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Investigating the Determinants of Social Media Touristic Website Attractiveness in Order For People to Use for Planning Future Trip

Abstract:

The technologies and functions of social media have significantly changed interaction on touristic websites (Llach *et al.,* 2013). These changes affect the perceived attractiveness of websites (Peng *et al.,* 2013). The determinants of attractive social media websites and corresponding online instruments remain under-investigated (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). Therefore, this study explores and describes factors of website attractiveness in the context of touristic social media and its relevance for potential usage for people to plan trips. This study examines the role of travel reviews in the process of planning trips; identify factors which influence poten-tial traveller's evaluations of touristic website and social media. For the area of social media, this study shows essen-tial success-relevant factors from the user perspective. Accordingly, the re-sults can serve as a starting point for other theoretical and empirical studies. The results of this study showed that virtual existence, published content and social networking positively influences social media attractiveness in the touris-tic context. Subsequently, social media attractiveness leads to people develop-ing intentions to visit use websites to plan for trips.

Key words: Online content, social networking, tourism websites, virtual existence

1. Introduction

The tourism industry provides products and services that cannot be observed or manipulated through direct experience prior to purchase (Llach *et al.,* 2013). Thus, people turn to indirect experience, such as the materials sited online (Turban *et al.,* 2000). Although people have been using the Internet to connect with others since the early 1980s, it is only in the last decade that social networking services have flourished and became popular practice (Lenhart *et al.,* 2010). Online travel catalogues, advisory, and bookings has been adopted by an increasing number of tourists worldwide (Llach *et al.,* 2013). Many tourists use the Internet for traveling preparation, searching for travel related information (Peng *et al.,* 2013). Hence, appealing and thought-provoking reports and presentations of travel destination is an important success factor in the tourism industry (Llach *et al.,* 2013).

Social media is used to describe a two-way media communication, sharing large scale (such as news blogs) or smaller user-generated content networks or micro-communities (such as blogs, podcasts, or wikis) (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). The rapid interest of social media is primarily for information and entertainment (Peng *et al.,* 2013). In the tourism industry, social networks and websites allow users to interact and provide reviews on hotels or on tourist attractions (Milanoa *et al.,* 2011). The websites users do not have pre-existing associations (the discussion, reviews, and ratings generated by other users). People who have visited a destination write on the website about their personal experiences, opinions, feedbacks and criticisms (positive and negative comments) (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013).

Online experiences have much greater potential in visualizing travel destinations (Llach *et al.,* 2013). Social media and websites play an important role as information sources through its 3D interactive tours (interactive onde-mand videos), guest reviews, etc. (Milanoa *et al.,* 2011). Therefore, it is important for practitioners to understand the Internet usage for potential tourists decision-making process in visiting a certain destination (Peng *et al.,* 2013). Turban *et al.,* (2000) indicated that it is important for the providers of touristic services to understand the way that tourists behave. This type of knowledge helps practitioners and authorities in tourism for developing a proper marketing strategy online (Llach *et al.,* 2013).

Prior academic studies have been conducted to investigate what stimulates people to actively contribute to online travel related websites (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003) and some research also exists regarding reasons to share opinions online (Peng *et al.,* 2013). However, there is limited research available that shed light on consumers' motivations to use website and social media for planning vacations (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). Accordingly, this study fills the academic gap, seeking insights on why travel customers visit online communities for their online travel purchasing (social media help with their purchase decision).

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the Internet on the demand side of the tourist market. The aim of this study is to contribute to a

better knowledge of Egyptian consumer behaviour by identifying the determinants that influence potential travellers to the use the Internet for travel planning. This study examines the role of travel reviews in the process of planning trips; identify factors which influence potential traveller's evaluations of touristic website and social media

2. Research Objectives

This research investigated the determinants (factors), which makes touristic website attractive for people to plan and book their future trips. The goal of the research was to empirically validate that there are various motivational factors in a touristic website development (website evaluation focus on specific web environment). These factors needed to be first clearly defined. This study was conducted in two phases: Phase I defines features and categories, and Phase II studies their motivational significance in the Egyptian context. The objective of the investigation was to construct a list of understandable features and categories regarding touristic website attractiveness. In order to do this, the researcher divided the research approach into two stages. Phase 1 was to ask subjects to group a set of preidentified features into commonly acceptable categories. Phase 2 was to verify the classification and refine the features and categories in order to identify the significance of each factor.

3. Theoretical Framework

Internet is an important communication channel in the tourism industry (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). The Internet provides an opportunity for the tourism industry to promote and sell services and products and to act in accordance with desires of consumers (Llach *et al.,* 2013).The Internet has recently become an essential part of media planning. Internet technologies help travel organisations in increasing efficiency and developing value-added services (Peng *et al.,* 2013) . Furthermore, travel websites and social media offer illustrated catalogues that provide potential customers with a significant amount of information, with high aesthetic photos, useful tips, maps and much more (Llach *et al.,* 2013). Social media and websites provide people with various online activities for gathering and sharing online information and knowledge (Lenhart *et al.,* 2010). Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Podcasts and Trip advisor are the best known and effective social media networks for marketing in the tourism industry (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). TripAdvisor Fact Sheet (2013) exposed that the many tourists search for hotel, airport, casino, beach, and map most frequently online.

3.1. Social Media and the Tourism Industry

The contact and communication among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks are identified as social media. Social media are: "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content"(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Social media networks are subcategories of information communication technology (ICT). They are "online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online and participation and collaboration" (Newson, 2008, p.3).

Social media are considered online communities of people who share, gain, and acknowledge common interests and activities.

The convenience, user-friendliness, accessibility, openness and availability of Internet have radically changed tourists' motivation to plan and book trips with different destination (Llach *et al.,* 2013). The uses of online websites give people around the world the opportunity to network, share ideas, and discuss issues regarding their tourism experience (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). It provides people with a collection of various interaction possibilities, such as instant chats, multiple videoconferences, exchange of email messages, participation in blogs, and discussion groups (Llach *et al.,* 2013). Hence, social media stimulates and encourages interaction of people to raise awareness about tourists' opinions in through the country (Peng *et al.,* 2013).

Potential tourists tend to desire various travel reports and news to gain knowledge before departure (Peng *et al.,* 2013). Travellers use the Internet when they decide to plan a trip in order to benefit from the social interactions (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). Through the use of various websites and social media, potential vacationers can check and assess photos or reviews from acquaintances' past trips posted on Facebook or by unknown travelers that post reviews on sites (Peng *et al.,* 2013). Social media marketing strategies can be crucial for satisfying tourist demand in the global world (Llach *et al.,* 2013). Social media lead visitors to find exactly what they are looking for, and making the tourist destination a perfect fit (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013).

3.2. Social Media in Egypt

Social media technologies represent an important instrumental resource that contributed to the birth and sustainability of various types of materials, news, information (Peng *et al.,* 2013). Access to social media among Egyptians is available because of government efforts to expand the nation's information technology capabilities as a tool for socioeconomic development (Hamdy, 2009). This undertaking took place in the beginning of 1999 when the government allowed for free Internet access, low-cost computers, and the expansion of Internet access centres (Hamdy, 2009). Due to the successful implementation of a free Internet strategy, Egypt now has the largest Internet market in Africa with more than five million users in early 2006 (Internet World Stats, 2014). Internet service has improved dramatically in the country in the last decade (Galal, 1999). According to *Internet World Stats* (2014), Egypt contains 29,809,724 Internet users as of June 2012 (35.6% of the population). Additionally, the popularity of the Internet usage in the country and the common online business access that reach Arabic-speaking markets is due to the development of Arabic websites and software's (Goldrup 2000). This invention, reduced the main issue (lack of Arabic language e-commerce) that held back regional e-commerce expansion (Barnwell and Beliakov, 2000).

The use of social media and networking services has become an integral part of Egyptians' daily lives (Barnwell and Beliakov, 2000). According to Collin *et al.* (2011), recent literature review, social networking services play a vital role in people's lives, delivering

educational outcomes; accessing more information than ever before; facilitating supportive relationships; identity formation (Self-estteem building); and promoting useful products and services. A major advantage of social media is its capacity for swiftly exchanging and disseminating information to millions (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013) of people inside and outside of Egypt (Barnwell and Beliakov, 2000).

3.3. Motives for Online Touristic Information Search

Social media is generally used to describe collaborative media comminotion, viewing user-generated content networks (Lenhart *et al.,*2010).With the Internet, people are consuming, producing, sharing and remixing media. Thus, there is the claim that today's people are "prod-users", they enthusiastically and actively produce and consume media (Bruns 2008). Social media empowers and aids people to engage in creative content production, inspiring them with new means of generating, nourishing, and bearing connections with others (Lenhart *et al.,* 2010).

Prior literature showed that potential tourists are persuaded to search for online travel reviews before travel decisions (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013). People are attracted to the use of the Internet for various purposes and motives (Lenhart *et al.,* 2010).Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) indicated that tourists' use the Internet to search for touristic information because of their functional needs, hedonic needs, innovation needs, aesthetic needs and sign needs. Kim *et al.* (2011) discovered that potential tourists are motivated to seek online travel reviews due to its convenience and qu-

ality, risk reduction, and social reassurance. Fodness and Murray (1999) indicate that a tourist's information search strategy has significant impacts on his length of stay, number of destination visited, number of attractions visited, and the travel-related expenditures. Browsing a touristic website leads to changes of attitude and behaviour, including searching for more information, coming back to the website, and visiting the destination (Wirtz *et al.,* 2013).

Literature have emphasised that use of social media is an increasingly complex communicative practice intrinsically linked to the diversification of media practices (Lenhart *et al.,* 2010). However, there is a rapid interest in social media (Peng *et al.,* 2013). For the purposes of this paper, the researcher focused on why people are attracted to use social networks for planning trips. According to Wirtz *et al.* (2013) study, the results showed that social media website attractiveness is determined by the interaction orientation, social networking and user-added value. Thus, this study took these variables and examined them in the Egyptian context to establish a link regarding the intention to use social media. The researcher wanted to develop results that shed light on the key aspects of users' expectations towards the integration of social media into vacation planning and how social media instruments the Egyptians evaluate. The researcher hypothesized that:

H1: virtual existence positively influences touristic social media attractiveness

H2: published content positively influences touristic social media attractiveness

H3: social networking positively influences touristic social media attractiveness

4. Methodology

According to Chowdhury's (2004) report: *"customers value, and are willing to pay for the simplification of decision making, the reduction of perceived risk, the optimal configuration of the transaction for their specific usage context, and the enhancement of the in-use experience* (p.494)*."* This declaration summarises the initial position of this research. This study wanted to investigate the determinants of social media attractiveness of potential tourists. The study addresses the research question "Why do people get attracted to social media when planning their vacations?" To investigate this question, two research approaches were conducted sequentially (a qualitative stage and quantitative stage).

Stage 1: Hypothesis formulation.

The first phase in this study was the qualitative. It was a *cross-sectional study* that took place during March 2014. This phase was *exploratory in nature*. The research study began with very little information known about what concerning the interaction orientation, social networking, and user-added value of social media, which makes it attractive for people to visit touristic websites (Wirtz *et al*., 2013). Thus, this study was a *correlational study*, interested in delineating the important variables. The investigation was done in Egyptian society (non-contrived setting), making it a *field study* (Creswell, 2009; Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

The researcher used *semi-structured interviews* to collect preliminary data in order to develop a proposed conceptual framework and specific hypotheses. The selection of the people was based on *purposive sampling*. The interviewees that were chose were people who used the Internet before traveling preparation, searching for travel related information. Fifteen interviews were conducted until saturation level of data was met (no new information was being stated). These participants were asked several question concerning what made social media and other social traveling websites attractive and how it impacted travellers' future traveling plans. The researcher interviewed all the respondents and recorded the discussion with their permission. The recordings were transcribed into computer files. Once the transcription was composed, the researcher began the theme analysis to provide a more reality-based standpoint of the visitors.

The qualitative analysis outcome helped emerge set of hypotheses aimed at answering the research question. They have been formulated based on the literature review and the information obtained through semi-structured interviewing of a carefully selected target sample.

Stage 2: Hypothesis validation.

The second phase in this study was the quantitative. It was a *cross-sectional study* that took place during March 2014. This phase was *descriptive in nature*. Descriptive researches are designed to gain more information and identify particular characteristics within a certain field of study. The set of hypotheses that were developed based on the qualitative outcomes provided the

dimensions for constructing a questionnaire. After testing and refinement, the questionnaire has then been used to collect data that provides evidence in favour or against these hypotheses. The questionnaire helped measure the impact of social media attractiveness factors on tourists' intentions to visit destinations.

Convenience sampling was used. The *consumers intercept data collection method* was used. The researcher stopped random people on the streets, shopping malls, college campuses, sports clubs, and retail outlets and asked if they were willing to fill out a questionnaire. Those who agreed were given the survey to fill out. This questionnaire allowed minimum interference with the consumers while answering the questions. It ensured more reliable responses from the participants since they did not have to feel like they had to conform to another individual's expectations.

5. Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analyses built valid inferences and conclusions in the form of words. The aim was to determine factors that influence potential travellers to the use the Internet for travel planning. This study examines the role of travel reviews in the process of planning trips; identify factors which influence potential traveller's evaluations of touristic website and social media. The researcher reduced, selected, coded, and combined the qualitative data (the reports and information) in order to evaluate the outcomes and develop themes (patterns of thoughts and opinions that the interviewees expressed). The current study used thematic analysis to examine and determine the main themes that emerged in the interviews.

The researcher visited numerous sites (college campuses, malls, sports club, etc.) to learn about people's perspectives regarding the usage of touristic websites and social media. Table 1 illustrates the attributes of the participants in this study.

Table 1: Respondents Demographic Traits

	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Career
Respondent 1	Female	Age 23	Single	Student
Respondent 2	Female	Age 30	Single	Business
Respondent 3	Female	Age 60	Widow	Teaching
Respondent 4	Male	Age 45	Divorced	Administrator
Respondent 5	Female	Age 18	Singe	Student
Respondent 6	Male	Age 26	Single	Swimming Coach
Respondent 7	Male	Age 28	Single	Engineer
Respondent 8	Male	Age 45	Single	Artist
Respondent 9	Male	Age 61	Married	Administrator
Respondent 10	Female	Age 55	Married	Business
Respondent 11	Female	Age 24	Engaged	Academic Researcher
Respondent 12	Female	Age 33	Married	House wife
Respondent 13	Female	Age 26	Engaged	Teaching
Respondent 14	Female	Age 24	Single	Teaching
Respondent 15	Male	Age 48	Married	Business Professor

The interviewees indicated that when people enter these websites to view content, leave comments, like posts, share pictures, join conversations, and engage with contacts and fans, they become attracted to the source, using it as a guide for the traveling planning. Furthermore, when the online visitors feel like they are gaining awareness, they are much more likely to become a return visitor and to recommend the site to their friends and family. One specific interviewee stated that:*"a network of travellers can aid people by contributing their suggestions, reviews, and a-dvice regarding various destinations and facilities. These linkages with people in a social network and is designed to save time on finding those who share travel similar tastes"*. Hence, travel and hospitality industries and social media can work together to drive guest engagement. Based on the interviews' quotations and paradigms, various antecedents were developed to know what constitutes for the creation of social media attractiveness. The following conceptual framework was developed based on the qualitative outcomes.

Figure 1:Proposed research Model- Antecedents of Social Media Attractiveness
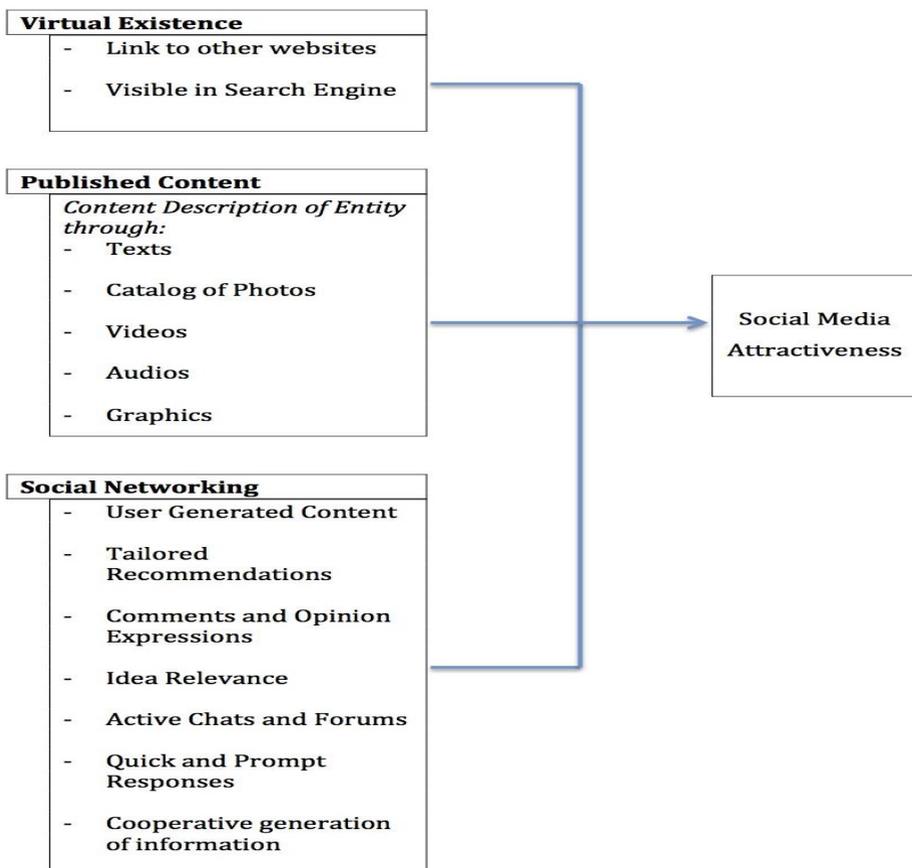
Once the model was formed, the researcher hypothesized that these antecedents (virtual existence, published content and social networking) positively influences social media attractiveness in the touristic context. Subsequently, social media attractiveness leads to people developing intentions to visit a certain country.

6. Quantitative Analysis

The determinants of social media attractiveness on potential tourists' intentions to visit a certain country were then assessed through a quantitative research approach. The questionnaires were ana-lysed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program, to answer the research questions and to support or invalidate the hypotheses. The reliability analysis, validity analysis, frequency analysis, correlation analysis, and regressions were conducted. The researcher received back 120 administrated questionnaires that were complete and accurate, for a response rate of 52%. The participants were from different demographic backgrounds (age , gender, marital status, career, and income) in order to ensure a large enough variety in the studied population. Table 1 shows the respondents' traits.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Traits of the Respondents

	Gender		Age		Marital Status		Career Field	
Category and Percentage	Female Male	52.6% 47.4%	20 less than 35 35 less than 50 50 less than 65	46.7% 43.3% 10%	Single Engaged Married	42.2% 21% 36.8%	Student Academic Engineering Financing Business	37% 26% 10.5% 10.5% 16%
Total		100%		100%		100%		100%

The first analysis conducted in the SPSS was the reliability analysis. This exploration was carried out to help indicate the stability, consistency and the "goodness" of each instrument that measured the variables. The Cronbach's Alpha in this analysis pointed to how well the scale's statements were positively correlated to one another. The closer the Alpha was to one, the higher the internal consistency (Pallant, 2007). This research showed that all the variables' Cronbach's Alpha were above 0.65, indicating that their scales were stable, consistent and free from error across time and across various items. The Cronbach's Alphas for each varia

ble were: Virtual Existence (.849), Social Networking (.857), User Generated (.855), Social Media (.860), and Intentions (.946).

The second analysis, the correlation analysis, conducted in this study was used to test hypothesizes that were developed from the proposed conceptual framework. The researcher hypothesized that the independent variables (Virtual Existence, Social Networking, User Generated Content) leads to positive social media attractiveness. Subsequently, social media leads to people developing intentions to visit a certain country. The results showed that virtual existence, social networking, and user

generated content had a positive and significant relationship with the potential tourists attraction to social media. Furthermore, social media was significant in creating their intentions to travel to various countries and destinations. Table 3 illustrates the conclusions regarding the hypotheses.

Table 2: Research Hypotheses Conclusions

Hypothesis	Correlation Coefficient	Relationship Description
Virtual Existence & Social Media Attractiveness	.444**	Positive, Strong, Significant
Social Networking & Social Media Attractiveness	.460**	Positive, Strong, Significant
User Generated & Social Media Attractiveness	.569**	Positive, Strong, Significant
Social Media & Intents to visit a country	.663**	Positive, Strong, Significant

The multiple regressions analysis was the final analysis to be conducted. It was a more sophisticated exploration of the interrelationship among the set of variables. The researcher used the multiple regression to explain each antecedent's contribution in creating touristic social media attractiveness.This discovery was recognized through the Beta coefficients. The variable with the largest Beta value made had the strongest effect (Pallant, 2007). In this study, the variables varied in its contribution and significance to the prediction of the creating social media attractiveness. According to the multiple regression analysis, the variable that strongly creates social media attractiveness was social networking (Beta Value=0.473). Subsequently, user generated content (Beta Value=0.223) and virtual existence (Beta Value=0.134) made touristic websites attractive.

7. Conclusion and Discussion
The results of the study highlight the combination of factors, which are important for customers and are likely to influence their future online visits to make travel plans. The starting point of the study was a conceptional derivation and empirical examination of factors, which influence the attractiveness of social media regarding the tourism industry. The qualitative insights emerged featured of social media factors that go beyond classic Internet offers. Egyptians believe that when it comes to the *"virtual existence of the social media",* it is attractive because it provides visibility of various touristic industries in the search engine and it links viewers to other related websites. When it comes to the *"published content texts of the social media",* they enjoyed the availability of the catalogue of photos, videos, audios, and graphics. Finally, when it comes to the *"user generated content of the social media",* they favoured the tailored recommendations, comments and opinion expressions, idea relevance, active chats and forums, quick prompt responses, and the cooperative generation of information.

The quantitative phase, which developed measures, proved to be reliable

and valid. These scales can be used to differentiate the concept of digital attractiveness in further empirical contributions. The proposed research model showed an acceptable fit and all hypotheses concerning the social media attractiveness constructs cannot be rejected. The virtual existence, published content and social networking of the social media positively affects perceived attractiveness of a social media. Attitudes towards Social Networking also have a positive effect on Social Media Website Attractiveness. Perceived Social Media Website Attractiveness in turn has a strong effect on people's traveling plans (the intention to use respective offers).

8. Academic and Practical Contribution

The identification of touristic web design features and categories that create a sense of user satisfaction adds value to the flourishing lists of design features. Thus, this study contributed academically by adding more knowledge to this field, electronic tourism development. This study developed a conceptual model that seeks to assess the effectiveness of the factors in which makes a touristic website attractive for potential visitors to make traveling plans. The model integrated three dimensions of service quality to determine the association between website visitors' satisfaction and retention of electronic tourism services online (websites and social media).

In an increasingly competitive touristic environment, motivational websites may prove to be a competitive advantage. The results of this preliminary study indicate that some features are

judged to be primarily attractive and motivational in nature, encouraging potential visitors to plan and book their trips.

9. Practical Implications and Recommendations

Practical implications of this research can be derived rom this outcomes to help various practitioners. Accordingly, the expectations of users have to be considered when social media strategies are developed. They cannot be successful if they are not aligned to an active role of the user in the process of value generation and user feedback. Interaction Orientation, Social Networking and User-added Value contribute to the attractiveness of social media platforms. Companies have to make sure they allocate a sufficient amount of resources in this sector.

The research shows that the features and categories describing the functionality of a touristic website are consistently identified as Interaction Orientation, Social Networking and Useradded Value. Thus, the researcher recommends that touristic websites should take these factors into consideration in order to establish motivational characteristics of websites in order to enhance cognitive outcomes, enjoyment, visual appearance and credibility among the people that are planning and booking their vacations and travel trips. These preliminary results suggest a framework for web designers who want to increase user satisfaction and decrease dissatisfaction.

10. Research Limitation and Future Studies

This study contained several limitations. It used nonprobability-sampling techniques; it focused on general social media, not something in specific (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and weblogs); due to time and geographic constraints, this research was a cross sectional study; and the outcomes were based on specific towns not the entire country, making the findings not generalizable to the whole population in Egypt.

In order to enhance this research in upcoming, investigations, future research is expected to broaden the sample size and scope of this study and focus on classifying and perhaps examining other web design factors and measures of customer satisfaction within the touristic website context. More so it is essential to develop better model that integrates other dimensions outside the ones used in this research and to assess their impact. Furthermore, future research should use a probability sampling technique in order for the results to be more generalizable.

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