

Case Study:

A Conceptual Framework for Crisis Planning and Management in the Jordanian Tourism Industry

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Abstract

Recently, crisis management in the tourism industry seems to have received more attention in the generic fields of management and crisis management. There are a few studies exploring how managers and policy makers in the tourism industry can manage and deal with crises or disasters and what precautions can be taken before, during and after crises. However, those studies which have been undertaken have, in the main, used survey method to explore negative impacts. They have not presented the opinions of managers and policy makers about how crises in general and political crises in particular, influence destination image and what are the relationship between crises and the tourism industry. This restricts the kind of insights that can be gleaned and is problematic given the differing interpretations of the negative impact of crises upon the tourism industry. Drawing upon qualitative research work (namely in-depth interviews), this study utilizes a descriptive case study approach to build up a rich picture of the impact of crises upon the tourism industry. The study depicts how managers and policy makers in the tourism industry understand and interpret the impact of crises in their industry and how, based upon their understanding and interpretation of crises management, a strategic approach to crises planning and management has emerged.

Keywords: Tourism in Jordan, Tourism, Crisis, Strategic Management and Planning.

Introduction

Despite the increased interest in crisis management in the tourism industry over the past two decades, the literature on crisis management in the field of tourism is still limited.^{3, 7, 8, 19} pointed out that there is a lack of research on crisis or disaster phenomena in the tourism industry, on the impacts of such events on both the industry and specific organisations and the responses of the tourism industry to such incidents. This lack of interest and research is surprising considering that crisis management, disaster recovery and organisational continuity are important competencies for managers in both the public and private sector.¹⁰ Only a small, if growing, body of research on crisis and disaster management has been conducted in the tourism industry. This

may be attributable in part to the chaotic and complex nature of these incidents and an inability by some managers and researchers to understand these phenomena.

Recently, crisis management in the tourism industry seems to have received more attention in the generic fields of management and crisis management. There are a few studies exploring how managers and policy makers in the tourism industry can manage and deal with crises or disasters and what precautions can be taken before, during and after crises.^{4, 10-12, 16, 18, 20} However, those studies which have been undertaken have, in the main, used survey method to explore negative impacts. They have not presented the opinions of managers and policy makers about how crises in general and political crises in particular influence destination image and what is the relationship between crises and the tourism industry. This restricts the kind of insights that can be gleaned and is problematic given the differing interpretations of the negative impact of crises upon the tourism industry.

Henderson¹⁴ believed that despite the expanding literature, the interaction between crises and tourism in its multiple forms still appeared under-researched in comparison to other dimensions with scope for further scrutiny in pursuit of a better understanding. Sonmez²² also argued that researchers need to explore possible solutions and preventive measures to deal with crises. Although many previous studies advocate the necessity of crisis management efforts, few have taken up the challenge. This may be attributed to the enormity of the task and the intimidating nature of managing a crisis resulting from natural disasters, terrorism or political instability and one which requires the restoration of a destination's image. Additional research is also needed to better understand how political violence influences destination image, how mass media contributes to the development of destination image and how image can be repaired during and after a negative occurrence, especially when accompanied by media scrutiny.

Sonmez²² added that a literature search fuelled by an interest in the relationship between crises and tourism also yields studies on the topics of war, crime and other natural disasters. The question remains whether all of these works shed sufficient light on the current understanding of how the tourism industry can be protected from political instability. Well publicized examples of terrorism or political conflict involving the tourism industry are frequently referred to by the studies which, although useful in chronicling the

relationship, -offer few solutions. Important questions remain: "how do destinations burdened with political challenges deal with negative images? How does the industry manage the crisis of terrorism or political strife? How can it become immune to the effects of terrorism and political problems?" Ritchie²⁰ added that there is a need for research following different paradigmatic positions to improve our understanding of crisis and disaster management in the tourism industry. This should include phenomenological approaches to explore the attitudes and opinions of managers and policy makers in the public and private sector towards crisis management and case study approaches to test models and concepts surrounding crisis management in the tourism industry.

The country of Jordan provides the perfect case study to produce a framework in answer to Sonmez's²² questions as well as to meet Ritchie's²⁰ requirements. The period from 2000 to date has been characterised by serious political instability in the Middle East.

What is a "Tourism Crisis"?

The World Tourism Organization has defined a tourism crisis as "any unexpected event that affects traveller confidence in a destination and interferes with its ability to continue operating normally".²⁴ Sonmez²² defined a tourism crisis as "any occurrence which can threaten the normal operations and conduct of tourism related businesses, damage a tourist destination's overall reputation for safety, attractiveness and comfort by negatively affecting visitors perceptions of that destination and, interrupt the continuity of business operations for the local travel and tourism industry, by the reduction in tourist arrivals and expenditures". Beirman² defined a destination crisis in the following terms: "a crisis is a situation requiring radical management action in response to events beyond the internal control of the destination, necessitating urgent adaptation of marketing and operational practices to restore the confidence of employees, associated enterprises and consumers in the viability of the destination". Glaesser¹³ saw a crisis as an "undesired, extraordinary, often unexpected and timely limited process with ambivalent development possibilities. It demands immediate decisions and countermeasures in order to influence the further development again positively for the organization / destination and to limit the negative consequences as much as possible. A crisis situation is determined by evaluating the seriousness of the occurring negative events, which threaten, weaken or destroy competitive advantages or important goals of the organization".

The tourism environment has become increasingly complex and unstable, making tourism organizations more susceptible to crises and disasters.¹ The tourism industry is one of the most susceptible and vulnerable of industries to crises.^{5, 17} Policy makers are faced with the predicament of

how they should respond to such crises in the absence of studies into the relative effectiveness of different responses. The list of cases where tourism demand has taken a sudden and unexpected downturn as a result of crises is long, and includes the effects of the 1991 Gulf War, terrorist attacks at Luxor in Egypt in 1997, the on-going Palestinian and Israeli conflict, the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the occurrence of Foot-and-Mouth disease in the UK in 2001, the impact of the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks in the US and of terrorist attacks in Bali and Kenya, the war in Iraq in 2003 and, more recently, the war between Lebanon and Israel in July 2006.¹³ In consequence, the tourism industry suffers a considerable reduction in sales volume. The drop in turnover for airlines alone as a result of the Gulf War 1991 was estimated at 2 billion dollars.⁵ Terrorist attacks in Egypt during the 1990s also caused tourists to stay away, which meant that, in the space of a year, the revenue from the international tourism industry for this destination dropped by 1 billion US dollars. This was topped by the events of September 11 in the United States of America, which caused not only the worst impact on the worldwide tourism industry since World War II, but also demonstrated how terrorism was able to trigger a slowdown of the whole world's economy. These examples illustrate how the tourism industry as an economic sector is challenged by negative events. It is therefore becoming more and more important to analyze negative events from every angle, to systematically identify critical success factors, to integrate them and take them into account when considering strategic corporate orientation.^{5, 13}

It is clear that a strategic approach to crisis planning and management is needed to help retain the confidence of travelers and the travel industry and to minimize the negative impact of crises on destinations. The goal is to get tourists returning to affected destinations as quickly as possible. Good crisis management techniques can speed up this process. Regardless of crisis type, the techniques for dealing with it effectively are similar. According to the World Tourism Organization, good communications based on the principles of honesty and transparency together with communications, promotion, security and market research are the key to successful strategy for crisis management.²⁴

A Tourism Crisis in Jordan

Jordan is about 90,000 square kilometers in area and presents a diversity of landscapes, strategically positioned at the convergence of Europe, Asia and Africa. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is bordered by Syria to the north, Iraq to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the east and south and Palestine and Israel to the west. Although it is mostly covered by desert, Jordan also has mountains, forests, beaches, rolling hills and fertile river valleys. Jordan has a climate that is made up largely of arid desert plateaux and moderate temperatures. Winter temperatures in the capital of Jordan (Amman) average around 7-10 degrees in January, with July temperatures reaching 23-27 degrees. Average annual rainfall

varies from less than 50 mm to over 600 mm in certain parts of the country. Amman, at over 950 meters elevation, is known for its cool, dry nights even in full summer.

Jordan has few natural resources and relies heavily on foreign subsidies and remittances from Jordanian expatriates abroad. During the last decade, Jordan's economy has been making steady progress through the implementation of comprehensive economic reforms and restructuring programmes supervised by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The main goal of restoring non-inflationary, sustainable growth has been accomplished. However, an International Monetary Fund review of Jordanian achievements in July 2000 gave the country a generally clean bill of economic health, noting that Jordan has improved economic conditions since the beginning of 1999. As with many economies in developing countries where politics play a vital role, the Jordanian economy still suffers from the conflict in the Middle East between Palestinians and Israelis, even if Jordan gets support from the entire world. Such a situation is likely to continue unless peace has been settled.

Tourism is of vital importance to the national economy of Jordan contributing more than US \$ 950 million to Jordan's economy and accounting for approximately 10 percent of the country's gross domestic product in the year 2007. According to the Ministry of Tourism in Jordan, 1.5 million tourists arrived in year 2007. It is considered to be the second largest source of currency inflow to the balance of payments accounting for 18.2% of service sector receipts and equivalent to 38% of Jordan's domestic exports. The industry is also a major source of employment, a total of 35000 people being directly employed in the tourism sector in 2004. The industry also serves to indirectly create employment via the construction, retail, food, transportation and industrial sectors (Jordan National Tourism Strategy, 2004).

Jordan enjoys a diversified landscape, from the Dead Sea, which lies more than 400 meters below the sea level up to hills and mountains over 1400 meters to valleys and a wide desert. As a result of this diversity, the country enjoys different climates, which result in different types of tourist product accordingly. Historical, cultural, social, religious sites and health tourism (both medical and curative) are among the major types of tourism in Jordan. However, to encourage Jordan's expanding tourism industry; the Jordanian government is making strenuous efforts to this important sector of the economy and the progress and improvement of the services provided by hotels, restaurants, and other tourism institutions.

Jordan is a destination with many iconic tourist attractions, such as Petra, Wadi Rum and the Dead Sea. Yet despite its advantages and its importance to the economy, Jordan's tourism sector is performing at a level far below its potential. The unstable political situation in the Middle East

has continued to negatively affect the Jordanian tourism industry during previous years. After years of increase in European tourist flows, the country recorded a serious decrease during the mid-1990s, with figures coming down from approximately 206,000 arrivals in the year 2000 to 145,000 in 2001 and to 92,000 in 2002.

The most evident reasons for the decline from 2000 to 2003 are the ongoing crisis in neighbouring Israel/Occupied Territories, the consequences of the events in New York of September 11 2001 and the war in Iraq. All these factors have affected the entire Jordanian travel industry; as a result, the Jordanian tourism industry has faced a serious challenge from the unstable political situation in the Middle East.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative and descriptive case study approach, the case study being based on the Jordanian tourism industry. It was considered the most appropriate method to adopt given its exploratory nature and the limited availability of information on this topic because this strategy recognizes the significance of understanding the relationship between political instability in the Middle East and tourism in Jordan.

Research methods

Data collection for this research was obtained from various sources, namely: secondary data such as maps, pictures, heritage sites, books, journals, newspapers, magazines, statistics and websites on the internet. The primary data sources were those gathered from the original sources and were collected especially for the research problem; they include information collected directly from participants by interviews. Interviewees, for example, represented all the participants involved in the Jordanian tourism industry such as tour operators, hoteliers, legislators, government officials, educators, as well as tour guides.

In-depth interviews are the most appropriate method in such a situation and by adopting this stance the investigation is far more open to new insights and better placed to interpret the contextual and political factors which are influential in the development of tourism. However, in-depth interviews are one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research method; they are one of the most widely used methods in qualitative research.¹⁵ They are considered by many to be an appropriate and practicable way to get at some of what for qualitative researchers are the central ontological components of social reality. Indeed, qualitative interviewing has become a commonplace that it is often taken to be the "gold standard of qualitative research".²¹ The main aim of this research is to develop a conceptual framework for managing a tourism crisis in Jordan within the framework of an unstable political situation in the Middle East.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the participant's office in Jordan and recorded, each interview lasted about one hour. The research explores the opinions of the 31 participants to gain in-depth information in relation to the aims of the project. Questions varied according to the participant's position. Participants who were policy makers in the Jordanian tourism industry from the public sector were asked about their direct experiences, opinions of the sector, their plans and strategy and how they did or will overcome crises which have had or might impact on the sector in the future. Participants in the private sector were asked about their perceptions and point of view on the Jordanian tourism industry. In general the questions were focused on the participant's opinions about the development of the sector as well as overcoming any future crises. It is intended that the data derived from the participants can be used to help the researchers develop a clear image and comprehensive ideas about how the conceptual framework was built, and how this conceptual framework can be used to alleviate the impact of political crises upon tourism in Jordan.

The researchers' key question was whether they have used a large enough sample to represent the right focus and enable them to address their research questions.¹⁵ The method of sampling and member of participants employed therefore was decided by the researchers on the advice of the General Director of the Jordan Tourism Board, ensuring that all policy makers and tourism bodies within the Jordanian tourism industry were including. This covered the private and public sectors including current and past members.

Findings

Jordan occupies a hazardous geopolitical location in the heart of the Middle East area. To the east lies Iraq and to the west are Israel and the West Bank. To the south is Saudi Arabia, to the north is Syria. Most interviewees believed that the regional political situation was the major factor hindering a greater development of tourism in Jordan. The ongoing crisis in Iraq and the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (especially since October 2000) have filled TV screens with images of conflict. At the same time the media have not imparted fair and balanced analysis that would inform a better understanding of causality, history, tolerant religious beliefs and social values about the Middle East area including Jordan.

The other problem, according to this minority of participants, is that the JTB Jordan has not done research in the past into the satisfaction of customers in order to know what the problem actually is. There is no real way of knowing what people feel about Jordan after they visit.

To conclude, the majority view of the interviewees was that the downturn in tourist travel to Jordan following regional instability has been a challenge for the development of Jordan's tourism industry. The ongoing crisis between Israeli and the Palestinian Authority, the events of September

11, 2001 and the war on Iraq 2003, in addition to the terrorism activity in the Middle East and worldwide, caused a major disruption in the growth of tourism in Jordan. The Jordanian tourism industry has not reached its full potential (at least temporarily) and still suffers from these regional conflicts. Once stability returns to the region and the Jordan tourist product is further developed, it is anticipated that growth in tourism will resume.

Dealing with Tourism crises in Jordan

Participants in this research have recognized and experienced the disruptive effects of incidents which result from breaches of security in the Middle East. Experience has shown that where the response to incidents is managed, the negative effects can be diminished and the duration shortened. Interviewees believe that to meet a crisis situation every country at risk needs a crisis management response plan.

A tourism crisis management response plan: For the first type of crisis (a short term crisis) all the participants believe that Jordan should engage in positive programmes as part of best practice management that will build equity into the image and attractiveness of Jordan and establish a broad network of media and trade relations. Interviewees suggest that the starting point for an effective crisis management response plan is to create a hub unit that can be immediately activated as soon as a potential crisis occurs. The participants recommend that the best practice in crisis management requires the creation of and identification of management and spokespersons, detailed overall plans and sub plans, detailed procedures outlined in manual format and web accessible, check lists, sample communications, templates for use in various circumstances and for use by the industry and databases of contacts for Ministries (official bodies), media, tour operators, hoteliers.

A strategic marketing approach (promotion of tourism during an ongoing political crisis in the Middle East): For the second type of a crisis (a long term crisis) the great majority of the interviewees believe that Jordan is a safe country compared to other countries in the region and that the Jordanian government should work to maintain this situation. Participants believe that problems in the Middle East are localized and that problems in Iraq, Israel and the West Bank are not affecting Jordan. Terrorism activities in the region should not affect Jordan at all. Interviewees believe that tourism in Jordan could be marketed out of these problems if the JTB had enough money to do so. Jordan must use the international media to improve the image people have about Jordan. The vast majority of participants believe that the image of Jordan should be improved and that the JTB should promote Jordan as a stand-alone destination in the Middle East, not as part of the Holy Land. Unfortunately, many receiving the news still do not differentiate between trouble spots close to Jordan and safe havens, such as Jordan. In the

past few years, this has led to a decline in tourist arrivals and in their receipts according to the interviewees.

When the question was asked to the participants, is it still possible to promote tourism in Jordan under these circumstances? The majority of the participants said yes, the question then put to the participants how we could overcome the negative affect of political crises in the Middle East upon tourism in Jordan. The great majority of the participants suggest that it is only a marketing job and the following indicator was considered in the quote that follows: "I think it is only marketing and promotion and the JTB should be more flexible in marketing Jordan. We also have got to be "a stand alone" destination to rely on this that we are a safe destination and should not stop it continuous. We need a big budget to do it and we have to spend money on marketing and promotion. Dubai is the less affected even with whatever happens in the region because of their marketing campaigns and concentration on marketing campaigns. Not because it is a fabulous destination, we have a much better product than Dubai, our only weakness is marketing."

Conclusion

The overwhelming majority of participants believe that Jordan is a destination with many iconic tourist attractions. Culture, history and heritage sites are the most important strengths of the Jordan tourist product. On the other hand, the weakest points are night life, beaches and sea side holidays. As a result, Egypt is considered the real competitor to Jordan, followed by Israel and Syria. Participants believe that in order to make tourism in Jordan more competitive compared to the other destinations in the region, Jordan should make available attractive and competitive Red Sea resorts, high standard tented camps in the desert, upgraded hotels services out of Amman, eco-nature parks and reserves with tourists services and accommodation facilities. Participants advise that Jordan must focus on attracting high-

yield visitors, developing niche products, enhancing the visitor experience, increasing international marketing and improving infrastructure and the regulatory environment.

The safety and stability of the Middle East, and scarce knowledge of the country, are the resistance factors indicated by the great majority of the participants. On the contrary, participants consider as inadequate the general public's awareness of the country. Tourism advertising is evaluated poorly. In contrast, the security of Jordan is positively considered as excellent and sufficient. But interviewees are dissatisfied with the marketing and promotional activities of the JTB. Participants from the private tourism sectors rate also as very poor the support received by the different institutions such as the JTB and the MOTA. Participants are dissatisfied with the negative travel advices or travel tips regularly issued by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Western Europe and America.

In conclusion, the general perception is that Jordan is in a very difficult geographical position, next to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and sharing borders with Iraq. Participants believe that to meet a crisis situation Jordan needs a crisis management response plan. The purpose of the crisis management system is to "manage" the crisis from a tourism viewpoint and to support the government to diminish its negative impacts. Experience shows that "a managed" approach can considerably diminish the negative impacts and shorten the crisis period. Furthermore, participants said that countries at risk should engage in positive programmes as part of best practice management that will build equity into the image and attractiveness of Jordan and to establish a broad network of media and trade relations. The overall objectives of a crisis management response plan should be as follows:

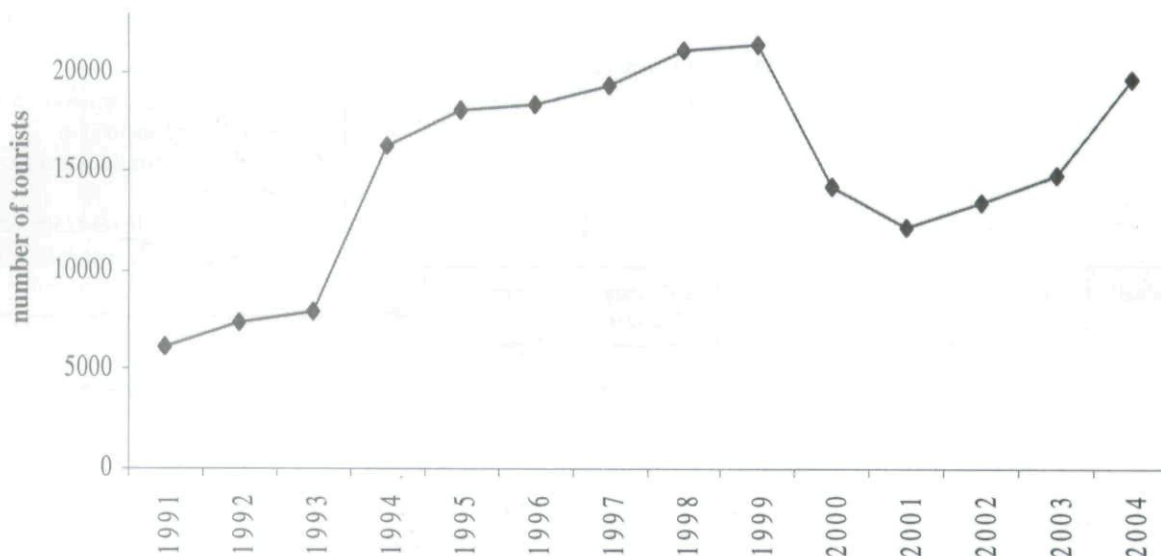


Fig 1: Number of tourists arriving with one tour operator from 1991 to 2004

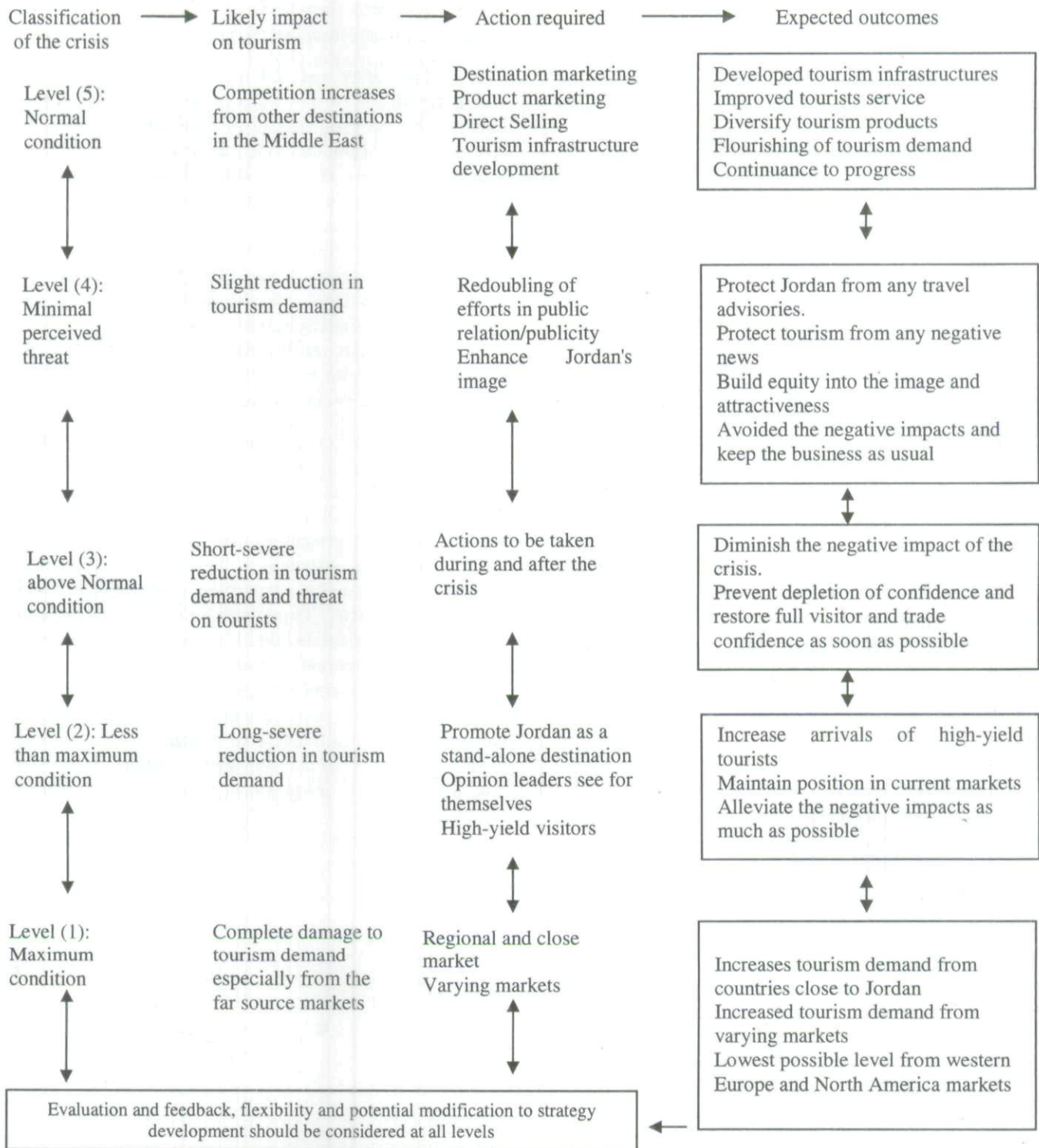


Fig. 2: A strategic implementation for crisis management in the Jordanian tourism industry

- To diminish the negative impact of the crisis.
- To prevent depletion of confidence and restore full visitor and trade confidence as soon as possible.
- To build positive equity into the image and attractiveness

of Jordan as a destination by virtue of the fact that it has a best practice plan and system.

The participants felt that the JTB and all the institutions within the Jordanian tourism industry including

the MOTA did not and do not yet appear to manage or to be able to handle any possible crisis in the future, because they do not have a crisis management response plan. However, the result seems to suggest that it is still possible to market tourism in Jordan within the current political situation in the Middle East. The Jordan case study reveals the problems associated with seeking to implement a destination marketing strategy during a political crisis of indeterminate duration.

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