

The Impact of the Attitudes towards Ecotourism Benefits on Destination Loyalty

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits (using the variables of economic development, social development, cultural preservation, community capacity building, and environmental protection) on destination loyalty of Wadi-Rum located in Jordan. A total of 297 questionnaire containing 29 items was used to collect information from the local residents of Wadi-Rum. Simple regression, T-test, and ANOVA analyses were conducted to test the research hypotheses. Results of the current study revealed that there is a significant positive impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty. Also, the results revealed that there is no significant difference in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty that can be attributed to gender. In addition, results found there is no significant difference in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty in favor of age, and educational level.

Keywords: ecotourism, destination loyalty, Arab world, Jordan

1. Introduction

The world is witnessing today attention and care evident in the concept of environmental and sustainable tourism that will provide clean distinctive environment free of any visitor beside disabled person as could lead to a change in the concept of sustainability in various fields. The concept of environmental and sustainable tourism development has led to attract tourists in large numbers in the various regions of the world to the intended tourist environment had, which have been characterized by the presence of awareness by the government and the local community towards the good care, planning, marketing and promotion for that destination, which would make all responsible parties are aware of what will happen as a result of any work that may be done by one of the users and visitors to the area (Su et al., 2014). The ultimate objective of most of the world is to make the intended environmental areas of the province as it was from the customs and traditions and the promotion of the local economy and work to upgrade environmental attractions to sustain all areas associated with this concept. Ecotourism is a form of tourism that involves visiting natural areas fragile, pristine and relatively without hindrance. Its purpose is to educate the traveler may be, to provide the necessary funds for protecting the environment; to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to promote respect for different cultures and human rights. Since 1980, ecotourism has been considered a decisive effort for the environment; so that future generations to confront the circumstances affecting them through human intervention. Several university programs use this description as in the definition of ecotourism work (Wu et al., 2015).

Generally, ecotourism dealing with the living parts of natural environments, and focuses on socially responsible travel, as well as personal growth and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism usually include travel to destinations where the flora and fauna, as well as the cultural heritage of the main attractions. It is intended that, that ecotourism provide insight into the impact of humans on the environment, and promote a greater appreciation of the natural habitats, including ecotourism is responsible for minimizing the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment programs, in addition to strengthening the cultural unity of the local population and evaluation of environmental factors. Hence we address to tackle Wadi Rum in Jordan. It is so hard to describe the beauty of Wadi Rum, but it is

brehtaking. It is one of the most important tourist sites in Jordan. Know the area colored Rocky Mountains yellow and white and red and brown and geographic characteristic shapes filled with color and deep valley, which cleaves the mountains. Land of Wadi Rum and are also characterized by natural bridges and rocks that take the forms of Mushrooms, naturally carved by wind and erosion factors and erosion over the years (Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities).

Featuring Wadi Rum plant life and animal unique and rare. The focus was on animal life in Wadi Rum after it was discovered the existence of the gray wolves, deer and foxes from a platoon "Blandford" rare red foxes and cats dunes. There are also many rare plants and herbs. And anemones grow red anemone flowers on the sides of the road and in the quietest places. You can also find in some mountainous areas and some medicinal herbs used by the Bedouins of hospitalization for several centuries. Play numerous nomadic tribes that inhabit the Wadi Rum area an important role in the beauty of the area is complete, even though some of them now live in a modern concrete houses; however, the majority still wear Bedouin outfit and adheres to the nomadic tradition by living a nomadic way such as raising the beauty and to drink milk and sew from goat hair tents throughout the summer. Many lovers of hiking are attracted to Wadi Rum, and enjoy climbing mountains and dramatic, with a height of some of the 1754 meters. And one of the most beautiful places of climbing Mount Khazali and Jebel Rum. The hikers the rookie, you can enjoy an easy stroll between the colored and dry or desert sand dunes and rocky plateaus (Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities). Indeed, the Declaration and the Wadi Rum area in 1998 protected area. It has been appointed the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature with support from the World Bank, a non-profit organization based on the preparation of plans to preserve and protect the region in addition to the formation of a team of local administration for the region on their own. This team is working under the auspices of the authority of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone and is devising ways to protect and preserve the Wadi Rum desert from the pressures of the growing human. It can be played discoveries and adventures inside and outside these protected, depending on the type of activity to be done.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The hypotheses development and research model are described. It then presents the methodology used for the study followed by its analysis and findings. The discussion and conclusion are then provided and areas for future research are also addressed.

2. Hypotheses Development

According to the study accomplished by Akbarzadeh and his colleagues (2011) where this research was conducted to find and use the best sites on environmental tourism development. This has been done through the adoption of an ecosystem approach to environmental issues, and the use of geographic information systems in the regions of Arasbarn area in Iran. Several issues focused on providing best practices and the status of the study area used maps by the Iranian geographical organization, which has been one of the materials and methods used in this research as well as their dependence ways avoiding ecological and environmental fabricated tools. According to study of Neba (2009), the reserves and other areas vitelline, serves as the fields and the expected environmental development of tourism in order to contain their biodiversity and the landscape and cultural heritage of local or indigenous people. She has been using a sample of a game reserve in Kimbi environmental sustainability to game reserves. She conducted ecotourism development process by employing a range of field observation to data collection and evaluation, and it is done by SWOT analysis technique; where identifies opportunities and threats. The use of the reserve data base to draw data on wildlife resources and systems methodology which includes rural appraisal, where she worked as a methodology to assess the current situation for wildlife, as well as field observations unofficial.

According to study of Gezon (2009), which focused on the theme of ecotourism in the regions of Medkhr and Ankara, and this has increased the interest in early research, so that was in 1990, it has been associated with it in the donor in the field of conservation and ecotourism. He used a qualitative approach; as this analysis focuses on the social level intensify the effects of tourism, comparing and contrasting communities on any side of the protected area. Also, it increased the number of tourists and infrastructure to accommodate. He developed them and guiding professional tour. In the process, this study was based on ethnographic research conducted between 1989 and 2010 in Ankarana region of Madagascar. According to study of Dorobantu et al. (2012), which focused on the important factor of economic activity in the European Union, which is composed of a wide range of products and destinations and many different stakeholders? The study adopted important topics environmental such as tourism, local communities, rural tourism, and sustainable development in Romania.

According to study of Su et al. (2014), which focused on the development of ecotourism, is closely associated with the sustainability of the natural protected areas, where facilitated by appropriate management; ecotourism can contribute to the conservation and development. In addition, it works on the welfare of the community. It has focused on the presence of a positive synergy between tourism and the environment on the one hand and society on the other.

Researchers can also develop this relationship, planning, and can discuss public policy for the development of ecotourism requirements in protected areas in China. This study has focused on the ecotourism assess, stakeholders and community participation in Xingkai Lake National Reserve in China. According to study of Wu et al. (2015), which focused on eight criteria: slope, tourism attraction, the density of the drainage system, cover the pastures, cover plants, the community, the height and density of the road network. All this is to assess the ecotourism in China Nature Reserve. This study has focused on ecotourism, assessing their suitability and preference for ecotourism in Hijnyang Chinese.

Barkauskiene & Snieska (2013), focused on ecotourism analysis as an integral part of the sustainable development of tourism. This study provides ecotourism as one of the fastest-growing types of tourism in the world. The study focused on important topics such as tourism, environment, sustainable tourism, sustainable tourism development and system analysis SWOT in Lithuania. According to study of Adrian Mendosa Ramos & Bruce Prieaux (2014), which focused on receiving the original ecotourism in the Mayan rainforest, little research got attention. This study deals with issues related to the level of empowerment in the Mayan village, which is located near the heritage sites in the south of Mexico. This study has focused on the original ecotourism, in addition to enabling stakeholders in the Mayan rainforest in Mexico. According to study of Blerseh & Kangas (2013), which focused to the emergence of ecotourism in the past two decades as an important strategy for the province, especially in the tropics; where the terms of the diversity of species and habitats threatened traditional forms of development. Further, it has focused on the study subject's important ecological Kalnzm model ecotourism to save the tropical ecosystem in Blize.

In order to test the research model of the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty, the study is hypothesized as follows:

H1: There is a statistically significant impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty.

H2A: There is a significant difference in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty due to gender.

H2B: There is a significant difference in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty due to age.

H2C: There is a significant difference in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty due to educational level.

3. Research Methodology

This section provides the methodology applied in the current study. It consists of the research model, operational definitions of the study's independent and dependent variables, research hypotheses, besides data collection tool and research population and sample.

3.1 Research Model

The elements of this research are established based on preceding literature, either theoretically or empirically. Indeed, this study used variables that are common in ecotourism literature. Figure 1 represents a model for the study that shows the relationship between the research independent variable, the dependent variable, and the moderating ones.

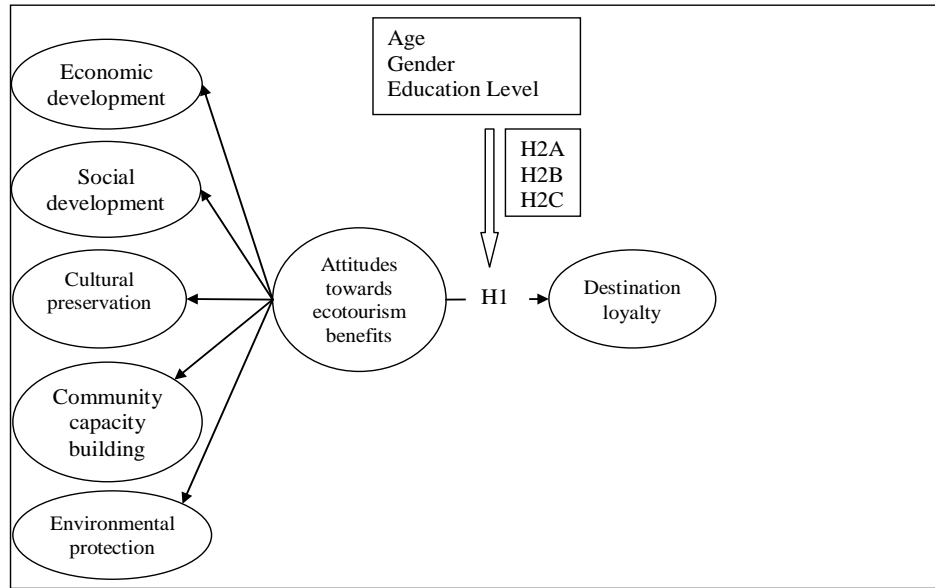


Figure 1. Research Model

3.2 Operational Definitions

Adapted from Chengcai et al. (2012), the current research considers five attitudes towards ecotourism benefits (the independent variable). These dimensions are economic development, social development, cultural preservation, community capacity building, and environmental protection; which were measured in the research questionnaire through three, eleven, three, five, and two items respectively. Also, destination loyalty, the dependent variable, adapted from Rahman (2014) and measured through five items.

3.3 Population and Sampling

This study has been the target of local residents of Wadi Rum categories; it has been ranked based on the age structure in addition to the educational level. A total of 297 questionnaire containing 29 items was used to collect information from the local residents of Wadi-Rum.

4. Data Analysis and Results

In order to explore the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty, in which these variables have been measured using 5-points Likert scale that varies between strongly disagree =1 and strongly agree =5; reliability and validity analyses were conducted, descriptive analysis was used to describe the characteristic of sample and the respondent to the questionnaires besides the independent and dependent variables. Also, simple regression analysis, Independent Samples T-test, and ANOVA test were employed to test the research hypotheses.

4.1 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two important measures to determine the quality and usefulness of the primary data. Validity is about accuracy and whether the instrument measures what it is intended to measure while reliability is about precision; it is used to check the consistency and stability of the questionnaire. Indeed, the researchers depended on scales and items that were previously developed and used by other researchers with similar interest. Also a draft of the questionnaire was formulated, and then it was reviewed by four academic lecturers –who have a sufficient knowledge and experience in this scope- to insure that each item is measuring what is intended to be measured, and to avoid the ambiguity and complexity in the phrasing of questions. The reliability of the instrument was measured by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Further, some scholars (e.g. Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Creswell, 2009) suggested that the values of all indicators or dimensional scales should be above the recommended value of 0.60. Table 1 represents the results of Cronbach's alpha for the independent and dependent variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of all the tested variables are above 0.60 which suggesting the composite measure is reliable.

Table 1. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of study variables

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Economic development	3	0.683
Social development	11	0.782
Cultural preservation	3	0.653
Community capacity building	5	0.770
Environmental protection	2	0.636
Destination loyalty	5	0.863

4.2 Respondents Demographic Profile

As indicated in Table 2, the demographic profile of the respondents for this study showed that they are typically females, most of them less than 30 years old, and the majorities less than high school and hold high school degree.

Table 2. Description of the respondents' demographic profiles

Category	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Gender	Males	141	47.5
	Females	156	52.5
	Total	297	100
Age	less than 20	105	35.4
	20 years - less than 25	95	32.0
	25 years - less than 30	44	14.8
	30 years - less than 40	28	9.4
	More than 40 years old	25	8.4
	Total	297	100
Education level	Less than high school	84	28.3
	High school	132	44.4
	Diploma	39	13.2
	Bachelor	25	8.4
	Master	16	5.4
	Doctorate	1	0.3
	Total	297	100

4.3 Descriptive Analysis

In order to describe the responses and thus the attitude of the respondents toward each question they were asked in the survey, the mean and the standard deviation were estimated. While the mean shows the central tendency of the data, the standard deviation measures the dispersion which offers an index of the spread or variability in the data (Pallant, 2005; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). In other words, a small standard deviation for a set of values reveals that these values are clustered closely about the mean or located close to it; a large standard deviation indicates the opposite. The level of each item was determined by the following formula: (highest point in Likert scale - lowest point in Likert scale) / the number of the levels used = $(5-1) / 5 = 0.80$, where 1-1.80 reflected by "very low", 1.81-2.60 reflected by "low", 2.61-3.40 reflected by "moderate", 3.41-4.20 reflected by "high", and 4.21-5 reflected by "very high". Then the items were being ordered based on their means. Tables 3 and 4 show the results.

Table 3. Overall mean and standard deviation of the study's variables

Type of Variable	Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	Order
Independent Variables	Attitudes towards ecotourism benefits	3.80	0.68	High	
	Economic development	3.99	0.74	High	2
	Social development	3.47	0.62	High	5
	Cultural preservation	3.73	0.71	High	3
	Community capacity building	3.72	0.81	High	4
	Environmental protection	4.10	0.79	High	1
Dependent Variable	Destination loyalty	4.34	0.70	Very high	

As presented in Table 3, data analysis results have shown that residents' attitudes towards ecotourism benefits in Wadi-Rum are applied to a high level in which the mean score is 3.80. Further, environmental protection, economic development, cultural preservation, community capacity building, and social development do exist highly and respectively; besides destination loyalty is applied to a greater extent. Table 4 demonstrates the mean, standard deviation, level, and order scores for resident attitudes towards ecotourism benefits items for each variable.

Table 4. Mean and standard deviation of the study's variables

Economic development	Mean	SD	Level	Order
Ecotourism promotes local economic development	4.02	0.94	High	1
Ecotourism promotes local industry development	3.94	0.92	High	2
Ecotourism increases the income of local residents	4.02	0.97	High	1
Social development	Mean	SD	Level	Order
Ecotourism increases employment opportunities for local residents	3.95	0.90	High	3
Ecotourism increases employment opportunities for local female residents	3.28	1.32	Moderate	7
Ecotourism raises local fame	4.09	0.89	High	1
Ecotourism facilitates the exchange of local and outside	4.00	0.91	High	2
Ecotourism promotes national unity	3.61	0.95	High	5
Ecotourism improves local infrastructure	3.53	1.00	High	6
Ecotourism improves local quality of life	3.72	1.07	High	4
Ecotourism sharpens the polarization between the rich and the poor residents (Reversed)	3.08	1.32	Moderate	8
Ecotourism increases the price and the cost of living (Reversed)	2.96	1.28	Moderate	9
Ecotourism disrupts daily lives for residents (Reversed)	2.54	1.31	Low	11
Ecotourism leads to local traffic congestion (Reversed)	2.61	1.31	Moderate	10
Cultural preservation	Mean	SD	Level	Order
Ecotourism promotes protection on local cultural heritage	3.99	0.99	High	1
Ecotourism promotes protection on the diversity of local cultural activities	3.91	0.90	High	2
Ecotourism destroys local Wadi-rum culture	3.29	1.35	Moderate	3
Community capacity building	Mean	SD	Level	Order
Ecotourism enhances the cohesion of community	3.68	1.17	High	4
Ecotourism improves the ability and quality of local residents	3.78	0.97	High	1
Ecotourism contributes to the rehabilitation and training of the local community (courses, training programs)	3.71	1.18	High	3

Ecotourism has contributes to increasing the contribution of the local community through their participation in decision-making	3.71	1.16	High	3
Local tourism contributes to increase in the number of local organizations	3.77	1.08	High	2
Environmental protection	Mean	SD	Level	Order
Ecotourism protects and improve local natural environment	4.05	0.99	High	2
Ecotourism improves local residents' awareness on protection environment	4.15	0.864	High	1
Destination loyalty	Mean	SD	Level	Order
I think tourists will return to Wadi-rum in the future	4.32	0.84	Very high	4
I think tourists are willing to recommend Wadi-rum to family and friends as a holiday destination	4.36	0.86	Very high	2
I think tourists have wonderful image of Wadi-rum as a holiday destination	4.33	0.89	Very high	3
I think tourists are very loyal to Wadi-rum as a destination choice	4.26	0.91	Very high	5
I think tourists will return to the same destinations that they previously visited in Wadi-rum	4.47	0.85	Very high	1

4.4 Hypotheses Testing Results

The current research is mainly seeking to investigate the impact of resident attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty in Wadi-Rum in Jordan. Consequently, in order to test the main hypothesis developed for this study, a simple regression technique was used as demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Regression analysis: Destination loyalty as dependent variable

Dependent variable	r	R ²	f	Sig (f)	β	t	Sig (t)
Destination loyalty	0.633	0.400	141.993	0.000a	0.353	6.476	0.000b

a. Predictors: (Constant), Attitudes towards ecotourism benefits

b. Dependent variable: Destination loyalty

Refer to Table 5 the correlation coefficient $R = 0.633$ indicates that there is a positive correlation between attitudes towards ecotourism benefits and destination loyalty. The R^2 indicated the generalizability of the model. It allows us to generalize the results taken from the respondents to the whole population. In this case it equals 0.400. The results showed that F-ratio for these data is equal to 141.993, which is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. Therefore, we conclude that there is a statistically significant effect of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty. The β indicates the contribution of the predictor (i.e. the independent variable) to the model. Table 5 shows the standardized coefficients for the attitudes towards ecotourism benefits. The value of β is 0.353, which does have a significant effect on destination loyalty.

Hypotheses H2A, H2B, and H2C argued that there is a significant difference in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty due to gender, age, and educational level. Independent Samples T-test was employed in order to investigate if there any significant differences in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty that can be attributed to gender. Also, ANOVA test was employed to examine if there any significant differences in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty that can be attributed to age, and educational level. Results of T-test, shown in Table 6, indicated that there is no significant difference in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty that can be attributed to gender. Also, results of ANOVA test, shown in Table 7, and Table 8, indicated that there is no significant difference in the impact of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty in favor of age, and educational level.

Table 6. T-test of resident attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty due to gender

Variables	Male			Female			T	df	Sig.
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.			
Destination loyalty	141	4.3560	0.65251	156	4.3410	0.74564	0.185	294.700	0.853

Table 7. ANOVA Analysis of resident attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty to age

Variables		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Destination loyalty	Between Groups	3.477	4	0.869	1.783	0.132
	Within Groups	142.325	292	0.487		
	Total	145.801	296			

Table 8. ANOVA Analysis of attitudes towards ecotourism benefits on destination loyalty due to educational level

Variables		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Destination loyalty	Between Groups	3.949	5	0.790	1.620	0.155
	Within Groups	141.853	291	0.487		
	Total	145.801	296			

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Through the case study of Wadi Rum in Jordan and the extent of the environmental impact of tourism and the vulnerability of the various emergency situations from several aspects, found that tourism is a social activity that involves travel on an individual or group aims to stay outside their usual environment over a period not too long; for the purpose of entertainment and business or other purposes. The development of sustainable rural tourism and responsible achievable without the application of the concept environmental thinking. As a result; help ecotourism and naturally on the development of tourism in rural areas. In order to do the natural ecotourism activities, we need to implement the management plans that contribute well to ensure professionalism, training, organization professional improvement for operators and that proper regulation of tourist flows. We need to determine the support for each threshold the protected area through management plans and that the integration of conservation issues and protection of natural and cultural environment with economic issues.

The emergence of the demographic character of the respondents to this study, mostly were females, most of whom are age less than 30 years, and the majority between less than high school and hold a high school diploma. This was with regard to demographic matters. Results of the descriptive analysis which showed determine the level of each of the following formula: (highest point Likert scale - the lowest point in the Likert) / number of levels used = scale (5.1) / 5 = 0.80 , where 1 to 1.80, which reflected "very low", from 1.81 to 2.60, which reflected a "low", from 2.61 to 3.40, which reflected a "moderate", from 3.41 to 4.20, which reflected the "high", and from 4.21 to 5 reflected "very high". And then going on the items ordered according to their means. The emergence of the level of the resident population towards ecotourism benefits for each variable, and found to be at a high level, which was the result of 3.85, and that was for the protection of the environment, economic development, cultural preservation, community capacity building and social development.

The current research seeks primarily to achieve the effect of resident positions in order to take advantage of ecotourism

that helps the loyalty tourist destination in Wadi Rum in Jordan. Further research is needed in other areas to validate the research model. Also, more research should consider the role of Information Technology (IT) in enhancing the ecotourism reachability. Indeed, several researchers consider the information systems and in particular the IT and its flexibility as an enabler to achieve the desired competitive advantages, and as a crucial support to operational and strategic business decisions (Al Azmi et al., 2012; Alenezi et al., 2015; Alkalha et al., 2012; Almajali & Tarhini, 2016; Altamony et al., 2012; Kateb et al., 2015; Maqableh & Karajeh, 2014a, 2014b; Masa'deh, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Masa'deh et al., 2016; Obeidat et al., 2013; Shannak et al., 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Tarhini et al., 2016; Vraskikh et al., 2016); thus further research is required to examine the role of such IT applications in enhancing the managerial decisions. In addition, scholars (e.g. Masa'deh et al. 2008; Hunaiti et al., 2009; Masa'deh & Kuk, 2009; Alshurideh et al., 2012; Hajir et al., 2015; Kannan & Gharibeh, 2013; Masa'deh & Shannak, 2012; Masa'deh et al. 2013; Masa'deh et al. 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Masa'deh et al. 2017; Obeidat et al., 2012, 2016; Shannak & Alkour, 2012; Tarhini et al., 2015a, 2015b) emphasize the need for large firms to integrate their IT systems with their KM strategies and processes in order to survive in their highly competitive business environments, which in turn could accelerate the managerial decisions as well.

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