MEASURING SOCIAL MEDIA FUNCTIONALITY ON THE FORMATION OF TOURIST VALUE CREATION

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ABSTRACT: *This study seeks to measure the factors related to social media functionality in the tourism industry promotion and its impact on the formation of Tourist Value Creation. This study hypothesized that media presence, information sharing, relational bonds, conversation, and reputation impact in tourist value creation (influence tourist planning/ taking trips). This study uses a quantitative research approach, with a cross-sectional design and a descriptive purpose. Each of the variables is measured using a 5-point Likert scale (the number of the items varied in each scale). This study distributed questionnaires online, using non-probability sample. The SPSS program is used to analyze the collected data. Based on this study's outcome, all the hypotheses were supported except for one hypothesis. Social media functionality related to conversation development, information sharing, online presence, and reputation impact tourist value creation. Relationship building through social media was deemed insignificant. This study seeks to provide noncommercial accumulated and up-to-date knowledge in the discipline. Industry practitioners can apply the empirical findings from this academic research to their businesses in order to remain competitive.*

KEYWORDS: functionality, information sharing, online conversations, online presence, reputation, social media, touristic value creation

INTRODUCTION

Kemp (2020) in a research showed that the globe is living in a new Digital 2020. According to the report that they summarized, for the first time – more than half of the world's total population now uses social media. The media usage has become part of people's daily lives, especially when it comes to using social media networks and applications (APCO world report, 2020). The data reportedly analyzed indicated that 3.96 billion people use social media today, accounting roughly 51% of the global population. Due to the pandemic that world has faced, in the year 2020, one million people are using social media for the first time every single day since this time last year (Kotler, 2020).

Buhalis and Law (2008) exhibited the ubiquity and status quo of information technology in tourism marketing and management. When it comes to the tourism industry, research have illustrated that social media is a popular information search that aids individuals in planning vacations and or using various tourism products and services (Gretzel, 2018).

According to Leung et al., (2013): *"Social media have been widely adopted by travelers to search, organize, share, and annotate their travel stories and experiences through blogs and microblogs (Blogger and Twitter), online communities (Facebook, RenRen, and TripAdvisor), media sharing sites (Flickr and YouTube), social bookmarking sites (Delicious), social knowledge sharing sites (Wikitravel), and other tools in a collaborative way"* (p.1). Therefore, this study seeks to measure Social media Functionality on the formation of Tourist Value Creation.

Considering the important role of social media in both travelers' decision making as well as in tourism operations and management, this study is practically important. It aids practitioners to comprehend and distinguish how businesses in the tourism industry can use social media to encourage tourism in the country; the function that can be applied on social media to develop tourist values, which influence their planning/ taking trips. Gretzel (2018) proposed that academic research could benefit the industry by providing theoretical principles to guide practitioners' decisions. In addition, Line and Runyan (2012) suggested that scholars have to regularly review prior research because revisiting existing research on specific research areas can assist them in understanding historical patterns and predicting future trends in the market. Therefore, this study is considered academically important. This study seeks to provide noncommercial accumulated and up-to-date knowledge in the discipline. Industry practitioners can apply the empirical findings from this academic research to their businesses in order to remain competitive.

Research Objective
The travel sector has continued to enlarge and spread throught the world. Many nations are seeking economical benefits for the country through its tourism business, which makes it one of the most significant and higher growth segments in the world - regardless of the ruin that exisit during 2020 (Ly and Ly, 2020). When it comes to promoting and marketing destinations or other touristic products and services, marketers need to create compelling content, especially when it comes to social media. Content is important to tourists in both pre and post tripping time (Narangajavana et al., 2019). The objective of this research paper seeks is to determine if social media influence tourism value creation which is used during decision making; and to discover the functional benefits tourists perceive when using social media while preparing to travel. The study will explore the questions: "does social media functionality influence Tourists value creation towards tourism?" and "what are the functionality roles social media plays when it comes to businesses in the tourism industry?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to tourism research, the destination image is what attracts tourists to develop intentions to visit a certain destination. Destination image refers to *"expressions of awareness, prejudices, impressions, imaginations and emotional thoughts toward a particular place"* (Lawson and Baud-Bovy, 1977). Accordingly, research showed that destination image encompasses an organic image and cognitive image. The cognitive image is: *"beliefs, impressions, ideas, perceptions, and knowledge"* (Revilla Hernández et

al., 2016). The cognitive image emerged according to the organic image. Organic image is fitting to an individual's experiences and opinion shaped by stimulated information from external sources, such as promotion and advertising (Gunn, 1972). Research have confirmed that social media is a vital tool to develop the organic image of a destination (Gretzel, 2018). Social media acts a mechanism that drives tourists behavior intentions (Mansfield, 2018). This is because social media provides many functions that aid marketing practices (Kotler, 2020).

Wang et al. (2002) explained that there is a popular trend in which tourists use social media as a source of information and in their travel involvement. This is because of the benefits offered by social media networks. Parra-López et al. (2011) research showed that advanced technology has many advantages that allow people to be able to prepare travel and trips enthusiastically. The utilization of social media has a positive outlook for tourists and is believed to have functional benefits (Wang, 2004; Mansfield, 2018).

The Concept of Social Media in the Tourism Industry
With the help of the Internet, social media networks emerged, which connected people together as a source of social benefits (Wang, 2004). Social media provides quick electronic communication of content. It enables the sharing of ideas, videos, pictures, photos, news, thoughts, and information through virtual communities (Mansfield, 2018).

When social media was first introduced to the world, it was meant to connect friends and family, allowing them to interact with one another (Gretzel, 2018). Now, Businesses have taken social media as a tool to generate profits and building a brand (Mansfield, 2018). Businesses see that social media is a significant tool that allows communication method (customized or standard) to reach out to mass customers (Gretzel, 2018). Social media usage has become part of people's daily lives. 3.96 billion people use social media today, accounting roughly 51% of the global population (APCO world report, 2020). Research have claimed that the power of social media is the ability to connect and share information with anyone around the globe simultaneously (Kotler, 2020).

Social media has made a huge impact on the tourism industry (Gretzel, 2018). People worldwide that develop intentions to travel, whether locally or internationally, engage with social networking sites to research trips (Ly and Ly, 2020). On social media, people make informed decisions about their travels as they find tourism content that is from formal (from marketers and business representatives) and informal sources (other customers, friends and family). Researches have found out that when people online share their personal experiences of a particular touristic product or service, such as hotel, restaurant or airline, this can encourage or discourage individuals traveling plans (Gretzel, 2018). According to Kemp (2020), TripAdvisor in particular has had a wide-reaching effect on the industry. *"It has 50 million unique monthly visitors who are actively seeking out travel information and advice from the sources they trust the most: other tourists and holiday-makers"* (p.1).

Social Media Functionality

Social media provides potential tourists with significant functional benefits, such as searching info about travel. Social media provides proficiency and comfort of web-based trip, where people can gain useful information without geographical or temporal boundaries, which rationalize the decision-making process (Wang, 2004). According to Ly and Ly (2020), social media provides tourist with the beneficial functions related to interactive information and communication, such as media presence, information sharing, relational bonds, conversation, and reputation. *"Tourists can autonomously organize their travel, vacation, and leisure time, and also share opinions on destinations and experiences by texting online comments and reviews"* (Luigi and Curzi, 2017, p.1). Accordingly, based on what prior studies specified as social media functionality related to business dealings, the researcher developed the hypotheses in this study.

Social Media Provides Online Conversations

Social media user communicates with various people online. Texts as "online conversations" provide a large deposit of information on both the supply and demand sides of tourism (Luigi and Curzi, 2017). There are several social media platforms designed primarily to encourage communication between users (Gretzel, 2018). These conversations, which can be formal or informal, have the power to fix any vague situations that individuals might have related to a destination or the tourism product or service being discussed. The communication exchanges or interactive shared information are the reason people use social media as an information source (Ly and Ly, 2020). Accordingly, the first hypothesis was developed to be further tested:

- Hypothesis 1: Social media online conversations leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination

Social Media Provides Information Sharing

Social media networking sites provide the option for: blogs, forums, wikis and micro-blogging for sharing information to target audiences in a timely manner (). Many individuals, worldwide, believe that social media information is a reliable platform because of the user-generated content. Thus, the content posted is not commercial based, but reflects personal experiences (Ly and Ly, 2020). On social media, users share different kinds of social media by video, image, news, or shared content. The online community sees this user-generated content as more credible and authentic for many hotels, restaurants and visitor attractions (Kemp, 2020). Information sharing is a common activity done by both businesses and individuals. When it comes to the tourism context, *"more than 200 million reviews and opinions posted on TripAdvisor to date, and more than 800 million active users on Facebook posting updates and sharing images, social media is dominating the industry"* (Kemp, 2020, p.1). Accordingly, the second hypothesis was developed to be further tested:

- Hypothesis 2: Social media information sharing leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination

Social Media Provides Online Presence

"Having an online presence can help you build an audience, connect with your customers, and keep them updated on your day to day activities, as well as hours of operation. If you're not online, how else can your customers know when you're open or what products or services you provide" (Curtis, 2020, p.1). Online presence displays to the online community, which is filled with potential consumers, the extent to which a user can know if someone exists and can be accessed (Ly and Ly, 2020). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) research displayed that tourism entities that have higher social incidence create a strong destination image in the eyes of people. People begin to become aware what the destination includes, which leads to fascination, allure, and potential future trips. Therefore, the more intense and powerful the presence of tourism products and services, the more likely people will consider visiting, consuming, or talking about it. The presences on social networks affect the intimacy of the subject (Ly and Ly, 2020). Accordingly, the third hypothesis was developed to be further tested:

- Hypothesis 3: Social media online presence leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination

Social Media Provides Relationship Development

The importance of relationship building in business has been discussed extensively in the academic literature (Kotler, 2020). Advanced information technologies and communication are making possible innovative forms of business interaction and activity involving new types of business relationships (Ly and Ly, 2020). The Internet and social media, evolving the nature of business relationships, are radically changing the business structure and commerce and the attributes needed to develop and maintain them (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Kotler and Armstrong (2018) elaborated on the vitality of customer relationships to business success. They indicated that strong relationships with customers and potential customers could lead to retain customers and create loyal customers, positive word of mouth and increased sales. Ly and Ly (2020) explained that social media could aid tourism industry to develop strategies that results in increased profits because social media is able to cultivate and nurture customer relationships as it provides connection between users, allowing them to talk, share, and follow as friends. Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis was developed to be further tested:

- Hypothesis 4: Social media relationship development leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination

Reputation

Reputation is the public perception of an organization (Ly and Ly, 2020). Reputation is an intangible asset, which is of financial value for an organization. Reputation is able to influence the attraction of customers, the generation of investment interest as well as positive media coverage (Laufer and Coombs, 2006). When it comes to social media and reputation, they can be interconnected. Researchers defined reputation on social media as being: *"built by community participation, collaboration and tailor-made content ranked by search engines"* (Schulze et al., 2015, p.2). Social media can provide an opportunity for

businesses in the tourism industry to form reputations by broadening customer reach, increasing sales, and promoting products and services, and creating brand awareness (Ly and Ly, 2020). Social media has empowered the public to play a role in reputation creation or deterioration, exposing them to citizens' comments and publicity. Anything can quickly go viral and be posted on social media (Jones et al., 2010). Thus, social media is a double-edged sword. Positive publicity can increase sales and negative publicity can ruin an image (Ly and Ly, 2020). Accordingly, the fifth hypothesis was developed to be further tested:

- Hypothesis 5: Social media online conversations leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination

Based on the prior studies, the researcher developed the following proposed research model, which reflects the hypotheses that are mentioned in the literature review. The independent variables are: (IV1) online presence (IV2) information sharing (IV3) relational bond (IV4) online conversations (IV5) reputation formation. The dependent variable is the tourist value creation.

Figure 1: The Proposed Research Model
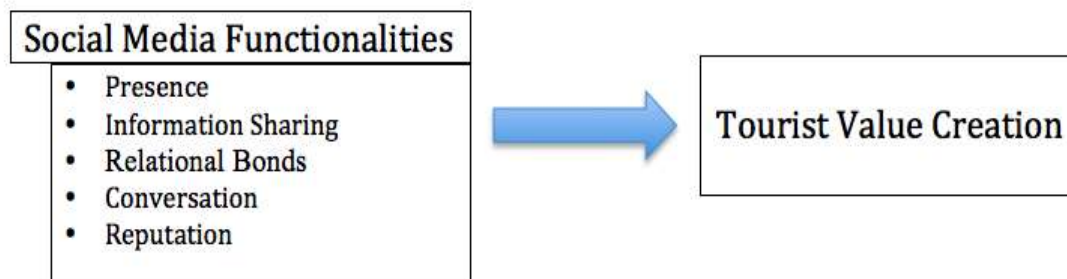
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses the *quantitative research approach* to measure the factors related to social media functionality in the tourism industry promotion and its impact on the formation of tourist value creation. This study was a *cross-sectional design*. A cross-sectional study involved the researcher to look at data from a population at one specific point in time. In this study, the researcher collected data once during a period of two months September and October 2020. The data was collected for a *descriptive purpose*. Descriptive research aims to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or phenomenon.

Egyptian travelers (who traveled before by using social media as an information source) are the population under investigation. The sampling technique used was *non-probability technique*. Not everyone had an equal chance of being a participant under study. *Administrated questionnaire* was the tool used to collect data. The questionnaires were *distributed online-* through the use of Google forms because of the COVID-19 and the

promotion of social distancing. Thus, meeting the participants' face-two-face would not have been safe for them.

Administrated Questionnaires were developed to assess each variable in the research model. The variables in this study were measured using scales from prior studies. Each of the variables is measured using a 5-point Likert scale (the number of the items varied in each scale). The scales were adjusted to suit the research topic. The *scale for the variable online presence* contained three statements*: I am interested in tourism product or service that are easy to see on social media; I am interested in tourism product or service that I can physically grasp; I am interested in tourism product or service that is very physically tangible* (Laroche et al., 2005).

The *scale for the variable information sharing* contained four statements: I would participate in customer discussions; I would provide my feedback to the site; I would contact the company; I would sign in at the site for information (Ko et al., 2005). The *scale for the variable online conversations* contained three statements: *enables two-way communication; is interactive; keeps my attention* (Sicilia et al., 2005)*.* The *scale for the variable tourism value creation* contained three statements: *It is likely that social media provides features that will offer advantages to the consumer; social media will add value to the advertised product; features to tourism products and services that are promoted on social media will likely perform well and make me consider the information* (Zhu and Levy, 2005)*.*

The *scale for the variable relational bond* contained seven statements: *tourism products/services uses social media to keep in touch with me; tourism products/services use social media to connect me with the information that suits me;* tourism *products/services uses social media to send me information that concerns my needs; tourism products/services uses social media to collect my opinions about services; tourism products/services uses social media sends me greeting cards or gifts on special days; tourism products/services uses social media to sponsor communities for customers; I can share my opinions about tourism products/services on social media* (Hsieh et al., 2005). The *scale for the variable online reputation* contained three statements: *social media provides me opportunity to "talk up" about tourism product/services to people; I bring up tourism products/services in a positive way in conversations or comments on social media to my friends and acquaintances; on social media, I often speak favorably about tourism products/services* (Arnett et al., 2003).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A pretest was conducted on the questionnaire to make sure the administrated questionnaire was free from error. 50 respondents participated in the pilot tests. Some statements were reworded differently for further clarification of the understanding of the statements. Once the adjustments were made, the researcher began the actual distribution.

A total of 384 questionnaires were used in the analysis after eliminating the incomplete questionnaires. The study contained a response rate of 84%. The data collected was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program. Several analyses were conducted with this program in order to find the answer to the research problem, such as the frequency analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and the multiple regressions.

The frequency analysis was conducted to describe the profile of the respondents in the study. According to the analysis, the participants were of different demographic settings (age, gender, marital status, career, and income). Table 1 illustrates the outcome.

Table 1: Frequency of the Respondents demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristic	N	%	Demographic characteristic	N	%
City of Residence:			**Age:**		
Cairo	102	26	Under 20	20	4.2
Alexandria	220	57	20 less than 35	201	60.2
Other	62	16	35 less than 50	100	26.1
			50 less than 65	63	16
Gender:			**Level of Education:**		
Female	200	52	Elementary School	5	1
Male	184	47.9	High School	39	10
			College	333	86.7
			Other	7	1.8
Job Status:			**Average Monthly Income:**		
Student	57	12.0	Less than 2,000	6	1.5
Blue collar	78	16.4	2,000 less than 5,000	200	52
White collar	167	43.4	5,000 less than 10,000	138	35.9
Other	82	17.3	over 10,000	40	10.4

The reliability analysis was carried out to help indicate the stability, consistency and the "goodness" of each instrument that measured the variables. 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 Alpha fro the independent variables were: online presence (0.92), information sharing (0.834) relational bond (0.776), online conversations (0.85), and reputation formation (0.794). The Cronbach's Alpha for the dependent variable, tourist value, was 0.89. The over all questionnaire also went through a reliability test. The Cronbach's Alpha for the overall questionnaire was 0.934. Therefore, the questionnaire had internal consistency.

The correlation analysis was conducted to indicate the direction, strength and significance of the relationships of the variables in the hypotheses. Accordingly, Hypothesis 1, social media online conversations leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination,

showed that the variables are significant, moderate and positive in relationship (0.467**). Hypothesis 2, social media information sharing leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination, showed that the variables are significant, moderate and positive in relationship (0.483**). Hypothesis 3, social media online presence leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination, showed that the variables are significant, strong and positive in relationship (0.767**). Hypothesis 4, social media relationship development leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination, showed that the variables are significant, strong and positive in relationship (0.567**). Hypothesis 5, social media online reputation leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination, showed that the variables are significant, moderate and positive in relationship (0.487**).

The multiple regressions analysis conducted a more sophisticated exploration of the interrelationship among the set of variables. Multiple regressions was used to test the hypotheses and explain further the variables and the relationship that exists. According to the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) the model was significant with an alpha of 0.000. ANOVA is the calculations that provide information about levels of variability within a regression model and form a basis for tests of significance.

When testing the hypotheses, the researcher used the regression analysis. The regression analysis allowed the researcher to describe the relationships between a set of independent variables and the dependent variable. Regression analysis produces a regression equation where the coefficients represent the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable. The p-values were used to test the hypotheses. The p-values evaluate those specific comparisons. Based on this study's outcome, all the hypotheses were supported except for one hypothesis. Social media functionality related to conversation development, information sharing, online presence, and reputation impact tourist value creation. Relationship building through social media was deemed insignificant.

Once the hypothesis was tested, the researcher sought to analyze the Beta coefficient. The beta coefficient compares the strength of the effect of each individual independent variable to the dependent variable. According to the analysis, the independent variables that hold the strongest strength of effect in creating tourist values are successively: online presence, reputation, information sharing, and conversation development. The following table illustrates the outcome of the hypothesis testing and the Beta coefficient.

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Value	Beta coefficient	Outcome
Social media *online conversations* leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination	0.000 p-value (< 0.05)	B = 0.042	Hypothesis is supported
Social media *information sharing* leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination	0.02 p-value (< 0.05)	B = 0.063	Hypothesis is supported
Social media *online presence* leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination	0.000 p-value (< 0.05)	B = 0.740	Hypothesis is supported
Social media *relationship* development leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination	0.41 p-value (< 0.05)	-----------	Hypothesis not supported
Social media online *reputation* leads to tourists' value creation towards the destination	0.000 p-value (< 0.05)	B = 0.083	Hypothesis is supported

RESEARCH DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study seeks to measure the factors related to social media functionality in the tourism industry promotion and its impact on the formation of Tourist Value Creation. This study hypothesized that media presence, information sharing, relational bonds, conversation, and reputation impact in tourist value creation (influence tourist planning/ taking trips). This study uses a quantitative research approach, with a cross-sectional design and a descriptive purpose. Each of the variables is measured using a 5-point Likert scale (the number of the items varied in each scale). This study distributed questionnaires online, using non-probability sample. The population under study was Egyptian who enjoys traveling and use social media as an information tool for planning vacations. The respondents profile was diverse in order to gain different opinions into consideration.

Based on this study's outcome, all the hypotheses were supported except for one hypothesis. Social media functionality related to conversation development, information sharing, online presence, and reputation impact tourist value creation. Relationship building through social media was deemed insignificant. The findings of this study were similar to the findings of prior studies. Accordingly, Wang et al. (2002) indicated that travelers utilize social media for planning, and traveling relates to the perceived benefit in such situations. Ly and Ly (2020) indicated that tourists consider the functionalities of social media as significant.

Grounded on the outcome of the study, the researcher recommends to practitioner to use social media as a marketing tool to promote tourism. Social media resources for travelers are vital and could be the source of sustainable competitive advantage. The tourism industry should seek to have a strong online presence on social media to attract consumers

to consider the destination and aid them in seeing value in the destination or the tourism product/service. They should have a successful value creation strategy and focus on communication online that enables interactivity and personalizing of marketing messages through social media. Their social media presence should allow travelers' shares the experiences of users and travelers, and offer users the possibility to customize personal information that they seek to know in order to add value.

When conducting this study, the research faced several limitations. Specific restrictions can be viewed as opportunities for future research. First, when developing the conceptual framework, the study only focused on social media functionality. Future research can focus on and compare other roles of social media, such as: functional, hedonic, social, and psychological benefits that are essential when planning and traveling as well as their perceptions on social media sites as easy to find, engaging, entertaining, informative, reliable, useful, valuable and accurate. This study used non-probability sampling through online distribution of questionnaires. This approach was selected because the research was conducted during the COVID-19. Therefore, future research should seek to find a sampling frame and select respondents using probability sampling. This study focused on Egyptian travelers. There may be interesting for Forthcoming study to have more respondents of different nationalities. This study focused on general tourism goods and services. Future study should pay attention to specific areas, for example, the hospitality business, to figure out the specific strategic resources and competitive advantages when
using social media.

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