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## **Tour guides as a supportive tool for the experiential image of Jordan's destination: a French tourists' perspective**

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**Abstract:** Tour guides as representatives for any destination by playing a vital role in supporting destinations experiential image (EI), and they could be a successful service recovery tool for improving EI. The purpose of this paper is to assess the experiential image of Jordan as a destination and how this destination is perceived by the French tourists as well as the role played by tour guides as a supporting tool for the image of destinations. A structured questionnaire was distributed to the French tourists after they'd spent a few days in Jordan. The main findings of this paper revealed that both hypotheses received empirical support. This study highlights the importance of tour guides in destination EI studies. Implication and future venues discussed.

**Keywords:** destination image; service recovery; tour guides; EI; experiential image.

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## 1 Introduction

Jordan as a tourist destination boasts many outstanding features that include a unique natural beauty, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, five sites classified as world heritage sites, the lowest geographical point on the planet, and the destination where the Christ was baptised. In spite of this richness, this destination is still struggling due to the political instability present in the whole region as a result of the Arab revolts known as 'Arab Spring' that began in 2011. For this reason, the number of tourists has dropped, especially from the European markets which include countries such as France (Mota.gov.jo, 2012). The number of (8,999,062) visitors who visited Jordan in 2010 before the Arab spring has seen a significant drop to (300,970) as at 2015 (Mota.gov.jo, 2015). As a result, the destination image of Jordan is highly affected by the geopolitical situation; therefore, it is crucial that the Jordan tourism sector finds helpful agents to sustain and improve its image.

Furthermore, the tourism sector is considered as one of the key sources for the Jordanian economy as it generates (\$2886, 1 Billion) for the Jordanian economy (Mota.gov.jo, 2015). Gunn's (1988, as cited by Ritchie and Echtner, 1991) stated that "As a result of visiting the destination, images tend to be more realistic, complex, and differentiated". This means the destination image is subject to change or has a dynamic nature depending on several factors such as the service provided, hospitality in the host destinations, and the ability of the host destination to meet tourists' expectations. Adding to that, the tourists' satisfaction largely depends on the comparisons between the prior image (i.e., WOM, friends' recommendation or from search engines) and the actual

image they perceived at the destination (Chon, 1990, as cited in Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Basically, these factors can be classified as controllable and uncontrollable, which mean that some of their performance can be improved if more awareness is given to them.

Organic and induced image of the destination is subject to possible change after the visit since tourists tend to compare their expectations and what exactly they faced in the selected destinations (Gunn, 1988). In this respect, tourists expect to have high expectations about the destination, which is something risky for destinations, especially when they cannot meet these expectations. As a result of this complex process of image formation (Gunn, 1972), destinations have to find helpful tools to help them to overcome these obstacles. Among these tools are the tour guides who play a critical role in helping destinations enhance their image during and after the visit since they are in direct contact with tourists throughout this important image formation process which takes place before, during and after the visit.

The contribution of this paper is three-fold. First, this research attempts to measure the EI of the Jordan destination as it is perceived by French tourists. It seeks to measure the extent to which these tourists believe that tour guides might be a supportive tool of the image they have about Jordan. Second, the selection of this segment is due to their importance to the Jordanian market as they are considered as a major component of inbound tourists to the Jordan destination, and their view is of great advantage for the Jordanian market. Third, this study aims at pointing out the extent to which tour guides could be a successful service recovery tool to help destinations overcome the struggle of mismatching expectations. This could be a helpful instrument for DMOs and governments to put more attention on the role tour guides might play to help destinations attract more tourists by supporting their EI.

## **2 Literature review**

### *2.1 Destination image and tour guides role*

Studying destination image is one of the most important factors affecting the visitation decision. Several researchers have pointed out the role of the destination image and its role in attracting tourists (Ahmed, 1991; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Byon and Zhang, 2010; Crompton, 1979; Dolnicar and Grün, 2013; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Gartner, 1994; Govers et al., 2007; Gunn, 1972; Harahsheh, 2009; Hunt, 1975; Jenkins, 1999; McCleary, 1999; Molina et al., 2010; Pike, 2002; Stepchenkova and Mills, 2010; Stylidis et al., 2014; Tasci, 2006) of the destination image as defined by Crompton (1979) “the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has a place”. Furthermore, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) defined it as “perceptions of an area or impressions of a place”.

The formation process of the destination image takes place in different stages according to Gunn (1988). While the first two stages are organic and induced image; the third one is a result of these two stages, namely the EI as stated by Fakeye and Crompton (1991). Therefore, the EI is highly affected by what the tourists actually encounter in the host destination. On the same context, Gartner (1993) stated that the image formation process encompasses three components: cognitive, affective, and conative. Since the conative image refers to the individual’s reaction towards the destination, it is considered

as an output of the cognitive and affective images that occur before visiting (Gartner, 1993). Based on this premise, it is imperative to clarify that more attention should be directed towards the EI of the destination image since it is the final output of all marketing efforts.

Many researchers have noted the role of tour guide in improving the destination image in front of the tourists as they directly interact with the tourists (Aloudat, 2010; Al-Okaily, 2015; Hansen and Mossberg, 2016; Raboti, 2010a; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Tas, 2016). The majority of these studies agreed that tour guide jobs vary from educators, facilitators, interpreters, ambassadors, public relations officers, company representatives, problem solvers, among many other roles (Al-Okaily, 2015; Black and Weiler, 2005; Chow, 2004; Cohen, 1985; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Raboti, 2010b; Tas, 2016; Tsai et al., 2016). Therefore, the question that arises, in this case, is how to assess the perception of tourists in terms of how tour guides perform to support and sustain the EI of the destination, as well as what kind of services and behaviours tour guides could provide to support the organic and induced images that tourists have.

Based upon that, effective destination tools to support their EI can be placed in either controllable or uncontrollable categories. Among the controllable tools, one key factor is a highly qualified tour guide who can be a major player during and after the visit to enhance as well as support the positive images about the destination (Stepchenkova and Morrison, 2006). Moreover, the level of hospitality at the destination is also among the controllable tools since this is one of the most vital components when visiting a destination, and it might affect the EI positively or negatively (Dmitrović et al., 2009). A high level of hospitality can be reflected by tour guides when they are highly qualified and have a mastery of the requisite skills (Abuhjeeleh et al., 2018). It should be stated that the level of hospitality can be increased through awareness programs by educating the host community concerning the importance of tourism for the entire destination.

Therefore, tour guides play a significant role in the tourism sector. "Tour guides are ambassadors of the country" as stated by his majesty, Abdullah, the king of Jordan during the royal tour he did to promote the Kingdom in 2009. Relatively, a significant number of mass tourists agreed to this, concerning the role tour guides might play during their visit. In the same context, the success of the whole trip, to some extent, depends on the competencies of tour guides (Raboti, 2010a). Thus, it could be said that there is a scarcity of literature related to Jordan destination image studies and Jordanian tour guides as well. In this respect, (Schneider and Sönmez, 1999) in their research about Jordan's destination image stated that the initiation of tour guides training and certification program (1995) managed by the consultation and technical service center could be considered as a helpful procedure to enhance the quality of service in the tourism sector.

In the same context, a few papers have been conducted on the Jordan destination image (Al-Shourah, 2001; Aloudat and Rawashdeh, 2013; Chiu and Ananzeh, 2012; Harahsheh, 2009; Schneider and Sönmez, 1999) among many others that undertook the tour guide as a subject matter in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan such as (Al-Okaily, 2015; Al-Oudat, 2010; Magablih, 2010). Schneider and Sonmez (1999) examined the destination image from the tourists' perspective during the festival of Jarash. Further, Harahsheh (2009) explored the image of the Jordan destination in the British and Swedish market. Harahsheh went further by examining the effect of religious beliefs on the image formation process of the Jordan destination. Moreover, Al-Okaily (2015) explored the destination image patterns construction process resulting from the interaction process that might happen between tourists and tour guides. She stated that the

destination image might be constructed regionally, nationally and at site level as well. The result of Al-Okaily's study revealed that new patterns of destination image might exist. In this respect, in her study exploring the tour guides' worldview.

Aloudat (2010) pointed out that Jordanian tour guides are considered as a critical agent in the entire tourism process. The results of her study revealed that tour guides might play the role of observers of tourism with their performance based upon their day-to-day involvement with all parties in the tourism sector. Relatively, Magablih et al. (2010) pointed out that Jordanian tour guides employ different strategies to overcome the cultural obstacles in the English language such as transliteration, paraphrasing and expansion (Magablih et al, 2010). These tools that tour guides might hire allow them to improve their performance in order to increase visitors' satisfaction. Therefore, and as recommended by Schneider and Sonmez (1999), more attention should be paid to conducting research about the Jordan destination image as well as finding new tools to enhance Jordan's image for potential visitors. Therefore, this research is based upon previous discussions to measure out the extent to which tour guides can help destinations, supporting as well as sustaining the organic and induced image tourists hold about destinations.

Based on the above, this paper focuses on the ability of tour guides to be an effective solution to help destinations protect and support their EI since tour guides are the front-line agents and in day-to-day contact with tourists; this means they play a major role between, pre and post-visit. In addition, they have a long-lasting effect on them (Aloudat, 2010), specifically in mass tourism. To fill these voids, we hypothesised the following:

*H1: The EI of Jordan destination as perceived by tourists from France is mostly negative.*

*H2: Tour guides are not a vital tool in supporting the EI of Jordan tourism destination.*

## *2.2 Research methodology*

This study is quantitative research; a questionnaire is the main data collecting tool. The sample of this study is the French tourists who are involved in visiting Jordan, who had an organic and induced image of the Jordan destination as well. To collect primary data, the researchers employed a structured questionnaire (in the French language) that consists of some questions related to tour guide performance and the tools that they rely on to enhance the destination image. The assessment process was a 7-point Likert scale to increase the accuracy of the obtained results (Burgess, 2001; Chambliss and Schutt, 2012; Frechtling, 2012; Sekaran, 2003; SPSS Incorporated, 2004). A total number of 456 out of 550 questionnaires was considered valid for the analysis process. To ensure the highest level of reliability as well as objectivity of tour guides during the process for completing the questionnaires, tour guides were just asked to clarify the instructions for tourists.

Questions were translated into the French language by an officially authorised translator. The French market was chosen since French tourists are among the highest numbers of visitors to the Jordan destination (6049 tourists from January to March in 2016). Furthermore, the French market is a strong indicator of tourist flow from Europe. Therefore, this research seeks to maximise the benefits of similar studies as well as enrich the destination image and tour guide literature as well.

To increase the reliability and validity of research outputs, it is imperative to clarify that the questionnaire EI major questions were derived from the study of Harahsheh (2009); which means its reliability and validity is previously attested (Harahsheh, 2009). In this respect, destination attributes that Harahsheh (2009) employed were derived from DI literature, particularly the study of (Baloglu and Love, 2005; Beerli and Martín, 2004; Crompton, 1979; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gallarza et al., 2002; Gartner, 1989, 1993; Govers et al., 2007; Jenkins, 1999; McCleary, 1999; Pike, 2002). Relatively, a panel of experts ( $N = 5$ ) in the same field was consulted, and their remarks and feedback were considered. Furthermore, the pertinent literature was reviewed. In the same context, a pilot study was conducted ( $N = 30$ ), and as a result, a few modifications were taken into consideration. SPSS 22, a Statistical Package for Social Sciences, and Microsoft Excel 2010 were employed for analysing the numeric data of this study since it is purely quantitative (Elrehail, 2018). Results are shown in forthcoming chapters.

### 2.3 Data analysis

As shown in Table 1, the predominant percentage of the study sample was female (53.1%). This can be a positive factor for the Jordan destination to maximise the advantages of the WOM marketing tool since females tend to tell the stories of their adventures and experiences more than males. In this respect, (73%) of the study sample are more than 50 years old which explains why most French tourists perceive Jordan as a cultural destination. More efforts must be paid to attract young visitors to the Jordan destination since Jordan is able to satisfy all kinds of tourists owing to its natural richness. For the educational level, most of this study sample had a bachelor's degree (64.9%), which agrees with the researcher's observation that French tourists are well-educated, and this could possibly mean that they are very interested in increasing their knowledge and awareness about the host destination. As related to the study, the sample yearly income, (51.1%) of this study is between (20,000 to 29,999) Euro. Relatively, (39.9%) of the study sample's yearly income is more than (30,000) Euro. Therefore, more attention should be paid to this market segment by increasing promotional efforts and finding creative tools to satisfy as well as attract them. Last but not least, concerning demographic variables is the number of visits; it is noted that (96.9%) of the sample study have visited Jordan for the first time, and it is very clear that only 3% have visited Jordan for the second time. Unfortunately, none of them visited the destination for the third time. This is a motivator for marketers to be more creative to stimulate tourists to repeat their visit.

- Jordan destination image as perceived by French tourists:

As shown in Table 2, French tourists basically see Jordan as a cultural destination (21.5%) which explains why the majority of French tourists aged above 50 years are more interested in cultural and historical sites. These results align with that of (Aloudat and Rawashdeh, 2013; Rawashdeh, 2006). In this respect, even though Jordan has great potential as a medical tourism destination, it is imperative to point out that only a minority of French tourists perceive Jordan as a medical destination (2.8%). This result contrasts with the reality that Jordan has one of the most important sites for medical tourism in the region, namely the Dead Sea. Therefore, increasing promotional efforts in this regard to market Jordan is essential. Similarly, a minority of French tourists perceive

Jordan as a MICE destination (2.6%). The reason might be that a significant number of the study sample was in group-form tourists, and they visit Jordan mainly for recreation as well as for leisure.

**Table 1** Demographic variables

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Category</i>     | <i>Percentage</i> |
|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Gender           | Male                | 46.9%             |
|                  | Female              | 53.1%             |
| Age (year)       | Less than 30        | 3.1%              |
|                  | 31 to 40            | 5.0%              |
|                  | 41 to 49            | 18.9%             |
|                  | More than 50        | 73.0%             |
| Education        | Secondary           | 21.7%             |
|                  | Bachelor            | 64.9%             |
|                  | Higher education    | 13.4%             |
| Income (yearly)  | Less than 9,999 €   | 1.1%              |
|                  | 10,000 to 19,999 €  | 7.9%              |
|                  | 20,000 to 29,999 €  | 51.1%             |
|                  | More than 30,000 €  | 39.9%             |
| N° of visit(s)   | First visit         | 96.9%             |
|                  | Second visit        | 3.1%              |
|                  | Third visit or more | –                 |

*Source:* Computed by the authors

**Table 2** How French tourists perceive Jordan as a tourism destination

| <i>How do you consider Jordan's as a tourism destination (TD)?</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Rank</i> | <i>Whole sample N°</i> |
|--|------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Cultural TD  | 440              | 21.5%             | 1           | 456                    |
| Relax TD   | 372              | 18.2%             | 2           | 456                    |
| Leisure TD   | 367              | 18.0%             | 3           | 456                    |
| Sun, Sea, and Sand TD  | 291              | 14.3%             | 4           | 456                    |
| Religious TD   | 255              | 12.5%             | 5           | 456                    |
| Adventure TD   | 207              | 10.1%             | 6           | 456                    |
| Medical TD   | 58               | 2.8%              | 7           | 456                    |
| MICE TD  | 50               | 2.6%              | 8           | 456                    |
| <i>Total N° of frequencies</i>                                     | <i>2040</i>      | <i>100%</i>       |             |                        |

*Source:* Computed by the authors

Moreover, destination marketers have to focus more attention to the Jordanian market as a religious destination. As it is clearly shown in Table 3, (12.5%) of the study sample perceive Jordan as a religious destination even though the Jordan destination has four pilgrimage sites, one of them is considered as one of the most important discoveries in

this century and is classified as a world heritage site, namely, the baptism site (Harahsheh, 2009). It is worth mentioning that examining the detailed destination image of the Jordan destination as perceived by French tourists is beyond the scope of this research but might be recommended for future doctoral research.

**Table 3** Jordan destination experiential image as perceived by French tourists

| <i>Attributes</i>   | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Attributes</i>             | <i>Mean</i> |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| Scenery             | 6.10        | Adventure/sports              | 5.04        |
| People/hospitality  | 6.02        | Infrastructure/transportation | 4.72        |
| Safety and security | 6.00        | Good value for money          | 4.63        |
| Climate             | 5.94        | Cost/price levels             | 4.61        |
| Historical sites    | 5.88        | Nightlife                     | 4.56        |
| Religious sites     | 5.84        | Things for tourists to do     | 4.41        |
| Atmosphere          | 5.80        | Handicrafts/souvenirs         | 4.00        |
| Quality of services | 5.64        | <i>Tourist information</i>    | 3.99        |
| Airport facilities  | 5.59        | <i>Shopping</i>               | 3.67        |
| Accommodation       | 5.58        | <i>Cleanliness</i>            | 3.65        |
| Accessibility       | 5.41        | <i>Beaches</i>                | 3.14        |
| Restaurants/cuisine | 5.25        |                               |             |
| <i>Overall mean</i> |             |                               | <i>5.02</i> |

*Source:* Primary research (note: results are presented herein mean rank). Means less than 4.0 represent a negative image about Jordan; Likert scale from 1 to 7)

- Research first hypothesis testing:

Once verifying the results of the 23 attributes related to the EI of Jordan destination (Table 3), one sample t-test was conducted to examine the extent to which the null hypothesis (1) is true. This hypothesis states that ***French tourists have a negative EI of Jordan tourism destination***. The results revealed that t-value, Mean, Sig., and (Std. D) were (68.520; 5.02; 0.000; 0.31958) respectively as reported in Table 4.

**Table 4** H1 (1) results: French tourists negatively perceive Jordan

| <i>T.Value</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Sig</i> | <i>Std. deviation</i> |
|----------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 68.520         | 5.02        | 0.000      | 0.31958               |

*Source:* computed by the authors

As shown in Table 4 resulting from computing the 23 attributes, Sig. is less than (5%) which accepts H1 the alternative one, which states that the image of Jordan destination as perceived by French tourists is positive. These results align with Harahsheh's (2009) results with regard to the image of Jordan as perceived by British and Swedish tourists.

As it appears in Table 5, results reveal that basically, tourists from France prefer to be guided by local tour guides as they are the most knowledgeable about the destination. Therefore, 93% of the study sample confirmed the need for a tour guide while visiting a

destination which could be considered as a significant indicator of the importance of the role tour guides might play.

**Table 5** How do you prefer your trip?

| <i>In your opinion, discovering the destination is better...</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| With tour guide  | 428              | 93.9%             |
| Without tour guide   | 28               | 6.1%              |
| <i>Total</i>   | <i>456</i>       | <i>100%</i>       |

*Source:* Computed by the authors

The French tourists were asked to state whether their experience in Jordan had exceeded and met their expectations. As noticed in Table 6, 55% stated that this experience had exceeded their expectations, 42% stated that it met their expectations, and 3% mentioned that it was less than what they had expected. Nonetheless, these results might be extremely advantageous for planners in the tourism sector in Jordan since the Jordan destination is obviously able to meet its visitor's expectations.

**Table 6** Match expectations

| <i>On the whole, did your visit...</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| Exceed your expectations               | 250              | 54.8%             |
| Meet your expectations                 | 192              | 42.1%             |
| Net meet your expectations             | 14               | 3.1%              |
| <i>Total</i>                           | <i>456</i>       | <i>100%</i>       |

*Source:* Computed by the authors

As shown in Table 7, 35% of French tourists were very satisfied, while 50% were slightly satisfied compared to 15% who were unbiased concerning this issue. Moreover, results revealed that a slight percent (less than 1%) were dissatisfied. As a result, it could be said that the Jordan destination is capable of satisfying visitors.

**Table 7** Level of satisfaction

| <i>Level of satisfaction</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Slightly satisfied           | 226              | 49.6%             |
| Very satisfied               | 158              | 34.6%             |
| Neutral                      | 68               | 14.9%             |
| Slightly dissatisfied        | 4                | 0.9%              |
| <i>Total</i>                 | <i>456</i>       | <i>100%</i>       |

*Source:* Computed by the authors

As documented in Table 8, the general trend of image changes while visiting Jordan is obviously positive. The average of image change was 6.18 out of 7 in Likert scales which is an excellent indicator. Based upon that, it is imperative to say that what tourists find in

the Jordan destination does not reflect their pre-visit perceptions since the gap of the image change's process is clearly huge. Thus, this should be considered by destination marketers.

**Table 8** Direction of image change

| <i>Do you think that your idea about Jordan has changed?</i> | <i>General mean of direction of change</i> | <i>Whole sample</i> |
|--|--|---------------------|
|  | 6.18                                       | 456                 |

Concerning the length of the stay spent by French tourists in Jordan; results in Table 9 revealed that the majority of this market segment stated that their stay in Jordan was more than 5 nights (84%). These results are in the line with Harahsheh's study (2009) as related to British and Swedish tourists who reported that their length of stay is between seven to ten nights.

**Table 9** Length of stay

| <i>Length of stay (night)</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Whole sample</i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Five or more                  | 84.2%             | 456                 |
| Four                          | 8.6%              | 456                 |
| Less than three               | 7.2%              | 456                 |
| Total                         | 100%              |                     |

Table 10 reports the great interest in revisiting (5.09 out of 7) and recommending the Jordan destination (6.29 out of 7) for others. Therefore, these results imply that tourists were satisfied, and they will reflect a positive image of Jordan to their relatives, families, and friends by means of word-of-mouth or other marketing tools.

**Table 10** Intention to revisit and recommending the destination

| <i>Will you consider going back to Jordan?</i> | <i>General mean of the intention to revisit</i>     | <i>Whole sample N°</i> |
|--|---|------------------------|
|  | 5.09  | 456                    |
| <i>Would you recommend Jordan to others?</i>   | <i>General mean of recommending the destination</i> | <i>Whole sample N°</i> |
|  | 6.29  | 456                    |

*Source: Computed by the authors*

Table 11 discusses the results of the effective image of the Jordan destination by using different semantic scales as noted in the table. Basically, the general mean of all results is associated with a significant positive trend of this image (5.59 out of 7). These results are in line with previous ones indicating that Jordan is mainly positively considered by the French market.

- Tools that tour guides might rely on to support destination EI:

As noted in Table 12, the most effective tool tour guides might rely on, as perceived by French tourists, is their charisma (17%). Charisma is defined as a “special power that some people have naturally, that makes them able to influence other people and attract their attention and admiration (Cambridge University Press, 2012). This demonstrates the importance of tour guides’ charisma while doing their job since this job depends on the way tour guides present information to tourists. Tour guides have to use far from traditional teaching methods. On the contrary, they have to master the art of enjoyable presentation for their clients to keep them attracted to their stories. The second factor derived from the data was the guide’s knowledge, which is something very remarkable, as being knowledgeable means that you can easily attract the tourists’ attention. The other key factors, on account of their importance, include the guide’s sense of humour, experience, and professionalism as tools tour guides might rely on to reflect a positive image about their destination and to protect the primary image tourists hold about Jordan. Finally, both skills; tolerance as well as a sense of respect, are two tools that have demonstrated the same performance as perceived by French tourists, (13.3%) and (12.2%) respectively. It could be said that Jordan as a destination is considered as a tolerant destination, and it presents one of the most respectful destinations concerning the coexistence among Muslims and Christians. This statement means that mastering the art of tolerance is of great value for the Jordan destination.

**Table 11** Affective image of Jordan destination

| <i>How do you describe the atmosphere or mood that you have experienced while visiting Jordan?</i> |   | <i>Descriptors (whole sample (456))</i> |             |
|--|---|---|-------------|
| <i>Negative</i>  |  | <i>Positive</i>                         | <i>Mean</i> |
| Scary  |   | Safe                                    | 6.03        |
| Stressed   |   | Relaxed                                 | 6.02        |
| Predictable  |   | Surprising                              | 5.80        |
| Unfriendly   |   | Friendly                                | 5.79        |
| Unpleasant   |   | Pleasant                                | 5.40        |
| Bored  |   | Excited                                 | 5.29        |
| Not stimulating  |   | Stimulating                             | 4.83        |
| <i>Overall mean</i>  |   |   | 5.59        |

- To what extent can tour guides be a supportive tool to support the EI of the Jordan tourism destination?

As noted in Table 13, eight questions were developed in order to measure the tour guides performance as supporters of EI of the Jordan destination. The majority of the means of these eight questions is between (5.07) to (6.10), which is a positive indicator of the ability of tour guides to be a vital tool and a supportive factor for destinations, to protect, sustain, and enhance their EI. As mentioned in the literature review, EI is a result of both organic and induced image. Relatively, the organic, as well as induced images, are formulated in the pre-visit stage. In this respect, EI is formulated in the post-visit stage. In the same context, the p-value in all cases is below 5%, which is a positive indicator to

accept the statement that those tour guides are a vital tool in supporting destinations to enhance the primary image formulated in the pre-visit stage. Therefore, destinations have to put more attention on these major players who can be a helpful tool to maintain a positive image about destinations and might be a proficient service recovery tool when destinations fail to meet their visitors' expectations.

**Table 12** The most effective tools tour guides (T.G) hire to a reflect positive image of Jordan

| <i>What were the best tools tour guides (TG) have employed to support the image that you held about Jordan?</i> | <i>Frequencies</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Whole sample N°</i> |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| TG charisma   | 433                | 17.0%             | 456                    |
| TG knowledge  | 384                | 15.0%             | 456                    |
| TG sense of humour  | 376                | 15.0%             | 456                    |
| TG experience   | 350                | 13.8%             | 456                    |
| TG management skills  | 347                | 13.7%             | 456                    |
| TG tolerance  | 338                | 13.3%             | 456                    |
| TG sense of respect   | 311                | 12.2%             | 456                    |
| <i>Total N°</i>   | <i>2538</i>        | <i>100%</i>       |                        |

*Source: Computed by the authors*

**Table 13** Tour guides performance as supporters of EI of destinations

| <i>Question N°</i> | <i>Means</i> | <i>T.Value</i> | <i>Sig</i> | <i>Std. deviation</i> |
|--------------------|--------------|----------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Q1                 | 5.51         | 34.466         | 0.000      | 0.93752               |
| Q2                 | 6.01         | 54.455         | 0.000      | 0.78858               |
| Q3                 | 5.07         | 20.333         | 0.000      | 1.12852               |
| Q4                 | 6.03         | 50.494         | 0.000      | 0.85879               |
| Q5                 | 5.84         | 41.559         | 0.000      | 0.94991               |
| Q6                 | 5.88         | 41.716         | 0.000      | 0.96541               |
| Q7                 | 5.95         | 39.961         | 0.000      | 1.04297               |
| Q8                 | 6.10         | 56.378         | 0.000      | 0.79906               |

*Source: Computed by the authors*

- Research second hypothesis testing:

The results of the eight questions related to tour guides who are considered as major players in supporting the EI of destinations were verified. Consequently, one sample t-test was conducted to examine the extent of the null hypothesis. This hypothesis states that **tour guides are not a vital tool in supporting the EI of Jordan tourism destination**. The results reveal that t-value, Mean, Sig., and (Std. D) are (93.455; 5.80; 0.000; 0.41202) respectively as reported in Table 14.

As shown in Table 14 resulting from computing the eight questions, Sig. is less than 5%, which rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative one stating that tour guides are a vital tool in supporting the EI of Jordan destination. This also means that tour guides are considered as major players on which destinations can rely to support

their EI among other tools such as the hospitality of the host community. Relatively, this leads the reader to get a better understanding of the role tour guides might play as a service recovery agent to help destinations overcome mismatching expectations which are an issue that most tourists suffer from. These results align with (Al-Okaily, 2015) and (Aloudat, 2010)'s results who agreed that tour guides are of great importance for destinations and are considered as major players within the entire tourism process.

**Table 14** Research main hypothesis result

| <i>T. Value</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Sig</i> | <i>Std. deviation</i> |
|-----------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 93.455          | 5.80        | 0.000      | 0.41202               |

*Source: Computed by the authors*

### 3 Discussion and conclusion

At the beginning of the study, the researcher set out to look into the issue of the role of tour guides concerning destination image formation in visitors and more importantly, how this party has a crucial role in shaping both the process and the outcome. One of the guiding premises is that first, the destination image that visitors have is crucial as it affects the performance of the destination, both in the short-term as well as long-term period. Thus, considering this issue, anything that affects the destination image such as the performance of tour guides is a key factor that must be looked into. It also means that if a destination wants to improve the performance of its tourism sector, one way that this objective can be achieved is by looking into how tour guides and the execution of their role can be enhanced to deliver positive outputs to the visitors. The issue was assessed using Jordan, and using a quantitative approach, the study acquired critical data that would help understand the subject matter in the case of one of the leading tourist groups in the country, namely French Visitors. Key findings supported the general premise adopted at the beginning of the study, namely that of tour guides having a key role in shaping the destination image of the visitors, which ultimately affects the entire tourism sector performance. The key role or factor identified that tour guides should have when it comes to handling visitors is charisma as this demonstrates their attitudes and shapes the image of visitors concerning the destination. Therefore, when destinations are looking to improve their performance, one key factor that can be looked into is the role and performance of tour guides present in the destination.

The study concludes by first pointing out that the stakeholders in the tourism sector must pay close attention to is the fact that there has been a clear identification of the correlation between tour guide performance and the experiential or post-visit destination image constructed, which eventually affects the performance of the destination. There are also specific roles and factors that are requisites to improving the performance of tour guides such as charisma, knowledge, skills and experience, and these are the key areas that destinations should focus on when working to improve the performance of these individuals. Thus, DMOs, governments and other stakeholders must understand this issue clearly and then go ahead and place the proper strategies into utilising tour guides for the improvement of the destination performance as well as a tool that the tourism sector might rely on when they fail to meet their clients' expectations. This is one of the key findings that the study recommends for the tourism sector at large.

### 3.1 Implication of the study

This study aimed to examine the role of tour guides for improving the destination image as perceived by tourists. From a holistic perspective, tourists are an active actor in the economic development wheel; therefore, countries which depends on the tourism sector should be more aware of the factors affecting this sector, such as the quality of services provided, quality of hotels and of tour guides as a frontline service provider for tourists. From the practical point of view, the leaders and directors of tourists' agencies should be aware of the skills, knowledge, and behaviour of tour guides in the recruitment process as they reflect the image of the visited destination.

### 3.2 Limitation and future research venues

This study has some limitations. First, this study was only conducted on one country, and the outcomes of this study can be generalised for Jordan only. Second, the results obtained from French tourists also limited our results. For the research venues, it is highly recommended to replicate this study in other countries and increase the sample of the study by selecting multiple nationalities of the tourists, which will lead to a clearer picture about the role of tour guides and how they affect the EI from the tourists' perspective, another venue which will also be helpful in assessing the EI from the tourist agencies' perspective.

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