

## **How Tourism Quality Creates Satisfaction from the Perspective of International Tourists**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to investigate tourism quality, as represented by software components of tourist satisfaction, loyalty and WOM in Jordan, from the perspective of international tourists. Further, purposive sampling technique was employed in this study. A structural model and regression weight analysis show the impact of software components on tourist satisfaction. A structured questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 384 foreign tourists who had experience of the Jordanian tourism sector, where 247 questionnaire forms were found to be usable, representing 64.%. The software components were found to have a significant effect on tourist satisfaction. From the study findings, some implications are proposed, including a recommendation to improve the quality of information, services, hospitality, safety and security of the Jordanian tourism sector, regularly and continuously. Further recommendations are suggested to help practitioners compete successfully in the tourism industry.

**Keywords:** Tourism quality, Tourist satisfaction, Loyalty, WOM, Jordanian tourism sector.

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## دور جودة المنتج السياحي في خلق الرضا من وجهة نظر السياح الأجانب

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### ملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى اختبار تأثير جودة المنتج السياحي في درجة الرضا والولاء وكلمة الفم المنطوقة في الأردن من وجهة نظر السياح الأجانب. اعتمدت الدراسة على عينة قصدية مكونة من (384) سائحاً، وتم استخدام الاستبانة كأداة لجمع البيانات؛ إذ وزعت على (384) سائحاً أقاموا في فنادق في العاصمة الأردنية، عمان. وبعد تدقيق الاستجابات، خضع للتحليل (247) استمارة، بنسبة استجابة بلغت (64.3%). وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة وجود أثر ذي دلالة إحصائية لجودة المنتج السياحي في الدول النامية في درجة الرضا والولاء وكلمة الفم المنطوقة لدى السائح الأجنبي. واستناداً إلى النتائج، أوصت الدراسة بعدد من التوصيات من أهمها تحسين جودة المنتج السياحي بشكل منتظم ومستمر من خلال التركيز على عناصر الجودة الأربعة الخاصة بالمنتج الخدمي السياحي، وهي: المعلومات والضيافة والخدمة والسلامة والأمن، وذلك لزيادة قدرة المنتج على المنافسة واستقطاب مزيد من السياح الأجانب.

**الكلمات الدالة:** جودة المنتج السياحي، رضا السائح، درجة الولاء، كلمة الفم المنطوقة، قطاع السياحة الأردني.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) (2018), as one of the “world’s largest economic sectors”, tourism and travel present global economic opportunities and constitute 10.4% of the global GDP (p.2). This share contributes to the sustainable economic growth and development of developing countries.

The literature strongly indicates that quality and consumer needs, along with how they determine the level of need or gather information, are directly associated with the ability of the tourism industry to be successful (Juwaheer & Ross, 2003; Eraqi, 2006). However, there is considerable disagreement in the literature on aspects and definitions of quality that can be used by organizations to develop clear strategic goals for future success (Lappalainen, 1998; Koch, 2004; Eraqi, 2006; Partalidou and Iakovidou, 2008; Steene, 2009). As the tourism industry continues to grow at around 4.6% growth per year (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018), it will be critical for organizations to have access to models that improve their strategic capabilities by understanding aspects of quality and how they influence areas of customer satisfaction, loyalty and word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations.

Given the increasing importance of the tourism sector in the global economy, it has attracted much attention in recent research. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2016), a substantial proportion of global tourism industry growth will occur in developing countries. However, only limited research has focused on the importance of developing countries in the global tourism industry and the literature has largely neglected the importance of looking deeper from the perspective of developing countries. Thus, we are taking the perspective of Jordan as a developing country.

Therefore, this study investigates tourists’ views of

quality, as their perceptions directly influence the tourist industry, indicated as being necessary in prior research, such as by Gilbert and Veloutsou (2006), Edvardsson et al. (2000) and others (Bansal and Voyer, 2000; Flavia et al., 2006; Keating et al., 2003; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). A conceptual model is developed, based on factors identified from research and including information, hospitality, service, safety and security. The conceptual framework then investigates how tourism satisfaction is influenced by these variables and influences tourism loyalty, which is explored for a relationship with WOM. Destination management organizations (DMOs) can utilize the model and the resulting significance of the variables to identify strategic goals that aim at improving the offerings to consumers and increasing value.

In the tourism industry literature, quality is found to relate to three primary areas: hardware (physical products), software (information, services and hospitality) and setting or location (Koch, 2004). Although some previous literature examines the relationship between and the importance of some of these factors and quality and other literature identifies the importance of quality, research is lacking on identifying each component and the direct relationship with each other (Goldstein et al., 2002; Pizam and Mansfeld, 2006; Poolthong and Mandhachitara, 2009; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009; Nicolau and Sellers, 2010; Grazhdani and Merollari, 2015).

The aim of this study is to fill this gap in tourism industry research and identify necessary components for future research and strategies in the tourism industry. Two identified aims are:

First: To investigate the influence of software components of tourism quality on tourist satisfaction.

Second: To investigate how the relationship

between software components and tourist satisfaction influences loyalty and WOM.

This study begins by reviewing the literature on the research variables, then outlining the hypotheses. Third, it describes the research methodology and then presents the findings. Fourth, it continues by discussing the findings. The final section indicates a number of practical implications for managers to conclude the research.

In this study, we think it is useful to understand the case of Jordan, a developing country in the Middle East, that was and still is, in the middle of many regional conflicts. In addition to the historical Arab-Israeli conflict in 1974 and the multiple wars stemming from this conflict (Smith, 2004), this region is also struggling with the consequences of the so-called Arab Spring, as well as many other conflicts that are sweeping through the entire region.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Tourism Quality**

There is an ongoing debate about whether the hard or soft elements of tourism are more important to customers. Do customers appreciate the size and luxury of physical structures, or are they more impressed by the quality of the service and the warmth of the reception they receive on arriving at their destination? This argument is likely to rage on for many years, without ever concluding whether quantity is more important than quality. What is indisputable, however, is the importance of determining precisely what factors are involved in producing a quality destination and giving the Destination Management Organization (DMO) information which will help them manage these factors. According to Koch (2004), in the tourism industry, the term quality refers to three areas: hardware (physical products), software (information, service and hospitality) and the environment. This model was first suggested by Romeiss-Stracke (1995) and

developed by Koch (2004). This three-dimensional model is a useful tool for assessing quality in tourism.

Regarding the hardware dimension, or physical products at the destination, this can be split into three elements: facilities (what is available to clients at the destination), functions (what services they provide) and aesthetics (their visual impact).

Software elements consist of information, service and hospitality. Information in this context means both information available at the destination and pre-trip information; namely, what can be learned about the destination online through advertisements, brochure,... etc. The second software element is service, which represents a source of competitive advantage and has an impact on consumer behaviour (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). The third element is hospitality which is “a kind of guarantee of reciprocity — one protects the stranger in order to be protected from him” (Muhlmann, 1932, p.463).

The last dimension of Koch’s model is the environment dimension, which can be judged according to three criteria: the landscape (and landscaping at the destination), resource management (sustainable development and usage) and, finally, the absence or presence of pollution.

In this study, the researchers examined the software components of tourism quality. However, regarding underlying safety and security concerns for potential customers, a number of studies have suggested that safety and security are underlying service-quality determinants (Iraqi, 2006; Partalidou and Iakovidou, 2008; Steene, 2009; Chan and Lam, 2013; Amir et al., 2015).

When tourists have no previous experience of travelling to a destination, they may get information about it through external sources, which can be positive or negative (Amir et al., 2015). However, to

enhance the tourist experience, DMOs may need to ensure the safety and security of tourists through information made available to them and their perceptions of the level of hospitality. Further, quality standards can provide a destination with relevant quality cues that signal its underlying safety and security attributes to potential customers. Similarly, they will be looking for a certain hospitality level and service quality at the intended destination (Kozak, 2003). Therefore, researchers have extended the three components of tourism quality as follows:

- Information.
- Hospitality.
- Service.
- Safety and Security.

#### **- Information**

Tourists can access information about destinations in multiple ways, including: word of mouth communication (WOM), brochures, television, newspapers and a broad range of media. Mill and Morrison (1992) and Lappalainen et al. (1998) argue that destination choices are affected by commercial and personal input. Advertising provides information on destinations, as do tourist businesses and travel companies; while relatives, friends, colleagues and social groups also provide information, albeit not for the same financial motives. In addition, tourists' experiences of destinations provide an extra source of information. As Duke and Persia (1994) point out, tourists who choose to travel to an overseas destination are far more likely to be well-informed than their counterparts who prefer to stay at home.

Skuras et al. (2006) argue that the quality of the tourist experience is positively affected by the amount of information which customers gather prior to departure and where they find it (the Internet, newspapers, the travel press and the press as a whole). The more information consumers

have about what to expect, what products and services they will be offered and what the destination promises, the more likely they are to enjoy a high level of quality.

Consumers who seek out services which meet their needs, as noted above, look for specific information which is more detailed than the facts sought from conventional tourist sources. This is because they want to be confident that their expectations will be met and the experience will be exactly what they are anticipating (Nicolau and Sellers, 2010). Therefore, consumers will not merely ask about the weather or what sightseeing opportunities are available. They will also look for information which is specific to a given geographical area and its ties to the tourist experience: its quality certification, whether the local hospitality industry explores the culinary and cultural traditions of the environment and offers visitors the opportunity to participate in local activities (Jun et al., 2007).

Empirical research has underlined the effect of information on customer satisfaction. Sparks and Browning (2011) state that customers prefer to support their decisions with correct information about a product's attributes; they can ask other, better-informed members of their social circle or turn to the media; i.e., the mainstream and travel press. Previous visitors or informed consumers pass on what they have learned or experienced to those who come after them. Another way of minimizing consumer risk occurs when consumers repeatedly purchase products or services from the same provider; in this way, they build up trust and test the reputation of the provider until they are sure that they can be loyal to these higher-quality companies and producing areas (Jun et al., 2007; Nicolau and Sellers, 2010). Finally, consumers can check service attributes by looking at

outward signs of quality: informational labelling, certifiers or branding, the warranties offered and advertisements.

Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) argue that information is a key to create perceptions of quality and forming preferences. The sources of information are also significant, mainly because of the customers' process information according to how they view its source and value more highly information which stems from the objective performance of the entity being evaluated rather than information from other sources (Major and McLeay, 2013). Alsubagh (2015) states that non-personal, or marketing, information is seen as less trustworthy and therefore less persuasive, than personal, statistical and factual information.

Abuamoud et al. (2018) aimed, through their study, to measure tourists' satisfaction with tourist sites in Jordan through analyzing tourist characteristics and identifying their sources of information. They found that information is important for tourists and that they turned to printable sources of information, like newspapers and books, in order to make decisions and plan their trips.

### **- Hospitality**

In 2009, Ottenbacher et al. conducted a literature review and found that researchers into hospitality had failed to agree on a definition of the field. The authors suggested that hospitality studies needed to focus on particular sectors in the hospitality industry, e.g. the hotel industry, as well as subdivisions within each sector, e.g. 5-star hotels within the category of the hotel industry. Since 5-star hotels have a high level of staff-customer engagement, it is more important to evaluate the servicescape and hospitality in these hotels than in budget hotels, where staff have quite different roles. If Ottenbacher et al.'s approach is followed, the research in this field will gain validity and reliability.

Hospitality businesses need to provide unforgettable services which stimulate guests' senses and this can be

achieved if staff who work in close contact with guests take on hosting roles and act as if they were entertaining and welcoming guests into their own homes. By creating "moments of truth" for guests and ensuring that they are constantly provided with small, but memorable, surprises, the service experience as a whole will be greatly enhanced, along with the guest experience. According to Hemmington (2007), this approach is a key dimension of hospitality. Ritzer (2007) argues that hospitality is weakened if the service experience is totally predictable and not open to spontaneity. In 2005, Lashley et al. evaluated this view by looking at "memorable meals"; they found that the quality of the food being served was less influential in creating an impressive dining experience than the setting and the emotions it created and stimulated in the dinners. Emotional value comes from the ambience of the hospitality setting and the way in which staff and guests interact, which in turn generates guest satisfaction, based on the quality of the experience offered to clients (Lashley, 2008). The goal of hospitality is to ensure that guests experience a high level of satisfaction and feel a sense of loyalty to the company. Nevertheless, it is equally vital to note, as stated by Telfer (2000), that hospitality must be authentic and motivated by a desire to please, look after guests and enhance their experience, rather than to receive extra payments or put on a display. Real service behaviour is not an act, but a natural behaviour and it forms an essential component of commercial hospitality.

Empirical research has stressed the effect of hospitality on satisfaction. As Taylor and Baker (1994) state, customers' satisfaction levels are a reflection of the extent to which their expectations are met. Grazhdani and Merollari (2015) note that a number of demographic factors may influence these

expectations: age, gender, income and ethnicity. In addition, guest expectations of hospitality can be determined by the features of a hotel, e.g. the star rating it has achieved. Zeithaml et al. (2006) assert that the star rating of a hotel is a clear promise that a specific level of service will be offered and guests will therefore expect that to be the case. Logically, guests will anticipate receiving higher levels of hospitality at hotels with higher star ratings.

Akroush et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between tourism service quality and destination loyalty at the Dead Sea, Jordan. The findings confirmed that there are four dimensions of hospitality that have an effect on tourist satisfaction: assurance – responsiveness; tangible facilities – empathy; reliability: and reliability – quality of directions. In the study by Alhelalat et al. (2017) on the impact of restaurant employees' service behaviour on customer satisfaction, they aimed to explain customer satisfaction through two aspects of service behaviour: functional and personal. They found that personal aspects were more able than functional ones to boost customer satisfaction.

#### **- Service**

Numerous efforts have been made to link the notion of quality to a variety of situations which has acted as a hurdle to the creation of a globally-accepted definition of quality. Parasuraman et al. (1985) state that, according to the Japanese, quality is not allowing for any mistakes and doing the right thing at the first attempt. Moreover, quality is the single most significant factor in driving economic growth for international companies, according to Reeves and Bednar (1994).

Vinagre and Neves (2008) state that the term quality is used to describe a number of observable facts. Kara et al. (2005) remark that some researchers see it as equivalent to usage convenience, while others view it as meeting the requirements. However, the American National Standards

Institute and the American Society for Quality have drawn up a definition to standardize the various interpretations of quality which exist, stating that quality is the sum of the features and characteristics of a product or service which affect its ability to satisfy prearranged, known needs (Ma et al., 2005, p.1068). Thus, service quality is associated with its own characteristics and, as argued by Jun et al. (2004) and Stewart et al. (1998), it also encompasses a type of attitude which incorporates a global judgement on the superiority of service. In this definition, service quality is closely connected to behavioural intent and, as noted by Fullerton (2005), behavioural intentions are visibly driven by attitudinal constructs. Goldstein et al. (2002) found that service quality, which derives from the service encounter process, can be seen as meeting others' expectations.

A number of researchers, including Parasuraman et al. (1988), have explored consumer satisfaction theories and concluded that service quality can be viewed as the shortfall between how customers perceive the service they receive and their expectations (Vinagre and Neves, 2008). This being the case, true quality, as defined by Kordupleski (Lee et al. 2016), which is also referred to as perceived service quality, is the gap between normative expectations of what should occur compared to what actually occurred (Kelley and Turley, 2001; Sureshchandar et al., 2002). Ryzin (2013), in his study which was founded on the expectancy-disconfirmation theory, found that prior expectations and experienced service quality are essential factors in service-recipient satisfaction.

In essence, service quality concentrates on meeting customers' needs and expectations and it can be assessed according to the extent to which it succeeds in achieving this aim (Lewis et al., 1994).

Morales Espinoza (1999) remarks that both academics and practitioners have found it difficult to determine how to measure service quality, which can be broken down into three components: variability, inseparability and perishability. Poolthong and Mandhachitara (2009) argue that this is because service quality is framed by complex structures, so it is not easy to decide which evaluative criteria are best suited to the task. Although this may be true, in order to improve quality, it is first necessary to measure it, so finding a method for doing this is vital. Sureschchandar et al. (2002) argue that service providers are best placed for understanding how consumers rate the service they receive and can therefore provide useful guidelines on how this assessment should be done. Vinagre and Neves (2008) make the point that a measurement process is helpful in determining how user experiences relate to a specific service and pinpointing criteria which will facilitate differentiation between services. Malhotra et al. (2005) add that when service marketing professionals are trying to use customer perceptions to gain an advantage over their rivals, they invariably describe perceptions of service quality in an accurate manner.

Al Rousa et al. (2010) investigated tourists' satisfaction with service quality levels in Jordan. The empirical findings indicate that quality is the main driver of customer satisfaction.

#### **- Safety and Security**

The tourism industry cannot provide tourism quality without ensuring that it offers safety and security. These two factors are essential to people, support the survival instinct, value the sacredness of the person, acknowledge human rights and respect for customers' mental and physical well-being and involve the correct exercise of duties. Travellers can face risks emanating from a number of human and organizational directions: from terrorist activities, the tourist sector itself and the natural

environment, as well as their own insecurity, erratic behaviours, ignorance and abusive ways of acting.

Tourism experiences are intended to be a source of pleasure, but both travel and tourism carry a range of risks. International tourists may be confronted by war, terrorism, crime, natural disasters, epidemics, transport accidents, food poisoning and dangerous encounters with wild animals (Wilks, 2006; Larsen et al., 2007; Howard, 2009; Bentley et al., 2010).

When tourists are deciding on their destination, the aforementioned safety and security factors play a significant role in shaping their choices, as well as what they can do once they arrive, so if these dangers are perceived as significant or widespread, tourist demand will fall (Pizam, 1999; Mawby, 2000; George, 2003; Pizam and Mansfeld, 2006; Araña and León, 2008; Rittichainuwat, 2008; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009). The tourism industry is always severely affected by any kinds of safety and security issues, which can plunge the sector into a downward spiral at a moment's notice, so it is essential to draw up contingency plans for monitoring and coping with all threats, whether they arise as a result of human or natural acts.

Brunt et al. (2000) assert that how travellers view safety and security and decide whether or not to go to a particular destination is based on a number of factors, including factual accounts of inadequacies, media input, political situations, stereotypes, cultural bias, lack of knowledge, psychological tendencies and travellers' individual objective conditions, which could be health, disability or psychological issues.

According to Pizam et al. (1997, p.23), the majority of travellers do not decide where to go simply because of price considerations and the impression they have of the destination, but also because they believe that their safety and security are

assured and safeguarded at their chosen destination.

Joppe, Martin and Waalen (2001) conducted a satisfaction analysis of destination attributes. Data was collected from 359 American and Canadian visitors to Toronto to assess the level of importance and satisfaction of 14 destination attributes, including transportation, hospitality, food, cleanliness, attractions and activities, accommodation and safety. The results showed that visitors perceived personal safety as the most important factor when choosing a destination to travel to, regardless of their country of origin. Peattie et al. (2005, p.399) note that if a tourist is subjected to any form of physical harm, this will impact negatively not only on the unfortunate victim, but also on anyone involved in promoting the area where the incident occurred. Araña and León (2008) point out that tourists are extremely sensitive to the threat of political unrest and terrorist activity and seek destinations which will offer them peace and serenity, so they can simply enjoy what the destination has to offer without worrying about their security.

It has previously been observed that the safety and security of a tourist location are viewed as significant factors influencing visitor satisfaction (Tasci & Boylu, 2010). Other researchers (Fornell et al., 1996; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007) report the detrimental impact on tourist satisfaction when safety and security risks are merely perceived, rather than actual, confirming the findings of Monroe (1990) and Zeithaml (2009). This demonstrates that the expenditure and hazards associated with safety and security are inversely correlated with perceived value and, therefore, customer satisfaction. As a consequence, tourists who perceive lower levels of risk have an increased likelihood of reporting a positive experience and increased satisfaction with a tourist destination.

Khuong and Nguyen (2017) investigated the factors that affect tourists' destination satisfaction in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The empirical findings indicate that tourist

satisfaction is increased by developed infrastructure, recreation activities and safety and security.

#### **- Tourist Satisfaction**

Woodside et al. (1989, p.6) define customer satisfaction as a specific type of consumer attitude which occurs post-purchase and reveals the extent to which the customer likes or dislikes the service he/she experienced. Gilbert and Veloutsou (2006) concur and state that high customer satisfaction levels result in significant economic gains. Nam et al. (2011) argue that customers who are highly satisfied are less motivated by considerations of price, less likely to be susceptible to counter-offers from competitors and remain loyal to the company for longer than their dissatisfied counterparts.

Cronin and Taylor (1992) explain the difference between the two terms by stating that a perception of quality is a form of viewpoint, a long-term general assessment, while satisfaction is an evaluation of a particular transaction. Ha and Jang (2010) add that quality is an abstract reaction and satisfaction is composed of both abstract and emotional reactions.

As a result, if consumers view service quality as satisfaction or meeting expectations, this introduces an element of misunderstanding about the exact meaning of the term satisfaction. Certain authors, such as Cronin et al. (2000) and Spreng and Mackoy (1996), do not see a significant difference between service quality and satisfaction. Bitner and Hubert (1994) assert that individual and global transactions generate customer satisfaction while, in contrast, service quality is based on an overall sense that a service provider's services are superior or inferior to those offered by others. Bitner (1990) qualifies this statement by saying that service quality can be summarized as a general response towards services.

Other writers believe that service quality, on the contrary, precedes satisfaction; a conclusion which is supported by the findings of Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Ekinci and Sirakaya (2004). Finally, a large number of researchers maintain that perceived service quality both precedes and mirrors satisfaction.

Accordingly, and based on the reviewed literature on the four software components which comprise information, service, hospitality and safety and security, the following hypotheses are suggested:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between information and tourist satisfaction in the Jordanian tourism sector.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between hospitality and tourist satisfaction in the Jordanian tourism sector.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between services and tourist satisfaction in the Jordanian tourism sector.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between safety and security and tourist satisfaction in the Jordanian tourism sector.

#### **- Tourist Loyalty**

Andreassen (1999) states that, traditionally, managers have aimed to inspire loyalty in their customers in order to raise future purchase intentions. Edvardsson et al. (2000) expand on this conclusion, asserting that customer loyalty can be seen and measured by their intention or inclination to purchase from the same organization again. As a result, loyalty is viewed as essential to a company's long-term success and sustainability (Flavia et al., 2006; Keating et al., 2003). Other researchers have listed a number of positive consequences of customer loyalty, including: strong and positive WOM recommendations (Hallowell, 1996), less price sensitivity (Lynch and Ariely, 2000) and a reliable income (Knox and Denison, 2000).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) attempt to determine whether the link between satisfaction and loyalty is virtual and spontaneous. However, this contention has yet to be proven and, in contrast, it is clear that the connection between loyalty and satisfaction is not immutable and changes radically according to changes in conditions. In 1995, for example, Jones and Sasser found that the relationship between loyalty and satisfaction is determined by the competitive structure of the tourism industry. Four years later, Oliver (1999) found that while satisfaction can result in loyalty, true loyalty will only take root when a number of factors, such as an embedded social network, are also in place.

Antón et al. (2017) investigated the effects of satisfaction and visit intensity on the intention to return and to make positive recommendations. Overall satisfaction has also been found to have a significant influence on loyalty.

For that reason, it would appear that a loyal tourist tends to have high satisfaction with the tourism industry. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is suggested:

- H<sub>5</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty in the Jordanian tourism sector.

#### **- WOM**

Bansal and Voyer (2000) argue that word of mouth (WOM) communication is one of the most influential and important forces in the market, since conversations between individuals and exchange of views on the quality of goods and services can make or break products and determine commercial success or failure. WOM is an efficient form of passing on and sharing information, because the individual giving feedback and advice does not stand to gain

anything from giving that advice or to benefit from subsequent consumer behaviour (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010). Kozinets et al. (2002) concur and note that consumers trust other consumers to give them objective information, while Day (1970) asserts that WOM is perceived to be the most unbiased and dependable source of information available to consumers.

Hallowell (1996) sees a linear connection between loyalty, a positive WOM verdict and recommendations, since loyal customers tend to underline the best attributes of a firm's products and, in This way, promote the company as a whole.

Hallowell (1996) suggests that if individuals think that they will receive greater value from consuming a product or service than not doing so, this conclusion will lead them to have a sense of loyalty to that product or service. The belief that they are getting greater value inspires the individuals to stay loyal to the company and endorse and support it, most commonly by spreading the message of what they think and feel *via* WOM.

Existing literature (e.g. Parasuraman et al., 1988; Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002) demonstrates a connection between satisfaction levels and a wish to make recommendations. Ennew et al. (2000) found that satisfied customers are more likely to engage in positive WOM and customers who feel dissatisfied are motivated to engage in negative WOM.

Many researchers, e.g. Cronin and Taylor (1992), have found that service quality precedes consumer satisfaction. However, while numerous studies have focused on the links between WOM, satisfaction levels and service quality, fewer studies have examined how service quality factors affect WOM and satisfaction levels at the same time. In 2007, Mackintosh, whose research was designed to investigate the relationship between business travellers and travel agents, argued that the quality of the relationship established between both parties impacts on customers' satisfaction with the organization and positive WOM. In

this context, Mackintosh defines relationship quality as how the customer evaluated the quality of the interaction he or she had with the travel agent they consulted. Similarly, it would appear that tourist who has high satisfaction and loyalty towards the tourism industry tends to be involved in positive WOM. For the above reasons, this hypothesis is suggested:

H6: There is a positive significant relationship between tourist loyalty and positive WOM in the Jordanian tourism sector.

Likewise, it would appear that tourists who are highly satisfied with the tourism industry tend to be involved in positive WOM mediation based on loyalty. For the above reasons, this hypothesis is suggested:

H7: There is a mediating effect of tourist loyalty on the relationship between tourist satisfaction and WOM in the Jordanian tourism sector.

## Research Methodology

### - Primary Data Collection Methods

The purpose of this study is to analyze the software components of tourism quality and tourist satisfaction in the Jordanian tourism sector. It used a cross-sectional survey, in which the data covers a particular period and only the use of quantitative methodology. The research questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part is to measure software components which consist of four factors (information, hospitality, services and safety and security). The second part of the research questionnaire seeks to measure the dependent variables represented by tourist satisfaction, loyalty and WOM. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale, where (1) indicates "strongly disagree" and (5) indicates "strongly agree", to measure the degree of tourist satisfaction. Questionnaire forms were distributed *via* e-mail and this required around 12 weeks to complete in order to ensure a large

enough sample size to provide statistically robust results. The experimental design also permitted testing the internal validity of the measurement. Descriptive data analyses, including frequency, percentage, mean scores and standard deviation, were employed to assess the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable, at a 0.05 significance level. Hypothesis testing and the influence of

variables were examined *via* multiple regression analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Version 22) was used for statistical calculations.

This study aims to offer a descriptive analytical approach. In addition, quantitative analytical techniques are employed to provide a thorough analysis of the research variables.

**Table 1. Research Construct Operationalization**

	Question No.	Statement	Author(s)
Information	1.	I easily found the tourist information centre (e.g. airports, place of stay).	Fuchs and Weiermair (2004); Poon and Low (2005)
	2.	I easily communicated with people in a language that both the local people and I are comfortable with (e.g. English).	
	3.	I easily found a personal guidance in the tourist bus and tourist spots.	
Hospitality	4.	I am satisfied with the courtesy of immigration officials at the port of entry.	Ottenbacher et al. (2009); Hemmington (2007), Ritzer (2007); Lashley (2008); Telfer (2000); Grazhdani and Merollari (2015)
	5.	I am satisfied with the reception at the airport by the tour operator.	
	6.	I am satisfied with the responsiveness of people at the place of stay.	
	7.	I am satisfied with the courtesy of people at the place of stay.	
	8.	I am satisfied with the responsiveness of staff at the place of stay to solve complaints.	
	9.	I am satisfied with the courtesy of people outside the place of stay.	
Services	10.	I am satisfied with the responsiveness of people outside the place of stay.	Reeves and Bednar (1994); Vinagre and Neves (2008); Kara et al. (2005); Ma et al. (2005); Jun et al. (2004); Fullerton (2005); Vinagre and Neves (2008)
	11.	I am satisfied with the attitude of staff at place of stay towards me.	
	12.	I am satisfied with the internet connectivity at the place of stay.	
	13.	I am satisfied with the telecom connectivity while travelling.	
	14.	I found money exchange facilities at my place of stay.	
Safety and Security	15.	I was able to access to medical help in case of emergencies.	Tribe and Snaith (1998); Yuksel and Yuksel (2001)
	16.	I was satisfied with the availability of a restaurant at my place of stay.	
Tourist Satisfaction	17.	I found the security at the tourist spots/places of visit satisfactory.	Gilbert and Veloutsou (2006); Nam et al (2011); Cronin and Taylor (1992); Ekinci and Sirakaya (2004)
	18.	I found the safety of domestic travel (e.g. airlines, buses, taxis) satisfactory.	
	19.	I am confident that I have made the correct decision to visit this destination.	
	20.	The experience that I have had with this destination has been satisfactory.	
Tourist Loyalty	21.	In general, I am satisfied with the way that this destination has carried out its tourism activities.	Edvardsson et al. (2000); Flavia et al. (2006); Keating et al. (2003); Hallowell (1996)
	22.	In general, I am satisfied with the service I have received from the destination.	
	23.	I have the intention to continue my relationship with this destination.	
WOM	24.	Based on my experience, it is very likely that I will continue my relationship with this destination in the next time.	Hallowell (1996); Bansal and Voyer (2000)
	25.	I will consider the same destination the next time I want to visit the same region.	
	26.	I will recommend this destination to other tourists.	
	27.	I will point out the positive aspects of this destination if anybody criticizes it.	

**Research Population and Sample**

According to Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and

Antiquities (MOTA), the total number of incoming foreigner tourists in 2016 was 4,168,396 (MOTA

Annual Report, 2016). A purposive sampling technique with minimal interference was used consisting of 384 respondents who are foreign tourists with experience of the Jordanian tourism sector. The questionnaire was prepared in English. The target population of this study was departing foreigner tourists who had stayed in hotels in Amman, the capital of Jordan. The data-gathering process proceeded between mid-June and mid-September, 2017. Only 247 questionnaire forms were found to be usable, representing a response rate of 64.3%.

## Findings

Describing the relationship between a sample and its population is very important. This section is, therefore, largely concerned with presenting a descriptive analysis of the sample to evaluate and provide an overview of the respondents' characteristics according to the following criteria.

### - Sample Characteristics

The characteristics of the respondents appear in Table 2.

**Table 2. Demographic Characteristics**

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Female	97	39.2
	Male	141	57.2
	I do not want to specify	9	3.6
	Total	247	100
<b>Age</b>	Under 18 Years	0	0
	18-27 Years	3	1.2
	28-37 Years	40	16.3
	38-47 Years	55	22.2
	48-57 Years	116	46.9
	Over 57	33	13.3
	Total	247	100
<b>Education Level</b>	High school and below	24	9.8
	College degree	45	18.2
	Bachelor degree	143	57.8
	Master degree	33	13.4
	Doctoral degree	2	0.8
	Total	247	100
<b>Occupation</b>	Employed	90	36.4
	Unemployed	48	19.4
	Retired	109	44.2
	Total	247	100
<b>Nationality</b>	White	88	35.6
	Asian	68	27.5
	Black	42	17
	African American	19	7.6
	American Indian	13	5.2
	Alaska Native	14	5.6
	Other, please specify	3	1.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows that the percentage for "gender" reached 57.2% for males, but the percentage for "I don't want to

specify" reached 3.6%. The highest percentage for "age" reached 46.9% for the age category 48-57

years, while the lowest percentage reached was 0% for the age category under 18 years. The highest percentage for “education” reached 57.8% for bachelor degrees, while the lowest percentage reached was 0.8% for doctorate holders. The highest percentage for “retired” reached 44.2%, while the lowest percentage reached was 19.4% for unemployed. Also, the table shows that the highest percentage for

“nationality” reached 35.6% for white, while the lowest percentage reached 1.2% for other nationalities.

**- Reliability**

Table 3 shows the reliability scales for all the dimensions.

**Table 3. Reliability Coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha)**

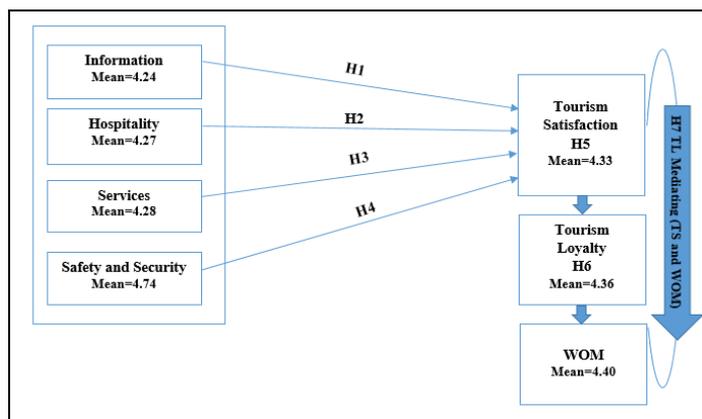
Dimension	Independent and Dependent Variables	
	No. of Items	Alpha Cronbach
<b>Information</b>	3	<b>0.840</b>
<b>Hospitality</b>	8	<b>0.908</b>
<b>Services</b>	5	<b>0.881</b>
<b>Safety and Security</b>	2	<b>0.877</b>
<b>Tourist Satisfaction</b>	4	<b>0.864</b>
<b>Tourist Loyalty</b>	3	<b>0.844</b>
<b>WOM</b>	2	<b>0.874</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0.893</b>

Items for subscales (information, hospitality, services, safety and security, tourist satisfaction, tourist loyalty and WOM) were subjected to reliability assessments. The Alpha coefficient values for the items were 0.840, 0.908, 0.881, 0.887, 0.864, 0.844 and 0.874, for information, hospitality, services, safety and security, tourist satisfaction, tourist loyalty and WOM, respectively. These values suggest that the measures exhibit desirable levels of

internal consistency at the aggregate level. The Alpha coefficient for all dimensions was 0.893.

**- Test of Hypotheses**

Figure 1 and Table 4 show that the means range from 4.24 to 4.74, with the highest mean being for safety and security dimension items and the lowest for information dimension items.



**Figure (1): The Research Conceptual Model**

**Table 4. Research Variable Tests**

Variable	Mean	S.D.
<b>Information</b>	4.24	0.932
<b>Hospitality</b>	4.27	0.956
<b>Services</b>	4.28	0.843
<b>Safety and Security</b>	4.74	0.793
<b>Tourist Satisfaction</b>	4.33	0.856
<b>Tourist Loyalty</b>	4.36	0.873
<b>WOM</b>	4.40	0.993

**- Analysis of Hypotheses**

To test the general hypotheses, structural equation modelling (SEM) was applied. SEM included a test of the overall model as well as individual tests of the relationships among the variables (Hoyle, 1995). Table 5 shows the results for the relationship between the software components of tourist quality and tourist satisfaction and satisfaction outcomes. On running the analysis, the

RMSEA value was 0.000, which showed a rich fit. Similarly, CMIN/DF indicated a rich-fit model with a value of (0.842). Dissimilarly GFI value was 0.922. In addition, NFI and CFI values were 0.913 and 0.912. Both values were within satisfactory limits. The fit indices of the structural model are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5. Fit Indices of Structured Model**

Variables	Values
$\chi^2$	1.743
$\chi^2/df$	0.842
Normal Fit Index (NFI)	0.913
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.912
Goodness Fit Index (GFI)	0.922
Root Mean Square Error of Approximate (RMSEA)	0.00

Figure 2 and Table 6 show the hypotheses testing results, to determine the significance of each path coefficient, as well as to estimate regression weight, standard error of regression weight and critical ratio for regression weight (CR = regression weight estimate divided by estimate of its standard error).

Table 6 presents each parameter's CR, estimate and SE. Hence, information has a significant positive and direct impact on tourist satisfaction (B=0.310, CR=1.391, p-value=0.00); or H1 is supported.

Hospitality has a significant positive and direct impact on tourist satisfaction (B=0.421, CR=2.721, p-

value=0.05); or H2 is supported. Services have a significant positive and direct impact on tourist satisfaction (B=0.302, CR=1.890, p-value=0.04); or H3 is supported. Safety and security have a significant positive and direct impact on tourist satisfaction (B=0.250, CR=4.501, p-value=0.03) or H4 is supported. Tourist satisfaction has a significant positive and direct impact on tourist loyalty (B=0.310,

CR=3.161, p-value=0.00); or H5 is supported. Tourist satisfaction has a significant positive and direct impact on WOM (B=0.257, CR=2.631, p-value=0.03); or H6 is supported. Finally, tourist loyalty has a significant positive and direct impact on WOM (B=0.341, CR=4.310, p-value=0.01; or H7 is supported.

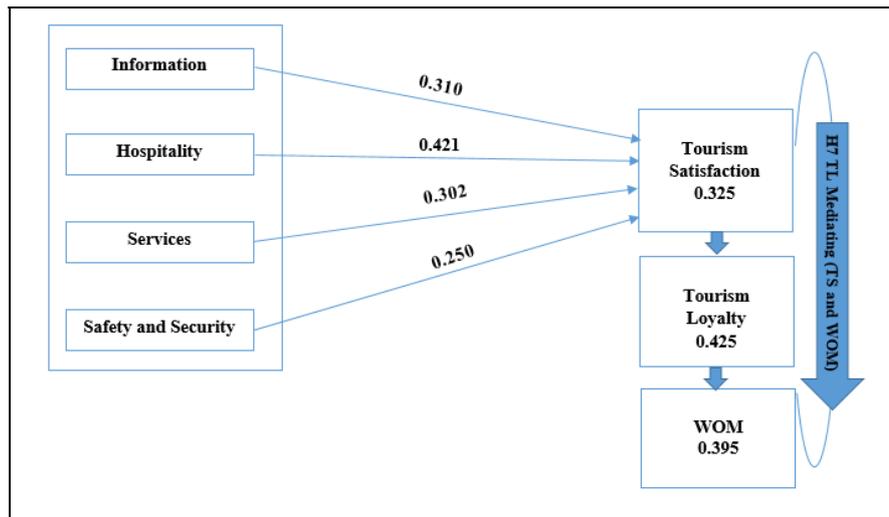


Figure (2): Structural Model Results

Table 5: Testing Result Regression Weight

Hypothesis	From	To	Estimate	SE	CR	p-value	
H1	Information	TS	0.310	0.0720	1.391	0.00	Accepted
H2	Hospitality	TS	0.421	0.0890	2.721	0.05	Accepted
H3	Services	TS	0.302	0.0841	1.890	0.04	Accepted
H4	Safety and Security	TS	0.250	0.0761	4.501	0.03	Accepted
H5	TS	TL	0.310	0.0649	3.161	0.00	Accepted
H6	TS	WOM	0.257	0.0570	2.631	0.03	Accepted
H7	TL	WOM	0.341	0.0461	4.310	0.01	Accepted

TS: tourist satisfaction.

TL: tourist loyalty.

WOM: Word-of-mouth.

### Discussion

This study investigates the influence and relationships of software components and tourism satisfaction by examining tourism quality, loyalty and WOM as influenced

by tourism. The conceptual model identified examines information, hospitality, services and safety and security based on tourist satisfaction, which then influences tourist loyalty, followed by WOM. The

selection of variables was based on findings in the literature, indicating the effect of the use of information about services and products, including WOM, on satisfaction. The results of this study provide empirical support for previous research. Information quality and quantity are important elements of satisfaction (Skuras et al., 2006; Jun et al., 2007; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Nicolau & Sellers, 2010; Abuamoud et al., 2018). Prior research on hospitality was found to relate to customer satisfaction in the case of expectations and features or levels of service (Taylor & Baker, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 2006; Grazhdani & Merollari, 2015; Akroush et al., 2016; Alhelalat et al., 2017). Service research included the term quality and researchers indicated that observable evidence, usage, convenience and perceptions influence consumers (Kara et al., 2005; Malhotra et al., 2005; Vinagre & Neves, 2008; Al Rousa et al., 2010). Safety and security play a significant role in the tourism industry regarding perceived satisfaction (Mawby, 2000; George, 2003; Pizam and Mansfeld, 2006; Araña and León, 2008; Rittichainuwat, 2008; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009; Khuong and Nguyen, 2017).

The results of this study support previous literature and confirm the conceptual model. The hypothesis testing results based on the findings from 247 respondents, demonstrate that all hypotheses are accepted. A positive significant relationship was found between information, hospitality, services, safety and security and tourist satisfaction for the Jordanian tourism sector. Additionally, a positive significant relationship was observed between tourist satisfaction and tourist loyalty, as well as between tourist loyalty and WOM (Mackintosh, 2007; Akroush et al., 2016; Antón et al., 2017).

The study also found that tourist loyalty has a mediation effect on the relationship between tourist satisfaction and WOM. The mediation results support H7 and provide strong empirical support for previous studies which found

and supported that WOM plays a crucial role in this context (Akroush et al., 2016; Antón et al., 2017).

### **Managerial Implications**

The major findings of this study have significant managerial implications for hospitality and tourism managers and policymakers. Since the ultimate goal of this study is to direct attention to the roles of each of the variables and to understand how tourism quality creates satisfaction, managers should understand that WOM is found in the literature to be an outcome of loyalty, to contribute to information resources and to be indicative of quality (Hallowell, 1996; Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Skuras et al., 2006; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). As a result, managers should create products of value by focusing on the importance of information, hospitality, services and safety and security. Mastering these four components will boost satisfaction and thus loyalty and consequently generate positive WOM.

Managers within the tourism industry should concentrate their efforts on creating a better experience, beginning with information sources and identifying areas for the organization to measure where changes must occur for improvement. Hospitality and tourism managers can also utilize the model to score the primary components, followed by short customer surveys and determine how services provide the foundation for improving WOM.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Whilst this study offers further knowledge of a relatively understudied area, it is subject to several constraints. First, some difficulties were encountered in the distribution of research questionnaire forms within the Jordanian tourism sector which may have contributed to some inconsistencies in the data

collection process; for example, one travel agency and two hotels chose to distribute the questionnaire to respondents by themselves, whereas in other situations, researchers distributed the questionnaire to respondents independently. Furthermore, this study took place within a single service industry, only the Jordanian tourism sector and this limits the wider application of the investigation's findings to other service organizations in Jordan as well as to a wider geographical area.

Further research is therefore required to apply the findings to other geographical areas and to widen the scope of the findings to include a greater range of management tourism professionals. For example, the approach followed

here could be extended to neighbouring Arab nations with a view to improving the approach and its results. An investigation of alternative services could permit the development of an improved model to optimize the representation of the service sector on a wider level, rather than focusing on the tourism industry in isolation. Further work should also examine whether the model could be employed to make a comparison between the service sector and the industrial sector. This would enable an interesting evaluation of whether the model described here could additionally be valid for a variety of alternative industries and service sectors in addition to the tourism industry.

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