



The effect of social networks on the purchase of Mashhad tourism agencies

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ABSTRACT

With the development of information technology in the world and its rapid entry to everyday life, social networks are a good place and play a role in public and various aspects of individual and social life are affected due to easy access, and day-to-day popularity of this phenomenon. It also leads social networks to create opportunities for businesses to attract and communicate more effectively with customers. Given the increasing development and expansion of competition in the tourism industry, this study examines the impact of social networks on the purchase of tourism agencies. This research is applied in terms of purpose and the method used is descriptive-survey based. The study's population included all the members of social networks (cables) related to tourism agencies in Mashhad that has been done in the period during March 2015 to August 2016. To determine the sample, random cluster sampling was used. In this study, the results of a 20 item questionnaire considering 220 individuals, were examined. To analyze the results, the SPSS and LISREL software were used. The results show that the path coefficients are significant for all the variables except the variable of intimacy and Easy communication with customer allocated having the most path coefficients.

Keywords: social networking, tourism agencies, facilitating communication, constant contact, intimacy, reduced costs.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry has been affected by a variety of factors including political, economic, cultural and technological changings, and the countries need the robust and different management means, strategic planning, targeting and target marketing in order to increase the number of international visitors and achieve the obtained economic resources (Loh, 2011, pp 33-37). Generalizing Internet application into marketing field has been along the development of methods and paradigms which have been governed on the marketing in 1990s. Applying internet which firstly had been considered as a mean to acquire the competitive advantage for the marketing owners, gradually was changed into the necessary infrastructure for presence in different markets (Jenkin, 2010, pp 74-83). Establishing some marketing based on internet was accelerated and some concepts have been added to commercial lexicons including e-commerce, e-payment and e-banking (Eslami, 2011, pp 67-75). commerce Paradigm based on internet, national and international economy has been developed all around the world, such that the intended share of total commercial exchanges has been allocated to internet-centered commerce. The economy development and move toward e-commerce has greatly influenced the service sector. Without considering the great amount of banking transaction in the form of electronic financial exchanges, the tourism sector has been influenced by these factors and the direct access of tourists to a great amount of information and services about a variety of tourism tours, historical, cultural and natural attractions, transportation facilities, residence centers, forward purchasing travel facilities and some others including the most

basic social networks, all have many applications for spreading human communications and their uses are increasing (Nikolova, 2012, pp 214-218). Different organizations also try to excel the other organizations in the competitive market by exploiting these means in the marketing and sales. This point accelerates the need with respect to the characteristics of current day (globalization and revolution of information technology period) with reliance on the social and modern media (Habibi, Laroche & Richard 2014, pp 52-64).

Discussing some phenomena, named as social networks, in recent years and the unexpected chance of internet users towards these networks, new opportunities have been appeared in the cyber space for e-commerce which have not been expected yet. Growth and spread of social medias have created different functions including sharing photos, multi-media files, and providing an atmosphere to communicate ideas with users from all around the world and in addition to development of internet functions has led to new concepts in the field of commerce and e-economy (Andzulis & Panagopoulos, 2012, pp 21-27).

One of the signs of penetrating social medias in travel and tourism chain, is their transformation as a window for tourism offices and travels. Most of tourism offices and traveling agencies use these networks especially Facebook and Instagram for advertising their services. The domain of social networks greatly influences the change of audience' mind (lashgarian & Roshani, 2012, pp 32-41).

The present study considers that social networks functions can be effective to achieve the goals of tourism development and horizon of Iran in 2026 so it has been defined and carried out by considering these points (Lashgarian et al., 2012, pp 32-41). The main idea, which has been discussed in the study, is a role that social networks influence purchase from travel agencies

through continuous communication, easiness for communicating and cost reduction for communicating. Continuous communication is due to a permanent two-sided communication between agency personnel and consumers. Social networks provide the permanent use for them with respect to the attractions which they have created for their users and tourism agencies announcing their plans and tours by creating social networks for their customers and increasing the information about different tourist targets (Jalilian & Mianji, 2010, pp 32-48).

Easy communication means easier communication ways between agency personnel. The social networks provide this possibility to communicate with the agency in the shortest time and lowest cost to let them know the latest news and share their comments and questions and they can enjoy their guides (Jalilian *et al.*, 2010, pp 32-48).

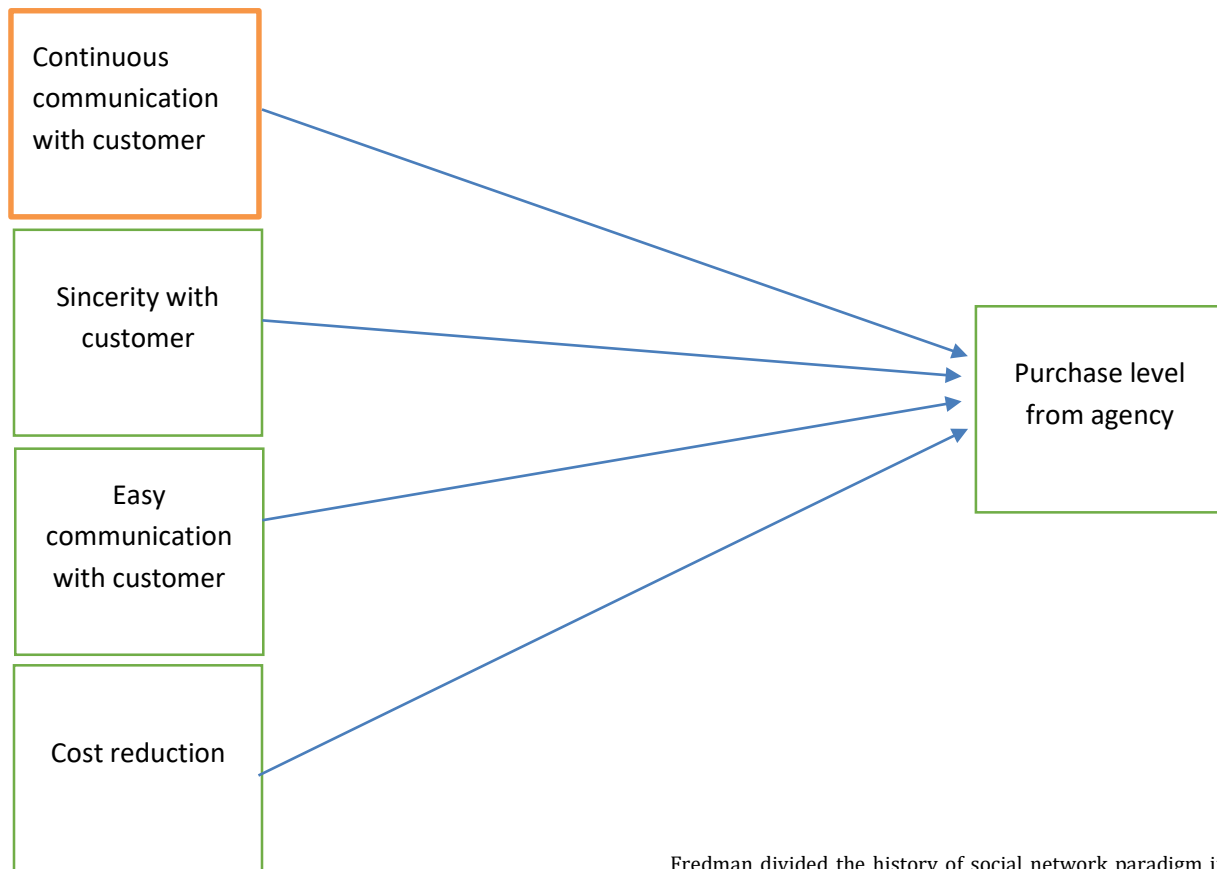
Close friendship here means two-sided close feeling between agency personnel and customers. The members of social networks know each other with sharing related posts and comments and this enjoyment of ideas and experiences of co-groups will result in more familiarity and sincerity among

members in one hand, and in the other hand, it will create sincerity between members and agency sales forces (Jalilian *et al.*, 2010, pp 32-48).

Study goals

1. Investigating the effect of social networks on the purchase from tourist agencies
2. Investigating the effect of social networks through the continuous communication with the customers on the purchase from tourist agencies
3. Investigating the effect of social networks through sincerity with consumers on the purchase from tourist agencies
4. Investigating the effect of social networks through facilitating the communication on the purchase from tourist agencies
5. Investigating the effect of social networks through the cost reduction for communication on the purchase from agency

Study conceptual model



Theoretical principles:

The concept of social network firstly has been introduced in the anthropology by Brown. Then in the middle of 1950, the concept has been used by Brown and Barnez (Salar, 2011, pp 34-35).

Fredman divided the history of social network paradigm into four different periods. He names from the middle of nineteenth century to 1920s as prehistoric. He believes that the beginning of social network refers back to August CONT. Cont was the first scientist who suggest that: looking at the society is through internal connections among social agents. Freman, Habz, Morgan, Hagman, Galton and Watson are some of the clear-sighted individuals, but Freman is considered as the pioneer of network analysis (Salar, 2011, pp 36-38).

Social networks are connected together with one or some especial kinds of attachment including: friendship, affinity, financial exchange, sexual relations, belief relations, etc. (Ramezani & Mirza Mohammadi, 2013, pp 147-150).

In the other definition, social networks are some kinds which have been created through some nodes (which are generally individual or organizational) that are connected to each other by one or some especial kind(s) of attachment(s) (Berat Ali Pour, 2012).

Social networks (cyber), is a site or a set of sites that individuals can share their thoughts, interests and their activities with the other ones (Amiri, Taj Abadi & Rahimi, 2012: 48-54).

So it is a term for describing the means and bases which the users share and post their materials (Mousavi Pour, 201: 74-78).

These networks have formed based on interest, value, ideology and nostalgia, in the future the individuals' positions in the media networks determine their positions in the society. The networks can be resulted in more powerful governments and citizens highlighting their social interests (Lashkarian *et al*, 2013: 32-41).

These networks can act for control and concentrated supervision, registration and recording the evidences and documents and also it can be served for local independency and citizen participation in political decision making. These networks as new media go through the determined borders of traditional media, if the dominant media avoided incident covering because of inter or beyond organizations or reflected inappropriately, the decentralized media could undertake the direction of news stream, and put the dominant media in a terrible situation. The media challenges the production manner, broadcast and main forms of usual medias (Salar, 2010: 36-3). New Media are able to change the interest toward receiver and put a wide variety of contents available for users, they even do not need the intermediate or controller system. New media can be considered as bigger challenge or opportunity for big and centralized media like radio and TV (Salar, 2010: 36-38).

Tourism

Mainly it means traveling from one origin to one destination just for traveling or commerce and its concept contains cultural, economic and social exchanges. These factors generally create a network which is called travel or tourism.

Tourism is a set of activities which happens during the travel of one tourist. The process includes every activity such as travel planning, traveling to destiny, residence, and coming back or even recalling the memories. Also some activities which have been done by the tourist as a part of travel include buying different goods, host interaction with guest. Generally, tourism can be considered as interactions which happen during the travel (Mill & Morrison 1992: 32-37).

Social networks and tourist agencies

With respect to the development of tourist industry and increasingly interests of individuals about excursion, travel and increase the number of agencies and tourist services agencies which have created highly competitive field in this arena, the need has been felt to have new methods for advertisement and communication to attract customers and acquire their trust (Loh, 2011: 33-37).

Purchase theories

Usually every customer has faced with many decisions for purchase. Mostly the companies which do research about the consumers' purchase behavior, try to find suitable responds

about what the consumers buy, method and number of purchases and their reasons.

But knowing the reasons of consumer or purchaser behavior is not easy because the related responses to these questions are in the thought and mind of consumer. The starting point of these studies is the model of response-motive. Consumer behavior has been formed accordingly, many motivated factors enter into the consumer black box along marketing factors and motives (with marketing mixtures).

He shows specific responses; consumer black box has constituted two parts. Firstly, it is the personal features which influence the illustration of initial motives and their responds.

Purchases types or purchase position

- a. **New purchase:** in this situation, the buyer for the first time starts to buy. The buyers have limited knowledge and they do not have prior knowledge. Consequently, they should obtain a variety of information about product, suppliers, prices, etc. In some decisions about new purchase, there is more risks. Maybe the decisions get time consuming and more individuals interfere in the decision making.
- b. **Modified repurchase (change of supplier):** it has been created when the existing supplier's performance has not satisfied the buyer, or cost reduction or quality improvement have been required.
- c. **Purchase repetition:** it happens when the buyer again needs the product which has bought and he is satisfied with the performance of existing supplier. The decision enjoys less risk (Madden, Roth, & Hudson, 2015: 212-220).

STUDY METHOD

The existing study is in the applied form in terms of goal and it is descriptive-survey about the way of implementing the study. With respect to the time and location domains, statistics population is all of the customers who have social networks related to the Mashhad travel agencies in spring 2016. Statistics sample has been estimated 220 individuals by Gersi Morgan table who were classified by cluster random method. The study has been taken action in two sections to collect data, firstly in the field of theoretical information and study background which has been done by library sources, internet, articles, thesis about tourism, travel agencies and social networks and the other one was a self-made questionnaire. The questionnaire has two sections: general questions: the goal is to get general information and demography of respondents and some points including gender, age, job, and studies. The second part includes 2 close questions with testing 4 hypotheses. The related answers to the question are scored on Likert scale concerning 5 items. After confirming the questionnaire, the researcher tries to distribute the questionnaires. The researcher distributed 250 questionnaires in order to avoid losing respondents based on the estimated sample and considered sample. After collecting the questionnaire and omitting the defected ones, 220 correct questionnaires have been received from the required parts. To analyze the data, the descriptive statistics and one way analysis have been used. For its survey, SPSS software has been used and validity and hypothesis testing and also illustration of structural equations have been done by Lisrel.

Questionnaire validity:

The researcher has enjoyed some specialist in the field of management for content validity, he referred to the advisors

and expert professors to be sure about the questionnaire's validity. The structure validity shows that how a measurement tool tests the size of one structure which has theoretical base. Factor validity is a kind of structure validity, which has been obtained by the factor analysis. The factor analysis is a

confirmation for assuring the relation between every buoy with its known structure. Mostly the factor analysis has been known as a technique to reduce the number of variables which describe the highest level of variance.

Table 1 fitting indices of factor – conformational analysis models for the mixed factors scale of marketing

X ²	df	P	X ² /df	RMR	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	GFI
0/52	17	0/57	1/91	0/001	0/03	0/91	0/94	0/88
32				0				

Chi-square index is one of the absolute indices, the less the chi-square amount is, the more satisfied and better is the codified model by researcher.

If the significance level for X² is more than 0.05, so the amount of chi-square is acceptable and if it is between 0.01 and 0.05, it is ideal. With respect to this point that the significance level is more than 0.05 for the mentioned model. It can be concluded that the amount of chi-square is acceptable for the model. One of the general indices is the normal or relative chi-square index, which is calculated by a simple division of chi-square amount to degree of freedom, mostly the amounts which are between 1 to 3 for this index are considered acceptable. As it can be seen in the table, the amount is 1.91 for the considered model which is a suitable and acceptable amount. GFI index is one of the comparative indices, the amount which is more than 0.8 shows good fitting for the model with the use of data. GFI amount has been obtained 0.83 for the model which shows a good fitting for the model.

The remaining matrix is one of the normal matrices which can be used for the evaluation of general fitting (codified model) and

also the partial fitting (defined parameters between two variables). The square root of remained mean of squares or RMR was 0.001 for the mentioned model which is a desirable amount for the model. Comparative fitting index. CFI amount, for the mentioned model 0.97 which is between 0.9 and 0.97, can say that data has been fitted appropriately; in the other word, the model is far from the independency model and approaches to a saturation model. The square root of the mean square error of the estimated index or RMSEA index is based on the remained matrix analysis. The acceptable models have 0.08 or smaller amount for this index. The fitting of models, which are more than 0.1, has estimated week. RMSEA amount has obtained 0.03 for this model which shows that the model is acceptable.

The main method of estimated consistency is Cronbach alpha coefficient.

Cronbach alpha is a coefficient of stability and consistency. It measures the internal consistency. In the other words, Cronbach alpha measures how well a set of observed variables can explain a hidden variable.

Table 2. Cronbach alpha coefficient

row	Questions headlines	Cronbach alpha coefficient
1	Continuous communication with consumer	0.93
2	Sincerity with consumers	0.78
3	Facilitating the communication	0.84
4	Cost reduction for communication	0.76
5	total	0.82

The table results show that Cronbach alpha is 0.82% for all of the questionnaire. It shows that the questionnaire has a

desirable validity. The components of stability have been confirmed.

Descriptive statistics of study variables:

Table 3: Respondents descriptive features

Variable	group	frequency	percent
Gender	male	134	60.9
	Female	86	39.1
Age	less than 25	20	9.1
	25-35	60	27.3
	35-45	81	36.8
	45-55	45	20.5
	More than 55	14	6.4
Education	diploma	20	9.1
	Technician	7	3.2
	BA	136	61.8
	MA	57	25.9

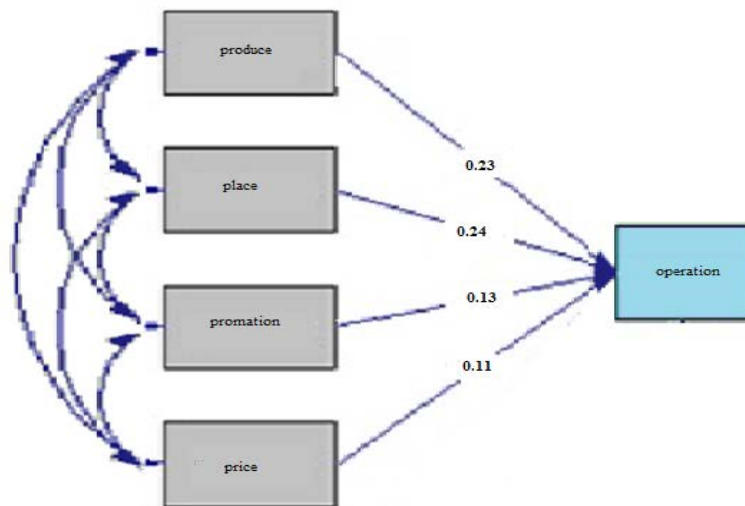
With respect to the above mentioned table, most of participants were men in the study who were 35 to 45 years old and they had BA degree.

Table 4. Coefficient of effective factors on the purchase from travel agencies

hypothesis	Direct path	Path coefficient	Significance level	Critical value	result
1	Continuous communication → purchase	0/34	0/004	2/47	significance
2	sincerity → purchase	0/19	0/14	0/54	insignificance
3	Facilitating communication → purchase	0/41	0/000	3/20	significance
4	Cost reduction → purchase	0/35	0/000	3/42	significance

Table 4 shows the coefficient of effective factors on the purchase from travel agencies. The amount of significance level is less than 0.05 for some factors including continuous communication, facilitating communication and cost reduction. So we conclude that these factors are effective with the specified coefficients on the purchase from travel agencies. Sincerity between agency and consumer did not show a

significance level even with 0.19 path coefficient. It means that the sincerity has not had a significance effect on the purchase from traveling agencies. Also the index of critical value is more than 1.96 for all of the factors instead of sincerity which shows the effect of continuous communication with consumer, facilitating the communication and cost reduction on the purchase from travel agencies.



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Social networks today have obtained a suitable position and important role among the public which is done along the attractive content production and visitors attractions. Such that sharing posts by every visitor will spread them effectively in the social networks and Internet space so the marketing goals will be met without special cost. The existing study wanted to investigate the effect of application and membership in the social networks on the purchase from travel agencies. The social networks with respect to all the attractions which have created for their users, they provide the permanent use for the users and travel agencies announcing their tours, plans

for their consumers and increasing their information about different traveling targets.

The second under-studied factor was sincerity due to using social networks among consumers. The results showed that the factor does not have a significance effect on the purchase from travel agencies.

Facilitating communication with consumers was another investigated factor, its probable effect has been investigated on the purchase from travel agencies. The results showed that the factor with 0.41 path coefficient, has a significance level on the purchase from travel agencies.

Social networks provide this possibility to communicate with the agencies in the shortest time and lowest cost and know the latest news and plans and share their ideas with the sale staff and use their guides.

Cost reduction is one of the under-studied cases due to using social networks in this study. The result showed that cost reduction with 0.35 path coefficient has influenced significantly

on the purchase from travel agency. With respect to the low cost of internet communications and some facilities which have been offered by them, the members know the plans and details of tours (price, departure and return date, travel duration, vehicle type, residence location, entertainment plans and visit) without physical reference and traffic cost and spending time with considering traffic within city, also they can decide about their travel and even provide the ticket and pay the costs through internet.

At the end, we can offer some applied and study suggestions based on the results which have been obtained:

- Travel agencies should be encouraged the members of network to comment, offer suggestions, and increase the quality of network content.
- Travel agencies should make available the related information to the different travel destinations and scenes through social network and increase the general and tourism knowledge.
- Travel agencies should provide some facilities through social network, facilities to accelerate the purchase and contract with the consumer and try to minimize the physical reference of consumer to the agency.
- Travel agencies should announce their prices, discount and facilities through social networks.

With respect to the study potential, some issues related to the social networks have been suggested, so the tourism researchers should pay attention to social networks in their analyses about Iran tourism industry as an important variable. The present study has paid more attention to the effect of social networks on different dimensions of consumer behavior, the more research is needed concerning the advantages and opportunities in the sales marketing since the study as the other ones has some limitations in the library and executive field. We can refer to the accessibility difficulty for social networks users, as in all of the steps their repeated coordination in the study was demanded. Also the subject has investigated some factors which have limited the access for the researcher.

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