Disaster And Emergency Planning For Jordanian Hotels

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Abstract: The global hospitality industry ranks among the most vulnerable to disaster and emergency situations, which can have harmful effects on hotels and other businesses. This study attempts to take a closer look at the Jordanian hotel industry's current level of readiness for disasters and emergencies. It also aims to explore strategies for and impediments to preparing for such scenarios. This study relied on in-depth interviews of thirty-six respondents from the hotel sector and made use of qualitative research methodologies based on snowball sampling. The results indicate that while a few hotels were well-equipped to manage disasters and emergencies, the majority, particularly three- and four-star establishments, did not have effective response systems. Numerous factors behind this poor preparedness were pinpointed including financial and material constraints, a dearth of adequately trained personnel, insufficient governmental support, and a general lack of awareness of the threats posed by disasters and emergencies.

Index Terms: Disaster, Emergency, Planning, Preparedness, Hotel, Jordan.

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism sector is particularly sensitive to the deleterious impacts of man-made and natural disasters and emergencies ranging from severe weather to terrorist attacks (Laws & Prideaux, 2017; Mansfeld, 1999). Henderson and Ng (2004) have shown how easily these events can negatively affect the hospitality industry, due in large part to the fact that both employees and guests are inextricably contained within the “product” itself. In destinations which are critically dangerous, such as war zones, the hospitality industry cannot even develop fully (Chung & D’Annunzio-Green, 2018). It is no doubt difficult to predict, let alone control, what will happen in the world external to the hotel (Gurtner, 2016) and so even the best-prepared of organizations remain vulnerable to a degree. Nonetheless, risk assessment and management techniques can be learned and effectively applied to mitigate the effects of disasters and emergencies, even if outright prevention is not feasible (Ritchie, 2008). It is essential to understand the history and evolution of disaster and emergency management (Haddow & Bullock, 2006). As the literature shows, the mechanisms for managing disasters and emergencies were first introduced to protect civilian populations from the threat of nuclear annihilation during World War II and in the following decade, emergency laws were also enacted (Rubin, 2012). It was in this period that disaster and emergency management started to become more codified and professionalized (Wilson & Oyola-Yemaie, 2000; Drabek, 2007). The further academic development of the field also guided and enhanced efforts to respond to real-life situations (Alexander, 2002). An integrated emergency management system (IEMS) was implemented in the 1980s as a way of incorporating stakeholders into the decision-making process for dealing with disasters and emergencies regardless of their location or magnitude (Blanchard et al., 2007; Canton, 2007).

Moe and Pathranarakul (2006) were the brainchildren of a new management model that integrated proactive and reactive response strategies, the former referring to planned impact-minimizing steps taken before a crisis hits and the latter to rehabilitation efforts made in the wake of said crisis (Moe & Pathranarakul, 2006). In addition, Preble (1997) summarized three main phases in the implementation of disaster and emergency management: (1) the formulation phrase, which anticipates and determines future courses of action, (2) the implementation phase, which focuses on structuring organizations appropriately to ensure the most robust response, and (3) the evaluation phase, which deals with post-crisis assessment and evaluation. In the hospitality industry, proactive planning can mitigate and even avoid potential disasters and emergencies (Peters & Pikkemaat, 2006). For it to work, however, hotels should be prepared well in advance, procedures must be executed effectively during a disaster or emergency, and recovery efforts need to be undertaken as swiftly as possible (Yu, Stafford, & Armoo, 2006). In recent years, there have been many scholars who not only researched, but also engaged in disaster and emergency planning in the field. Yet despite the ample literature available on the subject (Hartman & Mahesh, 2008), relatively few studies have concentrated on how hotels can specifically tailor and implement strategies to prepare for disasters and emergencies. The majority of research has been conducted in fields other than hospitality and tourism such as political science, medicine, economics, and management (De Silva, Khatibi & Azam, 2018a,b), some examples of which are Simmons (2009), Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar (2011), and Wilson and Tiefenbacher (2012). Perhaps unsurprisingly, no research dedicated to analysing the state of disaster and emergency preparedness within the hospitality industry had previously been conducted in Jordan prior to this study (Cavanaugh, Gelles, Reyes, Civiello, & Zahner, 2008; Pennington-Gray, Thapa, Kaplanidou, Cahyanto, & McLaughlin, 2011). There was a study done by Weimann (2006) who looked into the attacks on three hotels in the country in 2005, which killed around 67 people and wounded over 150 others, yet it remained limited to examining how terrorists use the internet to realize their plots. Ali and Ali (2010) asserted that only a handful of studies have explored whether hotels are adequately prepared or not to deal with disasters and emergencies before, during, and after their occurrence. In response to the seemingly increasing number of environmental and terrorist threats facing the Jordanian
hospitality industry, hotel managers need a more strategic and comprehensive outlook on disaster and emergency management. They not only need to become familiar with the latest models available to cope with crisis, but also devote more resources to threat-reduction planning as opposed to response and recovery after the fact (Ritchie, 2008). All this will help to avoid abrupt and ill-informed decision-making during a disaster or emergency that can further complicate matters and even spark new crises for a hospitality establishment (Ritchie, 2008). It is the objective of this study to extrapolate from research on the disaster and emergency preparedness of hotels to identify the most effective strategies for prevention, mitigation, and recovery. Tool bar to modify the header or footer on subsequent pages.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized qualitative research methodologies based on semi-structured interviews conducted in person with 43 management-level individuals at 36 three-, four-, and five-star Jordanian hotels. The three-star rating is for those establishments that offer a wide array of amenities that exceed average accommodation standards. Four stars are awarded to hotels that feature superior design and deluxe services that match the varying needs and expectations of guests. Finally, a five-star property will exhibit luxury and excellent attention to detail in all areas of its operation, allowing guests to enjoy highly personalized services and an extensive range of facilities. Respondents held high-level management positions at the selected hotels and had many years of experience working in the hotel industry. Some interviewees were both general managers and owners of their hotels while others were department managers from families with a strong management background. Several respondents were also retired personnel from the Jordanian Army and Intelligence Department. This sample was chosen using the snowball method while sample size was determined according to the “saturation criterion.” Qualitative thematic analysis was performed on the collected data with the aim of making it useful and relevant to the themes of this study. The key informants are summarized below in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>3 star</th>
<th>4 star</th>
<th>5 star</th>
<th>Sub total</th>
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<tr>
<td>General Manager</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and Maintenance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Finance Manager</td>
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<td>Front Office Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
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</table>

3 FINDINGS

3.1 Disasters and Emergencies that Affect Hotels in Jordan

The respondents cited many examples of a variety of devastating disasters and emergencies within the past three decades that have directly and indirectly affected the Jordanian hospitality industry. These consisted of natural disasters including a severe snow storm in 2013 and annual flooding in the capital Amman caused by heavy rain, terrorist activity such as the 2005 Amman bombings, and some isolated incidents, for example, the 1992 fire at the Intercontinental Hotel and staff housing fire at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Petra. Disasters and emergencies outside of Jordan that negatively impacted tourism included the wars in Iraq (1980, 1991, and 2003), September 11th: the global financial crisis (2001-2010), the Arab Spring (2011), and general political turmoil in the Middle East.

“A series of emergencies and disasters occurred within Jordanian hotel industry. Man-made such as the global financial crisis, Amman bombing 2005, Arab spring revolution, and natural such as heavy snow, and water flooding.” (Interviewee No. 28)

“Located within the unstable region, Jordan is situated in the centre of Middle East and very close to war-torn countries like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. Jordanian hotels were affected negatively since the first Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988), and the Gulf War (1991), and the second Iraqi War (2003), and lost businesses for a long period of time.” (Interviewee No. 13)

“Amman bombing 2005 was a great challenge and hotels encountered a lot of security problems which affected the sector.” (Interviewee No. 16)

“Natural disasters combined with bad infrastructure, poor preparation and poor collaboration would cause a serious state of emergency for hotels. To ensure business continuity, we bought an expensive four-wheel drive vehicle to transport guests to hospitals and airport and our employees to reach workplace. Unfortunately, the hotel realized that all roads and surrounding areas were still closed at that time.” (Interviewee No. 24)

Other interviewees talked about the way instability in neighbouring countries has had the effect of making Jordan appear more attractive to foreign visitors as a comparatively stable country to visit in the Middle East. For example, several respondents alluded to chaos theory in explaining how a disaster or emergency situation in one destination could lead to a diversion of tourists to other destinations in safer areas, a phenomenon corroborated by a study by Faulkner (2001) on shifts in the popularity of certain hotels based on the real and/or perceived stability of their geographic location. On the other hand, findings from research conducted by Ali and Ali (2010) seem to suggest that political and socio-economic upheaval in the Middle East region within the last two decades has had a detrimental impact on the hospitality industry in Jordan. Moreover, Paraskevas and Arendell (2007) showed how the destruction of the Twin Towers in 2001 along with eighteen other major terrorist attacks in subsequent years – of which two occurred in Jordan – negatively affected global tourism as seen in a decrease in international travel, the cancellation of reservations at hotels, a resulting drop in occupancy rates, and an overall loss in industry revenue.

3.2 Jordan: A Safe Destination

As results from Al-dalahmeh, Aloudat, Al-Hujran, and Migdadi
(2014) indicate, the Hashemite Kingdom is an attractive repeat destination for tourists wishing to experience the Middle East yet are concerned about safety and security, particularly those from Japan who are used to receiving early warnings for tsunamis and earthquakes. Not only is Jordan blessed to be in a region with relatively few natural disasters, but what terrorist threat does exist is considerably lower compared to its neighbours. Further, most respondents, particularly hotel managers with past military experience, asserted that most terrorist incidents in Jordan were in fact linked to geopolitical disturbances and tumult in the broader Middle East.

"Ministry of Tourism and Jordan Tourism Board should attract more Arabic tourists and use safety and security campaign to market Jordan as a safe destination [within] the unstable region in the Middle East." (Interviewee No. 31)

"Tour operators in Jordan must get benefits from the unstable situation in the Middle East and market Jordan as a safe destination to attract more tourists." (Interviewee No. 36)

While Jordan has periodically experienced major disasters and emergencies in the past several decades, it objectively remains a safe and stable country, especially in comparison to countries like Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon that have seen revolutions and the overthrow, attempted or successful, of governments. The findings presented in this section are supported by scholarship in the field, examples of which include Blake and Sinclair (2003), Rike (2003), Prideaux (2004), Ritchie (2004), Hitchcock and Darma Putra (2005), Kim, Chun, and Lee (2005), Rittichainuwat (2006), Al Mansoori, Ab Yazid, Khatibi & Azam, 2018a,b), Paraskevass and Arendell (2007), Ritchie (2008), Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, and Buyruk (2010), Cordesman (2011), Pennington-Gray et al. (2011), and Bharwani and Butt (2012).

3.4 Constraints Surrounding Disaster and Emergency Management

The findings of this research highlighted a number of constraints faced by Jordanian hotels in the successful implementation of disaster and emergency management. These included a general lack of awareness about security in a hospitality context, poor collaboration between hotel departments and security agencies, and insufficient financial wherewithal compounded by high industry costs and taxes. The latter in particular served as a barrier to providing paid trainings to employees, a common issue noted by Allison (2007). One recommendation mentioned by respondents in this study as well as by Ritchie (2004) was that management should be proactive in accordance with their own specific perspectives and visions in planning for disasters and emergencies to ensure the highest possible level of preparedness. Hotel managers in this sample also spoke to the negative impact of skilled personnel shortages on disaster and emergency management.

"Regarding the unstable political situation in Middle East, we received a decrease in arrivals which affected the financial situation of hotels." (Interviewee No. 11)

"The past management neglected the importance..."
of maintenance due to high maintenance costs of [equipment].” (Interviewee No. 3)

“Low-quality devices [used for a long time] needed to receive the spare parts. The spare parts were very expensive. Maintenance employees for the company were without necessary technical experience. Maintenance companies exploited the hotels by monopolizing the spare parts. High prices with low services.” (Interviewee No. 30)

As discussed by Prideaux, Coghlan, and Falco-Mammone (2008), economic constraints can severely hinder post-crisis recovery and rehabilitation. Most four- and three-star hotels in this study suffered financial losses due to a decline in tourism in light of unstable markets, geopolitical instability, and an increase in cost of living and taxes. Interestingly, the reverse was the case for the five-star hotel, which its managers attributed to the larger size of their establishments as well as the substantial financial backing they received from the hotel chain itself as well as the government. At the same time, several respondents raised issue with government policy regarding the purchasing and fixing of new security machines as well as the employment of more security personnel that failed to take into consideration the limited financial resources of some hotels. Another constraint observed in this study was a lack of intra-industry cooperation in mitigating and overcoming the negative impact of disasters and emergencies. It was revealed by a few interviewees that only five-star hotels enjoyed special treatment from governmental agencies after a crisis, but this same advantage was not afforded to their three-star counterparts. This had the effect not only of delaying a swift recovery of losses, but also creating and intensifying competition between hotels, a phenomenon which no doubt encouraged them to differentiate their competitive advantages as noted by Baloglu, Erdem, Brewer, Mayer, and Sainaghi (2010). Jordan, like many other countries, relies on the tourism and hospitality industry as a major contributor to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Yet as this study found, Jordanian hotels are subject to high taxes, which adversely impacts their net revenue, thus compromising not only their ability to provide quality services and products, but also allocate adequate budgets to departments that ensure security and maintenance. This in turn leads to poorer preparedness for disasters and emergencies. A lack of awareness among employees about how to implement safety procedures, utilize security apparatuses, and collaborate effectively with fellow employees was also among the barriers noted to successful disaster and emergency planning. Respondents mentioned that many staff members who had participated in specialized crisis training courses left their jobs in search of better opportunities with a higher salary. Similar findings were observed by Buuren (2009) who stressed that having accurate know-how in the face of crisis is imperative to developing an inclusive management culture in both the public and private sectors.

“In my opinion, we have lower skilled employees who should know how to deal with emergencies. A lot of emergency training[s] are academic and non-practical courses. Employees lack […] knowledge [of] how to use the work instruments and the safety procedures. Employees should gain the accurate knowledge, good training, and specialized practical courses.” (Interviewee No. 12)

“The shortage of skilled employees will affect the emergency preparedness. The employee without experience will be a barrier for successful emergency planning.” (Interviewee No. 29)

The findings of this study concluded that hotels in Jordan tend to avoid coordinating with one another, thereby increasing unbalanced competition and precluding effective disaster and emergency management. It was revealed by several hotel managers that employees would at times not adhere to their job responsibilities due to their lack of proper training and qualifications. Further, some establishments took advantage of inter-hotel competition to monopolize the hospitality and tourism sector.

“Unfortunately, hotels consider others as competitors. Agreements were signed before, but no one respect[s] [them]. The[re] [is] unfair competition with no monitoring and protection on pricing from the government. The three-star hotels had to stay empty and closed the business, or [decrease] the room rate to […] break even.” (Interviewee No. 36)

Finally, high turnover was seen as yet another constraint in planning for disasters and emergencies, particularly within three-star establishments. Respondents identified several causes for this including a lack of occupational and socio-cultural education among employees, which can lead to a widening of the gap between them and guests, thus generating negative reviews for the hotel (Samaraweera et al., 2018). As Grant (1996) indicated, appropriate training and education will enable public administrators to bolster efficiency and efficacy in the face of crisis.

“As a global constraint, […] high turnover among employees [is faced by] hotels. (Interviewee No. 1).

“It seems [there is] [unending] employee turnover.” (Interviewee No. 11)

3.5 Learning Lessons
This study found that, in light of the collective experience of major stakeholders within the Jordanian hospitality and tourism industry, preventative measures are the best way to ensure successful disaster and emergency planning (Paraskevas and Arendell, 2007). Hotels need to discuss, review, modernize, re-evaluate, and mobilize the long-term strategies they have developed to deal with crisis to promote the safety and security of their establishments. Further, it is vital to have multiple plans in place for a variety of unexpected scenarios and remain ever on alert. These findings are reiterated by Malhotra and Venkatesh (2009) who linked effective pre-crisis planning to successful recovery as well as the learning of valuable lessons in the post-crisis period.

“Preventive planning could be possible by better understanding [its] aim and purpose [and] planning ahead [to] implement procedures to be prepared if...
The need for open knowledge-sharing between hotels and organizations such as the Jordan Hotel Association and Ministry of Tourism was further emphasized by respondents. As Kapucu (2006) explained, inter-agency communication aids in inter-agency coordination. Further, the government needs to invest more time and resources in encouraging the hospitality and tourism sector to rebound after a crisis. This can take the form of regular inspections of hotels as well as financial assistance for the purchasing of reliable security equipment and the hiring of skilled and specially trained employees.

“Effective communication with Jordan Hotel Association, Ministry of Tourism, and other related organizations must be used. This will increase the cooperation, […] collaboration, and shar[ing] [of] important knowledge among hotels.” (Interviewee No. 34)

“High operating costs in the hotel such as water, energy, fuel, and electricity, with increasing prices for all services and taxes.” (Interviewee No. 24)

“High operating costs in the hotel, increasing prices for all services: taxes, water, energy, and electricity.” (Interviewee No. 8)

“The past management neglected the importance of maintenance due to high maintenance costs of [equipment].” (Interviewee No. 3)

Higher-rated hotels tend not only to have more robust disaster and emergency management strategies, but also better security apparatuses at their disposal such as advanced fire alarm systems and scanning machines to check luggage and bags prior to entry. This same level of technology should be made accessible for lower-tier hotels as well. Moreover, it is essential that all hotels collaborate more extensively with governmental and other external agencies, which have more comprehensive pre- and post-crisis planning and assessment procedures and can provide in-house training courses for hotel employees (Ritchie, 2004). Lastly, hotel managers should strive to attract and train staff who are capable of dealing with crisis situations as well as vest them with the necessary authority to make decisions on the ground as a disaster or emergency unfolds.

“The shortage of skilled employees will affect the emergency preparedness. The employee without experience will be a barrier for successful emergency planning.” (Interviewee No. 29)

“The paradoxical relation between hospitality and security created several problems for hotels. Employees from military background were subjected to training courses on how to deal with hotel guests.” (Interviewee No. 17)

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4 STUDY CONCLUSIONS
This study addressed the status of and prospects for disaster and emergency management within the hotel industry in Jordan. Its primary objective was to examine existing levels of preparedness as well as any factors that come in the way of effectively combating crises. Jordan’s hospitality and tourism industry has experienced and will likely continue to be affected by various disasters and emergencies, both domestic and international, from economic downturns to severe flash floods to terrorism. Considering the immense impact these events have on both major stakeholders and tourists, it was unexpected for the researchers to discover that disaster and emergency planning procedures have been totally or at least greatly overlooked by the sector as a whole. The findings made clear the imperative to upgrade Jordan’s safety and security measures in the context of hotels as well as devote more attention to the training and development of hotel managers and employees alike to better equip them with the tools they need to successfully prepare for disasters and emergencies in the future. It was learned that only five-star hotels in Jordan have the capacity to effectively handle any crisis that may come their way. The majority of other hotels were simply not prepared enough due to limited financial resources, a dearth of trained personnel on staff, and a lack of specialized know-how. This points to a serious level of vulnerability within the Jordanian hospitality and tourism industry. As is evident from the policies and track record of the General Directorate of Civil Defence, government agencies and NGOs are generally far more prepared for disasters and emergencies than hotels since the former invest in risk analysis and assessment, training and re-training programs, and signal and detection systems (Al-Nammari and Alzaghah, 2015). The corollary of these findings is that hotels should engage collaboratively with governmental and other external entities in the future. Hope for this proposed cooperation between public and private sectors is manifest in the high level of initiative and flexibility shown by Jordanian hotel managers in the face of past disasters and emergencies to maintain the continuity of their businesses. What needs to be addressed more immediately are the many obstacles to effective emergency planning and management from insufficient financial means to a lack of skilled staff to inadequate training programs and facilities. All industry stakeholders should work together to alleviate these problems and thereby improve their approaches to ensuring the safety and security of customers who choose Jordan as their tourist destination.

REFERENCES


