

Social Networks Apps and their Role in Tourism Marketing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract—This study aimed at investigating the role of social networks apps in tourism marketing for travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj City, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study used the descriptive and analytical approach to achieve its objectives and test its hypothesis. The study found that social networks apps play a vital role in marketing the tourism product in Al-Kharj City as well as communicating effectively and cheaply with the customers. The study recommended nominating and training some workers in tourism organizations to deal with social media networks and design websites and applications for these organizations.

Keywords—social networks apps, mobile, tourism marketing, tourism organization

1 Introduction

Marketing through social networks apps is regarded as an influential tool to get potential customers for all businesses of any sizes. Customers interact with brands through these platforms. Social networks apps marketing is a form of internet marketing, which includes creating and sharing the content on social media platforms to achieve marketing objectives and the brand names. Social media marketing contains activities such as posting updates, photos, videos, and other content, which encourages audience's participation. In addition to paid advertisements to platforms to reach customers in automatically without the constant need to update or publish the content manually. Social networks apps, allow individuals to interact with each other and build social relationships on the Internet [11]. When a prominent channel joins a social networking site, this provides it with a great possibility to directly communicate with its audience around the world. This makes it easier for them to promote their products rather than what they will exhibit and guarantee reaching a big number of followers. There is a very significant feature, which makes social networking sites one of the most efficient means of marketing, which is the feature of “sharing” or “retweeting” the posts that the marketer issues if the customer is interested in this post. This allows the marketer's message to spread widely in a short time if these sites are used accurately. Social media

also contains a great deal of information about services or products, which potential customers may desire to have. This gives the ability to easily analyze the market, reach customer's desires, and target them through the product being marketed. The current development of social networks has had a direct and clear impact on different fields and business sectors in general and on tourism and travel organizations in particular [12]. Activities and means have changed from being slow and needs a large numbers of human resource to faster and more precise and do not need human resources because they are automated. Marketing, either goods or services, has witnessed a great development in light of social media networks in terms of product presentation, specifications, prices, and even the way of delivering it to the customer in a short time, reducing efforts and cost. Considering that tourism and travel organizations are one of the commercial institutions aiming at achieving profits and reducing the costs to the possible range to display their services, tourism programs and offers, especially on occasions and holidays, they must take advantage of social networks apps to communicate with their customers directly. Travel and tourism organizations in the Kingdom began to use social networks apps as a marketing tool for their different tourism services and programs.

1.1 Study problem

The study problem is based on the following questions:

1. Do the operating travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj use social networks apps to market their tourism programs? What are the most used social networks apps by travel and tourism organizations?
2. Do social networks apps have an impact on marketing tourism services? Did social networks apps contribute to increase the number of customers who deal with tourism organizations?

1.2 Study significance

The study significance is represented in the following:

1. Clarifying the significance of social networks apps in E-marketing for tourism organizations in Al-Kharj City, as well as decreasing marketing costs represented by decreasing effort and time in marketing tourism products.
2. Highlighting the most widely used social networks apps in online tourism marketing for services.

1.3 Study objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identifying the extent of social networks apps use in tourism companies in Al- Kharj city.
2. Identifying the impact of social networks apps on marketing tourism services.

1.4 Study hypothesis

The study seeks to test the following hypothesis:

There is a significant correlation between social networks apps and marketing tourism product in travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj city.

1.5 Study population and sample

The study population is represented by all the operating tourism and travel organizations in Al-Kharj city, which number 16 companies. The study sample was randomly selected from workers in these organizations. The study sample reached 60 workers from travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj city.

1.6 Study methodology

The study is based on the descriptive and analytical approach by collecting secondary data from books, Master's & PhDs Theses, researches and periodicals, and collecting primary data by preparing a questionnaire to collect the opinions of the sample respondents. In addition, the five-year Likart scale was used (strongly disagree-disagree-neutral-agree-agree strongly).

1.7 Study tool

A questionnaire was designed including the study variables and it was distributed to the study sample based on [6]. The questionnaire contains two parts, a part for social networks apps, and a part for marketing the tourism product. In order to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire, it has been presented to a number of specialists at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, King Abdulaziz University and Taiz University. To test the stability of the questionnaire paragraphs, the alpha correlation coefficient (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) was used. The social media axis reached (0.875), and marketing the tourism product axis reached (0.916), and for the scale in general reached (0.896). Table 1 represents Stability coefficient, alpha cronbach of the study tool.

Table 1. Stability coefficient, alpha cronbach of the study

No.	Study Variables	Paragraphs	Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha
1	Social Networks	8	0.875
2	Tourist Product	4	0.916
Total		12	0.896

1.8 Study limitations

Objective limitations: This study seeks to investigate the issue of the relationship between social networks apps and the marketing of tourism products in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Time limitations: This study was conducted in the period from 1-9-2020 to 12-31-2020.

Human limitations: This study was conducted on workers in travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj city.

2 Literature review

There are few related studies to the topic of this study. Among which is; the study [6] which aimed at studying the impact of social networks on marketing the tourism products in Iraq. The study recommended the necessity to use social media sites to attract customers, serve them better, and nominate staff to deal with these sites. The study [3, 4] recommended the importance of using social media networks to communicate with customers in tourism and travel organizations in Al-Kharj to ensure fast communication with them and meet their desires. While the study [1] recommended the importance of marketing via social media networks. The study [12] recommended studying the importance of managing the relationship with customers to achieve their satisfaction in travel and tourism organizations. The study also recommended the necessity to communicate with customers using modern technologies and social media. The study [12] aimed at studying the importance of managing the relationship with customers to achieve their satisfaction in travel and tourism organizations. The study also recommended the necessity to communicate with customers using modern technologies and social media. The study [10] aimed at determining the role of social networking sites in the marketing of handicrafts. It also recommended the necessity to use social media sites intensively in marketing handicrafts. The study [8] recommended the importance of using social media sites to market the products of modern organizations. The study [2] recommended the importance of using social networks and websites in marketing tourism products and training workers in dealing with these networks. The study [9] aimed at studying the importance of social networks in determining customers' purchasing decision, and recommended the organizations to activate using social networks to market their products. The study [5] recommended the importance that the companies should adopt social media in their business, especially in the field of marketing and focusing their efforts on improving the efficiency of their content on social media. The study [7] aimed at studying the role of social media in supporting marketing communication. In addition, the study recommended using social networks due to their role in supporting marketing communication with customers and gaining their loyalty to the organization.

Through reviewing the previous studies, we find that most of them dealt with different topics and were conducted in rather different areas. Hence, this study is distinguished from other previous studies that were conducted on travel and tourism organizations in Al Kharj Governorate. Moreover, this study addressed the topic of social networks and their role in tourism marketing in Saudi Arabia.

3 Analytical side

The questionnaire was distributed to the study sample individuals from the travel and tourism companies in Al-Kharj city.

3.1 Results of the descriptive statistical analysis of the characteristics of the individuals of the study sample

According to the gender, the samples are distributed as shown in Table 2. According to age, the samples are distributed as shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Distribution of the sample items according to gender

Sex	Repetition	Percentage 100%
Male	44	73.333
female	16	26.666
Total	60	100

We notice from the previous table that (73.333%) of the sample were males, and (26.666%) were females.

Table 3. Distribution of the sample individuals according to age

Age	Repetition	Percentage 100%
Less than 20 years	16	26.666
From 21 to 30 years	10	16.667
From 31 to 40 years	15	25.000
From 41 to 50 years	10	16.667
Greater than 51 years	9	15.000
Total	60	100.000

From the previous table, we also noticed that most of the sample individuals were less than 20 years old (26.666%). This indicates that most of the workers in travel and tourism organizations are of young ages, and the lowest percentage was for the age group 50 years and up, which reached (15%).

Table 4. Distribution of the sample individuals according to experience

Years of Experience	Repetition	Percentage 100%
Less than 5 years	35	58.333
From 6 to 10	13	21.667
From 11 to 15	7	11.667
More than 16 years	5	08.333
Total	60	100.000

From the previous table, we noticed that most of the research sample individuals are less than 5 years' experience, which reached (58.333%). This is consistent with the age characteristics of the study sample in Table 4, and the lowest category of work experience in travel and tourism organizations was more than 16 years, which reached (08.333%). According to the academic qualification, the sample individuals are distributed as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of the sample individuals according to academic qualification

Degree	Repetition	Percentage 100%
Secondary	35	58.333
Diploma	13	21.667
Bachelor	12	20.000
Total	60	100

From the previous table, we notice that most of the sample individuals are those who hold a high school certificate, which reached (58.333%), and those who hold a diploma certificate reached (21.667%), compared with those with a bachelor's degree, which reached (20%).

3.2 The results of the analysis for the response of the study sample individuals in the travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj city

Table 6 represents the results of the statistical analysis of the independent variable social networks apps. Table 6 represents the results of the statistical analysis of the independent variable social networks apps.

Table 6. The results of the statistical analysis of the independent variable social networks apps

No.	Paragraph	Mean	St Dev.	Degree
1	The company has an official Twitter, Facebook and Instagram account.	4.539	0.891	High
2	The company mainly depends on the marketing of its services via social networks.	3.674	0.778	High
3	The company has employees whose main tasks are to publish via social networks for the services provided by it, flight schedules and departure slots.	3.492	1.204	High
4	The company's official website is periodically updated to cope up with the latest developments and technologies in this field.	3.489	0.749	High
5	The company has a special application via which the customer can learn about the most important services provided by it.	3.210	1.003	High
6	The company's employees have sufficient awareness and knowledge about what social networks are.	3.537	0.692	High
7	The company has a big number of friends & followers of its social media account.	3.720	0.789	High
Total		3.587	0.799	High

From the previous table, it is clear that the results of the statistical analysis of the related paragraphs of the questionnaire are the first variable (social networks apps); the paragraph with the highest value was the first paragraph with an arithmetic mean (4.539) and a standard deviation (0.891). This indicates that travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj have an official account on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. Paragraph No. 5 was ranked the lowest with an arithmetic mean (3.210) and a standard deviation (0.692). This indicates that travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj have a special application through which the customer can be familiar with the most important services provided. The attitude of the study sample were positive towards all paragraphs, as the mean of all paragraphs reached (3.587), and the standard deviation for all paragraphs reached (0.799), and the response level that represents the sample's agreement and consistency. Table 7 represents the results of the statistical analysis of the variable (tourism product approved marketing).

Table 7. Results of the statistical analysis of the variable (tourism product approved marketing)

No.	Paragraph	Mean	St Dev.	Degree
1	Marketing the tourism product via social networks has significantly increased profits in the company.	3.952	0.862	High
2	Marketing the tourism product via social networks facilitates the process of communication between the customer and the company.	4.601	0.950	High
3	Using social networks in marketing the tourism product has improved the promotional process of the services provided by the company.	4.304	0.916	High
4	Marketing the tourism product via social networks has reduced the time needed to introduce the customer to the tourism services and programs provided by the company.	3.896	0.904	High
5	Marketing tourism products via social networks has reduced the cost of marketing.	3.708	0.869	High
6	Marketing the tourism product via social networks helped the company to build its brand name.	3.754	0.872	High
7	Using social networks has contributed to increasing the number of customers dealing with the company.	3.697	0.859	High
Total		4.014	0.897	High

From the previous table, it shows the results of the statistical analysis of the questionnaire paragraphs which are related to the second variable (marketing the tourism product), the highest ranked paragraph was paragraph No.(2) with an arithmetic mean (4.601) with a standard deviation (0.950). This indicates that marketing the tourism product through social networks apps facilitates the contacting between the customer and the company. The lowest ranked paragraph was No. 7, with an arithmetic mean (3.697) and a standard deviation (0.859). This indicates that the use of social networks apps contributed to increase the number of customers dealing with the company. The attitudes of the study sample were positive towards all paragraphs, as the arithmetic mean of all paragraphs is (4.014) with standard deviation for all paragraphs is (0.897), and the response level represents the sample's agreement and consistency.

3.3 Testing the study hypothesis

In order to measure or test the strength of the correlation between the study variables, the simple correlation coefficient (Pearson Correlation) was used, as Table 8 shows the simple correlation between the study variables (social networks apps and tourism product marketing).

Table 8. Test the study hypothesis - simple correlation between the study variables

Correlations			
		X (Marketing the Tourism Product)	Y (Social Networks apps)
X (Marketing The Tourism Product)	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.156
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	60	
Y (Social Networks apps)	Pearson Correlation	-0.156	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	60	60

It is clear from the results in Table 8 that there is a negative correlation between social networks apps and the marketing of the tourism product and the type of this relationship is contrary. This leads us to accept the study hypothesis, which states; there is a significant correlation between social networks apps and tourism product marketing, and rejecting the alternative hypothesis, which states: There is no significant correlation between social networks apps and marketing of the tourism product.

4 Conclusion

Through analyzing the study results, we find that travel and tourism organizations in Al-Kharj city have an official account on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram, and heavily count on social networks apps to market their services. In addition, we find that marketing the tourism product through social networks apps has reduced the time required to familiarize the customer with tourism services and programs and facilitated the process of contacting customers and increasing their number. Consequently, it is important to excel and concentrate on the use of social networks apps and to develop their marketing activities for the purpose of benefiting and obtaining a competitive advantage. Also, to nominate an employee in every tourism organization, whose main task is to follow up and maintain the company’s account on social networks apps and respond to customers’ questions at the soonest time possible to facilitate contacting with the customer to win him, and to design special applications for the company to contact with customers and serve them better, which leads to save time, effort and cost.

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