



NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
TOURISM AND HOTEL MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

**THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMERS BUYING
DECISIONS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY:
A CASE STUDY OF NORTH CYPRUS**

ELMIRA ADZHALIMOVA

MASTER'S THESIS

NICOSIA
2019

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NICOSIA
2019

ACCEPTANCE/APPROVAL

We as the jury members certify the thesis entitled '**The impact of Social media on consumers buying decisions in the Tourism industry: A case study of North Cyprus**' prepared by the Elmira Adzhalimova, defended on 19/06/2019 has been found satisfactory for the award of degree of Master

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ÖZ

TURİZM ENDÜSTRİSİNDE KARAR ALAN MÜŞTERİLERE SOSYAL MEDYA'NIN ETKİSİ: KUZEY KIBRIS'IN OLGUSU

Teknolojinin başlangıcı ve gelişiminden bu yana, internet ve sosyal medya özellikle son zamanlarda hayatımızın önemli bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Birçok insan çeşitli şekillerde internetten yararlanır. Artan küreselleşme zaman kavramının algısını değiştirdi ve bu da kayda değer uluslararası rekabet ortamı yarattı. Bu rekabet ortamında, internet ve sosyal medya araçlarının kullanımı her geçen gün farklı pazarlar genelinde yayılmaktadır. Sosyal medya kapsadığı geniş ağlarla her kültürden ve bölgeden büyük grupların sosyal ihtiyaçlarına karşılık verir. Sosyal medya platformları sayesinde kullanıcılar çeşitli konular hakkında, bilgi, fotoğraflar, videolar ve yorumlarını geniş bir yelpazede paylaşabilir. Turizm, internet ve sosyal medya ağları ile en ilgili çalışma alanlarından biridir. Son zamanlarda uluslararası ve yerel turizm işletmeleri mal ve hizmetlerini pazarlamak için tüm bu sosyal platformları kullanmaktadır. Tüketici açısından, sosyal medya ağ siteleri karar verme aşamasında oldukça önemlidir. Bu nedenle, turizmde sosyal medya araçlarının önemi Turizm İşletmeleri ve turistler için artmaktadır. Turizm İşletmeleri (Örneğin, Otel zincirleri ve Seyahat acenteleri gibi) kısa sürede düşük maliyet ile sosyal medyanın etkin kullanımı sayesinde daha fazla potansiyel tüketiciye ulaşabilirler. Bu tüketiciler seyahat tercihleri hakkında karar verebilir veya sosyal platformlarında tüm yorumları inceledikten sonra kararlarını değiştirebilirler. Bu nedenle sosyal medyanın turizm sektöründeki turizm şirketlerinin satış ve müşterilerini arttırmada çok önemli olduğunu savunuyoruz.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Turizm Pazarlaması, Sosyal Medya, Sosyal medya platformları, Otel zincirleri, Seyahat acenteleri*

ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONSUMERS BUYING DECISIONS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF NORTH CYPRUS

Since the introduction and development of technology, internet and social media has become a significant part of our life particularly recently. The Internet has become a travel forum where tourist social media are the main governing body for their marketing motivation. These online platforms provide to travelers of a condition for interactive communication: information transfers, comments, opinions, reviews and estimates everything that can help with adoption of these or those tourist decisions. Improving the efficiency of this sector's activity becomes one of the primary issues on an increasingly dynamic global market, the changes regarding the distribution channel, the marketing services and the customer relationship management representing the key elements in this respect. With the growing popularity of social media on tourism sector, the theme of the impact of social media on tourism industry becomes relevant. In this paper, we provide that there is a strong relationship between information found through social media and the impact on the utilization of touristic products and services. We also provide that there is significant relationship touristic information about products and service that is found online and the intention, influence to buy. Tourism enterprises (such as hotel chains and travel agencies) can reach more potential consumers in a short period of time thanks to the effective use of social media at low cost. These consumers can make decisions about their travel preferences or change their decisions after reviewing all the comments on their social platform. Therefore, we argue that social media is very important in increasing the sales and customers of tourism companies in the tourism sector.

Keywords: *Social Media, Online word of mouth (eWOM), World Wide Web (WWW), Trip Advisor.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

- eWOM - Online word of mouth
- SEM - Structural Equation Model
- TRNC – Turkish Republic of North Cyprus
- WWW - World Wide Web

INTRODUCTION

To begin with, social media has become the most and widely used way of communication and advertisement by business and individuals in this era that we are living today. The introduction of web 1.0 a static and inactive World Wide Web was not sufficient for allowing people to engage each other via internet since it only catered for a read only type of format that only allowed companies to publish on their websites and users could only read without commenting. However, web 1.0 must be appreciated since it was just but the beginning of the journey.

The introduction of web 2.0 provided for technologies that enabled people to engage in a dynamic and active interaction on the internet by making use of the sophisticated technologies of web 2.0. This has seen the emergency of platforms of social networks that have gone a long way in bringing the world into a single, united and interactive global village. Social network sites such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and many more have gone a long way in connecting people from all over the world.

Of great importance in the use of social media is enabling companies to advertise and promote their products and services online. The current study is aimed at investigating the impact of social media in the Tourism industry. This study seeks to find out if buyers (hotel guests) of touristic products and services use social media to obtain information about different hotels in North Cyprus and their offers and if social media influence their intention to buy those products and services. This study also seeks to find out if travel agencies in North Cyprus make use of social media in promoting their services and what impact does the use of social media in increasing their sales. This will go a long way in helping hotel managers and travel agencies to come out with sophisticated ways of improving their social networking which will provide for a great deal in increasing the sales of the organization.

Word of mouth has by far been seen as the most influential way of inducing customers to buy a product or service that is if people post positive comments on the product of company. The other extreme is that word of mouth can go a long way in tarnishing the image of a firm or product in cases where negative comments are posted by former customers of the product or firm. This study argues that word of mouth is very crucial and touristic companies have to strive for the best to get positive comments on their services.

This study used of both qualitative and quantitative methods to deliver a robust analysis from respondents. The quantitative data was collected through the use of a questionnaire that was used to survey hotel guests in Acapulco, Cratos, PiaBella, Grand Pasha, Malpas, Öğretmen Evi, Lords Palace, Elexus, Olive Tree, as well as High Life hotels in Girne North Cyprus. A Structural Equation Model is used to evaluate the quantitative data in order to see relationships that exist between and among latent variables of information, intention, buying, utilization and social media influence. In the case of hotel agencies a qualitative questionnaire prepared by two academicians in the Faculty of Tourism, Near East University is used to collect data and a qualitative analysis will be made to evaluate the findings.

In the sections that follow, this study will start off by giving background information on the history of the World Wide Web, social media networks including their advantages and disadvantages in the Tourism industry. This study will also outline the theoretical review of the applicability and usefulness of social media in growing the Tourism industry as well as an empirical review of the empirical studies that were undertaken before by other researchers and academicians. Later on, this study gives an overview methodology (Structural Equation Modeling) and then proceed to do the data analysis as well as bringing results to the table and finally make conclusions and recommendations.

Problem of the Study

Today, the Internet has created ways to attract consumers. Consumer of the XXI century - already sophisticated, and the traditional use of advertising in the form of a huge banners with pictures and slogans does not surprise, and more and more new ways to attract consumers are being created on the Internet, be it a virtual tour of the hotel or the whole city. There is a possibility of a riot to today's traditional media; sometimes even threatening (Vural and Bat, 2010). Therefore, in order to attract consumers, all tourist enterprises are moving to the Internet space and social platforms in order to be closer to their consumers. From this it follows that tourist enterprises not only need to maintain their channels for promoting services on the Internet, but also use newer channels in order to attract more people. In the case of a public health service provider or product.

The problem of this research is to determine the frequency of usage of Social Media tools and media in the tourism sector, to examine the social media platforms and determining if social media influences on customer buying decisions in choosing a travel service or product.

Aim of the Study

This research is aimed at determining if social media influences customer buying decisions in choosing a travel service or product. This research also seeks to investigate if social media influences sales of travel agencies.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to find out if social media is useful in the tourism industry and if so management and marketing in the tourism industry should pay more attention in advertising their services on social media than radios and Televisions.

Research questions for hotel guests

This study used of questionnaires in order to retrieve data from the respondents. The research questions are provided in the questionnaire that is attached in Appendix A in the last section of this study. The research questions

as outlined in the questionnaire in Appendix A seeks to evaluate whether social media influence the buying decisions, intentions and utilization by individuals.

Research questions for travel agency

The research questions on travel agencies as outlined in the questionnaire in Appendix B of this study, seeks to find out if the use of social media by travel agencies has the impact of increasing their sales.

Hypotheses

This study partly used of the hypotheses as derived from the work of Icoz et al (2018) who carried out the same research in Turkey. Hypotheses testing were derived in this research basing on the fact that this study made survey on two different groups, that is, hotel guests and travel agencies. Eight hypotheses were derived to test whether social media impacts customers' buying decisions of hotel products.

H1: An increase in the individuals' knowledge or information on touristic products and services through social media results in an increase in their utilizing perceptions.

H2: An increase in individuals' knowledge on tourism service and product via social media, tend to influence them.

H3: An increase in the individuals' utilization of tourism service and product because of social media increases the chance of buying them.

H4: An increase in individuals' influence on tourism service and product via social media, also increase the buying chance.

H5: An increase in individuals' buying perceptions of tourism services on social media increases the chances of sharing their experiences.

H6: There is a positive relationship between individuals' knowledge about tourism services through social media and buying.

H7: There is a positive relationship between individuals' knowledge about tourism services through social media and their intention to share these experiences.

H8: There is a positive relationship between individuals influence by the tourism services in social media and the chance of utilizing them.

Following the hypotheses test outlined in the hypotheses section above; the figure below was used to show the relationships between variables that has been proposed in this study. In the figure A below the variables: information, utilization, buying, influence and intention are the latent or unmeasured variables in a path diagram presented in the circles or eclipse.

The figure below proposes that social media information on tourism services causes intention, utilization and influence to buy tourism services on social media. Furthermore, figure A indicates that utilization of social media causes the buying of tourism products on social media, while it is being caused by information and influence. Influence of social media on top of causing utilization and buying of touristic services, it is being caused by social media information or knowledge of tourism services. In addition to that the figure below illustrates that buying is being caused by information or knowledge, utilization and influence, while it causes the intention to share. Lastly, figure A indicates that intention is being caused by buying and knowledge of tourism products on social media. Figure A is a summary of the entire hypotheses that are outlined in the first section above.

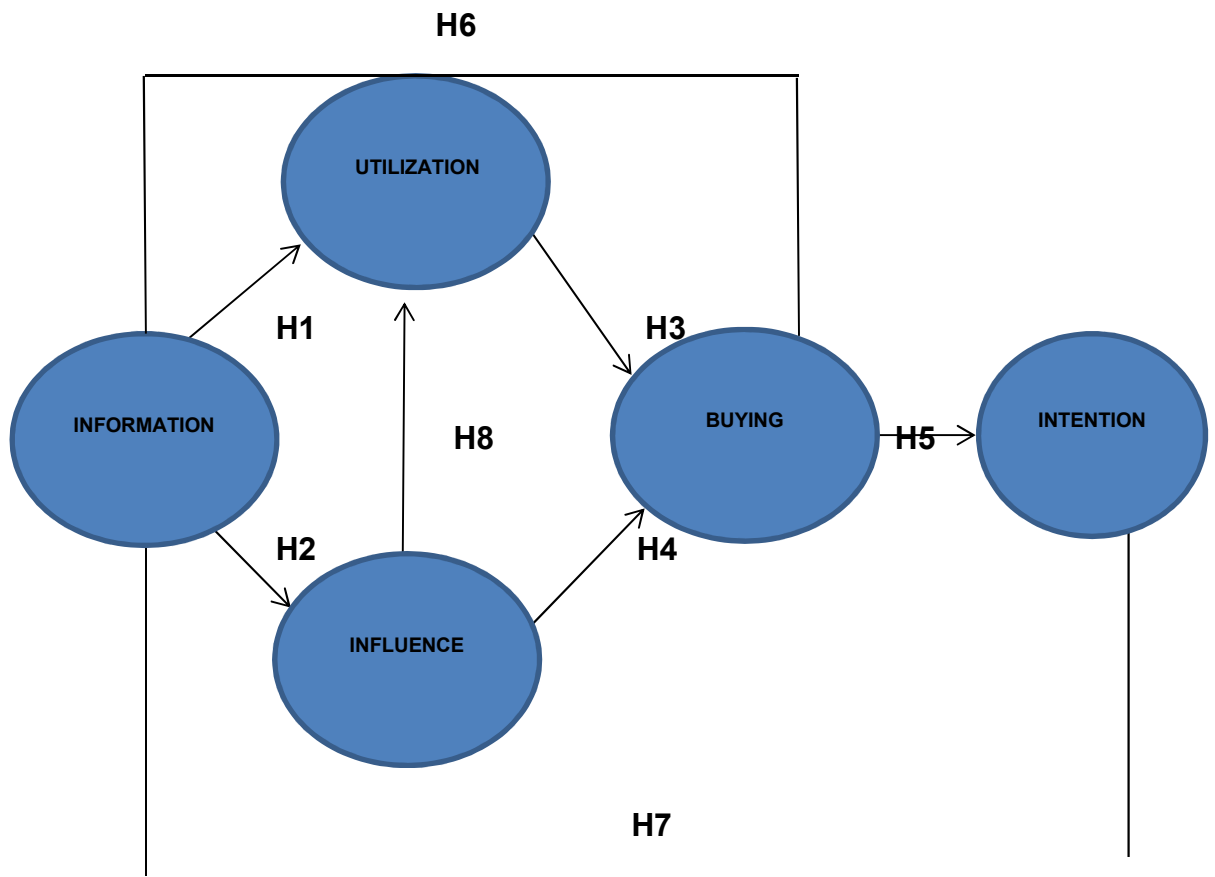


Figure A: Relationships between variables, a proposed model
Source: Icoz et al (2018)

The hypothesis on the qualitative analysis of the travel agencies is as follows:

Social media is significant in increasing sales of travel agencies in the tourism industry.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL BACKGROUND

1.1 World Wide Web

The introduction of the World Wide Web (www) was made possible by the introduction of web 1.0 which is a static and passive platform that is read only in nature thereby enabling only companies to create their websites and publish their information with no feedback from users. Thus web 1.0 is seen as one way of communication hence posed challenges to effective communication. Customers and other players could only read whatever the companies would have posted on their website. The introduction of web 2.0 according to Corigliano and Baggio (2004) was very crucial since it was more modified than web 1.0 in the sense that it allowed for users to give feedback and air out their views. Thus Web 2.0 was seen as more dynamic search engine that allowed for a two way communication from both sides (Corigliano & Baggio, 2004).

Birdsall (2007) and Leung (2013) concurs on the fact that web 2.0 is a social movement that allows for the users to connect with one another and share their knowledge, experience and ideas. The introduction of web 2.0 thus enabled the conversion of the static environment into a dynamic and an active environment. Munar (2013) argued that the introduction of web 2.0 has seen the emergence of platforms where all the acts of one's daily life can be shared among users thereby leading to different forms of social segregation to the industry of tourism.

The rest of the events of the history of the World Wide Web are summarized in Table 1.1 below. Table 1.1 gives a summary of the World Wide Web events

and their respective years in which they took place as well as the description of the event.

Table 1.1: Summary on the history of the Web from its beginnings to current

Year	Event	Description
1989	Beginnings	The emergency of World Wide Web was first adventured by Tim Berners-Lee who came up with a report, technical in form, that constituted of a system documents linked to each other
1989	The first website of the World	The first world's website consisted of text as well as various links connected to many documents
1993	First browser	The first browser in the world is Mosaic, which was originally developed at the University of Ilion's by NCSA
1993	The Mainstream of media	The New York Times postulated that Mosaic was a 'killer app', which could be useful in creating new industry
1994	White House	The United States of America White House managed to establish their own website
1994	Yahoo	Yang J and Filo D are the founders of Yahoo in Sunnyvale. Yahoo at its infants began as the hierarchical directory the Web's contents
1994	First purchases online	The first buying online was made by Pizza Hut Pizza Net, which is a storefront that was selling Pizzas and making orders online in Santa Cruz for home delivery
1995	Amazon.com	By 1995 the Amazon.com started making business online by selling books at fairly lower prices
1995	Internet Explorer	Internet Explorer is the first browser version that was released by Microsoft

1997	Google	Google.com managed to be registered as a domain. The mission of Google's founders as was reflected on its mathematical name was to provide infinite amount of Web information
2001	Wikipedia	Jimmy Wales was the founder and launcher of Wikipedia
2003	Social networks, blogs and music	This is the year when the iTunes Music Store was invented, thereby enabling the easy way in downloading music online. At the same time the debut of WordPress, Blogger, Myspace, and LinkedIn emerged
2004	Facebook	Harvard students pioneered and opened Facebook
2004	Firefox	Version 1.0 Web browser of Firefox was launched by Mozilla
2005	YouTube	YouTube was founded less and later acquired by Google with an amount totaling \$ 1.65 billion
2006	Twitter	Twitter was launched as a platform for micro-blogging
2008	Chrome	Web browser of Chrome was released by Google
2008	HTML 5	HTML5 which was the latest and standard version of HTML was introduced
2008	Coupons plus deals	The launch of coupon was seen with daily offers of mega deals in restaurants, retailers as well as service providers
2009	Bing	The search engine of Microsoft's Bing was launched
2010	Photo sharing	Pinterest and Instagram and Pinterest sites of photo-sharing was launched
2010	Quora	The Quora question and answer site was launched by Ex-Facebook workers
2011	Social networks	Google+ which was seen as a social network of interest basis was launched by Google

2013	Mobile Web and smartphones	Greater percentage of people could manage to own a smartphone
2014	WhatsApp	WhatsApp became the most widely used application in the world having been bought by Facebook

Source: Margues (2016)

1.2 Social media

Gunelius (2011) postulated that social media can be best defined as platforms that utilize the technologies of web 2.0. However there is no straight and one definition on what social media is, different scholars have been to this point came up with various and different definitions. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) social media refers to the ideological and technological built in groups of internet based platforms of web 2.0 that allows for the exchange as well as exchange of the contents generated by users in the form of texts, videos and photos. Blossom (2009) defined social media as a most widely usable tool that enables interactions to occur between people or among groups of people.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010); and Heinonen (2011) concurs that the most and basic types of social media ranges from social networks sites, virtual communities, collaborative projects, and social worlds platform just to mention but a few. Collaborative projects according to Ozuem et al (2012) give freedom on the side of users for the addition, removal and in some cases partial or complete change of the textual content and this is the case with Wikipedia. Mangold and Faulds (2009) postulated that examples of virtual communities take the form of YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram that enables users to share their opinions based on a topic by making use of texts, photos and videos. Heinonen (2011) argues that social network sites are platforms that enables users to create account profiles by making use of their personal information thereby allowing them to interact with friends via instant messaging, for instance, LinkedIn and Facebook, while social worlds platforms or virtual

games takes the form of Microsoft X-box's online gaming and/or PlayStation by Sony.

The characteristics of social media according to İşlek (2012) are connectivity, community, participation, dialogue and publicity. However, Adams (2011) on the other hand classified social media characteristics into five features, that is, basing on social media's accessibility, eternal even though its subject to changing, approachable, usability and timely bound.

1.3 Platforms of Social media

Several platforms of social networks have been introduced up to date and the rate at which the number is increasing at is amazingly high. Platforms of social networks include Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google and Instagram among many others.

1.3.1 Facebook

According to Zarella (2010) is by far the most and dominant used social media platform of the world. Zarella (2010) also argued that Facebook contains very suitable features that are most useful for marketing online. Facebook was first launched in 2004 by Harvard University students specifically meant to be used by Harvard students (Hew, 2011). In as much as it was specifically meant to be used by Harvard students with the passage of time other colleges gained access to Facebook, followed by High School students and later in 2006 anyone with an email address was able to create their Facebook accounts (Zarella, 2010).

1.3.2 Twitter

Comm (2009) postulated that Twitter, initially at its introduction in 2006, was designed for the sole purpose of domestic instant messaging communication within a company. Gunelius (2011) argued that the platform of social media that contains the most micro blog terminology is twitter. According to Gunelius (2011) some of Twitter's terminology includes; tweet, follow, time flow, @user, #hashtag, messages and retweet. The time flow represents the archive of user's tweets shared in their order, @user is used to mention someone in a related twitter shared, whereas #Hashtag symbolizes the theme of the twit for

easy identification by users and retweet is sharing someone's tweet (Guneius, 2011).

1.3.3 Instagram

Instagram a social networking platform that was created by Systrom and Krieger in 2010 allows users to share and/or edit their videos, photos and texts. Instagram has been recorded as one of the fastest social networking in gaining popularity just after its launch in 2010 because of its desirable features that allow users to share, upload and/or edit their videos and photos on the platform.

1.3.4 LinkedIn

According to Akar (2010) LinkedIn was basically developed to serve professional purposes of business people, recruiters and jobseekers to share their information amongst each other. According to LinkedIn, it is a social networking digital in nature that comprises of millions of professionals from all over the world that come from over one hundred and fifty industries that is mainly used for professional relationships. Experienced professionals on LinkedIn thus share jobs and search for one, including the recruitment of job seekers, and share solutions to various problems (Safko, 2010). Because of the above-mentioned purposes and uses of LinkedIn, it is viewed as the most restricted social networking where not all and sundry can use. Zarella (2010) argued that the characteristics of LinkedIn are useful in the marketing industry.

1.3.5 Google

Google is one of the largest technology companies of America that is among the big four together with Facebook, Apple and Amazon. It is a multinational technological company, that is, operates in other countries other than the one in which it was introduced or is owned, that has its specialty in internet related products as well as services. Ateş (2014) postulated that Google has a confirmation service, Google Plus, which is identical to it and is used to manage various social networks such as Google photos, Google drive, Gmail, Picasa and Google connect among many others. Ateş (2014) allude on the point that Google Plus is abbreviated at Google+ or simply G+ and come along

with additional facilities in the form of hangouts which is used for multiple video conferencing thereby enabling people to have conferences online by various people worldwide.

1.3.6 YouTube

According to Akar (2010), YouTube is by far the most popular platform of social networks that enables users to upload videos and for followers of different YouTube to subscribe and comment on the uploaded videos. Meriç (2010) argued that YouTube is now being owned by Google after having been bought from its founders, the internet investors of 2005 and has been very successful up to date. According to Weinberg (2009) argues that videos shared on YouTube can now manage to reach millions of people thereby being the most crucial means for advertisements, and marketing purposes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

In this section of theoretical literature review this study examines what other scholars postulated with regards to the impact of social media in the tourism industry. This theory on this topic is very useful in the study to pave the way and create the basis and foundations of the research. This study starts by examining the development of social media in the tourism industry. This study will also look into the benefits of social media to the tourism industry as well as the impact of Word of mouth in the tourism industry.

2.1.1 Social Media development in the Tourism Industry

According to Noti (2013), in order for Tourism companies to be successful in this age that we are living in, there is a necessity for them to identify the needs of their consumers and make use of up-to-date means of communication when advertising their products in a way that satisfies the demand of the Tourism industry. It is crystal clear that in this new age that have seen the widely use of social media all over the world with its portable and highly favorable qualities, social media thus may play a pivotal role in providing information to Tourists. Therefore, this research provides that tourism service providers and their respective travel agencies should consider the effective use of social media in order to increase sales and hence grow the business.

The use of social media in the tourism industry is considered as an emerging topic that has drawn attention of different researchers and academicians. Zeng et al (2014) argued that the best strategy for marketing tourism products is to allow for the leveraging of social media. On the same note Milano et al (2011) postulated that tourism websites have been seen increasing number of views

in the near past thereby showing that the role of social media is increasing in Tourism. According to Madden (2010), Stellefson (2013), Coto et al. (2017) that over the years, older people have begun to use social media more. According to Madden, from 2000 to 2010 there was an increase of 88%, and a 26% increase by those over 65 years.

However, according to Maier et al. (2011), the use of social media of the older generation is still significantly lower in comparison with the younger generation. Concerning the factor age for use and acceptance of the internet there are distinct differences in the German population. More than 90 % of the young people between 14-and 29 years are internet users. In contrast, only 48.5 % of people between 60-69 years and just 19 % of the people 70+ years of age are internet users. The rapid spread of information technology has not allowed to introduce people to the older generation. The reason is that people who retired throughout the millennium for the most part did not use social media during their work activities, also their reluctance to change their way of life. Also in line with Kutuk and Icoz (2016), Icoz et al. (2018) provide that young people are the ones who are most likely to be targeted through social media advertisements as elderly people tend to ignore the use of social media.

The million dollar question however remains as to whether social media can successfully boost length period and the number of visits. Zeng (2013) argues that Queensland Tourism irrespective of a massive campaign undertaken on its website only managed to attract many visitors only for a few weeks and by year statistics showed that it actually decreased by 8% in 2008 - 2009. Zeng (2013) also alludes on the point that solid evidence is lacking from an econometric point of view which is required to show the economic contribution of social media in the industry tourism.

According to Gururaja (2016) citing Seth (2012) argues that the emergency of social media in the Tourism industry has brought more advantages than disadvantages since this has made it easy for customers to visualize what the organization is providing, make their bookings online and see the prices thereof which was not possible before as customers needed to come in person

to the organization to see for themselves if they like the services offered by the organization. Thus in line with what has been postulated in the chapter above social media has reduced the cost of customers travelling to the organization only to do window shopping rather they do at their home.

2.1.2 Benefits of Social Media in Tourism Industry

Parra-López et al (2011), Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) concurs that there are basically four benefits of social media to the industry of tourism and these are classified as social, functional, psychological and hedonic benefits.

Functional benefits according to Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) are those benefits that are sort by community members who go online for the purpose of fulfilling needs that are specific to them as well as activities. These functional benefits include such things as looking for information on trips, planning as well as taking trips, Parra-López et al (2011).

Wang et al (2002) argues that the way in which communities found on online, provides a social structure that may convey a social meaning thereby catering for the social benefits of individuals and groups of individual. Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) postulated that these social benefits include tourists' communication with each other, exchanging opinions as well as relationship building.

In addition to that, psychological benefits according to Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) are those benefits such as a sense of belonging to communities, sense of affiliation as well as relationships amongst members of the community. Psychological benefits are obtainable if an ongoing communication occurs amongst members in a collaborative environment (Parra-López et al, 2011).

2.1.3 The Impact of Social Media Marketing in Tourism

According to Icoz, Kutuk and Icoz (2018) social media is new medium in the world of business and social media marketing has drawn more attention to various scholars who have defined it in various ways.

Weinberg (2009) argued that social media marketing is a facility which allows for firms to dig into their customers profiles and share experiences, promote products via electronic social channels which is not possible when using convectional promotional channels.

The most interesting definition of social media marketing is one that was postulated in Wikstrom (2010) who argued that social media marketing is an emerging way that is used for promotional purposes aimed at word of mouth marketing, where customers can discuss with firms and other customers rather than one way communication by firms to customers without allowing for feedback.

Icoz et al (2018) citing Tuten and Solomon (2015) postulated that through the use of social media, marketers are offered with great deal of opportunities to reach out to consumers in their work places and at where they live.

According to Icoz et al (2018) citing Miletsky (2010) postulated that there are basically three marketing strategies of social media which are; viral marketing, public relations and marketing content production. Icoz et al (2018) on top of the three strategies mentioned above, argue that classical WOM was transformed into electronic WOM and Online Reviews that necessitates users to air out their views and opinions with less limitations if any.

Litvin et al (2008), and Filieri and McLeay (2013) concurs that electronic WOM and Online Reviews are now very crucial in marketing research, e-commerce as well as electronic tourism since they are used as reliable sources of information by customers. The introduction of technologies and social media in the tourism industry has brought high growth rate and customers now require evaluating attributes first before purchasing (Ban et al., 2015).

Eroz and Dogdubay (2012) argues that firms in the tourism industry have come to make use of social media to create property interest, introduction of promotions, creating awareness and drawing attention in the media as well as brand recognition. According to Mercadal (2017) the emergency of social

media has enabled for tourism businesses to launch marketing campaigns that covers large populations.

2.1.4 The Impact of Social Media on Consumer Buying Decisions

According to Şimşek (1990) they are basically five stages of consumer buying decisions in the tourism industry. These stages can be named as needs recognition, information research, alternatives evaluation, buying decisions and the post-purchase behavior, Kotler (1999). Kotler (1999) argued that these stages are used by consumers chronologically until they finally make the buying decision and came up with the diagrammatical exposition below to illustrate how it works.

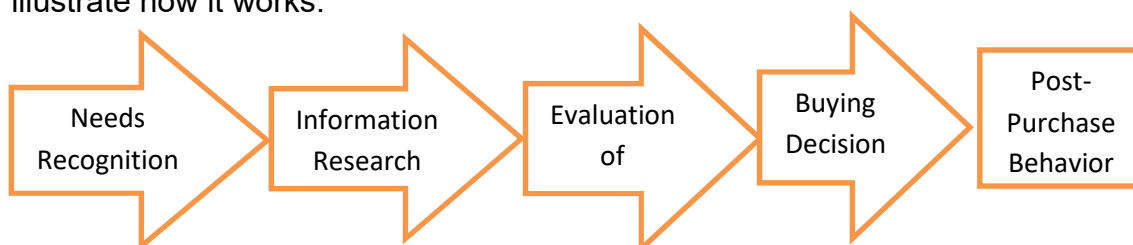


Figure 2.1: Buying Decision Process

Source: Kotler (1999)

Kutuk (2016) argues that the first stage in the buying decision process is to recognize the need to buy a product, thus a problem must be identified first which will then induce the feeling and need to buy. In tourism industry, Kutuk (2016) postulated that the need recognition stage in the buying decision process starts with the willingness and or need to travel which will lead in evaluating the feasibility thereof.

Once the need to travel has been recognized then the customer will engage in the second stage of information search. Kutuk (2016) citing Bovève and Thill (1992) postulated that the scope of information search solely depends on the characteristics of an individual such as attitudes, knowledge and motivations as well as market characteristics and situational characteristics. Nowadays with the high increase in the use of Social Media buyers tend to search for information about a touristic product via social media. This may be done through asking friends on social media, visiting hotel pages and websites as well as following information from word of mouth by other tourists commending on a product. This study provides for hotels and tourism agency to effectively

use social media in marketing their products and services to enable for buyers to readily find the information they require in the buying decision process.

The third stage according to Kotler (1999) is the evaluation of alternatives. Thus, it can be noted that buyers are exposed to a number of options which they get in the second stage of information search. Most customers tend to be indecisive on which option to follow in cases where several options seem good. Therefore, in the case of tourists willing to buy touristic products and/or services having been faced with many options they tend to evaluate and find the best option to follow. Kutuk (2016) argued that customer will always go for an alternative that is less risk. The selection criteria according to Kutuk (2016) play a pivotal role in the evaluation stage and it differs from individual to individual. Thus Uygur (2007) postulated that marketing managers will have to strive and develop the appropriate strategies which in turn will create positive attitudes and good company image.

Once alternatives have been evaluated and a choice has been made then the customer will do the buying. Kutuk (2016) postulated that the act of buying can only be done if and only if the decision is positive otherwise the customer will not buy. Kutuk (2016) also argues that the act of buying is not complete until the customer has acted and benefitted from the product. In other cases the buying process is delayed in cases where the customer consults friends and family after the evaluation process and they say otherwise or if the customer does not have sufficient money to act, Kutuk (2016).

Kutuk (2016) argues that when the act of buying the product has been done this does not mean that the buying process is completed. It is the post-purchase behavior of customers that marks the end of the buying process. Customers after consuming the product or service tend to make some evaluations and this is what is very significant to in the buying process (Kutuk, 2016). A satisfied consumer tends to buy more and more of the product while the unsatisfied one will influence others not to buy the product and this gives rise to the word of mouth which very influential.

2.1.5 Word of Mouth (WOM) and Tourism

According to Silverman (2001) word of mouth represents communication that takes place among people, on a certain product(s) or service(s), which are independent from the company supplying the product by way of making use of independent networks. Zarrad and Debabi (2015) argue that Word of Mouth occurs between consumers on a specific service, or product and/or company with a commercial influence that is independent.

The strength and influence of Word of Mouth is very powerful than formal advertisement as they create strong negative and/or positive attitudes to consumers. Tucker (2011) postulated that the key to the success of an organization rests on the word of mouth witnessing by customers. Word of mouth is an act of witnessing by customers on the quality of goods and services provided by an organization which they have consumed on a personal basis in the past. Word of Mouth is thus strong in the sense that it allows other customers to hear from the horse mouth, the real life customers who had an opportunity to consume the organization's services.

Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) came up with theories on why consumers may engage in WOM with others. The first theory proposed was based on the side of satisfied customers who shared their views because of reasons of drawing attention, reducing cognitive conflicts, avoiding the sense of being negative, help others and to be seen as knowledgeable, Steinkuehler and Williams (2006). On the other hand, dissatisfied customers were said to engage in WOM in order to warn other customers about the defects of the products or services, reduce anxiety and venting their dissatisfaction. The last theory according to Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) dissatisfied customers tend to have the greatest impact on the business than satisfied ones.

Hennig-Thurau (2004) argues that electronic WOM is a negative or positive statement that is made by customers, potential, former or actual, on internet about company's product to a large population of people. Electronic WOM if negative will result in great losses to a company. Datta et al, 2005 postulated that electronic WOM posted on internet is made visible to a large audience for

a long period of time, unlike traditional WOM. According to Cheung et al (2008) electronic WOM allows for users to get information from the world over from different people with relevant experience of the product.

2.1.6 Pros and Cons of Social Media

According to Salcido (2015) social media has got several merits and some of these advantages include, low cost for businesses, unlimited access, global reach, simplicity, flexibility, contact building, measurability, keeping in touch with family, professional networking and guaranteed meeting places among many others. It is crystal clear that Social media up to date has helped family and friends from across the world to connect and keep in touch with each other. Which the emergency of Skype and several other social networks such as Messenger and Hangouts that allows for people to hold a visual live video this has transformed the world into one global village. Furthermore, social media is very simple to use thus everyone can have access to one or several social platforms easily, hence is the most useful means for marketing purposes by businesses.

On the other hand, Social media comes with its disadvantages especially for companies and firms. One of the deadly and most common disadvantages of social network is hacking. Hacking has gone a long way in distorting the image of companies where some individuals may gain access to control and post on other users' platforms. False claims can also tarnish the image of a company where a viral message or video can be posted inciting that a certain product is not good thereby resulting in great losses to the company.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

In this section of empirical Literature Review this study is going to look into the empirical studies that were carried out in the past by the forerunners who did the same research topic with us. This study is going to examine the results that were found by other researchers. These results will help match, and do a critical analysis with the findings of this study.

To begin with, in a study by Chitharanjan (2016) that was undertaken in Ireland, 57 respondents were interviewed and the data was run using descriptive statistics, ANOVA test and cross tabulation. The results showed that there is a high level of consumer satisfaction from social media advertisements even though other groups tend to disagree. Chitharanjan (2016) argued that social media should be utilized for advertisement purposes.

In addition to that another study was carried out by Seabra (2013) where 236 respondents were interviewed. In this research Seabra (2013) postulated that social media impacts the tourism industry. The results also indicated that social media may play a crucial role as a sustainable competitive advantage in the tourism industry.

Matikiti et al (2017) in their study in South Africa that constituted of 340 respondents, questionnaires were used for data mining and a structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data. Matikiti et al (2017) in their results postulated that the factors that influence the use of SNSs in the process of trip organization are perceived behavioral control, subjective norm and perceived benefits. Tourists sites have to be easy to use, informative as well as being in a better position to provide safeguard for users (Matikiti et al, 2017).

Furthermore, Loureiro et al (2016) who made use of 310 respondents in Germany found out that 36% of participants made use of the online booking facilities. Participants were also getting relevant information on tourist offers from family and friends. Moreover, Loureiro et al (2016) found out that 65% of participants had already made an adventure booking and 50% was planning to do one in the future.

According to Roullet (2016) in a survey of 2 393 Quebec tourism enterprises in Canada found out that the significance of ICT in activities development of companies is known. They further argued that geographical, human, training and financial factors tend to slow down ICT processes as postulated in Roullet (2016). In another survey by Dina and Sabou (2012) that was carried out in Romania constituting of 123 young Romanians through interviews. The results

showed that the online environment is the most trusted source of information and that social media is being widely used to find information that is useful in the trip planning process (Dina & Sabou, 2012).

Rathonyi (2013) made use of questionnaire to interview University students in Hungary to investigate the demand and supply of Tourism. Rathonyi (2013) postulated that most students make use of Social Network Sites on a daily basis. However, they do not make use of these sites in the trip planning process. Furthermore, Rathonyi (2013) postulated that relatives and friends are crucial and are trusted most in obtaining tourism information.

According to Icoz et al (2018) in their study in Turkey found out that relationships were found to exist among variables such as tourism service media and use of perceptions, customers influence, and experience sharing intentions as well as tourism services buying.

Lastly Kutuk (2016) postulated that due to the emergency of social media travel agencies and hotel chains can now reach more customers at lower costs in a reasonably short time period. Students aged 19 – 28 are the most active and occasional users of social media even though it has been found that they don't buy tourism products. Kutuk (2016) also argues that intention, utilization, buying and information are interlinked decision making process stages of consumers.

The rest of the empirical studies and their findings are summarized in the table below. These studies show what the forerunners on the same topic and related topics to the current study obtained.

Table 2.2.1: Summary table of empirical results

Author	Country	Participants	Method	Findings
Roult (2016)	Canada	2 393 Quebec tourism enterprises	Survey	The significance of ICT in activities development of companies is known. Geographical, human, training and financial factors tend to slow down ICT processes.
Dina and Sabou (2012)	Romania	123 young Romanians	Survey	The online environment is the most trusted source of information Social media is being widely used to find information that is useful in the trip planning process
Matikiti et al (2017)	South Africa	340 respondents	Questionnaire Structural equation modelling	The factors that influence the use of SNSs in the process of trip organization are perceived behavioral control,

				<p>subjective norm and perceived benefits.</p> <p>Tourists sites have to be easy to use, informative as well as being in a better position to provide safeguards for users.</p>
Loureiro et al (2016)	Germany	310 respondents	Questionnaire Survey	<p>36% participants made use of the online booking facilities.</p> <p>Participants were also getting relent information on tourist offers from family and friends.</p> <p>65% of participants had already made an adventure booking and 50% was planning to do in the future.</p>
Rathonyi (2013)	Hungary	Students (University of Debrecen)	-Questionnaire - Survey	Most students make use of Social

			- Tourism demand and supply	<p>Network Sites on a daily basis.</p> <p>However, they do not make use of these sites in the planning process.</p> <p>Relatives and friends are crucial and are trusted most in obtaining tourism information.</p>
Yilmaz (2016)	Turkey	38 people	Structured interview carried out online and offline.	<p>Storytelling is very crucial for new tourists including the holiday experienced.</p> <p>Social Network Sites have gone a long way in enabling consumers in the tourism industry to share and produce their experiences in tourism.</p>

Sahin and Sengun (2015)	Turkey	550 University students	Survey	<p>Social media tend to affect the tourism sector in a positive and negative way.</p> <p>Young people's decisions are influenced by other people's comments on social media as well as their personal experiences</p>
Atadil (2010)	Turkey	255 participants	Survey	<p>70% of the participants in the study uses Social Media Networks to get hotel information.</p> <p>64% of the respondents showed that hotel information posted on SNS affects their hotel choices.</p>
Fountoulaki (2015)	Greece	20 hotel managers and tour operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview - Content analysis 	There is an increase in the significance of social media as

				<p>well as mobile in the distribution market of today and decreased significance of agents in the future.</p> <p>Focus in the tourism industry has to be put on Extranet.</p>
Bayne (2011)	Georgia	134 undergraduate participants	Experiment	<p>There is an increased awareness on students who received updates on their Facebook and tweets</p> <p>There was a decrease from the pre to the post-test treatment groups in the interest level while intention in participation increased on the side of Facebook treatment group.</p>

				The level of intent on the control and twitter groups decreased.
Schroeder and Gray (2014)	India, Brazil, Australia, South Korea	1784 males and 632 females	Survey Regression analysis	People aged 31 – 40 indicated that they used social media during their travel when a crisis occur.
Chitharanjan (2016)	Ireland	57 respondents	- Descriptive statistics, - ANOVA test - Cross tabulation	There is high level of consumer satisfaction from social media advertisements even though other groups tend to disagree. Social media should be utilized for advertisement purposes.
Seabra (2013)		236 respondents	Survey RBV model	Social media impacts the tourism industry Social media may play a crucial role as a sustainable competitive

				advantage in the tourism industry.
Icoz et al (2018)	Turkey	Social media users	- Survey - Structural modeling equation	Relationships were found to exist among variables such as tourism service media and use of perceptions, customers influence, experience sharing intentions as well as tourism services buying.
Kutuk (2016)	Turkey	Students	- ANOVA statistics - Structural equations.	Due to the emergency of social media travel agencies and hotel chains can now reach more customers at lower costs in a reasonably short time period Students aged 19 – 28 are the most active and occasional users of social media even though it has been found that they

				<p>don't buy tourism products.</p> <p>Intention, utilization, buying and information are interlinked decision-making process stages of consumers.</p>
Chin (1998)	USA		Partial Least Square (SEM)	<p>Covariance based analysis like LISREL, and Amos are the most widely used approaches.</p> <p>Partial least square approach of Structural Equation Modeling is very useful in other instances.</p>

2.3 Statistical of tourism in North Cyprus

Cyprus is one of the most popular resort destinations for foreign tourists. Tourism has traditionally been a major source of income and a driver of economic growth in Cyprus. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment Turkish Republic of North Cyprus for 2018, the number of arrivals in North Cyprus was 1 759 625 visitors (TR and Foreign arrivals included, North Cyprus excluded). The number of tourists staying at the tourist establishments for the year 2018 were 1 138 473 tourists (TR, Foreign tourists, North Cyprus (4% of the total number of tourists) included).

From January to April 2019, the number of tourist arrivals was 511 513 (TR and Foreign arrivals included, North Cyprus excluded) of which most of the arrivals are from TR (388 526), Germany (21 602), France (7 827), Great Britain (451), Iran (6 329), Jordan (4 450), and Russia (3 309). The number of arrivals by ports of entry from January to April 2019 are as follows: Girne – 13 086; Famagusta – 7 081 and Karpaz peninsula 78.

According to statistics of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment Turkish Republic of North Cyprus in the official website and Statistical year book of Tourism in North Cyprus (latest edition for 2017) the number of tourist accommodation establishments and categories comprise of 146 hotels in the 1*, 2*, 3*, 4* and 5* categories as well special class hotel, boutique hotel, class holiday village, tourist bungalow, apart hotel, traditional house, holiday homes and tourist guest house operating in North Cyprus. The largest tourist accommodation establishments in North Cyprus according to bed capacity statistics are: Elexus Resort Hotel/Spa, Acapulco hotel, Kaya Artemis Resort, Noah's Ark Deluxe Hotel/Spa, Salamis Hotel, Cratos Hotel, Merit Crystal Cove Hotel, Merit Park hotel, Lord's Palace Hotel and Malpas Hotel.

According to statistics of the Turkish Cyprus Tourism and Travel Agents Union, KITSAB in the official website and Statistical yearbook of Tourism in North Cyprus (latest edition for 2017), the number of tourism and travel agencies are divided into various groups, according to the services they provide; Group "A" agencies offer and perform all kinds of services specified in the related articles of the laws and Group "B" agencies have a temporary license to use. In the last period of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, the highest number of 10 incoming agencies were determined as Akgunler – 350 000; Northern Travel – 70 000; Cypriot Quarter Travel – 25 000; Chase Cyprus – 20 000 – 23 000; Tour Plus – 21 000; Puzzle – 20 000; Bon Voyage Travel – 20 000; Maestro – 15 000; Akmina – 12 000 and UA Journey Travel - 10 000. These agencies direct their tourists to many hotels in Cyprus such as Acapulco, Cratos, PiaBella, Grand Pasha, Malpas, Öğretmen Evi, Lords Palace, Elexus, Olive Tree, High life hotels and many others.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

3.1 Method Design and Data

This study made use of primary data which is the first and original data collected in the beginning from the horse mouth. A survey was carried out in 10 hotels (Acapulco, Cratos, PiaBella, Grand Pasha, Malpas, Öğretmen Evi, Lords Palace, Elexus, Olive Tree, High Life hotels) as well as 10 travel agencies (Akgunler, Northern Travel, Cypriot Quarter Travel, Chase Cyprus, Tour Plus, Puzzle Travel, Bon Voyage Travel, Maestro, Akmina Travel Club, UA Journey Travel), of North Cyprus.

As a result of this in this study two types of questionnaires are designed, that is, the first questionnaire was used to survey hotel guests in ten hotels (Acapulco, Cratos, PiaBella, Grand Pasha, Malpas, Öğretmen Evi, Lords Palace, Elexus, Olive Tree, High Life hotels) and the second questionnaire will be used to survey in ten travel agencies (Akgunler, Northern Travel, Cypriot Quarter Travel, Chase Cyprus, Tour Plus, Puzzle Travel, Bon Voyage Travel, Maestro, Akmina Travel Club, UA Journey Travel).

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis was used in order to come up with robust results on the study. For analyzing the data collected from hotel guest the quantitative data analysis by Structural Equation Modeling was used and the data was collected by making use of questionnaire draft that by making use of 5 Likert scale that ranges from 1 for strongly agree and 5 for strongly disagree. For analyzing the data that was obtained from the travel agencies

qualitative analysis was used having been made possible by the nature of the questions provided for in the questionnaire.

The sections that follows gives information pertaining to the sampling method of the study, give a brief explanation on what Structural Equation Modeling as well as its factors that come along with it.

The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of available literature to address several relevant issues concerning the process of decision-making and buying. In the preparation of the survey questions, was benefited from the work of Icoz et al (2018) who carried out the same research in Turkey.

3.2 Sampling

There are so many guests that visit various hotels every year in North Cyprus. For example, in the year 2018 there were over 101 740 guests at Malpas hotel and 178 956 guests at Cratos hotel as a result, it will not be possible to investigate all these guests.

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, the highest number of 10 incoming agencies was determined. In this thesis, mixed research model design with equal dominance of qualitative and quantitative research techniques will be used. Research in the qualitative dimension "case study" model was used. In the quantitative dimension of the study, screening model was used. In this thesis, the research universe, incoming agents and the guests brought in the first two months of 2019 (total 233,658 passenger) are formed. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 400 guests. The number of participants has been calculated according to the Sekeran (2003) sample size table.

3.3 Limitations of the study

The limitations of this survey are that it only investigated customers of only ten hotels in Cyprus yet there are several other hotels in Cyprus. Hotel guests from other Hotels which are not included in this survey, might have different views and also other customers of other hotels in the world. Therefore, this study

encourages that in future the survey must be conducted including several other hotel guests from the world over.

3.4 Structural Equation Modeling

According to Hox and Bechger (1998) a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a technique of modeling statistics that is basically general in form that is widely used in the behavioral sciences. It is a very useful model in the field of social sciences. Hox and Bechger (1998) argued that SEM is viewed as a model that combines factor analysis as well as regression or path analysis. According to Icoz et al (2018) SEM is basically used to analyze the relationship, structural in nature, between measured variables and latent variables. Icoz et al (2018) further argued that SEM put into consideration for the measuring errors of relationships in a given model into dependent variables and independent variables.

Bayram (2010) also argued that SEM provides for explanatory factor analysis, multiple regression analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis as well, as simultaneous equations model of relationships between latent variables. Hox and Bechger (1998) also postulated that the Structural Equation Modeling is also termed as the covariance structure modeling and/or Linear Structural Relations (LISREL).

Hox and Bechger (1998) citing Wright (1921) postulated that the Structural Equation Modeling is derived from the critical path analysis and argued that when starting a SEM analysis one has to start by drawing a path analysis diagram. In the path diagram rectangles or square boxes are used to represent observed or measured variables whereas a circle or an ellipse can be used to represent the latent, unmeasured variables (cited by Hox & Bechger, from Wright (1921). The single headed arrows in the diagram are known as the path which is used to define the model's causal relationships indicating that the variable at the tail is causing the variable at the point (Hox & Bechger, 1998). Hox and Bechger (1998) also elude on the point that covariance and correlations in a SEM are indicated by double headed arrows and there is no causal interpretation. Thus this study claims that the single headed arrows are

statistically used to represent the regression coefficients while the double headed ones represents covariance (Hox & Bechger, 1998).

There are basically two approaches to Structural Equation Modeling. The first approach is the Partial Least Square Approach (PLS) and the other one is Covariance-Based Solution. According to Chin (1998) the researcher's choice on whether to use covariance-based method or partial least square depends on the objectives and epistemic view of theory data of the researcher. These two approaches are discussed in the sections below.

3.4.1 Partial Least Square (PLS) Approach to SEM

According to Chin (1998) the Partial Least Square (PLS) approach to SEM is an alternative as well as a less used technique after the covariance-based approach which is widely used in most social sciences research. Wold (1985) postulated that PLS due to its minimal demands on residual distributions, sample size and measurement scales is the most powerful method of analysis. Chin (1998) also argues that PLS is used for theory confirmation as well as on suggesting if relationships exist or not and suggesting propositions for later tests.

In a bid to understand the PLS approach of SEM, Chin (1998) made use of a two-block model. Chin (1998) argues that two blocks refers to when the researcher is in a position to be able to partition indicators or observed variables into two groups, that is, two latent variables will be made use of and a block of indicators representing each latent variable. According to Chin (1998) it is of great significance to put into consideration path relations between constructs and among constructs as well as their respective indicators in path diagrams modeling. Chin (1998) in their study while making use of a one-way causal relationship argued that PLS allows for the modeling of relationships indicator-construct in an opposite direction, that is, in a causal or formative sense.

Chin (1998) postulated that under PLS approach the sample data of observed variables or indicators is used to estimate the measurement model parameters

as well as those parameters of the structural model. The structural model in this sense is the path coefficient and variances amongst the latent variables whereas the measurement model is the causal relationships or loadings between latent variables and observed variables. The PLS approach to SEM make use of a 3-stage algorithm estimation in order to obtain weights, loading and path estimates. The first stage makes use of a simple iterative scheme and multiple regressions contingent up until the solution come to a convergent with the weights of Latent variables score estimations (Chin, 1998). Stage 2 and 3 is simple through the use of OLS regression non-iterative applications, that is, if the Latent variables have been found and in these stages path coefficients, mean scores, loadings and location parameters of latent variables and observed variables are obtainable (Chin, 1998). Chin (1998) postulated that in stage 3 the latent variables are done as deviations from means.

3.4.2 Covariance-Based Solution to SEM

Chin (1998) argues that the Covariance-Based method is the most popular and widely used model of Structural Equation Modeling techniques. The covariance-based method is usually done by software like LISREL, RAMONA, SEPATH and AMOS (Chin, 1998). Under the covariance-based model this study starts by calculating the covariance matrix from the sample data, Chin (1998). Chin (1998) argues that under the covariance-based solution the parameters to be selected on a given model should be similar to those of the sample dataset.

Bollen (1989) as cited in Chin (1998) postulated that in the case of a two-block path model, for the sake of scale identification purposes the variance of the first latent variable and the first loading of the second latent variable to the observed variable should be set at 1. The indicators of the latent variable co-vary through its latent variable and given that the covariance of the first latent variable is set at 1 and assuming that the model is correct then the correlation between its 2 indicators is equivalent to the product of its loadings. Thus Chin (1998) argues that if the sample data correlation provides for a correlation of 0.81 then each indicator may be set at 0.91 which when multiplied will yield 0.81 which is similar to that of the sample data set.

CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive statistics of hotel guests

This section of the study to analyzes the results that were obtained after running the data on SPSS Statistics. This section will start by illustrating the descriptive statistics of hotel guests that were interviewed in various hotels (Acapulco, Cratos, PiaBella, Grand Pasha, Malpas, Öğretmen Evi, Lords Palace, Elexus, Olive Tree, High Life) of North Cyprus. Table 4.1.1 below shows the major descriptive statistics in the form of mean and standard deviation.

Table 4.1.1: Descriptive statistics of hotel guests

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	3.57	1.569
Gender	1.53	0.500
Marital status	1.50	0.501
Education	4.33	1.355
Income Level	3.21	1.068
Holidays	2.45	1.121
Social Media Use	3.39	1.511

In table 4.1.2 below this study provides the statistics of hotel guests in terms of their age. It can be noted that this study managed to interview sixty four respondents who were aged between 22 to 25 years and these constitutes of 16% of the total sample that was used. On top of that table 4.1.2 of this study provides that a total of 61 respondents out of 400 were aged 26 to 30 years

which is 15.3% of the total sample, 49 respondents which is 12.3% of the sample were aged between 31 to 35 years and 37 respondents constituting of 9.3% of the sample were aged between 36 to 40 years. In this study as illustrated in table 4.1.2, 189 respondents that constitutes of 47.3% of the total sample were aged above 40 years. Therefore it can be argued that almost half of respondents were elderly people of above 40 years old and the other half came from the younger generation of below 40 years of age.

Table 4.1.2: Descriptive statistics of hotel guests' age

Age			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
20 - 25	64	16.0	16.0
26 - 30	61	15.3	31.3
31 - 35	49	12.3	43.5
36 - 40	37	9.3	52.8
41+	189	47.3	100.0
Total	400	100.0	

Furthermore, in table 4.1.3 of this study below provides that 187 respondents from hotel guests were female and they constituted of 46.8% of the total sample study and 213 were male who constituted of 53.3% of the total sample.

Table 4.1.3: Descriptive statistics of hotel guests' gender

Gender			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	187	46.8	46.8
Male	213	53.3	100.0
Total	400	100.0	

In table 4.1.4 of the study below provides that the respondents constituted of 50.3% single or unmarried people and 49.8 % married.

Table 4.1.4: Descriptive statistics of hotel guests' marital status

Marital status			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	201	50.3	50.3
Married	199	49.8	100.0
Total	400	100.0	

In this study table 4.1.5 below shows the educational statuses of all hotel guest respondents. It can be noted that 2.8% of the respondents attended only Primary education, 5.5% attended up to Secondary education and 24.3% attended up to High school education. In table 4.1.5, 14% of the respondents attended up to vocational school with 30.3% who pursued their education up to bachelor's degree. The remaining 23.3% of the respondents had a master's degree or more.

Table 4.1.5: Descriptive statistics of hotel guests' education

Education			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Primary	11	2.8	2.8
Secondary	22	5.5	8.3
High school	97	24.3	32.5
Vocational school	56	14.0	46.5
Undergraduate	121	30.3	76.8
Masters+	93	23.3	100.0
Total	400	100.0	

In addition to that, table 4.1.6 of this study shows the income level of all hotel guests' respondents. It can be noted that only a mere 4.3% of the respondents had an income level of less than USD 250 while 21% had an income level of between USD 250 to 500. 38.8% of the respondents had an income level of between USD 500 to 1000 and 21.3% had an income level of USD 1000 to 2000. Table 4.1.6 of this study also shows that 14.8% of the respondents had an income level of above USD 2000.

Table 4.1.6: Descriptive statistics of hotel guests' income level

Income Level (Per Month - USD)			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
under 250 USD	17	4.3	4.3
250 – 500 USD	84	21.0	25.3
500 - 1000 USD	155	38.8	64.0
1000 - 2000 USD	85	21.3	85.3
more than 2000 USD	59	14.8	100.0
Total	400	100.0	

In table 4.1.7 of the study, the statistical results on the use of social media by respondents is obtained. This research observes that 12.3% of hotel respondents use social media for 10 to 30 minutes a day, while 18.8% use social media for 30 to 45 minutes a day and 22.8% uses social media for 45 to 60 minutes a day. In this study table 4.1.7 also illustrates that 21.3% of the respondents uses social media for 60 to 120 minutes a day whilst 14.3% uses social media for between 120 to 180 minutes and 10.8% uses social media for more than 180 minutes a day.

Table 4.1.7: Descriptive statistics of hotel guests' social media use (per a day)

Social Media use			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
10 - 30 min	49	12.3	12.3
30 - 45 min	75	18.8	31.0
45 - 60 min	91	22.8	53.8
60 -120 min	85	21.3	75.0
120 -180 min	57	14.3	89.3
more than 180 min	43	10.8	100.0
Total	400	100.0	

In table 4.1.8 of the study, the correlation results of hotel guests with respect to their gender, age, marital status, education level, income level, number holidays attended and social media use is illustrated. Table 4.1.8 shows that age, gender, marital status, education, income level, holidays and social media use are significantly correlated between each other except for social media use and education level and income level which are insignificant hence this study concludes that there is no correlation between them.

The rest of the variables show that there is a positive correlation relationship between them. It is only age and education as well as age and social media use that are negatively correlated. Therefore, this study concludes that an increase in one of these variables will result in increase in the respective

variables, but in the case of age and education and age and social media use, an increase in age of customers result in them reducing the number of times they appear on social media.

Table 4.1.8: Correlation results of hotel guests

Correlations								
		Age	Gender	Marital status	Education	Income Level	Holidays	SM use
Age	Pearson Correlation	1						
Gender	Pearson Correlation	0.185	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000						
Marital status	Pearson Correlation	0.174	0.803	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000					
Education	Pearson Correlation	-0.150	0.134	0.173	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003	0.007	0.001				
Income Level	Pearson Correlation	0.362	0.319	0.401	0.255	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000			
Holidays	Pearson Correlation	0.340	0.500	0.508	0.171	0.496	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000		
SM use	Pearson Correlation	-0.230	0.281	0.291	0.061	0.041	0.199	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.226	0.410	0.000	1

In this study table 4.1.8 above provides of great importance the probability value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$) which shows that model is significant at 1% and 5%, level of significant.

4.2 Structural Equation Model (SEM) results

This section of the study is going to look into the results of the Structural Equation Model that was run using SPSS AMOS. This research starts by showing the unstandardized estimates results of SEM model. Figure 4.2.1 below shows the unstandardized results of SEM model that was obtained from AMOS software. The figure in this study shows that the chi-square of model was obtained to be 1802.3 and 456 degrees of freedom. However, this study is not going to use the unstandardized estimates to interpret the model. This study make use of the standardized results that are shown in figure 4.2.2.

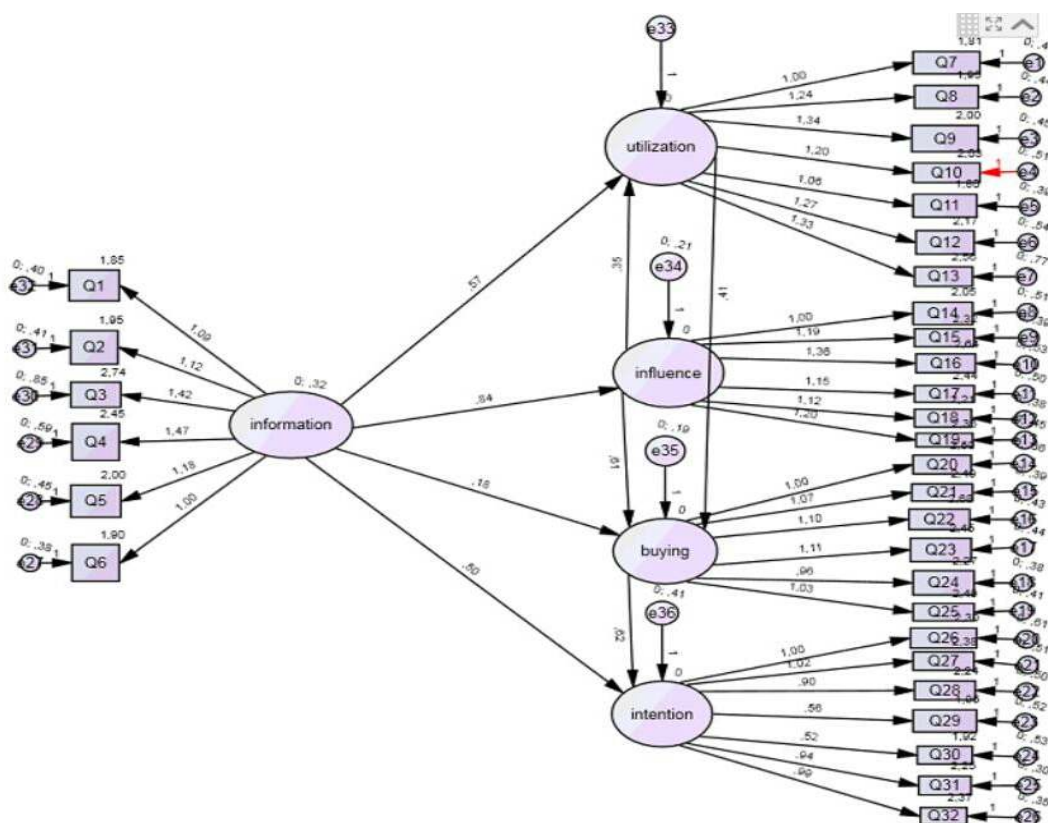


Figure 4.2.1: Unstandardized results of SEM

Source: Author's own illustration

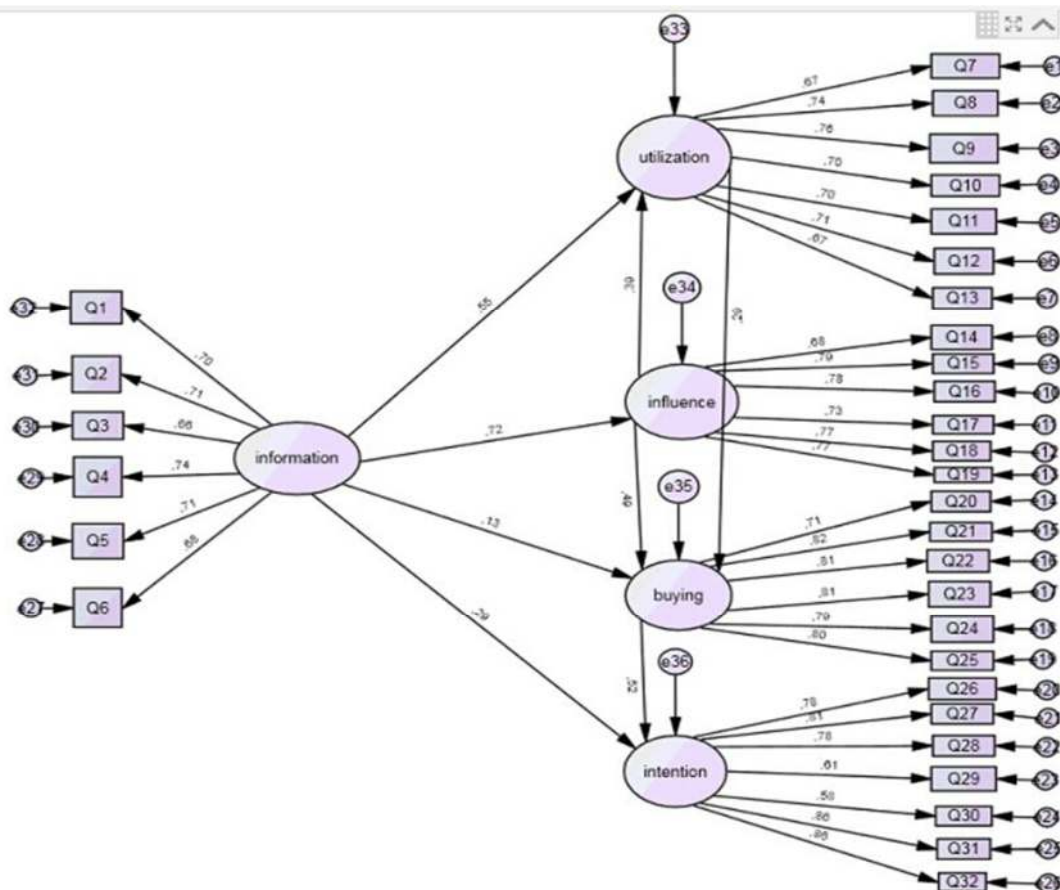


Figure 4.2.2: Standardized results of SEM

Source: Author's own illustration

According to figure 4.2.2 of the SEM standardized estimates that were obtained from Amos software there is a statistically significant relationship between tourist knowledge (information) of touristic products and services found from social media and the utilization perception thereof. This study provides that an increase in a single unit of information on touristic products on social media tends to increase the utilization of the products by 0.55 units. In this regard the findings of this study concurs with what is postulated in Kutuk and Icoz (2016) who argues that knowledge about tourist products from social media tends to increase utilization perception. Therefore H1 is accepted.

Furthermore, this study provides for a significant relationship between influence on tourism products and services and their information. Figure 4.2.2 shows that there is a 0.72 significant relationship, thus an increase in influence by a single unit has the effect of increasing information on tourism products

and services by 0.72 units. Thus, this study postulate that there is a significant relationship between influence and information leading us to accept H2.

Figure 4.2.2 also provides that there is a significantly positive relationship between utilization of social media and the act of buying the touristic products. Therefore this study argues that an increase in the utilization of social media by 1 unit will increase buying of tourism products by 0.29 units. As opposed to what is postulated in Kutuk and Icoz who found out that there was a negative relation between the two latent variables, this study provides for a positive relationship and tend to accept H3.

In addition to that, this study in line with the results obtained in figure 4.2.2 provides for a significant positive linear relationship between social media influence and buying of touristic products. This study also provide that an increase by 1 unit of social media influence will increases buying by 0.49 units, thus in this case H4 is accepted.

In this study, figure 4.2.2 also provides for a significant relationship between buying touristic products and services and the intention to share on social media. According to the results in figure 4.2.2 an increase in intention by 1 unit will lead in a 0.52 units increase in the buying of tourism products and services. In this case H5 is accepted that there is a significant positive relationship between buying and intention to share, hence H5 is accepted.

This research also provide that there is a significant relationship between buying of touristic products and services and information found on social media for the products and services. Figure 4.2.2 illustrates that buying has gotten a significant effect on information of 0.13. Therefore, this study argues that an increase by 1 unit of buying tourism products will result in an increase in information by 0.13. However, it must be noted that there is an error of e35 that exists. Therefore, H6 is accepted.

Moreover, a significant relationship between intention and information of touristic products was found. This study provides that an increase in intention

by 1 unit will cause the information to increase by 0.29 units. Therefore, H7 is accepted.

Lastly from figure 4.2.2 this study argues that there is a significant positive linear relationship between influence on social media and the utilization of touristic products and services on social media. An increase of utilization by 1 unit leads to an increase in influence by 0.39 units. Therefore, this study accepted H8.

This study provides the following structural equations:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{INFOR} &= 0.55*\text{UTILIZATION} + \text{error} \\ \text{INFOR} &= 0.72*\text{INFLUENCE} + \text{error} \\ \text{INFOR} &= 0.13*\text{BUYING} + \text{error} \\ \text{INFOR} &= 0.29*\text{INTENTION} + \text{error} \\ \text{UTILIZATION} &= 0.29*\text{BUYING} + \text{error} \\ \text{INFLUENCE} &= 0.49*\text{BUYING} + \text{error} \\ \text{BUYING} &= 0.52*\text{INTENTION} + \text{error} \\ \text{INFLUENCE} &= 0.39*\text{UTILIZATION} + \text{error} \end{aligned}$$

Since information has more explanatory variables this study provides it as follows:

$$\text{INFOR} = 0.55*\text{UTIL} + 0.72*\text{INFLU} + 0.13*\text{BUY} + 0.29*\text{INTEN} + \text{error}$$

This research also argue that by making use of the observed or measured variables such as those represented by Q1 to Q32 and the latent unobserved variables, this study managed to draw some important relationship which were otherwise impossible to find. Therefore, this research argues that Structural Equation Model is very crucial in the field of social sciences. This study also provides that the use of social media has got a great impact in the utilization, influence, information, intention and buying of touristic products and services.

In table 4.2.3 of the study below the statistical confirmatory results of the Structural Equation Model are provided. Of great importance is the probability value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$) which shows that the model is significant at the 1%, 5%, and 10% level of significant. Therefore, basing on the results of the

probability value, this study argue that the model is statistically significant and provides reliable results which can be used by tourism management. Table 4.2.3 also provides that the chi-square is 1802.323, degrees of freedom are 456, RAMSE is 0.086 and chi-square/df is equal to 3.952. The rest of the statistical values of the model are provided in table 4.2.3 below.

Table 4.2.3: Statistical confirmatory scores for the SEM model

Result (Default model)	
Chi-square	1802.323
Df	456
Prob level	0.000
RAMSE	0.086
Chi-sq/df	3.952
NFI	0.803
PNFI	0.693
CFI	0.844
IFI	0.845
RFI	0.771

4.3 Tests of Hypotheses

In this section, the study gives a brief summary of the hypothesis of both accepted and rejected:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship in the individuals' knowledge or information on touristic products and services through social media with their utilizing perceptions. Therefore, this study concur with what is postulated in Kutuk and Icoz (2016) that there is need to come up with quality information on social media to increase the sale of touristic products. In this case accept H1.

H2: An increase in individuals' knowledge on tourism service and product via social media, tend to influence customers in the tourism industry. In line with the findings accept H2.

H3: An increase in the individuals' utilization of tourism service and product because of social media increases the chance of buying them. As opposed to what is provided in Kutuk and Icoz (2016) who provided for a negative relationship between these two latent variables, this study argue that there is a positive significant relationship. Therefore, accept H3.

H4: The degree of individuals' influence on tourism service and product via social media tends increase the buying chance. Thus, H4 is accepted.

H5: An increase in individuals' buying perceptions of tourism services on social media increases the chances of sharing their experiences. In line with finding accept H5.

H6: There is a positive relationship between individuals' knowledge about tourism services through social media and buying. Provided findings in this study H6 is accepted.

H7: There is a positive relationship between individuals' knowledge about tourism services through social media and their intention to share these experiences. H7 is accepted.

H8: There is a positive relationship between individuals influence by the tourism services in social media and the chance of utilizing them. H8 is accepted.

4.4 Results from Travel Agencies

This section of the study provides for the statistical results of the travel agency who were part of respondents in this study. Table 4.4.1 provides the statistical results of the promotional strategy that is being used by travel agency in advertising their touristic services. Table 4.4.1 of the study provides that 10% of the travel agencies, who were interviewed, use Facebook for their promotional purposes and that 10% of the travel agencies uses strategic partnerships other than travel suppliers and tour operators. Lastly, table 4.4.1

shows that 80% of the travel agencies uses more than 1 promotion strategy. Therefore, this study argue that most of the travel agency in North Cyprus uses various means of social media for their promotional strategies.

Table 4.4.1: Promotional strategy statistics results of agencies

Promotion strategy			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Facebook	1	10.0	10.0
Strategic Partnerships other than travel suppliers and tour operators	1	10.0	20.0
More than 1 promotion strategy	8	80.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	

Table 4.4.2 in this study provides the statistical results of travel agencies' educational level. Table 4.4.2 shows that 10% of travel agencies attended only secondary education while the other 10% of the travel agencies attended up to high school. In addition to that table 4.4.2 provides that 50% of travel agencies (respondents) attended up to vocational school or foundation degree. The remaining 30% of respondents attended up to bachelor's degree, undergraduate in this study.

Table 4.4.2: Educational statistics of travel agencies

Education			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Secondary	1	10.0	10.0
High school	1	10.0	20.0
Foundation degree (vocational school)	5	50.0	70.0
Undergraduate	3	30.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	

Table 4.4.3 of the study below provides the statistical results of the travel agencies. Table 4.4.3 provides that 50% of travel agencies respondents were female and the other 50% were male. Therefore, given these gender statistics this study argues that a fairly balanced representation of the gender demographic statistics hence will yield reliable results.

Table 4.4.3: Travel agencies' gender

Gender			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	5	50.0	50.0
Male	5	50.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	

In addition to that, table 4.4.4 below shows the statistical results of travel agencies' income level. It can be noted from table 4.4.4 that 10% of respondents had an income level of between USD 250 to 500 and this is the group which has the lowest income level. Table 4.4.4 also shows that 60% of the respondents had an income level of between USD 500 to 1000 and this income level proved to be the one that is being earned by most of respondents.

Table 4.4.4: The income level of Travel agencies

Income Level			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
250 – 500 USD	1	10.0	10.0
500-1000 USD	6	60.0	70.0
1000-2000 USD	2	20.0	90.0
more than 2000 USD	1	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	

Table 4.4.5 shows the marital statuses of travel agencies respondents and it shows that 60% of them are single while the remaining 40 % are married.

Table 4.4.5: Marital status of travel agencies

Marital status			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	6	60.0	60.0
Married	4	40.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	

In table 4.4.6 of the study provides for the age of travel agencies and found out that 20% of them were aged between 20 to 25 years and these were the youngest. 40% of the travel agencies were found to be aged between 26 to 30 years, 20% of them are aged between 31 to 35 years and the remaining 20% are above 40 years.

Table 4.4.6: Age of travel agencies

Age			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
20 - 25	2	20.0	20.0
26 - 30	4	40.0	60.0
31 - 35	2	20.0	80.0
41+	2	20.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	

In table 4.4.7 of the study provides for the various jobs that are done by the travel agencies and found out that 90% of travel agencies work in a tourism sector while 10% of them indicated to be working in other sectors which are not the tourism sector.

Table 4.4.7: Work of travel agencies

Work			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
I work in tourism sector	9	90.0	90.0
Other	1	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	

Table 4.4.8 below shows the descriptive statistics on the responses of various questions that were given by travel agencies during this study. The rest of the explanations are given below.

Table 4.4.8: Descriptive statistics on agencies response

Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	1.70	2.214
Q2	1.00	0.000
Q3	1.00	0.000
Q4	1.10	0.316
Q5	1.00	0.000
Q6	1.10	0.316
Q7	1.10	0.316
Q8	1.00	0.000
Q9	1.00	0.000

In table 4.4.8 this study observe that Q2, Q3, Q5, Q8 and Q9 have got a standard deviation of zero which shows that there is no variance or difference on the responses that were given by travel agencies with respect to these questions and the mean is one which indicated that all travel agencies were in agreement with the questions that were asked. Therefore, this study argues that travel agencies in North Cyprus give promotional discounts to their clients as shown by question 2 in Appendix B.

In short, travel agencies thinks that social media marketing strategy is very important in increasing their sales and that taking advantage of social media packages help gain more marketing advantages. Travel agencies also argued that their promotional activities are very effective and this is in line with question 3 in Appendix B. This study in table 4.4.8 results of Q5 shows that travel agencies concur on the point that other ways of advertising such as televisions, printing, and radio are very useful in increasing their sales and clients for the company. According to the results in table 4.4.8 social media advertising increases sales for travel agency and travel agencies gain more marketing advantages by offering great packages and promotions on social media pages, (see also Appendix B).

On the other hand, table 4.4.8 shows a very small standard deviation value for Q4, Q6, and Q7 and in this case this study provides that most of the travel agencies agree that internet advertising increased their sales and their company clients, public relations attract more customers to come through their agency and that they remind their clients about special offers on social media (refer to questions in Appendix B). Q1 from table 4.4.8 shows a very high standard deviation indicating the travel agencies response regarding this question had variation, it was not the same. Therefore, in this case this study argues that in as much as other travel agencies have websites others do not have an official website.

4.5 Answers from various travel agencies with respect to different qualitative questions

Table: 4.5.1 Answers from various travel agencies with respect to different qualitative questions

No	Questions	Answers	Number	Frequency (100%)
1	Does your Travel agency have a website?	Yes	7	70%
		No	3	30%
2	Do you usually give promotional discounts to your clients?	Yes	10	100%
		No	-	-
3	Is the promotional activities undertaken by your agency effective?	Yes	10	100%
		No	-	-
4	Does internet advertising help increase sales and add more clients to your company?	Yes	9	90%
		No	1	10%

5	Does other ways of advertising like printing, televisions or radio advertisements, help increase the sales and get more clients for your company?	Yes	9	90%
		No	1	10%
6	Do good public relations attract more clients to come through your travel agency?	Yes	9	90%
		No	1	10%
7	Do you remind your clients on personal rates of your tour packages, promos and seasonal packages on social media pages?	Yes	9	90%
		No	1	10%
8	Do you think that social media marketing strategy is important in increasing travel agencies sales?	Yes	10	100%
		No	-	-
9	Do you think that you gain more marketing advantages by offering great packages and promotions on social media pages?	Yes	10	100%
		No	-	-

In the section below this study provides for the qualitative answers that were given by travel agencies with respect to different qualitative questions.

Participants' answer to the question "Does your Travel agency have a website?": we can see 7 positive answers from 10 agencies: "Yes, our travel

agency has a website”, “Yes, we have a website, because it is a very important for our agency”, “...” and 3 negative answers: “Not yet, but we are working on making our website”, “We don't have a website, but we have a Facebook page”, “...”.

According to question 2, “Do you usually give promotional discounts to your clients?” there are 10 positive answers from 10 agencies: “Sometimes we give promotional discounts to our clients”, “Sometimes we give promotional discounts to our clients in non-seasonal time”, “...”.

In line with question 3, “Is the promotional activities undertaken by your agency effective?” there are 10 positive answers from 10 agencies: “Yes, but some promotions give us from hotels to use and we use it”, “...”.

Under Question 4, “Does internet advertising help increase sales and add more clients to your company?” there are 9 positive answers from 10 agencies: ““Yes, when our operators give internet advertising, our sales will increase”, “...” and 1 negative answers: “Internet advertising helps to increase sales for our agency in foreign markets, but not in Cyprus”.

Under Question 5; “Does other ways of advertising like printing, television or radio advertisements, help increase the sales and get more clients for your company?” there are 9 positive answers from 10 agencies: “Yes, but mostly face to face marketing and internet advertising”, “...” and 1 negative answers: “We pay more attention to advertising just on our social media sites”, “...”.

According to question 6; “Do good public relations attract more clients to come through your travel agency?” , there are 9 positive answers from 10 agencies: “Yes, good public relations always attract more clients”, “...” and 1 negative answers: “...”.

According to question 7; “Do you remind your clients on personal rates of your tour packages, promos and seasonal packages on social media pages?” there are 9 positive answers from 10 agencies: “Yes, we remind your clients on

personal rates of your tour packages, promos and seasonal packages on social media pages”, “Yes, we remind your clients on personal rates of your tour packages, promos and seasonal packages on social media pages”. “...” and 1 negative answers: “...”.

Under Question 8 participants’ answer; “Do you think that social media marketing strategy is important in increasing travel agencies sales?” there are 10 positive answers from 10 agencies: “Absolutely yes, now is the time of social media, because social media is everything and way for every single advertising”, “Using social media as a marketing tool helps us to increasing our agency sales and supplement our income”, “...”.

In line with Question 9; “Do you think that you gain more marketing advantages by offering great packages and promotions on social media pages?” there are 10 positive answers from 10 agencies: “Of course yes, because we can reach thousands of people with social media channels”, “...”.

4.6 Comparing the results of the Travel agencies and Incoming Tourists on the usage of social media

According to the results of this research, the following features in the work of social media between travel agencies / tour operators and Incoming tourists in North Cyprus can be distinguished. On one hand, there are three main groups of tourists in North Cyprus: The main group of tourists in Cyprus are tourists over 40 years, constituting of 47.3% of the total group, and these are tourists from Germany, Great Britain, France, Israel, Turkey, Russia and others. There are psychological and cultural differences between them, which must be taken into account by hotels and travel agencies when organizing and providing services in the tourism sector. The main group of tourists, 40 years and above of age, are often targeted at the hotels which they are accustomed to and the quality of service of these hotels meets their needs. This research shows that, tourists from the UK and Germany prefer hotels which are quiet and comfortable, where they can spend time talking with other drinking coffee or reading a book by the pool side.

Well-coordinated work of travel agencies and hotels conducts familiarization with guests and provides excursions to the sights of North Cyprus. The main group of tourists do not often leave comments on Trip Advisor or Holiday check sites, but if the quality of service satisfies them they tend to be regular guests of these hotels and they will attract other potential customers through word of mouth advertising.

The second group of tourists is from 31 - 35 age groups (12.3%) and 36 – 40 years (9.3%), as per the results obtained in this research. This group of tourists are married couples with children, guests who have come for business, guests who have chosen a hotel for holidays and others. These age groups are active users of social networks, they carefully plan their holidays, especially couples with children or guests who have come for business. This group of tourists pay attention to the comments and advice in social media from other tourists to choose a tourist destination. Social media plays a big role in making decisions of this group of tourists. Furthermore, they often choose hotels with water parks for children, with live music, with show programs. This group of tourists will post a photo, video to social networks, share their impressions with friends and leave a comment on social media sites about their vacation. The interconnected work of travel agencies and hotels is aimed at ensuring the mobility and satisfaction of these customers, especially in such simple but very important details such as a coat for the baby, a child seat in the car, meeting at the airport and fast check-in to the room, high-quality Internet, mobile solution any problem.

Finally, the third group of tourists, aged 20-25 (16%) and 26-30 (15,3%), according to the results of our research. These are often students, couples, guests who came to the honeymoon and others. This group of tourists begin to choose their place of rest with a search in social networks, interesting advertising in social media, a bright and beautiful place to travel, clean and comfortable beaches, with an interesting history and culture of the city, noisy discos and foam parties, entertainment programs, diving and much more that is what attracts their attention. These are effective users of social media, they post and receive emotions in social networks and indicate with a hashtag#,

they mark locations and add history in an Instagram. Social media influences on the buying decisions of the group of tourists, aged 20-25 and 26-30 and this group of tourists inadvertently provide an advertising campaign for hotels. Hotel work should be aimed at providing a vivid and unforgettable vacation for this group of guests.

Interconnected work between hotels, travel agencies and tour operators plays an important role for all parties. Proper and competent work of hotels, travel agencies and tour operators in social media is a powerful tool for promoting services. The findings of this study confirms that 80% of agencies in North Cyprus use more than one advertising strategy in a concept. These established strong relationships help compete with new distribution channels. Travel agencies are focused on incoming business in North Cyprus, they work closely with foreign operators and advertise in social media interrelation. Foreign operators conduct an advertising campaign in social media locally in their city or country, attracting customers and processing their requests more efficiently than hotels, thanks to their experience, common culture and language. Tour operators represent the main distribution channels when they buy hotel rooms in bulk (among other things, they plan tickets for travel services, leisure services, etc.), to collect them in attractive packages and sell them to guests, directly or through a travel agent. In turn, the hotels also pay great attention to social media: they create web sites, pages on Facebook, Instagram, special staff as guests relations or social media supervisor and control comments in Trip Advisor.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides that social media is very useful in the tourism industry, this is so because in this study over 80% of travel agencies in North Cyprus make use of more than one promotional strategy all including means of social media. Travel agencies argue that by using social media platforms to promote their services they gain a great deal of profits. Due to that reason this research provided that tourism management should pay more attention in advertising their services of social media.

According to this thesis, there is a significant relationship between information of touristic products and services over social media by hotel guests and the latent variables of utilization of touristic products, influence to buy touristic products, the act of buying tourism products and the intention. Thus in this line this study concur with what is postulated in Icoz et al (2018), and Kutuk and Icoz (2016) who argues that information, utilization, influence, buying and intention are a sort of interlinked stages that are found in the decision making process of customers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that the cyclical process between information, intention, utilization, buying, and influence form the basis of social media tourism marketing strategy. Therefore, social media plays a very crucial role in giving tourists with information about tourism products and services. Social media also has the impact of influencing tourists to buy and use the tourism services.

This study also provide that social media tourism marketing strategy is a very fragile process since the failure of one stage may lead to the failure of the whole process also Icoz et al (2018) supported same results in their research. Milano et al. (2011), Sigala et al. (2012) and in Zivkovic (2014) stated that there is a significant positive relationship between information provided on social media and their utilization in tourism products and services. In line with Icoz et al (2018), and Kutuk and Icoz (2016) provided that there is a need for the tourism industry to develop quality information and publish it on social media platforms to attract a great deal of sales and clients. This thesis found the same results with these researches.

This research also provide that most of the tourists spend the greater part of their day using social media thus targeting them on social media will go a long way in promoting the tourism industry. Social media is increasingly growing by day with most people signing up and have an account with at least 5 social media platforms. Therefore, this research argues that in order for hotels to boost their sales they should make sure they meet their customers on those various platforms of social media.

In accordance with our findings, the fact that knowledge or information about tourism products and services is a determinant of buying through social media and thus motivates customers to share their experiences poses more concern to the management in the Tourism industry. Icoz et al. (2018) argue that more knowledge in people influences them to share their knowledge and experience online via social media platforms. Atadil (2011) and Lopez et al. (2011) postulated that the sharing of this information may pose either positive or negative perceptions on others, thus provided for a direct link between the level of influence and utilization.

In addition to that concluded in the same manner as Icoz et al (2018), citing Bayram and Sahbaz (2012), Hays et al. (2013), Paris (2013), Okazaki (2017) and Sotiriadis (2017) that the post purchase utilization of touristic products is one that is characterized by users sharing their experience of the product on social media as well as to purchase again in the future. The sharing of tourism

products and services by other customers who have tested the product has got a very great impact to future potential customers.

The results of research shows that the use of social media is negatively correlated with age hence posing the issue that as one grows up towards ageing years they tend to reduce their level of using social media. Madden (2010), Stellefson (2013), Coto et al. (2017) explained that over the years, older people have begun to use social media more. According to Madden, from 2000 to 2010 there was an increase of 88%, and a 26% increase by those over 65 years.

However, according to Maier et al. (2011), the use of social media of the older generation is still significantly lower in comparison with the younger generation. The rapid spread of information technology has not allowed to introduce people to the older generation. The reason is that people who retired throughout the millennium for the most part did not use social media during their work activities, also their reluctance to change their way of life.

Also in line with Kutuk and Icoz (2016) and Icoz et al. (2018) this study provides that young people are the ones who are most likely to be targeted through social media advertisements as elderly people tend to ignore the use of social media.

According to the results of this thesis, single participants (50.3%) are more than married (49.8%). Such statistics are related to the fact that students who attended the session and stay at the hotel took part in the study. Also, such statistics are due to the fact that many older people stayed at the hotel alone.

In short this research argues that the use of social media is very significant in the tourism industry and management should rethink and use it efficiently to achieve their set goals.

5.2 Policy Recommendation

This study recommend that tourism management should heavily make use of social media for their promotional and advertising purposes. This will go a long way in providing information to the users and hence utilization and buying of tourism products will increase.

5.3 Future Recommendation

In the future, it is recommended for another study to be carried out that covers hotel guests and travel agencies from various countries all over the world. By doing so tourism management will be able to be provided with a reliable result that is fairly representative of the global world.

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Appendix A: Hotel guests Questionnaire

Dear Respondent

RE: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a Master Student at the School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Near East University, North Cyprus. I am conducting a research entitled “THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CUSTOMER BUYING DECISIONS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY”. The attached questionnaire is a survey designed to determine whether social networks influence your buying decision when choosing a travel service or product. We also seek to find out whether social networks affect sales of travel agencies. May you please answer all the questions carefully? All information you provide will be strictly confidential and used for academic purposes only.

Thanks for your time and support,

Elmira

Section A

Group Questions – Demographics of the participants

1. Age

- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41 +

2. Gender

- Female
- Male

3. Marital status

- Single
- Married

4. Education

- *Primary*
- *Secondary*
- *High School*
- *Foundation Degree (Vocational School)*
- *Undergraduate*
- *Masters +*

5. Income Level (Per Month - USD)

- *under 250 USD*
- *250 – 500 USD*
- *500-1000 USD*
- *1000-2000 USD*
- *more than 2000 US*

6. How many times do you go on holidays per year?

- *1*
- *2*
- *3*
- *more than 4*

7. Frequency of social media use

- *10-30 min*
- *30-45 min*
- *45-60 min*
- *60-120 min*
- *120-180 min*
- *more than 180 min*

Section B

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I	INFORMATION					
1	Social networking sites (SNSs) provide hotel information for me.					
2	Social networking sites provide information for me about touristic facilities and destinations while making decisions.					
3	I subscribe on the social networking sites concerning my favourite hotels and tourism destinations; as well as following their notifications.					
4	I learn every kind of innovations regarding hotels and tourism destinations on social networking sites.					
5	Social networking sites are provides information before embarking on trips.					
6	Social networking sites contribute to the promotion of tourism facilities and destinations.					
II	UTILIZATION					
1	I have the chance to access the websites of the tourism facilities easily via SNSs.					

2	SNSs help me to make faster decisions about tourism facilities or the destinations I intend to visit.					
3	I use posts and the comments of the people on SNSs in decision making.					
4	I watch the videos on the pages of the SNSs concerning for tourism facilities that I intend to visit.					
5	I check the pictures of the hotels on the pages of the SNSs concerning tourism facilities.					
6	I carefully check and examine all of the special offers on the SNSs concerning the destinations and the tourism facilities that I intend to visit.					
7	I ask/post questions on SNSs while I am deciding on the tourism facility and/or destination that I intend to visit.					
II	INTERACTION / INFLUENCE					
I						
1	Positive comments /posts of the users on SNSs make me trust the tourism facilities that I am interested in.					
2	I think the posts and the comments of the tourists on SNSs are reliable.					
3	I am easily affected by the comments on tourism facilities posted on SNSs					
4	I think the experiences and comments that posted on SNSs concerning the travel agencies or the trips are convincing.					

5	I can make healthier decisions about my tourism activities by the help of SNSs					
6	The posts and comments on SNSs affect my decisions on tourism products.					
I	BUYING/ PURCHASE					
V						
1	I check all of the posts on SNSs about the tourism products that I am the stage whether to purchase or not.					
2	I might purchase a trip for a touristic destination which is posted on SNSs.					
3	I might order a touristic service that is advertised on SNSs.					
4	I might decide where to spend my holiday by social media.					
5	I might make preferences between locations/districts according to the comments posted on social media concerning such touristic locations.					
6	I might purchase a trip of a travel agency to a destination according to the information that are provided by means of social media.					
V	INTENTION					
1	I like sharing the pictures of the places I have visited during my trips on SNSs; and I like posting comments about them.					
2	I share my holiday experiences on social platforms and consequently I encourage my friends for such trips.					

3	I can share my opinions regarding to both positive and negative experiences I had with a hotel on social platforms.					
4	I think, day by day, many people are going to arrange trips by making use of social platforms; and then they are going the share their opinions via comments.					
5	I think, day by day, many people are going to upload videos and pictures on social platforms; and they are going to share their information and experiences.					
6	I am sure that from now on I am going to use social media means while organizing and improving my future trips.					
7	I am going to encourage my friends in the future for using social media for such purposes.					

Source: Icoz, Kutuk and Icoz (2018).

Appendix B: Travel Agencies Questionnaire

Dear Respondent

RE: RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a Master Student at the School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Near East University, North Cyprus. I am conducting a research entitled “THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CUSTOMER BUYING DECISIONS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY”. The attached questionnaire is a survey designed to determine whether social networks influence your buying decision when choosing a travel service or product. We also seek to find out whether social networks affect sales of travel agencies. May you please answer all the questions carefully? All information you provide will be strictly confidential and used for academic purposes only.

Thanks for your time and support,
Elmira

Name of Travel Agency: _____

Ownership:

Government _____ **Private** _____ **Other** _____

Section A

Group Questions – Demographics of the participants

1. Age

- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41 +

2. Gender

- *Female*
- *Male*

3. Marital status

- *Single*
- *Married*

4. Education

- *Primary*
- *Secondary*
- *High School*
- *Foundation Degree (Vocational School)*
- *Undergraduate*
- *Masters +*

5. Income Level (Per Month - USD)

- *under 250 USD*
- *250 – 500 USD*
- *500-1000 USD*
- *1000-2000 USD*
- *more than 2000 USD*

6-Work?

- *I work in a non-tourism sector*
- *I work in tourism sector*
- *Part of the development is from the tourism sector*

7. Which promotional strategy is being used most frequently by your agency?

- *Website*
- *Word of Mouth*
- *Twitter*
- *Linkedin.com*

- *Facebook*
- *Networking locally*
- *Writing articles and blog*
- *Advertising*
- *Directory listings*
- *Association membership*
- *Strategic Partnerships other than travel suppliers and tour operators*
- *Others _____*

Section B

1. Does your Travel agency have a website?
Answer.....
2. Do you usually give promotional discounts to your clients?
Answer.....
3. Is the promotional activities undertaken by your agency effective?
Answer.....
4. Does internet advertising help increase sales and add more clients to your company?
Answer.....
5. Does other ways of advertising like printing, televisions or radio advertisements, help increase the sales and get more clients for your company?
Answer.....
6. Do good public relations attract more clients to come through your travel agency?
Answer.....

7. Do you remind your clients on personal rates of your tour packages, promos and seasonal packages on social media pages?

Answer.....

8. Do you think that social media marketing strategy is important in increasing travel agencies sales?

Answer.....

9. Do you think that you gain more marketing advantages by offering great packages and promotions on social media pages?

Answer.....

***NB* The qualitative research questions have been prepared by taking the opinions of 2 academicians specialized in the field.**

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YAKIN DOĐU ÜNİVERSİTESİ

BİLİMSEL ARAŞTIRMALAR ETİK KURULU

23.05.2019

Dear Elmira Adzhalimova

Your application titled “**The impact of Social media on consumers buying decisions in the tourism industry**” with the application number YDÜ/SB/2019/432 has been evaluated by the Scientific Research Ethics Committee and granted approval. You can start your research on the condition that you will abide by the information provided in your application form.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Direnç Kanol

Rapporteur of the Scientific Research Ethics Committee

Note:If you need to provide an official letter to an institution with the signature of the Head of NEU Scientific Research Ethics Committee, please apply to the secretariat of the ethics committee by showing this document.