VOL. 10/ ISSUE. 2 JUNE 2024 Imad Khan et al., 2024
Pp: 583-591

Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)
Journal Homepage: https://pjsel.jehanf.com/index.php/journal ISSN
2521-8123 (Print)
2523-1227 (Online)

The Impact of Conflict on the Tourism Industry: Insights from Swat, Pakistan

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Original Article

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Keywords

Tourism Industry, Conflict, Swat, Tourist Attraction, Resources

Abstract

Tourism is one of the most vulnerable sectors to the impacts of conflict and insecurity. This paper examines the effects of random terror events on the tourism industry in Swat, emphasizing the economic, social, and psychological consequences. Drawing on recent data and case studies, the paper highlights the challenges in sustaining tourism amid perceived threats. A total of 31 questionnaires were filled through snowball technique. The results shows negative relationship between tourism development and conflict in the region. The findings of the study recommend infrastructure development, bridging trust building among local and foreign tourists and a close liaison among line departments with local community and investors for joint and constructive action in the tourism industry.

1. Introduction

Tourism in recent times is considered as one of the main contributors to the economies around the globe. Its contribution to the global GDP reached to 10.3% in 2019 (WTTC, 2019). Similarly, it is believed that 1 in 10 jobs globally are supported by tourism industry. While Arusha (2006) explains that tourism and its allied industries are responsible for 11% of GDP around the globe and a source of employment to more than 225 million people who are 10.7% of the total labor force existed in the world. Low-income countries and developing countries have potential of environmental and cultural assets which are the main sources of tourism industry. These economies have very limited sources of foreign exchange earnings thus tourism industry is one of the major sources through which livelihoods of the inhabitants of these areas can be improved.

World Trade Organization (WTO) (2008) explains that all over the globe tourism sector has evolved as one of the largest sectors which contributes around 35% to the global export services. Tourism industry contributed $2 billion per day income in 2006 and annually the international tourist arrivals increased by 6.5% annually. WTO also estimates that globally a total of 1.6 billion international tourist arrivals are expected by 2020 which explains the potential in the tourist industry. Wall and

Mathieson (2005) explain that potential in tourist industry is bringing hope to the economies which will be getting advantage out of these potential resources which are also considered as a catalyst in bringing change in the commercial and societal markets. Shah and Gupta (2000) emphasize that tourism industry bring positive change in the livelihoods of the local population by giving them employment opportunities and increasing their living standards. Giving the example of Maldives socioeconomic growth resulted because of the developments in the tourism sector. While some of the authors (Shapley 1994; Wall & Mathieson 2005) states that while the recipient economies bear costs such as environmental and social but in the developing economies poor parts of the countries do not receive the benefits as received by the more developed regions in these economies.

Pakistan, which is one of the developing countries and a potential destination for tourist attractions experience growth in tourist activities from 1975 to 2005. According to UNWTO (2013) report the number of tourist arrivals exacerbated in the early 2000 with huge receipts to the exchequer. Tourist industry shows a strong linkage between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment generation. World Tourism and Travel Council (2006) explains that tourism sector contributes around 6.3% to GDP and it also giving employment opportunities. These factors clearly indicates that demand for tourist activities are growing in Pakistan. But despite the importance of tourism industry for the economy, considerable attention is lacking in the priorities of the policy makers in Pakistan. This dilemma is explained by Khan et al. (2011) wherein the author states that Eco-tourism and sustainable development tourism is getting attention in Pakistan in the recent years mainly because of the tourist attractions in the Northern areas. Priority of the government should be on exploiting the potential that exist in the tourist industry without compromising the nature and culture. Thus, need of the hour is to develop and formulate tourism objectives which enhances our capabilities in tourism sector and improve the cultural and environmental resources instead of degrading it. For such purpose a mature planning is necessary which should be in line with the tourism objectives.

Another report published by tourism department in 2002 explain that Swat valley is an emerging tourist destination because of the increasing number of tourist arrival. It is estimated that in 1981 total arrival of tourists to the valley is 10000 which increased to 60000 in 1992 and if further exacerbated to 90000 during a single year in 1993. The tourist arrivals further increased to 0.2 million during 1999-2000. During the same time period a huge influx of local as well as foreign tourist were observed. But unfortunately, the region has gone through conflict in the late 2000. Conflict emerged in the region. While curbing the fanatics, the region has gone through sever destruction and the tourism industry was also a great victum of the crisis. It is estimated that a total of PKR 75 billion losses has been incurred since 2007 in which the hoteling industry alone has endured losses up to PKR7.5 billion. Arshad et al (2018) states that tourism sector is one of the major sectors contributing to the livelihoods of the local population. The estimates shows that about half a million local residents earn their income directly and indirectly from the tourism sector which is the third major contributor to the local economy of Swat. Furth more, the estimates shows that about 15000 workers are employed in the existing restaurants and hotels numbering more than 800.

Therefore, the current research focusses on the analysis of the tourism industry in district swat in connection to the conflict. The aim of the study is to find out how the local community perceive the conflict in connection to the tourism industry in the region. The main objective of the study is to evaluate the linkages between conflict and tourism in the context of Swat, Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa from the perspective of local community. This study is primarily based on the perceptions of the local community i-e., what do they perceived from the conflict and its effects on the local tourist industry. Erstwhile studies such as Raza and Jawaid (2013) explain the short- and long-term

effects of terrorism on tourism in Pakistan, while Hye and Khan (2013) confirms the long run relationship between economic growth and tourism development in Pakistan. Thus, tourism industry in Swat region in relationship to conflict has been analyzed from the perspective of local community.

2. Literature review

Many studies have investigated the importance of tourist industry as well as how terrorism affects the local economies and the tourist industry. As highlighted by Smith (2022), regions experiencing conflict see a decline in tourism arrivals that can extend years beyond the cessation of violence. Similarly, recent analyses by Global Tourism Institute (2021) demonstrate that media portrayal of security issues exacerbates the negative perception of destinations. The World Travel Organization (2020) underscores the importance of robust crisis management strategies to rebuild traveler confidence in conflict-prone areas. These perspectives, among others, provide a foundational understanding of the fragile relationship between tourism and conflict.

Bird et al (2008) explains the relationship between terrorism and how it affects the tourist industry. Terrorism results in the destruction of each and everything that will result in development of the societies and economies. Properties are damaged and destroyed, insecurity prevails, loss of lives, and loss of human and physical capital all occur because of terrorism. Moreover, tourist arrivals face a sever decrease due to conflict which also decreases expenditures by having less consumption and investment and at the end revenue from the tourism sector decreases. Investment in tourism is affected by crisis because people feel uncertainty and the investors become reluctant to invest thus it severely damages the economic growth and development in the long turn.

The study by Tribe (2011) argues that conflict results in increasing the cost on tourism development. He explains that the provision of goods and services to the affected tourist destination become difficult and needs more spending from the government which increases the cost of service delivery to the affected region. The government will also have to provide more security to the tourist and make them feel safe which will further exacerbate the already high cost because of the crisis. Thus, crisis adds more to the cost in the development of the tourism industry. Pizam and Fleisher (2002) analyzed the Israeli tourist industry. The findings shows that tourist arrivals has decreased because of the conflict engulfing the Isrealian territory. The bomb blasts in the area is another factor contributing to the reduction in number of tourist arrivals. The logic behind the destruction of the tourism industry is explained by Alluri (2009) wherein he argues that tourism industry is sensitive to crisis and as well as sensitive to peace because crisis affect the growth from the sector negatively while peace and security increase the income from the tourism sector. Individuals prefer to opt for such tourist destinations which are more peaceful and more secure. While they are reluctant to visit such sites where they feel insecure. Thus, tourism is highly dependent on the existence of peace and is much sensitive to crisis. Thus tourist loss attraction if they are unsafe. The same idea is also emphasized by Bueno de Mesquita (2009) while explain the relationship between crisis and tourism sector development. He argues that tourism is highly prone to violence and efforts should be attempted to avoid crisis and conflicts which will result in violence and thus damages the growth. Tourism revenues can be increase by the avoidance of violence. Llorca-Vivero (2008) further analyzed that this issue is still relatively unknown.

Research in in tourism industry specifically related to conflict has been analyzed in different dimensions for example Buultjens et al (2016) focused on the crisis in Sri Lanka and its effects on the local tourist economy, while Mansfelda and Korma (2015) analyzed the Cultural heritage sites in the Isrealian border in relation to terrorism, another study conducted by Naef and Ploner (2016)

has done post conflict analysis of the tourism industry in Yugoslavia after the WWII. As these studies discusses the conflict-tourism phenomenon in general but are related to a specific issue and area. Almeida et al. (2017) emphasize on the role of leadership in tackling the conflict in the context of tourism. The study suggests that leadership in the conflict management plays its role in beginning of the process, identity building and generating the capacity and dealing with problems while Gutiérrez et al. (2017) and Chien and Ritchie (2018) explains the dynamics of conflict in tourist destinations with reference to local residents. Arshad et al. (2018) focus on the challenges to the Pakistani Tourist industry explaining the potential for economic gains keeping in view the current status. The study further explains the tourism plays a vital role in indirect earnings and has strong potential for foreign direct investment. Azam et al (2018) and Haseeb et al. (2018) highlights the substantial role of tourism in promoting social welfare. Raza and Javed (2013) analyzed the tourism terrorism nexus in Pakistan concluding the significant negative effects of terrorism on tourism, while Kuto & Groves (2004) explains the tourists' behavior during crisis. The conflict in Swat region has a different perspective which needs to be thoroughly analyzed from the perspective of the local community.

After the terrorist attacks in September 2001, terrorism continues to be one of the main sources of uncertainty in the tourism industry. Cooper et al. (2008), explains the uncertainty principle according to which conflict results in uncertian environment which leads to decrease in the flow of tourists. It was also explained by Bird et al, (2008) that tourism industry is affected by conflicts in many ways i-e insecurity and destruction of infrastructure, loss of lives and flow of human capital. The author also argue that conflict diminishes the number of tourist arrivals which have negative impacts on the revenue collection from theses tourist destinations. Due to decrease in tourist arrivals consumption on goods and services decreases and the investors become reluctant to invest while on the other side expenses of the government increases due to the arrangements of more security and delivery of goods and services. If the situation of district Swat is analyzed in the above context we will realize that from 2001 to 2004 there is huge flow of tourist before Talibaniztion and after the conflict the foreign tourist arrivals almost reduced to zero because of the security problems. Terrorism affected the local economy as well as the livelihoods of the local residents. Properties were damaged, many individuals lost their lives, infrastructure was severely damaged and investors took a lot more time to invest because of the trust deficit.

3. Data Sources and Methodology

This is quantitative research in which we investigated the relationship between the two main variable, tourism and terrorism .In this research we used tourism as dependent variable and terrorism as independent variable. Terrorism was measured in terms of incidents took place in swat district during the conflict and terrorism was measured in term of number of tourist visited swat before and after conflict.

The main target areas were Mingora, Bahrain, Madyan. These areas were purposely selected because most of the hotels are situated in these areas. A total of 31 respondents were interviewed through questionnaire. These respondents were selected through snowball sampling technique (Kitchenham & Pfleeger, 2002). The samples selected were considered as representatives of the population therefore non probability samples were created. Attempts were made to select respondents who are having range of opinions.

3.2 Hypothesis

H_0= there is no relationship between tourism and terrorism.
H_1=terrorism effects tourism negatively.

3.3 Theoretical Background

Tourism development and innovation has become a hard topic in recent times (Peters and Waterman, 1982). The tourism industry is not a single entity rather it is a complex of different combinations ranging from economic dimensions (Weiermair, 2006) to entrepreneurship and the changing role of entrepreneurship (Richards & Carson, 2006; Koh & Hatten, 2002; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). Therefore, multiple actors and organizations collectively make Tourism industry a complex system of actions. The success of these actors is related on solutions to questions existing in different context. The context of Swat region is dominated by militancy since 2004. To understand the success of these tourism organizations, the researchers used actor-network theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005; Law, 1992). This approach is relevant to study tourism because its focus is on the collective actions (Latour, 2005, p. 14). According to this theory, collective action would only be made up of interactions between social actors which also include the local residents of Swat.

3.4 Econometric Model

Equation (1) presents functional form of the model

Tour= f (Tn, Se, Mi, Lg, Ft) ..... (1)

Where "Tour" presents tourism which is independent variable. Tn represents total number of tourist arrivals, Se represents security, Mi represents militancy and Ft represents Foreign tourist arrivals.

Where as Eq. (2) presents econometric model

$$Tour = \propto + \beta 1(Tn) + \beta 2(Se) + \beta 3(Mi) + \beta 4(Lg) + \beta(Ft) + \cup i \text{ ..... } (2)$$

4.1 Data analysis and interpretation

For this study we collected the data from a total of thirty respondents in which majority agreed that hoteling industry was growing rapidly before the start of the conflict but when the conflict started tourists stopped traveling to Swat and the adjacent areas, which used to be their attractive spots. Table 1 shows results of the different relevant questions posed in which almost all of the respondents gave same answers to the main question whether conflict affected the hoteling industry or not? T-statistics is 2.074 for the question that foreign tourists usually visited Swat before the conflict. It means that there has been a significant relationship between the two main variables; terrorism and hoteling industry. It is evident from the results that conflict and hoteling industry has negative significant relationship. Thus, a decrease in conflict leads to expansion of hotel industry.

Table 2 explains the situation of hoteling business before conflict. Around 90 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that hoteling industry was profitable before the conflict. Before conflict hoteling industry was on peak. Most of hotel owner earn from tourist and mostly from foreign tourist which spent more than domestic and the local hotel owner would earn nicely. But now the domestic tourist come rarely because the floods had destroyed the infrastructure. So, this is very difficult for tourist to visit to these tourist spot.

Table 3 shows the averages of the respondents to one of the main question on the relationship between terrorism and tourism. About 83 percent of the total respondents strongly agreed that conflict negatively affected the hoteling industry. It has been observed during the data collection process that most of the owners of the hoteling industry were very rich and their income level was higher before the conflict erupted in Swat. It was the post conflict period when they were affected the most and lots of tourists who used to visit Swat before the conflict now ceased to travel and

stay in the hotels where they used to stay before. It was revealed by most of the respondents that the tourists particularly the foreign tourists would pay higher prices for their short stay in Swat as compared to local tourists, but after the conflict all the foreign tourists ceased to travel which negatively affected the income level of the local hotel owners. Conflict negatively affected tourism because the number of domestic tourist decreases so that it affected the living standard of the hotel owners and the labor who work in these hotels.

Majority of the respondents replied that foreign tourists were visiting the region before the crisis but when conflict hit the area the industry faced a severe decline in the number of tourists from other countries. The Budhist remains were considered as main attractions for these tourists who were mainly keen to see the remains of Ghandhara Civilizations but the crisis resulted in limiting the number of these tourists. Majority of the respondents believed that the conflict has resulted in the reduction of not only the foreigners but also the local tourists. Due to the crisis people still are reluctant to visit the area due to insecurity they feel.

Buultjen et al (2016) while analyzing the Sri Lankan crisis and the tourist industry also concluded that the crisis significantly affected the foreign tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka. After the conflict ended government heavily invested in development of infrastructural projects which boosted the tourism sector and its share in the economic development. Mansfeld and Kormana (2015) in the analysis of the war and peace among the Isrealian border also reach to the same conclusion that tourist activities become stagnant during crisis over the border and flourish when there is peace. The development in such areas and the tourist's arrivals is primarily concerned with security situations as well as economic factors. Naef and Plone (2016) in the analysis of Yugoslavian war conclude that the conflict damaged the local tourist industry. In some parts of the region after the WWII when Yugoslavia opened its borders for foreigner's specifically European tourists, tourism development took place. The tourism activates in Bosnia–Herzegovina was also led to a complete halt due to crisis. Cattaruzza & Sintès (2012), also state that Balgaria and Yugoslavia attracted foreign tourists after the conflict and developed its tourism industry by attracting seaside tourist in the Western Europe. Upon review of the studies conducted in other countries/regions one can find almost same situation in the tourism industry affected by conflict. As stated above the crisis in Swat valley reduced the number of foreign as well as local tourist arrivals in the region and the tourism industry was badly affected which led to losses for related individuals and firms as well as significantly affected the local economy. A close interaction between local government and other line departments is necessary for the uplift of the tourism industry in the local area. Same results about the connectivity between line department is emphasized by Almeida et al. (2017) and Gutiérrez et al. (2017) wherein the authors show the importance of leadership in conflict management for tourism revival. The role of leadership management is of vital importance for tourism uplift in swat valley so as eliminate trust deficit among the tourist and promotion of better services and facilities. Connectivity among line departments and leadership will play its role in beginning of the process, identity building and generating the capacity and dealing with problems.

5.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

The interplay between conflict and tourism remains a critical area for research and policy intervention. While Swat continues to grapple with challenges, the adoption of innovative strategies can pave the way for recovery and growth. Policymakers must prioritize collaboration with local and international stakeholders to address the underlying issues affecting tourism resilience. This study emphasizes the role of local community, investors, governmental and non-governmental organizations in the revival of tourism industry in Swat valley. Without the involvement of local community and investors any development initiative will bring no optimal results in conflict resolution and tourism revival in the region.

Possible future research can be conducted on inter and intra connectivity between different governmental and non-governmental organizations in line with local community. These agents are primarily responsible for the policy formulation and execution. A research on developing a mechanism on the strong connection between these agents for the smooth functioning keeping in view people perception will be of significance to the conflict resolution and tourism development.

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