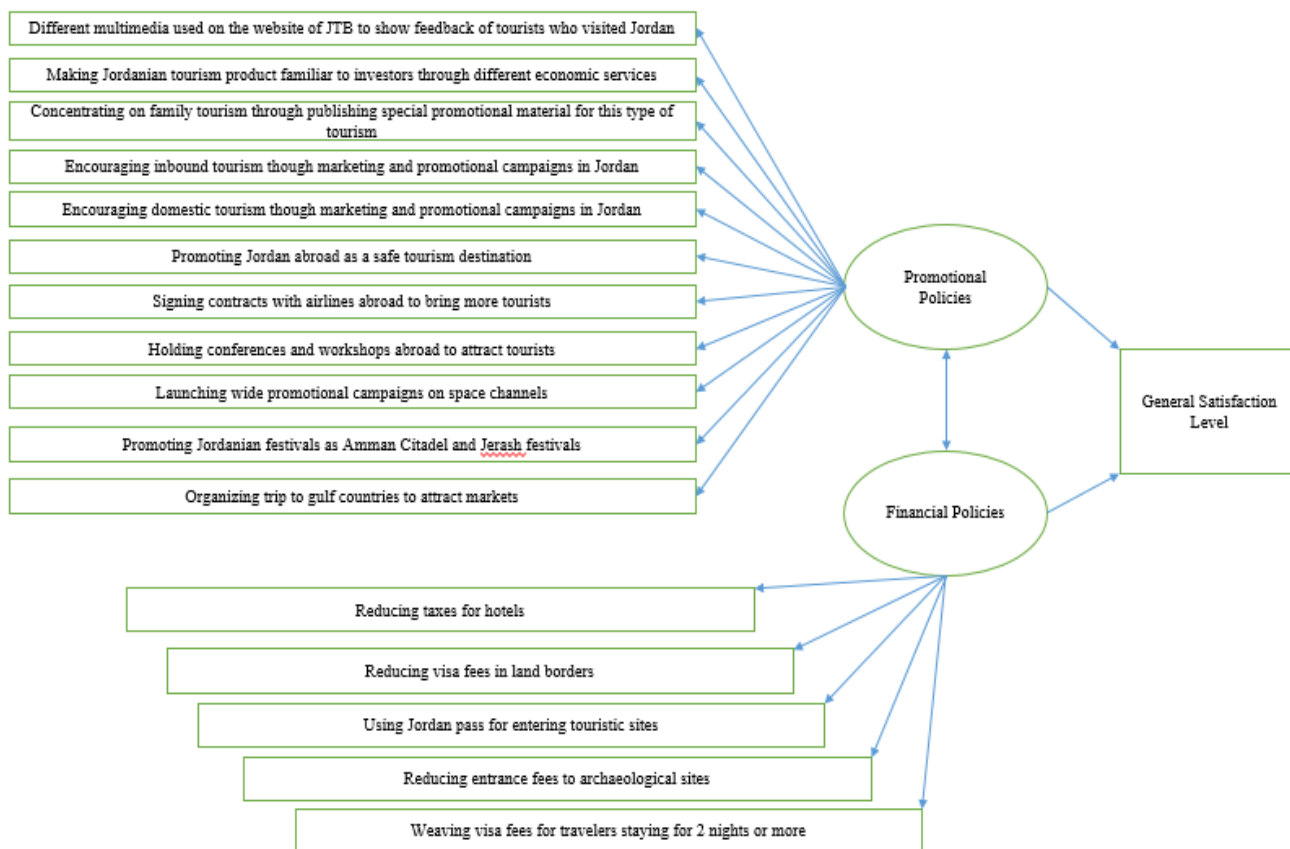


Figure 3. The Proposed Model of Regressing Specific Satisfaction about Policies (Promotional & Economic) variables on the variable of Overall Satisfaction

Table 3. The linear regression estimates and the significance levels for the model: Specific Policies Satisfaction (Promotional (PI) & Economic (EI)) on Overall Satisfaction (Note: (\*\*\*) mean that the p-value is less than .001)

Observed Variables	Path	Latent Variable	Standardised Regression Weights	Standard Error	Critical Ratio	P
Different multimedia used on the website of JTB to show feedback of tourists who visited Jordan	<---	PI	.618	.162	4.844	***
Making Jordanian tourism product familiar to investors through different economic services	<---	PI	.661	.166	5.316	***
Concentrating on family tourism through publishing special promotional material for this type of tourism	<---	PI	.634	.163	5.041	***
Encouraging inbound tourism though marketing and promotional campaigns in Jordan	<---	PI	.627	.162	4.969	***
Encouraging domestic tourism though marketing and promotional campaigns in Jordan	<---	PI	.538	.159	4.021	***
Promoting Jordan abroad as a safe tourism destination	<---	PI	.618	.161	4.874	***
Signing contracts with airlines abroad to bring more tourists	<---	PI	.729	.176	6.066	***
Holding conferences and workshops abroad to attract tourists	<---	PI	.707	.176	5.694	***
Launching wide promotional campaigns on space channels	<---	PI	.672	.168	5.398	***
Promoting Jordanian festivals as Amman Citadel and Jerash festivals	<---	PI	.564	.157	4.363	***
Organizing trip to gulf countries to attract markets	<---	PI	.483	.153	3.602	***
Reducing taxes for hotels	<---	EI	.697	.170	5.734	***
Reducing visa fees in land borders	<---	EI	.663	.165	5.377	***
Using Jordan pass for entering touristic sites	<---	EI	.634	.161	5.083	***
Reducing entrance fees to archaeological sites	<---	EI	.704	.172	5.772	***
Weaving visa fees for travelers staying for 2 nights or more	<---	EI	.489	.151	3.715	***
General Satisfaction	<---	PI	-.212	.720	-.311	.756
General Satisfaction	<---	EI	.618	.711	.813	.416

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Besides the low satisfaction levels of observed variables, it could be indicated from the results of Structure Equation Modelling that statistical relations between the latent variables and general satisfaction were insignificant (-.212 for promotional policies (minimal), and .618 for economic policies (moderate)), thus both null hypotheses were accepted. This means that such policies undertaken by tourism authorities did not significantly contribute to the general level of satisfaction reported by respondents. The focus by MOTA and JTB was on developing an emergency plan to raise the international profile of the country through targeting specific markets as those in Gulf countries, Turkey, and Far East, that is besides weaving taxes and fees. There is a general dissatisfaction among Jordanian tourism businesses that authorities are not taking enough effective procedure to deal with decline in tourism levels caused by Arab Spring events (Jordan Times, July 21st 2015), this was evidenced in a study by Magabli and Mustafa (2018) where a sample of 77 individuals in management positions in Jordanian tourism establishments gave their responses on levels of readiness by tourism authorities to deal with the decline in tourism caused by events of Arab Spring; a general negative perception was reported on different actions taken by public sector authorities as relates to planning and cooperating with tourism services. This was also clearly indicated in the low levels of satisfaction reported by respondents to the survey of this study.

Referring to previous studies (e.g. Mitroff, 1994; Faulkner, 2001; Ritchie, 2004), adopting a proactive approach is of relevance when dealing with crises; according to Sönmez et al. (1998), any destination should incorporate crisis management planning into the overall tourism planning, marketing, and management strategies; in addition to targeting markets and increasing promotion efforts, a team of officials and professionals from different sectors should be involved in monitoring destination image, gathering information on impacts, and creating strategies. A comprehensive approach should be adopted by the Jordanian tourism authorities to incorporate crisis management planning into the formulation of overall national marketing/management strategies, this should be done with a full involvement of other stakeholders, this becomes extremely important since the concept of "Crisis Management" is not part of the Jordanian tourism national strategies of (2004-2010; 2011-2015; and 2015-2025) (MOTA, 2003; 2010; and 2015); where the priority is given to diversifying the tourism product, enhancing the image of the country, increasing competitiveness and development of human resources.

### The COVID-19 Period and After

Jordan was one of the countries that economically suffered from COVID-19 epidemic, according to the IMF forecasts from 14th April 2020, GDP growth was expected to fall to -3.7% in 2020 (as cited by Nordea, 2020). In Jordan, tourism contributed with 12.4% to the total GDP of the country (the total GDP of Jordan in 2017 was 33,349.5 million JD (1 JD [Jordanian Dinar] = 1.41 United States Dollar) (Mustafa et al., 2022). This sector generated 4,108.2 million JD as receipts, and 53,488 jobs as a direct employment (Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities [MOTA], 2019). Such indicators are expected to strongly decline this year due to COVID-19 crises. The International Air Travel Association [IATA] estimates that there will be a decline by 52% (US \$700 million) in revenues of Jordanian airlines compared to 2019. This would put 34,400 Jordanian jobs and US \$1.1 billion of Jordan's GDP at risk (\$2.2 billion of Jordanian GDP and 70,000 jobs are supported by air transport) (Times Aerospace, 2024). In order to deal with this situation, the Jordanian authorities implemented several safety measures; these were: suspension of international flights, closure of all educational establishments, restaurants, and archaeological sites, cancellation of public events and gatherings, activation of defence law which took place on March 17 to enforce curfew, closing businesses and restricting people movement. There was also the continuous release of news and updates to inform the public on progress of coping with the crisis, awareness campaigns were launched on media, medical staffs were increased in health establishments, only food and some export-oriented industries were allowed to continue part of their operations (IMF, 2020). Despite the urgent need to implement them, such procedures had their negative effects on the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) segment which form 95 percent of private sector businesses and contribute with 40% to GDP, also on informal employment which forms 52 percent of total workforce. This took the form of losing cash flow, difficulty in covering operational costs and firing employees (Harb et al., 2022).

In May, a new stage of crisis management started; significant efforts were taken by the Jordanian authorities to make people return cautiously and gradually to normal life, where the Ministry of Health (as well as other ministries) launched a number of platforms to communicate with public and increase the awareness on the epidemic and safety measures to keep the spread of COVID-19 in its minimum levels (see for example the official websites of the Ministry of Health <https://corona.moh.gov.jo/en>; and the Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities [www.mota.gov.jo/Default.aspx](http://www.mota.gov.jo/Default.aspx)). The Ministry of Health and local companies launched the "Aman" (Safety) application that worn individuals when they encounter others who have COVID-19. The Central Bank of Jordan [CBJ] declared a number of measures as a containment of the negative impact of the epidemic on economy; for example: allowing banks to postpone payments of loans by clients, injecting additional liquidity, reducing interest rates on its refinancing program and expanding the coverage by the Jordan Loan Guarantee Corporation on Small and Medium Enterprises loans, including credit facilities dedicated to tourism sector (IMF, 2020). The government also organized the return of Jordanians who were abroad and were not able to return due to suspension of international flights, several luxury hotels were turned into COVID-19 isolation centers as a form of quarantine. There was also a three-month pause for business owners by Ministry of Finance (Ersan, 2020). Manual and fixed thermal scanners were installed at airports to test temperatures of travelers and detect symptoms of COVID-19 contaminations (Nahhas, 2020). Before reopening of tourist sites and facilities, sterilization operations took place at them to offer healthy places later, actually, the temporary absence of humans allowed unknown biodiversity various species to appear in these sites (Al-Tawaha, 2020).

Adopting such safety procedures and acquainting World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC] with them led to receiving the "Safe Travels" stamp by Jordan; which came after adopting three phases of actions; the first was the full lockdown of all tourism sites and facilities, this was followed by the phase of gradual reopening of the sector, and the



present stage which is seen through reopening facilities for domestic tourism. 4,700 Jordanians made benefit from the “Urdun Jannah” program (Jordan Times, July 5, 2020). This program was developed to encourage domestic tourism through supporting local airlines with JD1 million for air flights between Amman and Aqaba (with a cost of JD 40 for two-way trips) (1 Jordanian Dinar [JD] = 1.4 United States Dollar), this support is also to be given to tourism service providers in governorates and to hotels and camps in Petra (Aqaba Development Corporation, 2020). The Jordanian government also launched the website [salamtak.gov.jo](http://salamtak.gov.jo) for medical tourism which includes information that relates to prices, hospitals and transport. A phase started where bookings on Royal Jordanian flights were made from 11 countries, this will be followed by returning Jordanians through land borders (Jordan Times, July 5, 2020).

On the other hand, MOTA (2020) developed a comprehensive strategy which focused on dealing with the COVID-19 crisis through a 4-stage approach: response, recovery, reoperation and reforms. It also made some decisions and took important procedures that aimed at supporting the tourism sector which witnessed a big loss during COVID-19 pandemic. According to estimates made by MOTA, the tourism sector losses by end of 2020 would exceed 85% of tourism contribution to GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Unfortunately, that was what happened, and the losses were huge. Almost 100 travel agencies closed, 800 restaurants and local cafes, 80% of hotels rated 3 stars and below and some 14,000 employees all lost their sources of income (MOTA, 2020). Consequently, USAID in coordination with MOTA conducted a study to understand the impact of the coronavirus crisis on the tourism sector in Jordan and in that study, it was revealed that Jordan received 4.5 million international tourist arrivals in 2019; however, these were projected to decrease to 1.8 million in 2020, before rising to 3.5 million in 2021. In 2019, inbound tourists spent \$5.8 billion in Jordan; however, it was projected that less than \$2.4 billion would be received in 2020, a decline of just over 58 percent. It was projected that \$4.7 billion would be generated in 2021, an increase of 94 %. In 2020, the contribution of the tourism sector in TDG was estimated to be \$1.1 billion. This compares to \$2.5 billion in 2019, a decline of more than 55 percent. There were almost 97,000 tourism-related jobs in 2019; this number was projected to fall to around 52,500 in 2020, down 46 percent (ILO and Fafo, 2021).

According to a report released by BEST, MOTA with the help of the USAID took the necessary procedures to overcome the obstacles that COVID-19 pandemic put in the way of improving the tourism sector in Jordan. The following procedures and measures were taken:

- In response to an urgent request from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA) to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism in Jordan, in June 2020 BEST developed models for projecting visitor arrivals and expenditure to Jordan over the period 2020–2030.

- BEST supported MOTA’s urban planning efforts and provided recommendations for enhancing the visitor experience and services at several religious and heritage sites. This included a visitor journey and site improvement plan and interpretation for the biblical site of Machaerus; a tourism development report on Shobak Castle, focusing on immediate interventions needed to enhance the site experience; and recommendations for developing a visitor center for Karak, enhancing the visitor experience at Um Ar-Rasas, and restoration of the Aqaba Castle.

- To help prevent the spread of the coronavirus and elevate health, safety, and personal hygiene standards across the tourism sector, BEST worked with the MOTA to update the standard operating procedures (SOPs) and Guidelines Manual for cultural heritage sites to incorporate new health and safety measures addressing COVID-19 protocols and guidelines.

- The tourism recovery plan created by BEST provided a foundation for public-private consultations to further develop and agree to a recovery plan with a common vision and the confidence and support of the tourism industry and the government, as the need for public-private dialogue was identified as critical.

- The Tourism Research and Planning Directorate (TRPD) at the MOTA was established in early 2020 to consolidate statistics and data-gathering, and introduce research, reporting, and analysis for better decision-making. Prior to its establishment, the ministry had a statistics department but there was no integrated research and planning function. From the start of the extension, BEST provided support to the ministry to set up efficient operations and an organizational structure for the new directorate.

In the report of the Economic and Social Council of Jordan 2020, it was stated clearly that the tourism sector in Jordan, as it is all over the world, was badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was due to the complete closure that the country witnessed to reduce the impact of the fatal virus. The report also showed that the restrictions on travelling either by land or air caused a critical decline in the number of tourists visiting the country and hence resulting in a little contribution of tourism in the national income. Compared to 2019, the income of the tourism section declined 80% in 2020.

The response to the COVID-19 crisis in the Middle East and north Africa was rapid. Jordan as a small country with a humble health ability compared to other countries responded rapidly to the pandemic and kept the rate of infection and death low through the health procedures taken, but this resulted in big losses in all the economy sectors especially the tourism sector. The government adapted a clear policy toward controlling the spread of the virus which was implemented in most of the Arab countries (OCED, 2020). According to the Centre for Strategic Studies in the Jordanian University 2021, the government has managed a range of responses to the crisis. Prime Minister Dr. Bisher Khasawneh announced in December 2020 a package estimated at 260 million dinars (8.0% of GDP) that included an increase in the number of beneficiaries of the National Aid Fund (Takaful 3 Program) by 100 thousand families with an amount of 100 million dinars. He also directed the government to provide direct financial support for the sustainability of the sectors with the aim of preserving 180,000 jobs with an amount of 140 million dinars. In addition to that, he guided the government to provide about 20 million dinars to help the tourism sector that was badly affected by the pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

Before COVID19, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities depended heavily on communication and containment actions to recover from declines in tourism arrivals and revenues; there was no clear strategic planning approach, nor a

post-crisis research or SWOT were followed in deciding these actions. The case was different after COVID19 pandemic where more proactive and comprehensive approach was adopted by the Jordanian tourism authorities to incorporate crisis management planning into dealing with the situation to rebuild the image of Jordan as a destination, and to support enterprises of tourism industry in their economic recovery. There was an obvious absence of the concept of "Crisis Management" in tourism national strategies (MOTA, 2003; 2010; 2015); where the focus was on diversifying the tourism product, enhancing the image of the country and increasing competitiveness, the case was totally different in the Jordanian Tourism National Strategy (2021-2025), where the 4R's Model of Crisis Management was adopted besides focusing on heritage protection, tourism product and human resources development, and implementing reforms to enhance levels of investment and competitiveness.

### Limitations and further research

While there are several limitations to this study, those constraints may affect how the results are understood. The first limitation relates to the study's context (Jordan), which restricts the generalizability of the findings to different countries and should be taken into consideration for purposes of future research. Therefore, it is impossible to assert that the findings are applicable outside of specific circumstances. The location of this study is a middle east where the effects of tourism growth have not yet been completely felt by the locals. As a result, their judgments of the benefits and drawbacks of tourism are influenced by their general knowledge. Additional research might be done to attempt to quantify the advantages of tourism growth that residents are anticipating to better understand how residents' perspectives vary over time especially after recovering from pandemic. This limitation adds value as a base for future research.

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