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Perceived brand salience and destination brand loyalty from international tourists' perspectives: the case of Dead Sea destination, Jordan

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine an integrated model of perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality, perceived brand image and perceived brand loyalty in the Dead Sea tourism destination of Jordan from international tourists' perspectives.

Design/methodology/approach – A structured and self-administered survey was employed targeting international tourists who were visiting the Dead Sea tourism destination. The authors delivered 300 questionnaires to international tourists, from which 237 were retained and valid for the analysis. A series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses was used to assess the research constructs dimensions, unidimensionality, validity and composite reliability. Structural path analysis was also used to test the hypothesized relationships of the research model.

Findings – The structural findings show that perceived brand salience has positively and significantly affected each of perceived brand quality and perceived destination loyalty. Perceived brand quality has positively and significantly affected each of perceived brand image-physical environment, perceived brand image-people characteristics and perceived destination loyalty. Each of perceived brand image-physical environment and perceived brand image-people characteristics has positively and significantly affected perceived destination loyalty. The structural findings indicate that perceived brand quality has exerted the strongest effect on each of perceived brand image-physical environment and perceived brand image-people characteristics. Further, the structural results show that R^2 result of 0.48 indicates that 48 per cent of variation in perceived destination loyalty was caused by perceived brand quality, perceived brand image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) and perceived brand salience path.

Research limitations/implications – This paper has examined only three drivers of destination loyalty; meanwhile, other factors such as tourists' satisfaction and retention are potential areas of future research. Also, this study investigated international tourists' perspectives in the Dead Sea tourism destination only, which means that its generalization potential to other destinations is limited. Therefore, comparative studies inside and outside Jordan's tourism destinations are potential areas of future research. Other limitations and future research areas are also outlined.

Practical implications – The paper highlights the strategic importance of perceived brand quality and perceived brand image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) on perceived destination loyalty. Perceived brand quality acts as strong antecedent to perceived brand image dimensions, and perceived brand salience is an essential element of perceived destination loyalty. Perceived brand quality, perceived brand image dimensions and perceived brand salience are major drivers of perceived brand destination in an integrated manner. Also, perceived brand image dimensions of the physical environment and people friendless and kindness are also vital for creating perceived destination loyalty. Further, an integrated model of perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality, perceived brand image dimensions and destination loyalty is required by tourism organizations operating in the Dead Sea destination to win international tourists now and in the future.

Originality/value – This paper represents an early attempt to reveal and examine potential drivers of perceived destination loyalty in the Dead Sea, Jordan. Accordingly, it should shed more light into the

strategic role of perceived brand quality, perceived brand salience and perceived brand image dimensions and how they affect perceived destination loyalty. Further, the paper is the first of its kind that investigated an integrated model of perceived brand salience and perceived destination loyalty via perceived brand quality and image dimensions from international tourist perspectives in Jordan. The main issue here is that tourism organizations operating in the Dead Sea tourism destination have now valuable empirical evidence concerning the drivers of perceived destination loyalty from international tourists' perspectives.

Introduction

The field of tourism marketing is composed of firms that appeal to customers in their desire to travel to distant destinations. Yet, it is also composed of the country awareness seeking to attract tourists to stimulate the domestic economy. Tourism is now recognized to be among the most important growing sector in today's modern economies and critically important to many regions. As a crucial part of tourism marketing, destination brand loyalty has not been thoroughly investigated (Oppermann, 2000). More studies are called on destination brand loyalty to have a greater depth and knowledge of this concept in various tourism contexts with focus on understanding the role of perceived brand salience, perceived brand image and perceived brand quality in developing a destination brand loyalty. Furthermore, branding is the set of marketing activities that support the creation of brand equity, which consists of constructs such as brand loyalty, brand salience, brand quality and brand image in a market (Emari, 2012). These constructs may be used to explore consumer behavior research in relation to branding strategies (Kim *et al.*, 2008). Destination branding has emerged as an important component of promotional strategies by firms and countries alike. The destination brand is a type of brand that emerges out of largely random or unplanned processes (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Kay and Wang, 2011; Saraniemi, 2011). The formation of a destination brand depends upon random historical factors, such as the presence of national monuments, museums, the incidence of historical events, the presence of sports teams, types of appealing commercial activities, cultural attractions, the beauty of natural physical terrain and even the weather. As such, a destination brand consists of a cluster of dissimilar factors.

Although previous research (Oppermann, 2000; Faullant *et al.*, 2008; Pike *et al.*, 2010; Saraniemi, 2011; Guercini and Ranfagni, 2013) has examined the relationship between perceived brand salience and perceived brand destination loyalty, there has been only limited investigation into the impact of perceived brand salience on this relationship including perceived brand image and perceived brand quality. The reviewed literature suggests that perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality, perceived brand image and perceived destination loyalty are linked; yet, these studies tend to focus predominantly on demographic differences of tourists rather than investigating the complex relationships among these constructs (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Kay and Wang, 2011; Saraniemi, 2011; Guercini and Ranfagni, 2013; Herstein *et al.*, 2014). Further, little or no emphasis has been placed on the tourist's perceptions of the factors of a destination brand that might lead to destination brand loyalty (Faullant *et al.*, 2008; Pike *et al.*, 2010). A perceived destination brand has a complex set of components among various relationships which interact in a complex way to provide a better understanding of drivers of destination loyalty. Specifically, these relationships could be between perceived brand salience and each of perceived brand quality, perceived brand image and perceived brand loyalty. Drawing on this understanding, it is difficult for firms to manage or precisely control the perception of destination brands without a deeper understanding of the relationships with other drivers of destination brand loyalty.

Our research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by examining the impact of destination brand salience on each of perceived brand quality, perceived brand image and

perceived destination brand loyalty. Furthermore, this research further examines the impact of perceived brand image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) on perceived destination brand loyalty. Therefore, the empirical validation of the application of perceived brand salience on the perceived brand loyalty directly and through using perceived brand image and perceived brand quality has enriched our understanding of destination brand loyalty in tourism literature. Therefore, integrated frameworks to the study of destination brands need to be developed to cope with place branding problems that have emerged in various tourism settings. The present research provides an empirical examination of the international tourists visiting the Dead Sea tourism destination in Jordan, focusing on a set of activities, facilities, services and perceptions of them offered by local firms and the country (e.g. travel agencies, tour operators, governmental agencies). The main aim is to improve the management of international tourism organizations in Jordan. It can also provide several suggestions to both public and private sectors, as it could contribute to improving tourists' loyalty and encouraging more visits to the country under study, Jordan. The Dead Sea tourism destination of Jordan was selected for conducting our study, as it is one of the most reputable national tourism destinations. Also, the Dead Sea destination is globally recognized and well-positioned on the World's Tourism Map for different types of tourism and purposes. The historical and strategic importance of the Dead Sea, as a reputable brand destination, is explained in the next section.

The next section describes the literature review for this research. An integrative model is presented, based on which the research hypotheses are developed in Section 3. The research methodology is explained in Section 4. Results and discussion are displayed in Sections 5. In the final section, conclusions and contributions and the study limitations as well as possible future research are provided.

The Dead Sea of Jordan: a distinguished brand destination

The Dead Sea history

Dead Sea, also known as Bahr Lut, Eastern Sea, Lake of Asphalt, Salt Sea, "Sea of Sodom and Gomorrah", Sea of the Arabah, Sea of the Devil, "Sea of the Plain", Sea of Zoar or Stinking Lake. The Dead Sea is located in 80 km southeast from Jerusalem and 210 km south of the Sea of Galilee. Only about 2 inches of rainfall each year. The Dead Sea is 50 km long and 16 km wide. The shore is 394 m below sea level and is 396 m deep. Around 50,000 years ago, it was part of a long entrance that extended all of the way to the Red Sea in the south.

Because of its low elevation and its position in a deep basin, the climate of the Dead Sea area is unusual. Its very high evaporation does produce a haze; yet, its atmospheric humidity is low. Adjacent areas to it are very arid and favorable for the preservation of materials like the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea originally stretched the entire 360 km from Aqaba, in the south, to Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee) in the north. The therapeutic water of the Dead Sea has fascinated people to live. There are over 200 archaeological sites that have been discovered so far in the Dead Sea destination (http://atheism.about.com/od/bibleplacescities/p/DeadSea.htm).

The Dead Sea as a tourism destination

Tourists that visited Jordan in the year 2013 from foreign countries total about 5,388,917; this number was 6,314,250 in 2012, which indicates a decline in the number of tourists visiting Jordan. Visitors come to Jordan from all over the world from different continents such as Africa, America, Asia, Europe and the Arab countries. Visits heading to the Maghtas site in the year 2013, excluding Jordanians, are 76,386, with the greatest number coming from Europe in the first place with 28,356 tourists, then the Americas with 13,743 tourists and, then, the rest of the countries. The number of total nights spent by tourists at different stars hotels at the Dead Sea is 336,915, knowing that there are six five-star hotels and two four-star hotels. In the years 2012-2013, the high seasoned months at the Maghtas

region were April with about 10,773 visitors and October with about 9,945, then comes March with 8,327 visitors, November with 7,688 visitors and May with 7,470; the number of visitors for the rest of the months varies between 4,000 and 5,500 (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2014).

As many people are adopting healthier lifestyles, the popularity of spa vacations and health retreats have increased dramatically. Because of its strategic and convenient location in the middle of the world, along with being the saltiest and lowest point on the face of earth, the Dead Sea has become a unique tourism destination for international tourists. The leading attraction at the Dead Sea is its convenient warm climate around the year, the warm super salty water, the rich black mud which has "a long lasting positive therapeutic effect on dermatological diseases" and the extraordinary effortless floating experience. The various experiences that tourists can live in the Dead Sea region include the following:

■ *Fun and adventure tourism*: The Jordan Valley region is the most appropriate place for fun activities; these activities include outdoor hiking, leisure walks in nature and others such as horseback riding.

■ *Eco, nature, history and cultural tourism*: The old history of the Jordan Valley which is part of a rift valley joining Turkey to East Africa, which is formed by several destructions from many years ago. The Dead Sea stretches 360 km from Aqaba, from the South of Jordan to the lake of Tiberias (The Lake of Galilee in the North). The property of the therapeutic water of the Dead Sea in combination with the valley's fertile land and warm climate have attracted people since the Stone Age to live, hunt and farm.

■ *Leisure and wellness tourism*: The Dead Sea has been popular by providing spa benefits from its properties and attributes. Its relaxing sun radiation and climatic conditions, oxygen-rich atmosphere, thermo-mineral springs, mineral-rich sea salt and mineral-rich mud provide a medical treatment and therapeutic benefits, attracting visitors from all over the world.

■ *Religion and faith tourism*: For Christians, this land is holy because it is the place where God spoke to Moses and gave his ten commandments and where Jesus was baptized by John. Many of the sites are also holy for Muslims; many of them visit the tombs of Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) venerable companions and military leaders who fell in battle or became victims of the Great Plague (Amwas Plague) in the 18th year after the Hijra. These companions are Abu Ubeida Amer Bin Al-Jarrah, Abu Ubeida Amer Bin Al-Jarrah, Shurhabil Bin Hasanah, Amir Bin Abi Waqqas and Derar Bin Al-Azwar.

■ *Conferences and events tourism*: Its reputation as regional peacemaker – Jordan hosts high political and corporate meetings and conferences in the Dead Sea. Its excellent hotels and conference centers, equipped with the latest amenities provide successful events.

Therefore, the strategic importance of Dead Sea region, as a tourism destination, stems from being one of the world's leading and most unique and natural healing sites for treatment, rehabilitation and recreation. Consequently, investigating international tourists' brand loyalty is crucial to develop tourism and marketing strategies that should result in improving socio-economic impact for the Dead Sea destination and its people. Hundreds of thousands of visitors come to the Dead Sea every year from around the globe, to combine between fun and relaxing vacation along with a health and wellness tourism experience. Investing in the area and providing good roads and a variety of good hotels and facilitated areas make the Dead Sea an appealing destination for today's international visitors and would increase the number of visitors in the future (http://international.visitjordan.com/Wheretogo/thedeadsea).

Literature review

Destination branding is the set of marketing activities that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark and destination differentiation (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998; Blain

et al., 2005). Also, it conveys the expectation of a memorable travel experience with the destination, serves to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination and reduces consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities should serve creating a destination image and destination quality that positively affects consumer destination choice. Further, destination brand equity is reflected as perceptual equity by the use of perceived brand salience, perceived brand image and perceived brand quality, and indicates a destination brand loyalty as one of the consequences of perceptual equity (Boo *et al.*, 2009; Konecnik, 2010; Lim and Weaver, 2014). Indeed, the more organizations provide satisfaction to targeted customers, the more this will increase their destination brand loyalty, thus, attracting more customers in the future through increasing purchase intentions (Akroush, 2012; Kim *et al.*, 2013).

The limitation in the conceptualization of destination brand highlighted by previous studies (Pike, 2002, 2009; Pike *et al.*, 2010; Pike and Page, 2014) reveals a lack of consensus related to the constructs that may better explain destination brand loyalty. Destination image is an important concept in understanding the destination selection process from tourists' perspectives and in the determination of destination positioning strategy (Son, 2011; Lim and Weaver, 2014; Stepchenkova and Li, 2014). Therefore, destination brand image is defined as a set of consumer perceptions from the consumer's point of view (San Martín and Rodriguez, 2008). Earlier, Bigné *et al.* (2001) argued that destination image is the subjective interpretation of reality by the tourist. The image tourists have of a destination is largely subjective because it is based on the perceptions each tourist has of all of the destinations they have been to or have heard of. Having said that, perceived brand salience (Hankinson, 2005; Boo *et al.*, 2009), brand image and brand quality (Hankinson, 2005; Konecnik, 2010) are found to have relationships with destination brand loyalty.

Perceived destination brand loyalty

Destination brand loyalty has become one of the most vital tourism marketing strategic elements that is linked to organizational performance and destination reputation in many countries and tourism places. Destination brand loyalty measurement has recently been highlighted by theoretical and empirical research, primarily because loyalty is seen as a better predictor of actual behavior (Lopez-Toro *et al.*, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2013). The degree of a tourist's brand loyalty to a destination is reflected in his/her intentions to revisit the destination and also to recommend this place or site (Oppermann, 2000; Faullant, *et al.*, 2008). According to Pike, *et al.* (2010), brand loyalty represents the level of attachment to the destination. This can be viewed in terms of visitation, intent to visit and word-of-mouth referrals to others.

Customer's loyalty has been highlighted by many researchers as an important driver of future stability and growth of any organization (Kumar and Lim, 2008; Vinh and Long, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the success of a destination strongly depends on a thorough analysis of tourist motivations and on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). It is true that the determinants of customer loyalty are based on the customer satisfaction that has been regarded as major driver of loyalty in relation to the availability of destination image (Sou and Wu, 2008; Alexandris *et al.*, 2008). The other variable of word-of-mouth is one of the most important forms of loyalty as new customers may be attracted by recommendations of others (Faullant *et al.*, 2008). Owing to the personalized transmission of word-of-mouth to the recipient and the content of personal experiences, it is seen as a more trustworthy source of information in consumers' decision-making process (Swan and Oliver, 1989). This sheds light on the way that a customer receives the service delivery, and tends to contribute some of the time to a service-related information search (Yang *et al.*, 2014). Once the customer is satisfied with the service, he/she will repeat the process and, hence, form loyalty; as the frequency of repurchasing intensifies, the chance of searching for alternatives decreases. A brand which triggers emotions is most likely to have an influence on creating consumer experience, resulting in a purchase, and if

justifying expectations, making brand loyalty. Furthermore, tourist satisfaction contributes to longer stay ratios, loyalty and increased spending (Lopez-Toro *et al.*, 2010). As the number of tourists increases, tourism income increases, and so does the achievement of goals for organizations and governments alike.

Perceived brand salience

Recently, there have been calls for the consideration of building brand salience as an outcome of effective advertising (Ehrenberg *et al.*, 2000), as well as discussion of the role of brand salience from a brand management perspective (Keller and Davey, 2001; Romaniuk, 2002; Pike *et al.*, 2010). The concept of salience is most commonly associated with the ability of an item to "stand out" from its environment or background (Guido, 1998). Saliency refers to the fact that not all of a person's beliefs stand out with equal prominence in his/her cognitive field. This "prominence", from a cognitive perspective, is typically translated to accessibility from long-term memory (Guido, 1998). The salience of local attractions has not been specifically studied from a destination branding perspective. Branding theory suggests that awareness is an especially important initial factor to positive brand decisions (Keller, 2003; Kapferer, 2004). Yet, brands are subject to complex cognitive processing; the development of a brand's favorability due to salience, in contrast to other preference factors, needs to be examined. Brand salience is the foundation of the hierarchy, and is the strength of the destination's presence in the mind of the target when a given travel context is considered (Pike *et al.*, 2010). Brand salience is defined as the propensity of the brand to be thought of by buyers (i.e. "stand out" from memory) in buying situations (Romaniuk and Sharp, 2004), with the aim being to be remembered for the reasons intended rather than just achieve general awareness (Aaker, 1996). Brand salience has often been neglected in favor of concepts such as brand attitude, image and equity. It is also due to salience being conceptualized simply as "top of mind" awareness. It assumes that the product category cue is the only mechanism for buyers to think of the brand in buying and media consumption situations. However, research regarding how information in memory is accessed suggests that this implicit assumption is not valid. Recalling brands from memory does not just depend on a single cue (the product category) and noticing a brand is more than simply recognizing it (linking the name to the product category). Therefore, it seems timely to re-examine what the concept of brand salience should mean in a marketing context and the implications for measurement (Guido, 1998; Pike *et al.*, 2010). This will allow researchers to examine empirically the contribution of brand salience to the understanding and prediction of buyer behavior in relation to brand quality and image in international tourism.

Perceived brand quality

Destination brand quality is defined as "consumer perception from total quality of a product than others' options" (Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived brand quality is also defined as the "perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service relative to relevant alternatives and with respect to its intended purpose" (Keller, 2003, p. 238). The term of quality is a very subjective, but it can be made operational through a variety of scale measures, as can all the other brand equity dimensions (Konecnik, 2010). Perceived brand quality is a competitive necessity, and brand quality is concerned with perceptions of the quality of a destination's infrastructure, hospitality service and amenities such as accommodation (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Stepchenkova and Li, 2014). Destination brand quality refers to perceptions of quality of the facilities and non-physical aspects of the destinations. Customer perceptions of brand quality are important to successful destination marketing because of their influence on destination selection, the products' consumption and the decision to return to a destination (Kim *et al.*, 2013). Previous research reports that elements of perceived quality, such as destination infrastructure, impact brand performance have a crucial effect of destination brand loyalty (Buhalis, 2000). Perceived brand quality brings value to consumers including a reason to buy and differentiating the

brand from competing brands in the markets. A few previous studies have investigated the topic of destination brand quality (Murphy *et al.*, 2000; Buhalis, 2000; Pike *et al.*, 2010). This is interesting because the overall evaluation of a tourist's destination is a combination of services, goods and experiences, which is a vital element affecting consumer behavior in their decisions.
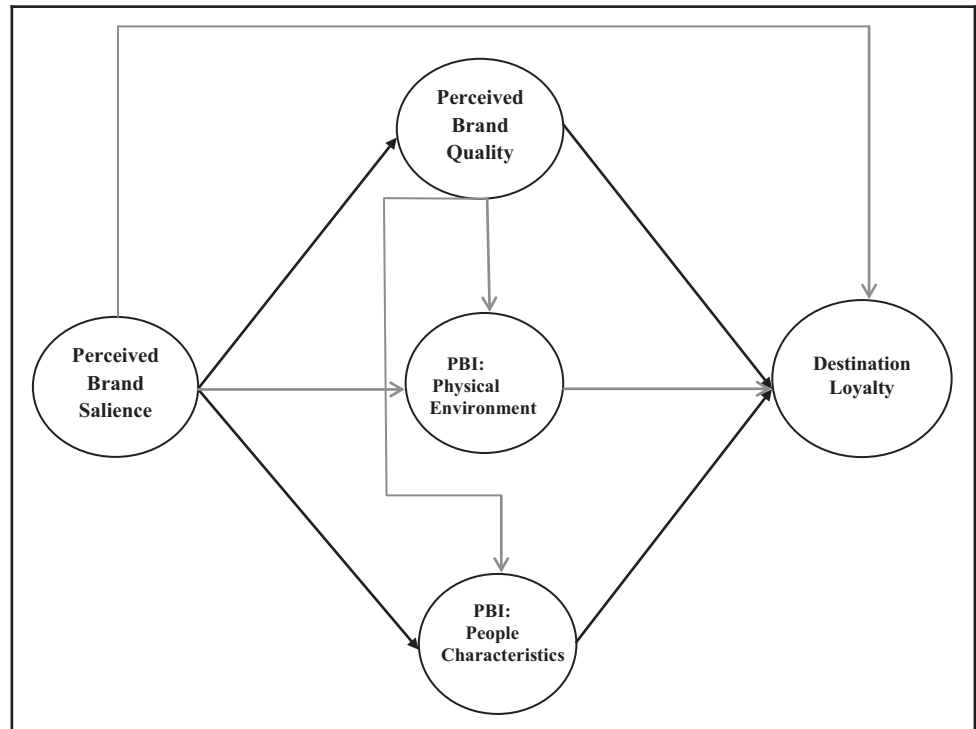
Perceived brand image

The concept of destination brand image is defined as an individual's overall perception or the total set of impressions of a place (Hunt, 1975). Earlier, Crompton (1979) conceptualized brand destination image as the sum of cognitive beliefs and affective impressions that an individual possesses of a particular destination. Brand image represents the perceptions attached to the destination (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Herstein *et al.*, 2014). Customers' expectations depend on the organization and/or the country image such that companies with good corporate image may influence the way the customers perceive their products and the value perception (Guercini and Ranfagni, 2013). According to Gunn (1988) and Hanlan and Kelly (2005), a destination image can be identified by any individual even though the individual has no intention to travel to the destination, whereas travel information can be conducted by tourists to gain specific image when they have a specific intention to visit the destination. According to Hankinson (2005), there are five categories of brand image attributes: economic, physical environment, activities and facilities, brand attitudes and people characteristics. The research works of Gunn (1988) and Fakeye and Crompton (1991) argued that individuals hold of a particular destination in the tourism industry, which consists of non-tourism information (i.e. geography books, television reports or magazine articles), of tourism-specific information (i.e. destination brochure or vacation Web site) and of a result of direct experience of the destination. Further, the two studies of Baloglu and McCleary (1999a, 1999b) highlighted that the focus should be more on the destination image of cognitive factors (the estimation process for tourism site selection), affective factors (the beliefs and attitudes of the target destination) and conative factors (the final choice of one's destination).

Consequently, although the contribution of many prior studies (Pritchard and Morgan's, 1998; Keller, 2003; Aaker, 1996; Konecnik and Go, 2008; McCartney *et al.*, 2008; Balakrishnan, 2009; Pike *et al.*, 2010; Guercini and Ranfagni, 2013; Herstein *et al.*, 2014) is noticeable, the field of destination branding is still considered to be in its formative years, particularly in relation to the wider branding literature that recently emerged. Many studies have called for a paradigm shift to the quest of brand loyalty as a strategic business goal (Reichheld, 1996; Oliver, 1999; Pike *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, there have been few empirical studies devoted to testing the destination branding in relation to tourists perceived brand salience, brand quality, brand image and destination loyalty; yet, these studies tend to focus predominantly on demographic differences of tourists. Little or no emphasis has been placed on the tourist's perceptions of the factors of destination brand that might lead to destination brand loyalty. Based on relevant literature review the research objectives are as follows:

- to examine the effect of perceived brand salience on each of perceived brand quality, perceived brand image dimensions and perceived destination loyalty;

- to examine the effect of perceived brand quality on each of perceived brand image dimensions and perceived destination loyalty;

- to examine the effect of brand image dimensions on perceived destination loyalty; and

- to provide tourism organizations in Jordan with strategic insights regarding the factors that affect perceived destination loyalty with focus on the Dead Sea destination (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Research proposed model

Hypotheses development

Perceived brand salience refers to whether or not buyers recall the brand first when asked to name brands from a given product category. Thus, it is frequently used either interchangeably with or as a subset of brand awareness (Keller, 1993), rather than being considered as a stand-alone concept. Previous studies demonstrate that consumers actively consider between two and four brands in their decision set (Pike *et al.*, 2010). It is proposed that membership in a consumer's decision set for a given travel context, elicited through unaided awareness, which represents a source of competitive advantage. Therefore, destination brand awareness and recognition are vital for tourists during the decision-making process of choosing a destination. Previous research suggests that perceived salience affects perceived brand quality (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Kay and Wang, 2011; Saraniemi, 2011; Guercini and Ranfagni, 2013; Herstein *et al.*, 2014). Thus, based on the discussed literature, we hypothesize as follows:

H1. Perceived brand salience has a positive effect on perceived brand quality.

Destination brand salience is largely about having a chance of being thought of (are you likely to notice or retrieve the brand in that buying situation?). Brand salience has an effective role during the selection from the options that the buyer is considering. That is, brand salience also has a positive influence on that brand being selected from that set of considered options, when more than one brand presents its image to the customer (Macdonald and Sharp, 2000; Hankinson, 2005). When the brand is retrieved, the customer also gets some sense of how much they know about the brand. This provides a sense of assurance that the brand will be appropriate for the situation. Thus, brand salience provides a further benefit by then making the brand, once thought of, more likely to be chosen. When a customer perceives the performance of a service to be equal to or higher than his expectations, the same customer will be satisfied having a positive image as an international tourist. A greater awareness and brand salience will enhance the brand image of a destination in tourism industry. The work of Fakeye and Crompton (1991) compared

differences in destination image among three groups of non-visitors, first-timers and repeaters. They examined five cognitive destination image factors:

1. social opportunities and attractions;

2. natural and cultural amenities;

3. accommodations, transportation and infrastructure;

4. food and friendly people; and

5. evening entertainment.

In the same vein, Etchner and Ritchie (1991) recognized that destination image had both physical (e.g. scenery, infrastructure, facilities, activities and accommodations) and people characteristics (e.g. friendly people, feeling and atmosphere). The physical aspect was related to tangibility (i.e. cognitive), and the people characteristics included intangible aspects (i.e. affective). Furthermore, Obenour et al. (2005) developed a destination image scale that included six cognitive image dimensions: priority, attractiveness for overnights, resources, facilities, peripheral attractiveness and reputation. Therefore, perceived brand image consists of two themes of physical environment and people characteristics. Previous research has found a positive relationship between the perceived brand salience and perceived destination image (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Etchner and Ritchie, 1991; Hankinson, 2005; Obenour et al., 2005). Thus, based on the discussed literature, we can hypothesize as follows:

H2. Perceived brand salience has a positive effect on perceived brand image-physical environment.

H3. Perceived brand salience has a positive effect on perceived brand image-people characteristics.

Buyers show a degree of loyalty in that they happily adopt restricted repertoires of brands (Ehrenberg et al., 2000). This is evident even in "involving" or high-value choices. Even those buyers who actively "research the market" typically only evaluate a tiny fraction of the available offers (Pike et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2013). Previous research suggests an indirect relationship between destination brand salience and destination brand loyalty for short haul destinations (Boo et al., 2009). Perceived destination brand salience is in relation with perceived brand quality and brand image (Hankinson, 2005). Destination brand salience will positively influence destination brand loyalty for short and long haul visitors. Yet, we predict that destination brand salience will be stronger for short haul travelers, due to the geographical proximity. Thus, we can hypothesize as follows:

H4. Perceived brand salience has a positive effect on perceived destination brand loyalty.

Destination image is a self-analysis process towards branding (Konecnik, 2004). Therefore, considering the images in the target market (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007) is an important step in the branding process including the brand quality as a vital input. However, few frameworks encompass the destination brand building process and have incorporated image evaluation or image building as part of the process. When an organization has a high-quality image, it should have no problem positioning its own products or brands at a premium level (Kim et al., 2013). Therefore, perceived brand quality is a key driver for the success of tourism branding and positively affects perceived brand image dimensions (Atilgan et al., 2003; Herstein et al., 2014). Thus, we can hypothesize that the following:

H5. Perceived brand quality has a positive effect on perceived brand image-physical environment.

H6. Perceived brand quality has a positive effect on perceived brand image-people characteristics.

Perceived brand quality is a key dimension of brand equity for product manufacturers and service providers (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003). Further, perceived brand quality has been found to positively relate to brand loyalty (Boo et al., 2009). Customer loyalty is important for both the firm and the customer (Tarus and Rabach, 2013). Further, loyal customers are willing to make repeat purchases in the business that delivers value beyond their expectation. Thus, we propose that destination brand infrastructure elements of quality will positively influence destination brand loyalty for short and long haul travelers. Thus, we can hypothesize that the following:

> H7. Perceived brand quality has a positive effect on perceived destination brand loyalty.

The destination image consists of cognitive and affective factors. Gartner (1993) explained the component of cognitive image as the evaluation of the known attributes of the product according to facts and the component of affective image as the relations to motives. The holistic perceived brand image reflects the essence of the brand, including functional and symbolic image attributes, in addition, to a global impression about a destination (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a; Morgan et al., 2002). Brand experience a broader assessment of the brand, and the brand provides a gestalt. Brand experience includes special feelings, emotions, cognitive and behavioral reactions that are being told by consumers. Brand is the scale of final four aspects of sensory, emotional, intellectual and behavioral brand experience (Barnes et al., 2014). Therefore, a hierarchical relationship exists between the three components of a destination image where the affective is dependent on the cognitive, whereas the holistic is dependent on the other two components. This can create a long-term image for the tourism place in a nation where it positively influences visitor's actual consumption behavior (Murray and Vogel, 1997). The work of Stock (2009) provided four main issues on nations' images: first, to appeal to tourists; second, to add value to the products produced in the country; third, to attract foreign investment; and fourth, to attract talented residents. Segmenting the target markets is thus a core task in place branding. It is also important to evaluate brand image after having international tourists to satisfy them and gain their loyalty. Loyalty is both attitudinal in terms of intent to purchase and behavioral through word-of-mouth referrals and repeat purchase. Previous research suggests a positive relationship between brand image and destination loyalty (Pike et al., 2010; Lopez-Toro et al., 2010). Thus, we can hypothesize the following:

> H8. Perceived brand image-physical environment has a positive effect on perceived destination brand loyalty.

> H9. Perceived brand image-people characteristics have a positive effect on perceived destination brand loyalty.

Research methodology

Population and sample

The research population is all international tourists who visited the Dead Sea tourism destination during April-May 2014. The researchers encountered many difficulties to obtain contact details of international tourists visiting the Dead Sea tourism destination at that time. Therefore, a convenience sample from international tourists who were visiting the Dead Sea during April-May 2014 was drawn. The researchers attempted to have access to international tourists' contact details such as names and email addresses, but it was denied by the hotels due to confidentiality and privacy reasons. Consequently, five-star hotels located in the Dead Sea tourism destination were visited by the researchers and were asked to assist them to accomplish the data collection process. Hard copies of the research questionnaires were personally distributed to 300 international tourists by three of the researchers using the mall interception method. Therefore, the rationale of using the mall interception method at the five-star hotels in the Dead Sea tourism destination was threefold; first, lack of international tourists' contact details; second, the five-star hotels were cooperative adequately with the researchers to complete the data collection process

successfully; and third, each tourist of the research sample should be a tourist to the Dead Sea tourism destination to be included in the sample. Consistent with previous empirical research in the field of international tourism, the unit of analysis was "the international tourist" who was visiting the Dead Sea destination in Jordan. Therefore, 300 questionnaires were delivered to the international tourists and other hotels' touristic sites in the Dead Sea destination from which 237 questionnaires were returned and valid for the analysis. The high response rate, 79 per cent, is reasonable due to the personal data collection method which usually yields a high response rate.

Measurement items

The items measuring the chosen research constructs were adapted from prior related research in the field of perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality, perceived brand image and destination loyalty literature. Perceived brand salience was measured using a five-item scale derived from Pike *et al.* (2010). Perceived brand quality was measured using a six-item scale derived from Pike *et al.* (2010). Perceived brand image was measured using a six-item scale derived from Hankinson (2005), and brand loyalty was measured using a four-item scale derived from Pike *et al.* (2010). All the research constructs were measured on five-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 5 "strongly agree" to 1 "strongly disagree". A small section was also included in the questionnaire to study the respondents' characteristics. Table I shows constructs' measurement items and their sources of operationalization.

Questionnaire design, administration and data collection

A self-administered survey was developed and administered to international tourists who visited the Dead Sea tourism destination during April-May 2014 in Jordan. The questionnaire was designed via an iterative process that has been adapted from previous empirical research to generate its measurements and items. Although English language is widely spoken in Jordan, and by the majority of international tourists, the questionnaire was originally constructed in English and then translated into Arabic and Spanish languages based on the translation guidelines provided by Malhotra (2010). Then, two bilingual PhD holders in business and three research assistants who are familiar with the international tourism business culture translated our questionnaire from English to Arabic and Spanish. Then, back translation was employed until the final versions were produced in Arabic and Spanish. Finally, the English, Spanish and Arabic versions were piloted prior to the primary data collection process. Then, the three versions were offered to the respondents. Next, the survey instrument was piloted using 20 interviews with a judgmental sample of 20 international tourists to reveal their ability to understand it and to test its appropriateness for the research purposes. Also, two academic experts from reputable Jordanian universities examined the questionnaire for face and content validity purposes. Based on the guidelines recommended by Malhotra (2010), the pilot study was insightful upon which a number of amendments were carried out on the first draft of the questionnaire where every aspect (e.g. content, wording, design and layout) of the questionnaire was piloted. Confidentiality was assured to the respondents using two methods; first, they were assured of the confidentiality issue at the beginning of the questionnaire; and second, the data collection process was carried out personally by three of the researchers who assured the confidentiality issue during the process of delivering and returning the questionnaires. The questionnaires were personally delivered to 300 international tourists at international five-star hotels where the research objectives were explained to them. The data collection process was carried out through the personal delivery method using the personal interviews approach due to the fact that the researchers did not have access to international tourists' contact details and lists. Further, the personal delivery method is one of the best data collection methods that usually yields high response rate (Malhotra, 2010). The delivered questionnaires to the international tourists were 300 from which 237 were

Table I	Constructs measurements and items	
Constructs and items		*Sources of constructs operationalization*
Perceived brand salience		Pike *et al.* (2010)
PBS1	I believe the Dead Sea destination has a good name and reputation	
PBS2	The characteristics of the Dead Sea destination come to my mind quickly	
PBS3	When I am thinking of an international holiday, the Dead Sea destination comes to my mind immediately	
PBS4	The Dead Sea destination is very famous	
PBS5	I have seen a lot of advertising promoting the Dead Sea destination in my country	
Perceived brand quality		Pike *et al.* (2010)
PBQ1	Modern and technologically relevant vehicles were available	
PBQ2	The infrastructure is designed well and in high quality standards	
PBQ3	The meals that were served are of a high quality	
PBQ4	The accommodation and facilities were appealing and in good design	
PBQ5	Physical appearance of the hotel I stayed in and tours escort were tidy and clean	
PBQ6	Personal safety was considered as a major aspect in every service provided	
Perceived brand image		Hankinson (2005)
PBI1	The Dead Sea destination environment is attractive	
PBI2	It is easy to access historical and touristic places in the Dead Sea destination	
PBI3	I enjoyed the style of buildings in the Dead Sea destination	
PBI4	I think there is a good transportation in the Dead Sea destination	
PBI5	The residents of the Dead Sea destination are friendly	
PBI6	The residents of the Dead Sea destination are good and welcoming to tourists	
Perceived destination loyalty		Pike *et al.* (2010)
PDL1	I intend visiting the Dead Sea destination in the future	
PDL2	The Dead Sea destination would be my first choice for a vacation in the region	
PDL3	The Dead Sea destination provides more benefits than other destinations in the region	
PDL4	I would advise/recommend other people to visit the Dead Sea destination	

returned yielding a response rate of 79 per cent. The valid and usable questionnaires for the data analysis process were 237.

Research sample demographic profile

Table II exhibits the research sample demographics. Table II shows that the vast majority of the international tourists are young, educated with middle monthly income. Also, the great majority of them traveled from Europe and Middle East and can be described as regular travelers, as they travel frequently on yearly basis. Further, slightly less than two-thirds of the international tourists visited the Dead Sea destination for leisure purposes. Finally, almost two-thirds of them knew about the Dead Sea destination through television ads and word-of-mouth, which indicates the strategic importance of these two promotional tools in designing tourism marketing communications strategy to attract international tourists.

Table II	Tourists demographic profile		
Measure	*Items*	*Frequency*	*(%)*
Gender	Male	109	46.0
	Female	128	54.0
Age	20-30 years	98	41.4
	31-40 years	85	35.9
	41-50 years	34	14.3
	51 years and above	20	8.4
Monthly income	1,000-2,000$	115	48.5
	2,001-4,000$	66	27.8
	4,001-6,000$	29	12.2
	>6,000$	27	11.4
Marital status	Single	119	50.2
	Married	107	45.1
	Divorced	10	4.2
	Widow	1	0.4
Education	High school	34	14.3
	Two years college	24	10.1
	Bachelor's degree	118	49.8
	Graduate studies	57	24.1
	Other	3	1.7
Nationality	Europe	98	41.4
	Far East	10	4.2
	Middle East	92	38.8
	USA	23	9.7
	Africa	1	0.4
	Australia	12	5.1
	South America	1	0.4
How many times do you travel abroad?	Do not travel on yearly basis	19	8.0
	1-2 times a year	115	48.5
	3-4 times a year	57	24.1
	>4 times a year	46	19.4
Reason of visiting the Dead Sea?	Leisure	151	63.7
	Business	11	4.6
	Medical	8	3.4
	Bundled package	47	19.8
	Other	20	8.4
How did you know about the Dead Sea?	Television	62	26.2
	Friends/family/relatives	97	40.9
	Internet	20	8.4
	Social media	7	3.0
	Magazines/newspapers	9	3.8
	Other	42	17.7

Constructs validity and composite reliability

The validity of the research instrument was assessed through face, content, convergent and discriminant validity. The face validity was assessed through the pilot work of the research instrument with 20 international tourists as well as two academic experts from reputable business schools who checked the relevance and appropriateness of the questionnaire to achieve the research objectives. Content validity is evidenced by explaining the methodology used to develop the research questionnaire (Churchill, 2001), which included the following:

■ examining the previous empirical and theoretical work of tourism service quality, brand image and brand loyalty; and

■ conducting the pilot study before starting the fieldwork. With regard to construct validity, as recommended by Hair *et al.* (1998), exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are used to assess construct validity.

Thus, EFA was performed to test the unidimensionality of the research constructs so as to examine the degree to which the items are tapping to the same concept. Also, CFA,

derived from structural equation modeling (SEM), is a more rigorous test of unidimensionality (Garver and Mentzer, 1999, p. 40). Thus, CFA was utilized to confirm and sometimes to refine the unidimensionality of measurements that resulted from the EFA. To assess the EFA, five commonly used assumptions were followed (Hair *et al.*, 1998; Field, 2000), as shown in Table III. Statistical Package for Social Sciences software was used to conduct EFA. To assess the CFA, guidelines and goodness of measurement model fit using SEM were followed (Chau, 1997, p. 318; Hair *et al.*, 1998), as shown in Table IV.

All the items measuring the research constructs were subject to EFA so as to reveal their unidimensionality. The results of EFA suggested that factor analysis is appropriate for analyzing the data given the values of the five assumptions of EFA were met, as shown in Table III. Because of the fact that the eigenvalue is greater than 1, a five-factor model was derived that explains 67.2 per cent of the total variance. The EFA results reveal that the five factors are perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality, perceived brand image (two dimensions) and destination quality. Also, the EFA results indicate that the six items of

Table III	EFA results				
EFA indicators		*EFA indicators: cut-off points*		*EFA results*	
Testing for multicollinearity or singularity: determinant of R-matrix		Determinant > 0.00001		Determinant = 0.0005	
Measure of sampling adequacy: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)		KMO > 0.50		KMO = 0.82	
Measure of sampling adequacy: Bartlett's test of sphericity		χ^2: $p \leq 0.05$		χ^2: 2,133, $p = 0.000$	
Factor extracting (retention) method: principal component factor analysis		Eigenvalues > 1		Five factors extracted	
Factor analysis rotation: independent factors		Orthogonal – Varimax: it simplifies the interpretation of factors		Five factors extracted	
EFA factor loadings		Loading > 0.40		0.52 – 0.83	
Extraction of sum square loadings					
			EFA factor loadings		
Constructs and items	*Factor 1*	*Factor 2*	*Factor 3*	*Factor 4*	*Factor 5*
Perceived destination loyalty					
PDL1	0.68				
PDL2	0.72				
PDL3	0.67				
PDL4	0.68				
Perceived brand salience					
PBS1		0.58			
PBS2		0.60			
PBS3		0.73			
PBS4		0.82			
PBS5		0.75			
Perceived brand image: physical environment					
PBI1			0.73		
PBI2			0.66		
PBI3			0.71		
PBI4			0.61		
Perceived brand image: people characteristics					
PBI5				0.82	
PBI6				0.83	
Perceived brand quality					
PBQ1					0.56
PBQ2					0.58
PBQ3					0.76
PBQ4					0.80
PBQ5					0.52
Total variance explained by a five-factor model			67.2%		
Eigen-values	7.01	2.20	1.28	1.20	1.07

Table IV	CFA: fit indices, factor loadings, CRs and AVEs		
Constructs and items	CFA factors loadings	CR	AVE
Perceived destination loyalty			
PDL1	0.74	0.82	0.54
PDL2	0.84		
PDL3	0.75		
PDL4	0.70		
Perceived brand salience			
PBS1	0.61	0.81	0.52
PBS2	0.63		
PBS3	0.80		
PBS4	0.66		
PBS5	0.75		
Perceived brand image: physical environment			
PBI1	0.77	0.80	0.54
PBI2	0.71		
PBI3	0.75		
PBI4	0.70		
Perceived brand image: people characteristics			
PBI5	0.92	0.93	0.87
PBI6	0.93		
Perceived brand quality			
PBQ1	0.66	0.82	0.53
PBQ2	0.74		
PBQ3	0.80		
PBQ4	0.68		
PBQ5	0.65		

	CFA model goodness-of-fit indices		
Model goodness-of-fit indices	Model desired level	Model indices results	CFA results
Chi-square	$\chi^2, p \geq 0.05$	$\chi^2 = 256, p = 0.002$	Confirmed the CFA cut-off points
NFI	NFI $\geq$ 0.90	0.901	
Non-normed fit index	NNFI $\geq$ 0.90	0.915	
Comparative fit index	CFI $\geq$ 0.90	0.929	
Goodness-of-fit index	GFI $\geq$ 0.90	0.901	
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index	AGFI $\geq$ 0.80	0.861	
Standardized root mean-square residual	SRMR $\leq$ 0.08	0.063	
Root mean square error of approximation	RMSEA $<$ 0.10	0.075	
CFA factors loadings range	Loadings $>$ 0.60	0.61 – 0.93	

perceived brand image loaded onto two dimensions named as "physical environment" and "people characteristics". To confirm and validate the findings that emerged from using EFA, the five-factor model were evaluated by CFA using EQS (6.1) software. The measurement model of the CFA relates the observed variables to their latent variable. As shown in Table IV, measures of goodness-of-fit were met. Table IV shows that the results emerged from CFA support the findings that emerged from EFA, and all items loadings well exceeded the cut-off point value, i.e. 0.60.

Convergent validity is examined by using the Bentler–Bonett normed fit index (NFI) (Bentler and Bonett, 1990). All of the constructs have NFI values above 0.90. Furthermore, as shown in Tables V and VI, indication of the measures' convergent validity is provided by the fact that all factor loadings are significant and that the scales exhibit high levels of internal consistency (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). Also, as shown in Table IV, the values of composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct are all above the threshold suggested by Bagozzi (1980): 0.70 and 0.50, respectively. In our research, the discriminant validity is established by, first, the absence

Table V Shared variance among the research constructs

Research constructs	Perceived brand salience	Perceived brand quality	Brand image-physical environment	Brand image-people characteristics	Perceived destination loyalty
Perceived brand salience (M = 3.35, SD = 0.86)	**54.0**				
Perceived brand quality (M = 3.89, SD = 0.80)	11.0	**52.0**			
Brand image-physical environment (M = 3.870, SD = 0.84)	06.0	32.0	**54.0**		
Brand image-people characteristics (M = 3.93, SD = 0.90)	07.0	26.0	20.0	**87.0**	
Perceived destination loyalty (M = 3.63, SD = 0.82)	27.0	27.0	18.0	24.0	**53.0**

Note: The bold numbers presented diagonally are the AVEs for the research constructs which are usually compared with the squared values of the correlations in the same matrix

Table VI Summary of structural path model results

Hypotheses	Variables in the paths model	β*	t-value**
H1	Perceived brand salience → perceived brand quality	0.33	5.29*
H2	Perceived brand salience → perceived brand image-physical environment	0.07	1.17
H3	Perceived brand salience → perceived brand image-people characteristics	0.08	1.48
H4	Perceived brand salience → perceived destination loyalty	0.36	7.10*
H5	Perceived brand quality → perceived brand image-physical environment	0.55	9.76*
H6	Perceived brand quality → perceived brand image-people characteristics	0.36	5.26*
H7	Perceived brand quality → perceived destination loyalty	0.22	3.47*
H8	Perceived brand image-physical environment → perceived destination loyalty	0.15	2.56*
H9	Perceived brand image-people characteristics → perceived destination loyalty	0.25	4.31*

| Model goodness-of-fit indices: desired level	χ^2 $p \geq 0.05$	NFI $\geq$ 0.90	NNFI $\geq$ 0.90	CFI $\geq$ 0.90	GFI $\geq$ 0.90	AGFI $\geq$ 0.80	SRMR $\leq$ 0.08	RMSEA <0.10
Model indices results	2.11 $p = 0.22$	0.991	0.971	0.997	0.995	0.947	0.014	0.021

Notes: *Standardized beta coefficients; **significant at $p < 0.05$

of significant cross-loadings that are not represented by the measurement model (i.e. congeneric measures). The absence of significant cross-loading is also an evidence of constructs unidimensionality (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988); and second, to establish the evidence for the discriminant validity among the constructs, we compared the shared variance among the constructs with AVE from each construct. The discriminant validity is established between two constructs if the AVE of each one is higher than the shared variance. Comparing the shared variance and AVE values shown in Table V, where the diagonal values are the AVEs, our results indicated a support for the discriminant validity among the latent variables in our model.

Structural model and hypotheses testing

Structural path analysis was used to test the research model and hypotheses, as shown in Figure 2. The research model was tested through the structural relationships between each of perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality, perceived brand image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) and perceived destination brand loyalty in one structural model. The structural model began by creating direct paths from perceived brand salience to each of perceived brand quality, perceived brand image-physical environment, perceived brand image-people characteristics and perceived destination brand loyalty. Direct paths were also created from perceived brand quality to each of perceived brand image-physical environment, perceived brand image-people

Figure 2 Empirical model

Note: *Standardised beta coefficients are significant at $p < 0.05$
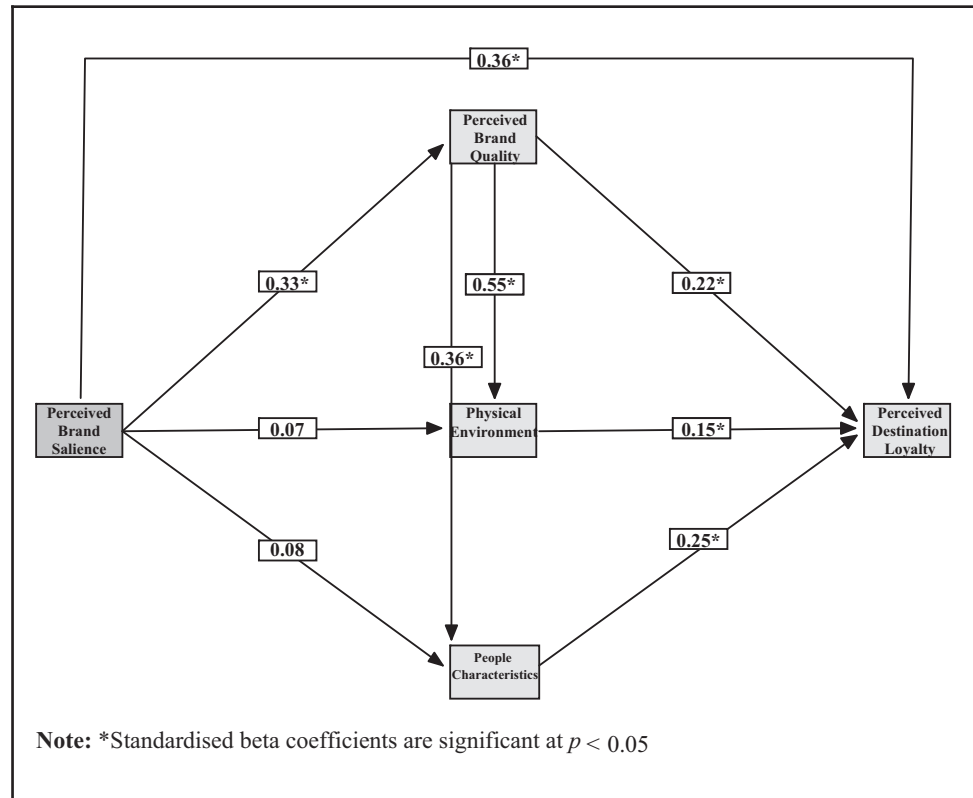
characteristics and perceived destination brand loyalty. Finally, paths were created from each of perceived brand image-physical environment and perceived brand image-people characteristics to perceived destination brand loyalty. As shown in Table VI, the goodness-of-fit measures indicate that the model has an excellent fit to the data. Table VI shows the structural path model goodness-of-fit measures and the structural paths results. The structural findings indicate that all the research hypotheses (*H1-H9*) are supported except *H2* and *H3* which are partially supported. Perceived brand salience has positively and significantly affected each of perceived brand quality ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = 5.29$), perceived brand image-physical environment, ($\beta = 0.07$, $t = 1.17$) perceived brand image-people characteristics ($\beta = 0.08$, $t = 1.48$) and perceived destination brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 7.10$), respectively, providing full support for *H1* and *H4* and partial support for *H2* and *H3*. Meanwhile, *H2* and *H3* are partially supported due to the non-significant effect of perceived brand salience on perceived brand image-physical environment and perceived brand image-people characteristics but maintained a positive effect. The findings also show that perceived brand quality has positively and significantly affected each of perceived brand image-physical environment ($\beta = 0.55$, $t = 9.76$), perceived brand image-people characteristics ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 5.26$) and perceived destination brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 3.47$), respectively, providing full support for *H5*, *H6* and *H7*. Finally, each of perceived brand image-physical environment ($\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.56$) and perceived brand image-people characteristics ($\beta = 0.25$, $t = 4.31$) has positively and significantly affected perceived destination brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 3.47$), respectively, providing full support for *H8* and *H9*. The structural findings indicate that perceived brand quality has exerted the strongest effect on each of perceived brand image-physical environment ($\beta = 0.55$, $t = 9.76$) and perceived brand image-people characteristics ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 5.26$), respectively. Meanwhile, perceived brand salience exerted ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 7.10$) the second strongest effect on perceived destination brand loyalty, and stronger than its effect ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = $

5.29) on perceived brand quality. Further, the structural results show that R^2 result of 0.48 indicates that 48 per cent of variation in perceived destination brand loyalty was caused by perceived brand quality, perceived brand image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) and perceived brand salience path. Also, R^2 result of 0.33 indicates that 33 per cent of variation in perceived brand image-physical environment was caused by perceived brand quality and perceived brand salience path. Finally, R^2 result of 0.27 indicates that 27 per cent of variation in perceived brand image-people characteristics was caused by perceived brand quality and perceived brand salience path.

Results discussion

The objectives of this study are threefold; first, to identify the determinants of perceived destination brand loyalty using a sample of international tourists visiting Jordan's Dead Sea as a distinguished tourism destination; second, to determine the effect of perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality, perceived brand image dimensions and perceived destination brand loyalty; and third, to examine the effect of perceived brand image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) on perceived destination brand loyalty. The results from the EFA and CFA revealed that all the factors investigated in the study are found unidimensional except perceived brand image. The results showed that the six items of perceived brand image loaded onto two dimensions named as "physical environment" and "people characteristics". The tourism industry characteristics focus on the physical environment attributes where tangible facilities are the strongest – the cognitive aspects. Also, people characteristics, as an essential part of perceived brand image, play a fundamental role in the tourism destination of the Dead Sea as well as tourists' perceived destination brand loyalty – the affective aspects. In other words, peoples' kindness, hospitality, friendless, warm reception, culture and positive attitudes are all important drivers of creating a tourism destination brand loyalty – the Dead Sea.

The findings indicate that the Dead Sea perceived destination brand loyalty as a function of perceived brand quality, perceived brand image-physical environment, perceived brand image-people characteristics and perceived brand salience. Branding a tourism destination necessitates the development of a destination brand loyalty that encapsulates the sense of place experienced by the host community and visitors, a wide-range of natural and cultural resources, attractions and amenities. The tourists' destination brand loyalty of the Dead Sea is created by perceived brand image dimensions – the physical environment and local residents' friendliness and kindness with international tourists – as well as perceived brand quality. Therefore, the international tourists' perceived destination brand loyalty is affected by their expectations directly about perceived destination salience, perceived brand quality and perceived brand image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) of the Dead Sea destination. Perceived destination brand loyalty represents the level of attachment to the Dead Sea destination in terms of visitation, revisit, intent to visit and word-of-mouth referrals to others.

Perceived brand salience has positively and significantly affected each of perceived brand quality ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = 5.29$), perceived brand image-physical environment, ($\beta = 0.07$, $t = 1.17$) perceived brand image-people characteristics ($\beta = 0.08$, $t = 1.48$) and perceived destination brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 7.10$), respectively, providing full support for H1 and H4 and partial support for H2 and H3. This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies (Hankinson, 2005; Pike et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2013; Tarus and Rabach, 2013). Meanwhile, H2 and H3 are partially supported due to the non-significant effect of perceived brand salience on perceived brand image-physical environment and perceived brand image-people characteristics but maintained a positive effect. This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies (Hankinson, 2005; Guercini and Ranfagni, 2013). The findings also show that perceived brand

quality has positively and significantly affected each of perceived brand image-physical environment (β = 0.55, t = 9.76), perceived brand image-people characteristics (β = 0.36, t = 5.26) and perceived destination loyalty (β = 0.22, t = 3.47), respectively, providing full support for *H5*, *H6* and *H7*. This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies (Keller, 2003; Herstein *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2013) which showed similar results. A potential justification for this result is that the effect of perceived brand quality on perceived brand image is stronger than the effect of perceived brand salience on perceived brand image. In other words, perceived brand image is a function of perceived brand quality.

Finally, each of perceived brand image-physical environment (β = 0.15, t = 2.56) and perceived brand image-people characteristics (β = 0.25, t = 4.31) has positively and significantly affected perceived destination brand loyalty (β = 0.22, t = 3.47), respectively, providing full support for *H8* and *H9*. This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Lopez-Toro *et al.*, 2010; Son, 2011). The structural findings indicate that perceived brand quality has exerted the strongest effect on each of perceived brand image-physical environment (β = 0.55, t = 9.76) and perceived brand image-people characteristics (β = 0.36, t = 5.26), respectively. Meanwhile, perceived brand salience exerted (β = 0.36, t = 7.10) the second strongest effect on perceived destination loyalty, and stronger than its effect (β = 0.33, t = 5.29) on perceived brand quality. These results provide empirical support to the previous research, suggesting the positive interrelationship between perceived brand salience, perceived brand image, perceived brand quality and perceived destination brand loyalty in several previous studies (Pike *et al.*, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Saraniemi, 2011; Herstein *et al.*, 2014; Lim and Weaver, 2014; Stepchenkova and Li, 2014).

Conclusions and managerial implications

Overall, this research draws attention to the drivers of destination brand loyalty from international tourists' perspectives. Perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality and perceived image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) are strategic constructs and interact in a complex way to create a destination brand loyalty. The empirical findings indicate that focusing on such constructs would lead to an increase in the potential of revisit intentions in international tourists' minds in the future.

The results from this research supported the research hypotheses, as this reveals that tourism awareness of organizations and countries improved the attractiveness and enjoyable environment for tourists that would lead to future visits and promoting the visited tourism sites by the loyal international tourists. Tourism decision-makers must allocate resources and strengthen their policies and strategic decisions toward the management of their tourism destinations to achieve better destination brand loyalty for the Dead Sea. In particular, strategic decisions should be taken with respect to tourism destination brand loyalty on each of perceived brand salience (e.g. awareness), perceived brand quality (e.g. destination's infrastructure and hospitality service) and perceived brand image (e.g. brand attitude, people and activities) from a tourism destination. Tourism organizations and other stakeholders of the Dead Sea destination in Jordan have now empirical evidence which indicates that perceived brand salience is a major driver of perceived brand quality and the later is a strong driver of each of brand image dimensions (physical environment and people characteristics) and perceived destination brand loyalty. Further, managers should recognize that each of brand image dimensions has a vital role in building destination brand loyalty from international tourists' perspectives.

Furthermore, the economic benefits of attracting tourists from different parts of the globe have been recognized as one of the valuable economic platforms to stimulate the growth of local economies with specific focus on developing countries and emerging markets. Our

research provides empirical findings on the importance of integrating the tested framework of this study in the strategy of tourism businesses to provide better operations for the tourism destination branding, creating better branding processes, customer loyalty and overall performance. This highlighted strategic insights regarding the factors that affect a destination brand loyalty with focus on the Dead Sea destination for tourism organizations. Consequently, as part of their competitive strategies, tourism organizations promoting the Dead Sea destination should recognize that destination brand loyalty is a key function of perceived brand salience, destination brand image and destination brand quality, and all is essential to achieve better destination branding. Therefore, having a strategy to create destination image and destination brand quality is a key function that positively affects consumer destination choice leading for better brand loyalty. Indeed, the more organizations provide brand salience for targeted customers, the more this will increase their destination brand loyalty, thus, attracting more customers for developing countries (e.g. Dead Sea destination).

Contributions, limitations and future research

The current study highlights a key theoretical contribution by developing an integrated theoretical framework in a holistic way including all the possible relationships to enriching the perceived destination loyalty research stream. The associative relationships in this framework among the dimensions of perceived brand salience, perceived brand quality, perceived brand image (two dimensions) and destination loyalty have been examined from many studies but have not fully been explained in previous research, especially in emerging markets. By empirically validating the application of perceived brand salience to the perceived destination loyalty directly and through using perceived brand image and perceived brand quality, this research has enriched our understanding of perceived brand loyalty in tourism literature and its contribution to the knowledge of destination branding. Another theoretical contribution is that this research expanded the application of perceived brand loyalty beyond the traditional internal organization issues through an empirical support for international branding effects on a destination. In this research context, there are also contributions for the consideration of building brand loyalty as an outcome of effective awareness, as well as discussion of the role of brands loyalty and brand salience from a brand management perspective. The loyalty of local attractions is also specifically studied from a destination branding perspective. From a practical perspective, the case of the interaction between local and international economy has been a concern for many policymakers and managers of tourism organizations in emerging markets. This research suggests that destination brand loyalty is an especially important initial factor to positive brand decisions for a tourism destination. In particular, specific tourism product attributes and destination people like accommodation, tourists' activities, transportation, staff attitude, shopping, infrastructure and information are the key factors of the overall loyalty effects of a destination. Indeed, organizations that are serious about measuring the status of the destination customers should rely on brand loyalty approach because this approach is true and meaningful to understand the destination brand and tourism industry. Managers of tourism organizations are invited to benefit from the results of this study for building destination brand strategies and achieve the required organizational performance objectives.

Research limitations exist as a result of research design trade-offs. From a theoretical standpoint, this paper has examined only three drivers of perceived destination brand loyalty; meanwhile, other factors such as tourists' satisfaction and destination brand experience should be investigated in future research. From an empirical standpoint, this study investigated international tourists' perspectives in the Dead Sea tourism destination only which means that its generalization potential to other tourism destinations is limited. Therefore, comparative studies inside and outside Jordan's tourism destinations are potential areas of future research. From a methodological standpoint, while the unit of analysis in this paper was the "international tourist", future research can conduct comparative analysis between the international tourists

and tourism organizations managers and employees' perceptions with regard to perceived brand quality, perceived brand image and destination brand loyalty as well as other factors mentioned earlier. Finally, this study investigated an integrated model of perceived brand salience and destination brand loyalty with focus mainly on leisure tourism within the Dead Sea destination area. Future research may investigate or apply the research model and other factors on other tourism destinations as well as other types of tourism purposes such as medical, religious and business. A mixed method of qualitative and qualitative research and design is also recommended for future research.

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