

Studying the Relationship between ICT Prevalence and Online Tourism Booking A Comparative Study between Saudi Arabia and Egypt

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Abstract. Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide, during the last decades, tourism as an information intensive business has been strongly affected by the rapid changes in technology, especially the Internet which continues to gain importance in the tourism sector. Since the 1980s, Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been transforming tourism globally. One of the major results is the changing in traveler's behavior. The purpose of this paper is to examine and describe the relationship between the expansion of ICT applications and the community's behavior in tourism online booking, with a comparative study between Saudi and Egyptian Community. The paper depends on a descriptive and analytical approach based on analyzing the latest surveys and statistics conducted last 3 years in Middle East included Saudi Arabia & Egypt, to find indicators about the relationship between ICT prevalence and Online booking, especially in travel & tourism industry.

Introduction

During the last two decades (1990-2010), the intensive proliferation of ICT networks, created a new environment: the global domain. The characteristic of those networks is fast and reliable real-time communications between remote installations, which facilitates the global-wide instant diffusion of information, consistent transmission of multimedia, real-time control of remote installations and economic transactions; and of course, real-time communication between people and/or organizations (Mavrofidis and Papageorgiou, 2013).

Hasslinger et al., (2007) state that Internet has developed into a new distribution channel and online transactions are rapidly increasing. Moreover, Silverstein (2002) mentions that Internet makes life simple and innovative. People are doing business online and trade has become more easy and fast due to this. Internet provides new ways to promote business. Website becomes the essence of online business as to show their services and products. Internet gathers all competitors and consumers in one place. It brings new lane to promote, advertise products and services in market.

Muñoz and Amaral (2010) add that the importance of Internet for the travel and tourism industry has increased rapidly over the last few years. Understanding how travelers behave is of critical importance to travel suppliers and tourism authorities.

The development of the Internet and e-commerce, are factors that are starting to have a strong influence on how consumers make their travel decisions, thus also affect the choice and distribution of destinations. Internet permits potential tourists to get information more quickly and from different websites, to compare different options and to book and purchase their travels online. The consumers today can easier make decisions themselves regarding the best deal or last-minute booking (Eurostat, 2007).

Nielsen (2010) indicates that Nielsen Online president Jonathan Carson says, "Travel is a category extremely suited to the Internet due to the latter's ability to provide efficient access to an extremely wide range of comparable information. Whilst certain areas of the travel industry were initially slow to utilize the benefits of the Internet, it is now one of the undoubted success stories of online, playing an integral part in

the arrangements and experience of today's traveler". Frendberg and Svensson (2008) criticize that however, all is not well when it comes to online booking and the travel services do, apart from what is already mentioned, have some limitations. The amount of time and the difficulty of using online travel agencies may be significant, especially for complex trips and for inexperienced users.

Literature Review

1- ICT & Internet and tourism industry

Today's world is a world of information explosion, this information explosion is taking place in such a fast speed that even a literate person is feeling as if he or she is illiterate being not able to cope up with such an information explosion (Harichandan and Welukar, 2012).

Mavrofidis and Papageorgiou (2013) state that the proliferation of information and communication technology (ICT) and their interaction with certain social systems, led to the emergence of globalization phenomenon. Globalization lays on a technological infrastructure that makes it possible, by minimizing the time needed for communication and inter-systemic interactions. This also, has led to a strong support of the global financial system to the ICT industry, so that the latter can provide faster applications at any level of networking, thus putting both globalization and the ICT industry in an accelerating mutual development.

William et al., (2007) show that the rate of technological innovation in ICT has accelerated dramatically, and the sector today is ordered of magnitude larger than it was 20 years ago, and it encompasses a more diverse universe of players than ever before. Today, the sector includes hardware, software, the Internet, telephony, and content, application, and support services, provided by entities ranging from corporate giants to garage entrepreneurs to individual developers and open-source networks. Relevant content and applications are integral parts of the value proposition, and the "network effect" is crucial- technology only increases productivity when lots of people share access.

Specifically displaying the relation between ICT and tourism industry, Dixit et al., (2006) assure that tourism is the world's largest civilian industry whose growth, economic significance and potential are phenomenal across the globe. Moreover, Ma et al., (2003) explain that information communication technologies (ICTs) have been applied in tourism since the early adoption of Computer Reservation System (CRS) in airlines in 1950s and in the transformation to Global Distribution Systems (GDSs) in the 1980's. Hotel property management systems and hotel CRS systems

appeared shortly afterwards. However it is the development of the Internet that brought the revolutionary changes to the structure of the industry, by providing tourism principals, airlines and hoteliers, an opportunity to sell directly.

In other words, Dixit et al., (2006) point out that the domain of online tourism has gained significant strength with the arrival of Internet. In a short span of time, Internet has proved its worth successfully in taping tourism opportunities utilizing modern communication technology. Dixit et al., (2006) add that online tourism has been defined as "a new form of travel product distribution where a supplier/service provider offers products/services mainly through the medium of Internet to a group of customers, irrespective of their physical location". Online tourism equips a tourist, tour operator or travel agent for convenient exchanges using electronic medium. User groups globally are finding online technologies supportive in decision making for availing tourism products and services. Even in its introductory stage, tourism industry has largely been benefited by online tourism in certain countries.

Muñoz and Amaral (2009) discuss that tourism as an information intensive industry can gain important synergies from the use of the Internet. The tourism sector has been a pioneer in adopting and developing ICT applications and today is rated among the top product or service categories purchased via the Internet in many countries. Travel products and services appear to be well suited to online selling because they possess the characteristics that can function in the electronic environment. According to Peterson et al., (1997), products and services that have a low cost, are frequently purchased, have an intangible value proposition and/or are relatively high on differentiation are more amenable to be purchased over the Internet. Specifically, travel products are high involvement products that are less tangible and more differentiated than many other consumer goods, which make them suitable for sale through the Internet (Bonn et al., 1998).

Law et al., (2004) summarize that the rapid growth of the travel industry requires sophisticated information communication technologies (ICTs) for managing the increasing volume and quality of tourism traffic. The emergences of new tourism services and products, coupled with a rapid increase in tourism demand, have driven the wide-scale adoption of ICTs in general, and in particular, the Internet as an electronic intermediary. In other words, Internet serves as a new communication and distribution channel for e-travelers and suppliers of travel services and products. This new channel also enables tourism businesses to improve their

competitiveness and performance.

2- Consumer behavior in online booking

The Internet is a relatively new medium for communication and information exchange that has become present in our everyday life. The number of Internet users is constantly increasing which also signifies that online purchasing is increasing (Joines et al., 2003).

Weening (2012) indicates that the total global E-commerce sale in 2011 have grown to Euro 690 billion (USD 961 billion) and recorded an increase of 20 % to cross 1 trillion Euro mark in 2013. Asia Pacific region is leading in terms of growth as compared to mature markets like US, UK, Japan and European countries. Asia Pacific recorded 130 % growth specially China in 2011. The online retailing is becoming an integral part of an economy and country and worldwide increasingly seeing trust and confidence in purchasing online.

Oppenheim and Ward (2006) show that the rapid increase is explained by the growth in the use of broadband technology combined with a change in consumer behavior.

“Consumer behavior is the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society” (Kuester, 2012). Consumer behavior of every individual is different from other depending on buying choices which is influenced by buying habits and choices that are turn tampered by psychological and social drivers that affect purchase decision process (Bashir, 2013).

Christopher and Hwang (2003) explain that trying to identify the online consumer is difficult since the rapid development of e-commerce has also led to an increase of both technologies and different types of consumers. It is also known that the type of product has a significant influence on the online consumer behavior which makes it more difficult to identify consumer characteristics. Although Allred et al., (2006) argue that there are still some characteristics that can be identified to specify the online consumer such as: younger, wealthier, better educated, having a higher “computer literacy” and are bigger retail spenders. Moreover, Hasslinger et al., (2007) add the following characteristics: make more money, less risk aware, innovative, impulsive, variety seeker, less brand and price conscious, and with a more positive attitude towards advertising and direct marketing.

Online consumers are always seeking new products, new attractiveness and the most important thing being price compatibility with their budget. The Internet is the best way to save time and money through

purchasing online within their range of budget at home or in anywhere. Online consumers don't have limits to online shopping. They also use Internet for comparison of prices of goods and services, news, visit social networks and search information and so on. The recession has so much impact on online consumer behavior (Rodriguez, 2009).

Online shopping or booking behavior depends on four factors such as Shopping motives, personality variables, Internet knowledge & experience and last factor is shopping incentives. These are key determinants to influence the behavior of online consumers. Online seekers are the main sources of online shoppers always want to seek information within few clicks and reach to the most relevant information according to their requirements such as competitive brands, best price offers, product specification and consumer word-of-mouth (Gao, 2005).

3. E-tourism

Porter (2001) shows that tourism is one of the first services sectors adapt and use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for promoting its services. Mavri and Angelis (2009) add that ICT enable travelers to access reliable and accurate information, as well as to make reservations in a fraction of the time, cost, and inconvenience required by conventional methods.

According to Muñoz and Amaral (2009) travel products and services appear to be well suited to online selling because they possess the characteristics that can function in the electronic environment. Products and services that have a low cost, are frequently purchased, have an intangible value proposition and/or are relatively high on differentiation are more amenable to be purchased over the Internet. Specifically, travel products are high involvement products that are less tangible and more differentiated than many other consumer goods, which make them suitable for sale through the Internet.

Mavri and Angelis (2009) explain that e-tourism is the use of new technologies for activities such as online booking (hotels, tickets, etc.), portals of touristic destinations that contain information valuable for travelers, etc. Moreover they argue what differentiates “e-tourism” from classical tourism is the large scale savings on traditional activities, such as call centers and information centers. In other words, e-tourism offers the potential to make information and booking facilities available to large numbers of consumers at a relatively low cost.

According to e-business watch report (2003), the world tourism industry has certainly been one of the

first to make large-scale use of the new information technologies. It appears that technological progress over the past thirty years has allowed the most innovative tourism enterprises to redefine not only their own organizational structure but their relationships with partner organizations, thus achieving the twin goals of optimizing operating costs and increasing ability to generate value for their customers.

With the enormous amount of information potentially available to travelers, the Internet constitutes an important platform for information exchange between the consumer and industry suppliers (e.g., hotels, transportation sectors, and attractions), intermediaries (e.g., travel agents), controllers (e.g., governments and administrative bodies), as well as many non-profit organizations such as destination marketing organizations (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Different technological interfaces, such as search engines, online travel booking sites, and websites of destination marketing organizations facilitate the information exchange between online travelers and the so-called “online tourism domain” (Xiang et al., 2008).

4- Tourist behavior in online booking

Morrison, et al., (2001) display the topic from the consumers’ point of view, Internet is a valuable tool to search for travel-related information, making online air-ticket bookings, online room reservations, online purchasing. Mavri and Angelis (2009) assure it means that Internet enables consumers to engage directly with suppliers and challenge the role of intermediaries. It also allows consumers to interact dynamically with suppliers and destinations and often make requests that will enable them to customize their products.

4.1. Online travel & tourism information search

According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010) tourists’ online search behaviors are motivated by their functional needs, hedonic needs, innovation needs, aesthetic needs and sign needs. The tourists search for hotel, airport, casino, and beach and map most frequently. The most frequently used channels for tourists to search travel information are, in order, general search engines, vertical search engines, online travel agents OTAs, portal travel channels, and social media such as review sites, online communities. Travelers usually are directed to social media sites by the general search engines. Peng et al., (2013) add that the potential tourists are inclined to search for online travel reviews before travel decisions, especially accommodation decisions. Kim et al., (2013) find that the chief motivations for consumers to seek online travel reviews are convenience and quality, risk reduction, and social reassurance. Moreover, most travelers follow the

recommendation of the company or friends and colleagues at first, and then turn to such online sources as the brand website, OTAs, and Trip Advisor, and make online booking via the brand websites or OTAs. Skadberg and Kimmel (2004) explain that flow experience while browsing a destination website leads to changes of attitude and behavior, including inquiring for more information, coming back to the website, and visiting the destination. Online travel reviews have a significant impact on online sales, with a 10% increase in traveler review ratings boosting online bookings by more than 5%. Consumers seem to be more influenced by early negative information, especially when the overall set of reviews is negative, whereas positively framed information together with numerical rating details increases booking intentions (Peng et al., 2013).

4.2. Online travel & tourism booking

Lang (2000) mentions that while travelers are increasingly turning to the Internet for information, many are still hesitant to book online because of the perceived lack of a secure payment method, a lack of confidence in the technology and a need for a personal service and human interface. Bogdanovych et al., (2006) add that travelers prefer booking their international trips from a travel agent rather than booking online, due to the advantages of travel agents in social interaction, expertise and the possibility to save time on search, though they believe it is cheaper to book online.

Peng et al., (2013) point out that the determinants of online travel booking validated mainly by the following: Firstly, the characteristics derived from the Internet, including perceived risk, security, convenience, time saving and usefulness. Secondly, the characteristics of the online suppliers, including information quality, competitive price, pricing patterns, service performance and reputation, terms and conditions. Thirdly, personal characteristics including technological inclination or consumer innovativeness, self-efficacy, preference for offline service, timing, involvement, Internet experience, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, online shopping experience, subjective norms, trust, gender, age and educational background.

4.3. Loyalty after online booking

Bai et al., (2008) state that in the online environment, users’ satisfaction toward tourism websites are mainly attributed to the (functionality and usability of websites) information function and search speed of the website.

5. Global online tourism booking – (facts & figures)

As it was mentioned, the online shopping trend around the world spread very fast. In other words, the

significant growth of the number of Internet users improved e-commerce in several industries, particularly in hospitality and tourism. 70% of tourists now choose their holiday destination by browsing the Internet, the prevalence of Internet has inevitably changed the booking habits of tourists, customers can book hotel rooms at anytime, anywhere, and can receive immediate confirmations (Mzoughi et al., 2012).

Moreover, The Nielsen Company conducted a survey in 2010 and polled over 27,000 Internet users in 55 market from Asia Pacific, Europe, Middle East, North America to look at how consumers shop online. Globally online shopping is made on books and cloths as per survey data. Most people are interested to purchase and bought usually books and cloths. Airline tickets, book hotel reservations are also commonly bought through Internet which indicates the progress and stability of economy. According to Nielsen survey, 24% are concerned to purchased online ticket for airlines while 17% made hotel reservations due to which the globally impact is that travel arrangements increased online 7% point and 9% in 2010 respectively (Nielsen, 2010).

Peng et al., (2013) indicate that online travel agents (OTAs) such as Expedia, Priceline, have gained extensive attention since the beginning of electronic business development. The OTAs mainly focus on online travel booking and establish a successful model for tourism and electronic business. Up to date, all of the airline companies and large hotels have official (i.e., self-owned) websites for convenience booking service. The penetration rate of online travel booking for example in America is 70%, 50% in EU and 30% in India.

Global overview

Note: The following statistics includes both direct sales and sales through intermediaries in transportation, travel accommodation, car rental and tourist attractions.

Source: Euro Monitor International (February 2014).

- Global online travel sales accounted for US\$590 billion (2013), 25% of total sales.
- Air travel online sales accounted for US\$360 billion - 46% of total air travel sales.
- Accommodation online sales amounted to US\$164 billion, 23% total accommodation sales.
- North America was the leading world region in terms of online travel sales (2013). Europe was the second world region at US\$200 billion. Middle East and Africa is the fifth between 7 regions.
- Asia Pacific to double its online travel sales by 2017

from US\$78 billion to US\$155 billion.

- According to Google, consumers' use of multiple screens is sequential or simultaneous. Smartphones are generally the starting point then move to PC, tablet or TV.
- Social media is a great tool to engage customers and gain loyalty over the long term, travelers have been sharing their reviews, photos, videos, travel services and other content for years., let's see (Trip Advisor), and effective in generating bookings in the short term.
- As a confidence boosting measure and to promote online purchase of travels, travel consultants are advising both novice travelers and experienced globetrotters to search for the big online travel web sites: Travelocity.com, Expedia.com, Booking.com, Hotel-online.com, TripAdvisor.com and Orbitz.com to find the best deals (Dixit. et al., 2006).
- Rising demand for real-time services, Companies need to provide personalized alerts and information. Customer service needs to be available 24H/7D and easy to access via mobile devices.
- OTAs have made significant investments in Google ads, which fuel their growth. From search engine to knowledge engine: providing not only links but also answers. Steady growth for Google Hotel Finder and Google Flights Search Engines.
- Leading tour operators are investing heavily in the online channel, over a third of TUI Travel and Thomas Cook's sales in 2013 were made online.
- 87% of travelers use the internet for the bulk of travel planning, 62% of them researches upcoming trip, 45% sources trip ideas, 43% read reviews and 31% watched travel videos.
- North America is the top regional destination for travel intent with 43% of searches; Europe was the second with 35% of global searches, Asia with only 15%, South America 4%, Middle East and Africa just 3%.

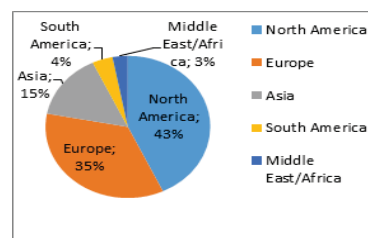


Fig.1. 2013 Percent of Global Travel Online Search Volume

Source: Euro Monitor International (February 2014), 37 P.

- Top 10 destinations (countries) in online travel searching & booking in 2013 are: United States, Spain, United Kingdom, Italy, France, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and Thailand.
- Top 3 destinations: London, Paris and Barcelona, account for 57% of the travel search volume in Europe.

6. Saudi Arabia & Egypt (Case study)

Facts, figures & indicators

Last 5 years, plenty of IT companies conducted surveys about Internet usage, ICT prevalence and online shopping & booking in the Middle East and Arab countries included Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The paper displays most important and the latest of them with analysis and indicators.

- With consideration the difference of population, table (1) shows a comparison between Saudi Arabia and Egypt in general number of Internet users and online shopping & booking 2012- 2013.

Table 1. Internet users & online shopping in Saudi Arabia & Egypt 2012-2013. Source: Wikipedia, Global Internet Usage (2012-2013).

Items	Saudi Arabia	Egypt
Population	m 28	m 90
Internet users from any device including smartphone	50% + 14.328.632	41% + 36.881.374
Internet penetration rate	60%	44%
Online shopping	10%	10%
Rank in the global list of countries	15	34
Rank in the Arabic list of countries	2	3

Remark: With consideration the difference of population, more than 30% of population in UAE (United Arab of Emirates) has online shopping & booking (1st in Arab world), while 40% in Kuwait (4th in Arab world).

- Google Company conducted a survey in 2012 in 3 markets: UAE – Saudi Arabia and Egypt about the smartphone as one of the most important application of ICT prevalent and its effects:

- The rate of smartphone penetration in Saudi Arabia about 65%, with number of users about 73%, while in Egypt lower than 25%.
- Average number of applications for the smartphone owners in Saudi Arabia about 32, in Egypt 12.
- 72% of Internet users with smartphone in Saudi

Arabia are female, 60% male. In opposite 70% of Internet users with smartphone in Egypt are male, 43% female.

- Mobile Internet (smartphone & tablets) acquires more than 30% of Internet usage in Saudi Arabia, which represent the double of international rate, while in Egypt about 12%.

Table 2 explains the main reasons for using Internet with smartphone:

Reason	Saudi Arabia	Egypt
Pass time while waiting & chatting	64%	61%
Avoid missing news when being outside home	57%	57%
Answer questions quickly	52%	52%
Costs less than on computer	21%	37%
No internet access at home	15%	34%

Table 2. Reasons for using Internet with smartphone in Saudi Arabia & Egypt . Source: Google: <http://think.withgoogle.com>, (2012).

- The average daily use of the Internet for individual in Saudi Arabia about 8 hours, most of them is youth from 16 to 35 years old. In Egypt, The average weekly uses of the Internet for individual in Egypt about 19-21 hours, about 3 hours daily (Rayz, 2014).

- According to the survey conducted by (Ipsos, 2013):

1- Saudi Arabia

- Internet population in Saudi Arabia consists of 57% male, 43% female. 40% from 20-30 years old, 24% from 31–40 years old, 19% from 15-19 years old, 17% from 40+ years old.
- Finance & stock market, recruitment websites, videos websites (you tube), governmental websites, have the highest reach, highest page views, visits, and time spent per visit.
- Top 20 websites categories are: search engine, videos (you tube), social networks, mail, technology, forums, news, general, horizontal portals, women, governmental, storage, e-commerce, games, encyclopedia, entertainment, telecom, translation, travel & tourism, banking.
- Based on average monthly internet reach, the top 20 websites are: google.com.sa, you tube, google, face book (59%), live, twitter (33%), msn, microsoft, ar. wikipedia, hafiz.gov.sa, sabq, yahoo, conduit, anchor free, broonzyah, sedty, hawaaworld, m5zn, alnaddy, souq.com.
- Top e-commerce websites ranked based on average monthly Internet reach: Souq (13%), Sukar (8%), Namshi (7%) and MarkVIP (5%).

2- Egypt

- Internet population in Egypt consists of 62% male, 38% female. 43% from 20-30 years old, 28% from 15-19 years old, 15% from 31-40 years old, 14% from 40+ years old.
- Music websites, religion and dating websites have the highest reach, highest page views, visits, and time spent per visit.
- Top 20 websites categories are: search engine, social networks, videos (you tube), horizontal portals, mail, technology, general, forums, news, directory, storage, women, games, entertainment, e-commerce, encyclopedia, translation, music, telecom, TV.
- Based on average monthly internet reach, the top 20 websites are: face book (78%), google.com.eg, you tube, google, yahoo, mail.yahoo, Ar.hao123, maktoob.yahoo, fatakat, live, ar. wikipedia twitter (17%), babylon, microsoft, msn, masrawy, myegy, adobe, y8 and youm7.
- Top e-commerce websites ranked based on average monthly Internet reach: Souq (10%), Jumia (7%), Alibaba (4%) and Amazon (4%).
- - About consumer behavior in online booking, many surveys have been managed by (MasterCard, 2014), (Bayt.com, 2013) and (YouGovSiraj, 2013) in 8 countries in Arab world and Middle East, included Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The main results are:
 - About (83%) of surveyed consumers (8000) depends on Internet firstly to gain the information (awareness formation) of the different brands, its qualities and prices. Secondly, they make a comparison which may be led to the buying or booking decision. Thirdly, (68%) take a decision to buy, but with the traditional way! Just about (9-10%) do the actual purchase online.
 - The most important goods and services for consumers focused on buying them online at: airline tickets and book hotel rooms for tourism services, and home appliances, electronics and clothes for goods, especially through Souq.com as a main website for shopping in Arab world.
 - (59%) have been affected by Internet to change their loyalty for specific brands to other brands.
 - (60%) of sample mention that: product price, website reputation, safety paying, delivery fees and ease transaction are the most important factors to take their actual decision to online buying or booking.
 - Note that Saudi Arabia like the rest of Arab Gulf countries possess many of the mega shopping centers (malls) included all global brands in various products, which facilitates the process of traditional buying from shops. Unlike Egypt, growth rate of online shopping is steady but limited where also there is no such a kind or number of shopping malls. In addition to the difference in economic and living conditions. But in the end, rates of online shopping are very close in the two countries, despite the big differences between them
- Mentioned surveys assured that Kuwait, UAE and Qatar on the top in online shopping with rate between (30 -50%).
 - (Nielsen, 2013) explains to better understand Internet environment in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Agree that the number of Internet users in the two countries is growing daily, despite the existing differences between them in the quality of Internet services in terms of speed, volume of data and price compared to the level of income for individuals.
- A simple comparison of the bouquets online in the two countries, each country has 3 telecom companies offering Internet services. The study displays sample of prices range for packages. In Saudi Arabia, for example: 30 GB equals about 93\$, 10GB equals about 53\$, while a gigabyte equals 26.7 \$,. While in Egypt, the highest volume of data is 15 GB equals 28.6 \$, 7 GB equals 14.3 \$, 4 GB equals 8.6\$, and 1 GB equals 3.58\$. About 54% of respondents in Saudi Arabia state that the prices of Internet packs are exaggerated, while in Egypt is considered among the least expensive countries in the region due to the intense competition between companies to get a bigger market share, and where there is no uniform pricing policy. The study emphasizes that the Egyptians do not accept to buy the new technology only after lower prices (Kamal, 2013).
- (52%) of respondents in Saudi Arabia mention that they interested in reviewing the suit Internet packs before buying smart phones or tablet computers.
- The Nilsen study in December 2013 confirms that more than 59% of Internet users in Egypt use a reduced method to access Internet by sharing the cost of the Internet and post the link to suit low-income earners, while ADSL as an Internet immobile and fast service fit high-income earners, whether in homes or offices and companies. Add to USB modem services, which are not used widely among Egyptians. Add to the non-proliferation of smartphones and tablet computers widely, com-

pared to Saudi Arabia, which explain that more than (52%) of Internet users in Egypt access with computers.

Online travel & tourism booking

- Experts of (Red Travel Exhibition Company) which arranged the ATM Arabian Travel Market in Dubai May 2014 believe that there is a growing expectation for online tourism booking in the Middle East, especially with the improving of safe environment for trading and online payment, even became now standards of the success of airlines, travel agencies and hotels the extent of flexibility in dealing with e-customers. The statistics indicate that the major tourism booking sites such as: Expedia and Price Line.com achieved during the first half of the year 2014 a proportion of international online sales up to 73%, but mostly through Europe and America.

- According to the survey conducted by (Amadeus) in 2012, the percentage of Saudis online booking for airline tickets does not exceed 7% of the total annual bookings, at a time when global rates to 30%. In spite of the fact that Saudi Arabia is an outbound tourism country - about 4.5 million outbound trips- and rely mainly on domestic flight, in a market where it flourishes technology applications and Internet services, where more than 55% of the population access Internet with high penetration. At a time of growing sales and profits of traditional travel agencies in Saudi Arabia during the years from 2006 to 2012 at rates of up to 42%. The study attributed the reason that Saudi tourists think those two elements mainly: (confidence and safety), safety in online payment despite the available daily online banking, and confidence in the tourism reservation without any unpleasant surprises.

- During (ATM) Arabic Travel Market held in Dubai 2014, Pay Fort Company - The gateway to best online payments for travel agencies, airlines and hotels in the Arab world, which provides payment via American Express, Visa, MasterCard and Cash u- displayed the results of its survey conducted in (2012-2013) about online travel & tourism booking, which mainly are:

- Emirates Airline occupies the first position in Internet sales by 46%, followed by Kuwait at 34%, then Lebanon 18%, followed by Egypt 12% and Saudi Arabia 7% (Fig. 2).

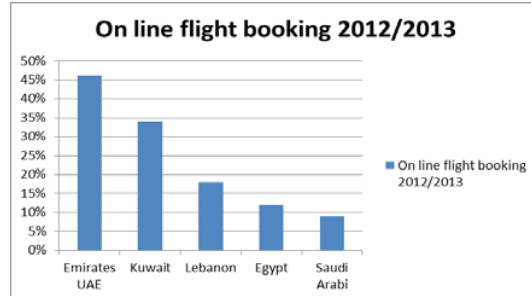


Fig.2. 2012/ 2013 Percent of Online Flight Booking in Some Arab Countries. Source: Pay Fort (2014).

- For hotel e- reservations, Saudi Arabia 12%, followed by the UAE and Egypt at rate 10% then to Lebanon 7%, and Kuwait 5% (Fig 3).



Fig.3. 2012/ 2013 Percent of Online Hotel Booking in Some Arab Countries. Source: Pay Fort (2014).

- Booking.com (2013) assures as an expert in online hotel booking that Saudi Arabia is the first in the Middle East and the third globally in the rate of online hotel booking through (Booking.com), especially with smartphones and tablets.

- Forecasts of tourism experts - attendants in ATM Arabian Travel Market in Dubai 2014 - indicate that the category of young people (youth) in some Arab markets, especially in Saudi Arabia pushing strongly towards bookings via the Internet, and confirms that (safety and confidence) are the elements which pushing for mostly to the traditional way of booking for flight tickets, rooms and trips, in addition to the element of human communication and tourist advices. Moreover, 68% of those who booked online for travel & tourism visited travel agencies to ensure of their bookings (confidence), especially when planning for family trips, which is the largest percentage in the Saudi tourism. Also, Saudis respondents especially the youth indicate that tourism websites have become like encyclopedia, which they can gather information, opinions and reviews about the various tourist services and different tourist suppliers such as hotels, airlines and travel agencies.

- For Egypt, Pay Fort (2014) assures by its surveys' results that the percentage of online shopping in Egypt ranging from 9% to 10% of the total Internet users. Moreover, Amadeus indicates that Egypt's share of the Middle East overall online tourism booking is 9% during the period 2012-2013. In addition Amadeus (2014) displays that travel and tourism booking in the Middle East reached in 2011 to 51.6 billion dollars and 12% growth in 2012 until it reached 71 billion dollars in 2014. (22%) online booking exceed 15.2 billion dollars. Emirates share alone nearly 50% of the online tourist booking, where Amadeus surveys indicate that UAE is the gateway or the key to the growth of online tourism booking in the region. In Arabian Travel Market (Dubai 2014), Amadeus during its seminar presented report indicates that increasing numbers of holders of credit cards and debit in the Middle East will increase customers who book their holidays online, so as to increase their sense of confidence and safety.

- According to the survey's results announced by PhocusWright (international company for travel market research & industry intelligence) December 2012 In Egypt during the 5th Annual International Conference on E-Tourism, Emirates is the first in online travel & tourism booking by more than 50%, followed by Kuwait at 34%, then 12% by Saudi Arabia, Egypt 10% and Qatar by 9%.

Discussion & results

The aim of this study is to answer an important question. Does the ICT Prevalence in any society means necessarily the increasing in online shopping in general and online travel & tourism booking particularly?, with a comparative study between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The study displays the effects of ICT especially Internet on tourism industry, consumer behavior in online booking, e-tourism and the different stages of tourist behaviors in online booking. Also, the study shows facts and figures for global online tourism booking. Furthermore, the research discusses many recent surveys conducted during last 3 years about the environment of ICT, Internet usage and online shopping in general, travel & tourism online booking particularly in Middle East included Saudi Arabia & Egypt. The analysis of this study has brought up the following findings:

- The tourism sector has been a pioneer in adopting and developing ICT applications and today is rated among the top product or service categories purchased via the Internet in many countries, especially with the rapid increase in tourism demand. Travel products and services are well suited to online selling because they possess the characteristics that can function in

the electronic environment. 25% of total global travel sales accounted 2013 online. 46% of total air travel sales 2013 online. 23% of total accommodation sales 2013 are online. Social networks are a great effective tool in generating bookings in the short term. 87% of international travelers use the internet for travel planning, 62% of them researches trip, 43% read reviews and 31% watched travel videos. North America and Europe is the top in e-tourism.

- Online tourism booking behavior affected by four factors: booking motives, personality variables, Internet knowledge & experience and last factor is booking incentives.

- A comparison between Saudi Arabia and some Gulf Arab states such as the UAE and Kuwait, and with similarities including: the wide spread of ICT, per capita income levels, the level of overall economic state, Internet services and infrastructure available, Internet users & penetration rate, prevalence of smartphones & tablet. Saudi Arabia is located behind these countries in the total rate of online shopping & booking. With consideration the difference of population, for online shopping in general, the rates in 2012-2013 are between 30% to 50% in UAE, Kuwait and Qatar, but 10% in Saudi Arabia. For online travel & tourism booking, UAE occupies the first place in overall by 50%, and in online air travel booking with 46%, Kuwait 34%, Lebanon 18% and Saudi Arabia 7%. But, Saudi Arabia is the first in online hotel booking with 12%, UAE 10% and Kuwait 5%.

- A comparison between Saudi Arabia and Egypt as the case study of the paper, it is significant to mention the differences between the both countries, there is a big difference between Saudi Arabia and Egypt for the benefit of Saudi Arabia in the following aspects: nature of the country as a tourism market, Egypt is a tourism destination, while the Saudi source country for outbound tourism, about 4.5 billion outbound trip, spread of ICT, per capita income levels, the level of overall economic state, life style, Internet services and infrastructure available (Internet packages- speed, data volume & price), 59% of Internet users in Egypt share the cost of Internet by posting the link to suit low-income earners. Internet users (+50% Saudi - 41% Egypt) & penetration rate (60% Saudi- 44% Egypt), average daily use (8 hours Saudi- 3 hours Egypt), prevalence and penetration of smartphones & tablet (65% Saudi- 25% Egypt). Despite these clear differences, the percentage of online shopping in both countries is comparable, may be identical, which is approximately 10%.

- Social networks such as: (face book), you tube and Google search are in the top 5 websites in both coun-

tries, which focuses on how to use them more in motivating online shopping and booking.

- Souq.com is the first in top e-commerce websites, 13% in Saudi, and 10% in Egypt. Although, Souq.com in the back of a list of top 20 website frequented by Saudis and Egyptians.

- Travel & tourism websites in the end of a top 20 websites frequented by Saudis and it non-existent on same list for Egyptians.

- The main figures of online travel & tourism booking in both countries indicate to: Egypt (12%) superiority over Saudi Arabia (7%) in the rate of online booking for airline tickets. But in opposite, Saudi outperformed in online hotel booking with 12% while Egypt 10%. All in all online travel & tourism booking in Saudi is 12% and in Egypt 10%.

- In general, note must be recorded through the convergence ratios between both countries although the clear differences between them, which indicate to other factors affecting consumer behavior such as: safety payment, confidence in reservation procedures, tourism awareness, cultural & social structure, which can be described as the privacy of Saudi society. This explain that the ICT prevalence may mean increasing the number of Internet users, increase the Internet penetration and the average daily use, but it does not necessarily mean increasing the rate of online purchase or booking.

- The results of surveys that have been presented and analyzed mention that the impact of Internet, its penetration, increasing numbers of users, the spread of technology applications and smart devices serve mainly the stage of formation and change consumer behavior (especially Saudi) toward the purchase decision with information collection, awareness of different products or services, compare between its qualities and prices, and following the reviews to decide the best choice, but not necessarily buying online. Especially with the family nature of Saudi society in terms of travel and tourism, therefore, Saudi tourist trying to make sure of booking before traveling to avoid any unpleasant situations with family. Add to emphasize the factors of safe payment and confidence of booking, both being the most important ever for Saudi tourists. Particularly, with 68% of those who conducted online tourism bookings then went to travel agents to ensure the accuracy of their trips. Which is different from the nature of open Egyptian society, in addition Egypt fundamentally is a tourism destination.

Conclusion & recommendations

ICT today is making incredible impact on our lives. Tourism has been immensely benefited in the new or-

der. The awareness, growth and significance of online tourism are increasing day by day. Various available technologies are relentlessly active in shaping the future of tourism.

Internet penetration, spread of ICT, number of Internet users, rate of daily use and the spread of smart devices came in favor of the Saudi society compared to Egyptian society, but the online shopping rates were almost identical between both. And rates of travel & tourism online booking came close despite the obvious differences between the two countries. Which indicate that the ICT prevalence does not necessarily increase online shopping, booking rates, but it does mean a direct increase in the Internet penetration, number of users, and serves the process of gathering information and comparison between the goods and services to make a purchase decision before heading to vendors.

Our results indicate that the use and penetration of Internet depends basically on the ICT prevalence level in the society. However, when considering the use of the Internet for online purchasing or booking, variables related to demographic characteristics of the population and characteristics of travel and tourism are also relevant.

The following suggestions can be fruitful to effect successfully on consumer behavior towards online travel & tourism booking in Saudi Arabia and Egypt:

- Tourist suppliers and OTAs on their online marketing should concentrate their efforts to affect the consumer behavior to an actual purchase decision and pay online at a time while the service' information is satisfied, and transfer the UAE, Kuwait' experience in this regard to Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

- Tourist suppliers and OTAs on their online marketing should depend on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and YouTube site, which are the top websites visited by the Saudis and Egyptians, to achieve the spreading and increase the influence on the online booking decision.

- The research finding also suggested that the travel & tourism websites focus on the payment safety guarantee and confidence in procedures and details of booking when addressing to the online Saudi tourist.

- It is significant that travel agents should not be assured to the limited online booking in Egypt or Saudi Arabia compared to surrounding countries or international rates, because the largest segment of Internet users in both are young people (youth) with heavily continuous increase and with Internet experience to the degree of professionalism, which push towards the growing of online booking. Briefly, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are promising in the field of e-booking.

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دراسة العلاقة بين إنتشار تطبيقات تكنولوجيا المعلومات والإتصالات والحجوزات السياحية عبر الإنترنت

دراسة مقارنة بين المملكة العربية السعودية ومصر^(١)

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الحجز عبر الإنترنت، سلوك المستهلك، تكنولوجيا المعلومات والإتصالات، السياحة الإلكترونية، شركات السياحة عبر الإنترنت.

ملخص البحث: صناعة السياحة واحدة من أكبر الصناعات الخدمية والقطاعات الاقتصادية نمواً في العالم، وهي صناعة كثيفة المعلومات وسريعة في التأثير والإستفادة من التطورات المتسارعة لتكنولوجيا المعلومات والإتصالات لتحسين خدماتها وتطوير شكل عملياتها السياحية. يناقش البحث مدى العلاقة بين إنتشار تطبيقات تكنولوجيا المعلومات والإتصالات في المجتمعات وتأثيرها في سلوك المستهلك السياحي وإنعكاسها على معدل الحجوزات السياحية عبر الإنترنت، ويهدف البحث إلى دراسة هذا الجانب بالتطبيق كدراسة مقارنة بين المملكة العربية السعودية ومصر. ولذلك أعتمد البحث على المنهج الوصفي والتحليل من خلال دراسة التأثير المباشر لتطورات تكنولوجيا المعلومات والإتصالات على صناعة السياحة الإلكترونية وتغييرات سلوك المستهلك السياحي من خلال المؤشرات العالمية لحجوزات السياحة والسفر عبر الإنترنت، ثم دراسة البلدين محل البحث من خلال عرض وتحليل نتائج عدد كبير من الدراسات الميدانية والإستطلاعات والأبحاث التي قامت بها شركات وجهات متخصصة مثل شركة جوجل وأمادايوس وبوكينج خلال السنوات الثلاث السابقة حول الإنترنت ومستخدميه وكثافته وإنتشار الأجهزة الذكية والتسوق عبر الإنترنت والحجوزات السياحية في دول الشرق الأوسط ومن بينها كلا من السعودية ومصر. وقد توصل البحث إلى نتيجة أساسية تتمثل في أن تأثير إنتشار تكنولوجيا المعلومات والإتصالات والأجهزة الذكية يؤثر بشكل مباشر في زيادة عدد مستخدمي الإنترنت وزيادة المعدل اليومي للإستخدام وفي كثافة وتوغل الإنترنت في المجتمع، ويخدم أيضاً سلوك المستهلك السياحي في مرحلة جمع المعلومات وإجراء المقارنات حول خدمات السفر والسياحة وموردى الخدمات السياحية المختلفة، مما يساعد على بناء قرار الإختيار والشراء. ولكن ليس بالضرورة المساهمة في الحجز والشراء الفعلي عبر الإنترنت، الذي يتأثر بعدة عوامل أخرى مرتبطة بطبيعة المجتمع وخصوبيته الديموغرافية وبطبيعة الخدمة السياحية وبمدى توافر معدلات الأمان في الدفع عبر الإنترنت ومدى الثقة في تأكيد إجراءات الحجز عبر الإنترنت. وهو مايفسر أنه رغم الفروق الواضحة بين السعودية ومصر فيما يتصل بإنتشار تطبيقات تكنولوجيا المعلومات وجودة خدمات الإنترنت ومستوى المعيشة الاقتصادية، إلا أن نسب التسوق عبر الإنترنت تكاد تكون متطابقة، ومعدلات الحجز الإلكتروني للسفر والسياحة متقاربة، وهي بصفة عامة أقل بكثير من المعدلات العالمية وأقل بكثير من بعض دول الشرق الأوسط ومنطقة الخليج العربي الأخرى. إلا أن المؤشرات تشير إلى أن شريحة الشباب وهي الغالبة على الإستخدام الكثيف للإنترنت في الدولتين ستزيد من معدلات الشراء والتسوق والحجوزات السياحية عبر الإنترنت خلال السنوات القادمة.

(١) الشكر والتقدير لعادة البحث العلمي بجامعة الملك سعود ومركز البحوث بكلية الآثار جامعة الملك سعود على دعمهم للبحث.