

## Residents' Perceptions of Tourism Careers in a Conservative Society

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**Abstract:** The role of local communities and their perception toward tourism development were widely undertaken for four decades. Tourism employment is one of the most important socio-economic impacts of tourism development. However, willingness to work in tourism sector depends on factors according to the community structure and characteristics. Thus, this study aims at examining Aqaba residents' perception and attitude towards tourism careers. 412 respondents showed negative perceptions toward tourism careers in terms of social image, religion and gender. Nevertheless, they were somewhat willing to work in tourism. By the correlation test, significant relationships between (social image, religion and gender) and attitude towards tourism careers were found. Managerial and theoretical implications were included in the conclusion.

**Key words:** Tourism Careers • Jordan • Conservative Community

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry is now a great catalyst of change worldwide. There were about 806 millions international tourists in 2005. This number is expected to increase sharply by 2020. These figures relate to international flights and in most countries the volume of domestic tourism is much greater than the number of international tourist arrivals. It is currently believed that tourism creates 215 million jobs (8.1 per cent of the total jobs in the world). Tourism will grow in less developed countries faster than that in countries with developed economies [1]. Within the planning approach of tourism development as an economic force, local residents seem to be marginalized when decision makers and planners pay greater attention to foreign investors.

By result, local residents will be the first victim of both decision makers and investors on their own land [2]. What compounds this problem is local residents' lack of awareness of how much is it important to be involved in this beneficial industry. This affects negatively the way local residents think about tourism careers. [3] mentioned that most residents in destinations are not experienced enough with tourism to achieve a balance between tourists and locals' development and management.

[4] stated that the employees' negative attitude toward their work creates minimal chance to achieve customer satisfaction. Perception towards working in any

industry is determined by the staff commitment in addition to the available jobs in the industry. It can be argued that this is particularly relevant to tourism sector as it has been proved that potential workers have a bad image of working in the sector [5]. Due to the importance of positive attitudes towards the one's work in any industry and the role of tourism in creating job opportunities for residents, the current study is an attempt to find out how and why local residents perceive negatively and/or positively the tourism careers. It aims also at addressing decision makers to consider such an issue in the planning process. The study seeks to investigate the following questions:

- How local residents in Aqaba perceive tourism careers in the perspective of social image, religion and gender?
- To what extent Aqaba residents' perceptions in the three perspectives are related to their willingness to work in tourism sector?
- To what extent Aqaba residents' awareness of tourism contribution/role relates to their willingness to work in tourism sector?

**Literature Review:** Careers are considered one aspect of the socio-economic impacts resulting from the tourism development. However, previous studies on evaluating residents' perception towards tourism careers are modest

in number. They deal mainly with students and young people's perception towards tourism and hospitality careers. In a comparative study, [6] examined local young people's attitudes towards tourism and hospitality jobs in both United Kingdom and Greece. They examined many factors such as career decision, career advice, career preference and other personal factors. The main findings of the study were that pupils from the UK showed attitudes less positively towards tourism than pupils from Greece. Another finding is that there were differences in attitudes towards the employment in the whole tourism sector.

[7] examined tourism employment quality in Hawaii. The study pointed out that respondents who are involved in tourism as employees showed relatively positive attitudes towards their job due mainly to the good wage they get. In a relatively early study, [8] tested a number of school leavers' perception towards careers in the tourism and hospitality sector in Queensland area. He found that respondents respect their work in tourism and hospitality. Qualification and experience were the important criteria taken into their consideration. The study also revealed that value statements mentioned in the questionnaire such as: a comfortable life, reliability, social recognition and self control were associated with their work in the sector. [9] analyzed under graduate students' perceptions towards tourism career in Turkey. Most respondents showed their perception in a negative way. In addition, they believe that they have lower prestige than being in another sector. Conversely, respondents demonstrated positively their image of the whole tourism industry.

[10] tested the perception of a group of students in Arizona. The study pointed out a significant difference between the opinion of Anglo and minority respondents. They were also interested in the tourism and hospitality careers. [11] examined the perception of undergraduate students towards careers in tourism and hospitality industry in Australian institutions. Within the twenty factors that the study used to measure their perceptions, the respondents expressed that tourism and hospitality careers will not offer them important factors. The current study differs from the most previous literature by examining local inhabitants' perception of the tourism and hospitality careers depending on four factors: social images, gender, religion and awareness of tourism contribution/role. The relationships between these factors and respondents' willingness to work in tourism were also examined. The study relies on previous studies that undertake perceptions towards tourism careers as summarized below:

**Social Image:** According to [12, p: 19], the image of occupations is an important stimulus in career choice decision and affected by social prestige. Residents' perception toward tourism sector in many Arab countries is still relatively linked to their traditional western style. Thus, the international nature of tourism with what it may bring to a community from firstly its residents' point of view seems to be problematic [13]. [11] argued that low salaries, a shortage of skills, the negative industry image are factors that increase this negative perception. Other researches revealed that tourism careers give little chances of advancement in terms of social images [14].

**Gender:** The nature of tourism is described as heterogeneous and unequal industry. This to be clarified, female employees regardless their positions at the organization work long hours compared to their male colleagues, face a type of social integration decline and suffer from social constraints according to the one's community structure [15, 16]. [17] have undertaken influential factors such as: lack of equity, conflicts with family activities and childcare responsibility. [18] examined a set of factors that contribute to the sex segregation of employment in some tourism organizations.

**Religion:** It is known that religion is a main influential factor on people's attitude and behavior. Traditionally, tourism is strongly linked to religion when traveling from place of stay to a sacred place. Additionally, the different perceptions between believers and non-believers of tourism may create a tension and misunderstanding among residents at their destination [19]. The relationship between Islamic religiosity and residents' perception of socio-cultural impacts of tourism was examined. Religiosity could be measured by Islamic belief, practice and piety [20, 21].

**Awareness of Tourism Contribution:** Usually, residents' perception towards tourism is a result of their awareness about it. [22] argued that the more an individual is knowledgeable about tourism the more he is able to consciously evaluate the benefits and costs of tourism. In this context, most researchers measure the awareness of tourism contribution by residents' recognition of the role of tourism in different sides such as supporting the local economy, improving the public services, improving the infrastructure and providing good career opportunities [23, 24, 25].

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Study Site:** The study was conducted on local residents in Aqaba city in Jordan during Mars and early April 2015. Aqaba is located in the south of the country and the north of the red sea (Gulf of Aqaba). Historically, it has been inhabited 4000 BC because of its strategic location on the trading routes between the three old continents. It was a settlement of Edomites and Nabateans who extensively populated the city. It was mentioned in the Bible as 'Ezion-Gaber in the iron age. Later, the Greeks and Romans signed a clear existence in the city [26]. Aqaba is the only coastal city located in the far south of the country. The city is now the capital of Aqaba Governorate of about 100, 000 people. Aqaba is important to the country as the only seaport located on the northern part of the red sea.

Aqaba borders both Saudi Arabia and Israeli entity. The city is also located at the head of Aqaba Gulf [27]. Aqaba is known today as a diving center and beach resort. It is also the core of what is called 'The Golden Triangle' which consists of the three important tourist destinations; Petra, Wadi Rum and Aqaba itself. Furthermore, industrial activities remain important to the country as a good producer of phosphate and some shells. The city has been transferred to an economic zone in 2000 to attract great industrial and tourist investment [28].

**Procedures:** The selected sample in this study was firstly due to the author's familiarity with Aqaba city as a member of its community. The study is based on quantitative method to investigate residents' perceptions and attitude towards tourism careers. In addition to the secondary information and data, the main method used in this study is the survey questionnaires in order to collect data. The use of quantitative approach is suitable in economy, psychology, geography and marketing [29]. [30] mentioned also that most tourism researchers use structured surveys.

Accordingly, 500 questionnaires were distributed randomly to residents in different areas of Aqaba city. Because dependence on tourism would affect positively the perception towards tourism [31, 32] and to avoid any possible bias in responses, none of the respondents were employed in tourism establishments. 442 questionnaires were recollected. Finally, 412 valid questionnaires were analyzed. The questionnaire's items were selected carefully based on the literature and the characteristics of the study community. The items were divided into three parts:

Part (1) includes information about the respondents' personal profile.

Part (2) includes items about social image, gender, religion and awareness of tourism contribution.

Part (3) includes two items to measure residents' perception towards tourism careers. The two items are:  
\*If you do not have a job, you accept working in tourism,  
\*As an employee, you accept part-time working in tourism.

With reference to the four domains, it is noted that the first three are directly related to tourism careers, while the fourth undertakes the role/contribution of tourism in different sides. The use of this domain is for more interpretation of the respondents' overall assessment of tourism career. In other words, it can play the role of predictor factors. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used for most questions of the study (5=strongly agreed; 1=strongly disagreed). SPSS software was used. To test the objectives of the study, the study used statistical tools such as t-test, means and standard deviation and Pearson correlation.

## **RESULTS**

**Personal Profile:** 60, 2% of the respondents were male and 39, 8% were female. 53, 4% of the total sample were in the age range of (18-30). Concerning the marital status, 57, 8% of the respondents were single. The greater percentage of the respondents in terms of monthly income were 55, 3% for those of less than 400 JD, while only 1% of them were of monthly income of (1500-2000) JD. The highest proportion of the respondents (59%) said their educational level is secondary school and less, while only 17% said they have master and PhD degree. Finally, in terms of profession, 38, 3% of the sample were employees in the public sector and 10, 2% were unemployed.

**Respondents' Perception towards Tourism Careers:** The second section of the questionnaire was designed to measure the perception of the respondents' towards tourism careers. It consists of 26 statements in terms of habits and social image (7 items), gender (5 items), religion (5 items) and awareness of tourism importance (9 items). Table 1 shows the respondents' means and standard deviations of their perception towards the tourism careers. It was found out that the highest means were scored for the awareness of tourism contribution (3.50) followed by religion (3.21). Based on the total mean

Table 1: Total mean average of the study domains

Main Domains	Mean*	SD	Impact Description
Social image	2.73	1.07	Mid
Gender	2.74	1.23	Mid
Religion	3.21	1.20	Mid
Awareness of tourism Contribution	3.50	1.02	High

Table 2: T-test

Main Domains	Mean*	SD	df	t	t critical	sig
Social image	2.73	1.07	411	1.84	2.576	0.116
Gender	2.74	1.23	411	2.48	2.576	0.072
Religion	3.21	1.20	411	2.43	2.576	0.068
Awareness of tourism Contribution	3.50	1.02	411	2.26	2.576	0.89

Table 3: Mean values for attitude

Main Domains	Mean	SD	Impact Description
1-If you do not have a job, you accept working in tourism.	3.55	0.98	High
2-As an employee, you accept part-time working in tourism.	2.51	1.05	Mid
Average	3.03	0.63	Mid

Table 4: Correlation values between the study domains and attitude

Domains	Statistics	Attitude
Social image	Sig	0.00*
	R	.521
Gender	Sig	0.01*
	R	.295
Religion	Sig	0.00*
	R	.597
Awareness	Sig	0.895
	R	.013

\* Significant at  $\alpha \leq 0.01$  level (2-tailed)

average of each domain, it can be said that respondents are moderately negative about tourism careers due mainly to religious norms.

Here, awareness of tourism contribution is excluded from this context since it does not describe respondents' opinions about tourism careers. In terms of social image and gender, respondents were also negative about tourism careers but with a lower degree. To check the mean values of the four domains, t-test was made. From Table 2, respondents' perception towards tourism careers can be described as follows:

- Residents' perception towards tourism careers in terms of social image is negative.
- Residents' perception towards tourism careers in terms of gender is negative.
- Residents' perception towards tourism careers in terms of religion is negative.
- Residents' perception towards tourism contribution/role is negative.

All items of the four factors were written in a negative form.

**Correlation Test:** One of the study objectives is to determine to what extent each of the aforementioned domains relates to respondents' attitude towards tourism careers. However, the items' means of attitude were calculated. Although respondents perceived negatively tourism careers based on the four domains, they were somewhat willing to work in tourism, especially if they are unemployed as show in Table 3. This finding is contradictory to the previous ones. Correlations between the four domains and attitude were computed as shown in Table 4. A strong positive correlation was found between respondents' perception towards tourism careers in terms of religion and their willingness to work in tourism. A relatively similar finding was shown between perception towards tourism careers regarding social image and willingness to work in tourism. Respondents' awareness of tourism contribution was found to not have a significant relationship with willingness to work in tourism.

## DISCUSSION

Recognizing residents' attitude towards tourism careers is important for tourism sustainability. However, studies about residents' attitude towards tourism careers are modest in number compared to the attitude towards tourism impacts. As mentioned earlier, most studies that undertake attitudes towards tourism careers have focused on tourism and hospitality students. The current study undertakes how the whole community assesses tourism careers based mainly on social and religious considerations. Hence, this section attempts to compare the findings in the current study with those in previous studies. As studies about attitudes towards tourism careers were rarely undertaken, the discussion attempts also to compare the findings with other studies about attitudes towards tourism impacts that use the same variables. Overall, respondents were willing to work in tourism if they are unemployed and somewhat willing to accept part-time work in tourism. This result would be contradictory to their negative perception towards tourism careers in terms of social image and religion. This contradiction may be due to the high demand for labor in tourism sector. Further, their response does not say that working in tourism is their job priority. In other words, they may work in tourism since they do not have another opportunity.

The study revealed a strong positive relationship between religion and willingness to work in tourism. This finding is inconsistent with [20]. They found that Islamic belief and practice had negative relationship with residents' perception towards tourism impacts in tourist areas in Iran. In the same country, [21] showed neutrality in the respondents' perception of the effect of tourism on the county's religion. In the current study, this negative assessment of tourism careers regarding religion may be due to the negative social image. This assumption could be realistic since the study shows a relatively similar relationship between social image and willingness to work in tourism. In their analysis about tourism careers, [12] relates tourism careers to social prestige. In many Middle-Eastern countries such as Jordan, careers is still assessed by the whole social image. The occupation contribution to the society is still one concern in this context. However, religion and social image are very integrated.

With a lower degree, the study found a significant relationship between gender issues and respondents' willingness to work in tourism (attitude). Respondents showed negative perceptions to the women's work in tourism. This finding is consistent with the study [17] in Hong Kong. They referred to the difficulties that women face in a male-dominated environment. The most important finding in their study is that both men and women prefer male supervisors. Similar results were found in the study of Brownell [33] in the USA. Such a finding is normal in the current study since the negative perception towards the female position in tourism was found in western countries.

Awareness of tourism role/contribution is widely used as a predictor factor in tourism behavioral studies. The research argues that knowledge about tourism role would lead to positive attitudes to tourism. In fact, studies about residents' attitude towards tourism career have not used this factor, while this study has attempted to recognize a possible relationship between it and attitude. Though, the current study revealed an insignificant relationship between this factor and respondents' willingness to work in tourism. This finding is inconsistent with [22, 34] who argued that respondents who recognized the important role of tourism perceived it positively. However, the nine items concerning awareness of tourism contribution deal with general benefits of tourism (e.g. Supporting the local economy, improving the public services, improving the infrastructure...) and not personal benefits. This may be the reason behind the weak relationship between this factor and attitude towards tourism careers.

## CONCLUSION

Within the high acceleration of tourism development in Aqaba, the need for qualified staff is becoming a necessity. As part of tourism sustainability, promoting tourism careers for local residents is a planning priority. The findings of this study need to be seriously considered by addressing decision makers in Aqaba authority. The study attempted to deal with three questions regarding the way respondents perceive tourism careers, the relationship between their perception and attitude towards tourism careers and the relationship between residents' awareness of tourism contribution/role and attitude towards tourism careers. As the study respondents were somewhat willing to work in tourism sector and regardless any possible interpretation, the supportive factors that enhance this attitude should be taken into consideration. This recommendation relates to other studies' findings. For example, it was found that religion is strongly associated with respondents' attitude. This means that if a respondent believe that tourism jobs interfere with religion, he would refuse to work in tourism. Here, local planners are asked to promote that the Islamic religion is not opposed to travel and tourism industry [34]. The same challenge would appear with the social image regarding tourism careers. If the community culture is difficult to change in a short time, promoting the important role of tourism could be the pathway to enhance the positive image of tourism careers. Government awareness campaigns oriented to parents and schools are part of the solution. Further, part-time jobs in hotels for school and university students could be arranged between the local authority (ASEZA) and the hotel sector during the holiday. This would also change the community bad image about women and tourism jobs. This is necessary since female employees in Aqaba hotels do not exceed 4% of the total employees there [27].

The current study contributes significantly to existing knowledge on attitude towards tourism careers. First, the previous studies undertake mainly students' perception towards tourism careers, while this study recognizes the role of other parties of community (e.g. parents) in affecting clearly the young peoples' behavior. Second, it is one of the few studies that makes an integration of the four domains. Third, in addition to the past literature, other criteria in selecting some of the questionnaire items was the appropriateness to the societal and religious characteristics of the study area (e.g. *For females, tourism careers create problems for being married and As employees in tourism, we have to serve non-halal food and beverage*). Forth, the study is

the first about residents' attitude towards tourism careers in this under-researched area. For future research, the current study suggests using a developed theoretical framework for more meaningful and interpreted results. A good example in this context is the use of social exchange theory that relates the personal benefits from tourism to the attitude. For the same purpose, studying the relationships between the respondents' personal profile and their attitude could be beneficial.

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