



NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES TO
PROMOTE TOURISM IN ERBIL CITY HOTELS

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Thesis Defense

The use of Social Network Sites to Promote Tourism in Erbil City Hotels

We certify the thesis is satisfactory for the award of degree of
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DEDICATION

This goes to my beloved family. Whose undying support has made it possible to attain my goal of completing my master program. To my parents Mr and Mrs Jamal, your unconditional love and support has brought me this far. Thank you

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to extend my appreciation and thanks to my supervisor assoc. Prof. Dr. Tulen Saner who has been my guide in completing my thesis. Her outstanding intellect inspired me to do the best for this work and for that I am very thankful. I will forever remember the time well spent with you and all the knowledge that you passed on to me,

Secondly, it is with great honor and respect that I acknowledge my late mother Bayan (God bless her dear soul) and father Jamal, without them I wouldn't be where I am today. To my wife Mariam, who has been my source of strength and wisdom, for that I am deeply grateful.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the role of social network sites in tourism in Erbil city hotels. It is inarguably that social network sites have greatly evolved and this has extended to the tourism sector. The tourism sector in Kurdistan Region of Iraq is on the verge of expansion and social network sites are one of the avenues that can be exploited to further promote tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Empirical literature has shown strong support of the benefits that are attributed from the utilization of social network sites in tourism. 485 questionnaires were distributed to business tourists residing in 4 and 5-star hotels in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq on the condition that they used social network sites for tourism purposes. The collected data was analyzed using ordinary least squares regression method. The results showed that social network sites are playing a positive role in as far as informational, promotional, competitive and innovative roles are concerned.

Key Words: Tourism, social networks sites, tourist destinations, tourism product, informational role, promotional role, competitive role and innovative role.

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada Erbilde turizmin sosyal a siteleriinde ki rolü incelenmiştir. Tartışmasız sosyal a siteleri büyük ölçüde gelişmektedir ve bu turizm sektörünü de aynı oranda geliştirmiştir. Kürdistan turizm tevikleri için kullanılabilen ve gün geçtikçe turizm sektörü gelişmekte olduğu ayrıca sosyal a sitelerinin kullanıldığı bölgedir. Ampirik literatür incelendiğinde turizmde sosyal a siteleri kullanımının güçlü faydalar sağladığını göstermiştir. BU araştırmada, Erbil, Irakın Kürdistan bölgesinde 4 ve 5 yıldızlı otellerde konaklayan i amaçlı seyahat eden 485 turiste turizm amaçlı sosyal a sitelerinde kullanımlarıyla ilgili anket doldurtulmuştur. Toplanan veriler sıradan en küçük kareler regresyon yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar sosyal a sitelerinin, bilgilendirme promosyon, rekabetçi ve yenilikçi roller açısından olumlu bir rol oynaydığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Turizm, Sosyal A Siteleri, Turist Bölgeleri, Turizm Ürünü, Bilgilendirme Rolü, Promosyan Rolü, Rekabetçi Rolü, Yenilikçi Rolü.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

KRG- Kurdistan Regional Government

KTA- Kurdistan Tourism Authority

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Scientist

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

The study looks at the use of social network sites to promote tourism. This chapter focuses on background to study, problem statement, hypothesis, research questions, research objectives, justification of the study, and organization of the study.

The world has witnessed exponential growth in social network sites and users. Statistical reports by Bradbury(2013) have it that 16% of 18-29 year old internet users were social networking site users and that in 2010 this number had surged to 86%. Henrikson (2011) echoed the same idea and asserted that social networking has extended and taken root in older age groups. Henrikson's (2011) ideas were based on his findings which revealed that the number of 50-64 year olds and 65 years and above old internet users using social networking sites had risen from 7% and 5% in September 2005 to 26% and 47% respectively in May 2010.

Various definitions have been put forward to define social network sites. Below are some of the definitions.

Social network sites refers to all forms of electronic communication such as websites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (The Social Media Tourism Symposium 2011).

Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Dana 2007).

Social network sites refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities (Dewing 2012)

A definition by Dewing (2012) will be adopted for consideration in this study. However, for the purposes of this study social network sites will be defined as all forms of electronic communication such as internet based and mobile services for social networking and microblogging that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content & join online communities.

Broadband internet rose to popularity in 1990 and this eventually led to the developments of websites that allowed users to create and upload content. Though the first websites were dominated by the likes of sixdegrees.com and Friendster, they have been a widespread development and acceptance in network sites. Figures released in 2012 by CBC (2012) and Knowiton (2012) showed that Twitter had 517 million users while Facebook had 1 million users during the same time period.

It can be noted that social networking developments have not been limited to the social aspect of life. These developments have been greatly embraced by the corporate world and as a result social networking has become a daily norm in start-ups, small, medium sized and large corporations. Despite such a growth in usage and applicability, researchers still contend that little has been done to analyze how such social network sites developments affect business process and performance (Denyer et al. 2011). Bughin (2009) therefore contended that great need be put to determine the extent to which the utilization of social network sites impacts business process performance. However, such analysis needs to be drawn to tourism which has greatly taken a toll in the usage of social network sites.

The World Travel Market asserts that the role of technology especially social network sites has helped tourism business to promote their services and reach customers in a more personal way. This follows after the World Travel Market witnessed more than 1 billion arrivals of tourists around the world in 2012. This can be attributed to the ability of social network sites to serve as communication media that can instantly cross borders. Tourism business have greatly harnessed social network sites developments and are now incorporating it in their promotion and planning activities. One of the significant role social networking sites have played in tourism is in destination marketing. Social networking sites are playing significant roles in tourism and it is being used to attract

customers, engage users' interest and participation, retain users and build loyalty, learn about user preferences and to provide relevant customized information to users.

1.1 Background to Study '},/.

There have been a series of sessions and meetings in and outside Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the area of tourism. Such events are meant to promote and further develop Kurdistan's tourism industry. These events include the 21 November 2007 Duhok Governorate tourism session organized by Kurdistan Region's tourism minister (KRG, 2007).

On the other hand, there have been growing fears surrounding security and stability in KRG. A study by Padden (2006) reviewed that insurgent bombings and daily sectarian violence have greatly distorted KRG's tourism identity. The biggest challenge is being posed by ISIS which has been raking havoc in Northern and Western Iraq and in August 2015 it advanced in Northern Iraq routing government forces and taking the important city of Mosul by coup de main (Washington institute: 2015). As a result, a number of countries such as Australia, UK, Sweden, Japan and Germany have imposed strict travel warnings to KRG. Besides a fall in tourism revenue, KRG's tourism sector has suffered from a number of issues stretching from negative publicity to fall in ranking in terms of international rankings. Meanwhile, the telecommunications and information industry has evolved greatly and this has seen a number of social network sites platforms taking form worldwide. This includes Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Skype, TripAdvisor, LinkedIn. The benefits from the use of social network sites have been immense and Rowe (2011) outlined seven ways one should be leveraging social network sites which include;

- 1) Solicit endorsements
- 2) *Maximize* revenue per seat;
- 3) Bond with guests;
- 4) Manage reputation;
- 5) Reach out to new customers
- 6) Recruit new staff and
- 7) Build a buzz.

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- 6) Recruit new staff and
- 7) Build a buzz.

Social network sites are now playing a great role in tourism as they act as a source of information for travelers. A study by Zheng (2010) reviewed that search engines are now referring users to social network sites when searched for travel information and other tourist packages.

On the other hand, KRG's telecommunications and information industry is still evolving to standards that will see the information and communications technology industry positively impacting the tourism industry. As much negative information about KRG has surfaced through social network sites, analysts still believe that social networks sites can positively turnaround the same situation.

Despite all these challenges, KRG's tourism minister contends that KRG has vast amounts of untapped resources, chiefly, oil, gas and other minerals (possibly uranium) as well as agriculture. As a result, KRG's tourism industry is being foreseen as the chief tool that will positively market and portray the region's image. Thus KRG's tourism minister advocated the need to inform international tourists of the autonomous and safety position that now surrounds KRG. One of the ways they suggested was using every possible media to promote KRG as a tourism destination and this includes social networks sites.

In a study conducted by Kapiki (2015), it is reviewed that if the tourism and hospitality industry is to compete successfully it has to make use of information and communication technologies notably social networks sites. It is further highlighted that social networks sites allow the hospitality industry to attract more guests, ameliorate service quality, deliver exceptional service guest satisfaction, and increase in revenue as well as market share (Kapiki, 2015).

Social network sites are a crucial tool for success in business today and globally, different estimates have suggested that 50% of leisure trips and 40% of business trips are booked online (Jashi, 2013). In this study, Jashi (2013) further estimated that from the period 2014, over 3 billion of the world's population will be able to transact electronically via mobile or internet technology with 90% mobile penetration rate and 6.5 billion mobile connections. It can be noted that tourist demand satisfaction is determined by the impact and usage of social network sites marketing. To a large extent,

social networks sites are now being used to stimulate and encourage interaction of customers so as to promote tourist awareness.

Other researchers strongly contend that as long as the conflicts between KRG and Baghdad government over disputed territories are still prevalent, then the KRG's tourism industry will still sink in the doldrums. Currently efforts are being made to rebrand KRG's image in the eyes of international tourists and these includes initiatives such as loans being offered to individuals wishing to launch tourism ventures especially from the region's major city centers such as Erbil, Sulaimani and Dahuk (Al-monitor,2013), the strengthening of the Peshmerga forces and police and Asayish to boost security and promote KRG as a safe tourism destination. With the huge role social networks sites are playing in the tourism industry worldwide this study therefore seeks to analyze how social network sites influences tourism in KRG.

1.2 Problem Statement

One of the most significant impacts of social network sites is their ability to relay information quickly. Social network sites have evolved greatly and this has changed both the economic, social and political landscape. Researchers strongly contend that the tourism industry can benefit a lot from such changes if it can harness and tap into such changes. For instance, Kamal (2013) further postulated that information spread through social networks helps to create transnational links whereby individuals and groups are able to engage in widespread dialogue. However, Larsen (2006) proffers a different perspective and argues that social network sites are effective when luring international tourists compared to domestic tourist especially in KRG where most people do not have access to internet. For example, an article by Hawlergov (2013) points out that in 2005 Kurdistan Region of Iraq internet penetration was close to 0 and the only telecom was the government monopoly entity with aging exchanges and no fiber optics.

Other researchers such as Germann (2013), further argue that social network sites can only play a significant role in tourism if the number of internet service provider is more thus allowing affordability and huge access. This argument is synonymous with events in Kurdistan where the sole provider that connects Kurdistan internet to the world is

Turkey. Such ability to provide internet service by Turkey hinges on good relations between KRG and Turkey of which most Iraq's see it as a way of Turkey to rip KRG of gas and oil.

Secondly, other studies show that internet usage is a bit expensive in KRG and this hampers the ability of social network sites to positively influence tourism in KRG. Hawlergov (2013) further revealed that if you are in KRG, 1 Mb is the most expensive rate in the world, more expensive than Cuba. The major cause is still being attributed to the monopoly aspect of internet provision and argues that they must allow any private sector company to make deals with neighboring countries including connecting to KRG. In this report Hawlergov (2013) says the internet penetration rate in is at 8% and is only because of KRG, and that Newroz has managed to reach 10% penetration rate.

Despite all these different perspectives other tourist destinations especially in Africa (eMarketing, 2011) where internet penetration is very low have been seen to gain so much from social network sites. Thus there is a striking question on how exactly does social network sites influence tourism. There has not been a consensus as to the exact impact of social network sites on tourism when researchers like Roberts (2013) strongly argue that social network sites have negative impacts on businesses and that sometimes it needs to be ignored. This study therefore seeks to analyze the impacts of the use of social network sites on tourism.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are;

1. To examine the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil.
2. To assess the influence of social network sites on tourism trends.
3. To analyze how online social network sites developments can be used to determine the behavior of tourism in Erbil.
4. To assess how social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil?
2. How do online social network sites influence tourism trends?
3. How can social network sites developments be used to indicate the behavior of tourism in Erbil?
4. How do social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil?

1.5 Hypothesis

H₀: Social network sites play no significant role on the tourism industry.

H₁: Social network sites play a significant role on the tourism industry.

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study is carried out in partial fulfillment of the requirements of MSc Hotel and Tourism Management at Near East University. This thesis will be of great value to the following stakeholders;

- **Researcher**

This research will add to the researcher's existing skills in particular research, analytical and decision making which can be used in future researches and policy making

- **Near East University**

This study will serve as a source of reference to other scholars notably in the area of Tourism. Most studies have been conducted in the Western parts of the Globe such as America where social network developments have dramatically progressed. Such studies if applied to Middle East nations such as Kurdistan region of Iraq, may fail to provide concrete explanations of the role played by social networks on the tourism industry. Thus this study will be one of the few that draws attention to the problem in the Middle East region.

In addition, social network developments are still evolving and the tourism industry still remains as the fastest growing service industry. This leaves a study gap and thus there is greater need to continually add to the few available social networks and tourism sources of knowledge that relate to Kurdistan region of Iraq.

- **Policy Makers and other Stakeholders**

The study will aid policy makers to have a wide insight on how social networks can be effectively harnessed to promote tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As such, will result in an increase its market share and dominance in the industry.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study analyses the impacts of social network sites on tourism and the area of interest is Erbil. The study is based on a combination of secondary data, and primary data on social network sites and tourism collected in Erbil. The researcher however encountered access to data problems because most of the data especially from the periods 2001 to 2007 is not readily available in Kurdistan and hence had to use questionnaires to retrieve the required information.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one deals with the problem and its setting. Empirical and theoretical literature reviews are addressed in chapter two. This chapter outlines the theoretical concepts and other empirical literature that have been conducted under the subjects of social networks and tourism. Chapter three provides an outline of measurements of social network sites. On the other hand, chapter four provides a detailed review of tourism and hospitality in KRG while chapter five highlights the methodology used to analyze the collected data so as to answer the research questions. Chapter six dwells on empirical analysis and discussion of findings. Chapter seven concludes the study by looking at conclusion, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research. The next chapter looks at literature review.

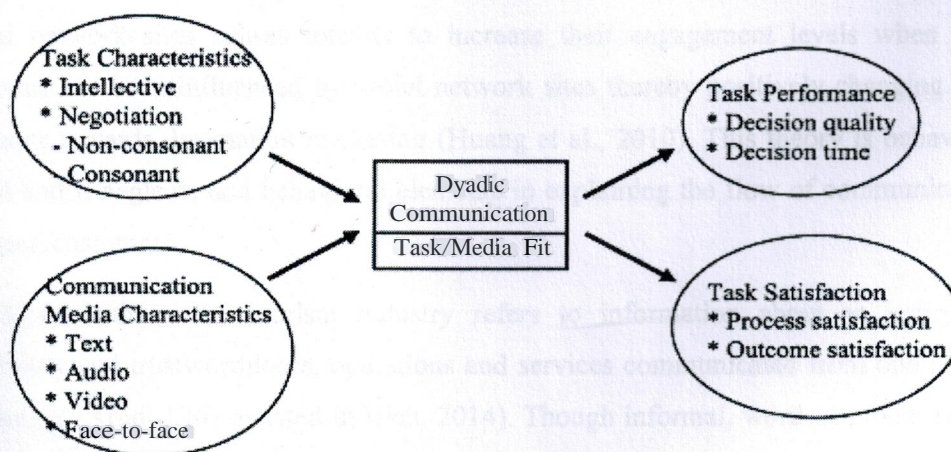
Social presence theory is known as a deficit theory hence as such focuses on cases that have been filtered at while idealizing face-to-face communication as the global standard of communication (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004). When applied to tourism, it neglects the importance of other communication mediums on tourism. Thus it may fail to adequately give an analysis of the roles of social networks on tourism.

Social presence theory suffers from the problem of changes in context. A significant number of researches have contradicted in findings about social presence and the learning aspect of it. For instance, Wise et al (2004) found that there is no relationship between social presence and student learning while Picciano (2002) argues that there is a relationship between the two. Moreover; social presence behavior changes with time.

2.2.2 Media Richness Theory

It deals with the ability of a communication medium to reproduce information sent over it. The theory assumes that people seek to avoid uncertainty and that a significant number of media work better for certain tasks compared to others. In addition, the theory groups information into categories or hierarchies based on the richness of information. This is shown below.

Figure 2.1 Media Richness Model



Media richness model: Source: Suh (1999)

This theory is important in studying the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil because it shows that the type of an online social network site is determined by the effectiveness of the network site in communicating tourism information. It also shows that uncertainty determines the choice of a network site that is used to communicate tourism information.

Media richness theory has been surrounded with ineffectiveness in explaining email usage (Markus 1994). Media richness theory further assumes that people select a medium based on the feasibility of the task at hand (Daft and Lengel, 1984). However, this contradicts with the idea that people select media based on feasibility, convenience and affordability (Hopkins 2012). This greatly applies to the roles of social medium on tourism where tourists are using web reviews and blogs such as TripAdvisor based on convenience and affordability.

2.2.3 Flow Theory

This theory contends that communication is at optimal level when people act with total involvement. It contends that consumers' intentions to revisit a particular website and purchase goods is determined by the perceived level of flow (Hausman and Siskind, 2009). This theory helps to explain why social network sites cause more people to positively react to destination marketing in tourism. This is supported by the fact that social network sites causes tourists to increase their engagement levels when their behavior has been influenced by social network sites thereby positively changing their behavior towards destination marketing (Huang et al., 2010). This theory is behavioral based and it neglects non behavioral elements in explaining the flow of communication between customers.

Word-of-mouth in the tourism industry refers to information about an entity, its credibility and trustworthiness, operations and services communicated from one person to another (Arndt 1967 as cited in Bich, 2014). Though informal, word-of-mouth is said to be effective communication source between customers (Gremer, 1994). Other studies have shown that though word-of-mouth is powerful, it has a lot of shortfalls. Word-of-mouth is effective when there is little or no uncertainty. Uncertainty translates to high

risk and causes tourists to switch to other forms of communication and thus rendering the effects of word-of-mouth on tourism ineffective.

2.3 Social Networks Sites

Social network sites refer to applications and websites that allow people to create and share information and participate in social networking. Social network sites take different forms such as business networks, enterprise social networks, blogs, forums, microblogs product or service review, photo sharing, social bookmarking, social gaming, video sharing, virtual worlds and social networks. They can however be classified into virality (the extent to which users re-share posted content) and mobile social network sites and business potential (this is sensitive to time and location).

2.3.1 Travel 2.0 and Tourism

Travel 2.0 refers to the full interactive second phase of travel information websites. The first wave was booking oriented and it included AA.com, Kayak, Expedia etc. Travel 2.0 is structured in such way that users can contribute information such as travelogues and reviews, words and images. Thus users can find information pertaining to hotels, destinations and other aspects of travel. Travel 2.0 websites include;

- **Igo Ugo** which specializes in providing travel advice.
- **Trip Advisor** which deals with information on destinations and hotels, and attraction reviews.
- **Flicker Travel** allows users around the world to upload photos.
- **Hotel Chatter** constitutes blogposts on hotel related matters.

2.3.2 Web 2.0 and its Adoption in Tourism

Web 2.0 is the second wave of development of the internet associated with a shift from static web pages to user generated content in social network sites provided on the web. Web 2.0 has reshaped marketing methods in the tourism industry. This has given the consumer more control over the decision making process on travel and tourism (Reactive, 2007). Web 2.0 has promoted an increase in information sources for tourists and these are now showing up in most search engines under travel and tourism. Web 2.0

however leads to closed relationships between the service provider and customers (Cox et al., 2009).

The developments in web2.0 have extended to mobile devices and as such mobile devices are now a very USffytgol of web 2.0 they encourage tourism communication. In a research by Travel monitor it has been established that 40% of international travelers travel with a smart phone of which 40% use them to obtain travel information on the destination and 34% of business travelers use them to alter bookings in transit (Noti, 2013).

Social network sites: Include networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc. Social network sites have increasingly become marketing tool for tourist destinations and organizations around the world are now posting information pertaining products, customer testimonials, forums etc.

- Mash-ups: this is an application that is being used by tourists to find information about restaurants, hotels and other tourist services (Sigala, 2007).
- Hotel rating systems: Is a form of collaborative tool that allows customers to rate services provided during their stay in a hotel and this helps other customers to make informed decisions about the hotels they will book into.
- Podcasting: It is an online radio that uses RSS technology and allows users to upload audio and video contents. A good example is YouTube.
- RSS: It stands for Really Simple Syndication and allows users to obtain updated information about what they are most interested in (Boni and Stemart, 2006).
- Biogs: These are online portals with a weak communitarian degree that allow readers to write and comment on certain subjects. This allows customers to share their experiences, trips and experiences (Boni and Stemart, 2006).

2.4 Trends in Social Network Sites and their Implications on Tourism

There has been a tremendous change in social network sites notably in the uses of social media. For instance, there has been a significant shift from searching aspect to socializing aspect of social network sites. Such a trend has an important bearing on

tourism destinations, tourism product, tourist behavior, tourism portals and tourism marketing. For example, tourism portals have increased in numbers and as such contain information about what travelers are saying about a particular destination (Fotis et al., 2010). In addition, user generated content is also emerging as a source of credible information. However, user generated content always contain mixed information and hence the effects on travel tourism might not be significant.

Social network sites have allowed penetration of markets that were previously dominated by traditional suppliers. As such, social network sites can be said to have increased competition in the tourism industry. Such competition promotes efficiency and cheaper tourism products and services. In addition, social network sites are now a dominant primary medium by which travel information is being shared (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). In their nature, social network sites are said to be a cheaper way of accessing information. As result tourists and or travelers can now make purchasing decisions faster and at a lower cost.

Social network sites are surrounded by perceived risk and popularity problems. It has been established that the greater the perceived risk the greater people will depend on personal networks of family and friends (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

Moreover, social network sites are surrounded by gender and age problems. The benefits of social networks sites are said to benefit females a lot compared to their male counterparts (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

2.5 Uses of Social Network Sites in Tourism

2.5.1 Identifying Brand Advocates

Brand advocates can be defined as those customers that do not only prefer your services or products but would put an effort to review your activities or comment about them, influence others and share your content. This is now being executed online through social network sites. Impartial reviews and word-of-mouth are now some of the key components of success in the tourism sector since more tourists search for a hotel review before they book a room.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

KRG- Kurdistan Regional Government

KTA- Kurdistan Tourism Authority

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Scientist

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

The study looks at the use of social network sites to promote tourism. This chapter focuses on background to study, problem statement, hypothesis, research questions, research objectives, justification of the study, and organization of the study.

The world has witnessed exponential growth in social network sites and users. Statistical reports by Bradbury(2013) have it that 16% of 18-29 year old internet users were social networking site users and that in 2010 this number had surged to 86%. Henrikson (2011) echoed the same idea and asserted that social networking has extended and taken root in older age groups. Henrikson's (2011) ideas were based on his findings which revealed that the number of 50-64 year olds and 65 years and above old internet users using social networking sites had risen from 7% and 5% in September 2005 to 26% and 47% respectively in May 2010.

Various definitions have been put forward to define social network sites. Below are some of the definitions.

Social network sites refers to all forms of electronic communication such as websites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (The Social Media Tourism Symposium 2011).

Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Dana 2007).

Social network sites refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities (Dewing 2012)

A definition by Dewing (2012) will be adopted for consideration in this study. However, for the purposes of this study social network sites will be defined as all forms of electronic communication such as internet based and mobile services for social networking and microblogging that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content & join online communities.

Broadband internet rose to popularity in 1990 and this eventually led to the developments of websites that allowed users to create and upload content. Though the first websites were dominated by the likes of sixdegrees.com and Friendster, they have been a widespread development and acceptance in network sites. Figures released in 2012 by CBC (2012) and Knowiton (2012) showed that Twitter had 517 million users while Facebook had 1 million users during the same time period.

It can be noted that social networking developments have not been limited to the social aspect of life. These developments have been greatly embraced by the corporate world and as a result social networking has become a daily norm in start-ups, small, medium sized and large corporations. Despite such a growth in usage and applicability, researchers still contend that little has been done to analyze how such social network sites developments affect business process and performance (Denyer et al. 2011). Bughin (2009) therefore contended that great need be put to determine the extent to which the utilization of social network sites impacts business process performance. However, such analysis needs to be drawn to tourism which has greatly taken a toll in the usage of social network sites.

The World Travel Market asserts that the role of technology especially social network sites has helped tourism business to promote their services and reach customers in a more personal way. This follows after the World Travel Market witnessed more than 1 billion arrivals of tourists around the world in 2012. This can be attributed to the ability of social network sites to serve as communication media that can instantly cross borders. Tourism business have greatly harnessed social network sites developments and are now incorporating it in their promotion and planning activities. One of the significant role social networking sites have played in tourism is in destination marketing. Social networking sites are playing significant roles in tourism and it is being used to attract

customers, engage users' interest and participation, retain users and build loyalty, learn about user preferences and to provide relevant customized information to users.

1.1 Background to Study '},/.

There have been a series of sessions and meetings in and outside Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the area of tourism. Such events are meant to promote and further develop Kurdistan's tourism industry. These events include the 21 November 2007 Duhok Governorate tourism session organized by Kurdistan Region's tourism minister (KRG, 2007).

On the other hand, there have been growing fears surrounding security and stability in KRG. A study by Padden (2006) reviewed that insurgent bombings and daily sectarian violence have greatly distorted KRG's tourism identity. The biggest challenge is being posed by ISIS which has been raking havoc in Northern and Western Iraq and in August 2015 it advanced in Northern Iraq routing government forces and taking the important city of Mosul by coup de main (Washington institute: 2015). As a result, a number of countries such as Australia, UK, Sweden, Japan and Germany have imposed strict travel warnings to KRG. Besides a fall in tourism revenue, KRG's tourism sector has suffered from a number of issues stretching from negative publicity to fall in ranking in terms of international rankings. Meanwhile, the telecommunications and information industry has evolved greatly and this has seen a number of social network sites platforms taking form worldwide. This includes Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Skype, TripAdvisor, LinkedIn. The benefits from the use of social network sites have been immense and Rowe (2011) outlined seven ways one should be leveraging social network sites which include;

- 1) Solicit endorsements
- 2) *Maximize* revenue per seat;
- 3) Bond with guests;
- 4) Manage reputation;
- 5) Reach out to new customers
- 6) Recruit new staff and
- 7) Build a buzz.

Social network sites are now playing a great role in tourism as they act as a source of information for travelers. A study by Zheng (2010) reviewed that search engines are now referring users to social network sites when searched for travel information and other tourist packages.

On the other hand, KRG's telecommunications and information industry is still evolving to standards that will see the information and communications technology industry positively impacting the tourism industry. As much negative information about KRG has surfaced through social network sites, analysts still believe that social networks sites can positively turnaround the same situation.

Despite all these challenges, KRG's tourism minister contends that KRG has vast amounts of untapped resources, chiefly, oil, gas and other minerals (possibly uranium) as well as agriculture. As a result, KRG's tourism industry is being foreseen as the chief tool that will positively market and portray the region's image. Thus KRG's tourism minister advocated the need to inform international tourists of the autonomous and safety position that now surrounds KRG. One of the ways they suggested was using every possible media to promote KRG as a tourism destination and this includes social networks sites.

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Other researchers strongly contend that as long as the conflicts between KRG and Baghdad government over disputed territories are still prevalent, then the KRG's tourism industry will still sink in the doldrums. Currently efforts are being made to rebrand KRG's image in the eyes of international tourists and these includes initiatives such as loans being offered to individuals wishing to launch tourism ventures especially from the region's major city centers such as Erbil, Sulaimani and Dahuk (Al-monitor,2013), the strengthening of the Peshmerga forces and police and Asayish to boost security and promote KRG as a safe tourism destination. With the huge role social networks sites are playing in the tourism industry worldwide this study therefore seeks to analyze how social network sites influences tourism in KRG.

1.2 Problem Statement

One of the most significant impacts of social network sites is their ability to relay information quickly. Social network sites have evolved greatly and this has changed both the economic, social and political landscape. Researchers strongly contend that the tourism industry can benefit a lot from such changes if it can harness and tap into such changes. For instance, Kamal (2013) further postulated that information spread through social networks helps to create transnational links whereby individuals and groups are able to engage in widespread dialogue. However, Larsen (2006) proffers a different perspective and argues that social network sites are effective when luring international tourists compared to domestic tourist especially in KRG where most people do not have access to internet. For example, an article by Hawlergov (2013) points out that in 2005 Kurdistan Region of Iraq internet penetration was close to 0 and the only telecom was the government monopoly entity with aging exchanges and no fiber optics.

Other researchers such as Germann (2013), further argue that social network sites can only play a significant role in tourism if the number of internet service provider is more thus allowing affordability and huge access. This argument is synonymous with events in Kurdistan where the sole provider that connects Kurdistan internet to the world is

Turkey. Such ability to provide internet service by Turkey hinges on good relations between KRG and Turkey of which most Iraq's see it as a way of Turkey to rip KRG of gas and oil.

Secondly, other studies show that internet usage is a bit expensive in KRG and this hampers the ability of social network sites to positively influence tourism in KRG. Hawlergov (2013) further revealed that if you are in KRG, 1 Mb is the most expensive rate in the world, more expensive than Cuba. The major cause is still being attributed to the monopoly aspect of internet provision and argues that they must allow any private sector company to make deals with neighboring countries including connecting to KRG. In this report Hawlergov (2013) says the internet penetration rate in is at 8% and is only because of KRG, and that Newroz has managed to reach 10% penetration rate.

Despite all these different perspectives other tourist destinations especially in Africa (eMarketing, 2011) where internet penetration is very low have been seen to gain so much from social network sites. Thus there is a striking question on how exactly does social network sites influence tourism. There has not been a consensus as to the exact impact of social network sites on tourism when researchers like Roberts (2013) strongly argue that social network sites have negative impacts on businesses and that sometimes it needs to be ignored. This study therefore seeks to analyze the impacts of the use of social network sites on tourism.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are;

1. To examine the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil.
2. To assess the influence of social network sites on tourism trends.
3. To analyze how online social network sites developments can be used to determine the behavior of tourism in Erbil.
4. To assess how social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil?
2. How do online social network sites influence tourism trends?
3. How can social network sites developments be used to indicate the behavior of tourism in Erbil?
4. How do social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil?

1.5 Hypothesis

H₀: Social network sites play no significant role on the tourism industry.

H₁: Social network sites play a significant role on the tourism industry.

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study is carried out in partial fulfillment of the requirements of MSc Hotel and Tourism Management at Near East University. This thesis will be of great value to the following stakeholders;

- **Researcher**

This research will add to the researcher's existing skills in particular research, analytical and decision making which can be used in future researches and policy making

- **Near East University**

This study will serve as a source of reference to other scholars notably in the area of Tourism. Most studies have been conducted in the Western parts of the Globe such as America where social network developments have dramatically progressed. Such studies if applied to Middle East nations such as Kurdistan region of Iraq, may fail to provide concrete explanations of the role played by social networks on the tourism industry. Thus this study will be one of the few that draws attention to the problem in the Middle East region.

In addition, social network developments are still evolving and the tourism industry still remains as the fastest growing service industry. This leaves a study gap and thus there is greater need to continually add to the few available social networks and tourism sources of knowledge that relate to Kurdistan region of Iraq.

- **Policy Makers and other Stakeholders**

The study will aid policy makers to have a wide insight on how social networks can be effectively harnessed to promote tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As such, will result in an increase its market share and dominance in the industry.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study analyses the impacts of social network sites on tourism and the area of interest is Erbil. The study is based on a combination of secondary data, and primary data on social network sites and tourism collected in Erbil. The researcher however encountered access to data problems because most of the data especially from the periods 2001 to 2007 is not readily available in Kurdistan and hence had to use questionnaires to retrieve the required information.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one deals with the problem and its setting. Empirical and theoretical literature reviews are addressed in chapter two. This chapter outlines the theoretical concepts and other empirical literature that have been conducted under the subjects of social networks and tourism. Chapter three provides an outline of measurements of social network sites. On the other hand, chapter four provides a detailed review of tourism and hospitality in KRG while chapter five highlights the methodology used to analyze the collected data so as to answer the research questions. Chapter six dwells on empirical analysis and discussion of findings. Chapter seven concludes the study by looking at conclusion, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research. The next chapter looks at literature review.

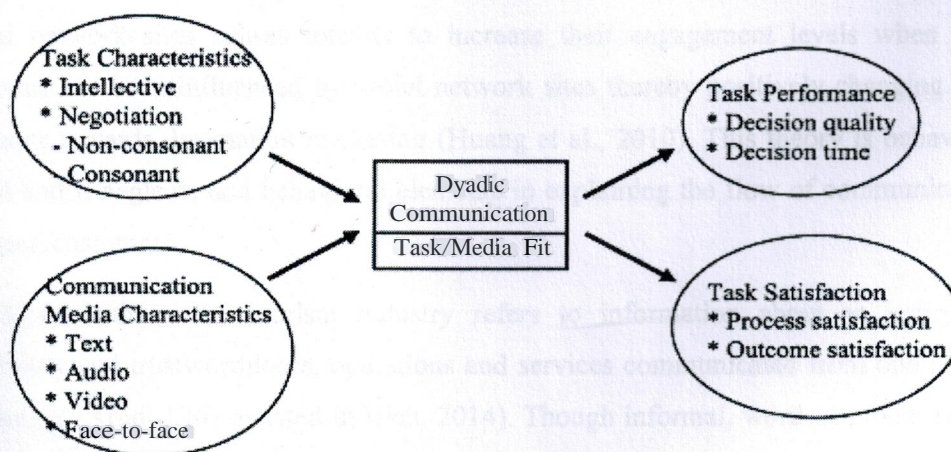
Social presence theory is known as a deficit theory hence as such focuses on cases that have been filtered at while idealizing face-to-face communication as the global standard of communication (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004). When applied to tourism, it neglects the importance of other communication mediums on tourism. Thus it may fail to adequately give an analysis of the roles of social networks on tourism.

Social presence theory suffers from the problem of changes in context. A significant number of researches have contradicted in findings about social presence and the learning aspect of it. For instance, Wise et al (2004) found that there is no relationship between social presence and student learning while Picciano (2002) argues that there is a relationship between the two. Moreover; social presence behavior changes with time.

2.2.2 Media Richness Theory

It deals with the ability of a communication medium to reproduce information sent over it. The theory assumes that people seek to avoid uncertainty and that a significant number of media work better for certain tasks compared to others. In addition, the theory groups information into categories or hierarchies based on the richness of information. This is shown below.

Figure 2.1 Media Richness Model



Media richness model: Source: Suh (1999)

This theory is important in studying the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil because it shows that the type of an online social network site is determined by the effectiveness of the network site in communicating tourism information. It also shows that uncertainty determines the choice of a network site that is used to communicate tourism information.

Media richness theory has been surrounded with ineffectiveness in explaining email usage (Markus 1994). Media richness theory further assumes that people select a medium based on the feasibility of the task at hand (Daft and Lengel, 1984). However, this contradicts with the idea that people select media based on feasibility, convenience and affordability (Hopkins 2012). This greatly applies to the roles of social medium on tourism where tourists are using web reviews and blogs such as TripAdvisor based on convenience and affordability.

2.2.3 Flow Theory

This theory contends that communication is at optimal level when people act with total involvement. It contends that consumers' intentions to revisit a particular website and purchase goods is determined by the perceived level of flow (Hausman and Siskind, 2009). This theory helps to explain why social network sites cause more people to positively react to destination marketing in tourism. This is supported by the fact that social network sites causes tourists to increase their engagement levels when their behavior has been influenced by social network sites thereby positively changing their behavior towards destination marketing (Huang et al., 2010). This theory is behavioral based and it neglects non behavioral elements in explaining the flow of communication between customers.

Word-of-mouth in the tourism industry refers to information about an entity, its credibility and trustworthiness, operations and services communicated from one person to another (Arndt 1967 as cited in Bich, 2014). Though informal, word-of-mouth is said to be effective communication source between customers (Gremer, 1994). Other studies have shown that though word-of-mouth is powerful, it has a lot of shortfalls. Word-of-mouth is effective when there is little or no uncertainty. Uncertainty translates to high

risk and causes tourists to switch to other forms of communication and thus rendering the effects of word-of-mouth on tourism ineffective.

2.3 Social Networks Sites

Social network sites refer to applications and websites that allow people to create and share information and participate in social networking. Social network sites take different forms such as business networks, enterprise social networks, blogs, forums, microblogs product or service review, photo sharing, social bookmarking, social gaming, video sharing, virtual worlds and social networks. They can however be classified into virality (the extent to which users re-share posted content) and mobile social network sites and business potential (this is sensitive to time and location).

2.3.1 Travel 2.0 and Tourism

Travel 2.0 refers to the full interactive second phase of travel information websites. The first wave was booking oriented and it included AA.com, Kayak, Expedia etc. Travel 2.0 is structured in such way that users can contribute information such as travelogues and reviews, words and images. Thus users can find information pertaining to hotels, destinations and other aspects of travel. Travel 2.0 websites include;

- **Igo Ugo** which specializes in providing travel advice.
- **Trip Advisor** which deals with information on destinations and hotels, and attraction reviews.
- **Flicker Travel** allows users around the world to upload photos.
- **Hotel Chatter** constitutes blogposts on hotel related matters.

2.3.2 Web 2.0 and its Adoption in Tourism

Web 2.0 is the second wave of development of the internet associated with a shift from static web pages to user generated content in social network sites provided on the web. Web 2.0 has reshaped marketing methods in the tourism industry. This has given the consumer more control over the decision making process on travel and tourism (Reactive, 2007). Web 2.0 has promoted an increase in information sources for tourists and these are now showing up in most search engines under travel and tourism. Web 2.0

however leads to closed relationships between the service provider and customers (Cox et al., 2009).

The developments in web2.0 have extended to mobile devices and as such mobile devices are now a very USffytgol of web 2.0 they encourage tourism communication. In a research by Travel monitor it has been established that 40% of international travelers travel with a smart phone of which 40% use them to obtain travel information on the destination and 34% of business travelers use them to alter bookings in transit (Noti, 2013).

Social network sites: Include networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc. Social network sites have increasingly become marketing tool for tourist destinations and organizations around the world are now posting information pertaining products, customer testimonials, forums etc.

- Mash-ups: this is an application that is being used by tourists to find information about restaurants, hotels and other tourist services (Sigala, 2007).
- Hotel rating systems: Is a form of collaborative tool that allows customers to rate services provided during their stay in a hotel and this helps other customers to make informed decisions about the hotels they will book into.
- Podcasting: It is an online radio that uses RSS technology and allows users to upload audio and video contents. A good example is YouTube.
- RSS: It stands for Really Simple Syndication and allows users to obtain updated information about what they are most interested in (Boni and Stemart, 2006).
- Biogs: These are online portals with a weak communitarian degree that allow readers to write and comment on certain subjects. This allows customers to share their experiences, trips and experiences (Boni and Stemart, 2006).

2.4 Trends in Social Network Sites and their Implications on Tourism

There has been a tremendous change in social network sites notably in the uses of social media. For instance, there has been a significant shift from searching aspect to socializing aspect of social network sites. Such a trend has an important bearing on

tourism destinations, tourism product, tourist behavior, tourism portals and tourism marketing. For example, tourism portals have increased in numbers and as such contain information about what travelers are saying about a particular destination (Fotis et al., 2010). In addition, user generated content is also emerging as a source of credible information. However, user generated content always contain mixed information and hence the effects on travel tourism might not be significant.

Social network sites have allowed penetration of markets that were previously dominated by traditional suppliers. As such, social network sites can be said to have increased competition in the tourism industry. Such competition promotes efficiency and cheaper tourism products and services. In addition, social network sites are now a dominant primary medium by which travel information is being shared (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). In their nature, social network sites are said to be a cheaper way of accessing information. As result tourists and or travelers can now make purchasing decisions faster and at a lower cost.

Social network sites are surrounded by perceived risk and popularity problems. It has been established that the greater the perceived risk the greater people will depend on personal networks of family and friends (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

Moreover, social network sites are surrounded by gender and age problems. The benefits of social networks sites are said to benefit females a lot compared to their male counterparts (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

2.5 Uses of Social Network Sites in Tourism

2.5.1 Identifying Brand Advocates

Brand advocates can be defined as those customers that do not only prefer your services or products but would put an effort to review your activities or comment about them, influence others and share your content. This is now being executed online through social network sites. Impartial reviews and word-of-mouth are now some of the key components of success in the tourism sector since more tourists search for a hotel review before they book a room.

2.5.2 Delivering a Great Customer Service

Delivering a great customer service allows a tourism business to retain existing customers and gain new customers. Social network sites thus allows tourism businesses to deliver a great customer service by allowing businesses to search for conversations around their brand and promptly respond to questions on their social network sites pages. Examples of this include post-vacation conversations on Trip Advisor about what tourists liked most about a trip or hotel and ask them to write a review about it.

2.5.3 Understanding your Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to understand who their customers are and what they want. Through understanding of tourists' issues, trends and needs which in turn influence marketing efforts, tourism businesses can strictly engineer their efforts towards such understanding thereby positively influencing consumer behavior towards their products and services.

2.5.4 Interacting with the Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to post content that adds value to tourists, ask questions and respond to comments. This engages customers into an interaction thereby gaining loyalty from existing and potential customers.

2.5.5 Destination Marketing

Social network sites support marketing activities by promoting destinations in order to attract potential tourists to visit a destination. A study conducted by (Popescu, 2014) reviewed that social network sites allow tourism businesses to distribute topical news stories. Destination management organizations can publicize information about their destinations to communities of people that are interested in their products. In addition, social network sites are timely as customers are constantly checking them thus destination management organizations can emphasize about their current events and campaigns on social network sites.

2.5.6 Checking Competitors

The tourism industry is now faced with a lot of competition and thus businesses need to keep track of what their competitors are doing. Social network sites allow businesses to

keep track of their competitors' activities, that is, what are they doing and what have they not done. This presents the business with greater market opportunities.

2.6 Impacts of Online Social Network Sites on Consumer Behavior and Tourism

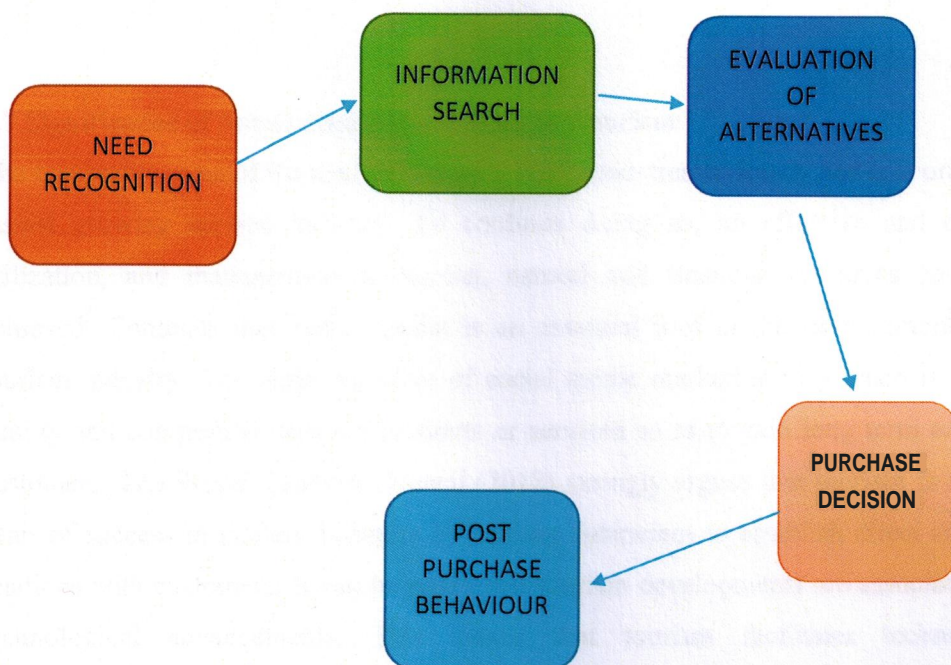
Consumer behavior can be defined as the process involved when individuals or groups, select, purchase, services, ideas or experience to satisfy needs and desires (Solomon, 2011). Various models have been developed to explain consumer behavior and these include the stimulus response and the buying process models (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model highlights both the internal and external factors, and personal characteristics of the buyer that contribute to the final buying decision of a customer. It attempts to give a thorough understanding of consumer behavior. According to this model social network sites falls under marketing and other stimuli while buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions process fall into customer's black box. This model shows that it is marketing and other stimuli, and the customer's black box that influence a response. Such response is evidenced by product choice, brand choice, purchase timing and purchase amount. When applied to tourism, it shows that social network sites must initially alter buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions (customer's black box) and it is then that these tourist's characteristics and decisions that cause a response in product, brand and purchasing. Thus the effectiveness of social on tourism is assumed to be dependent on the ability of marketing and other stimuli to influence the tourist's black box.

This model does not show the exact nature of the relationship between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box. In addition, it lacks empirical support and thus the magnitude of impact of between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box on tourism cannot be established with preciseness.

The buying process model (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model is a step by step illustration of the actual buying process. When applied to tourism, this model assumes that tourists first develop a need. Such a need will cause tourists to look for information regarding the tourism products and services they need to satisfy their needs. The diagrammatic explanation is shown in figure 2.2.

The model further states that when tourists gather the necessary information, they will now use the acquired information to evaluate the available alternatives. It is after evaluation that the tourist will then make a purchasing decision. The model also highlights that after consumption of the product there is post purchase behavior. Such behavior reflects a tourist satisfaction and reaction from acquisition of the tourism product or service.

Figure 22 The Buying Process Model.



Source: Adapted from Kotler and Armstrong (2004)

This model has an important bearing in explaining the impact of social network sites on consumer behavior (tourist behavior) in tourism because it outlines the role played by social network sites in the buying process. Thus according to this model, social media is used to search for information about tourist activities, destinations, hotels etc. Social network sites are also seen playing an important of providing such information. However, it does not consider others issues such as credibility of the information and the perceived risk associated with the media. The model does not show the relationship between social network sites and tourism. The buying process model has an advantage

over the stimulus model in the sense that the buying process model considers post purchase behavior.

Post behavior is important because it determines whether tourists will continue to purchase tourism products and services or not and how much more or less of the product or service they will continue to buy. It also outlines the importance of tourism service providers in meeting tourists' perceptions or expectations. When a purchased tourist product or service fails to meet tourists' perceptions, tourists may cut down their expenditure spent on tourist products or services (post purchase behavior).

2.7 Significance of Social Media Marketing in Tourism

The competitiveness of the tourism industry has grown tremendously and it is one of the fastest growing service industry. To continue doing so, an effective and efficient utilization, and management of human, natural and financial resources has to be achieved. Contends that social media is an essential tool in the development of the tourism industry. The main objective of social media marketing in tourism is to offer quality and competitive tourism products or services so as to gain long term and loyal customers. The World Tourism Council (2012) strongly argues that tourism is now the heart of success in modern business by helping businesses to establish direct and good relations with customers. It can be noted that tourism developments are associated with technological advancements. This means that tourism facilitates technological advancements. This was reinforced by Jashi (2013) who outlined that there is a unilateral relationship between internet penetration and online bookings. His suggestion pointed to high internet penetration and the high usage of credit cards. This was further supported by Hope-Johnstone (2010) who strongly asserts that about 3 billion of the world population now conducts electronic transactions through the internet and via mobile phones. The most known and effective social media networks for marketing tourism are Facebook, Travelshake, Twitter, Podcasts and YouTube. Thus in order to attract huge numbers of customers around the world, the tourism team needs to utilize proper social media tools that can effectively and efficiently transmit the right message and engage the right users.

2.8 Tourism Product

A tourism product can be defined as a bundle of activities, services and benefits that contribute to the entire tourism experience (Bich, 2014). The tourism product is divided into three; the product that tourist think they are going to buy, the actual product that tourist buy and the augmented product which are the benefits provided by the suppliers. The effectiveness of social network sites in influencing tourism can be measured by its ability to impact the three dimensions. Thus social network sites must sell tourism products in the most appealing and attractive manner that can lure potential customers and cause existing customers to continue to buy tourism products. Apart from advertised products, tourism destinations must also provide augmented products. Research has shown that it is augmented products that creates customer loyalty and keeps them continuing buying the firm's products. Tourism products advertised on social network sites must at least match the actual product purchased by tourists.

2.9 Empirical Literature Review

Jashi (2015) examined the importance of social network sites in tourism with emphasis on Georgia. The undertaking of the study by Jashi (2015) stemmed from the assertion that significant effort has been put on analyzing the impact of social network sites on tourism. Results from the study showed that social media marketing is of paramount importance in tourism. Recommendations given showed strong support for the utilization of social media marketing in tourism.

Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) undertook a study to identify the linkage between social network sites and tourism. This was based on arguments which revealed that social network sites are playing significant roles in tourism. The study identified that the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism are focusing on tourism practices, promotion, decision making and providing information. This reinforced study results by Jashi (2015) which established that social media is an important tool in tourism marketing. Deductions made from the study revealed that the role of social network sites in tourism has not been sufficiently examined. Hence there is need to

examine the role of social network sites in tourism in various aspects such as business activities and trends, individual behaviour and other social attributes.

Gohil (2015) analyzed both the impacts and roles of social network sites in tourism in Madhya Pradesh, India. This study sought to examine how the informational role of social media impacts tourism. It is in this regard that the study outlined that social network sites can be utilized to promote tourism information. Further results from the study revealed that social media is an important tool for strategic positioning and branding tourism globally.

Rathonyi (2013) undertook a study to examine the social network sites influence on tourism with regards to University of Debrecen students. The study stemmed from the assertion that students seek tourism information to avoid uncertainty. Study results revealed that social network sites are important in accessing both information and purchasing opportunities. The study by Rathonyi (2013) focused on analyzing the impact of social network sites on both aspects of supply and demand.

In it in this regard that this study will employ an amalgamative approach of the above mentioned studies to examine the roles of social network sites in tourism. Using ideas provided by Rathonyi (2013), this study will examine the roles of social network sites from both the supply and demand aspects, that is, from both business and individual person's perspectives. In addition, insights by Jashi (2015), Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) and Gohil (2015) will be used to examine the informational innovative, promotional and competitive (supply and demand aspects) roles of social network sites in tourism. These roles have an impact on the number of tourists visiting a particular place (tourism sale volume), their behavior in terms of visiting choices and amount of money spent on tourism products. This study will therefore examine the impact of informative, promotional, innovative and competitive roles of social network sites on tourism sales volume using information collected from business tourists visiting Erbil hotels in Kurdistan region of Iraq. It in this regard that using this insights a following conceptual framework will be utilized to formulate a methodological tool that will be used to approach the roles of social network sites in tourism.

Figure 2.3 Conceptual Framework



2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the underlying theories and concepts surrounding social networks sites and tourism. The theories reviewed include the social presence theory, media richness theory and the flow theory. The social presence theory was found to suffer from changes in context and that it neglects other mediums of communication. It was also established that social presence changes with time. On the other hand, this chapter identified that the media richness theory is ineffective in explaining email usage and does not consider feasibility, convenience and affordability factors in explaining how people chose social network sites in tourism. The flow theory had non behavioral shortfalls. This chapter also looked at travel 2.0 and tourism, web 2.0 and tourism, trends in social network sites and their implications on tourism, uses of social network sites in tourism, impacts of social network sites on consumer behavior in tourism and the tourism product. The above literature showed inconclusive gaps in theories and empirical literature and it attempted to fill in the literature gaps.

CHAPTER ID

MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The main objective of the designed questionnaire is to determine the role of online social media network sites on tourism in Erbil. As a result, the dependent variable will be represented by social media usage while independent variables are informational, promotional, competitive, innovative and increasing sales volume roles.

Table 3.1 Model Expression

	Informational role (X₁)
1	How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites
2	What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks
3	Use social media for socializing purposes
4	Respond to comments
5	Ask or answer an tourism question
	Promotional role (X₂)
1	To market existing tourism products
2	To promote new tourism products
3	Expand tourism clientele base
4	Enter new tourism markets
5	Makes the tourism corporation to be known
	Competitive role (X₃)
1	Gain more tourism market share
2	Reduces the level of tourism competition to a tourism firm
3	Helps in acquiring tourism information that competitors cannot get access
4	Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm

5	Helps build corporate tourism legacy
	Innovative role (X4)
1	Makes it cheaper to access tourism information
2	Tourists can get instant feedback
3	It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty
4	Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose
5	Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information
	Increase in tourism sales volume (TSv)
1	Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks
2	Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products
3	It results in tourism brand loyalty
4	Safeguards the tourism company's reputation
5	Improves tourists' perception of the tourist destination

This study used adopted a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009). In this study Monachesi et al (2009) focused on supporting knowledge discovery in an eLearning environment having social components. They found that about 50% of the respondents use instant messaging and that the number of respondent who use forums and mailing lists was high compared to other online communication and stood at 45%. His questionnaire format is important to this study because it gives a detailed description of how people use online communication.

This study however made additional changes to a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009) because it mainly focuses on the extent to which people use online communication. This questionnaire also had limitations of being centered on information systems in eLearning and hence does not fully explain the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil.

CHAPTER IV

OVERVIEW OF HOSPITALITY IN KRG OF IRAQ

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the general overview of Kurdistan region of Iraq, developments in online network sites and how they are influencing tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In addition, it provides an insight as to the roles online social networks are playing on tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This chapter seeks to identify opportunities and threats that are posed by online social networks and how the Kurdistan tourism officials can position themselves to benefit from changing trends in online social networks. It also looks at tourism structures including tourist destinations, sites and attractions.

4.2 Overview of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Kurdistan is an autonomous region located in the Northern part of Iraq. The Iraq's constitution recognizes Kurdistan as an independent region. Generally Kurds are of Indo-European origin and most of the people speak Kurdish while Arabic and Turkmeni languages are also gaining popularity. The population comprises of Armenian, Arab, and Turkmen groups. Kurdistan also contains various religious groups which includes Muslim, Christians, and Yazidi. Below is a geographical map of Kurdistan.

Fig 4.1 Geographical Map of Kurdistan of Iraq



Source: BBC

4.2.1 Subdivision

Kurdistan is divided into lower and upper Kurdistan. Upper Kurdistan is composed of northern, northeastern and northwestern parts. This region stretches from Lake Urmia to the west of Amed. Lower Kurdistan is composed of Southern Kurdistan and the main cities are Erbil and Kirkuk.

4.2.2 Geography

It is estimated that Kurdistan covers about 12 000 km² in Syria, 65 000 km² in Iraq, 125 000 km² in Iran and 190 000 km² which stretches in Turkey. There are six governorates in Kurdistan and three of them are under the Kurdish government while the rest are under the control of Syrian Kurdistan and Iranian Kurdistan. The south eastern part of Turkey contains about 15 to 20 million Kurds (Clive, 2007).

4.2.3 Population

According to Kurdistan's regional government, the Kurdish population is estimated to be 52 million and this figure comprises of Chaldeans, Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians and Arabs. The regional government further revealed that the median age is above 20 years with 36% constituting an age group of 0-14 years and 4% of the population being over 63 years (krg.org).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

KRG- Kurdistan Regional Government

KTA- Kurdistan Tourism Authority

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Scientist

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

The study looks at the use of social network sites to promote tourism. This chapter focuses on background to study, problem statement, hypothesis, research questions, research objectives, justification of the study, and organization of the study.

The world has witnessed exponential growth in social network sites and users. Statistical reports by Bradbury(2013) have it that 16% of 18-29 year old internet users were social networking site users and that in 2010 this number had surged to 86%. Henrikson (2011) echoed the same idea and asserted that social networking has extended and taken root in older age groups. Henrikson's (2011) ideas were based on his findings which revealed that the number of 50-64 year olds and 65 years and above old internet users using social networking sites had risen from 7% and 5% in September 2005 to 26% and 47% respectively in May 2010.

Various definitions have been put forward to define social network sites. Below are some of the definitions.

Social network sites refers to all forms of electronic communication such as websites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (The Social Media Tourism Symposium 2011).

Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Dana 2007).

Social network sites refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities (Dewing 2012)

A definition by Dewing (2012) will be adopted for consideration in this study. However, for the purposes of this study social network sites will be defined as all forms of electronic communication such as internet based and mobile services for social networking and microblogging that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content & join online communities.

Broadband internet rose to popularity in 1990 and this eventually led to the developments of websites that allowed users to create and upload content. Though the first websites were dominated by the likes of sixdegrees.com and Friendster, they have been a widespread development and acceptance in network sites. Figures released in 2012 by CBC (2012) and Knowiton (2012) showed that Twitter had 517 million users while Facebook had 1 million users during the same time period.

It can be noted that social networking developments have not been limited to the social aspect of life. These developments have been greatly embraced by the corporate world and as a result social networking has become a daily norm in start-ups, small, medium sized and large corporations. Despite such a growth in usage and applicability, researchers still contend that little has been done to analyze how such social network sites developments affect business process and performance (Denyer et al. 2011). Bughin (2009) therefore contended that great need be put to determine the extent to which the utilization of social network sites impacts business process performance. However, such analysis needs to be drawn to tourism which has greatly taken a toll in the usage of social network sites.

The World Travel Market asserts that the role of technology especially social network sites has helped tourism business to promote their services and reach customers in a more personal way. This follows after the World Travel Market witnessed more than 1 billion arrivals of tourists around the world in 2012. This can be attributed to the ability of social network sites to serve as communication media that can instantly cross borders. Tourism business have greatly harnessed social network sites developments and are now incorporating it in their promotion and planning activities. One of the significant role social networking sites have played in tourism is in destination marketing. Social networking sites are playing significant roles in tourism and it is being used to attract

customers, engage users' interest and participation, retain users and build loyalty, learn about user preferences and to provide relevant customized information to users.

1.1 Background to Study '},/.

There have been a series of sessions and meetings in and outside Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the area of tourism. Such events are meant to promote and further develop Kurdistan's tourism industry. These events include the 21 November 2007 Duhok Governorate tourism session organized by Kurdistan Region's tourism minister (KRG, 2007).

On the other hand, there have been growing fears surrounding security and stability in KRG. A study by Padden (2006) reviewed that insurgent bombings and daily sectarian violence have greatly distorted KRG's tourism identity. The biggest challenge is being posed by ISIS which has been raking havoc in Northern and Western Iraq and in August 2015 it advanced in Northern Iraq routing government forces and taking the important city of Mosul by coup de main (Washington institute: 2015). As a result, a number of countries such as Australia, UK, Sweden, Japan and Germany have imposed strict travel warnings to KRG. Besides a fall in tourism revenue, KRG's tourism sector has suffered from a number of issues stretching from negative publicity to fall in ranking in terms of international rankings. Meanwhile, the telecommunications and information industry has evolved greatly and this has seen a number of social network sites platforms taking form worldwide. This includes Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Skype, TripAdvisor, LinkedIn. The benefits from the use of social network sites have been immense and Rowe (2011) outlined seven ways one should be leveraging social network sites which include;

- 1) Solicit endorsements
- 2) *Maximize* revenue per seat;
- 3) Bond with guests;
- 4) Manage reputation;
- 5) Reach out to new customers
- 6) Recruit new staff and
- 7) Build a buzz.

Social network sites are now playing a great role in tourism as they act as a source of information for travelers. A study by Zheng (2010) reviewed that search engines are now referring users to social network sites when searched for travel information and other tourist packages.

On the other hand, KRG's telecommunications and information industry is still evolving to standards that will see the information and communications technology industry positively impacting the tourism industry. As much negative information about KRG has surfaced through social network sites, analysts still believe that social networks sites can positively turnaround the same situation.

Despite all these challenges, KRG's tourism minister contends that KRG has vast amounts of untapped resources, chiefly, oil, gas and other minerals (possibly uranium) as well as agriculture. As a result, KRG's tourism industry is being foreseen as the chief tool that will positively market and portray the region's image. Thus KRG's tourism minister advocated the need to inform international tourists of the autonomous and safety position that now surrounds KRG. One of the ways they suggested was using every possible media to promote KRG as a tourism destination and this includes social networks sites.

In a study conducted by Kapiki (2015), it is reviewed that if the tourism and hospitality industry is to compete successfully it has to make use of information and communication technologies notably social networks sites. It is further highlighted that social networks sites allow the hospitality industry to attract more guests, ameliorate service quality, deliver exceptional service guest satisfaction, and increase in revenue as well as market share (Kapiki, 2015).

Social network sites are a crucial tool for success in business today and globally, different estimates have suggested that 50% of leisure trips and 40% of business trips are booked online (Jashi, 2013). In this study, Jashi (2013) further estimated that from the period 2014, over 3 billion of the world's population will be able to transact electronically via mobile or internet technology with 90% mobile penetration rate and 6.5 billion mobile connections. It can be noted that tourist demand satisfaction is determined by the impact and usage of social network sites marketing. To a large extent,

social networks sites are now being used to stimulate and encourage interaction of customers so as to promote tourist awareness.

Other researchers strongly contend that as long as the conflicts between KRG and Baghdad government over disputed territories are still prevalent, then the KRG's tourism industry will still sink in the doldrums. Currently efforts are being made to rebrand KRG's image in the eyes of international tourists and these includes initiatives such as loans being offered to individuals wishing to launch tourism ventures especially from the region's major city centers such as Erbil, Sulaimani and Dahuk (Al-monitor, 2013), the strengthening of the Peshmerga forces and police and Asayish to boost security and promote KRG as a safe tourism destination. With the huge role social networks sites are playing in the tourism industry worldwide this study therefore seeks to analyze how social network sites influences tourism in KRG.

1.2 Problem Statement

One of the most significant impacts of social network sites is their ability to relay information quickly. Social network sites have evolved greatly and this has changed both the economic, social and political landscape. Researchers strongly contend that the tourism industry can benefit a lot from such changes if it can harness and tap into such changes. For instance, Kamal (2013) further postulated that information spread through social networks helps to create transnational links whereby individuals and groups are able to engage in widespread dialogue. However, Larsen (2006) proffers a different perspective and argues that social network sites are effective when luring international tourists compared to domestic tourist especially in KRG where most people do not have access to internet. For example, an article by Hawlergov (2013) points out that in 2005 Kurdistan Region of Iraq internet penetration was close to 0 and the only telecom was the government monopoly entity with aging exchanges and no fiber optics.

Other researchers such as Germann (2013), further argue that social network sites can only play a significant role in tourism if the number of internet service provider is more thus allowing affordability and huge access. This argument is synonymous with events in Kurdistan where the sole provider that connects Kurdistan internet to the world is

Turkey. Such ability to provide internet service by Turkey hinges on good relations between KRG and Turkey of which most Iraq's see it as a way of Turkey to rip KRG of gas and oil.

Secondly, other studies show that internet usage is a bit expensive in KRG and this hampers the ability of social network sites to positively influence tourism in KRG. Hawlergov (2013) further revealed that if you are in KRG, 1 Mb is the most expensive rate in the world, more expensive than Cuba. The major cause is still being attributed to the monopoly aspect of internet provision and argues that they must allow any private sector company to make deals with neighboring countries including connecting to KRG. In this report Hawlergov (2013) says the internet penetration rate in is at 8% and is only because of KRG, and that Newroz has managed to reach 10% penetration rate.

Despite all these different perspectives other tourist destinations especially in Africa (eMarketing, 2011) where internet penetration is very low have been seen to gain so much from social network sites. Thus there is a striking question on how exactly does social network sites influence tourism. There has not been a consensus as to the exact impact of social network sites on tourism when researchers like Roberts (2013) strongly argue that social network sites have negative impacts on businesses and that sometimes it needs to be ignored. This study therefore seeks to analyze the impacts of the use of social network sites on tourism.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are;

1. To examine the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil.
2. To assess the influence of social network sites on tourism trends.
3. To analyze how online social network sites developments can be used to determine the behavior of tourism in Erbil.
4. To assess how social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil?
2. How do online social network sites influence tourism trends?
3. How can social network sites developments be used to indicate the behavior of tourism in Erbil?
4. How do social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil?

1.5 Hypothesis

H₀: Social network sites play no significant role on the tourism industry.

H₁: Social network sites play a significant role on the tourism industry.

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study is carried out in partial fulfillment of the requirements of MSc Hotel and Tourism Management at Near East University. This thesis will be of great value to the following stakeholders;

- **Researcher**

This research will add to the researcher's existing skills in particular research, analytical and decision making which can be used in future researches and policy making

- **Near East University**

This study will serve as a source of reference to other scholars notably in the area of Tourism. Most studies have been conducted in the Western parts of the Globe such as America where social network developments have dramatically progressed. Such studies if applied to Middle East nations such as Kurdistan region of Iraq, may fail to provide concrete explanations of the role played by social networks on the tourism industry. Thus this study will be one of the few that draws attention to the problem in the Middle East region.

In addition, social network developments are still evolving and the tourism industry still remains as the fastest growing service industry. This leaves a study gap and thus there is greater need to continually add to the few available social networks and tourism sources of knowledge that relate to Kurdistan region of Iraq.

- **Policy Makers and other Stakeholders**

The study will aid policy makers to have a wide insight on how social networks can be effectively harnessed to promote tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As such, will result in an increase its market share and dominance in the industry.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study analyses the impacts of social network sites on tourism and the area of interest is Erbil. The study is based on a combination of secondary data, and primary data on social network sites and tourism collected in Erbil. The researcher however encountered access to data problems because most of the data especially from the periods 2001 to 2007 is not readily available in Kurdistan and hence had to use questionnaires to retrieve the required information.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one deals with the problem and its setting. Empirical and theoretical literature reviews are addressed in chapter two. This chapter outlines the theoretical concepts and other empirical literature that have been conducted under the subjects of social networks and tourism. Chapter three provides an outline of measurements of social network sites. On the other hand, chapter four provides a detailed review of tourism and hospitality in KRG while chapter five highlights the methodology used to analyze the collected data so as to answer the research questions. Chapter six dwells on empirical analysis and discussion of findings. Chapter seven concludes the study by looking at conclusion, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research. The next chapter looks at literature review.

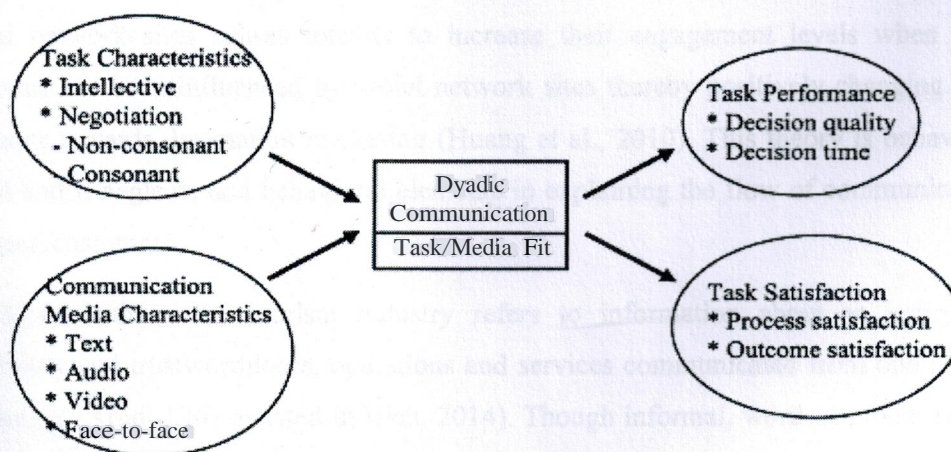
Social presence theory is known as a deficit theory hence as such focuses on cases that have been filtered at while idealizing face-to-face communication as the global standard of communication (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004). When applied to tourism, it neglects the importance of other communication mediums on tourism. Thus it may fail to adequately give an analysis of the roles of social networks on tourism.

Social presence theory suffers from the problem of changes in context. A significant number of researches have contradicted in findings about social presence and the learning aspect of it. For instance, Wise et al (2004) found that there is no relationship between social presence and student learning while Picciano (2002) argues that there is a relationship between the two. Moreover; social presence behavior changes with time.

2.2.2 Media Richness Theory

It deals with the ability of a communication medium to reproduce information sent over it. The theory assumes that people seek to avoid uncertainty and that a significant number of media work better for certain tasks compared to others. In addition, the theory groups information into categories or hierarchies based on the richness of information. This is shown below.

Figure 2.1 Media Richness Model



Media richness model: Source: Suh (1999)

This theory is important in studying the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil because it shows that the type of an online social network site is determined by the effectiveness of the network site in communicating tourism information. It also shows that uncertainty determines the choice of a network site that is used to communicate tourism information.

Media richness theory has been surrounded with ineffectiveness in explaining email usage (Markus 1994). Media richness theory further assumes that people select a medium based on the feasibility of the task at hand (Daft and Lengel, 1984). However, this contradicts with the idea that people select media based on feasibility, convenience and affordability (Hopkins 2012). This greatly applies to the roles of social medium on tourism where tourists are using web reviews and blogs such as TripAdvisor based on convenience and affordability.

2.2.3 Flow Theory

This theory contends that communication is at optimal level when people act with total involvement. It contends that consumers' intentions to revisit a particular website and purchase goods is determined by the perceived level of flow (Hausman and Siskind, 2009). This theory helps to explain why social network sites cause more people to positively react to destination marketing in tourism. This is supported by the fact that social network sites causes tourists to increase their engagement levels when their behavior has been influenced by social network sites thereby positively changing their behavior towards destination marketing (Huang et al., 2010). This theory is behavioral based and it neglects non behavioral elements in explaining the flow of communication between customers.

Word-of-mouth in the tourism industry refers to information about an entity, its credibility and trustworthiness, operations and services communicated from one person to another (Arndt 1967 as cited in Bich, 2014). Though informal, word-of-mouth is said to be effective communication source between customers (Gremer, 1994). Other studies have shown that though word-of-mouth is powerful, it has a lot of shortfalls. Word-of-mouth is effective when there is little or no uncertainty. Uncertainty translates to high

risk and causes tourists to switch to other forms of communication and thus rendering the effects of word-of-mouth on tourism ineffective.

2.3 Social Networks Sites

Social network sites refer to applications and websites that allow people to create and share information and participate in social networking. Social network sites take different forms such as business networks, enterprise social networks, blogs, forums, microblogs product or service review, photo sharing, social bookmarking, social gaming, video sharing, virtual worlds and social networks. They can however be classified into virality (the extent to which users re-share posted content) and mobile social network sites and business potential (this is sensitive to time and location).

2.3.1 Travel 2.0 and Tourism

Travel 2.0 refers to the full interactive second phase of travel information websites. The first wave was booking oriented and it included AA.com, Kayak, Expedia etc. Travel 2.0 is structured in such way that users can contribute information such as travelogues and reviews, words and images. Thus users can find information pertaining to hotels, destinations and other aspects of travel. Travel 2.0 websites include;

- **Igo Ugo** which specializes in providing travel advice.
- **Trip Advisor** which deals with information on destinations and hotels, and attraction reviews.
- **Flicker Travel** allows users around the world to upload photos.
- **Hotel Chatter** constitutes blogposts on hotel related matters.

2.3.2 Web 2.0 and its Adoption in Tourism

Web 2.0 is the second wave of development of the internet associated with a shift from static web pages to user generated content in social network sites provided on the web. Web 2.0 has reshaped marketing methods in the tourism industry. This has given the consumer more control over the decision making process on travel and tourism (Reactive, 2007). Web 2.0 has promoted an increase in information sources for tourists and these are now showing up in most search engines under travel and tourism. Web 2.0

however leads to closed relationships between the service provider and customers (Cox et al., 2009).

The developments in web2.0 have extended to mobile devices and as such mobile devices are now a very USffytgol of web 2.0 they encourage tourism communication. In a research by Travel monitor it has been established that 40% of international travelers travel with a smart phone of which 40% use them to obtain travel information on the destination and 34% of business travelers use them to alter bookings in transit (Noti, 2013).

Social network sites: Include networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc. Social network sites have increasingly become marketing tool for tourist destinations and organizations around the world are now posting information pertaining products, customer testimonials, forums etc.

- Mash-ups: this is an application that is being used by tourists to find information about restaurants, hotels and other tourist services (Sigala, 2007).
- Hotel rating systems: Is a form of collaborative tool that allows customers to rate services provided during their stay in a hotel and this helps other customers to make informed decisions about the hotels they will book into.
- Podcasting: It is an online radio that uses RSS technology and allows users to upload audio and video contents. A good example is YouTube.
- RSS: It stands for Really Simple Syndication and allows users to obtain updated information about what they are most interested in (Boni and Stemart, 2006).
- Biogs: These are online portals with a weak communitarian degree that allow readers to write and comment on certain subjects. This allows customers to share their experiences, trips and experiences (Boni and Stemart, 2006).

2.4 Trends in Social Network Sites and their Implications on Tourism

There has been a tremendous change in social network sites notably in the uses of social media. For instance, there has been a significant shift from searching aspect to socializing aspect of social network sites. Such a trend has an important bearing on

tourism destinations, tourism product, tourist behavior, tourism portals and tourism marketing. For example, tourism portals have increased in numbers and as such contain information about what travelers are saying about a particular destination (Fotis et al., 2010). In addition, user generated content is also emerging as a source of credible information. However, user generated content always contain mixed information and hence the effects on travel tourism might not be significant.

Social network sites have allowed penetration of markets that were previously dominated by traditional suppliers. As such, social network sites can be said to have increased competition in the tourism industry. Such competition promotes efficiency and cheaper tourism products and services. In addition, social network sites are now a dominant primary medium by which travel information is being shared (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). In their nature, social network sites are said to be a cheaper way of accessing information. As result tourists and or travelers can now make purchasing decisions faster and at a lower cost.

Social network sites are surrounded by perceived risk and popularity problems. It has been established that the greater the perceived risk the greater people will depend on personal networks of family and friends (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

Moreover, social network sites are surrounded by gender and age problems. The benefits of social networks sites are said to benefit females a lot compared to their male counterparts (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

2.5 Uses of Social Network Sites in Tourism

2.5.1 Identifying Brand Advocates

Brand advocates can be defined as those customers that do not only prefer your services or products but would put an effort to review your activities or comment about them, influence others and share your content. This is now being executed online through social network sites. Impartial reviews and word-of-mouth are now some of the key components of success in the tourism sector since more tourists search for a hotel review before they book a room.

2.5.2 Delivering a Great Customer Service

Delivering a great customer service allows a tourism business to retain existing customers and gain new customers. Social network sites thus allows tourism businesses to deliver a great customer service by allowing businesses to search for conversations around their brand and promptly respond to questions on their social network sites pages. Examples of this include post-vacation conversations on Trip Advisor about what tourists liked most about a trip or hotel and ask them to write a review about it.

2.5.3 Understanding your Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to understand who their customers are and what they want. Through understanding of tourists' issues, trends and needs which in turn influence marketing efforts, tourism businesses can strictly engineer their efforts towards such understanding thereby positively influencing consumer behavior towards their products and services.

2.5.4 Interacting with the Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to post content that adds value to tourists, ask questions and respond to comments. This engages customers into an interaction thereby gaining loyalty from existing and potential customers.

2.5.5 Destination Marketing

Social network sites support marketing activities by promoting destinations in order to attract potential tourists to visit a destination. A study conducted by (Popescu, 2014) reviewed that social network sites allow tourism businesses to distribute topical news stories. Destination management organizations can publicize information about their destinations to communities of people that are interested in their products. In addition, social network sites are timely as customers are constantly checking them thus destination management organizations can emphasize about their current events and campaigns on social network sites.

2.5.6 Checking Competitors

The tourism industry is now faced with a lot of competition and thus businesses need to keep track of what their competitors are doing. Social network sites allow businesses to

keep track of their competitors' activities, that is, what are they doing and what have they not done. This presents the business with greater market opportunities.

2.6 Impacts of Online Social Network Sites on Consumer Behavior and Tourism

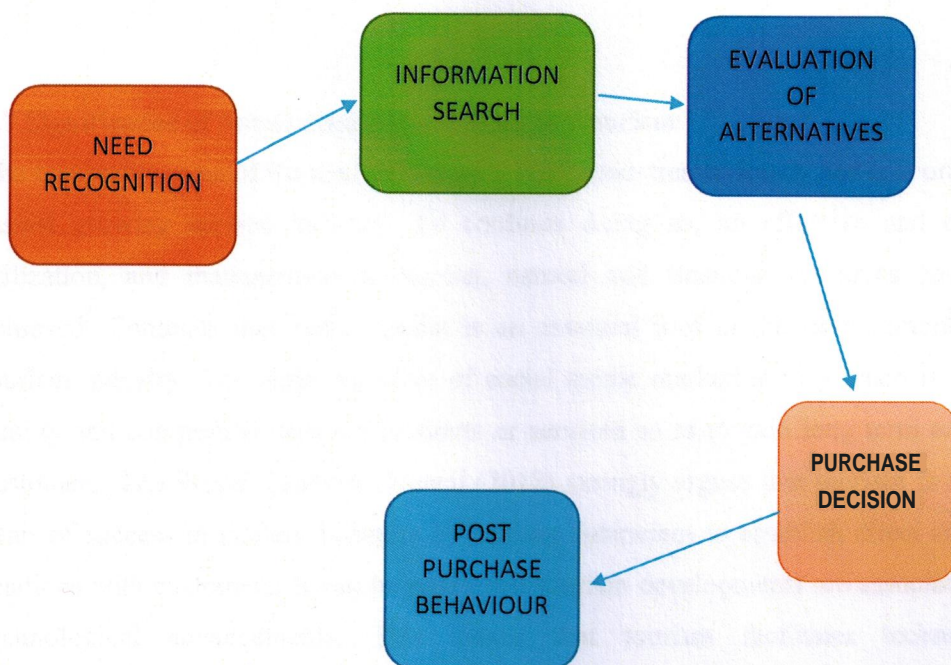
Consumer behavior can be defined as the process involved when individuals or groups, select, purchase, services, ideas or experience to satisfy needs and desires (Solomon, 2011). Various models have been developed to explain consumer behavior and these include the stimulus response and the buying process models (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model highlights both the internal and external factors, and personal characteristics of the buyer that contribute to the final buying decision of a customer. It attempts to give a thorough understanding of consumer behavior. According to this model social network sites falls under marketing and other stimuli while buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions process fall into customer's black box. This model shows that it is marketing and other stimuli, and the customer's black box that influence a response. Such response is evidenced by product choice, brand choice, purchase timing and purchase amount. When applied to tourism, it shows that social network sites must initially alter buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions (customer's black box) and it is then that these tourist's characteristics and decisions that cause a response in product, brand and purchasing. Thus the effectiveness of social on tourism is assumed to be dependent on the ability of marketing and other stimuli to influence the tourist's black box.

This model does not show the exact nature of the relationship between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box. In addition, it lacks empirical support and thus the magnitude of impact of between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box on tourism cannot be established with preciseness.

The buying process model (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model is a step by step illustration of the actual buying process. When applied to tourism, this model assumes that tourists first develop a need. Such a need will cause tourists to look for information regarding the tourism products and services they need to satisfy their needs. The diagrammatic explanation is shown in figure 2.2.

The model further states that when tourists gather the necessary information, they will now use the acquired information to evaluate the available alternatives. It is after evaluation that the tourist will then make a purchasing decision. The model also highlights that after consumption of the product there is post purchase behavior. Such behavior reflects a tourist satisfaction and reaction from acquisition of the tourism product or service.

Figure 22 The Buying Process Model.



Source: Adapted from Kotler and Armstrong (2004)

This model has an important bearing in explaining the impact of social network sites on consumer behavior (tourist behavior) in tourism because it outlines the role played by social network sites in the buying process. Thus according to this model, social media is used to search for information about tourist activities, destinations, hotels etc. Social network sites are also seen playing an important of providing such information. However, it does not consider others issues such as credibility of the information and the perceived risk associated with the media. The model does not show the relationship between social network sites and tourism. The buying process model has an advantage

over the stimulus model in the sense that the buying process model considers post purchase behavior.

Post behavior is important because it determines whether tourists will continue to purchase tourism products and services or not and how much more or less of the product or service they will continue to buy. It also outlines the importance of tourism service providers in meeting tourists' perceptions or expectations. When a purchased tourist product or service fails to meet tourists' perceptions, tourists may cut down their expenditure spent on tourist products or services (post purchase behavior).

2.7 Significance of Social Media Marketing in Tourism

The competitiveness of the tourism industry has grown tremendously and it is one of the fastest growing service industry. To continue doing so, an effective and efficient utilization, and management of human, natural and financial resources has to be achieved. Contends that social media is an essential tool in the development of the tourism industry. The main objective of social media marketing in tourism is to offer quality and competitive tourism products or services so as to gain long term and loyal customers. The World Tourism Council (2012) strongly argues that tourism is now the heart of success in modern business by helping businesses to establish direct and good relations with customers. It can be noted that tourism developments are associated with technological advancements. This means that tourism facilitates technological advancements. This was reinforced by Jashi (2013) who outlined that there is a unilateral relationship between internet penetration and online bookings. His suggestion pointed to high internet penetration and the high usage of credit cards. This was further supported by Hope-Johnstone (2010) who strongly asserts that about 3 billion of the world population now conducts electronic transactions through the internet and via mobile phones. The most known and effective social media networks for marketing tourism are Facebook, Travelshake, Twitter, Podcasts and YouTube. Thus in order to attract huge numbers of customers around the world, the tourism team needs to utilize proper social media tools that can effectively and efficiently transmit the right message and engage the right users.

2.8 Tourism Product

A tourism product can be defined as a bundle of activities, services and benefits that contribute to the entire tourism experience (Bich, 2014). The tourism product is divided into three; the product that tourist think they are going to buy, the actual product that tourist buy and the augmented product which are the benefits provided by the suppliers. The effectiveness of social network sites in influencing tourism can be measured by its ability to impact the three dimensions. Thus social network sites must sell tourism products in the most appealing and attractive manner that can lure potential customers and cause existing customers to continue to buy tourism products. Apart from advertised products, tourism destinations must also provide augmented products. Research has shown that it is augmented products that creates customer loyalty and keeps them continuing buying the firm's products. Tourism products advertised on social network sites must at least match the actual product purchased by tourists.

2.9 Empirical Literature Review

Jashi (2015) examined the importance of social network sites in tourism with emphasis on Georgia. The undertaking of the study by Jashi (2015) stemmed from the assertion that significant effort has been put on analyzing the impact of social network sites on tourism. Results from the study showed that social media marketing is of paramount importance in tourism. Recommendations given showed strong support for the utilization of social media marketing in tourism.

Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) undertook a study to identify the linkage between social network sites and tourism. This was based on arguments which revealed that social network sites are playing significant roles in tourism. The study identified that the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism are focusing on tourism practices, promotion, decision making and providing information. This reinforced study results by Jashi (2015) which established that social media is an important tool in tourism marketing. Deductions made from the study revealed that the role of social network sites in tourism has not been sufficiently examined. Hence there is need to

examine the role of social network sites in tourism in various aspects such as business activities and trends, individual behaviour and other social attributes.

Gohil (2015) analyzed both the impacts and roles of social network sites in tourism in Madhya Pradesh, India. This study sought to examine how the informational role of social media impacts tourism. It is in this regard that the study outlined that social network sites can be utilized to promote tourism information. Further results from the study revealed that social media is an important tool for strategic positioning and branding tourism globally.

Rathonyi (2013) undertook a study to examine the social network sites influence on tourism with regards to University of Debrecen students. The study stemmed from the assertion that students seek tourism information to avoid uncertainty. Study results revealed that social network sites are important in accessing both information and purchasing opportunities. The study by Rathonyi (2013) focused on analyzing the impact of social network sites on both aspects of supply and demand.

In it in this regard that this study will employ an amalgamative approach of the above mentioned studies to examine the roles of social network sites in tourism. Using ideas provided by Rathonyi (2013), this study will examine the roles of social network sites from both the supply and demand aspects, that is, from both business and individual person's perspectives. In addition, insights by Jashi (2015), Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) and Gohil (2015) will be used to examine the informational innovative, promotional and competitive (supply and demand aspects) roles of social network sites in tourism. These roles have an impact on the number of tourists visiting a particular place (tourism sale volume), their behavior in terms of visiting choices and amount of money spent on tourism products. This study will therefore examine the impact of informative, promotional, innovative and competitive roles of social network sites on tourism sales volume using information collected from business tourists visiting Erbil hotels in Kurdistan region of Iraq. It in this regard that using this insights a following conceptual framework will be utilized to formulate a methodological tool that will be used to approach the roles of social network sites in tourism.

Figure 2.3 Conceptual Framework



2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the underlying theories and concepts surrounding social networks sites and tourism. The theories reviewed include the social presence theory, media richness theory and the flow theory. The social presence theory was found to suffer from changes in context and that it neglects other mediums of communication. It was also established that social presence changes with time. On the other hand, this chapter identified that the media richness theory is ineffective in explaining email usage and does not consider feasibility, convenience and affordability factors in explaining how people chose social network sites in tourism. The flow theory had non behavioral shortfalls. This chapter also looked at travel 2.0 and tourism, web 2.0 and tourism, trends in social network sites and their implications on tourism, uses of social network sites in tourism, impacts of social network sites on consumer behavior in tourism and the tourism product. The above literature showed inconclusive gaps in theories and empirical literature and it attempted to fill in the literature gaps.

CHAPTER ID

MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The main objective of the designed questionnaire is to determine the role of online social media network sites on tourism in Erbil. As a result, the dependent variable will be represented by social media usage while independent variables are informational, promotional, competitive, innovative and increasing sales volume roles.

Table 3.1 Model Expression

	Informational role (X₁)
1	How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites
2	What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks
3	Use social media for socializing purposes
4	Respond to comments
5	Ask or answer an tourism question
	Promotional role (X₂)
1	To market existing tourism products
2	To promote new tourism products
3	Expand tourism clientele base
4	Enter new tourism markets
5	Makes the tourism corporation to be known
	Competitive role (X₃)
1	Gain more tourism market share
2	Reduces the level of tourism competition to a tourism firm
3	Helps in acquiring tourism information that competitors cannot get access
4	Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm

5	Helps build corporate tourism legacy
	Innovative role (X4)
1	Makes it cheaper to access tourism information
2	Tourists can get instant feedback
3	It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty
4	Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose
5	Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information
	Increase in tourism sales volume (TSv)
1	Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks
2	Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products
3	It results in tourism brand loyalty
4	Safeguards the tourism company's reputation
5	Improves tourists' perception of the tourist destination

This study used adopted a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009). In this study Monachesi et al (2009) focused on supporting knowledge discovery in an eLearning environment having social components. They found that about 50% of the respondents use instant messaging and that the number of respondent who use forums and mailing lists was high compared to other online communication and stood at 45%. His questionnaire format is important to this study because it gives a detailed description of how people use online communication.

This study however made additional changes to a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009) because it mainly focuses on the extent to which people use online communication. This questionnaire also had limitations of being centered on information systems in eLearning and hence does not fully explain the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil.

CHAPTER IV

OVERVIEW OF HOSPITALITY IN KRG OF IRAQ

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the general overview of Kurdistan region of Iraq, developments in online network sites and how they are influencing tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In addition, it provides an insight as to the roles online social networks are playing on tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This chapter seeks to identify opportunities and threats that are posed by online social networks and how the Kurdistan tourism officials can position themselves to benefit from changing trends in online social networks. It also looks at tourism structures including tourist destinations, sites and attractions.

4.2 Overview of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Kurdistan is an autonomous region located in the Northern part of Iraq. The Iraq's constitution recognizes Kurdistan as an independent region. Generally Kurds are of Indo-European origin and most of the people speak Kurdish while Arabic and Turkmeni languages are also gaining popularity. The population comprises of Armenian, Arab, and Turkmen groups. Kurdistan also contains various religious groups which includes Muslim, Christians, and Yazidi. Below is a geographical map of Kurdistan.

Fig 4.1 Geographical Map of Kurdistan of Iraq



Source: BBC

4.2.1 Subdivision

Kurdistan is divided into lower and upper Kurdistan. Upper Kurdistan is composed of northern, northeastern and northwestern parts. This region stretches from Lake Urmia to the west of Amed. Lower Kurdistan is composed of Southern Kurdistan and the main cities are Erbil and Kirkuk.

4.2.2 Geography

It is estimated that Kurdistan covers about 12 000 km² in Syria, 65 000 km² in Iraq, 125 000 km² in Iran and 190 000 km² which stretches in Turkey. There are six governorates in Kurdistan and three of them are under the Kurdish government while the rest are under the control of Syrian Kurdistan and Iranian Kurdistan. The south eastern part of Turkey contains about 15 to 20 million Kurds (Clive, 2007).

4.2.3 Population

According to Kurdistan's regional government, the Kurdish population is estimated to be 52 million and this figure comprises of Chaldeans, Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians and Arabs. The regional government further revealed that the median age is above 20 years with 36% constituting an age group of 0-14 years and 4% of the population being over 63 years (krg.org).

4.2.4 Climate

The climate in Kurdistan can be said to be an extreme continental climate. That is, too cold in winter and too hot in summer. Rainfall patterns vary with regions. For example, in the high plateaus, precipitation ranges from 700mm to 3000mm a year while plains it ranges from 200mm to 400mm a year.

4.2.5 Petroleum and Mineral Resources

Kurdistan contains one of the sixth largest oil reserves in the world and it is estimated that the oil reserves in Kurdistan are 45 billion barrels with more than 45 oil sites. It also contains associated and gas reserves which are more than 2 800km³ (Hawlergov, 2013). A notable number of companies are undertaking mining activities in Kurdistan and these include Genel Energy, Exxon, Chevron, Talisman Energy, Marathon Oil, Total, Hunt Oil and Gulf Keystone Petroleum. There are other mineral resources such as copper, coal, limestone, zinc, marble, iron and gold.

4.2.6 Natural Resources

There are a lot of rivers and mountains in Kurdistan and these contribute to the natural to its beauty. The mountains of Kurdistan are characterized by snow fall and heavy rain which provide water to other rivers such as Kura and Khabur. Furthermore, because of the rivers' altitudes which are 3000m to 4000m above sea level, the rivers are a source of energy. Dukandam and Lake Sulaymani are major sources of tourists' attractions in Kurdistan.

Mountains are however important geographically and are a symbol of the Kurdish life. There is a common saying which says that 'Kurds have no friends but the mountains'. The famous mountains include Zagros, Shingar, Gara, and Matini.

4.3 Tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Tourism in Kurdistan has been on an upward trend irrespective of the source of the visitors. This is illustrated in table 4.3. This is evidenced by forecasts made by Lababedi (2012) who showed that in 2012 the tourism sector in Kurdistan grew by 4.9% of GDP and projected that in 2013 and 2014, Kurdistan's tourism would grow by 5% of GDP

and 5.5% of GDP respectively. Tourist attractions in Kurdistan are found in three major cities namely Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimani. These provinces have a lot of tourist destination within and around them. Below is a detailed description of these provinces.

Table 4.1 Tourist places in Erbil province

Tourism resort	Description
Sami Abdul Rahman Park	It is built on a Ba'ath military base and comprises of a large municipal park.
Qaysari bazaar	This is a traditional market which sells food, household goods, textiles, gold and other souvenirs
Khanzad castle	Its period of origin relates to the Soran period
Sheik Chooli minaret	It is found in the western part of Erbil and was constructed by Sultan Mudhaffarudeen. This site has its origins from 543-586AD.
Shaqlawa resort	It is common for selling fresh produce and a good tourist destination.
Gali Ali Beg	Is a common for recreational activities and has a waterfall.
Bekhal Resort	A popular resort which is close to Gali Ali Beg.

Table 4.2 Tourist places in Dohuk

Tourism resort	Description
Amedi:	<p>Amedi comprises of beautiful mountains and valleys and it is ranked number 21 in the world. It is one of the beautiful cities in the world.</p> <p>The total population in Amedi is about 9 000.</p> <p>This place also includes Amadia Citadel and Sulav resort which are common tourist destinations.</p>
Saint IthLiha Church:	It known as the oldest church and is assumed to have been built in 500AD.



Table 4.3 Tourist places in Suleimani

Tourism resort	Description
Dokan Lake	It similar to Darbandikhan Lake and has restaurants, leisure facilities and cabins that make the place more enjoyable.
Darbandikhan dam	This place has restaurants, leisure facilities and cabins that make the place more enjoyable.
Ahmadaawa resort	It more active in summer because of its orchards, waterfalls and springs.
Suleimani Museum	It is a richest museum with houses that are more than 1000 years old. Below is table showing the number of hotels, motels, tourism villages, beds, and restaurants and cafes in Kurdistan region from the year 2007-2014.

Table 4.4 The number of hotels, motels, tourism villages, beds, and restaurants and cafes in Kurdistan region from the year 2007-2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Hotels	106	166	131	168	202	259	314	385
motels	49	53	72	96	128	168	206	248
Tourism villages	29	33	37	42	44	54	72	75
No. of beds	10451	11363	13480	22533	26811	31634	34954	44504
cafes	129	151	233	305	338	482	565	643

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

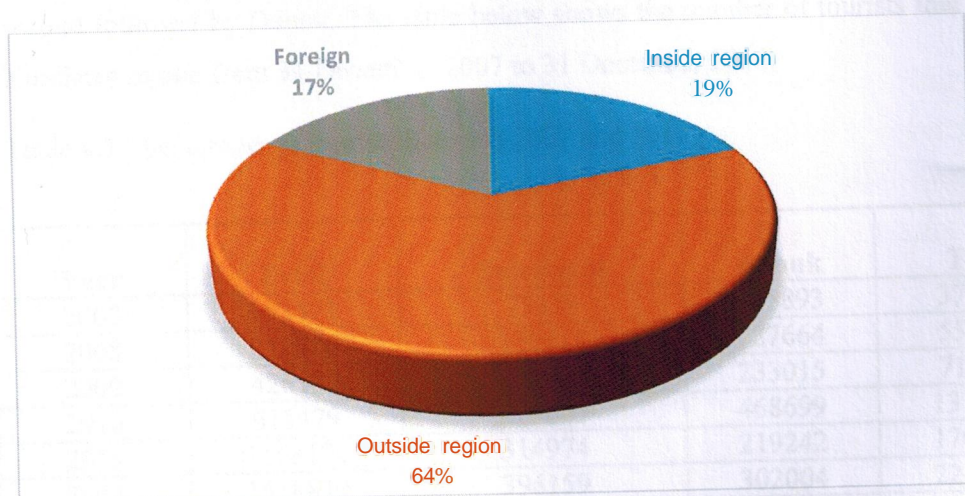
The number of tourists both domestic and foreign has been on an upward trend except in 2014 where it declined amid of political fears. This is shown below in table 4.5.

Table 4.5 The number of guests who visited Kurdistan Region between 2007-2014

Year	Inside KRG	Outside KRG	Foreign	Total
2007	137118	186420	53859	377397
2008	190230	285740	82890	558860
2009	209611	44919	13254	791345
2010	329536	789760	194545	1313845
2011	315161	1149738	237491	1702390
2012	313144	1470138	433711	221699
2013	459847	1933544	558636	2952027
2014	273326	1000726	255346	1529434

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

Fig 4.2 Classification of the total number of tourists that visited Kurdistan in 2007



Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

From figure 4.2 it can be deduced that the highest number of tourists who visited Kurdistan Region of Iraq came from other parts of Iraq(outside region) and accounted for 64% of the total number of tourists who visited KRG. Foreign tourists, that is, those that came from countries such as USA, Germany, Syria, Turkey etc., accounted for 17% of the total number of tourists who visited Kurdistan. This was followed by domestic

tourism (inside region) which accounted for 19% of the total number of tourists. This diagrammatic explanation entails that much emphasis is needed to promote domestic tourism and enhance the effectiveness of current policies to lure foreign tourists.

Table 4.6 The total number of hotels in Erbil, Sulaimani and Dohuk with and without stars

	5 *	4*	3*	2 *	1 *	Without stars	total
Erbil	12	36	59	193	164	15	485
Sulaimani	6	12	42	62	66	0	188
Dohuk	7	9	30	32	50	0	128
TOTAL	28	56	130	229	244	15	704

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

The highest number of high star hotels was recorded in Erbil with Suleimani being second followed by Dohuk. The table below shows the number of tourists that came to Kurdistan region from 31 December 2007 to 31 December 2014.

Table 4.7 The number of tourists between 2007 and 2014

Year	Erbil	Suleimani	Dohuk	Total
2007	153571	77933	145893	377397
2008	211780	119416	227664	558860
2009	426398	131932	233015	719345
2010	615479	229663	468699	1313841
2011	1168174	314974	219242	1702390
2012	1518830	396159	302004	2216993
2013	2029623	477990	444414	2952027
2014	937591	362213	229630	1529434

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

The lowest number of tourist that came to Kurdistan region of Iraq was recorded in 2014 and this was for all the three cities with totals of 937 591,362 213 and 229 630 respectively. The highest percentage increase in the number of tourist that came to

Kurdistan region was registered in 2010 and stood at 60%. On the other hand, lowest number was registered in 2011 and 2012 and stood at 30%. This is expressed in table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8 Growth rate of tourists visiting KRG between 2007 and 2014

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
No. of tourists	377397	558860	791345	1313841	1702390	2216993	2952027	1529434
O/o		48%	42%	66%	30%	30%	33%	-48%

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

It can be deduced that the highest growth rate in tourist visiting KRG was experienced in 2010 with a growth rate of 66%. The year 2014 experienced a significant decline in tourists visiting KRG and this is because of the war that had taken its toll in Iraq.

4.4 Online Social Networks in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Social network sites have not greatly evolved in Kurdistan. However, other network sites such as Twitter have greatly taken form in Kurdistan. A number of significant users of twitter have been reported to be journalists, activists, students and politicians. Dizayee (2014) reported that Twitter user numbers have grown significantly in Kurdistan region of Iraq as many people are now using the social network for so many reasons which include awareness, protests, getting access to information etc. Twitter. Kurds has emerged and is now being used to provide information especially concerning specific issues of major concern. However, more people in Kurdistan are now using Facebook and Instagram.

In addition, there is now what is known as the Kurdish Social Media Gathering (KSMG) which was organized through Twitter. Live newsfeed streams and social media feeds are also growing as they are being included in worldwide forums and conferences. For example, the Sulaimani Forum organized by the University of Iraq which was seen on Twitter feed. Facebook user numbers have also increased in Kurdistan and this is

because is being used to keep in touch with family and friends. This has seen the formation of a group on Facebook called 'Largest Kurdish Community on Facebook'. This group has brought together Kurdish and other people from different parts of the world and established links for collecting ideas and helping each other information wise and physically.

Of great importance social network sites have become a way of communicating with Kurds in the diaspora. This is evidenced by a new social network site called 2dul.com formed by Zawen Aarif and has more than 4 000 followers and 100 members. In conclusion, social network sites can be said to have brought together people on a large scale and thus 'making the Kurdish world smaller'.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have focused on literature on social network sites. This chapter focuses on how the study was conducted. This chapter will dwell on research design, population, research instruments, and data collection and presentation procedures. The main emphasis of this study is gather concrete evidence that enables us to answer the research questions and make sound recommendations.

5.2 Research Design

A multiple regression model will be used to determine the nature and significance of the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism and this will be coupled by the use of SPSS. The multiple regression model will be of the following form;

$$SN = f_0 + f_1 X_1 + f_2 X_2 + f_3 X_3 + f_4 X_4 + f_5 X_5 + \mu \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where; SN is social network sites , f_0 , f_1 , f_2 , f_3 , f_4 and f_5 are parameters, X_1 , X_2 , X_3 , X_4 and X_5 are informational role, promotional role, competitive role, innovative role and increasing sales volume role respectively and μ is the error term. The collected data will be presented in the form of tables, charts and diagrams. Data analysis will also encompass descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Cronbach's alpha will be used to determine the reliability of the collected data.

5.2.1 Definition of Variables

5.2.1.1 Informational Roles

Assertions provided by Gohil (2015) outlined that the informational role of social network sites entails the ability to offer the required details pertaining to the desired subject matter. It is in this regard that there is a unilateral relationship between the

informational role of social network and tourism. Thus expected results will be compared with the study results obtained by Gohil (2015).

5.2.2 Promotional Role

Promotion in this study can be defined as the enhancement of awareness about an idea or product through activities such as advertising and other marketing campaigns. Zeng and Geritsen (2014) established that social network can be used to enhance promotional objectives or activities in tourism. Thus a positive relationship between the promotional role of tourism and social network is therefore anticipated.

5.2.3 Competitive Role

Competitiveness can be defined as the potential ability of a firm or an individual to gain an increase in the quality of products offered, number of customers or sales revenue attributed to a particular activity. Thus in this study competitiveness of tourism can be alternatively be described as the ability of tourism individuals or firms to offer quality tourism products, number of tourists or tourism sales revenue attributed to a particular tourism activity. It can be deduced from this definition that a positive association exists between the competitive role of social network and tourism and this can be supported by study results by Zeng and Geritsen (2014).

5.2.4 Innovative Role

This refers to the ability of an individual or firm to positively change the way of doing activities through the use of efficient and cost effective technological systems. Innovation is therefore regarded as the catalyst that positively influences organizational activities by improving the usage of input materials and the output produced. In this regard, Gohil (2015) postulated that social network does significantly results in major improvements in tourism activities. Hence a positive relationship between the innovative role of social network and tourism is anticipated.

5.2.5 Tourism Sales Volume (TSv)

Tourism sales volume in this regard refers to the volume of sales that are attributed to tourism activities. In this study, unilateral association between social network sites and tourism is anticipated in line with the study by Gohil (2015). Social network usage in tourism is greatly attributed to the endeavor to increase tourism sales. Hence, an increase

in tourism sales through social network usage will cause an increase in social network usage.

5.3 Population

A population can be defined as an entire pool of study from which a sample is drawn. In this study our population is business tourists that use 5-star and 4-star hotels in Erbil. The reason behind the selection of these 5-star and 4-star hotels is that they have websites and applications for reservations and a majority of tourists book these hotels. The Kurdistan Tourism Authority (2015) reports that more tourists preferred 5 and 4-stars hotels because of the availability of better information communication technology infrastructure. In addition, table 4.7 has shown that the highest number of tourists visited Erbil and totaled 937 591. Thus the study will draw its attention towards Erbil. However, because of the magnitude of the population, it is difficult to undertake a study of the population of that magnitude and hence stratified random sampling will be used to select the population.

Stratified random sampling is defined as the division of significantly large population into smaller groups known as strata so as to conveniently undertake a study of the desired population. It is in this regard that the total number of hotels (see table 4.6) in Erbil will be used as strata or sample size. The KTA (2016) asserts that the total number of hotels in Erbil stood at 485 in 2015. It is in this regard that 485 will be utilized as a strata and hence 485 questionnaires were distributed to business tourist residing in 4-star and 5-star hotels in Erbil (see table 6.2). Questions were therefore asked if the guest is a business tourist or not before handing over the questionnaire.

5.4 Data Collection Methods

This study used both primary and secondary data and outlines the methods that were used to collect the data. Secondary data included publications, records and other documented information about the number of tourists that came to Kurdistan, revenue collected from tourist activities, investment expenditure on tourism in KRG, social network usage and development statistics etc. The researcher will travel to the relevant places such as the ministry of tourism and ministry of information and communication

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

KRG- Kurdistan Regional Government

KTA- Kurdistan Tourism Authority

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Scientist

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

The study looks at the use of social network sites to promote tourism. This chapter focuses on background to study, problem statement, hypothesis, research questions, research objectives, justification of the study, and organization of the study.

The world has witnessed exponential growth in social network sites and users. Statistical reports by Bradbury(2013) have it that 16% of 18-29 year old internet users were social networking site users and that in 2010 this number had surged to 86%. Henrikson (2011) echoed the same idea and asserted that social networking has extended and taken root in older age groups. Henrikson's (2011) ideas were based on his findings which revealed that the number of 50-64 year olds and 65 years and above old internet users using social networking sites had risen from 7% and 5% in September 2005 to 26% and 47% respectively in May 2010.

Various definitions have been put forward to define social network sites. Below are some of the definitions.

Social network sites refers to all forms of electronic communication such as websites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (The Social Media Tourism Symposium 2011).

Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Dana 2007).

Social network sites refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities (Dewing 2012)

A definition by Dewing (2012) will be adopted for consideration in this study. However, for the purposes of this study social network sites will be defined as all forms of electronic communication such as internet based and mobile services for social networking and microblogging that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content & join online communities.

Broadband internet rose to popularity in 1990 and this eventually led to the developments of websites that allowed users to create and upload content. Though the first websites were dominated by the likes of sixdegrees.com and Friendster, they have been a widespread development and acceptance in network sites. Figures released in 2012 by CBC (2012) and Knowiton (2012) showed that Twitter had 517 million users while Facebook had 1 million users during the same time period.

It can be noted that social networking developments have not been limited to the social aspect of life. These developments have been greatly embraced by the corporate world and as a result social networking has become a daily norm in start-ups, small, medium sized and large corporations. Despite such a growth in usage and applicability, researchers still contend that little has been done to analyze how such social network sites developments affect business process and performance (Denyer et al. 2011). Bughin (2009) therefore contended that great need be put to determine the extent to which the utilization of social network sites impacts business process performance. However, such analysis needs to be drawn to tourism which has greatly taken a toll in the usage of social network sites.

The World Travel Market asserts that the role of technology especially social network sites has helped tourism business to promote their services and reach customers in a more personal way. This follows after the World Travel Market witnessed more than 1 billion arrivals of tourists around the world in 2012. This can be attributed to the ability of social network sites to serve as communication media that can instantly cross borders. Tourism business have greatly harnessed social network sites developments and are now incorporating it in their promotion and planning activities. One of the significant role social networking sites have played in tourism is in destination marketing. Social networking sites are playing significant roles in tourism and it is being used to attract

customers, engage users' interest and participation, retain users and build loyalty, learn about user preferences and to provide relevant customized information to users.

1.1 Background to Study '},/.

There have been a series of sessions and meetings in and outside Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the area of tourism. Such events are meant to promote and further develop Kurdistan's tourism industry. These events include the 21 November 2007 Duhok Governorate tourism session organized by Kurdistan Region's tourism minister (KRG, 2007).

On the other hand, there have been growing fears surrounding security and stability in KRG. A study by Padden (2006) reviewed that insurgent bombings and daily sectarian violence have greatly distorted KRG's tourism identity. The biggest challenge is being posed by ISIS which has been raking havoc in Northern and Western Iraq and in August 2015 it advanced in Northern Iraq routing government forces and taking the important city of Mosul by coup de main (Washington institute: 2015). As a result, a number of countries such as Australia, UK, Sweden, Japan and Germany have imposed strict travel warnings to KRG. Besides a fall in tourism revenue, KRG's tourism sector has suffered from a number of issues stretching from negative publicity to fall in ranking in terms of international rankings. Meanwhile, the telecommunications and information industry has evolved greatly and this has seen a number of social network sites platforms taking form worldwide. This includes Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Skype, TripAdvisor, LinkedIn. The benefits from the use of social network sites have been immense and Rowe (2011) outlined seven ways one should be leveraging social network sites which include;

- 1) Solicit endorsements
- 2) *Maximize* revenue per seat;
- 3) Bond with guests;
- 4) Manage reputation;
- 5) Reach out to new customers
- 6) Recruit new staff and
- 7) Build a buzz.

Social network sites are now playing a great role in tourism as they act as a source of information for travelers. A study by Zheng (2010) reviewed that search engines are now referring users to social network sites when searched for travel information and other tourist packages.

On the other hand, KRG's telecommunications and information industry is still evolving to standards that will see the information and communications technology industry positively impacting the tourism industry. As much negative information about KRG has surfaced through social network sites, analysts still believe that social networks sites can positively turnaround the same situation.

Despite all these challenges, KRG's tourism minister contends that KRG has vast amounts of untapped resources, chiefly, oil, gas and other minerals (possibly uranium) as well as agriculture. As a result, KRG's tourism industry is being foreseen as the chief tool that will positively market and portray the region's image. Thus KRG's tourism minister advocated the need to inform international tourists of the autonomous and safety position that now surrounds KRG. One of the ways they suggested was using every possible media to promote KRG as a tourism destination and this includes social networks sites.

In a study conducted by Kapiki (2015), it is reviewed that if the tourism and hospitality industry is to compete successfully it has to make use of information and communication technologies notably social networks sites. It is further highlighted that social networks sites allow the hospitality industry to attract more guests, ameliorate service quality, deliver exceptional service guest satisfaction, and increase in revenue as well as market share (Kapiki, 2015).

Social network sites are a crucial tool for success in business today and globally, different estimates have suggested that 50% of leisure trips and 40% of business trips are booked online (Jashi, 2013). In this study, Jashi (2013) further estimated that from the period 2014, over 3 billion of the world's population will be able to transact electronically via mobile or internet technology with 90% mobile penetration rate and 6.5 billion mobile connections. It can be noted that tourist demand satisfaction is determined by the impact and usage of social network sites marketing. To a large extent,

social networks sites are now being used to stimulate and encourage interaction of customers so as to promote tourist awareness.

Other researchers strongly contend that as long as the conflicts between KRG and Baghdad government over disputed territories are still prevalent, then the KRG's tourism industry will still sink in the doldrums. Currently efforts are being made to rebrand KRG's image in the eyes of international tourists and these includes initiatives such as loans being offered to individuals wishing to launch tourism ventures especially from the region's major city centers such as Erbil, Sulaimani and Dahuk (Al-monitor, 2013), the strengthening of the Peshmerga forces and police and Asayish to boost security and promote KRG as a safe tourism destination. With the huge role social networks sites are playing in the tourism industry worldwide this study therefore seeks to analyze how social network sites influences tourism in KRG.

1.2 Problem Statement

One of the most significant impacts of social network sites is their ability to relay information quickly. Social network sites have evolved greatly and this has changed both the economic, social and political landscape. Researchers strongly contend that the tourism industry can benefit a lot from such changes if it can harness and tap into such changes. For instance, Kamal (2013) further postulated that information spread through social networks helps to create transnational links whereby individuals and groups are able to engage in widespread dialogue. However, Larsen (2006) proffers a different perspective and argues that social network sites are effective when luring international tourists compared to domestic tourist especially in KRG where most people do not have access to internet. For example, an article by Hawlergov (2013) points out that in 2005 Kurdistan Region of Iraq internet penetration was close to 0 and the only telecom was the government monopoly entity with aging exchanges and no fiber optics.

Other researchers such as Germann (2013), further argue that social network sites can only play a significant role in tourism if the number of internet service provider is more thus allowing affordability and huge access. This argument is synonymous with events in Kurdistan where the sole provider that connects Kurdistan internet to the world is

Turkey. Such ability to provide internet service by Turkey hinges on good relations between KRG and Turkey of which most Iraq's see it as a way of Turkey to rip KRG of gas and oil.

Secondly, other studies show that internet usage is a bit expensive in KRG and this hampers the ability of social network sites to positively influence tourism in KRG. Hawlergov (2013) further revealed that if you are in KRG, 1 Mb is the most expensive rate in the world, more expensive than Cuba. The major cause is still being attributed to the monopoly aspect of internet provision and argues that they must allow any private sector company to make deals with neighboring countries including connecting to KRG. In this report Hawlergov (2013) says the internet penetration rate in is at 8% and is only because of KRG, and that Newroz has managed to reach 10% penetration rate.

Despite all these different perspectives other tourist destinations especially in Africa (eMarketing, 2011) where internet penetration is very low have been seen to gain so much from social network sites. Thus there is a striking question on how exactly does social network sites influence tourism. There has not been a consensus as to the exact impact of social network sites on tourism when researchers like Roberts (2013) strongly argue that social network sites have negative impacts on businesses and that sometimes it needs to be ignored. This study therefore seeks to analyze the impacts of the use of social network sites on tourism.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are;

1. To examine the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil.
2. To assess the influence of social network sites on tourism trends.
3. To analyze how online social network sites developments can be used to determine the behavior of tourism in Erbil.
4. To assess how social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil?
2. How do online social network sites influence tourism trends?
3. How can social network sites developments be used to indicate the behavior of tourism in Erbil?
4. How do social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil?

1.5 Hypothesis

H₀: Social network sites play no significant role on the tourism industry.

H₁: Social network sites play a significant role on the tourism industry.

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study is carried out in partial fulfillment of the requirements of MSc Hotel and Tourism Management at Near East University. This thesis will be of great value to the following stakeholders;

- **Researcher**

This research will add to the researcher's existing skills in particular research, analytical and decision making which can be used in future researches and policy making

- **Near East University**

This study will serve as a source of reference to other scholars notably in the area of Tourism. Most studies have been conducted in the Western parts of the Globe such as America where social network developments have dramatically progressed. Such studies if applied to Middle East nations such as Kurdistan region of Iraq, may fail to provide concrete explanations of the role played by social networks on the tourism industry. Thus this study will be one of the few that draws attention to the problem in the Middle East region.

In addition, social network developments are still evolving and the tourism industry still remains as the fastest growing service industry. This leaves a study gap and thus there is greater need to continually add to the few available social networks and tourism sources of knowledge that relate to Kurdistan region of Iraq.

- **Policy Makers and other Stakeholders**

The study will aid policy makers to have a wide insight on how social networks can be effectively harnessed to promote tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As such, will result in an increase its market share and dominance in the industry.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study analyses the impacts of social network sites on tourism and the area of interest is Erbil. The study is based on a combination of secondary data, and primary data on social network sites and tourism collected in Erbil. The researcher however encountered access to data problems because most of the data especially from the periods 2001 to 2007 is not readily available in Kurdistan and hence had to use questionnaires to retrieve the required information.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one deals with the problem and its setting. Empirical and theoretical literature reviews are addressed in chapter two. This chapter outlines the theoretical concepts and other empirical literature that have been conducted under the subjects of social networks and tourism. Chapter three provides an outline of measurements of social network sites. On the other hand, chapter four provides a detailed review of tourism and hospitality in KRG while chapter five highlights the methodology used to analyze the collected data so as to answer the research questions. Chapter six dwells on empirical analysis and discussion of findings. Chapter seven concludes the study by looking at conclusion, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research. The next chapter looks at literature review.

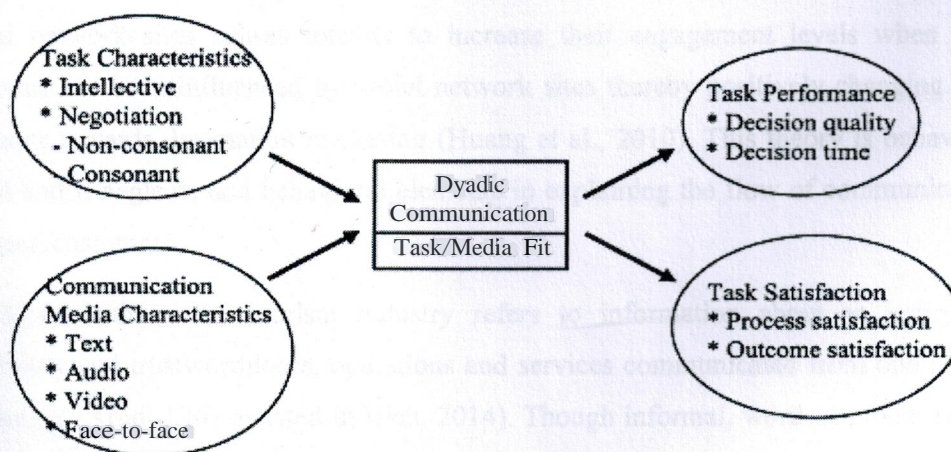
Social presence theory is known as a deficit theory hence as such focuses on cases that have been filtered at while idealizing face-to-face communication as the global standard of communication (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004). When applied to tourism, it neglects the importance of other communication mediums on tourism. Thus it may fail to adequately give an analysis of the roles of social networks on tourism.

Social presence theory suffers from the problem of changes in context. A significant number of researches have contradicted in findings about social presence and the learning aspect of it. For instance, Wise et al (2004) found that there is no relationship between social presence and student learning while Picciano (2002) argues that there is a relationship between the two. Moreover; social presence behavior changes with time.

2.2.2 Media Richness Theory

It deals with the ability of a communication medium to reproduce information sent over it. The theory assumes that people seek to avoid uncertainty and that a significant number of media work better for certain tasks compared to others. In addition, the theory groups information into categories or hierarchies based on the richness of information. This is shown below.

Figure 2.1 Media Richness Model



Media richness model: Source: Suh (1999)

This theory is important in studying the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil because it shows that the type of an online social network site is determined by the effectiveness of the network site in communicating tourism information. It also shows that uncertainty determines the choice of a network site that is used to communicate tourism information.

Media richness theory has been surrounded with ineffectiveness in explaining email usage (Markus 1994). Media richness theory further assumes that people select a medium based on the feasibility of the task at hand (Daft and Lengel, 1984). However, this contradicts with the idea that people select media based on feasibility, convenience and affordability (Hopkins 2012). This greatly applies to the roles of social medium on tourism where tourists are using web reviews and blogs such as TripAdvisor based on convenience and affordability.

2.2.3 Flow Theory

This theory contends that communication is at optimal level when people act with total involvement. It contends that consumers' intentions to revisit a particular website and purchase goods is determined by the perceived level of flow (Hausman and Siskind, 2009). This theory helps to explain why social network sites cause more people to positively react to destination marketing in tourism. This is supported by the fact that social network sites causes tourists to increase their engagement levels when their behavior has been influenced by social network sites thereby positively changing their behavior towards destination marketing (Huang et al., 2010). This theory is behavioral based and it neglects non behavioral elements in explaining the flow of communication between customers.

Word-of-mouth in the tourism industry refers to information about an entity, its credibility and trustworthiness, operations and services communicated from one person to another (Arndt 1967 as cited in Bich, 2014). Though informal, word-of-mouth is said to be effective communication source between customers (Gremer, 1994). Other studies have shown that though word-of-mouth is powerful, it has a lot of shortfalls. Word-of-mouth is effective when there is little or no uncertainty. Uncertainty translates to high

risk and causes tourists to switch to other forms of communication and thus rendering the effects of word-of-mouth on tourism ineffective.

2.3 Social Networks Sites

Social network sites refer to applications and websites that allow people to create and share information and participate in social networking. Social network sites take different forms such as business networks, enterprise social networks, blogs, forums, microblogs product or service review, photo sharing, social bookmarking, social gaming, video sharing, virtual worlds and social networks. They can however be classified into virality (the extent to which users re-share posted content) and mobile social network sites and business potential (this is sensitive to time and location).

2.3.1 Travel 2.0 and Tourism

Travel 2.0 refers to the full interactive second phase of travel information websites. The first wave was booking oriented and it included AA.com, Kayak, Expedia etc. Travel 2.0 is structured in such way that users can contribute information such as travelogues and reviews, words and images. Thus users can find information pertaining to hotels, destinations and other aspects of travel. Travel 2.0 websites include;

- **Igo Ugo** which specializes in providing travel advice.
- **Trip Advisor** which deals with information on destinations and hotels, and attraction reviews.
- **Flicker Travel** allows users around the world to upload photos.
- **Hotel Chatter** constitutes blogposts on hotel related matters.

2.3.2 Web 2.0 and its Adoption in Tourism

Web 2.0 is the second wave of development of the internet associated with a shift from static web pages to user generated content in social network sites provided on the web. Web 2.0 has reshaped marketing methods in the tourism industry. This has given the consumer more control over the decision making process on travel and tourism (Reactive, 2007). Web 2.0 has promoted an increase in information sources for tourists and these are now showing up in most search engines under travel and tourism. Web 2.0

however leads to closed relationships between the service provider and customers (Cox et al., 2009).

The developments in web2.0 have extended to mobile devices and as such mobile devices are now a very USffytgol of web 2.0 they encourage tourism communication. In a research by Travel monitor it has been established that 40% of international travelers travel with a smart phone of which 40% use them to obtain travel information on the destination and 34% of business travelers use them to alter bookings in transit (Noti, 2013).

Social network sites: Include networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc. Social network sites have increasingly become marketing tool for tourist destinations and organizations around the world are now posting information pertaining products, customer testimonials, forums etc.

- Mash-ups: this is an application that is being used by tourists to find information about restaurants, hotels and other tourist services (Sigala, 2007).
- Hotel rating systems: Is a form of collaborative tool that allows customers to rate services provided during their stay in a hotel and this helps other customers to make informed decisions about the hotels they will book into.
- Podcasting: It is an online radio that uses RSS technology and allows users to upload audio and video contents. A good example is YouTube.
- RSS: It stands for Really Simple Syndication and allows users to obtain updated information about what they are most interested in (Boni and Stemart, 2006).
- Biogs: These are online portals with a weak communitarian degree that allow readers to write and comment on certain subjects. This allows customers to share their experiences, trips and experiences (Boni and Stemart, 2006).

2.4 Trends in Social Network Sites and their Implications on Tourism

There has been a tremendous change in social network sites notably in the uses of social media. For instance, there has been a significant shift from searching aspect to socializing aspect of social network sites. Such a trend has an important bearing on

tourism destinations, tourism product, tourist behavior, tourism portals and tourism marketing. For example, tourism portals have increased in numbers and as such contain information about what travelers are saying about a particular destination (Fotis et al., 2010). In addition, user generated content is also emerging as a source of credible information. However, user generated content always contain mixed information and hence the effects on travel tourism might not be significant.

Social network sites have allowed penetration of markets that were previously dominated by traditional suppliers. As such, social network sites can be said to have increased competition in the tourism industry. Such competition promotes efficiency and cheaper tourism products and services. In addition, social network sites are now a dominant primary medium by which travel information is being shared (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). In their nature, social network sites are said to be a cheaper way of accessing information. As result tourists and or travelers can now make purchasing decisions faster and at a lower cost.

Social network sites are surrounded by perceived risk and popularity problems. It has been established that the greater the perceived risk the greater people will depend on personal networks of family and friends (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

Moreover, social network sites are surrounded by gender and age problems. The benefits of social networks sites are said to benefit females a lot compared to their male counterparts (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

2.5 Uses of Social Network Sites in Tourism

2.5.1 Identifying Brand Advocates

Brand advocates can be defined as those customers that do not only prefer your services or products but would put an effort to review your activities or comment about them, influence others and share your content. This is now being executed online through social network sites. Impartial reviews and word-of-mouth are now some of the key components of success in the tourism sector since more tourists search for a hotel review before they book a room.

2.5.2 Delivering a Great Customer Service

Delivering a great customer service allows a tourism business to retain existing customers and gain new customers. Social network sites thus allows tourism businesses to deliver a great customer service by allowing businesses to search for conversations around their brand and promptly respond to questions on their social network sites pages. Examples of this include post-vacation conversations on Trip Advisor about what tourists liked most about a trip or hotel and ask them to write a review about it.

2.5.3 Understanding your Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to understand who their customers are and what they want. Through understanding of tourists' issues, trends and needs which in turn influence marketing efforts, tourism businesses can strictly engineer their efforts towards such understanding thereby positively influencing consumer behavior towards their products and services.

2.5.4 Interacting with the Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to post content that adds value to tourists, ask questions and respond to comments. This engages customers into an interaction thereby gaining loyalty from existing and potential customers.

2.5.5 Destination Marketing

Social network sites support marketing activities by promoting destinations in order to attract potential tourists to visit a destination. A study conducted by (Popescu, 2014) reviewed that social network sites allow tourism businesses to distribute topical news stories. Destination management organizations can publicize information about their destinations to communities of people that are interested in their products. In addition, social network sites are timely as customers are constantly checking them thus destination management organizations can emphasize about their current events and campaigns on social network sites.

2.5.6 Checking Competitors

The tourism industry is now faced with a lot of competition and thus businesses need to keep track of what their competitors are doing. Social network sites allow businesses to

keep track of their competitors' activities, that is, what are they doing and what have they not done. This presents the business with greater market opportunities.

2.6 Impacts of Online Social Network Sites on Consumer Behavior and Tourism

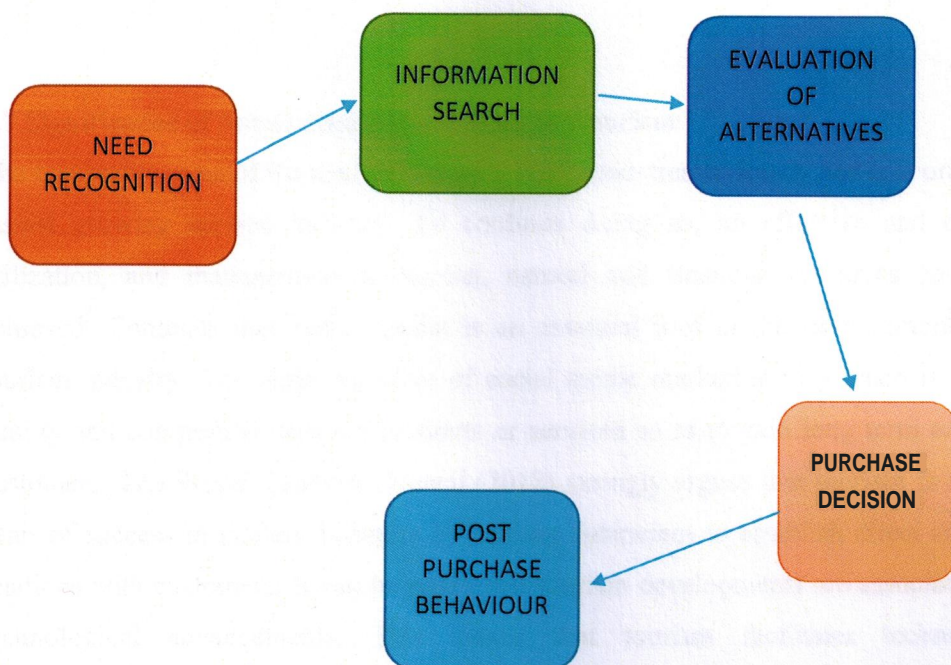
Consumer behavior can be defined as the process involved when individuals or groups, select, purchase, services, ideas or experience to satisfy needs and desires (Solomon, 2011). Various models have been developed to explain consumer behavior and these include the stimulus response and the buying process models (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model highlights both the internal and external factors, and personal characteristics of the buyer that contribute to the final buying decision of a customer. It attempts to give a thorough understanding of consumer behavior. According to this model social network sites falls under marketing and other stimuli while buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions process fall into customer's black box. This model shows that it is marketing and other stimuli, and the customer's black box that influence a response. Such response is evidenced by product choice, brand choice, purchase timing and purchase amount. When applied to tourism, it shows that social network sites must initially alter buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions (customer's black box) and it is then that these tourist's characteristics and decisions that cause a response in product, brand and purchasing. Thus the effectiveness of social on tourism is assumed to be dependent on the ability of marketing and other stimuli to influence the tourist's black box.

This model does not show the exact nature of the relationship between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box. In addition, it lacks empirical support and thus the magnitude of impact of between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box on tourism cannot be established with preciseness.

The buying process model (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model is a step by step illustration of the actual buying process. When applied to tourism, this model assumes that tourists first develop a need. Such a need will cause tourists to look for information regarding the tourism products and services they need to satisfy their needs. The diagrammatic explanation is shown in figure 2.2.

The model further states that when tourists gather the necessary information, they will now use the acquired information to evaluate the available alternatives. It is after evaluation that the tourist will then make a purchasing decision. The model also highlights that after consumption of the product there is post purchase behavior. Such behavior reflects a tourist satisfaction and reaction from acquisition of the tourism product or service.

Figure 22 The Buying Process Model.



Source: Adapted from Kotler and Armstrong (2004)

This model has an important bearing in explaining the impact of social network sites on consumer behavior (tourist behavior) in tourism because it outlines the role played by social network sites in the buying process. Thus according to this model, social media is used to search for information about tourist activities, destinations, hotels etc. Social network sites are also seen playing an important of providing such information. However, it does not consider others issues such as credibility of the information and the perceived risk associated with the media. The model does not show the relationship between social network sites and tourism. The buying process model has an advantage

over the stimulus model in the sense that the buying process model considers post purchase behavior.

Post behavior is important because it determines whether tourists will continue to purchase tourism products and services or not and how much more or less of the product or service they will continue to buy. It also outlines the importance of tourism service providers in meeting tourists' perceptions or expectations. When a purchased tourist product or service fails to meet tourists' perceptions, tourists may cut down their expenditure spent on tourist products or services (post purchase behavior).

2.7 Significance of Social Media Marketing in Tourism

The competitiveness of the tourism industry has grown tremendously and it is one of the fastest growing service industry. To continue doing so, an effective and efficient utilization, and management of human, natural and financial resources has to be achieved. Contends that social media is an essential tool in the development of the tourism industry. The main objective of social media marketing in tourism is to offer quality and competitive tourism products or services so as to gain long term and loyal customers. The World Tourism Council (2012) strongly argues that tourism is now the heart of success in modern business by helping businesses to establish direct and good relations with customers. It can be noted that tourism developments are associated with technological advancements. This means that tourism facilitates technological advancements. This was reinforced by Jashi (2013) who outlined that there is a unilateral relationship between internet penetration and online bookings. His suggestion pointed to high internet penetration and the high usage of credit cards. This was further supported by Hope-Johnstone (2010) who strongly asserts that about 3 billion of the world population now conducts electronic transactions through the internet and via mobile phones. The most known and effective social media networks for marketing tourism are Facebook, Travelshake, Twitter, Podcasts and YouTube. Thus in order to attract huge numbers of customers around the world, the tourism team needs to utilize proper social media tools that can effectively and efficiently transmit the right message and engage the right users.

2.8 Tourism Product

A tourism product can be defined as a bundle of activities, services and benefits that contribute to the entire tourism experience (Bich, 2014). The tourism product is divided into three; the product that tourist think they are going to buy, the actual product that tourist buy and the augmented product which are the benefits provided by the suppliers. The effectiveness of social network sites in influencing tourism can be measured by its ability to impact the three dimensions. Thus social network sites must sell tourism products in the most appealing and attractive manner that can lure potential customers and cause existing customers to continue to buy tourism products. Apart from advertised products, tourism destinations must also provide augmented products. Research has shown that it is augmented products that creates customer loyalty and keeps them continuing buying the firm's products. Tourism products advertised on social network sites must at least match the actual product purchased by tourists.

2.9 Empirical Literature Review

Jashi (2015) examined the importance of social network sites in tourism with emphasis on Georgia. The undertaking of the study by Jashi (2015) stemmed from the assertion that significant effort has been put on analyzing the impact of social network sites on tourism. Results from the study showed that social media marketing is of paramount importance in tourism. Recommendations given showed strong support for the utilization of social media marketing in tourism.

Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) undertook a study to identify the linkage between social network sites and tourism. This was based on arguments which revealed that social network sites are playing significant roles in tourism. The study identified that the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism are focusing on tourism practices, promotion, decision making and providing information. This reinforced study results by Jashi (2015) which established that social media is an important tool in tourism marketing. Deductions made from the study revealed that the role of social network sites in tourism has not been sufficiently examined. Hence there is need to

examine the role of social network sites in tourism in various aspects such as business activities and trends, individual behaviour and other social attributes.

Gohil (2015) analyzed both the impacts and roles of social network sites in tourism in Madhya Pradesh, India. This study sought to examine how the informational role of social media impacts tourism. It is in this regard that the study outlined that social network sites can be utilized to promote tourism information. Further results from the study revealed that social media is an important tool for strategic positioning and branding tourism globally.

Rathonyi (2013) undertook a study to examine the social network sites influence on tourism with regards to University of Debrecen students. The study stemmed from the assertion that students seek tourism information to avoid uncertainty. Study results revealed that social network sites are important in accessing both information and purchasing opportunities. The study by Rathonyi (2013) focused on analyzing the impact of social network sites on both aspects of supply and demand.

In it in this regard that this study will employ an amalgamative approach of the above mentioned studies to examine the roles of social network sites in tourism. Using ideas provided by Rathonyi (2013), this study will examine the roles of social network sites from both the supply and demand aspects, that is, from both business and individual person's perspectives. In addition, insights by Jashi (2015), Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) and Gohil (2015) will be used to examine the informational innovative, promotional and competitive (supply and demand aspects) roles of social network sites in tourism. These roles have an impact on the number of tourists visiting a particular place (tourism sale volume), their behavior in terms of visiting choices and amount of money spent on tourism products. This study will therefore examine the impact of informative, promotional, innovative and competitive roles of social network sites on tourism sales volume using information collected from business tourists visiting Erbil hotels in Kurdistan region of Iraq. It in this regard that using this insights a following conceptual framework will be utilized to formulate a methodological tool that will be used to approach the roles of social network sites in tourism.

Figure 2.3 Conceptual Framework



2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the underlying theories and concepts surrounding social networks sites and tourism. The theories reviewed include the social presence theory, media richness theory and the flow theory. The social presence theory was found to suffer from changes in context and that it neglects other mediums of communication. It was also established that social presence changes with time. On the other hand, this chapter identified that the media richness theory is ineffective in explaining email usage and does not consider feasibility, convenience and affordability factors in explaining how people chose social network sites in tourism. The flow theory had non behavioral shortfalls. This chapter also looked at travel 2.0 and tourism, web 2.0 and tourism, trends in social network sites and their implications on tourism, uses of social network sites in tourism, impacts of social network sites on consumer behavior in tourism and the tourism product. The above literature showed inconclusive gaps in theories and empirical literature and it attempted to fill in the literature gaps.

CHAPTER ID

MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The main objective of the designed questionnaire is to determine the role of online social media network sites on tourism in Erbil. As a result, the dependent variable will be represented by social media usage while independent variables are informational, promotional, competitive, innovative and increasing sales volume roles.

Table 3.1 Model Expression

	Informational role (X₁)
1	How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites
2	What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks
3	Use social media for socializing purposes
4	Respond to comments
5	Ask or answer an tourism question
	Promotional role (X₂)
1	To market existing tourism products
2	To promote new tourism products
3	Expand tourism clientele base
4	Enter new tourism markets
5	Makes the tourism corporation to be known
	Competitive role (X₃)
1	Gain more tourism market share
2	Reduces the level of tourism competition to a tourism firm
3	Helps in acquiring tourism information that competitors cannot get access
4	Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm

5	Helps build corporate tourism legacy
	Innovative role (X4)
1	Makes it cheaper to access tourism information
2	Tourists can get instant feedback
3	It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty
4	Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose
5	Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information
	Increase in tourism sales volume (TSv)
1	Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks
2	Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products
3	It results in tourism brand loyalty
4	Safeguards the tourism company's reputation
5	Improves tourists' perception of the tourist destination

This study used adopted a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009). In this study Monachesi et al (2009) focused on supporting knowledge discovery in an eLearning environment having social components. They found that about 50% of the respondents use instant messaging and that the number of respondent who use forums and mailing lists was high compared to other online communication and stood at 45%. His questionnaire format is important to this study because it gives a detailed description of how people use online communication.

This study however made additional changes to a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009) because it mainly focuses on the extent to which people use online communication. This questionnaire also had limitations of being centered on information systems in eLearning and hence does not fully explain the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil.

CHAPTER IV

OVERVIEW OF HOSPITALITY IN KRG OF IRAQ

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the general overview of Kurdistan region of Iraq, developments in online network sites and how they are influencing tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In addition, it provides an insight as to the roles online social networks are playing on tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This chapter seeks to identify opportunities and threats that are posed by online social networks and how the Kurdistan tourism officials can position themselves to benefit from changing trends in online social networks. It also looks at tourism structures including tourist destinations, sites and attractions.

4.2 Overview of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Kurdistan is an autonomous region located in the Northern part of Iraq. The Iraq's constitution recognizes Kurdistan as an independent region. Generally Kurds are of Indo-European origin and most of the people speak Kurdish while Arabic and Turkmeni languages are also gaining popularity. The population comprises of Armenian, Arab, and Turkmen groups. Kurdistan also contains various religious groups which includes Muslim, Christians, and Yazidi. Below is a geographical map of Kurdistan.

Fig 4.1 Geographical Map of Kurdistan of Iraq



Source: BBC

4.2.1 Subdivision

Kurdistan is divided into lower and upper Kurdistan. Upper Kurdistan is composed of northern, northeastern and northwestern parts. This region stretches from Lake Urmia to the west of Amed. Lower Kurdistan is composed of Southern Kurdistan and the main cities are Erbil and Kirkuk.

4.2.2 Geography

It is estimated that Kurdistan covers about 12 000 km² in Syria, 65 000 km² in Iraq, 125 000 km² in Iran and 190 000 km² which stretches in Turkey. There are six governorates in Kurdistan and three of them are under the Kurdish government while the rest are under the control of Syrian Kurdistan and Iranian Kurdistan. The south eastern part of Turkey contains about 15 to 20 million Kurds (Clive, 2007).

4.2.3 Population

According to Kurdistan's regional government, the Kurdish population is estimated to be 52 million and this figure comprises of Chaldeans, Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians and Arabs. The regional government further revealed that the median age is above 20 years with 36% constituting an age group of 0-14 years and 4% of the population being over 63 years (krg.org).

4.2.4 Climate

The climate in Kurdistan can be said to be an extreme continental climate. That is, too cold in winter and too hot in summer. Rainfall patterns vary with regions. For example, in the high plateaus, precipitation ranges from 700mm to 3000mm a year while plains it ranges from 200mm to 400mm a year.

4.2.5 Petroleum and Mineral Resources

Kurdistan contains one of the sixth largest oil reserves in the world and it is estimated that the oil reserves in Kurdistan are 45 billion barrels with more than 45 oil sites. It also contains associated and gas reserves which are more than 2 800km³ (Hawlergov, 2013). A notable number of companies are undertaking mining activities in Kurdistan and these include Genel Energy, Exxon, Chevron, Talisman Energy, Marathon Oil, Total, Hunt Oil and Gulf Keystone Petroleum. There are other mineral resources such as copper, coal, limestone, zinc, marble, iron and gold.

4.2.6 Natural Resources

There are a lot of rivers and mountains in Kurdistan and these contribute to the natural to its beauty. The mountains of Kurdistan are characterized by snow fall and heavy rain which provide water to other rivers such as Kura and Khabur. Furthermore, because of the rivers' altitudes which are 3000m to 4000m above sea level, the rivers are a source of energy. Dukandam and Lake Sulaymani are major sources of tourists' attractions in Kurdistan.

Mountains are however important geographically and are a symbol of the Kurdish life. There is a common saying which says that 'Kurds have no friends but the mountains'. The famous mountains include Zagros, Shingar, Gara, and Matini.

4.3 Tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Tourism in Kurdistan has been on an upward trend irrespective of the source of the visitors. This is illustrated in table 4.3. This is evidenced by forecasts made by Lababedi (2012) who showed that in 2012 the tourism sector in Kurdistan grew by 4.9% of GDP and projected that in 2013 and 2014, Kurdistan's tourism would grow by 5% of GDP

and 5.5% of GDP respectively. Tourist attractions in Kurdistan are found in three major cities namely Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimani. These provinces have a lot of tourist destination within and around them. Below is a detailed description of these provinces.

Table 4.1 Tourist places in Erbil province

Tourism resort	Description
Sami Abdul Rahman Park	It is built on a Ba'ath military base and comprises of a large municipal park.
Qaysari bazaar	This is a traditional market which sells food, household goods, textiles, gold and other souvenirs
Khanzad castle	Its period of origin relates to the Soran period
Sheik Chooli minaret	It is found in the western part of Erbil and was constructed by Sultan Mudhaffarudeen. This site has its origins from 543-586AD.
Shaqlawa resort	It is common for selling fresh produce and a good tourist destination.
Gali Ali Beg	Is a common for recreational activities and has a waterfall.
Bekhal Resort	A popular resort which is close to Gali Ali Beg.

Table 4.2 Tourist places in Dohuk

Tourism resort	Description
Amedi:	<p>Amedi comprises of beautiful mountains and valleys and it is ranked number 21 in the world. It is one of the beautiful cities in the world.</p> <p>The total population in Amedi is about 9 000.</p> <p>This place also includes Amadia Citadel and Sulav resort which are common tourist destinations.</p>
Saint IthLiha Church:	It known as the oldest church and is assumed to have been built in 500AD.



Table 4.3 Tourist places in Suleimani

Tourism resort	Description
Dokan Lake	It similar to Darbandikhan Lake and has restaurants, leisure facilities and cabins that make the place more enjoyable.
Darbandikhan dam	This place has restaurants, leisure facilities and cabins that make the place more enjoyable.
Ahmadaawa resort	It more active in summer because of its orchards, waterfalls and springs.
Suleimani Museum	It is a richest museum with houses that are more than 1000 years old. Below is table showing the number of hotels, motels, tourism villages, beds, and restaurants and cafes in Kurdistan region from the year 2007-2014.

Table 4.4 The number of hotels, motels, tourism villages, beds, and restaurants and cafes in Kurdistan region from the year 2007-2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Hotels	106	166	131	168	202	259	314	385
motels	49	53	72	96	128	168	206	248
Tourism villages	29	33	37	42	44	54	72	75
No. of beds	10451	11363	13480	22533	26811	31634	34954	44504
cafes	129	151	233	305	338	482	565	643

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

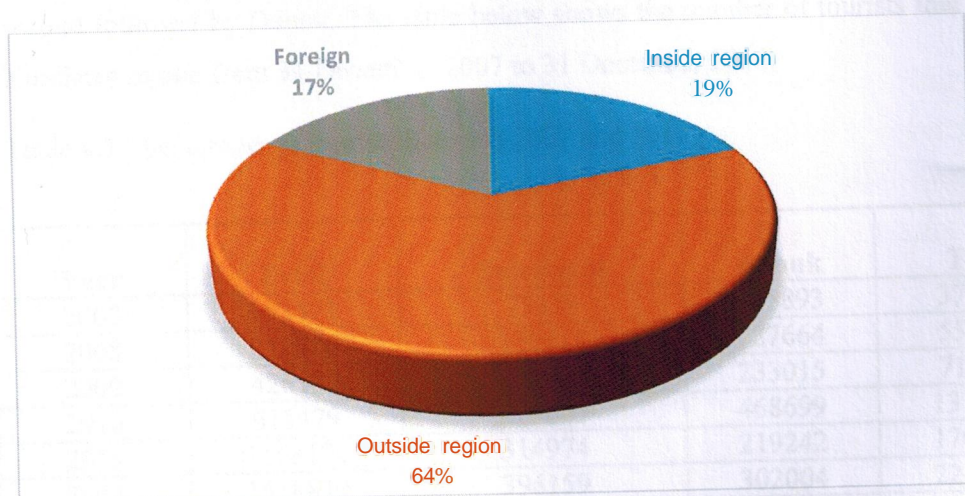
The number of tourists both domestic and foreign has been on an upward trend except in 2014 where it declined amid of political fears. This is shown below in table 4.5.

Table 4.5 The number of guests who visited Kurdistan Region between 2007-2014

Year	Inside KRG	Outside KRG	Foreign	Total
2007	137118	186420	53859	377397
2008	190230	285740	82890	558860
2009	209611	44919	13254	791345
2010	329536	789760	194545	1313845
2011	315161	1149738	237491	1702390
2012	313144	1470138	433711	221699
2013	459847	1933544	558636	2952027
2014	273326	1000726	255346	1529434

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

Fig 4.2 Classification of the total number of tourists that visited Kurdistan in 2007



Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

From figure 4.2 it can be deduced that the highest number of tourists who visited Kurdistan Region of Iraq came from other parts of Iraq(outside region) and accounted for 64% of the total number of tourists who visited KRG. Foreign tourists, that is, those that came from countries such as USA, Germany, Syria, Turkey etc., accounted for 17% of the total number of tourists who visited Kurdistan. This was followed by domestic

tourism (inside region) which accounted for 19% of the total number of tourists. This diagrammatic explanation entails that much emphasis is needed to promote domestic tourism and enhance the effectiveness of current policies to lure foreign tourists.

Table 4.6 The total number of hotels in Erbil, Sulaimani and Dohuk with and without stars

	5 *	4*	3*	2 *	1 *	Without stars	total
Erbil	12	36	59	193	164	15	485
Sulaimani	6	12	42	62	66	0	188
Dohuk	7	9	30	32	50	0	128
TOTAL	28	56	130	229	244	15	704

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

The highest number of high star hotels was recorded in Erbil with Suleimani being second followed by Dohuk. The table below shows the number of tourists that came to Kurdistan region from 31 December 2007 to 31 December 2014.

Table 4.7 The number of tourists between 2007 and 2014

Year	Erbil	Suleimani	Dohuk	Total
2007	153571	77933	145893	377397
2008	211780	119416	227664	558860
2009	426398	131932	233015	719345
2010	615479	229663	468699	1313841
2011	1168174	314974	219242	1702390
2012	1518830	396159	302004	2216993
2013	2029623	477990	444414	2952027
2014	937591	362213	229630	1529434

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

The lowest number of tourist that came to Kurdistan region of Iraq was recorded in 2014 and this was for all the three cities with totals of 937 591,362 213 and 229 630 respectively. The highest percentage increase in the number of tourist that came to

Kurdistan region was registered in 2010 and stood at 60%. On the other hand, lowest number was registered in 2011 and 2012 and stood at 30%. This is expressed in table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8 Growth rate of tourists visiting KRG between 2007 and 2014

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
No. of tourists	377397	558860	791345	1313841	1702390	2216993	2952027	1529434
O/o		48%	42%	66%	30%	30%	33%	-48%

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

It can be deduced that the highest growth rate in tourist visiting KRG was experienced in 2010 with a growth rate of 66%. The year 2014 experienced a significant decline in tourists visiting KRG and this is because of the war that had taken its toll in Iraq.

4.4 Online Social Networks in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Social network sites have not greatly evolved in Kurdistan. However, other network sites such as Twitter have greatly taken form in Kurdistan. A number of significant users of twitter have been reported to be journalists, activists, students and politicians. Dizayee (2014) reported that Twitter user numbers have grown significantly in Kurdistan region of Iraq as many people are now using the social network for so many reasons which include awareness, protests, getting access to information etc. Twitter. Kurds has emerged and is now being used to provide information especially concerning specific issues of major concern. However, more people in Kurdistan are now using Facebook and Instagram.

In addition, there is now what is known as the Kurdish Social Media Gathering (KSMG) which was organized through Twitter. Live newsfeed streams and social media feeds are also growing as they are being included in worldwide forums and conferences. For example, the Sulaimani Forum organized by the University of Iraq which was seen on Twitter feed. Facebook user numbers have also increased in Kurdistan and this is

because is being used to keep in touch with family and friends. This has seen the formation of a group on Facebook called 'Largest Kurdish Community on Facebook'. This group has brought together Kurdish and other people from different parts of the world and established links for collecting ideas and helping each other information wise and physically.

Of great importance social network sites have become a way of communicating with Kurds in the diaspora. This is evidenced by a new social network site called 2dul.com formed by Zawen Aarif and has more than 4 000 followers and 100 members. In conclusion, social network sites can be said to have brought together people on a large scale and thus 'making the Kurdish world smaller'.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have focused on literature on social network sites. This chapter focuses on how the study was conducted. This chapter will dwell on research design, population, research instruments, and data collection and presentation procedures. The main emphasis of this study is gather concrete evidence that enables us to answer the research questions and make sound recommendations.

5.2 Research Design

A multiple regression model will be used to determine the nature and significance of the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism and this will be coupled by the use of SPSS. The multiple regression model will be of the following form;

$$SN = f_0 + f_1 X_1 + f_2 X_2 + f_3 X_3 + f_4 X_4 + f_5 X_5 + \mu \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where; SN is social network sites , f_0 , f_1 , f_2 , f_3 , f_4 and f_5 are parameters, X_1 , X_2 , X_3 , X_4 and X_5 are informational role, promotional role, competitive role, innovative role and increasing sales volume role respectively and μ is the error term. The collected data will be presented in the form of tables, charts and diagrams. Data analysis will also encompass descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Cronbach's alpha will be used to determine the reliability of the collected data.

5.2.1 Definition of Variables

5.2.1.1 Informational Roles

Assertions provided by Gohil (2015) outlined that the informational role of social network sites entails the ability to offer the required details pertaining to the desired subject matter. It is in this regard that there is a unilateral relationship between the

informational role of social network and tourism. Thus expected results will be compared with the study results obtained by Gohil (2015).

5.2.2 Promotional Role

Promotion in this study can be defined as the enhancement of awareness about an idea or product through activities such as advertising and other marketing campaigns. Zeng and Geritsen (2014) established that social network can be used to enhance promotional objectives or activities in tourism. Thus a positive relationship between the promotional role of tourism and social network is therefore anticipated.

5.2.3 Competitive Role

Competitiveness can be defined as the potential ability of a firm or an individual to gain an increase in the quality of products offered, number of customers or sales revenue attributed to a particular activity. Thus in this study competitiveness of tourism can be alternatively be described as the ability of tourism individuals or firms to offer quality tourism products, number of tourists or tourism sales revenue attributed to a particular tourism activity. It can be deduced from this definition that a positive association exists between the competitive role of social network and tourism and this can be supported by study results by Zeng and Geritsen (2014).

5.2.4 Innovative Role

This refers to the ability of an individual or firm to positively change the way of doing activities through the use of efficient and cost effective technological systems. Innovation is therefore regarded as the catalyst that positively influences organizational activities by improving the usage of input materials and the output produced. In this regard, Gohil (2015) postulated that social network does significantly results in major improvements in tourism activities. Hence a positive relationship between the innovative role of social network and tourism is anticipated.

5.2.5 Tourism Sales Volume (TSv)

Tourism sales volume in this regard refers to the volume of sales that are attributed to tourism activities. In this study, unilateral association between social network sites and tourism is anticipated in line with the study by Gohil (2015). Social network usage in tourism is greatly attributed to the endeavor to increase tourism sales. Hence, an increase

in tourism sales through social network usage will cause an increase in social network usage.

5.3 Population

A population can be defined as an entire pool of study from which a sample is drawn. In this study our population is business tourists that use 5-star and 4-star hotels in Erbil. The reason behind the selection of these 5-star and 4-star hotels is that they have websites and applications for reservations and a majority of tourists book these hotels. The Kurdistan Tourism Authority (2015) reports that more tourists preferred 5 and 4-stars hotels because of the availability of better information communication technology infrastructure. In addition, table 4.7 has shown that the highest number of tourists visited Erbil and totaled 937 591. Thus the study will draw its attention towards Erbil. However, because of the magnitude of the population, it is difficult to undertake a study of the population of that magnitude and hence stratified random sampling will be used to select the population.

Stratified random sampling is defined as the division of significantly large population into smaller groups known as strata so as to conveniently undertake a study of the desired population. It is in this regard that the total number of hotels (see table 4.6) in Erbil will be used as strata or sample size. The KTA (2016) asserts that the total number of hotels in Erbil stood at 485 in 2015. It is in this regard that 485 will be utilized as a strata and hence 485 questionnaires were distributed to business tourist residing in 4-star and 5-star hotels in Erbil (see table 6.2). Questions were therefore asked if the guest is a business tourist or not before handing over the questionnaire.

5.4 Data Collection Methods

This study used both primary and secondary data and outlines the methods that were used to collect the data. Secondary data included publications, records and other documented information about the number of tourists that came to Kurdistan, revenue collected from tourist activities, investment expenditure on tourism in KRG, social network usage and development statistics etc. The researcher will travel to the relevant places such as the ministry of tourism and ministry of information and communication

technology in KRG to acquire the needed data. This will also involve access the internet as another means of retrieving the required data. Primary data was obtained on a face to face basis using questionnaires.

5.4.1 Secondary Data

Secondary data such as figures, tables and charts will be used before data analysis to support the issues at hand and help provide further details about the role of social network sites on tourism. The advantage of using secondary data is that it is readily available and is cheaper to access.

5.4.2 Primary Data

Primary data refers to data that is collected for the first time by the researcher for use in a research project. In this study primary data was collected through questionnaires. The questionnaires were given out to business tourists in Erbil who use internet sites to access, utilize and send tourism information online. The obtained questionnaire responses will be analyzed using a statistical package called SPSS. The questionnaire is shown in appendix I.

5.4.2.1 Questionnaire Design

Having established the research objectives and questions, a questionnaire matching such objectives was designed for distribution. The designed questionnaire is generally aimed at identifying the roles of social network on tourism. Four roles of social network sites were identified to be informational, promotional, competitive and innovative.

Section A of the questionnaire measures the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the study will attempt to identify how these demographic characteristics determine social network usage. As a result, will try to relate and establish how social network usage in tourism is affected by these demographic characteristics.

The second group of questions seeks to identify the types of social networks sites available and determine their frequency of usage. This is essential because by identifying the types and frequency of usage, providers of tourism products will be in a better position to structure their goods and services in line with the opportunities being posed by the types and frequency of usage of social networks sites.

The third group of questions deals with the roles of social network sites in tourism. Thus this study will be mainly centered on questions from the second and third groups.

The dependent variables will be obtained from the third and fourth groups of questions while the independent variables will be obtained from the first, second and third groups of questions.

The questionnaires included both open and closed questions. Closed questions are questions that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' or very short phrase. Closed questions will involve asking respondents if they use social networks sites to access travel information, their gender and sex etc. On the other hand, open questions are questions that require more than one word answers. In this study open questions will involving asking questions for example such as what is your favorite online travel site and why?, and what factors do use when choosing an online social network site to look for travel information? The researcher used both closed and open questions because closed questions help the respondent to complete the questionnaire quickly while open questions allow the researcher to get more detailed information about a the role of online social networks on tourism in K.R.G. Moreover, it was done with the concepts of precision and clarity. The advantages of using a questionnaire are given as follows;

- They are cheaper to administer to respondents.
- They do not contain much bias compared to interviews.
- They are convenient to respondents who may choose to fill them at their own convenience as such they have a high rate of accuracy.

However questionnaires have the following disadvantages;

- They are slow and hence the response rate is slow.
- Long responses are possible.
- One can judge the quality of response.

5.4.2.2 Questionnaire Pretesting

Pretesting was done so as to ensure that the respondents understand questions asked and to check the response rate. 15 questionnaires were used for pretesting and the respondents managed to respond positively to the pretest and were satisfied with both

the objectives of the survey and its clarity. Having seen that the respondents were satisfied with the survey, the researcher went on to administer more questionnaires so as to proceed with the data collection and analysis process.

5.4.2.3 Questionnaire Distribution

The questionnaires were distributed in person and dates and time were agreed upon for collection of the questionnaires. This was useful because it made sure that the questionnaires were delivered to the correct respondents and would be collected when the respondents are done completing them.

5.5 Problems Encountered in Data Gathering

The major hindrance encountered was the unavailability of official statistics from the period 1999-2006. This is evidenced by a written document reference number 245 dated 4 February 2016 obtained from the Kurdistan's General Board of Tourism (GBT). The request for data was made on 5 November 2015 and only managed to get a response confirming the unavailability of data on the 4th February 2016 (see appendix 2). In addition, some of the respondents took time to respond citing busy schedules, in addition, some questionnaires were returned with unfilled spaces and this to some extent affected the final response rate. This also affects the study's results and recommendations.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has laid down the procedures that were used to gather the required data, present and analyze it. Time constraints were encountered in collecting the questionnaires. The collected responses were analyzed and organized into tables, charts and diagrams. The following chapter is a description of the data analysis and presentation procedures that were used.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Response Rate

The research draws its attention on analyzing business tourists who visit Erbil and utilize social networks sites to access tourism products. A total of 485 questionnaires were distributed to business tourists residing in Erbil hotels and 470 questionnaires were returned which represents a response rate of 96.91%. Using cut off points for response rates established by Njui, (2013), it can be noted that a 50% response rate is standard rate upon which deductions can start to be made. On the other hand, a response rate of 60% is considered better while that which is above 70% is considered to be an excellent response rate. This therefore exhibits that our response rate is relatively high and hence the probability that the obtained results will contain a high level of reliability is very high. The response rate information is shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Response Rate

	Frequency	Percentage
Filled questionnaires	470	96.91%
Unreturned questionnaire	15	3.09%
Total	485	100

From the 485 questionnaires that were distributed, the following decomposition of the distribution process was made;

Table 6.2 Decomposition of the questionnaire distribution

HOTEL NAME	HOTEL STARS	QUESTIONNAIRES DISTRIBUTED
Rotana	5	10
Divan	5	7
Van royal	5	11
Tangram	5	11
Shaqlawaw international	5	8
Sipan	5	10
Grand swiss	5	8
Dedeaman	5	13
Ozbaankawa royal	5	10
Erbil international	5	9
Cristal erbil	5	8
khanzad	5	11
Darin plaza	4	8
Grand plaza	4	9
Canyon	4	7
Altinsaray	4	10
Banoj	4	11
Bloumecary	4	11
Monaco palace	4	8
View	4	12
Grand istanbul	4	7
Grand Erbil	4	10
Helindeville	4	8
Erbil tower	4	14
Jiger palace	4	9
ABN international	4	12
Palma palace	4	8
Hayali suits	4	11
Ktina	4	11
Sky Erbil	4	9
Shahin palace	4	12
Erbil quartz	4	7
Classy Erbil	4	10
Wlat	4	8
Mariana	4	11
Best in Erbil	4	12
Capital Erbil	4	17
Altinmalk plaza	4	13
Ararat Erbil	4	9

Fiori	4	14
Jouhyana	4	7
Lamassu	4	9
Seever	4	12
Karwansaray	4	10
Fomix Erbil	4	8
Aljawahry	4	11
Chwarchra	4	9

6.2 General Background of the Respondents

Out of the 470 questionnaires that were retrieved, the general background of the respondents is shown in table 6.3.

Table 6.3 General background of the respondents

Item	Variable	Description	Responses	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	251	53.4%
		Female	219	46.6%
		Total	470	100%
2	Age	18-23	70	14.9%
		24-29	114	24.3%
		30-35	119	25.3%
		36-41	71	15.1%
		42+	96	20.4%
		Total	470	100%
3	Marital status	Single	161	34.3%
		Married	309	65.7%
		Total	470	100%
4	Level of education	Secondary	31	6.6%
		Undergraduate	168	35.7%
		Graduate	192	40.9%
		Post graduate	64	13.6%
		Phd	15	3.2%
		Total	470	100%

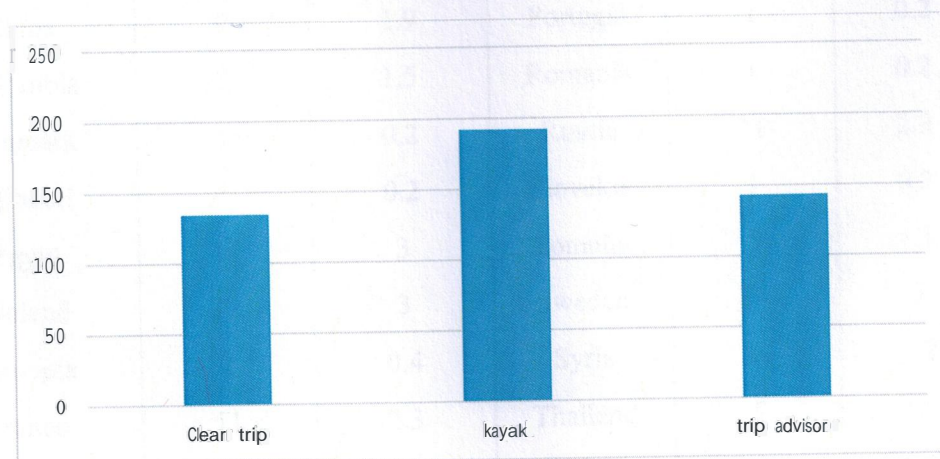
From the table 6.3 it can be observed that from the 470 questionnaires that were retrieved, 53.4% of the respondents were male while 46.6% of the respondents were female. It can further be revealed that 14.9% of these respondents were between the age group of 18-23 years, 24.3% were between the age group of 24-29 years, 25.3% were between the age group of 30-35 years, 15.1% were between the age group of 36-41 years and 20.4% were above the age group of 42 years. 34.3% of the 470 respondents were single while 65.7% respondents were married. The highest level of education recorded among the tourists is graduate level and 3.2% of the respondents had a Ph.D. 168 tourists had an undergraduate degree while 31 tourists were qualified up to secondary level.

Table 6.4 Number of tourists with children

Item	Variable	Description	Responses	Percentage
5	Do you have Children	No children	249	53.0%
		Have children	221	47.0%

Table 6.4 exhibits that 249 tourists had no children while 221 tourists had children. This is of paramount importance because the number of tourists visiting a country can increase with the number of tourists who have children.

Figure 6.1 Use of tourism applications among business guests who visited Erbil



Source: Excel computation based on questionnaire data

Amongst the three widely used travel sites, it was discovered that most business tourists strongly prefer to use Kayak in making travel arrangements such as hotel and flight bookings. The number of tourists who used Kayak is 192 followed by TripAdvisor with 143. ClearTrip was ranked last with a usage of 134 tourists. Implications are therefore implies that more informatiofi Was sought especially concerning flights and hence we can expect more tourists to be or having to planned to visit Erbil.

Table 65 Number of business tourists who visited Erbil by their country of origin

Country	Number of tourists	Percentage %	Country	Number of tourists	Percentage %
Algeria	3	0.6	Italy	7	1.5
Philippines	8	1.7	Morocco	11	2.3
Portugal	1	0.2	Moldova	4	0.9
Romania	1	0.2	Jordan	14	3
Russia	11	2.3	Lebanon	16	3.4
Slovakia	1	0.2	Nepal	8	1.7
Somalia	5	1.1	Netherlands	1	0.4
Australia	6	1.3	Nigeria	4	0.9
Switzerland	5	1.1	Norway	6	1.3
Canada	11	2.3	Pakistan	6	1.3
China	9	1.9	Portugal	1	0.2
Colombia	7	1.5	Romania	1	0.2
Denmark	1	0.2	Russia	11	2.3
Djibouti	1	0.2	Slovakia	1	0.2
Egypt	14	3	Somalia	5	1.1
Finland	12	3	Sweden	14	3
Ethiopia	2	0.4	Syria	34	7.2
France	11	2.3	Thailand	5	1.1
Georgia	16	3.4	Turkey	39	8.3

Germany	17	3.6	UAE	7	1.5
Holland	16	3.4	UK	29	6.2
Hungary	1	0.2	Ukraine	6	1.3
India	9	2	USA	58	12
Iran	21	4.5	Yemen	4	0.9
Spain	3	0.6			

The highest number of tourist who visited Erbil came from USA with a total of 58 followed by Turkey with 39. Other leading nations with the significant numbers of tourists that visited Erbil are UK, Syria, Lebanon, Georgia and Holland with total of 30, 20, 16, 16 and 16 respectively.

Figure 6.2 Business tourists' social network sites usage per day

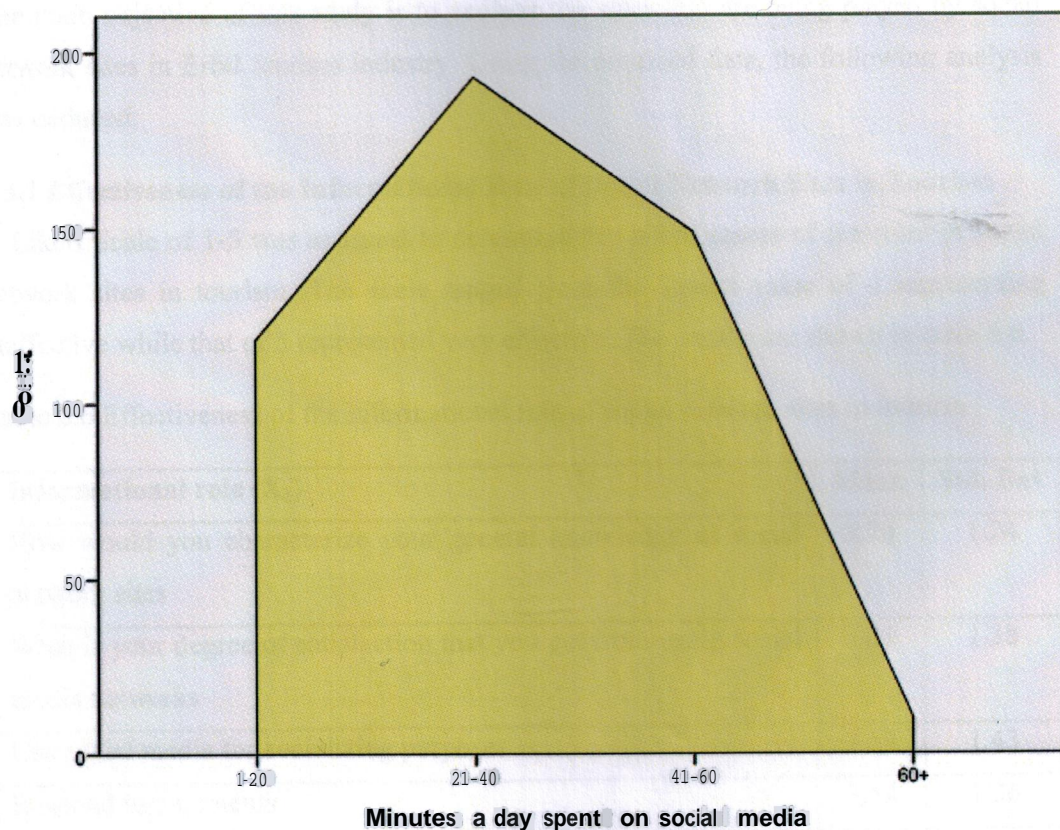


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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

KRG- Kurdistan Regional Government

KTA- Kurdistan Tourism Authority

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Scientist

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

The study looks at the use of social network sites to promote tourism. This chapter focuses on background to study, problem statement, hypothesis, research questions, research objectives, justification of the study, and organization of the study.

The world has witnessed exponential growth in social network sites and users. Statistical reports by Bradbury(2013) have it that 16% of 18-29 year old internet users were social networking site users and that in 2010 this number had surged to 86%. Henrikson (2011) echoed the same idea and asserted that social networking has extended and taken root in older age groups. Henrikson's (2011) ideas were based on his findings which revealed that the number of 50-64 year olds and 65 years and above old internet users using social networking sites had risen from 7% and 5% in September 2005 to 26% and 47% respectively in May 2010.

Various definitions have been put forward to define social network sites. Below are some of the definitions.

Social network sites refers to all forms of electronic communication such as websites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (The Social Media Tourism Symposium 2011).

Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Dana 2007).

Social network sites refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities (Dewing 2012)

A definition by Dewing (2012) will be adopted for consideration in this study. However, for the purposes of this study social network sites will be defined as all forms of electronic communication such as internet based and mobile services for social networking and microblogging that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content & join online communities.

Broadband internet rose to popularity in 1990 and this eventually led to the developments of websites that allowed users to create and upload content. Though the first websites were dominated by the likes of sixdegrees.com and Friendster, they have been a widespread development and acceptance in network sites. Figures released in 2012 by CBC (2012) and Knowiton (2012) showed that Twitter had 517 million users while Facebook had 1 million users during the same time period.

It can be noted that social networking developments have not been limited to the social aspect of life. These developments have been greatly embraced by the corporate world and as a result social networking has become a daily norm in start-ups, small, medium sized and large corporations. Despite such a growth in usage and applicability, researchers still contend that little has been done to analyze how such social network sites developments affect business process and performance (Denyer et al. 2011). Bughin (2009) therefore contended that great need be put to determine the extent to which the utilization of social network sites impacts business process performance. However, such analysis needs to be drawn to tourism which has greatly taken a toll in the usage of social network sites.

The World Travel Market asserts that the role of technology especially social network sites has helped tourism business to promote their services and reach customers in a more personal way. This follows after the World Travel Market witnessed more than 1 billion arrivals of tourists around the world in 2012. This can be attributed to the ability of social network sites to serve as communication media that can instantly cross borders. Tourism business have greatly harnessed social network sites developments and are now incorporating it in their promotion and planning activities. One of the significant role social networking sites have played in tourism is in destination marketing. Social networking sites are playing significant roles in tourism and it is being used to attract

customers, engage users' interest and participation, retain users and build loyalty, learn about user preferences and to provide relevant customized information to users.

1.1 Background to Study '},/.

There have been a series of sessions and meetings in and outside Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the area of tourism. Such events are meant to promote and further develop Kurdistan's tourism industry. These events include the 21 November 2007 Duhok Governorate tourism session organized by Kurdistan Region's tourism minister (KRG, 2007).

On the other hand, there have been growing fears surrounding security and stability in KRG. A study by Padden (2006) reviewed that insurgent bombings and daily sectarian violence have greatly distorted KRG's tourism identity. The biggest challenge is being posed by ISIS which has been raking havoc in Northern and Western Iraq and in August 2015 it advanced in Northern Iraq routing government forces and taking the important city of Mosul by coup de main (Washington institute: 2015). As a result, a number of countries such as Australia, UK, Sweden, Japan and Germany have imposed strict travel warnings to KRG. Besides a fall in tourism revenue, KRG's tourism sector has suffered from a number of issues stretching from negative publicity to fall in ranking in terms of international rankings. Meanwhile, the telecommunications and information industry has evolved greatly and this has seen a number of social network sites platforms taking form worldwide. This includes Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Skype, TripAdvisor, LinkedIn. The benefits from the use of social network sites have been immense and Rowe (2011) outlined seven ways one should be leveraging social network sites which include;

- 1) Solicit endorsements
- 2) *Maximize* revenue per seat;
- 3) Bond with guests;
- 4) Manage reputation;
- 5) Reach out to new customers
- 6) Recruit new staff and
- 7) Build a buzz.

Social network sites are now playing a great role in tourism as they act as a source of information for travelers. A study by Zheng (2010) reviewed that search engines are now referring users to social network sites when searched for travel information and other tourist packages.

On the other hand, KRG's telecommunications and information industry is still evolving to standards that will see the information and communications technology industry positively impacting the tourism industry. As much negative information about KRG has surfaced through social network sites, analysts still believe that social networks sites can positively turnaround the same situation.

Despite all these challenges, KRG's tourism minister contends that KRG has vast amounts of untapped resources, chiefly, oil, gas and other minerals (possibly uranium) as well as agriculture. As a result, KRG's tourism industry is being foreseen as the chief tool that will positively market and portray the region's image. Thus KRG's tourism minister advocated the need to inform international tourists of the autonomous and safety position that now surrounds KRG. One of the ways they suggested was using every possible media to promote KRG as a tourism destination and this includes social networks sites.

In a study conducted by Kapiki (2015), it is reviewed that if the tourism and hospitality industry is to compete successfully it has to make use of information and communication technologies notably social networks sites. It is further highlighted that social networks sites allow the hospitality industry to attract more guests, ameliorate service quality, deliver exceptional service guest satisfaction, and increase in revenue as well as market share (Kapiki, 2015).

Social network sites are a crucial tool for success in business today and globally, different estimates have suggested that 50% of leisure trips and 40% of business trips are booked online (Jashi, 2013). In this study, Jashi (2013) further estimated that from the period 2014, over 3 billion of the world's population will be able to transact electronically via mobile or internet technology with 90% mobile penetration rate and 6.5 billion mobile connections. It can be noted that tourist demand satisfaction is determined by the impact and usage of social network sites marketing. To a large extent,

social networks sites are now being used to stimulate and encourage interaction of customers so as to promote tourist awareness.

Other researchers strongly contend that as long as the conflicts between KRG and Baghdad government over disputed territories are still prevalent, then the KRG's tourism industry will still sink in the doldrums. Currently efforts are being made to rebrand KRG's image in the eyes of international tourists and these includes initiatives such as loans being offered to individuals wishing to launch tourism ventures especially from the region's major city centers such as Erbil, Sulaimani and Dahuk (Al-monitor, 2013), the strengthening of the Peshmerga forces and police and Asayish to boost security and promote KRG as a safe tourism destination. With the huge role social networks sites are playing in the tourism industry worldwide this study therefore seeks to analyze how social network sites influences tourism in KRG.

1.2 Problem Statement

One of the most significant impacts of social network sites is their ability to relay information quickly. Social network sites have evolved greatly and this has changed both the economic, social and political landscape. Researchers strongly contend that the tourism industry can benefit a lot from such changes if it can harness and tap into such changes. For instance, Kamal (2013) further postulated that information spread through social networks helps to create transnational links whereby individuals and groups are able to engage in widespread dialogue. However, Larsen (2006) proffers a different perspective and argues that social network sites are effective when luring international tourists compared to domestic tourist especially in KRG where most people do not have access to internet. For example, an article by Hawlergov (2013) points out that in 2005 Kurdistan Region of Iraq internet penetration was close to 0 and the only telecom was the government monopoly entity with aging exchanges and no fiber optics.

Other researchers such as Germann (2013), further argue that social network sites can only play a significant role in tourism if the number of internet service provider is more thus allowing affordability and huge access. This argument is synonymous with events in Kurdistan where the sole provider that connects Kurdistan internet to the world is

Turkey. Such ability to provide internet service by Turkey hinges on good relations between KRG and Turkey of which most Iraq's see it as a way of Turkey to rip KRG of gas and oil.

Secondly, other studies show that internet usage is a bit expensive in KRG and this hampers the ability of social network sites to positively influence tourism in KRG. Hawlergov (2013) further revealed that if you are in KRG, 1 Mb is the most expensive rate in the world, more expensive than Cuba. The major cause is still being attributed to the monopoly aspect of internet provision and argues that they must allow any private sector company to make deals with neighboring countries including connecting to KRG. In this report Hawlergov (2013) says the internet penetration rate in is at 8% and is only because of KRG, and that Newroz has managed to reach 10% penetration rate.

Despite all these different perspectives other tourist destinations especially in Africa (eMarketing, 2011) where internet penetration is very low have been seen to gain so much from social network sites. Thus there is a striking question on how exactly does social network sites influence tourism. There has not been a consensus as to the exact impact of social network sites on tourism when researchers like Roberts (2013) strongly argue that social network sites have negative impacts on businesses and that sometimes it needs to be ignored. This study therefore seeks to analyze the impacts of the use of social network sites on tourism.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are;

1. To examine the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil.
2. To assess the influence of social network sites on tourism trends.
3. To analyze how online social network sites developments can be used to determine the behavior of tourism in Erbil.
4. To assess how social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil?
2. How do online social network sites influence tourism trends?
3. How can social network sites developments be used to indicate the behavior of tourism in Erbil?
4. How do social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil?

1.5 Hypothesis

H₀: Social network sites play no significant role on the tourism industry.

H₁: Social network sites play a significant role on the tourism industry.

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study is carried out in partial fulfillment of the requirements of MSc Hotel and Tourism Management at Near East University. This thesis will be of great value to the following stakeholders;

- **Researcher**

This research will add to the researcher's existing skills in particular research, analytical and decision making which can be used in future researches and policy making

- **Near East University**

This study will serve as a source of reference to other scholars notably in the area of Tourism. Most studies have been conducted in the Western parts of the Globe such as America where social network developments have dramatically progressed. Such studies if applied to Middle East nations such as Kurdistan region of Iraq, may fail to provide concrete explanations of the role played by social networks on the tourism industry. Thus this study will be one of the few that draws attention to the problem in the Middle East region.

In addition, social network developments are still evolving and the tourism industry still remains as the fastest growing service industry. This leaves a study gap and thus there is greater need to continually add to the few available social networks and tourism sources of knowledge that relate to Kurdistan region of Iraq.

- **Policy Makers and other Stakeholders**

The study will aid policy makers to have a wide insight on how social networks can be effectively harnessed to promote tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As such, will result in an increase its market share and dominance in the industry.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study analyses the impacts of social network sites on tourism and the area of interest is Erbil. The study is based on a combination of secondary data, and primary data on social network sites and tourism collected in Erbil. The researcher however encountered access to data problems because most of the data especially from the periods 2001 to 2007 is not readily available in Kurdistan and hence had to use questionnaires to retrieve the required information.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one deals with the problem and its setting. Empirical and theoretical literature reviews are addressed in chapter two. This chapter outlines the theoretical concepts and other empirical literature that have been conducted under the subjects of social networks and tourism. Chapter three provides an outline of measurements of social network sites. On the other hand, chapter four provides a detailed review of tourism and hospitality in KRG while chapter five highlights the methodology used to analyze the collected data so as to answer the research questions. Chapter six dwells on empirical analysis and discussion of findings. Chapter seven concludes the study by looking at conclusion, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research. The next chapter looks at literature review.

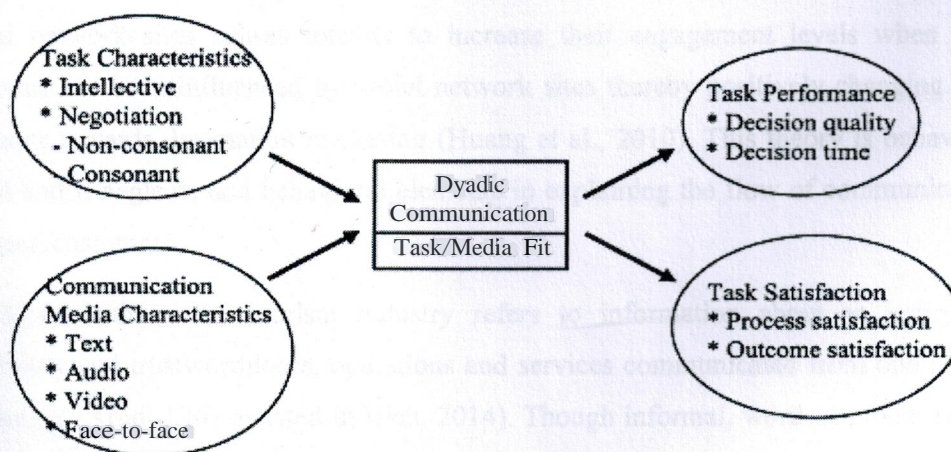
Social presence theory is known as a deficit theory hence as such focuses on cases that have been filtered at while idealizing face-to-face communication as the global standard of communication (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004). When applied to tourism, it neglects the importance of other communication mediums on tourism. Thus it may fail to adequately give an analysis of the roles of social networks on tourism.

Social presence theory suffers from the problem of changes in context. A significant number of researches have contradicted in findings about social presence and the learning aspect of it. For instance, Wise et al (2004) found that there is no relationship between social presence and student learning while Picciano (2002) argues that there is a relationship between the two. Moreover; social presence behavior changes with time.

2.2.2 Media Richness Theory

It deals with the ability of a communication medium to reproduce information sent over it. The theory assumes that people seek to avoid uncertainty and that a significant number of media work better for certain tasks compared to others. In addition, the theory groups information into categories or hierarchies based on the richness of information. This is shown below.

Figure 2.1 Media Richness Model



Media richness model: Source: Suh (1999)

This theory is important in studying the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil because it shows that the type of an online social network site is determined by the effectiveness of the network site in communicating tourism information. It also shows that uncertainty determines the choice of a network site that is used to communicate tourism information.

Media richness theory has been surrounded with ineffectiveness in explaining email usage (Markus 1994). Media richness theory further assumes that people select a medium based on the feasibility of the task at hand (Daft and Lengel, 1984). However, this contradicts with the idea that people select media based on feasibility, convenience and affordability (Hopkins 2012). This greatly applies to the roles of social medium on tourism where tourists are using web reviews and blogs such as TripAdvisor based on convenience and affordability.

2.2.3 Flow Theory

This theory contends that communication is at optimal level when people act with total involvement. It contends that consumers' intentions to revisit a particular website and purchase goods is determined by the perceived level of flow (Hausman and Siskind, 2009). This theory helps to explain why social network sites cause more people to positively react to destination marketing in tourism. This is supported by the fact that social network sites causes tourists to increase their engagement levels when their behavior has been influenced by social network sites thereby positively changing their behavior towards destination marketing (Huang et al., 2010). This theory is behavioral based and it neglects non behavioral elements in explaining the flow of communication between customers.

Word-of-mouth in the tourism industry refers to information about an entity, its credibility and trustworthiness, operations and services communicated from one person to another (Arndt 1967 as cited in Bich, 2014). Though informal, word-of-mouth is said to be effective communication source between customers (Gremer, 1994). Other studies have shown that though word-of-mouth is powerful, it has a lot of shortfalls. Word-of-mouth is effective when there is little or no uncertainty. Uncertainty translates to high

risk and causes tourists to switch to other forms of communication and thus rendering the effects of word-of-mouth on tourism ineffective.

2.3 Social Networks Sites

Social network sites refer to applications and websites that allow people to create and share information and participate in social networking. Social network sites take different forms such as business networks, enterprise social networks, blogs, forums, microblogs product or service review, photo sharing, social bookmarking, social gaming, video sharing, virtual worlds and social networks. They can however be classified into virality (the extent to which users re-share posted content) and mobile social network sites and business potential (this is sensitive to time and location).

2.3.1 Travel 2.0 and Tourism

Travel 2.0 refers to the full interactive second phase of travel information websites. The first wave was booking oriented and it included AA.com, Kayak, Expedia etc. Travel 2.0 is structured in such way that users can contribute information such as travelogues and reviews, words and images. Thus users can find information pertaining to hotels, destinations and other aspects of travel. Travel 2.0 websites include;

- **Igo Ugo** which specializes in providing travel advice.
- **Trip Advisor** which deals with information on destinations and hotels, and attraction reviews.
- **Flicker Travel** allows users around the world to upload photos.
- **Hotel Chatter** constitutes blogposts on hotel related matters.

2.3.2 Web 2.0 and its Adoption in Tourism

Web 2.0 is the second wave of development of the internet associated with a shift from static web pages to user generated content in social network sites provided on the web. Web 2.0 has reshaped marketing methods in the tourism industry. This has given the consumer more control over the decision making process on travel and tourism (Reactive, 2007). Web 2.0 has promoted an increase in information sources for tourists and these are now showing up in most search engines under travel and tourism. Web 2.0

however leads to closed relationships between the service provider and customers (Cox et al., 2009).

The developments in web2.0 have extended to mobile devices and as such mobile devices are now a very USffytgol of web 2.0 they encourage tourism communication. In a research by Travel monitor it has been established that 40% of international travelers travel with a smart phone of which 40% use them to obtain travel information on the destination and 34% of business travelers use them to alter bookings in transit (Noti, 2013).

Social network sites: Include networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc. Social network sites have increasingly become marketing tool for tourist destinations and organizations around the world are now posting information pertaining products, customer testimonials, forums etc.

- Mash-ups: this is an application that is being used by tourists to find information about restaurants, hotels and other tourist services (Sigala, 2007).
- Hotel rating systems: Is a form of collaborative tool that allows customers to rate services provided during their stay in a hotel and this helps other customers to make informed decisions about the hotels they will book into.
- Podcasting: It is an online radio that uses RSS technology and allows users to upload audio and video contents. A good example is YouTube.
- RSS: It stands for Really Simple Syndication and allows users to obtain updated information about what they are most interested in (Boni and Stemart, 2006).
- Biogs: These are online portals with a weak communitarian degree that allow readers to write and comment on certain subjects. This allows customers to share their experiences, trips and experiences (Boni and Stemart, 2006).

2.4 Trends in Social Network Sites and their Implications on Tourism

There has been a tremendous change in social network sites notably in the uses of social media. For instance, there has been a significant shift from searching aspect to socializing aspect of social network sites. Such a trend has an important bearing on

tourism destinations, tourism product, tourist behavior, tourism portals and tourism marketing. For example, tourism portals have increased in numbers and as such contain information about what travelers are saying about a particular destination (Fotis et al., 2010). In addition, user generated content is also emerging as a source of credible information. However, user generated content always contain mixed information and hence the effects on travel tourism might not be significant.

Social network sites have allowed penetration of markets that were previously dominated by traditional suppliers. As such, social network sites can be said to have increased competition in the tourism industry. Such competition promotes efficiency and cheaper tourism products and services. In addition, social network sites are now a dominant primary medium by which travel information is being shared (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). In their nature, social network sites are said to be a cheaper way of accessing information. As result tourists and or travelers can now make purchasing decisions faster and at a lower cost.

Social network sites are surrounded by perceived risk and popularity problems. It has been established that the greater the perceived risk the greater people will depend on personal networks of family and friends (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

Moreover, social network sites are surrounded by gender and age problems. The benefits of social networks sites are said to benefit females a lot compared to their male counterparts (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

2.5 Uses of Social Network Sites in Tourism

2.5.1 Identifying Brand Advocates

Brand advocates can be defined as those customers that do not only prefer your services or products but would put an effort to review your activities or comment about them, influence others and share your content. This is now being executed online through social network sites. Impartial reviews and word-of-mouth are now some of the key components of success in the tourism sector since more tourists search for a hotel review before they book a room.

2.5.2 Delivering a Great Customer Service

Delivering a great customer service allows a tourism business to retain existing customers and gain new customers. Social network sites thus allows tourism businesses to deliver a great customer service by allowing businesses to search for conversations around their brand and promptly respond to questions on their social network sites pages. Examples of this include post-vacation conversations on Trip Advisor about what tourists liked most about a trip or hotel and ask them to write a review about it.

2.5.3 Understanding your Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to understand who their customers are and what they want. Through understanding of tourists' issues, trends and needs which in turn influence marketing efforts, tourism businesses can strictly engineer their efforts towards such understanding thereby positively influencing consumer behavior towards their products and services.

2.5.4 Interacting with the Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to post content that adds value to tourists, ask questions and respond to comments. This engages customers into an interaction thereby gaining loyalty from existing and potential customers.

2.5.5 Destination Marketing

Social network sites support marketing activities by promoting destinations in order to attract potential tourists to visit a destination. A study conducted by (Popescu, 2014) reviewed that social network sites allow tourism businesses to distribute topical news stories. Destination management organizations can publicize information about their destinations to communities of people that are interested in their products. In addition, social network sites are timely as customers are constantly checking them thus destination management organizations can emphasize about their current events and campaigns on social network sites.

2.5.6 Checking Competitors

The tourism industry is now faced with a lot of competition and thus businesses need to keep track of what their competitors are doing. Social network sites allow businesses to

keep track of their competitors' activities, that is, what are they doing and what have they not done. This presents the business with greater market opportunities.

2.6 Impacts of Online Social Network Sites on Consumer Behavior and Tourism

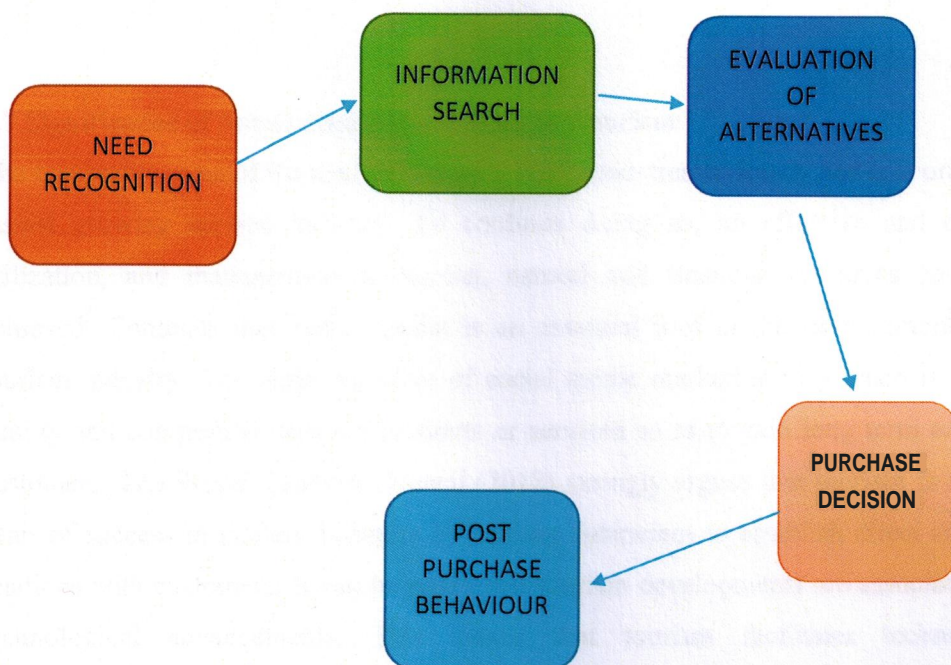
Consumer behavior can be defined as the process involved when individuals or groups, select, purchase, services, ideas or experience to satisfy needs and desires (Solomon, 2011). Various models have been developed to explain consumer behavior and these include the stimulus response and the buying process models (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model highlights both the internal and external factors, and personal characteristics of the buyer that contribute to the final buying decision of a customer. It attempts to give a thorough understanding of consumer behavior. According to this model social network sites falls under marketing and other stimuli while buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions process fall into customer's black box. This model shows that it is marketing and other stimuli, and the customer's black box that influence a response. Such response is evidenced by product choice, brand choice, purchase timing and purchase amount. When applied to tourism, it shows that social network sites must initially alter buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions (customer's black box) and it is then that these tourist's characteristics and decisions that cause a response in product, brand and purchasing. Thus the effectiveness of social on tourism is assumed to be dependent on the ability of marketing and other stimuli to influence the tourist's black box.

This model does not show the exact nature of the relationship between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box. In addition, it lacks empirical support and thus the magnitude of impact of between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box on tourism cannot be established with preciseness.

The buying process model (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model is a step by step illustration of the actual buying process. When applied to tourism, this model assumes that tourists first develop a need. Such a need will cause tourists to look for information regarding the tourism products and services they need to satisfy their needs. The diagrammatic explanation is shown in figure 2.2.

The model further states that when tourists gather the necessary information, they will now use the acquired information to evaluate the available alternatives. It is after evaluation that the tourist will then make a purchasing decision. The model also highlights that after consumption of the product there is post purchase behavior. Such behavior reflects a tourist satisfaction and reaction from acquisition of the tourism product or service.

Figure 22 The Buying Process Model.



Source: Adapted from Kotler and Armstrong (2004)

This model has an important bearing in explaining the impact of social network sites on consumer behavior (tourist behavior) in tourism because it outlines the role played by social network sites in the buying process. Thus according to this model, social media is used to search for information about tourist activities, destinations, hotels etc. Social network sites are also seen playing an important of providing such information. However, it does not consider others issues such as credibility of the information and the perceived risk associated with the media. The model does not show the relationship between social network sites and tourism. The buying process model has an advantage

over the stimulus model in the sense that the buying process model considers post purchase behavior.

Post behavior is important because it determines whether tourists will continue to purchase tourism products and services or not and how much more or less of the product or service they will continue to buy. It also outlines the importance of tourism service providers in meeting tourists' perceptions or expectations. When a purchased tourist product or service fails to meet tourists' perceptions, tourists may cut down their expenditure spent on tourist products or services (post purchase behavior).

2.7 Significance of Social Media Marketing in Tourism

The competitiveness of the tourism industry has grown tremendously and it is one of the fastest growing service industry. To continue doing so, an effective and efficient utilization, and management of human, natural and financial resources has to be achieved. Contends that social media is an essential tool in the development of the tourism industry. The main objective of social media marketing in tourism is to offer quality and competitive tourism products or services so as to gain long term and loyal customers. The World Tourism Council (2012) strongly argues that tourism is now the heart of success in modern business by helping businesses to establish direct and good relations with customers. It can be noted that tourism developments are associated with technological advancements. This means that tourism facilitates technological advancements. This was reinforced by Jashi (2013) who outlined that there is a unilateral relationship between internet penetration and online bookings. His suggestion pointed to high internet penetration and the high usage of credit cards. This was further supported by Hope-Johnstone (2010) who strongly asserts that about 3 billion of the world population now conducts electronic transactions through the internet and via mobile phones. The most known and effective social media networks for marketing tourism are Facebook, Travelshake, Twitter, Podcasts and YouTube. Thus in order to attract huge numbers of customers around the world, the tourism team needs to utilize proper social media tools that can effectively and efficiently transmit the right message and engage the right users.

2.8 Tourism Product

A tourism product can be defined as a bundle of activities, services and benefits that contribute to the entire tourism experience (Bich, 2014). The tourism product is divided into three; the product that tourist think they are going to buy, the actual product that tourist buy and the augmented product which are the benefits provided by the suppliers. The effectiveness of social network sites in influencing tourism can be measured by its ability to impact the three dimensions. Thus social network sites must sell tourism products in the most appealing and attractive manner that can lure potential customers and cause existing customers to continue to buy tourism products. Apart from advertised products, tourism destinations must also provide augmented products. Research has shown that it is augmented products that creates customer loyalty and keeps them continuing buying the firm's products. Tourism products advertised on social network sites must at least match the actual product purchased by tourists.

2.9 Empirical Literature Review

Jashi (2015) examined the importance of social network sites in tourism with emphasis on Georgia. The undertaking of the study by Jashi (2015) stemmed from the assertion that significant effort has been put on analyzing the impact of social network sites on tourism. Results from the study showed that social media marketing is of paramount importance in tourism. Recommendations given showed strong support for the utilization of social media marketing in tourism.

Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) undertook a study to identify the linkage between social network sites and tourism. This was based on arguments which revealed that social network sites are playing significant roles in tourism. The study identified that the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism are focusing on tourism practices, promotion, decision making and providing information. This reinforced study results by Jashi (2015) which established that social media is an important tool in tourism marketing. Deductions made from the study revealed that the role of social network sites in tourism has not been sufficiently examined. Hence there is need to

examine the role of social network sites in tourism in various aspects such as business activities and trends, individual behaviour and other social attributes.

Gohil (2015) analyzed both the impacts and roles of social network sites in tourism in Madhya Pradesh, India. This study sought to examine how the informational role of social media impacts tourism. It is in this regard that the study outlined that social network sites can be utilized to promote tourism information. Further results from the study revealed that social media is an important tool for strategic positioning and branding tourism globally.

Rathonyi (2013) undertook a study to examine the social network sites influence on tourism with regards to University of Debrecen students. The study stemmed from the assertion that students seek tourism information to avoid uncertainty. Study results revealed that social network sites are important in accessing both information and purchasing opportunities. The study by Rathonyi (2013) focused on analyzing the impact of social network sites on both aspects of supply and demand.

In it in this regard that this study will employ an amalgamative approach of the above mentioned studies to examine the roles of social network sites in tourism. Using ideas provided by Rathonyi (2013), this study will examine the roles of social network sites from both the supply and demand aspects, that is, from both business and individual person's perspectives. In addition, insights by Jashi (2015), Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) and Gohil (2015) will be used to examine the informational innovative, promotional and competitive (supply and demand aspects) roles of social network sites in tourism. These roles have an impact on the number of tourists visiting a particular place (tourism sale volume), their behavior in terms of visiting choices and amount of money spent on tourism products. This study will therefore examine the impact of informative, promotional, innovative and competitive roles of social network sites on tourism sales volume using information collected from business tourists visiting Erbil hotels in Kurdistan region of Iraq. It in this regard that using this insights a following conceptual framework will be utilized to formulate a methodological tool that will be used to approach the roles of social network sites in tourism.

Figure 2.3 Conceptual Framework



2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the underlying theories and concepts surrounding social networks sites and tourism. The theories reviewed include the social presence theory, media richness theory and the flow theory. The social presence theory was found to suffer from changes in context and that it neglects other mediums of communication. It was also established that social presence changes with time. On the other hand, this chapter identified that the media richness theory is ineffective in explaining email usage and does not consider feasibility, convenience and affordability factors in explaining how people chose social network sites in tourism. The flow theory had non behavioral shortfalls. This chapter also looked at travel 2.0 and tourism, web 2.0 and tourism, trends in social network sites and their implications on tourism, uses of social network sites in tourism, impacts of social network sites on consumer behavior in tourism and the tourism product. The above literature showed inconclusive gaps in theories and empirical literature and it attempted to fill in the literature gaps.

CHAPTER ID

MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The main objective of the designed questionnaire is to determine the role of online social media network sites on tourism in Erbil. As a result, the dependent variable will be represented by social media usage while independent variables are informational, promotional, competitive, innovative and increasing sales volume roles.

Table 3.1 Model Expression

	Informational role (X₁)
1	How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites
2	What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks
3	Use social media for socializing purposes
4	Respond to comments
5	Ask or answer an tourism question
	Promotional role (X₂)
1	To market existing tourism products
2	To promote new tourism products
3	Expand tourism clientele base
4	Enter new tourism markets
5	Makes the tourism corporation to be known
	Competitive role (X₃)
1	Gain more tourism market share
2	Reduces the level of tourism competition to a tourism firm
3	Helps in acquiring tourism information that competitors cannot get access
4	Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm

5	Helps build corporate tourism legacy
	Innovative role (X4)
1	Makes it cheaper to access tourism information
2	Tourists can get instant feedback
3	It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty
4	Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose
5	Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information
	Increase in tourism sales volume (TSv)
1	Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks
2	Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products
3	It results in tourism brand loyalty
4	Safeguards the tourism company's reputation
5	Improves tourists' perception of the tourist destination

This study used adopted a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009). In this study Monachesi et al (2009) focused on supporting knowledge discovery in an eLearning environment having social components. They found that about 50% of the respondents use instant messaging and that the number of respondent who use forums and mailing lists was high compared to other online communication and stood at 45%. His questionnaire format is important to this study because it gives a detailed description of how people use online communication.

This study however made additional changes to a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009) because it mainly focuses on the extent to which people use online communication. This questionnaire also had limitations of being centered on information systems in eLearning and hence does not fully explain the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil.

CHAPTER IV

OVERVIEW OF HOSPITALITY IN KRG OF IRAQ

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the general overview of Kurdistan region of Iraq, developments in online network sites and how they are influencing tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In addition, it provides an insight as to the roles online social networks are playing on tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This chapter seeks to identify opportunities and threats that are posed by online social networks and how the Kurdistan tourism officials can position themselves to benefit from changing trends in online social networks. It also looks at tourism structures including tourist destinations, sites and attractions.

4.2 Overview of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Kurdistan is an autonomous region located in the Northern part of Iraq. The Iraq's constitution recognizes Kurdistan as an independent region. Generally Kurds are of Indo-European origin and most of the people speak Kurdish while Arabic and Turkmeni languages are also gaining popularity. The population comprises of Armenian, Arab, and Turkmen groups. Kurdistan also contains various religious groups which includes Muslim, Christians, and Yazidi. Below is a geographical map of Kurdistan.

Fig 4.1 Geographical Map of Kurdistan of Iraq



Source: BBC

4.2.1 Subdivision

Kurdistan is divided into lower and upper Kurdistan. Upper Kurdistan is composed of northern, northeastern and northwestern parts. This region stretches from Lake Urmia to the west of Amed. Lower Kurdistan is composed of Southern Kurdistan and the main cities are Erbil and Kirkuk.

4.2.2 Geography

It is estimated that Kurdistan covers about 12 000 km² in Syria, 65 000 km² in Iraq, 125 000 km² in Iran and 190 000 km² which stretches in Turkey. There are six governorates in Kurdistan and three of them are under the Kurdish government while the rest are under the control of Syrian Kurdistan and Iranian Kurdistan. The south eastern part of Turkey contains about 15 to 20 million Kurds (Clive, 2007).

4.2.3 Population

According to Kurdistan's regional government, the Kurdish population is estimated to be 52 million and this figure comprises of Chaldeans, Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians and Arabs. The regional government further revealed that the median age is above 20 years with 36% constituting an age group of 0-14 years and 4% of the population being over 63 years (krg.org).

4.2.4 Climate

The climate in Kurdistan can be said to be an extreme continental climate. That is, too cold in winter and too hot in summer. Rainfall patterns vary with regions. For example, in the high plateaus, precipitation ranges from 700mm to 3000mm a year while plains it ranges from 200mm to 400mm a year.

4.2.5 Petroleum and Mineral Resources

Kurdistan contains one of the sixth largest oil reserves in the world and it is estimated that the oil reserves in Kurdistan are 45 billion barrels with more than 45 oil sites. It also contains associated and gas reserves which are more than 2 800km³ (Hawlergov, 2013). A notable number of companies are undertaking mining activities in Kurdistan and these include Genel Energy, Exxon, Chevron, Talisman Energy, Marathon Oil, Total, Hunt Oil and Gulf Keystone Petroleum. There are other mineral resources such as copper, coal, limestone, zinc, marble, iron and gold.

4.2.6 Natural Resources

There are a lot of rivers and mountains in Kurdistan and these contribute to the natural to its beauty. The mountains of Kurdistan are characterized by snow fall and heavy rain which provide water to other rivers such as Kura and Khabur. Furthermore, because of the rivers' altitudes which are 3000m to 4000m above sea level, the rivers are a source of energy. Dukandam and Lake Sulaymani are major sources of tourists' attractions in Kurdistan.

Mountains are however important geographically and are a symbol of the Kurdish life. There is a common saying which says that 'Kurds have no friends but the mountains'. The famous mountains include Zagros, Shingar, Gara, and Matini.

4.3 Tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Tourism in Kurdistan has been on an upward trend irrespective of the source of the visitors. This is illustrated in table 4.3. This is evidenced by forecasts made by Lababedi (2012) who showed that in 2012 the tourism sector in Kurdistan grew by 4.9% of GDP and projected that in 2013 and 2014, Kurdistan's tourism would grow by 5% of GDP

and 5.5% of GDP respectively. Tourist attractions in Kurdistan are found in three major cities namely Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimani. These provinces have a lot of tourist destination within and around them. Below is a detailed description of these provinces.

Table 4.1 Tourist places in Erbil province

Tourism resort	Description
Sami Abdul Rahman Park	It is built on a Ba'ath military base and comprises of a large municipal park.
Qaysari bazaar	This is a traditional market which sells food, household goods, textiles, gold and other souvenirs
Khanzad castle	Its period of origin relates to the Soran period
Sheik Chooli minaret	It is found in the western part of Erbil and was constructed by Sultan Mudhaffarudeen. This site has its origins from 543-586AD.
Shaqlawa resort	It is common for selling fresh produce and a good tourist destination.
Gali Ali Beg	Is a common for recreational activities and has a waterfall.
Bekhal Resort	A popular resort which is close to Gali Ali Beg.

Table 4.2 Tourist places in Dohuk

Tourism resort	Description
Amedi:	<p>Amedi comprises of beautiful mountains and valleys and it is ranked number 21 in the world. It is one of the beautiful cities in the world.</p> <p>The total population in Amedi is about 9 000.</p> <p>This place also includes Amadia Citadel and Sulav resort which are common tourist destinations.</p>
Saint IthLiha Church:	It known as the oldest church and is assumed to have been built in 500AD.



Table 4.3 Tourist places in Suleimani

Tourism resort	Description
Dokan Lake	It similar to Darbandikhan Lake and has restaurants, leisure facilities and cabins that make the place more enjoyable.
Darbandikhan dam	This place has restaurants, leisure facilities and cabins that make the place more enjoyable.
Ahmadaawa resort	It more active in summer because of its orchards, waterfalls and springs.
Suleimani Museum	It is a richest museum with houses that are more than 1000 years old. Below is table showing the number of hotels, motels, tourism villages, beds, and restaurants and cafes in Kurdistan region from the year 2007-2014.

Table 4.4 The number of hotels, motels, tourism villages, beds, and restaurants and cafes in Kurdistan region from the year 2007-2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Hotels	106	166	131	168	202	259	314	385
motels	49	53	72	96	128	168	206	248
Tourism villages	29	33	37	42	44	54	72	75
No. of beds	10451	11363	13480	22533	26811	31634	34954	44504
cafes	129	151	233	305	338	482	565	643

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

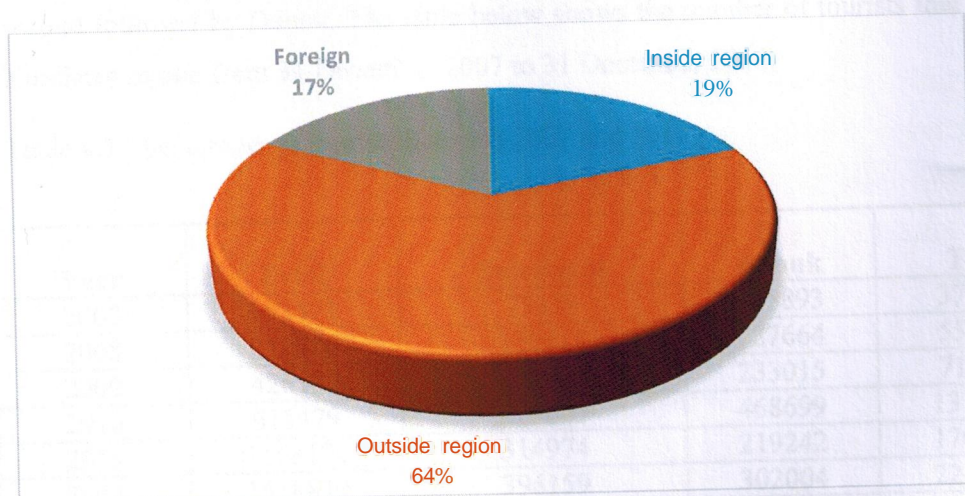
The number of tourists both domestic and foreign has been on an upward trend except in 2014 where it declined amid of political fears. This is shown below in table 4.5.

Table 4.5 The number of guests who visited Kurdistan Region between 2007-2014

Year	Inside KRG	Outside KRG	Foreign	Total
2007	137118	186420	53859	377397
2008	190230	285740	82890	558860
2009	209611	44919	13254	791345
2010	329536	789760	194545	1313845
2011	315161	1149738	237491	1702390
2012	313144	1470138	433711	221699
2013	459847	1933544	558636	2952027
2014	273326	1000726	255346	1529434

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

Fig 4.2 Classification of the total number of tourists that visited Kurdistan in 2007



Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

From figure 4.2 it can be deduced that the highest number of tourists who visited Kurdistan Region of Iraq came from other parts of Iraq(outside region) and accounted for 64% of the total number of tourists who visited KRG. Foreign tourists, that is, those that came from countries such as USA, Germany, Syria, Turkey etc., accounted for 17% of the total number of tourists who visited Kurdistan. This was followed by domestic

tourism (inside region) which accounted for 19% of the total number of tourists. This diagrammatic explanation entails that much emphasis is needed to promote domestic tourism and enhance the effectiveness of current policies to lure foreign tourists.

Table 4.6 The total number of hotels in Erbil, Sulaimani and Dohuk with and without stars

	5 *	4*	3*	2 *	1 *	Without stars	total
Erbil	12	36	59	193	164	15	485
Sulaimani	6	12	42	62	66	0	188
Dohuk	7	9	30	32	50	0	128
TOTAL	28	56	130	229	244	15	704

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

The highest number of high star hotels was recorded in Erbil with Suleimani being second followed by Dohuk. The table below shows the number of tourists that came to Kurdistan region from 31 December 2007 to 31 December 2014.

Table 4.7 The number of tourists between 2007 and 2014

Year	Erbil	Suleimani	Dohuk	Total
2007	153571	77933	145893	377397
2008	211780	119416	227664	558860
2009	426398	131932	233015	719345
2010	615479	229663	468699	1313841
2011	1168174	314974	219242	1702390
2012	1518830	396159	302004	2216993
2013	2029623	477990	444414	2952027
2014	937591	362213	229630	1529434

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

The lowest number of tourist that came to Kurdistan region of Iraq was recorded in 2014 and this was for all the three cities with totals of 937 591,362 213 and 229 630 respectively. The highest percentage increase in the number of tourist that came to

Kurdistan region was registered in 2010 and stood at 60%. On the other hand, lowest number was registered in 2011 and 2012 and stood at 30%. This is expressed in table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8 Growth rate of tourists visiting KRG between 2007 and 2014

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
No. of tourists	377397	558860	791345	1313841	1702390	2216993	2952027	1529434
O/o		48%	42%	66%	30%	30%	33%	-48%

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

It can be deduced that the highest growth rate in tourist visiting KRG was experienced in 2010 with a growth rate of 66%. The year 2014 experienced a significant decline in tourists visiting KRG and this is because of the war that had taken its toll in Iraq.

4.4 Online Social Networks in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Social network sites have not greatly evolved in Kurdistan. However, other network sites such as Twitter have greatly taken form in Kurdistan. A number of significant users of twitter have been reported to be journalists, activists, students and politicians. Dizayee (2014) reported that Twitter user numbers have grown significantly in Kurdistan region of Iraq as many people are now using the social network for so many reasons which include awareness, protests, getting access to information etc. Twitter. Kurds has emerged and is now being used to provide information especially concerning specific issues of major concern. However, more people in Kurdistan are now using Facebook and Instagram.

In addition, there is now what is known as the Kurdish Social Media Gathering (KSMG) which was organized through Twitter. Live newsfeed streams and social media feeds are also growing as they are being included in worldwide forums and conferences. For example, the Sulaimani Forum organized by the University of Iraq which was seen on Twitter feed. Facebook user numbers have also increased in Kurdistan and this is

because is being used to keep in touch with family and friends. This has seen the formation of a group on Facebook called 'Largest Kurdish Community on Facebook'. This group has brought together Kurdish and other people from different parts of the world and established links for collecting ideas and helping each other information wise and physically.

Of great importance social network sites have become a way of communicating with Kurds in the diaspora. This is evidenced by a new social network site called 2dul.com formed by Zawen Aarif and has more than 4 000 followers and 100 members. In conclusion, social network sites can be said to have brought together people on a large scale and thus 'making the Kurdish world smaller'.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have focused on literature on social network sites. This chapter focuses on how the study was conducted. This chapter will dwell on research design, population, research instruments, and data collection and presentation procedures. The main emphasis of this study is gather concrete evidence that enables us to answer the research questions and make sound recommendations.

5.2 Research Design

A multiple regression model will be used to determine the nature and significance of the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism and this will be coupled by the use of SPSS. The multiple regression model will be of the following form;

$$SN = f_0 + f_1 X_1 + f_2 X_2 + f_3 X_3 + f_4 X_4 + f_5 X_5 + \mu \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where; SN is social network sites , f_0 , f_1 , f_2 , f_3 , f_4 and f_5 are parameters, X_1 , X_2 , X_3 , X_4 and X_5 are informational role, promotional role, competitive role, innovative role and increasing sales volume role respectively and μ is the error term. The collected data will be presented in the form of tables, charts and diagrams. Data analysis will also encompass descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Cronbach's alpha will be used to determine the reliability of the collected data.

5.2.1 Definition of Variables

5.2.1.1 Informational Roles

Assertions provided by Gohil (2015) outlined that the informational role of social network sites entails the ability to offer the required details pertaining to the desired subject matter. It is in this regard that there is a unilateral relationship between the

informational role of social network and tourism. Thus expected results will be compared with the study results obtained by Gohil (2015).

5.2.2 Promotional Role

Promotion in this study can be defined as the enhancement of awareness about an idea or product through activities such as advertising and other marketing campaigns. Zeng and Geritsen (2014) established that social network can be used to enhance promotional objectives or activities in tourism. Thus a positive relationship between the promotional role of tourism and social network is therefore anticipated.

5.2.3 Competitive Role

Competitiveness can be defined as the potential ability of a firm or an individual to gain an increase in the quality of products offered, number of customers or sales revenue attributed to a particular activity. Thus in this study competitiveness of tourism can be alternatively be described as the ability of tourism individuals or firms to offer quality tourism products, number of tourists or tourism sales revenue attributed to a particular tourism activity. It can be deduced from this definition that a positive association exists between the competitive role of social network and tourism and this can be supported by study results by Zeng and Geritsen (2014).

5.2.4 Innovative Role

This refers to the ability of an individual or firm to positively change the way of doing activities through the use of efficient and cost effective technological systems. Innovation is therefore regarded as the catalyst that positively influences organizational activities by improving the usage of input materials and the output produced. In this regard, Gohil (2015) postulated that social network does significantly results in major improvements in tourism activities. Hence a positive relationship between the innovative role of social network and tourism is anticipated.

5.2.5 Tourism Sales Volume (TSv)

Tourism sales volume in this regard refers to the volume of sales that are attributed to tourism activities. In this study, unilateral association between social network sites and tourism is anticipated in line with the study by Gohil (2015). Social network usage in tourism is greatly attributed to the endeavor to increase tourism sales. Hence, an increase

in tourism sales through social network usage will cause an increase in social network usage.

5.3 Population

A population can be defined as an entire pool of study from which a sample is drawn. In this study our population is business tourists that use 5-star and 4-star hotels in Erbil. The reason behind the selection of these 5-star and 4-star hotels is that they have websites and applications for reservations and a majority of tourists book these hotels. The Kurdistan Tourism Authority (2015) reports that more tourists preferred 5 and 4-stars hotels because of the availability of better information communication technology infrastructure. In addition, table 4.7 has shown that the highest number of tourists visited Erbil and totaled 937 591. Thus the study will draw its attention towards Erbil. However, because of the magnitude of the population, it is difficult to undertake a study of the population of that magnitude and hence stratified random sampling will be used to select the population.

Stratified random sampling is defined as the division of significantly large population into smaller groups known as strata so as to conveniently undertake a study of the desired population. It is in this regard that the total number of hotels (see table 4.6) in Erbil will be used as strata or sample size. The KTA (2016) asserts that the total number of hotels in Erbil stood at 485 in 2015. It is in this regard that 485 will be utilized as a strata and hence 485 questionnaires were distributed to business tourist residing in 4-star and 5-star hotels in Erbil (see table 6.2). Questions were therefore asked if the guest is a business tourist or not before handing over the questionnaire.

5.4 Data Collection Methods

This study used both primary and secondary data and outlines the methods that were used to collect the data. Secondary data included publications, records and other documented information about the number of tourists that came to Kurdistan, revenue collected from tourist activities, investment expenditure on tourism in KRG, social network usage and development statistics etc. The researcher will travel to the relevant places such as the ministry of tourism and ministry of information and communication

technology in KRG to acquire the needed data. This will also involve access the internet as another means of retrieving the required data. Primary data was obtained on a face to face basis using questionnaires.

5.4.1 Secondary Data

Secondary data such as figures, tables and charts will be used before data analysis to support the issues at hand and help provide further details about the role of social network sites on tourism. The advantage of using secondary data is that it is readily available and is cheaper to access.

5.4.2 Primary Data

Primary data refers to data that is collected for the first time by the researcher for use in a research project. In this study primary data was collected through questionnaires. The questionnaires were given out to business tourists in Erbil who use internet sites to access, utilize and send tourism information online. The obtained questionnaire responses will be analyzed using a statistical package called SPSS. The questionnaire is shown in appendix I.

5.4.2.1 Questionnaire Design

Having established the research objectives and questions, a questionnaire matching such objectives was designed for distribution. The designed questionnaire is generally aimed at identifying the roles of social network on tourism. Four roles of social network sites were identified to be informational, promotional, competitive and innovative.

Section A of the questionnaire measures the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the study will attempt to identify how these demographic characteristics determine social network usage. As a result, will try to relate and establish how social network usage in tourism is affected by these demographic characteristics.

The second group of questions seeks to identify the types of social networks sites available and determine their frequency of usage. This is essential because by identifying the types and frequency of usage, providers of tourism products will be in a better position to structure their goods and services in line with the opportunities being posed by the types and frequency of usage of social networks sites.

The third group of questions deals with the roles of social network sites in tourism. Thus this study will be mainly centered on questions from the second and third groups.

The dependent variables will be obtained from the third and fourth groups of questions while the independent variables will be obtained from the first, second and third groups of questions.

The questionnaires included both open and closed questions. Closed questions are questions that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' or very short phrase. Closed questions will involve asking respondents if they use social networks sites to access travel information, their gender and sex etc. On the other hand, open questions are questions that require more than one word answers. In this study open questions will involving asking questions for example such as what is your favorite online travel site and why?, and what factors do use when choosing an online social network site to look for travel information? The researcher used both closed and open questions because closed questions help the respondent to complete the questionnaire quickly while open questions allow the researcher to get more detailed information about a the role of online social networks on tourism in K.R.G. Moreover, it was done with the concepts of precision and clarity. The advantages of using a questionnaire are given as follows;

- They are cheaper to administer to respondents.
- They do not contain much bias compared to interviews.
- They are convenient to respondents who may choose to fill them at their own convenience as such they have a high rate of accuracy.

However questionnaires have the following disadvantages;

- They are slow and hence the response rate is slow.
- Long responses are possible.
- One can judge the quality of response.

5.4.2.2 Questionnaire Pretesting

Pretesting was done so as to ensure that the respondents understand questions asked and to check the response rate. 15 questionnaires were used for pretesting and the respondents managed to respond positively to the pretest and were satisfied with both

the objectives of the survey and its clarity. Having seen that the respondents were satisfied with the survey, the researcher went on to administer more questionnaires so as to proceed with the data collection and analysis process.

5.4.2.3 Questionnaire Distribution

The questionnaires were distributed in person and dates and time were agreed upon for collection of the questionnaires. This was useful because it made sure that the questionnaires were delivered to the correct respondents and would be collected when the respondents are done completing them.

5.5 Problems Encountered in Data Gathering

The major hindrance encountered was the unavailability of official statistics from the period 1999-2006. This is evidenced by a written document reference number 245 dated 4 February 2016 obtained from the Kurdistan's General Board of Tourism (GBT). The request for data was made on 5 November 2015 and only managed to get a response confirming the unavailability of data on the 4th February 2016 (see appendix 2). In addition, some of the respondents took time to respond citing busy schedules, in addition, some questionnaires were returned with unfilled spaces and this to some extent affected the final response rate. This also affects the study's results and recommendations.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has laid down the procedures that were used to gather the required data, present and analyze it. Time constraints were encountered in collecting the questionnaires. The collected responses were analyzed and organized into tables, charts and diagrams. The following chapter is a description of the data analysis and presentation procedures that were used.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Response Rate

The research draws its attention on analyzing business tourists who visit Erbil and utilize social networks sites to access tourism products. A total of 485 questionnaires were distributed to business tourists residing in Erbil hotels and 470 questionnaires were returned which represents a response rate of 96.91%. Using cut off points for response rates established by Njui, (2013), it can be noted that a 50% response rate is standard rate upon which deductions can start to be made. On the other hand, a response rate of 60% is considered better while that which is above 70% is considered to be an excellent response rate. This therefore exhibits that our response rate is relatively high and hence the probability that the obtained results will contain a high level of reliability is very high. The response rate information is shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Response Rate

	Frequency	Percentage
Filled questionnaires	470	96.91%
Unreturned questionnaire	15	3.09%
Total	485	100

From the 485 questionnaires that were distributed, the following decomposition of the distribution process was made;

Table 6.2 Decomposition of the questionnaire distribution

HOTEL NAME	HOTEL STARS	QUESTIONNAIRES DISTRIBUTED
Rotana	5	10
Divan	5	7
Van royal	5	11
Tangram	5	11
Shaqlawa international	5	8
Sipan	5	10
Grand swiss	5	8
Dedeaman	5	13
Ozbaankawa royal	5	10
Erbil international	5	9
Cristal erbil	5	8
khanzad	5	11
Darin plaza	4	8
Grand plaza	4	9
Canyon	4	7
Altinsaray	4	10
Banoj	4	11
Bloumecary	4	11
Monaco palace	4	8
View	4	12
Grand istanbul	4	7
Grand Erbil	4	10
Helindeville	4	8
Erbil tower	4	14
Jiger palace	4	9
ABN international	4	12
Palma palace	4	8
Hayali suits	4	11
Ktina	4	11
Sky Erbil	4	9
Shahin palace	4	12
Erbil quartz	4	7
Classy Erbil	4	10
Wlat	4	8
Mariana	4	11
Best in Erbil	4	12
Capital Erbil	4	17
Altinmalk plaza	4	13
Ararat Erbil	4	9

Fiori	4	14
Jouhyana	4	7
Lamassu	4	9
Seever	4	12
Karwansaray	4	10
Fomix Erbil	4	8
Aljawahry	4	11
Chwarchra	4	9

6.2 General Background of the Respondents

Out of the 470 questionnaires that were retrieved, the general background of the respondents is shown in table 6.3.

Table 6.3 General background of the respondents

Item	Variable	Description	Responses	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	251	53.4%
		Female	219	46.6%
		Total	470	100%
2	Age	18-23	70	14.9%
		24-29	114	24.3%
		30-35	119	25.3%
		36-41	71	15.1%
		42+	96	20.4%
		Total	470	100%
3	Marital status	Single	161	34.3%
		Married	309	65.7%
		Total	470	100%
4	Level of education	Secondary	31	6.6%
		Undergraduate	168	35.7%
		Graduate	192	40.9%
		Post graduate	64	13.6%
		Phd	15	3.2%
		Total	470	100%

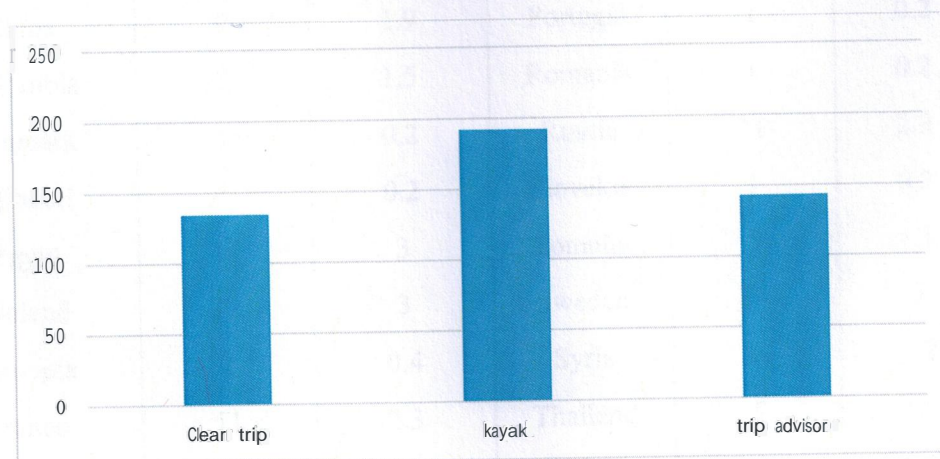
From the table 6.3 it can be observed that from the 470 questionnaires that were retrieved, 53.4% of the respondents were male while 46.6% of the respondents were female. It can further be revealed that 14.9% of these respondents were between the age group of 18-23 years, 24.3% were between the age group of 24-29 years, 25.3% were between the age group of 30-35 years, 15.1% were between the age group of 36-41 years and 20.4% were above the age group of 42 years. 34.3% of the 470 respondents were single while 65.7% respondents were married. The highest level of education recorded among the tourists is graduate level and 3.2% of the respondents had a Ph.D. 168 tourists had an undergraduate degree while 31 tourists were qualified up to secondary level.

Table 6.4 Number of tourists with children

Item	Variable	Description	Responses	Percentage
5	Do you have Children	No children	249	53.0%
		Have children	221	47.0%

Table 6.4 exhibits that 249 tourists had no children while 221 tourists had children. This is of paramount importance because the number of tourists visiting a country can increase with the number of tourists who have children.

Figure 6.1 Use of tourism applications among business guests who visited Erbil



Source: Excel computation based on questionnaire data

Amongst the three widely used travel sites, it was discovered that most business tourists strongly prefer to use Kayak in making travel arrangements such as hotel and flight bookings. The number of tourists who used Kayak is 192 followed by TripAdvisor with 143. ClearTrip was ranked last with a usage of 134 tourists. Implications are therefore implies that more informatiofi Was sought especially concerning flights and hence we can expect more tourists to be or having to planned to visit Erbil.

Table 65 Number of business tourists who visited Erbil by their country of origin

Country	Number of tourists	Percentage %	Country	Number of tourists	Percentage %
Algeria	3	0.6	Italy	7	1.5
Philippines	8	1.7	Morocco	11	2.3
Portugal	1	0.2	Moldova	4	0.9
Romania	1	0.2	Jordan	14	3
Russia	11	2.3	Lebanon	16	3.4
Slovakia	1	0.2	Nepal	8	1.7
Somalia	5	1.1	Netherlands	1	0.4
Australia	6	1.3	Nigeria	4	0.9
Switzerland	5	1.1	Norway	6	1.3
Canada	11	2.3	Pakistan	6	1.3
China	9	1.9	Portugal	1	0.2
Colombia	7	1.5	Romania	1	0.2
Denmark	1	0.2	Russia	11	2.3
Djibouti	1	0.2	Slovakia	1	0.2
Egypt	14	3	Somalia	5	1.1
Finland	12	3	Sweden	14	3
Ethiopia	2	0.4	Syria	34	7.2
France	11	2.3	Thailand	5	1.1
Georgia	16	3.4	Turkey	39	8.3

Germany	17	3.6	UAE	7	1.5
Holland	16	3.4	UK	29	6.2
Hungary	1	0.2	Ukraine	6	1.3
India	9	2	USA	58	12
Iran	21	4.5	Yemen	4	0.9
Spain	3	0.6			

The highest number of tourist who visited Erbil came from USA with a total of 58 followed by Turkey with 39. Other leading nations with the significant numbers of tourists that visited Erbil are UK, Syria, Lebanon, Georgia and Holland with total of 30, 20, 16, 16 and 16 respectively.

Figure 6.2 Business tourists' social network sites usage per day

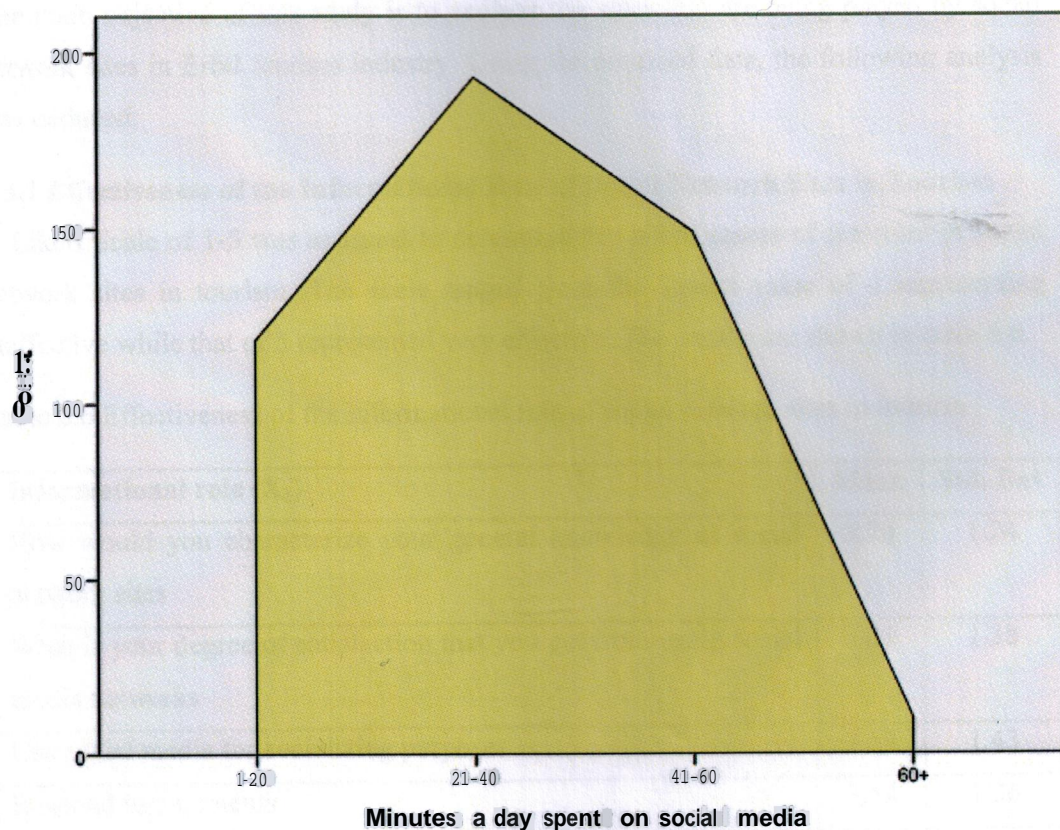


Figure 6.2 exhibits social network sites usage in terms of minutes spent a day on social network sites. Figure 6.2 reveals that a significant number of tourists spent 21-40 minutes a day on social network sites followed by 41-60 minutes. A high usage of social network sites entails a change in tourists' behavior in terms of accessing tourism information. This therefore implies that business tourists are spending much time a day accessing tourism websites in search of tourism related information. Such social network sites daily usage intensity also implies that the related social network sites are either cost effective or time saving. It also implies that tourists are now preferring convenient ways of accessing information which can guarantee them efficiency and effectiveness. Failure to have social network sites by tourism suppliers therefore can imply a loss of potential customers.

6.3 Effectiveness of the Roles Social Network Sites in Tourism in Erbil

The main objective of this study is to analyze the roles that are being played by social network sites in Erbil tourism industry. Using the obtained data, the following analysis was deduced;

6.3.1 Effectiveness of the Informational Role of Social Network Sites in Tourism

A Likert Scale of 1-5 was assigned to determine the effectiveness of the roles of social network sites in tourism. The scale ranged from the lowest value of 1 representing ineffective while that of 5 represented very effective. The results are shown in table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Effectiveness of the informational role of social network sites in tourism

Informational role (X ₁)	Mean	Std. Dev
How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites	3.78	1.24
What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks	3.61	1.38
Use social media for socializing purposes	3.53	1.43
Respond to comments	3.54	1.36
Ask or answer an tourism question	3.84	1.26

It can be noted from table 6.6 that all the responses aimed at assessing the informational role of social network sites had mean scores that revolved around 4. The mean score of 4 resembles effective on the Likert Scale. Though the usage of social network sites to ask or answer tourism questions had a highest mean score of 3.84, it still falls under the range of effective on the Likert Scale. Generally it can be observed that all the elements of the informational have relatively almost equal mean scores and this signifies that they are relatively contributing equally to towards the effective fulfillment of providing information. However, the use of social network sites for socializing purposes had a high standard deviation of 1.43. This entails that the use of social network sites for socializing purposes has a high responsive capacity and any possible changes in the factor will cause high changes in the ability to provide information.

6.3.2 Effectiveness of the Promotional Role of Social Network Sites in Tourism

From table 6.7 it can be deduced that the use of social network sites to aid tourist destination enter new tourism markets is highly effective with a highest mean score contribution of 3.81. The use of social network sites to expand tourism clientele base is relatively ineffective since it is yielding lower contributions compared to other factors. The ability of social network sites to make the tourism corporation known has a high responsive capacity and hence attention must be drawn to avoid adverse changes. Adverse changes in the ability to make the tourism corporation known can pose severe adverse effects on promotion initiatives.

Table 6.7 Effectiveness of the promotional role of social network sites in tourism

Promotional role (X2)	Mean	Std. Dev
To market existing tourism products	3.72	1.12
To promote new tourism products	3.78	1.16
Expand tourism clientele base	3.58	1.12
Enter new tourism markets	3.81	1.16
Makes the tourism corporation to be known	3.72	1.19

6.3.3 Effectiveness of the Competitive Role of Social Network Sites in Tourism

The study also endeavored to examine how social network sites can be utilized in improving the competitiveness of tourism product suppliers. The results of the analysis are shown in table 6.8. The results provide strong evidence that social network sites are effective in improving the competitiveness of tourism product suppliers and this is reinforced by the highest mean score of 3.88. The use of social network sites to reduce tourism competition and improve the competitiveness of the tourism firm have relatively the same standard deviations. This means that these factors have high responsive potential to aid in improving the competitiveness of tourism firms. Hence policy initiatives must strengthen in ensuring that they improve the roles that are being played by these elements.

Table 6.8 Effectiveness of the competitive role of social network sites in tourism

Competitive role (X3)	Mean	Std. Dev
Gain more tourism market share	3.81	1.06
Reduce the level of competition to a tourism firm	3.86	1.15
Helps in acquiring information	3.87	1.15
Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm	3.88	1.13
Helps build corporate tourism legacy	3.62	1.09

6.3.4 Effectiveness of the Innovative Role of Social Networks in Tourism

Results shown in table 6.9 provide evidence that the adoption of social networks is effective in aiding tourists to make informed decisions and this is reinforced by a highest mean score of 3.40. Information provided by the respondents show that the tourists lowly ranked the use of social network sites as cheaper way of accessing information with a mean score of 2.91. Possible reasons suggest that there are other costs that are incurred in utilizing such sites. For instance, one might incur Wi-Fi costs, data bundle costs, travelling costs as one travels to an area of that can provide such access. The respondents also shown preference that the use of social network sites to obtain reliable information is significantly important. This is reinforced by a high standard deviation of

1.52. Thus failure by tourists to get reliable information can significantly tarnish the image of the service provider and can drive the firm out of business.

Table 6.9 Effectiveness of the innovative role of social network sites in tourism

Innovative role (X ₁) ~	Mean	Std. Dev
Makes it cheaper to access tourism information	2.91	1.31
Tourists can get instant feedback	3.21	1.37
It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty	3.40	1.19
Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose	3.15	1.52
Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information	2.95	1.45

6.3.5 Analysis of Increase in Tourism Sales Volume

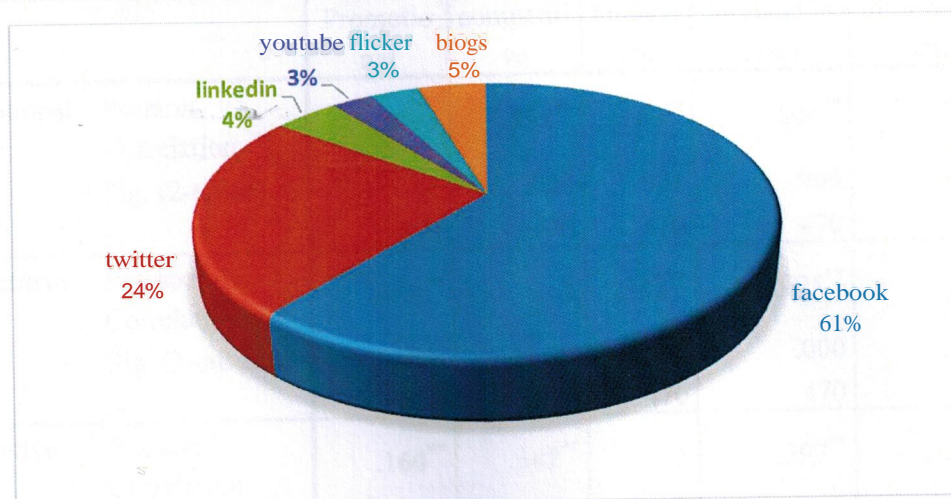
Results presented in table 6.10 show that the ability of tourists to spend more money an important element in improving tourism sales volume with a mean score of 3.87. This is followed by improvement in tourists' perceptions with a mean score of 3.86. The willingness of tourists to visit a particular destination is also an important force to reckon with. This is evidenced by a high standard deviation of 1.17. Thus the willingness of tourists to visit a particular destination must be influenced in the positive direction so that the impact on tourism sales volume will be significant.

Table 6.10 Analysis of increases in tourism sales volume

Increase in tourism sales volume (TSv)	Mean	Std. Dev
Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks	3.83	1.17
Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products	3.87	1.13
It results in tourism brand loyalty	3.61	1.11
Safeguards the tourism company's reputation	3.79	1.06
Improves tourists perceptions of the tourist destination	3.86	1.15

6.4 Social Network Sites Usage Among the Respondents

Figure 6.3 Social network sites usage among the tourists



Source: Excel data presentation based on the retrieved data

It is denoted in figure 6.3 that a significant portion of the tourists who visited Erbil are Facebook users and constituted 61% of the total number of tourist. This was followed with Twitter with a second highest number of users equivalent to 24%. Flickr and YouTube had similar number of users and each accounted for 3% of the total number of tourists who visited Erbil. LinkedIn constituted of 4% of the total number of the total number of tourists who visited Erbil. It can be deuced that informal word of mouth about tourism in Erbil is more dominant. This entails that tourists are more likely to get information about tourism in Erbil from their friends, family and relatives.

6.5 Coefficient of Correlation

The Kendall Tau's-b was employed in order to determine the nature and strength of association of the variables. The results are presented in table 6.11. It can be noted that all the variables are positively related and the correlations are significant at 1%. The competitive role of social network sites is highly correlated with increase in sales volume and promotional roles with coefficients of 0.925 and 0.854 respectively. The innovative role is lowly correlated with informational, promotional and competitive roles of social network sites with coefficients of 0.133, 0.160 and 0.382 respectively.

Table 6.11 Coefficient of Correlation

		Promotional	competitive	innovative	Increase in sales	informational
Promotional	Pearson Correlation	1	.854 **	.160**	.804 **	.120**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001	.000	.009
	N	470	470	470	470	470
competitive	Pearson Correlation	.854**	1	.382 **	.925 **	.207**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	470	470	470	470	470
innovative	Pearson Correlation	.160**	.382**	1	.397 **	.133**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000		.000	.004
	N	470	470	470	470	470
Increase in sales	Pearson Correlation	.804**	.925 **	.397 **	1	.190**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	470	470	470	470	470
informational	Pearson Correlation	.120**	.207**	.133**	.190**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.000	.004	.000	
	N	470	470	470	470	470

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

6.6 Model Summary Results

An R-square of 0.76 was obtained and this entails that 76% variation in tourism sales volume is explained by informational, promotional, and competitive and innovative roles of social networks sites. Thus 24% variation in tourism sales volume is explained by variables outside the model. Model summary results are presented in table 6.12.

Table 6.12 Model summary results

R-squared	0.76
Adjusted R-square	0.757

6.7 Empirical Results

Table 6.13 Estimated Model results

	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig
Constant	0.127	1.156	0.242
Informational	0.02	1.038	0.3
Promotional	0.161	3.344	0.001*
Competitive	0.652	8.536	0.000*
Innovative	0.055	3.491	0.001*
Tourism sales volume	0.093	1.443	0.150

* Statistically significant at 1%

Using the above results, the estimated equation can thus be expressed as follows;

$$S \sim 0.127 + 0.020X_1 + 0.161X_2 + 0.652X_3 + 0.055X_4 + 0.093X_5$$

Informational role had a coefficient of 0.02 and this entails that an increase in tourism informative initiatives or activities by 1% will result in an increase in the use of social network sites by 2%. This provides empirical support to the findings by Gohil (2015) which outlined that there is a positive association between the informational role of tourism and social network sites. Possible reasons suggest that providing tourists with all the information they need on social network sites reduces acts of mistrusts on the part of tourists. Thus more tourists will acquire tourism products as their level of trust of the tourism products rises.

Promotional role had a coefficient of 0.161 which entails that either a 1% change increase in awareness campaigns will cause an increase in social network sites activities by 16.1%. Alternatively, it can be expressed that an improvement in the ability of tourism service to promote tourism using social network will have a positive effect on

social network usage of 16.1 %. This concurs with results by Zeng and Geritsen (2014) and this suggests that the ability to promote the tourism destinations and services greatly exposes service providers to more customers and hence an increase in sales volume. Hence social network site usage rises together with the increase in response to the promotional activities.

Tourism efforts to enhance the competitiveness of the firm using social network sites has a coefficient of 0.652 which entails that either a 1% improvement in the drive to improve the competitiveness of tourism service providers will cause an increase in social network sites usage by 65.2%. This was supported by Zeng and Geritsen (2014) and this is because an improvement in competitiveness improves the firms' dominance in the market and hence can easily get more customers through manipulative actions such as competitive pricing or arbitrage pricing.

The results also support study results by Gohil (2015) as evidenced by a positive association between the innovative efforts in tourism and social network sites. The innovative drive by tourism firms through the usage of social network sites will cause an increase in social network sites usage by 5.5%. This is because innovation improves the way of doing business and thereby resulting in efficiency and effectiveness which are strongly needed by tourists. Tourists favor destinations that are effective and efficient in offering services. Hence sales volumes are foreseen to increase in favor of those destinations that are efficient and effective in offering services. Policy implications must therefore promote innovative ways of doing business.

Further insights can be established from table 6.13 that an increase in tourism activities to generate more sales will result a higher usage of social network sites. This can be evidenced by a coefficient of 0.093 which implies that social network usage will increase by 0.093 following an increase in efforts to increase tourism sales by 1 unit. This can be reinforced by insights established by Gohil (2015) which established that there is a positive connection between tourism and social network sites.

The studies sought answer to the question what is the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil. Using information utilized in the conceptual framework and regression model estimation it can therefore be concluded that the roles of social

network sites in tourism are promotional, informational, competitive, innovative and increase in sales volume.

The study also endeavored to establish how online social network sites influence tourism trends. It was established that the extent to which tourism relies on the usage of social network sites lies in the ability of social network sites to enhance tourism activities in relation to informational, promotional, innovative, competitive and increasing sales volume. Thus tourism trends can be said to positively change in response to positive developments in social network sites.

The question how can social network sites developments be used to indicate the behavior of tourism in Erbil was addressed by positive relationships between tourism and social network sites. In this respect, tourism activities have been established to cause an increase in social network sites developments. Thus improvements or developments in social networks sites are in response to changes in tourism activities. This therefore implies that social network sites developments are a reflection of what is transpiring in tourism. For instance, an increase in social network sites development can be said to be as a result of an increase in tourism activities.

From the estimated regression results, it was established that tourism activities can explain changes in social network sites by 76%. Thus positive or negative changes in social network sites are said to either enhance tourism activities or hamper tourism respectively. This addresses the question how social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil.

3 of the 5 positive variables are significant at 1% and we can in overall accept the alternative hypothesis that social network sites play a significant positive role in Erbil tourism industry. The extent to which this hypothesis holds can be reinforced by the obtained R-square of 76%.

6.8 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

From table 6.14, it can be noted that the obtained significant value is significant at 0.01 thus we accept the null hypothesis of homogeneity. We therefore conclude that there is homogeneity in both the variance and sample size of tourism and social network site usage data. Thus the error value is approximately equal. Thus our estimated model can be said to be correctly specified and the null hypothesis of variable inclusion is rejected.

Table 6.14 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) table

	Sum of squares	d.f.	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	131.137	4	26.227	293.150	0.000*
Residual	41.513	465	0.089		
Total	172.649	469			

6.9 Reliability Test

Reliability test was conducted for the four variables that address the roles of auditing. The Cronbach's alpha will be used to interpret the results of the analysis. The following was obtained;

Table 6.15 Cronbach's alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
0.716	0.782	5

Of the 5 variables that were analyzed, a Cronbach's alpha statistic of 71.6% was obtained for roles of social network sites. This entails that 71.6% changes in tourism sales volume is considered to be internally consistent and reliable. The item statistics presented in table 6.16 shows that there is a positive correlation between the selected variables. This means that all the social network roles are mutually and positively related to tourism sales volume.

Table 6.16 Item-total statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Promotional	0.637
competitive	0.567
Innovative	0.777
Increase in sales	0.571
Informational	0.774

Table 6.16 also shows that if factors such as promotional, competitive and increase in sales are removed, the reliability of the model will decline to 63.7%, 56.7% and 57.1% respectively in explaining social network sites usage. The model's reliability will however increase to 77.7% if innovative is removed and this suggests that the innovative role of social network sites is negatively impacting the effectiveness of social network roles. Thus a removal of this role from Erbil tourism initiatives will see an increase in social network sites usage. On the other hand, factors such as informational and innovative are significantly important in improving social network sites usage in tourism. Policy initiatives should therefore be designed to improve the effectiveness of these factors.

CHAPTER VII

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

The main objective of the study was to examine the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism. This was necessitated by an exponential growth in social network sites and users around the world. This was also followed by a surge in the number of millennials who are traveling around the world. The widespread proliferation in the number and types of social network sites has posed numerous changes in tourism trends and not much has been done to examine the underlying issues. On the other hand, there has been no consensus as to whether the changes in tourism trends is being attributed to demographic changes or changes in social network sites. This study therefore was an endeavor to examine the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism. The recommendations made herein are based on the analyzed data.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 Recommendations to Business Entities Involved in Tourism

The obtained results revealed that all tourism activities have a positive effect on social network sites. Deductions can be made that social network sites usage is resultantly causing positive effects in tourism and hence its wide spread use. Foremost, tourism players are therefore encouraged to further improve the ability to provide information through the use of social network sites. Such information must contain a high possible level of reliability at all costs. This is because failure to provide accurate or reliable information can have undesirable negative consequences on the performance of both the firms and the tourism industry.

The results of the study revealed that there is a positive linkage between tourism promotional activities and social network sites usage. Thus firms in the tourism

industries are advocated to continually engage in intensive marketing initiatives so as to further promote their products. This enables firms to gain access into new markets and expand their current level of customer out reach.

The ability of social network sites to enhance the competitive position of tourism firms needs to be continually assessed and improved all time. This is because failure to improve the competitive position of the firm in the market can cause the firm to lose customers to other tourism firms especially those from outside KRG. Competitive strategies must be designed in such way that reflects current changes in the world economy so as to cater for the ever changing customer needs and problems.

Business entities engaged in tourism and other tourism related activities are strongly urged to continue and increase their usage of social network sites as a way of innovating their information systems. This is based on the results of the study which showed that innovation has a positive linkage with tourism sales volume. Innovation is essential because it results in efficiency and effectiveness in the operations of firms. This is important because tourists are always looking for service providers who can provide a particular service effectively and efficiently.

7.2.2 Recommendations to the Government

The government of Kurdistan Region of Iraq must implement strategies that promote tourism. For instance, increased security and awareness campaigns can be made especially on international scale were most foreign tourists have a negative perception about KRG because of security fears. Thus there is greater need by the government of Kurdistan to continually promote KRG as a safe tourist destination. Bilateral and multilateral agreements in the area of tourism can be made by the government with other foreign nations.

7.3 Suggestions for Future Studies

The results of the study have shown strong and reliable evidence that social network sites are playing a significant role in tourism in KRG. Other studies can however, narrow the study to specific region and types of tourism.

7.4 Conclusion

It can therefore be concluded that social network sites are playing a significant role in tourism in Erbil. The most significant roles that are being by social network sites are in Erbil are promotional, competitive and innovative and these are positively contributing to the success of tourist destinations in Erbil. Thus in order to fully benefit from social network sites, tourism officials in Kurdistan Region of Iraq must innovate their information systems and provide information on social network sites. This must be supported by the necessary infrastructure so as to domestically promote social network site usage. Initiatives can be adopted which further make the accessibility of social network sites cost effective. Significant attention must be trusted towards promoting domestic tourism and efforts can be undertaken to improve the international image of Kurdistan Region of Iraq .

It can be concluded from this study that the social network sites role of providing information has a significant positive impact on tourism sales volume. This is mainly attributed to the fact that providing information reduces uncertainty. Tourists are specifically interested in obtaining information about where there are going, what is involved, how to get there, possible good and bad things they stand to encounter. As a result the extent to which such information is provided aids in the decision making process. This is supported from information drawn from buying process model which outlined that purchase decisions and post purchase decisions are determined by the ability of the consumer to obtain information so as to make an assessment and evaluation of the available alternatives.

It can also be concluded that social network sites is now widely being used in tourism to promote tourism. This is evidenced by results obtained in this study which outlined that the promotional role of social network sites has significant positive implications on tourism sales volume. Social network sites thus provide tourism firms with a greater ability to promote tourism destinations and related services. It can also be said in this regard that the ability of tourism service providers to reach existing and new tourists is now hinging on the promotional ability of social network sites.

Further conclusions can be made that social network sites is also part of the innovative drive by tourism service providers to innovate their business operations. As such many tourism service providers have taken a toll to increasingly utilize social network sites as an operation enhancement toll that can be used to reach tourists at a lower cost and a fast rate. Thus the social network sites role of innovation can be concluded to be significantly and positively related to tourism sales volume.

Insights provided in this study highlighted that tourism service providers are now facing a lot of competition and as results were advocated to further improve their competitiveness. Improvements in competitiveness result in an increase in both the influx of tourists and tourism sales volume. Thus it can be concluded that tourism sales volume is positively and significantly related to the competitiveness of tourism service providers.

The effectiveness of social network sites to execute profound functions greatly depends on factors that surround the use of the concerned social network sites. As such may include feasibility, convenience, affordability, objectives etc.

Conclusions can therefore be drawn that social network has wide positive implications on the tourism industry. This can be evidenced by its numerous roles that it is playing towards improving tourism. In overall, the alternative hypothesis that social network plays a significant positive role in Erbil tourism industry can be concluded to be acceptable.

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SECTION 3: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

1. What is your gender? Please tick where appropriate.

Male

☐

Female

☐

2. What is your age group? Please tick where appropriate.

18-23

☐

24-29

☐

30-35

☐

36-41

☐

42-47

☐

3. Marital status? Please tick where appropriate.

Single

☐

Married

☐

If your answer to the above is married, please tick if you have children or not.

Yes

☐

No

☐

4. What is your country of origin?

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire: Social network sites and Tourism

This questionnaire is in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Tourism and Hotel Management at Near East University, North Cyprus. Kindly complete the required information and note well that this information is strictly for academic purposes and hence will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

SECTION A: RESPONDENT PROFILE

1. What is your gender? Please tick where appropriate.

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What is your age group? Please tick where appropriate.

18-23	<input type="checkbox"/>
24-29	<input type="checkbox"/>
30-35	<input type="checkbox"/>
36-41	<input type="checkbox"/>
42+	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Marital status? Please tick where appropriate.

Single	<input type="checkbox"/>
Married	<input type="checkbox"/>

If your answer to the above is married, indicate below if you have children or not.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. What is your country of origin?

5. What is your level of education? Please tick where appropriate.

Primary school

☐

Secondary

☐

Undergraduate

☐

Graduate

☐

Post graduate

☐

PhD

☐

SECTION B: INFORMATION SECTION

6. Do you use online social network sites? Please tick where appropriate.

Yes

☐

No

☐

7. Which of the following social networking sites are you a member or? Please tick where appropriate.

Facebook

☐

Twitter

☐

LinkedIn

☐

YouTube

☐

Flicker

☐

Blogs

☐

Other, please specify

8. Roughly how long have you been using social network sites?

1-12 months

☐

2-5 years

☐

6-10 years

☐

10+

☐

9. Roughly how many minutes a day do you spend on social network sites? Please

tick where appropriate.

1-20	D
20-40	O
40-60	D
60+	O

10. Which site do you use for travel information, bookings, hotels and flights?

TripAdvisor	O
Kayak	D
ClearTrip	D
Other.	

11. How effective are the following social network roles (informational, promotional, competitive and innovative) in tourism? On a scale of 1-5 where 5= very effective, 4= effective, 3=moderately effective, 2= slightly effective and 1= ineffective

Informational role	1	2	3	4	5
How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites					
What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks					
Use social media for socializing purposes					
Respond to comments					
Ask or answer an tourism questions					
Promotional role	1	2	3	4	5
To market existing tourism products					
To promote tourism new products					
Expand tourism clientele base					
Enter new tourism markets					

Makes the tourism corporation to be known					
Competitive role	1	2	3	4	5
Gain more tourism market share					
Reduces the level of tourism competition to a tourism firm					
Helps in acquiring tourism information that competitors cannot get access					
Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm					
Helps build corporate tourism legacy					
Innovative role	1	2	3	4	5
Makes it cheaper to access tourism information					
Tourists can get instant feedback					
It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty					
Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose					
Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information					
Increase in tourism sales volume	1	2	3	4	5
Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks					
Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products					
It results in tourism brand loyalty					
Safeguards the tourism company's reputation					
Improves tourist perception					

اقلیم کوردستان - عێراق

هه‌ری‌می کوردستان - عێراق

مجلس الوزراء

نه‌نجومه‌نی و‌م‌زیران

وزارة البلديات والسياحة

JL,,\$ S 4\$ j L,itt~JLi ~JUoJ

الهيئة العامة للسياحة

(Kurdistan) Region - Iraq

Council of Ministers

Ministry of Municipality & Tourism

JÜ~Ji:ni4'\$ ~S~~

مديرية التخطيط والمتابعة

General Board of Tourism

به‌پ‌یوه‌به‌رایه‌تی پ‌لان‌دانان و به‌دواداچوونه‌وه

ریکۆت : ٢٠١٦ / ٠٢ / ٠٤

ژماره : 245

کۆردی / ٢٧ / ٢٠١٦

T _____ st University/ _____

Subject/Information

Years:

Regarding your Letter from 5.Nov.2015, Request For Permission to Undertake a survey and obtain data for a Masters Degree Disertation By Rewar Jamal

We hereby inform you That General Board of Tourism Doesn't Have any official statistics of Tourism during (1999-2006).

Best regards



Expert

Fawzi Yousif Toma

Director of planning and follow-up

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

KRG- Kurdistan Regional Government

KTA- Kurdistan Tourism Authority

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Scientist

CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

The study looks at the use of social network sites to promote tourism. This chapter focuses on background to study, problem statement, hypothesis, research questions, research objectives, justification of the study, and organization of the study.

The world has witnessed exponential growth in social network sites and users. Statistical reports by Bradbury(2013) have it that 16% of 18-29 year old internet users were social networking site users and that in 2010 this number had surged to 86%. Henrikson (2011) echoed the same idea and asserted that social networking has extended and taken root in older age groups. Henrikson's (2011) ideas were based on his findings which revealed that the number of 50-64 year olds and 65 years and above old internet users using social networking sites had risen from 7% and 5% in September 2005 to 26% and 47% respectively in May 2010.

Various definitions have been put forward to define social network sites. Below are some of the definitions.

Social network sites refers to all forms of electronic communication such as websites for social networking and microblogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (The Social Media Tourism Symposium 2011).

Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Dana 2007).

Social network sites refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content or join online communities (Dewing 2012)

A definition by Dewing (2012) will be adopted for consideration in this study. However, for the purposes of this study social network sites will be defined as all forms of electronic communication such as internet based and mobile services for social networking and microblogging that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content & join online communities.

Broadband internet rose to popularity in 1990 and this eventually led to the developments of websites that allowed users to create and upload content. Though the first websites were dominated by the likes of sixdegrees.com and Friendster, they have been a widespread development and acceptance in network sites. Figures released in 2012 by CBC (2012) and Knowiton (2012) showed that Twitter had 517 million users while Facebook had 1 million users during the same time period.

It can be noted that social networking developments have not been limited to the social aspect of life. These developments have been greatly embraced by the corporate world and as a result social networking has become a daily norm in start-ups, small, medium sized and large corporations. Despite such a growth in usage and applicability, researchers still contend that little has been done to analyze how such social network sites developments affect business process and performance (Denyer et al. 2011). Bughin (2009) therefore contended that great need be put to determine the extent to which the utilization of social network sites impacts business process performance. However, such analysis needs to be drawn to tourism which has greatly taken a toll in the usage of social network sites.

The World Travel Market asserts that the role of technology especially social network sites has helped tourism business to promote their services and reach customers in a more personal way. This follows after the World Travel Market witnessed more than 1 billion arrivals of tourists around the world in 2012. This can be attributed to the ability of social network sites to serve as communication media that can instantly cross borders. Tourism business have greatly harnessed social network sites developments and are now incorporating it in their promotion and planning activities. One of the significant role social networking sites have played in tourism is in destination marketing. Social networking sites are playing significant roles in tourism and it is being used to attract

customers, engage users' interest and participation, retain users and build loyalty, learn about user preferences and to provide relevant customized information to users.

1.1 Background to Study '},/.

There have been a series of sessions and meetings in and outside Kurdistan Region of Iraq in the area of tourism. Such events are meant to promote and further develop Kurdistan's tourism industry. These events include the 21 November 2007 Duhok Governorate tourism session organized by Kurdistan Region's tourism minister (KRG, 2007).

On the other hand, there have been growing fears surrounding security and stability in KRG. A study by Padden (2006) reviewed that insurgent bombings and daily sectarian violence have greatly distorted KRG's tourism identity. The biggest challenge is being posed by ISIS which has been raking havoc in Northern and Western Iraq and in August 2015 it advanced in Northern Iraq routing government forces and taking the important city of Mosul by coup de main (Washington institute: 2015). As a result, a number of countries such as Australia, UK, Sweden, Japan and Germany have imposed strict travel warnings to KRG. Besides a fall in tourism revenue, KRG's tourism sector has suffered from a number of issues stretching from negative publicity to fall in ranking in terms of international rankings. Meanwhile, the telecommunications and information industry has evolved greatly and this has seen a number of social network sites platforms taking form worldwide. This includes Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Skype, TripAdvisor, LinkedIn. The benefits from the use of social network sites have been immense and Rowe (2011) outlined seven ways one should be leveraging social network sites which include;

- 1) Solicit endorsements
- 2) *Maximize* revenue per seat;
- 3) Bond with guests;
- 4) Manage reputation;
- 5) Reach out to new customers
- 6) Recruit new staff and
- 7) Build a buzz.

Social network sites are now playing a great role in tourism as they act as a source of information for travelers. A study by Zheng (2010) reviewed that search engines are now referring users to social network sites when searched for travel information and other tourist packages.

On the other hand, KRG's telecommunications and information industry is still evolving to standards that will see the information and communications technology industry positively impacting the tourism industry. As much negative information about KRG has surfaced through social network sites, analysts still believe that social networks sites can positively turnaround the same situation.

Despite all these challenges, KRG's tourism minister contends that KRG has vast amounts of untapped resources, chiefly, oil, gas and other minerals (possibly uranium) as well as agriculture. As a result, KRG's tourism industry is being foreseen as the chief tool that will positively market and portray the region's image. Thus KRG's tourism minister advocated the need to inform international tourists of the autonomous and safety position that now surrounds KRG. One of the ways they suggested was using every possible media to promote KRG as a tourism destination and this includes social networks sites.

In a study conducted by Kapiki (2015), it is reviewed that if the tourism and hospitality industry is to compete successfully it has to make use of information and communication technologies notably social networks sites. It is further highlighted that social networks sites allow the hospitality industry to attract more guests, ameliorate service quality, deliver exceptional service guest satisfaction, and increase in revenue as well as market share (Kapiki, 2015).

Social network sites are a crucial tool for success in business today and globally, different estimates have suggested that 50% of leisure trips and 40% of business trips are booked online (Jashi, 2013). In this study, Jashi (2013) further estimated that from the period 2014, over 3 billion of the world's population will be able to transact electronically via mobile or internet technology with 90% mobile penetration rate and 6.5 billion mobile connections. It can be noted that tourist demand satisfaction is determined by the impact and usage of social network sites marketing. To a large extent,

social networks sites are now being used to stimulate and encourage interaction of customers so as to promote tourist awareness.

Other researchers strongly contend that as long as the conflicts between KRG and Baghdad government over disputed territories are still prevalent, then the KRG's tourism industry will still sink in the doldrums. Currently efforts are being made to rebrand KRG's image in the eyes of international tourists and these includes initiatives such as loans being offered to individuals wishing to launch tourism ventures especially from the region's major city centers such as Erbil, Sulaimani and Dahuk (Al-monitor, 2013), the strengthening of the Peshmerga forces and police and Asayish to boost security and promote KRG as a safe tourism destination. With the huge role social networks sites are playing in the tourism industry worldwide this study therefore seeks to analyze how social network sites influences tourism in KRG.

1.2 Problem Statement

One of the most significant impacts of social network sites is their ability to relay information quickly. Social network sites have evolved greatly and this has changed both the economic, social and political landscape. Researchers strongly contend that the tourism industry can benefit a lot from such changes if it can harness and tap into such changes. For instance, Kamal (2013) further postulated that information spread through social networks helps to create transnational links whereby individuals and groups are able to engage in widespread dialogue. However, Larsen (2006) proffers a different perspective and argues that social network sites are effective when luring international tourists compared to domestic tourist especially in KRG where most people do not have access to internet. For example, an article by Hawlergov (2013) points out that in 2005 Kurdistan Region of Iraq internet penetration was close to 0 and the only telecom was the government monopoly entity with aging exchanges and no fiber optics.

Other researchers such as Germann (2013), further argue that social network sites can only play a significant role in tourism if the number of internet service provider is more thus allowing affordability and huge access. This argument is synonymous with events in Kurdistan where the sole provider that connects Kurdistan internet to the world is

Turkey. Such ability to provide internet service by Turkey hinges on good relations between KRG and Turkey of which most Iraq's see it as a way of Turkey to rip KRG of gas and oil.

Secondly, other studies show that internet usage is a bit expensive in KRG and this hampers the ability of social network sites to positively influence tourism in KRG. Hawlergov (2013) further revealed that if you are in KRG, 1 Mb is the most expensive rate in the world, more expensive than Cuba. The major cause is still being attributed to the monopoly aspect of internet provision and argues that they must allow any private sector company to make deals with neighboring countries including connecting to KRG. In this report Hawlergov (2013) says the internet penetration rate in is at 8% and is only because of KRG, and that Newroz has managed to reach 10% penetration rate.

Despite all these different perspectives other tourist destinations especially in Africa (eMarketing, 2011) where internet penetration is very low have been seen to gain so much from social network sites. Thus there is a striking question on how exactly does social network sites influence tourism. There has not been a consensus as to the exact impact of social network sites on tourism when researchers like Roberts (2013) strongly argue that social network sites have negative impacts on businesses and that sometimes it needs to be ignored. This study therefore seeks to analyze the impacts of the use of social network sites on tourism.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are;

1. To examine the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil.
2. To assess the influence of social network sites on tourism trends.
3. To analyze how online social network sites developments can be used to determine the behavior of tourism in Erbil.
4. To assess how social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil?
2. How do online social network sites influence tourism trends?
3. How can social network sites developments be used to indicate the behavior of tourism in Erbil?
4. How do social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil?

1.5 Hypothesis

H₀: Social network sites play no significant role on the tourism industry.

H₁: Social network sites play a significant role on the tourism industry.

1.6 Justification of the Study

This study is carried out in partial fulfillment of the requirements of MSc Hotel and Tourism Management at Near East University. This thesis will be of great value to the following stakeholders;

- **Researcher**

This research will add to the researcher's existing skills in particular research, analytical and decision making which can be used in future researches and policy making

- **Near East University**

This study will serve as a source of reference to other scholars notably in the area of Tourism. Most studies have been conducted in the Western parts of the Globe such as America where social network developments have dramatically progressed. Such studies if applied to Middle East nations such as Kurdistan region of Iraq, may fail to provide concrete explanations of the role played by social networks on the tourism industry. Thus this study will be one of the few that draws attention to the problem in the Middle East region.

In addition, social network developments are still evolving and the tourism industry still remains as the fastest growing service industry. This leaves a study gap and thus there is greater need to continually add to the few available social networks and tourism sources of knowledge that relate to Kurdistan region of Iraq.

- **Policy Makers and other Stakeholders**

The study will aid policy makers to have a wide insight on how social networks can be effectively harnessed to promote tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As such, will result in an increase its market share and dominance in the industry.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study analyses the impacts of social network sites on tourism and the area of interest is Erbil. The study is based on a combination of secondary data, and primary data on social network sites and tourism collected in Erbil. The researcher however encountered access to data problems because most of the data especially from the periods 2001 to 2007 is not readily available in Kurdistan and hence had to use questionnaires to retrieve the required information.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one deals with the problem and its setting. Empirical and theoretical literature reviews are addressed in chapter two. This chapter outlines the theoretical concepts and other empirical literature that have been conducted under the subjects of social networks and tourism. Chapter three provides an outline of measurements of social network sites. On the other hand, chapter four provides a detailed review of tourism and hospitality in KRG while chapter five highlights the methodology used to analyze the collected data so as to answer the research questions. Chapter six dwells on empirical analysis and discussion of findings. Chapter seven concludes the study by looking at conclusion, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research. The next chapter looks at literature review.

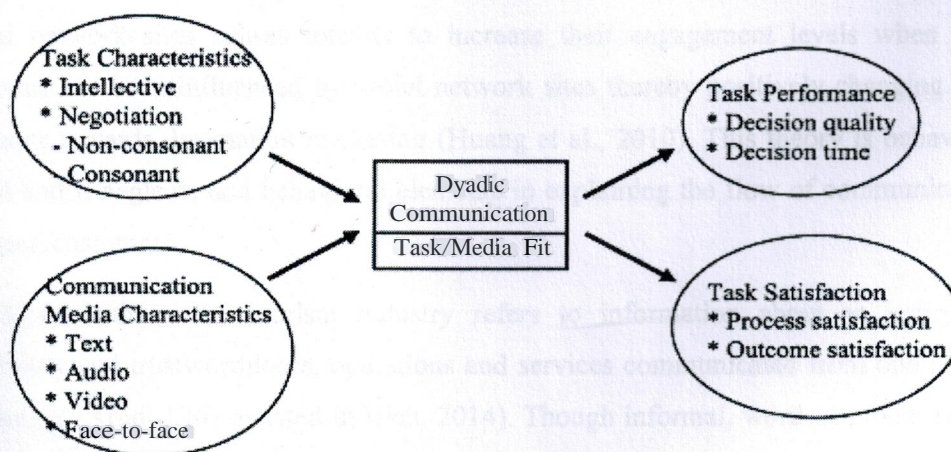
Social presence theory is known as a deficit theory hence as such focuses on cases that have been filtered at while idealizing face-to-face communication as the global standard of communication (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004). When applied to tourism, it neglects the importance of other communication mediums on tourism. Thus it may fail to adequately give an analysis of the roles of social networks on tourism.

Social presence theory suffers from the problem of changes in context. A significant number of researches have contradicted in findings about social presence and the learning aspect of it. For instance, Wise et al (2004) found that there is no relationship between social presence and student learning while Picciano (2002) argues that there is a relationship between the two. Moreover; social presence behavior changes with time.

2.2.2 Media Richness Theory

It deals with the ability of a communication medium to reproduce information sent over it. The theory assumes that people seek to avoid uncertainty and that a significant number of media work better for certain tasks compared to others. In addition, the theory groups information into categories or hierarchies based on the richness of information. This is shown below.

Figure 2.1 Media Richness Model



Media richness model: Source: Suh (1999)

This theory is important in studying the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil because it shows that the type of an online social network site is determined by the effectiveness of the network site in communicating tourism information. It also shows that uncertainty determines the choice of a network site that is used to communicate tourism information.

Media richness theory has been surrounded with ineffectiveness in explaining email usage (Markus 1994). Media richness theory further assumes that people select a medium based on the feasibility of the task at hand (Daft and Lengel, 1984). However, this contradicts with the idea that people select media based on feasibility, convenience and affordability (Hopkins 2012). This greatly applies to the roles of social medium on tourism where tourists are using web reviews and blogs such as TripAdvisor based on convenience and affordability.

2.2.3 Flow Theory

This theory contends that communication is at optimal level when people act with total involvement. It contends that consumers' intentions to revisit a particular website and purchase goods is determined by the perceived level of flow (Hausman and Siskind, 2009). This theory helps to explain why social network sites cause more people to positively react to destination marketing in tourism. This is supported by the fact that social network sites causes tourists to increase their engagement levels when their behavior has been influenced by social network sites thereby positively changing their behavior towards destination marketing (Huang et al., 2010). This theory is behavioral based and it neglects non behavioral elements in explaining the flow of communication between customers.

Word-of-mouth in the tourism industry refers to information about an entity, its credibility and trustworthiness, operations and services communicated from one person to another (Arndt 1967 as cited in Bich, 2014). Though informal, word-of-mouth is said to be effective communication source between customers (Gremer, 1994). Other studies have shown that though word-of-mouth is powerful, it has a lot of shortfalls. Word-of-mouth is effective when there is little or no uncertainty. Uncertainty translates to high

risk and causes tourists to switch to other forms of communication and thus rendering the effects of word-of-mouth on tourism ineffective.

2.3 Social Networks Sites

Social network sites refer to applications and websites that allow people to create and share information and participate in social networking. Social network sites take different forms such as business networks, enterprise social networks, blogs, forums, microblogs product or service review, photo sharing, social bookmarking, social gaming, video sharing, virtual worlds and social networks. They can however be classified into virality (the extent to which users re-share posted content) and mobile social network sites and business potential (this is sensitive to time and location).

2.3.1 Travel 2.0 and Tourism

Travel 2.0 refers to the full interactive second phase of travel information websites. The first wave was booking oriented and it included AA.com, Kayak, Expedia etc. Travel 2.0 is structured in such way that users can contribute information such as travelogues and reviews, words and images. Thus users can find information pertaining to hotels, destinations and other aspects of travel. Travel 2.0 websites include;

- **Igo Ugo** which specializes in providing travel advice.
- **Trip Advisor** which deals with information on destinations and hotels, and attraction reviews.
- **Flicker Travel** allows users around the world to upload photos.
- **Hotel Chatter** constitutes blogposts on hotel related matters.

2.3.2 Web 2.0 and its Adoption in Tourism

Web 2.0 is the second wave of development of the internet associated with a shift from static web pages to user generated content in social network sites provided on the web. Web 2.0 has reshaped marketing methods in the tourism industry. This has given the consumer more control over the decision making process on travel and tourism (Reactive, 2007). Web 2.0 has promoted an increase in information sources for tourists and these are now showing up in most search engines under travel and tourism. Web 2.0

however leads to closed relationships between the service provider and customers (Cox et al., 2009).

The developments in web2.0 have extended to mobile devices and as such mobile devices are now a very USffytgol of web 2.0 they encourage tourism communication. In a research by Travel monitor it has been established that 40% of international travelers travel with a smart phone of which 40% use them to obtain travel information on the destination and 34% of business travelers use them to alter bookings in transit (Noti, 2013).

Social network sites: Include networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype etc. Social network sites have increasingly become marketing tool for tourist destinations and organizations around the world are now posting information pertaining products, customer testimonials, forums etc.

- Mash-ups: this is an application that is being used by tourists to find information about restaurants, hotels and other tourist services (Sigala, 2007).
- Hotel rating systems: Is a form of collaborative tool that allows customers to rate services provided during their stay in a hotel and this helps other customers to make informed decisions about the hotels they will book into.
- Podcasting: It is an online radio that uses RSS technology and allows users to upload audio and video contents. A good example is YouTube.
- RSS: It stands for Really Simple Syndication and allows users to obtain updated information about what they are most interested in (Boni and Stemart, 2006).
- Biogs: These are online portals with a weak communitarian degree that allow readers to write and comment on certain subjects. This allows customers to share their experiences, trips and experiences (Boni and Stemart, 2006).

2.4 Trends in Social Network Sites and their Implications on Tourism

There has been a tremendous change in social network sites notably in the uses of social media. For instance, there has been a significant shift from searching aspect to socializing aspect of social network sites. Such a trend has an important bearing on

tourism destinations, tourism product, tourist behavior, tourism portals and tourism marketing. For example, tourism portals have increased in numbers and as such contain information about what travelers are saying about a particular destination (Fotis et al., 2010). In addition, user generated content is also emerging as a source of credible information. However, user generated content always contain mixed information and hence the effects on travel tourism might not be significant.

Social network sites have allowed penetration of markets that were previously dominated by traditional suppliers. As such, social network sites can be said to have increased competition in the tourism industry. Such competition promotes efficiency and cheaper tourism products and services. In addition, social network sites are now a dominant primary medium by which travel information is being shared (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). In their nature, social network sites are said to be a cheaper way of accessing information. As result tourists and or travelers can now make purchasing decisions faster and at a lower cost.

Social network sites are surrounded by perceived risk and popularity problems. It has been established that the greater the perceived risk the greater people will depend on personal networks of family and friends (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

Moreover, social network sites are surrounded by gender and age problems. The benefits of social networks sites are said to benefit females a lot compared to their male counterparts (Faria and Stacia, 2012).

2.5 Uses of Social Network Sites in Tourism

2.5.1 Identifying Brand Advocates

Brand advocates can be defined as those customers that do not only prefer your services or products but would put an effort to review your activities or comment about them, influence others and share your content. This is now being executed online through social network sites. Impartial reviews and word-of-mouth are now some of the key components of success in the tourism sector since more tourists search for a hotel review before they book a room.

2.5.2 Delivering a Great Customer Service

Delivering a great customer service allows a tourism business to retain existing customers and gain new customers. Social network sites thus allows tourism businesses to deliver a great customer service by allowing businesses to search for conversations around their brand and promptly respond to questions on their social network sites pages. Examples of this include post-vacation conversations on Trip Advisor about what tourists liked most about a trip or hotel and ask them to write a review about it.

2.5.3 Understanding your Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to understand who their customers are and what they want. Through understanding of tourists' issues, trends and needs which in turn influence marketing efforts, tourism businesses can strictly engineer their efforts towards such understanding thereby positively influencing consumer behavior towards their products and services.

2.5.4 Interacting with the Audience

Social network sites allow tourism businesses to post content that adds value to tourists, ask questions and respond to comments. This engages customers into an interaction thereby gaining loyalty from existing and potential customers.

2.5.5 Destination Marketing

Social network sites support marketing activities by promoting destinations in order to attract potential tourists to visit a destination. A study conducted by (Popescu, 2014) reviewed that social network sites allow tourism businesses to distribute topical news stories. Destination management organizations can publicize information about their destinations to communities of people that are interested in their products. In addition, social network sites are timely as customers are constantly checking them thus destination management organizations can emphasize about their current events and campaigns on social network sites.

2.5.6 Checking Competitors

The tourism industry is now faced with a lot of competition and thus businesses need to keep track of what their competitors are doing. Social network sites allow businesses to

keep track of their competitors' activities, that is, what are they doing and what have they not done. This presents the business with greater market opportunities.

2.6 Impacts of Online Social Network Sites on Consumer Behavior and Tourism

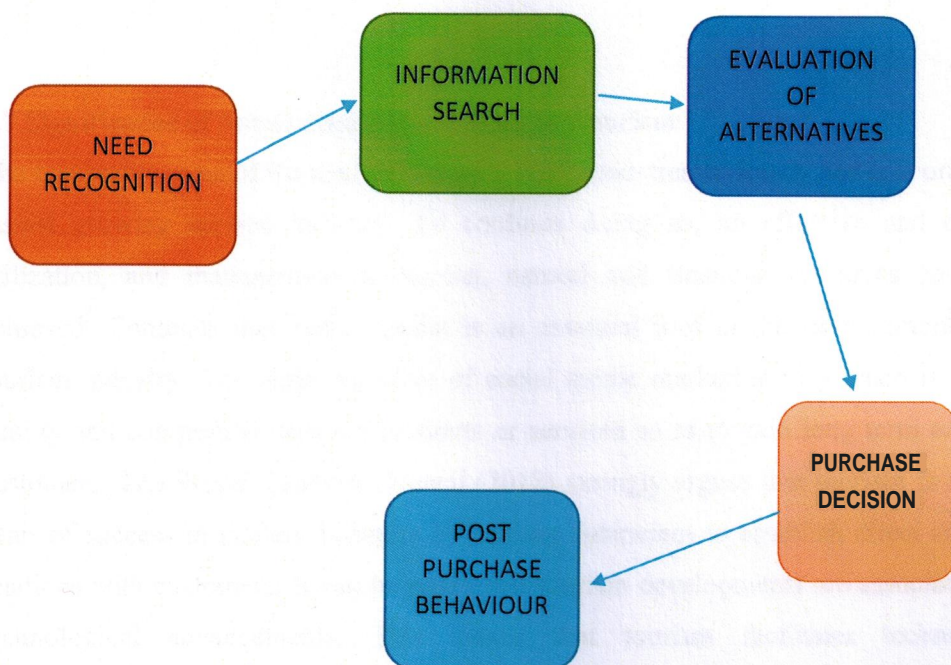
Consumer behavior can be defined as the process involved when individuals or groups, select, purchase, services, ideas or experience to satisfy needs and desires (Solomon, 2011). Various models have been developed to explain consumer behavior and these include the stimulus response and the buying process models (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model highlights both the internal and external factors, and personal characteristics of the buyer that contribute to the final buying decision of a customer. It attempts to give a thorough understanding of consumer behavior. According to this model social network sites falls under marketing and other stimuli while buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions process fall into customer's black box. This model shows that it is marketing and other stimuli, and the customer's black box that influence a response. Such response is evidenced by product choice, brand choice, purchase timing and purchase amount. When applied to tourism, it shows that social network sites must initially alter buyer's characteristics and buyer's decisions (customer's black box) and it is then that these tourist's characteristics and decisions that cause a response in product, brand and purchasing. Thus the effectiveness of social on tourism is assumed to be dependent on the ability of marketing and other stimuli to influence the tourist's black box.

This model does not show the exact nature of the relationship between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box. In addition, it lacks empirical support and thus the magnitude of impact of between marketing and other stimuli, and the tourist's black box on tourism cannot be established with preciseness.

The buying process model (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). This model is a step by step illustration of the actual buying process. When applied to tourism, this model assumes that tourists first develop a need. Such a need will cause tourists to look for information regarding the tourism products and services they need to satisfy their needs. The diagrammatic explanation is shown in figure 2.2.

The model further states that when tourists gather the necessary information, they will now use the acquired information to evaluate the available alternatives. It is after evaluation that the tourist will then make a purchasing decision. The model also highlights that after consumption of the product there is post purchase behavior. Such behavior reflects a tourist satisfaction and reaction from acquisition of the tourism product or service.

Figure 22 The Buying Process Model.



Source: Adapted from Kotler and Armstrong (2004)

This model has an important bearing in explaining the impact of social network sites on consumer behavior (tourist behavior) in tourism because it outlines the role played by social network sites in the buying process. Thus according to this model, social media is used to search for information about tourist activities, destinations, hotels etc. Social network sites are also seen playing an important of providing such information. However, it does not consider others issues such as credibility of the information and the perceived risk associated with the media. The model does not show the relationship between social network sites and tourism. The buying process model has an advantage

over the stimulus model in the sense that the buying process model considers post purchase behavior.

Post behavior is important because it determines whether tourists will continue to purchase tourism products and services or not and how much more or less of the product or service they will continue to buy. It also outlines the importance of tourism service providers in meeting tourists' perceptions or expectations. When a purchased tourist product or service fails to meet tourists' perceptions, tourists may cut down their expenditure spent on tourist products or services (post purchase behavior).

2.7 Significance of Social Media Marketing in Tourism

The competitiveness of the tourism industry has grown tremendously and it is one of the fastest growing service industry. To continue doing so, an effective and efficient utilization, and management of human, natural and financial resources has to be achieved. Contends that social media is an essential tool in the development of the tourism industry. The main objective of social media marketing in tourism is to offer quality and competitive tourism products or services so as to gain long term and loyal customers. The World Tourism Council (2012) strongly argues that tourism is now the heart of success in modern business by helping businesses to establish direct and good relations with customers. It can be noted that tourism developments are associated with technological advancements. This means that tourism facilitates technological advancements. This was reinforced by Jashi (2013) who outlined that there is a unilateral relationship between internet penetration and online bookings. His suggestion pointed to high internet penetration and the high usage of credit cards. This was further supported by Hope-Johnstone (2010) who strongly asserts that about 3 billion of the world population now conducts electronic transactions through the internet and via mobile phones. The most known and effective social media networks for marketing tourism are Facebook, Travelshake, Twitter, Podcasts and YouTube. Thus in order to attract huge numbers of customers around the world, the tourism team needs to utilize proper social media tools that can effectively and efficiently transmit the right message and engage the right users.

2.8 Tourism Product

A tourism product can be defined as a bundle of activities, services and benefits that contribute to the entire tourism experience (Bich, 2014). The tourism product is divided into three; the product that tourist think they are going to buy, the actual product that tourist buy and the augmented product which are the benefits provided by the suppliers. The effectiveness of social network sites in influencing tourism can be measured by its ability to impact the three dimensions. Thus social network sites must sell tourism products in the most appealing and attractive manner that can lure potential customers and cause existing customers to continue to buy tourism products. Apart from advertised products, tourism destinations must also provide augmented products. Research has shown that it is augmented products that creates customer loyalty and keeps them continuing buying the firm's products. Tourism products advertised on social network sites must at least match the actual product purchased by tourists.

2.9 Empirical Literature Review

Jashi (2015) examined the importance of social network sites in tourism with emphasis on Georgia. The undertaking of the study by Jashi (2015) stemmed from the assertion that significant effort has been put on analyzing the impact of social network sites on tourism. Results from the study showed that social media marketing is of paramount importance in tourism. Recommendations given showed strong support for the utilization of social media marketing in tourism.

Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) undertook a study to identify the linkage between social network sites and tourism. This was based on arguments which revealed that social network sites are playing significant roles in tourism. The study identified that the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism are focusing on tourism practices, promotion, decision making and providing information. This reinforced study results by Jashi (2015) which established that social media is an important tool in tourism marketing. Deductions made from the study revealed that the role of social network sites in tourism has not been sufficiently examined. Hence there is need to

examine the role of social network sites in tourism in various aspects such as business activities and trends, individual behaviour and other social attributes.

Gohil (2015) analyzed both the impacts and roles of social network sites in tourism in Madhya Pradesh, India. This study sought to examine how the informational role of social media impacts tourism. It is in this regard that the study outlined that social network sites can be utilized to promote tourism information. Further results from the study revealed that social media is an important tool for strategic positioning and branding tourism globally.

Rathonyi (2013) undertook a study to examine the social network sites influence on tourism with regards to University of Debrecen students. The study stemmed from the assertion that students seek tourism information to avoid uncertainty. Study results revealed that social network sites are important in accessing both information and purchasing opportunities. The study by Rathonyi (2013) focused on analyzing the impact of social network sites on both aspects of supply and demand.

In it in this regard that this study will employ an amalgamative approach of the above mentioned studies to examine the roles of social network sites in tourism. Using ideas provided by Rathonyi (2013), this study will examine the roles of social network sites from both the supply and demand aspects, that is, from both business and individual person's perspectives. In addition, insights by Jashi (2015), Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) and Gohil (2015) will be used to examine the informational innovative, promotional and competitive (supply and demand aspects) roles of social network sites in tourism. These roles have an impact on the number of tourists visiting a particular place (tourism sale volume), their behavior in terms of visiting choices and amount of money spent on tourism products. This study will therefore examine the impact of informative, promotional, innovative and competitive roles of social network sites on tourism sales volume using information collected from business tourists visiting Erbil hotels in Kurdistan region of Iraq. It in this regard that using this insights a following conceptual framework will be utilized to formulate a methodological tool that will be used to approach the roles of social network sites in tourism.

Figure 2.3 Conceptual Framework



2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the underlying theories and concepts surrounding social networks sites and tourism. The theories reviewed include the social presence theory, media richness theory and the flow theory. The social presence theory was found to suffer from changes in context and that it neglects other mediums of communication. It was also established that social presence changes with time. On the other hand, this chapter identified that the media richness theory is ineffective in explaining email usage and does not consider feasibility, convenience and affordability factors in explaining how people chose social network sites in tourism. The flow theory had non behavioral shortfalls. This chapter also looked at travel 2.0 and tourism, web 2.0 and tourism, trends in social network sites and their implications on tourism, uses of social network sites in tourism, impacts of social network sites on consumer behavior in tourism and the tourism product. The above literature showed inconclusive gaps in theories and empirical literature and it attempted to fill in the literature gaps.

CHAPTER ID

MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The main objective of the designed questionnaire is to determine the role of online social media network sites on tourism in Erbil. As a result, the dependent variable will be represented by social media usage while independent variables are informational, promotional, competitive, innovative and increasing sales volume roles.

Table 3.1 Model Expression

	Informational role (X₁)
1	How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites
2	What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks
3	Use social media for socializing purposes
4	Respond to comments
5	Ask or answer an tourism question
	Promotional role (X₂)
1	To market existing tourism products
2	To promote new tourism products
3	Expand tourism clientele base
4	Enter new tourism markets
5	Makes the tourism corporation to be known
	Competitive role (X₃)
1	Gain more tourism market share
2	Reduces the level of tourism competition to a tourism firm
3	Helps in acquiring tourism information that competitors cannot get access
4	Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm

5	Helps build corporate tourism legacy
	Innovative role (X4)
1	Makes it cheaper to access tourism information
2	Tourists can get instant feedback
3	It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty
4	Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose
5	Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information
	Increase in tourism sales volume (TSv)
1	Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks
2	Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products
3	It results in tourism brand loyalty
4	Safeguards the tourism company's reputation
5	Improves tourists' perception of the tourist destination

This study used adopted a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009). In this study Monachesi et al (2009) focused on supporting knowledge discovery in an eLearning environment having social components. They found that about 50% of the respondents use instant messaging and that the number of respondent who use forums and mailing lists was high compared to other online communication and stood at 45%. His questionnaire format is important to this study because it gives a detailed description of how people use online communication.

This study however made additional changes to a questionnaire by Monachesi et al. (2009) because it mainly focuses on the extent to which people use online communication. This questionnaire also had limitations of being centered on information systems in eLearning and hence does not fully explain the role of online social network sites on tourism in Erbil.

CHAPTER IV

OVERVIEW OF HOSPITALITY IN KRG OF IRAQ

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the general overview of Kurdistan region of Iraq, developments in online network sites and how they are influencing tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In addition, it provides an insight as to the roles online social networks are playing on tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This chapter seeks to identify opportunities and threats that are posed by online social networks and how the Kurdistan tourism officials can position themselves to benefit from changing trends in online social networks. It also looks at tourism structures including tourist destinations, sites and attractions.

4.2 Overview of Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Kurdistan is an autonomous region located in the Northern part of Iraq. The Iraq's constitution recognizes Kurdistan as an independent region. Generally Kurds are of Indo-European origin and most of the people speak Kurdish while Arabic and Turkmeni languages are also gaining popularity. The population comprises of Armenian, Arab, and Turkmen groups. Kurdistan also contains various religious groups which includes Muslim, Christians, and Yazidi. Below is a geographical map of Kurdistan.

Fig 4.1 Geographical Map of Kurdistan of Iraq



Source: BBC

4.2.1 Subdivision

Kurdistan is divided into lower and upper Kurdistan. Upper Kurdistan is composed of northern, northeastern and northwestern parts. This region stretches from Lake Urmia to the west of Amed. Lower Kurdistan is composed of Southern Kurdistan and the main cities are Erbil and Kirkuk.

4.2.2 Geography

It is estimated that Kurdistan covers about 12 000 km² in Syria, 65 000 km² in Iraq, 125 000 km² in Iran and 190 000 km² which stretches in Turkey. There are six governorates in Kurdistan and three of them are under the Kurdish government while the rest are under the control of Syrian Kurdistan and Iranian Kurdistan. The south eastern part of Turkey contains about 15 to 20 million Kurds (Clive, 2007).

4.2.3 Population

According to Kurdistan's regional government, the Kurdish population is estimated to be 52 million and this figure comprises of Chaldeans, Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians and Arabs. The regional government further revealed that the median age is above 20 years with 36% constituting an age group of 0-14 years and 4% of the population being over 63 years (krg.org).

4.2.4 Climate

The climate in Kurdistan can be said to be an extreme continental climate. That is, too cold in winter and too hot in summer. Rainfall patterns vary with regions. For example, in the high plateaus, precipitation ranges from 700mm to 3000mm a year while plains it ranges from 200mm to 400mm a year.

4.2.5 Petroleum and Mineral Resources

Kurdistan contains one of the sixth largest oil reserves in the world and it is estimated that the oil reserves in Kurdistan are 45 billion barrels with more than 45 oil sites. It also contains associated and gas reserves which are more than 2 800km³ (Hawlergov, 2013). A notable number of companies are undertaking mining activities in Kurdistan and these include Genel Energy, Exxon, Chevron, Talisman Energy, Marathon Oil, Total, Hunt Oil and Gulf Keystone Petroleum. There are other mineral resources such as copper, coal, limestone, zinc, marble, iron and gold.

4.2.6 Natural Resources

There are a lot of rivers and mountains in Kurdistan and these contribute to the natural to its beauty. The mountains of Kurdistan are characterized by snow fall and heavy rain which provide water to other rivers such as Kura and Khabur. Furthermore, because of the rivers' altitudes which are 3000m to 4000m above sea level, the rivers are a source of energy. Dukandam and Lake Sulaymani are major sources of tourists' attractions in Kurdistan.

Mountains are however important geographically and are a symbol of the Kurdish life. There is a common saying which says that 'Kurds have no friends but the mountains'. The famous mountains include Zagros, Shingar, Gara, and Matini.

4.3 Tourism in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Tourism in Kurdistan has been on an upward trend irrespective of the source of the visitors. This is illustrated in table 4.3. This is evidenced by forecasts made by Lababedi (2012) who showed that in 2012 the tourism sector in Kurdistan grew by 4.9% of GDP and projected that in 2013 and 2014, Kurdistan's tourism would grow by 5% of GDP

and 5.5% of GDP respectively. Tourist attractions in Kurdistan are found in three major cities namely Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimani. These provinces have a lot of tourist destination within and around them. Below is a detailed description of these provinces.

Table 4.1 Tourist places in Erbil province

Tourism resort	Description
Sami Abdul Rahman Park	It is built on a Ba'ath military base and comprises of a large municipal park.
Qaysari bazaar	This is a traditional market which sells food, household goods, textiles, gold and other souvenirs
Khanzad castle	Its period of origin relates to the Soran period
Sheik Chooli minaret	It is found in the western part of Erbil and was constructed by Sultan Mudhaffarudeen. This site has its origins from 543-586AD.
Shaqlawa resort	It is common for selling fresh produce and a good tourist destination.
Gali Ali Beg	Is a common for recreational activities and has a waterfall.
Bekhal Resort	A popular resort which is close to Gali Ali Beg.

Table 4.2 Tourist places in Dohuk

Tourism resort	Description
Amedi:	<p>Amedi comprises of beautiful mountains and valleys and it is ranked number 21 in the world. It is one of the beautiful cities in the world.</p> <p>The total population in Amedi is about 9 000.</p> <p>This place also includes Amadia Citadel and Sulav resort which are common tourist destinations.</p>
Saint IthLiaha Church:	It known as the oldest church and is assumed to have been built in 500AD.



Table 4.3 Tourist places in Suleimani

Tourism resort	Description
Dokan Lake	It similar to Darbandikhan Lake and has restaurants, leisure facilities and cabins that make the place more enjoyable.
Darbandikhan dam	This place has restaurants, leisure facilities and cabins that make the place more enjoyable.
Ahmadaawa resort	It more active in summer because of its orchards, waterfalls and springs.
Suleimani Museum	It is a richest museum with houses that are more than 1000 years old. Below is table showing the number of hotels, motels, tourism villages, beds, and restaurants and cafes in Kurdistan region from the year 2007-2014.

Table 4.4 The number of hotels, motels, tourism villages, beds, and restaurants and cafes in Kurdistan region from the year 2007-2014

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Hotels	106	166	131	168	202	259	314	385
motels	49	53	72	96	128	168	206	248
Tourism villages	29	33	37	42	44	54	72	75
No. of beds	10451	11363	13480	22533	26811	31634	34954	44504
cafes	129	151	233	305	338	482	565	643

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

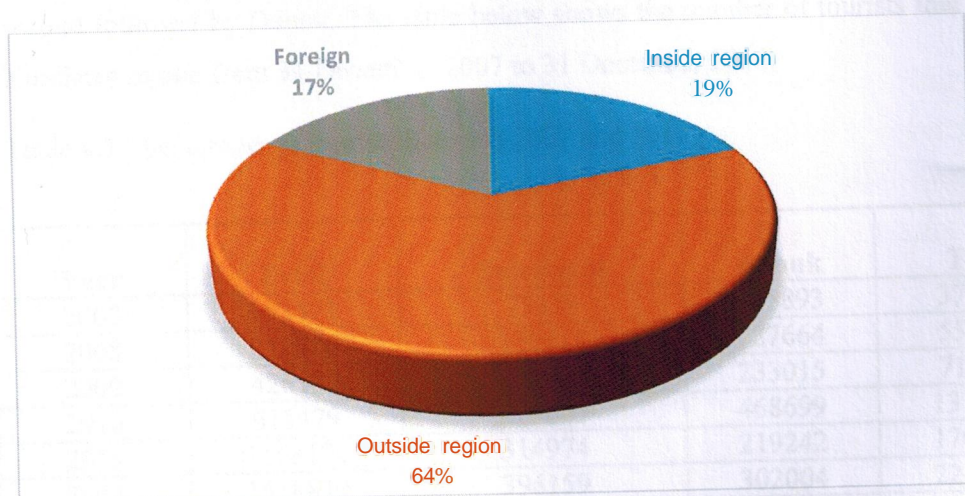
The number of tourists both domestic and foreign has been on an upward trend except in 2014 where it declined amid of political fears. This is shown below in table 4.5.

Table 4.5 The number of guests who visited Kurdistan Region between 2007-2014

Year	Inside KRG	Outside KRG	Foreign	Total
2007	137118	186420	53859	377397
2008	190230	285740	82890	558860
2009	209611	44919	13254	791345
2010	329536	789760	194545	1313845
2011	315161	1149738	237491	1702390
2012	313144	1470138	433711	221699
2013	459847	1933544	558636	2952027
2014	273326	1000726	255346	1529434

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

Fig 4.2 Classification of the total number of tourists that visited Kurdistan in 2007



Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

From figure 4.2 it can be deduced that the highest number of tourists who visited Kurdistan Region of Iraq came from other parts of Iraq(outside region) and accounted for 64% of the total number of tourists who visited KRG. Foreign tourists, that is, those that came from countries such as USA, Germany, Syria, Turkey etc., accounted for 17% of the total number of tourists who visited Kurdistan. This was followed by domestic

tourism (inside region) which accounted for 19% of the total number of tourists. This diagrammatic explanation entails that much emphasis is needed to promote domestic tourism and enhance the effectiveness of current policies to lure foreign tourists.

Table 4.6 The total number of hotels in Erbil, Sulaimani and Dohuk with and without stars

	5 *	4*	3*	2 *	1 *	Without stars	total
Erbil	12	36	59	193	164	15	485
Sulaimani	6	12	42	62	66	0	188
Dohuk	7	9	30	32	50	0	128
TOTAL	28	56	130	229	244	15	704

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

The highest number of high star hotels was recorded in Erbil with Suleimani being second followed by Dohuk. The table below shows the number of tourists that came to Kurdistan region from 31 December 2007 to 31 December 2014.

Table 4.7 The number of tourists between 2007 and 2014

Year	Erbil	Suleimani	Dohuk	Total
2007	153571	77933	145893	377397
2008	211780	119416	227664	558860
2009	426398	131932	233015	719345
2010	615479	229663	468699	1313841
2011	1168174	314974	219242	1702390
2012	1518830	396159	302004	2216993
2013	2029623	477990	444414	2952027
2014	937591	362213	229630	1529434

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

The lowest number of tourist that came to Kurdistan region of Iraq was recorded in 2014 and this was for all the three cities with totals of 937 591,362 213 and 229 630 respectively. The highest percentage increase in the number of tourist that came to

Kurdistan region was registered in 2010 and stood at 60%. On the other hand, lowest number was registered in 2011 and 2012 and stood at 30%. This is expressed in table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8 Growth rate of tourists visiting KRG between 2007 and 2014

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
No. of tourists	377397	558860	791345	1313841	1702390	2216993	2952027	1529434
O/o		48%	42%	66%	30%	30%	33%	-48%

Source: Kurdistan tourism authority (2015)

It can be deduced that the highest growth rate in tourist visiting KRG was experienced in 2010 with a growth rate of 66%. The year 2014 experienced a significant decline in tourists visiting KRG and this is because of the war that had taken its toll in Iraq.

4.4 Online Social Networks in Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Social network sites have not greatly evolved in Kurdistan. However, other network sites such as Twitter have greatly taken form in Kurdistan. A number of significant users of twitter have been reported to be journalists, activists, students and politicians. Dizayee (2014) reported that Twitter user numbers have grown significantly in Kurdistan region of Iraq as many people are now using the social network for so many reasons which include awareness, protests, getting access to information etc. Twitter. Kurds has emerged and is now being used to provide information especially concerning specific issues of major concern. However, more people in Kurdistan are now using Facebook and Instagram.

In addition, there is now what is known as the Kurdish Social Media Gathering (KSMG) which was organized through Twitter. Live newsfeed streams and social media feeds are also growing as they are being included in worldwide forums and conferences. For example, the Sulaimani Forum organized by the University of Iraq which was seen on Twitter feed. Facebook user numbers have also increased in Kurdistan and this is

because is being used to keep in touch with family and friends. This has seen the formation of a group on Facebook called 'Largest Kurdish Community on Facebook'. This group has brought together Kurdish and other people from different parts of the world and established links for collecting ideas and helping each other information wise and physically.

Of great importance social network sites have become a way of communicating with Kurds in the diaspora. This is evidenced by a new social network site called 2dul.com formed by Zawen Aarif and has more than 4 000 followers and 100 members. In conclusion, social network sites can be said to have brought together people on a large scale and thus 'making the Kurdish world smaller'.

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have focused on literature on social network sites. This chapter focuses on how the study was conducted. This chapter will dwell on research design, population, research instruments, and data collection and presentation procedures. The main emphasis of this study is gather concrete evidence that enables us to answer the research questions and make sound recommendations.

5.2 Research Design

A multiple regression model will be used to determine the nature and significance of the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism and this will be coupled by the use of SPSS. The multiple regression model will be of the following form;

$$SN = f_0 + f_1 X_1 + f_2 X_2 + f_3 X_3 + f_4 X_4 + f_5 X_5 + \mu \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where; SN is social network sites , f_0 , f_1 , f_2 , f_3 , f_4 and f_5 are parameters, X_1 , X_2 , X_3 , X_4 and X_5 are informational role, promotional role, competitive role, innovative role and increasing sales volume role respectively and μ is the error term. The collected data will be presented in the form of tables, charts and diagrams. Data analysis will also encompass descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Cronbach's alpha will be used to determine the reliability of the collected data.

5.2.1 Definition of Variables

5.2.1.1 Informational Roles

Assertions provided by Gohil (2015) outlined that the informational role of social network sites entails the ability to offer the required details pertaining to the desired subject matter. It is in this regard that there is a unilateral relationship between the

informational role of social network and tourism. Thus expected results will be compared with the study results obtained by Gohil (2015).

5.2.2 Promotional Role

Promotion in this study can be defined as the enhancement of awareness about an idea or product through activities such as advertising and other marketing campaigns. Zeng and Geritsen (2014) established that social network can be used to enhance promotional objectives or activities in tourism. Thus a positive relationship between the promotional role of tourism and social network is therefore anticipated.

5.2.3 Competitive Role

Competitiveness can be defined as the potential ability of a firm or an individual to gain an increase in the quality of products offered, number of customers or sales revenue attributed to a particular activity. Thus in this study competitiveness of tourism can be alternatively be described as the ability of tourism individuals or firms to offer quality tourism products, number of tourists or tourism sales revenue attributed to a particular tourism activity. It can be deduced from this definition that a positive association exists between the competitive role of social network and tourism and this can be supported by study results by Zeng and Geritsen (2014).

5.2.4 Innovative Role

This refers to the ability of an individual or firm to positively change the way of doing activities through the use of efficient and cost effective technological systems. Innovation is therefore regarded as the catalyst that positively influences organizational activities by improving the usage of input materials and the output produced. In this regard, Gohil (2015) postulated that social network does significantly results in major improvements in tourism activities. Hence a positive relationship between the innovative role of social network and tourism is anticipated.

5.2.5 Tourism Sales Volume (TSv)

Tourism sales volume in this regard refers to the volume of sales that are attributed to tourism activities. In this study, unilateral association between social network sites and tourism is anticipated in line with the study by Gohil (2015). Social network usage in tourism is greatly attributed to the endeavor to increase tourism sales. Hence, an increase

in tourism sales through social network usage will cause an increase in social network usage.

5.3 Population

A population can be defined as an entire pool of study from which a sample is drawn. In this study our population is business tourists that use 5-star and 4-star hotels in Erbil. The reason behind the selection of these 5-star and 4-star hotels is that they have websites and applications for reservations and a majority of tourists book these hotels. The Kurdistan Tourism Authority (2015) reports that more tourists preferred 5 and 4-stars hotels because of the availability of better information communication technology infrastructure. In addition, table 4.7 has shown that the highest number of tourists visited Erbil and totaled 937 591. Thus the study will draw its attention towards Erbil. However, because of the magnitude of the population, it is difficult to undertake a study of the population of that magnitude and hence stratified random sampling will be used to select the population.

Stratified random sampling is defined as the division of significantly large population into smaller groups known as strata so as to conveniently undertake a study of the desired population. It is in this regard that the total number of hotels (see table 4.6) in Erbil will be used as strata or sample size. The KTA (2016) asserts that the total number of hotels in Erbil stood at 485 in 2015. It is in this regard that 485 will be utilized as a strata and hence 485 questionnaires were distributed to business tourist residing in 4-star and 5-star hotels in Erbil (see table 6.2). Questions were therefore asked if the guest is a business tourist or not before handing over the questionnaire.

5.4 Data Collection Methods

This study used both primary and secondary data and outlines the methods that were used to collect the data. Secondary data included publications, records and other documented information about the number of tourists that came to Kurdistan, revenue collected from tourist activities, investment expenditure on tourism in KRG, social network usage and development statistics etc. The researcher will travel to the relevant places such as the ministry of tourism and ministry of information and communication

technology in KRG to acquire the needed data. This will also involve access the internet as another means of retrieving the required data. Primary data was obtained on a face to face basis using questionnaires.

5.4.1 Secondary Data

Secondary data such as figures, tables and charts will be used before data analysis to support the issues at hand and help provide further details about the role of social network sites on tourism. The advantage of using secondary data is that it is readily available and is cheaper to access.

5.4.2 Primary Data

Primary data refers to data that is collected for the first time by the researcher for use in a research project. In this study primary data was collected through questionnaires. The questionnaires were given out to business tourists in Erbil who use internet sites to access, utilize and send tourism information online. The obtained questionnaire responses will be analyzed using a statistical package called SPSS. The questionnaire is shown in appendix I.

5.4.2.1 Questionnaire Design

Having established the research objectives and questions, a questionnaire matching such objectives was designed for distribution. The designed questionnaire is generally aimed at identifying the roles of social network on tourism. Four roles of social network sites were identified to be informational, promotional, competitive and innovative.

Section A of the questionnaire measures the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the study will attempt to identify how these demographic characteristics determine social network usage. As a result, will try to relate and establish how social network usage in tourism is affected by these demographic characteristics.

The second group of questions seeks to identify the types of social networks sites available and determine their frequency of usage. This is essential because by identifying the types and frequency of usage, providers of tourism products will be in a better position to structure their goods and services in line with the opportunities being posed by the types and frequency of usage of social networks sites.

The third group of questions deals with the roles of social network sites in tourism. Thus this study will be mainly centered on questions from the second and third groups.

The dependent variables will be obtained from the third and fourth groups of questions while the independent variables will be obtained from the first, second and third groups of questions.

The questionnaires included both open and closed questions. Closed questions are questions that can be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' or very short phrase. Closed questions will involve asking respondents if they use social networks sites to access travel information, their gender and sex etc. On the other hand, open questions are questions that require more than one word answers. In this study open questions will involving asking questions for example such as what is your favorite online travel site and why?, and what factors do use when choosing an online social network site to look for travel information? The researcher used both closed and open questions because closed questions help the respondent to complete the questionnaire quickly while open questions allow the researcher to get more detailed information about a the role of online social networks on tourism in K.R.G. Moreover, it was done with the concepts of precision and clarity. The advantages of using a questionnaire are given as follows;

- They are cheaper to administer to respondents.
- They do not contain much bias compared to interviews.
- They are convenient to respondents who may choose to fill them at their own convenience as such they have a high rate of accuracy.

However questionnaires have the following disadvantages;

- They are slow and hence the response rate is slow.
- Long responses are possible.
- One can judge the quality of response.

5.4.2.2 Questionnaire Pretesting

Pretesting was done so as to ensure that the respondents understand questions asked and to check the response rate. 15 questionnaires were used for pretesting and the respondents managed to respond positively to the pretest and were satisfied with both

the objectives of the survey and its clarity. Having seen that the respondents were satisfied with the survey, the researcher went on to administer more questionnaires so as to proceed with the data collection and analysis process.

5.4.2.3 Questionnaire Distribution

The questionnaires were distributed in person and dates and time were agreed upon for collection of the questionnaires. This was useful because it made sure that the questionnaires were delivered to the correct respondents and would be collected when the respondents are done completing them.

5.5 Problems Encountered in Data Gathering

The major hindrance encountered was the unavailability of official statistics from the period 1999-2006. This is evidenced by a written document reference number 245 dated 4 February 2016 obtained from the Kurdistan's General Board of Tourism (GBT). The request for data was made on 5 November 2015 and only managed to get a response confirming the unavailability of data on the 4th February 2016 (see appendix 2). In addition, some of the respondents took time to respond citing busy schedules, in addition, some questionnaires were returned with unfilled spaces and this to some extent affected the final response rate. This also affects the study's results and recommendations.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has laid down the procedures that were used to gather the required data, present and analyze it. Time constraints were encountered in collecting the questionnaires. The collected responses were analyzed and organized into tables, charts and diagrams. The following chapter is a description of the data analysis and presentation procedures that were used.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Response Rate

The research draws its attention on analyzing business tourists who visit Erbil and utilize social networks sites to access tourism products. A total of 485 questionnaires were distributed to business tourists residing in Erbil hotels and 470 questionnaires were returned which represents a response rate of 96.91%. Using cut off points for response rates established by Njui, (2013), it can be noted that a 50% response rate is standard rate upon which deductions can start to be made. On the other hand, a response rate of 60% is considered better while that which is above 70% is considered to be an excellent response rate. This therefore exhibits that our response rate is relatively high and hence the probability that the obtained results will contain a high level of reliability is very high. The response rate information is shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Response Rate

	Frequency	Percentage
Filled questionnaires	470	96.91%
Unreturned questionnaire	15	3.09%
Total	485	100

From the 485 questionnaires that were distributed, the following decomposition of the distribution process was made;

Table 6.2 Decomposition of the questionnaire distribution

HOTEL NAME	HOTEL STARS	QUESTIONNAIRES DISTRIBUTED
Rotana	5	10
Divan	5	7
Van royal	5	11
Tangram	5	11
Shaqlawaw international	5	8
Sipan	5	10
Grand swiss	5	8
Dedeaman	5	13
Ozbaankawa royal	5	10
Erbil international	5	9
Cristal erbil	5	8
khanzad	5	11
Darin plaza	4	8
Grand plaza	4	9
Canyon	4	7
Altinsaray	4	10
Banoj	4	11
Bloumecary	4	11
Monaco palace	4	8
View	4	12
Grand istanbul	4	7
Grand Erbil	4	10
Helindeville	4	8
Erbil tower	4	14
Jiger palace	4	9
ABN international	4	12
Palma palace	4	8
Hayali suits	4	11
Ktina	4	11
Sky Erbil	4	9
Shahin palace	4	12
Erbil quartz	4	7
Classy Erbil	4	10
Wlat	4	8
Mariana	4	11
Best in Erbil	4	12
Capital Erbil	4	17
Altinmalk plaza	4	13
Ararat Erbil	4	9

Fiori	4	14
Jouhyana	4	7
Lamassu	4	9
Seever	4	12
Karwansaray	4	10
Fomix Erbil	4	8
Aljawahry	4	11
Chwarchra	4	9

6.2 General Background of the Respondents

Out of the 470 questionnaires that were retrieved, the general background of the respondents is shown in table 6.3.

Table 6.3 General background of the respondents

Item	Variable	Description	Responses	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	251	53.4%
		Female	219	46.6%
		Total	470	100%
2	Age	18-23	70	14.9%
		24-29	114	24.3%
		30-35	119	25.3%
		36-41	71	15.1%
		42+	96	20.4%
		Total	470	100%
3	Marital status	Single	161	34.3%
		Married	309	65.7%
		Total	470	100%
4	Level of education	Secondary	31	6.6%
		Undergraduate	168	35.7%
		Graduate	192	40.9%
		Post graduate	64	13.6%
		Phd	15	3.2%
		Total	470	100%

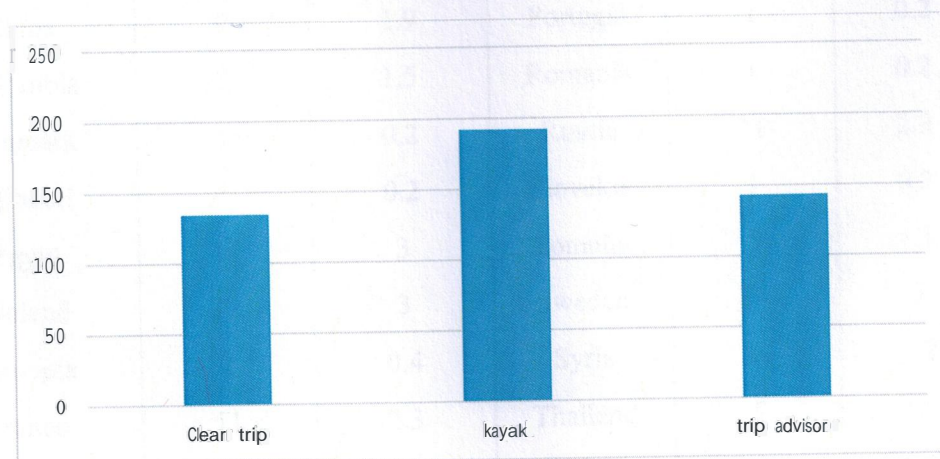
From the table 6.3 it can be observed that from the 470 questionnaires that were retrieved, 53.4% of the respondents were male while 46.6% of the respondents were female. It can further be revealed that 14.9% of these respondents were between the age group of 18-23 years, 24.3% were between the age group of 24-29 years, 25.3% were between the age group of 30-35 years, 15.1% were between the age group of 36-41 years and 20.4% were above the age group of 42 years. 34.3% of the 470 respondents were single while 65.7% respondents were married. The highest level of education recorded among the tourists is graduate level and 3.2% of the respondents had a Ph.D. 168 tourists had an undergraduate degree while 31 tourists were qualified up to secondary level.

Table 6.4 Number of tourists with children

Item	Variable	Description	Responses	Percentage
5	Do you have Children	No children	249	53.0%
		Have children	221	47.0%

Table 6.4 exhibits that 249 tourists had no children while 221 tourists had children. This is of paramount importance because the number of tourists visiting a country can increase with the number of tourists who have children.

Figure 6.1 Use of tourism applications among business guests who visited Erbil



Source: Excel computation based on questionnaire data

Amongst the three widely used travel sites, it was discovered that most business tourists strongly prefer to use Kayak in making travel arrangements such as hotel and flight bookings. The number of tourists who used Kayak is 192 followed by TripAdvisor with 143. ClearTrip was ranked last with a usage of 134 tourists. Implications are therefore implies that more informatiofi Was sought especially concerning flights and hence we can expect more tourists to be or having to planned to visit Erbil.

Table 65 Number of business tourists who visited Erbil by their country of origin

Country	Number of tourists	Percentage %	Country	Number of tourists	Percentage %
Algeria	3	0.6	Italy	7	1.5
Philippines	8	1.7	Morocco	11	2.3
Portugal	1	0.2	Moldova	4	0.9
Romania	1	0.2	Jordan	14	3
Russia	11	2.3	Lebanon	16	3.4
Slovakia	1	0.2	Nepal	8	1.7
Somalia	5	1.1	Netherlands	1	0.4
Australia	6	1.3	Nigeria	4	0.9
Switzerland	5	1.1	Norway	6	1.3
Canada	11	2.3	Pakistan	6	1.3
China	9	1.9	Portugal	1	0.2
Colombia	7	1.5	Romania	1	0.2
Denmark	1	0.2	Russia	11	2.3
Djibouti	1	0.2	Slovakia	1	0.2
Egypt	14	3	Somalia	5	1.1
Finland	12	3	Sweden	14	3
Ethiopia	2	0.4	Syria	34	7.2
France	11	2.3	Thailand	5	1.1
Georgia	16	3.4	Turkey	39	8.3

Germany	17	3.6	UAE	7	1.5
Holland	16	3.4	UK	29	6.2
Hungary	1	0.2	Ukraine	6	1.3
India	9	2	USA	58	12
Iran	21	4.5	Yemen	4	0.9
Spain	3	0.6			

The highest number of tourist who visited Erbil came from USA with a total of 58 followed by Turkey with 39. Other leading nations with the significant numbers of tourists that visited Erbil are UK, Syria, Lebanon, Georgia and Holland with total of 30, 20, 16, 16 and 16 respectively.

Figure 6.2 Business tourists' social network sites usage per day

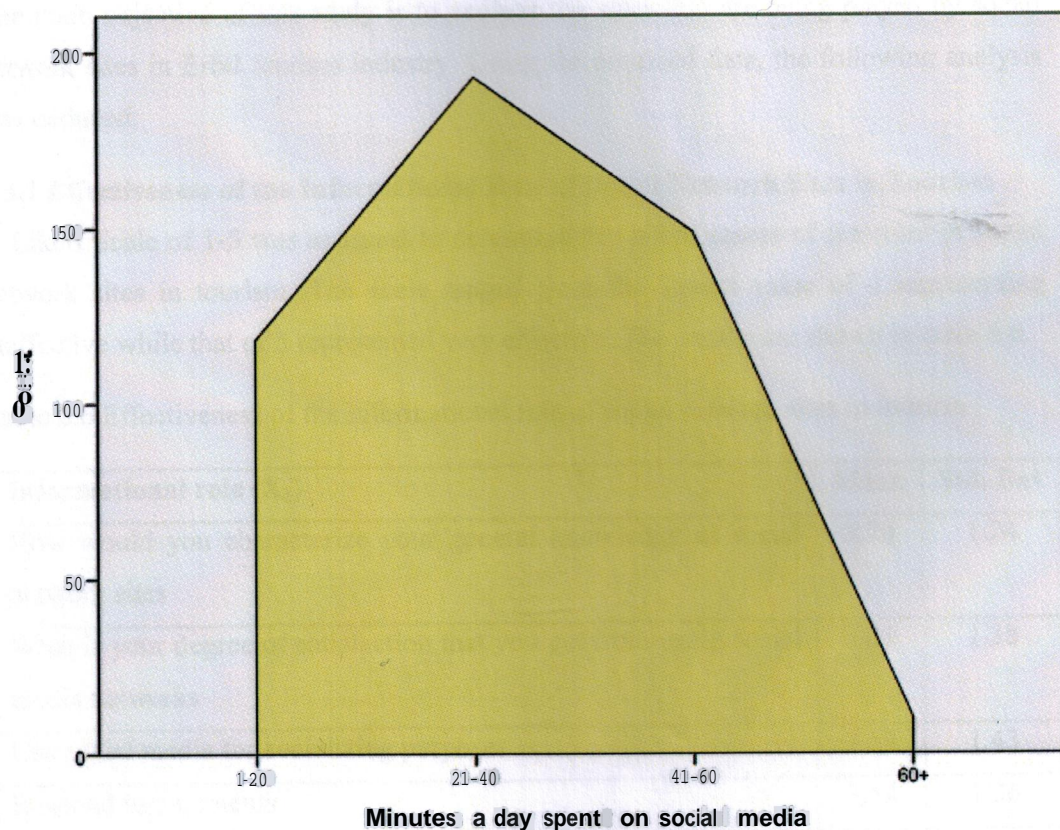


Figure 6.2 exhibits social network sites usage in terms of minutes spent a day on social network sites. Figure 6.2 reveals that a significant number of tourists spent 21-40 minutes a day on social network sites followed by 41-60 minutes. A high usage of social network sites entails a change in tourists' behavior in terms of accessing tourism information. This therefore implies that business tourists are spending much time a day accessing tourism websites in search of tourism related information. Such social network sites daily usage intensity also implies that the related social network sites are either cost effective or time saving. It also implies that tourists are now preferring convenient ways of accessing information which can guarantee them efficiency and effectiveness. Failure to have social network sites by tourism suppliers therefore can imply a loss of potential customers.

6.3 Effectiveness of the Roles Social Network Sites in Tourism in Erbil

The main objective of this study is to analyze the roles that are being played by social network sites in Erbil tourism industry. Using the obtained data, the following analysis was deduced;

6.3.1 Effectiveness of the Informational Role of Social Network Sites in Tourism

A Likert Scale of 1-5 was assigned to determine the effectiveness of the roles of social network sites in tourism. The scale ranged from the lowest value of 1 representing ineffective while that of 5 represented very effective. The results are shown in table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Effectiveness of the informational role of social network sites in tourism

Informational role (X ₁)	Mean	Std. Dev
How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites	3.78	1.24
What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks	3.61	1.38
Use social media for socializing purposes	3.53	1.43
Respond to comments	3.54	1.36
Ask or answer an tourism question	3.84	1.26

It can be noted from table 6.6 that all the responses aimed at assessing the informational role of social network sites had mean scores that revolved around 4. The mean score of 4 resembles effective on the Likert Scale. Though the usage of social network sites to ask or answer tourism questions had a highest mean score of 3.84, it still falls under the range of effective on the Likert Scale. Generally it can be observed that all the elements of the informational have relatively almost equal mean scores and this signifies that they are relatively contributing equally to towards the effective fulfillment of providing information. However, the use of social network sites for socializing purposes had a high standard deviation of 1.43. This entails that the use of social network sites for socializing purposes has a high responsive capacity and any possible changes in the factor will cause high changes in the ability to provide information.

6.3.2 Effectiveness of the Promotional Role of Social Network Sites in Tourism

From table 6.7 it can be deduced that the use of social network sites to aid tourist destination enter new tourism markets is highly effective with a highest mean score contribution of 3.81. The use of social network sites to expand tourism clientele base is relatively ineffective since it is yielding lower contributions compared to other factors. The ability of social network sites to make the tourism corporation known has a high responsive capacity and hence attention must be drawn to avoid adverse changes. Adverse changes in the ability to make the tourism corporation known can pose severe adverse effects on promotion initiatives.

Table 6.7 Effectiveness of the promotional role of social network sites in tourism

Promotional role (X2)	Mean	Std. Dev
To market existing tourism products	3.72	1.12
To promote new tourism products	3.78	1.16
Expand tourism clientele base	3.58	1.12
Enter new tourism markets	3.81	1.16
Makes the tourism corporation to be known	3.72	1.19

6.3.3 Effectiveness of the Competitive Role of Social Network Sites in Tourism

The study also endeavored to examine how social network sites can be utilized in improving the competitiveness of tourism product suppliers. The results of the analysis are shown in table 6.8. The results provide strong evidence that social network sites are effective in improving the competitiveness of tourism product suppliers and this is reinforced by the highest mean score of 3.88. The use of social network sites to reduce tourism competition and improve the competitiveness of the tourism firm have relatively the same standard deviations. This means that these factors have high responsive potential to aid in improving the competitiveness of tourism firms. Hence policy initiatives must strengthen in ensuring that they improve the roles that are being played by these elements.

Table 6.8 Effectiveness of the competitive role of social network sites in tourism

Competitive role (X3)	Mean	Std. Dev
Gain more tourism market share	3.81	1.06
Reduce the level of competition to a tourism firm	3.86	1.15
Helps in acquiring information	3.87	1.15
Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm	3.88	1.13
Helps build corporate tourism legacy	3.62	1.09

6.3.4 Effectiveness of the Innovative Role of Social Networks in Tourism

Results shown in table 6.9 provide evidence that the adoption of social networks is effective in aiding tourists to make informed decisions and this is reinforced by a highest mean score of 3.40. Information provided by the respondents show that the tourists lowly ranked the use of social network sites as cheaper way of accessing information with a mean score of 2.91. Possible reasons suggest that there are other costs that are incurred in utilizing such sites. For instance, one might incur Wi-Fi costs, data bundle costs, travelling costs as one travels to an area of that can provide such access. The respondents also shown preference that the use of social network sites to obtain reliable information is significantly important. This is reinforced by a high standard deviation of

1.52. Thus failure by tourists to get reliable information can significantly tarnish the image of the service provider and can drive the firm out of business.

Table 6.9 Effectiveness of the innovative role of social network sites in tourism

Innovative role (X ₁) ~	Mean	Std. Dev
Makes it cheaper to access tourism information	2.91	1.31
Tourists can get instant feedback	3.21	1.37
It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty	3.40	1.19
Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose	3.15	1.52
Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information	2.95	1.45

6.3.5 Analysis of Increase in Tourism Sales Volume

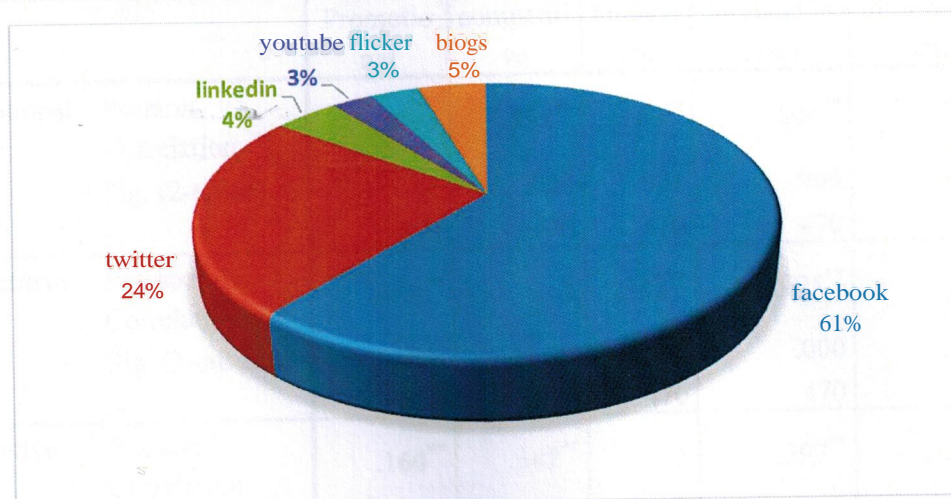
Results presented in table 6.10 show that the ability of tourists to spend more money an important element in improving tourism sales volume with a mean score of 3.87. This is followed by improvement in tourists' perceptions with a mean score of 3.86. The willingness of tourists to visit a particular destination is also an important force to reckon with. This is evidenced by a high standard deviation of 1.17. Thus the willingness of tourists to visit a particular destination must be influenced in the positive direction so that the impact on tourism sales volume will be significant.

Table 6.10 Analysis of increases in tourism sales volume

Increase in tourism sales volume (TSv)	Mean	Std. Dev
Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks	3.83	1.17
Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products	3.87	1.13
It results in tourism brand loyalty	3.61	1.11
Safeguards the tourism company's reputation	3.79	1.06
Improves tourists perceptions of the tourist destination	3.86	1.15

6.4 Social Network Sites Usage Among the Respondents

Figure 6.3 Social network sites usage among the tourists



Source: Excel data presentation based on the retrieved data

It is denoted in figure 6.3 that a significant portion of the tourists who visited Erbil are Facebook users and constituted 61% of the total number of tourist. This was followed with Twitter with a second highest number of users equivalent to 24%. Flickr and YouTube had similar number of users and each accounted for 3% of the total number of tourists who visited Erbil. LinkedIn constituted of 4% of the total number of the total number of tourists who visited Erbil. It can be deduced that informal word of mouth about tourism in Erbil is more dominant. This entails that tourists are more likely to get information about tourism in Erbil from their friends, family and relatives.

6.5 Coefficient of Correlation

The Kendall Tau's-b was employed in order to determine the nature and strength of association of the variables. The results are presented in table 6.11. It can be noted that all the variables are positively related and the correlations are significant at 1%. The competitive role of social network sites is highly correlated with increase in sales volume and promotional roles with coefficients of 0.925 and 0.854 respectively. The innovative role is lowly correlated with informational, promotional and competitive roles of social network sites with coefficients of 0.133, 0.160 and 0.382 respectively.

Table 6.11 Coefficient of Correlation

		Promotional	competitive	innovative	Increase in sales	informational
Promotional	Pearson Correlation	1	.854 **	.160**	.804 **	.120**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001	.000	.009
	N	470	470	470	470	470
competitive	Pearson Correlation	.854**	1	.382 **	.925 **	.207**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	470	470	470	470	470
innovative	Pearson Correlation	.160**	.382**	1	.397 **	.133**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000		.000	.004
	N	470	470	470	470	470
Increase in sales	Pearson Correlation	.804**	.925 **	.397 **	1	.190**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	470	470	470	470	470
informational	Pearson Correlation	.120**	.207**	.133**	.190**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.000	.004	.000	
	N	470	470	470	470	470

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

6.6 Model Summary Results

An R-square of 0.76 was obtained and this entails that 76% variation in tourism sales volume is explained by informational, promotional, and competitive and innovative roles of social networks sites. Thus 24% variation in tourism sales volume is explained by variables outside the model. Model summary results are presented in table 6.12.

Table 6.12 Model summary results

R-squared	0.76
Adjusted R-square	0.757

6.7 Empirical Results

Table 6.13 Estimated Model results

	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig
Constant	0.127	1.156	0.242
Informational	0.02	1.038	0.3
Promotional	0.161	3.344	0.001*
Competitive	0.652	8.536	0.000*
Innovative	0.055	3.491	0.001*
Tourism sales volume	0.093	1.443	0.150

* Statistically significant at 1%

Using the above results, the estimated equation can thus be expressed as follows;

$$S \sim 0.127 + 0.020X_1 + 0.161X_2 + 0.652X_3 + 0.055X_4 + 0.093X_5$$

Informational role had a coefficient of 0.02 and this entails that an increase in tourism informative initiatives or activities by 1% will result in an increase in the use of social network sites by 2%. This provides empirical support to the findings by Gohil (2015) which outlined that there is a positive association between the informational role of tourism and social network sites. Possible reasons suggest that providing tourists with all the information they need on social network sites reduces acts of mistrusts on the part of tourists. Thus more tourists will acquire tourism products as their level of trust of the tourism products rises.

Promotional role had a coefficient of 0.161 which entails that either a 1% change increase in awareness campaigns will cause an increase in social network sites activities by 16.1%. Alternatively, it can be expressed that an improvement in the ability of tourism service to promote tourism using social network will have a positive effect on

social network usage of 16.1 %. This concurs with results by Zeng and Geritsen (2014) and this suggests that the ability to promote the tourism destinations and services greatly exposes service providers to more customers and hence an increase in sales volume. Hence social network site usage rises together with the increase in response to the promotional activities.

Tourism efforts to enhance the competitiveness of the firm using social network sites has a coefficient of 0.652 which entails that either a 1% improvement in the drive to improve the competitiveness of tourism service providers will cause an increase in social network sites usage by 65.2%. This was supported by Zeng and Geritsen (2014) and this is because an improvement in competitiveness improves the firms' dominance in the market and hence can easily get more customers through manipulative actions such as competitive pricing or arbitrage pricing.

The results also support study results by Gohil (2015) as evidenced by a positive association between the innovative efforts in tourism and social network sites. The innovative drive by tourism firms through the usage of social network sites will cause an increase in social network sites usage by 5.5%. This is because innovation improves the way of doing business and thereby resulting in efficiency and effectiveness which are strongly needed by tourists. Tourists favor destinations that are effective and efficient in offering services. Hence sales volumes are foreseen to increase in favor of those destinations that are efficient and effective in offering services. Policy implications must therefore promote innovative ways of doing business.

Further insights can be established from table 6.13 that an increase in tourism activities to generate more sales will result a higher usage of social network sites. This can be evidenced by a coefficient of 0.093 which implies that social network usage will increase by 0.093 following an increase in efforts to increase tourism sales by 1 unit. This can be reinforced by insights established by Gohil (2015) which established that there is a positive connection between tourism and social network sites.

The studies sought answer to the question what is the role of online social network sites on tourists visiting Erbil. Using information utilized in the conceptual framework and regression model estimation it can therefore be concluded that the roles of social

network sites in tourism are promotional, informational, competitive, innovative and increase in sales volume.

The study also endeavored to establish how online social network sites influence tourism trends. It was established that the extent to which tourism relies on the usage of social network sites lies in the ability of social network sites to enhance tourism activities in relation to informational, promotional, innovative, competitive and increasing sales volume. Thus tourism trends can be said to positively change in response to positive developments in social network sites.

The question how can social network sites developments be used to indicate the behavior of tourism in Erbil was addressed by positive relationships between tourism and social network sites. In this respect, tourism activities have been established to cause an increase in social network sites developments. Thus improvements or developments in social networks sites are in response to changes in tourism activities. This therefore implies that social network sites developments are a reflection of what is transpiring in tourism. For instance, an increase in social network sites development can be said to be as a result of an increase in tourism activities.

From the estimated regression results, it was established that tourism activities can explain changes in social network sites by 76%. Thus positive or negative changes in social network sites are said to either enhance tourism activities or hamper tourism respectively. This addresses the question how social network sites affect tourism markets in Erbil.

3 of the 5 positive variables are significant at 1% and we can in overall accept the alternative hypothesis that social network sites play a significant positive role in Erbil tourism industry. The extent to which this hypothesis holds can be reinforced by the obtained R-square of 76%.

6.8 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

From table 6.14, it can be noted that the obtained significant value is significant at 0.01 thus we accept the null hypothesis of homogeneity. We therefore conclude that there is homogeneity in both the variance and sample size of tourism and social network site usage data. Thus the error value is approximately equal. Thus our estimated model can be said to be correctly specified and the null hypothesis of variable inclusion is rejected.

Table 6.14 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) table

	Sum of squares	d.f.	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	131.137	4	26.227	293.150	0.000*
Residual	41.513	465	0.089		
Total	172.649	469			

6.9 Reliability Test

Reliability test was conducted for the four variables that address the roles of auditing. The Cronbach's alpha will be used to interpret the results of the analysis. The following was obtained:

Table 6.15 Cronbach's alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
0.716	0.782	5

Of the 5 variables that were analyzed, a Cronbach's alpha statistic of 71.6% was obtained for roles of social network sites. This entails that 71.6% changes in tourism sales volume is considered to be internally consistent and reliable. The item statistics presented in table 6.16 shows that there is a positive correlation between the selected variables. This means that all the social network roles are mutually and positively related to tourism sales volume.

Table 6.16 Item-total statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Promotional	0.637
competitive	0.567
Innovative	0.777
Increase in sales	0.571
Informational	0.774

Table 6.16 also shows that if factors such as promotional, competitive and increase in sales are removed, the reliability of the model will decline to 63.7%, 56.7% and 57.1% respectively in explaining social network sites usage. The model's reliability will however increase to 77.7% if innovative is removed and this suggests that the innovative role of social network sites is negatively impacting the effectiveness of social network roles. Thus a removal of this role from Erbil tourism initiatives will see an increase in social network sites usage. On the other hand, factors such as informational and innovative are significantly important in improving social network sites usage in tourism. Policy initiatives should therefore be designed to improve the effectiveness of these factors.

CHAPTER VII

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

The main objective of the study was to examine the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism. This was necessitated by an exponential growth in social network sites and users around the world. This was also followed by a surge in the number of millennials who are traveling around the world. The widespread proliferation in the number and types of social network sites has posed numerous changes in tourism trends and not much has been done to examine the underlying issues. On the other hand, there has been no consensus as to whether the changes in tourism trends is being attributed to demographic changes or changes in social network sites. This study therefore was an endeavor to examine the roles that are being played by social network sites in tourism. The recommendations made herein are based on the analyzed data.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 Recommendations to Business Entities Involved in Tourism

The obtained results revealed that all tourism activities have a positive effect on social network sites. Deductions can be made that social network sites usage is resultantly causing positive effects in tourism and hence its wide spread use. Foremost, tourism players are therefore encouraged to further improve the ability to provide information through the use of social network sites. Such information must contain a high possible level of reliability at all costs. This is because failure to provide accurate or reliable information can have undesirable negative consequences on the performance of both the firms and the tourism industry.

The results of the study revealed that there is a positive linkage between tourism promotional activities and social network sites usage. Thus firms in the tourism

industries are advocated to continually engage in intensive marketing initiatives so as to further promote their products. This enables firms to gain access into new markets and expand their current level of customer out reach.

The ability of social network sites to enhance the competitive position of tourism firms needs to be continually assessed and improved all time. This is because failure to improve the competitive position of the firm in the market can cause the firm to lose customers to other tourism firms especially those from outside KRG. Competitive strategies must be designed in such way that reflects current changes in the world economy so as to cater for the ever changing customer needs and problems.

Business entities engaged in tourism and other tourism related activities are strongly urged to continue and increase their usage of social network sites as a way of innovating their information systems. This is based on the results of the study which showed that innovation has a positive linkage with tourism sales volume. Innovation is essential because it results in efficiency and effectiveness in the operations of firms. This is important because tourists are always looking for service providers who can provide a particular service effectively and efficiently.

7.2.2 Recommendations to the Government

The government of Kurdistan Region of Iraq must implement strategies that promote tourism. For instance, increased security and awareness campaigns can be made especially on international scale were most foreign tourists have a negative perception about KRG because of security fears. Thus there is greater need by the government of Kurdistan to continually promote KRG as a safe tourist destination. Bilateral and multilateral agreements in the area of tourism can be made by the government with other foreign nations.

7.3 Suggestions for Future Studies

The results of the study have shown strong and reliable evidence that social network sites are playing a significant role in tourism in KRG. Other studies can however, narrow the study to specific region and types of tourism.

7.4 Conclusion

It can therefore be concluded that social network sites are playing a significant role in tourism in Erbil. The most significant roles that are being by social network sites are in Erbil are promotional, competitive and innovative and these are positively contributing to the success of tourist destinations in Erbil. Thus in order to fully benefit from social network sites, tourism officials in Kurdistan Region of Iraq must innovate their information systems and provide information on social network sites. This must be supported by the necessary infrastructure so as to domestically promote social network site usage. Initiatives can be adopted which further make the accessibility of social network sites cost effective. Significant attention must be trusted towards promoting domestic tourism and efforts can be undertaken to improve the international image of Kurdistan Region of Iraq .

It can be concluded from this study that the social network sites role of providing information has a significant positive impact on tourism sales volume. This is mainly attributed to the fact that providing information reduces uncertainty. Tourists are specifically interested in obtaining information about where there are going, what is involved, how to get there, possible good and bad things they stand to encounter. As a result the extent to which such information is provided aids in the decision making process. This is supported from information drawn from buying process model which outlined that purchase decisions and post purchase decisions are determined by the ability of the consumer to obtain information so as to make an assessment and evaluation of the available alternatives.

It can also be concluded that social network sites is now widely being used in tourism to promote tourism. This is evidenced by results obtained in this study which outlined that the promotional role of social network sites has significant positive implications on tourism sales volume. Social network sites thus provide tourism firms with a greater ability to promote tourism destinations and related services. It can also be said in this regard that the ability of tourism service providers to reach existing and new tourists is now hinging on the promotional ability of social network sites.

Further conclusions can be made that social network sites is also part of the innovative drive by tourism service providers to innovate their business operations. As such many tourism service providers have taken a toll to increasingly utilize social network sites as an operation enhancement toll that can be used to reach tourists at a lower cost and a fast rate. Thus the social network sites role of innovation can be concluded to be significantly and positively related to tourism sales volume.

Insights provided in this study highlighted that tourism service providers are now facing a lot of competition and as results were advocated to further improve their competitiveness. Improvements in competitiveness result in an increase in both the influx of tourists and tourism sales volume. Thus it can be concluded that tourism sales volume is positively and significantly related to the competitiveness of tourism service providers.

The effectiveness of social network sites to execute profound functions greatly depends on factors that surround the use of the concerned social network sites. As such may include feasibility, convenience, affordability, objectives etc.

Conclusions can therefore be drawn that social network has wide positive implications on the tourism industry. This can be evidenced by its numerous roles that it is playing towards improving tourism. In overall, the alternative hypothesis that social network plays a significant positive role in Erbil tourism industry can be concluded to be acceptable.

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SECTION 3: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

1. What is your gender? Please tick where appropriate.

Male

☐

Female

☐

2. What is your age group? Please tick where appropriate.

18-23

☐

24-29

☐

30-35

☐

36-41

☐

42-47

☐

3. Marital status? Please tick where appropriate.

Single

☐

Married

☐

If your answer to the above is married, please tick whether you have children or not.

Yes

☐

No

☐

4. What is your country of origin?

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire: Social network sites and Tourism

This questionnaire is in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Tourism and Hotel Management at Near East University, North Cyprus. Kindly complete the required information and note well that this information is strictly for academic purposes and hence will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

SECTION A: RESPONDENT PROFILE

1. What is your gender? Please tick where appropriate.

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What is your age group? Please tick where appropriate.

18-23	<input type="checkbox"/>
24-29	<input type="checkbox"/>
30-35	<input type="checkbox"/>
36-41	<input type="checkbox"/>
42+	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Marital status? Please tick where appropriate.

Single	<input type="checkbox"/>
Married	<input type="checkbox"/>

If your answer to the above is married, indicate below if you have children or not.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. What is your country of origin?

5. What is your level of education? Please tick where appropriate.

Primary school

☐

Secondary

☐

Undergraduate

☐

Graduate

☐

Post graduate

☐

PhD

☐

SECTION B: INFORMATION SECTION

6. Do you use online social network sites? Please tick where appropriate.

Yes

☐

No

☐

7. Which of the following social networking sites are you a member or? Please tick where appropriate.

Facebook

☐

Twitter

☐

LinkedIn

☐

YouTube

☐

Flicker

☐

Blogs

☐

Other, please specify

8. Roughly how long have you been using social network sites?

1-12 months

☐

2-5 years

☐

6-10 years

☐

10+

☐

9. Roughly how many minutes a day do you spend on social network sites? Please

tick where appropriate.

1-20	D
20-40	O
40-60	D
60+	O

10. Which site do you use for travel information, bookings, hotels and flights?

TripAdvisor	O
Kayak	D
ClearTrip	D
Other.	

11. How effective are the following social network roles (informational, promotional, competitive and innovative) in tourism? On a scale of 1-5 where 5= very effective, 4= effective, 3=moderately effective, 2= slightly effective and 1= ineffective

Informational role	1	2	3	4	5
How would you characterize your general knowledge of social network sites					
What is your degree of satisfaction that you get from using social media networks					
Use social media for socializing purposes					
Respond to comments					
Ask or answer an tourism questions					
Promotional role	1	2	3	4	5
To market existing tourism products					
To promote tourism new products					
Expand tourism clientele base					
Enter new tourism markets					

Makes the tourism corporation to be known					
Competitive role	1	2	3	4	5
Gain more tourism market share					
Reduces the level of tourism competition to a tourism firm					
Helps in acquiring tourism information that competitors cannot get access					
Improves the competitiveness of the tourism firm					
Helps build corporate tourism legacy					
Innovative role	1	2	3	4	5
Makes it cheaper to access tourism information					
Tourists can get instant feedback					
It helps tourists to make decisions thereby reducing uncertainty					
Tourists can get reliable information which service providers are not willing to disclose					
Promotes convenience and effectiveness in sharing information					
Increase in tourism sales volume	1	2	3	4	5
Tourists are willing to visit tourist destinations that have significant access to social media networks					
Social media networks cause tourist to spend more money on tourism products					
It results in tourism brand loyalty					
Safeguards the tourism company's reputation					
Improves tourist perception					

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وزارة البلديات والسياحة

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الهيئة العامة للسياحة

(Kurdistan) Region - Iraq

Council of Ministers

Ministry of Municipality & Tourism

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مديرية التخطيط والمتابعة

General Board of Tourism

به‌پ‌یوه‌به‌رایه‌تی پ‌لان‌دانان و به‌دواداچوونه‌وه

ریکۆت : ٢٠١٦ / ٠٢ / ٠٤

ژماره : 245

کۆردی / ٢٧ / ٢٠١٦

T _____ st University/ _____

Subject/Information

Years:

Regarding your Letter from 5.Nov.2015, Request For Permission to Undertake a survey and obtain data for a Masters Degree Disertation By Rewar Jamal

We hereby inform you That General Board of Tourism Doesn't Have any official statistics of Tourism during (1999-2006).

Best regards



Expert

Fawzi Yousif Toma

Director of planning and follow-up

Originality

GradeMark

PeerMark

JS

BY RIWARR

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