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Faculty of Tourism and Hotels

The Impact of Digital Marketing Channels on
Customer Buying Decision Process: A Study on
the Egyptian Tourism and Hospitality Services
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تأثير قنوات التسويق الرقمي على عملية إتخاذ قرار شراء العملاء: دراسة على خدمات السياحة والضيافة المصرية

ملخص

أصبح لقنوات التسويق الرقمي في الوقت الحالي دوراً هاماً في نجاح صناعتي السياحة والضيافة حيث يمكن للعملاء الوصول بشكل سريع وبطريقة بسيطة إلى جميع أنواع المعلومات حول أحدث العروض وأفضل الأسعار. وعلى الرغم من الدور المهم لقنوات التسويق الرقمي، إلا أن هناك نقصاً في الدراسات التي تبحث في تأثير هذه القنوات على سلوك شراء العملاء في صناعتي السياحة والضيافة في مصر. وبناء على ذلك، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى محاولة سد هذه الفجوة من خلال تحديد قنوات التسويق الرقمي الأكثر تفضيلاً للعملاء في الوجهة المصرية ودراسة تأثير قنوات التسويق الرقمي على عملية اتخاذ قرار الشراء لدى العملاء في وكالات السفر والفنادق في مصر. اعتمدت الدراسة على قياس المراحل الخمس لعملية قرار الشراء من قبل العميل (Kotler & Keller 2012). بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تبحث الدراسة في تأثير أربع قنوات للتسويق الرقمي (البريد الإلكتروني، الهاتف المحمول، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، والموقع الإلكتروني) على النموذج المقترح في إطار صناعتي السياحة والضيافة المصرية. تستند البيانات التي تم جمعها من عملاء السياحة والضيافة (الأجانب والمصريين) على طريقة أخذ عينات بسيطة. تم إرسال رابط الاستبيان عبر الإنترنت، كما تم توزيع استبيانات ورقية على العينة المستهدفة. بلغ عدد الاستبيانات الصحيحة 323 مستجيباً مصرياً و 242 سائحاً أجنبياً. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام SPSS ver. 22. أكدت النتائج على وجود تأثير معنوي لقنوات التسويق الأربعة محل الدراسة على المراحل الخمس للشراء. أشارت النتائج أيضاً إلى أن السائحين الأجانب يستخدمون البريد الإلكتروني والمواقع الإلكترونية لتحديد احتياجاتهم، ويستخدمون وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والهاتف المحمول والبريد الإلكتروني في عملية البحث عن المعلومات، والمواقع الإلكترونية لتقييم البدائل. بينما يستخدم السائحين المصريين البريد الإلكتروني والهاتف المحمول لتحديد

احتياجاتهم، ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي لتقييم البدائل، والبريد الإلكتروني لتقييم عملية ما بعد الشراء.

الكلمات الدالة:

قنوات التسويق الرقمي، عملية اتخاذ قرار الشراء، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الهاتف المحمول، الموقع الإلكتروني

Abstract

Digital marketing channels (DMCs) have become crucial to the success of tourism and hospitality businesses wherein customers have access to information on the latest offers and best prices. Despite the significant role of DMCs, there is a lack of studies investigating the impact of DMCs on customer buying behavior in the Egyptian tourism and hospitality industries. Accordingly, the current study aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of DMCs on the customer buying decision process in the context of Egyptian tourism and hospitality services. The study adopted the five-stage model of the customer buying decision process (need recognition, information research, evaluation, purchase decision, post-purchase) (Kotler & Keller 2012). Furthermore, it examines the effects of the four DMCs (e-mail, mobile, social media, and website) on the suggested model in Egypt's tourism and hospitality settings. The data collected from tourism and hospitality customers (foreign and Egyptian tourists) is based on the 10 times rule method. An online questionnaire link was sent, and paper-based questionnaires were distributed to the target sample. The number of valid questionnaires is 242 foreign tourists and 323 Egyptian tourists. The data were analyzed using SPSS ver. 22. The results confirmed the significant effect of the four DMCs on the five stages. The findings also indicated that foreign tourists utilize e-mail and websites for recognition, mobile, social media, and email for information research, and websites for evaluation. The Egyptian tourists use e-mail and mobile for recognition, social media for evaluation, and the website for post-purchase.

Keywords: Digital marketing channels, customer buying decision process, social media, mobile, website

1. Introduction

Digital marketing channels (DMCs) such as e-mail, mobile, social media, and websites have become ingrained in the daily lives of people (Mariani et al., 2014; Stephen, 2016; Vijayanand, 2021). They are using DMCs extensively; approximately, 92% of internet users (3.7 billion) are utilizing their mobile phones to access the internet, additionally, there are 3.56 billion active social media users worldwide (Dazeinfo, 2018; Unni, 2020). Customers use DMCs in searching for information about products and services they want to buy, and in connecting directly with brands (Abou-Shouk et al., 2013; Ryan, 2014; Salloum & Shaalan 2018; Omar & Atteya 2020).

Tourism and hospitality services providers employ DMCs (e.g., e-mail, mobile, social media, and websites) to attract new customers, improve customer service, enhance operational efficiency, and increase income (Malik et al., 2013; Amaro & Duarte, 2015). DMCs allow businesses to follow customers' activities (Kaur, 2017); engage directly with them (Amaro & Duarte, 2015; Martins et al., 2015); and announce information about products and services (Unni, 2020). DMCs play a significant part in customer buying behavior (Vinerean et al., 2013). Moreover, they let businesses better understand customers' requirements; hence, accomplishing their overall marketing goals (Law et al., 2014; Batinic, 2015; Vijayanand, 2021).

Despite the importance of DMCs in the process of the customer buying decision, there is a deficiency in

examining the impact of the DMCs (e-mail, mobile, social media, and websites) on the five stages of the customer buying decision process in the context of the Egyptian tourism and hospitality industries (Unni, 2020). Kotler and Keller (2012) proposed the five-stage model explaining the stages of buying decision process (need recognition, information research, evaluation, purchase decision, post-purchase). Several previous studies examined the model in various disciplines. However, there is a gap in testing the impact of DMCs (e-mail, mobile, social media, website) on the five stages of customer purchasing decisions in the context of Egyptian tourism and hospitality settings. Furthermore, latent literature has limitations in uncovering issues related to the following: the most preferred DMCs that customers use when they purchase tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination; the reason(s) for choosing them, the role of DMCs in changing customer's buying decision; the frequency of utilizing DMCs in buying tourism and hospitality services; the reasons for choosing DMCs to purchase tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination; the most preferred DMC in every stage from the five stages of the buying process by both foreign and Egyptian tourists. There is also a lack of investigation of the differences between foreign and Egyptian tourists as well as males and females in their reasons for using DMCs, frequency of utilizing them, and DMCs' effect on changing their opinions towards buying decisions.

This paper intends to bridge these gaps, hence; it adopts the five-stage model of the customer buying decision process (need recognition, information research, evaluation,

purchase decision, post-purchase) (Kotler & Keller 2012) and aims to test the effect of DMCs (e-mail, mobile, social media, website) on the five stages relying on data collected from customers (foreign and Egyptian tourists) of tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination. Hence, the major objectives of the study are to:

- Identify the most preferred DMCs that customers (foreign and Egyptian tourists) use when they purchase tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination.
- Recognize the reason(s) for choosing specified DMCs.
- Examine the effect of DMCs on changing buying decisions.
- Consider the frequency of utilizing DMCs in buying tourism and hospitality services.
- Understand the reasons for choosing DMCs to purchase tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination.
- Detect the most preferred DMC in every stage from the five stages of the buying process by both foreign and Egyptian tourists.
- Differentiate between foreign and Egyptian tourists as well as males and females in their usage of DMCs; the frequency of utilizing DMCs, and the effect of DMCs on changing their opinions towards buying decisions.

The study also aims to test the following hypotheses:

H1a: E-mail has a significant positive effect on foreign tourists' buying process.

H1b: E-mail has a significant positive effect on the Egyptian tourists' buying process.

H2a: The mobile has a significant positive effect on foreign tourists' buying process.

H2b: The mobile has a significant positive effect on the Egyptian tourists' buying process.

H3a: Social media has a significant positive effect on foreign tourists' buying process.

H3b: Social media has a significant positive effect on the Egyptian tourists' buying process.

H4a: The website has a significant positive effect on foreign tourists' buying process.

H4b: The website has a significant positive effect on the Egyptian tourists' buying process.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The next section explains the literature review. The methodology section describes the sample attributes, data collection methods, and scale items adapted from prior studies to measure the five steps of the model and the four adopted DMCs. Then, the results are presented, and a discussion and recommendations are given.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital Marketing Channels

Digital marketing could be explained as marketing that involves the use of electronic devices such as computers, smartphones, mobile phones, and gaming consoles to engage stakeholders in the process (Omar & Atteya 2020).

It is a projection of traditional marketing on the internet, with its tools and strategies (Unni, 2020). Digital marketing combines traditional marketing approaches with the use of digital technology to achieve marketing objectives (Chaffey et al., 2009). Its techniques could replicate various marketing communications features and traditional media channels (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2013).

Tourism and hospitality sectors must embrace digitalization to remain competitive and satisfy the demands of digital customers (Happ & Ivancso-Horvath, 2018). Travel agencies and hotels have recognized the value of digital marketing and have included digital technologies in their marketing strategies (Kaur, 2017). The three E's (Ease, Engage, and Earn) may be used to categorize the variables triggering that lead to the adoption of digital marketing technologies (Sharma et al., 2020). Specifically, digital marketing is user-centric and enhances interactive customer-brand relationships to achieve marketing goals (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012; Otero & Rolan, 2016).

2.1.1. E-mail

E-mail is a DMC that involves sending advertising or business information via e-mail (Omar and Atteya, 2020). It also involves providing customized messages to the brand mailers for their birthdays and anniversaries, giving a discount on services at the right moment to attract new customers or keep existing ones loyal (Otero and Rolan, 2016; Nizar & Janathanan, 2018; Isiaka, 2021). E-mail isn't used just about flooding the audience's inboxes with emails; it must be well-planned and performed to

provide the best results (Khan & Islam, 2017). Emails are an excellent approach to maintaining contact with customers after the purchase (Ugonna et al., 2017).

In the tourism and hospitality industries, travel agencies and hotels can send customized e-mails that are tailored to the user's requirements and enhance the likelihood of receiving immediate responses (Scharl et al., 2005; Isiaka, 2021). Users may learn about the latest hotel offers, unique holiday package discounts, membership clubs, room availability, and much more via email (Vijayanand, 2021). The use of email DMC allows every possible interested visitor to arrive at the right time for the lowest cost and best offers (Kotler & Koller, 2016; Kaur, 2017).

2.1.2. Mobile

In tourism and hospitality, mobile marketing enables travel agencies and hotels to connect and interact with their customers in a relevant and interactive manner using any device or mobile network (Mohamed et al., 2016). Tourists readily embrace mobile technology because they recognize the usefulness and ease that this software provides while doing travel-related tasks such as finding information, making reservations, paying for services, and traveling (Lu, et al., 2015; Fong et al., 2017). Mobile marketing is the broadest, fastest, cheapest, and most relevant marketing channel where users can easily obtain information and features of appealing goods, as well as the ability to complete the buying and selling process (Alam et al., 2015).

Today, both individuals and brands have become more dependent on mobile. On the one hand, no one can deny that people now have a greater desire to use mobile than ever before (Omar & Atteya,2020). Specifically, mobile marketing provides access to customers to know their benefits and needs and influences their purchasing decisions (Tiffany et al., 2018; Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed,2021). It also provides customers with customized information that promotes products, services, and ideas (Wang et al., 2014). On the other hand, brands connect with the customer using mobile devices to facilitate the selling of products or services and the distribution of information on those products and services (Cunha, 2019).

2.1.3. Social Media

Social media provide a chance to generate new forms of social interaction between customers and brands (Unni, 2020). Social media is booming in terms of the number and variety of platforms and users (Stephen, 2016). Thus, one can find audiovisual platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, and SoundCloud; image platforms such as Flickr, Picassa, Pinterest, and Instagram; general social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or specialized ones such as LinkedIn; news or bookmark aggregators such as Delicious; blogs; and wikis, etc. (Budiman, 2021).

Travel agencies and hotels adopt social media marketing which has several benefits including the ability to link business to customers, establish connections, and maintain relationships in a timely and cost-effective manner (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Additionally, travel agencies and hotels use social media to connect and interact with

new and present customers, resulting in have strong customer-brand relationships and the development of all-important meaningful interactions with customers (Mersey et al., 2010). Social media enables travel agencies and hotels to build trust and enhance customer service (Nizar and Janathanan, 2018).

2.1.4. Website

Website is one of the most important DMCs, it is a collection of product-related web pages that are published on a web server and identified by a domain name (Ugonna et al., 2017; Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed 2021). A website is a channel used by a virtual company to achieve the aim of its marketing strategy and all related activities (Khan & Islam, 2017). Website marketing enables immediate communication, getting information from the right source, preparing, and designing a product based on customers' needs (Obednikovska et al., 2019). By adopting the website, brands can communicate with customers, and increase direct sales (Obednikovska et al., 2019).

The website DMC is crucial for travel agencies and hotels (Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed,2021) which decorated their official websites with product images, music, videos, and information regarding products and services (Batinic, 2015; Shamim and Farjana,2017). The art of designing the website is so profoundly enhanced the appropriate website standards (Dhore and Godbole, 2019) and attracts customers to visit the website, and makes them frequently come back to it and purchase products and services (Kotler et al., 2017).

2.2. Customer-Buying Decision Process

Buying decisions are the product of a lengthy, thorough process that may include a broad search for information, a comparison of brands, and an assessment (Stankevich,2017). Decision-making is described as the selection of an alternative to solve an issue, the amount of time and effort necessary to complete the process differs depending on the buying situation (Prasad & Jha,2014). Brands need to understand how customers gather information about different alternatives and use this information to select among competing brands (Belch & Belch, 2009).

Among several models and theories explained the customer-buying decision process (i.e., Simon, 1960; Nicosia,1966; Engel et al., 1968; Sheth and Howard, 1969; Narayana and Markin, 1975; Keeney, 1982; Rassuli and Harrell, 1990; Sheth et al., 1991; Smith and Rupp, 2003; Armano, 2007; Court et al., 2009) the current study adopted the model of customer buying decision process (Figure 1) which developed by Kotler and Keller (2012). The proposed model included five stages that customers move through when buying a product or service.

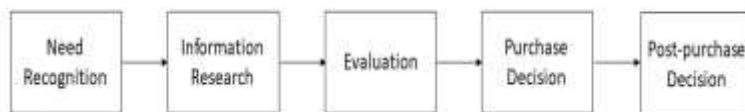


Figure 1: Five-stage model of the customer buying decision process
Source: Kotler and Keller (2012).

2.2.1. Need Recognition

It is the initial stage in the customer decision-making process (Kotler & Keller 2016; Kotler et al., 2017). The firm should recognize the needs of its customers and work to meet them (Kotler & Keller, 2012). In the need recognition, the companies can find out the need of the customer and create marketing strategies (Omar & Atteya, 2020).

2.2.2. Information Research

When a customer wants to buy a new product, s/he searches for product information (Clow & Baack, 2016). In this stage, the customer starts looking for information on the product from a variety of sources (Kotler & Keller, 2012) including personal sources (family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances); commercial sources (advertising, salespeople, dealer, and manufacturer, web and mobile sites, packaging, displays); public sources (mass media, consumer rating organization, social media, online searchers and peer reviews); and experimental sources (examining and using the product) (Kotler et al., 2017).

2.2.3. Evaluation

When a customer collects information about a product or a brand, s/he ranks the product or brand and evaluates it (Omar & Atteya, 2020). Based on the customers' needs, wants, and desires, they buy products and services that give them additional benefits (Kotler & Keller 2016). Brands should understand the evaluation process of

customers and take the benefit from the evaluation of the alternatives (Qazzafi,2019).

2.2.4. Purchase Decision

The customer has decided to buy a product after gathering information from a variety of sources, evaluating it, and deciding where and what to buy (Clow & Baack, 2016). Customers buy the brand or product that gets the highest rating during the evaluation stage (Kotler et al., 2017). The buyer chooses the best product after weighing the options (Qazzafi,2019).

2.2.5. Post-Purchase Decision

The post-purchase decision is the last stage of the customer buying decision- process. Brands' efforts do not stop after buying decisions (Kotler et el., 2017). The brands should recognize the behavior of the customer towards the products after purchase (Kotler & Keller, 2016). After the use of the product, the customer might be satisfied or dissatisfied (Omar & Atteya,2020). If the customer is satisfied, s/he can influence other customers to buy the product (word of mouth); additionally, the chances of retention will increase (Clow & Baack, 2016; Stankevich,2017).

3. Methodology

The current study is deductive and adopts the quantitative research design (Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2016). The present study implements the survey based on its appropriateness to the deductive approach and quantitative design. The data collected depends on a questionnaire as the most proper data collection technique

for the mentioned justifications (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2014). An online questionnaire link was sent, and paper-based questionnaires were distributed to the target sample.

3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

The questionnaire targeted foreign and Egyptian tourists who are using DMCs to buy the Egyptian tourism and hospitality services. One of the rules of thumb that can be helpful is to note that there is a positive relationship between the number of measurement items (questions in a questionnaire) and the sample size. The sample should allow for a ratio of at least 5:10 respondents per question (Hinkin et al., 1997). Ryan (1995), though, argues for a more demanding ratio of at least ten respondents per item. A simple application of the “10-times rule” (Hair et al., 2014) is used to determine the sample size for this research, “10 times the maximum number of inner or outer links pointing at any latent variable”. Since this research employed (26) items from previous studies to measure the four DMCs, and (14) Items to measure the five steps of the customer buying decision process; in total, there are (40) items in the scale. Therefore, the appropriate sample size for a questionnaire has (40) questions, is 200 to 400 respondents.

Noteworthy, the researchers gathered a total number of (565) valid questionnaire forms (242 foreign tourists and 323 Egyptian tourists). Hence, the number of the valid forms exceeds the number of the determined sample. Moreover, the number of the Egyptian tourists' forms exceeds the number of the foreign tourists' forms; as mentioned by UNWTO (2020), the domestic tourist trips

are always more of all arrivals to a destination than foreign tourists. Therefore, the sample is representative.

3.2. Measurement items

The questionnaire includes three main parts explained as follows: first, questions asked about some demographic information (age, gender, and nationality), the respondent's most preferred DMC, the reason(s) for choosing specified DMCs, whether this DMC influences buying decisions, the frequency of utilizing DMCs in buying tourism and hospitality services. Regarding the second and third part of the questionnaire, the evaluation of all items was anchored on a five-point Likert scale. The study employed 40 items from previous studies. The second part includes measurement items asked about the four adopted DMCs (Appendix 1). To measure the e-mail DMC, 6 items were adapted from Iftikar and Khan (2017). While 8 measurement items were adapted from Omar and Atteya (2020) to measure the mobile DMC. Furthermore, the current study adapted 6 scale items to measure social media and 6 items to measure websites as DMCs from Vijayanand (2021). Finally, the third part includes 14 items adapted from Omar and Atteya (2020) to measure the five stages (need recognition, information research, evaluation, purchase decision, post-purchase decision) (Appendix 2).

3.3. Data analysis

For the questionnaire data analysis, statistical tools of statistical package social science (SPSS version 22) were used for data input and analysis in using percentage, mean, standard deviation, T-test, and correlations.

4. Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographic variables

Variables	Foreign tourists (N = 242, 42.8%)	Egyptian tourists (N = 323, 57.2%)	Total (N = 565, 100%)	
Sex	Male	106 (43.8%)	176 (54.5%)	282 (49.9%)
	Female	136 (56.2%)	147 (45.5%)	283 (50.1%)
Age	Below 20 years	12 (5%)	8 (2.5%)	20 (3.5%)
	21- 30 years	66 (27.3%)	91 (28.2%)	157 (27.8%)
	31-40 years	74 (30.6%)	150 (46.4%)	224 (39.6%)
	41-50 years	60 (24.8%)	52 (16.1%)	112 (19.8%)
	+50 years	30 (12.4)	22 (6.8%)	52 (9.2%)
Digital Marketing Channels (DMCs)	Social Media	40 (16.5%)	136 (42.1%)	176 (31.2%)
	Websites	116 (47.9%)	128 (39.6%)	244 (43.2%)
	Mobile	56 (23.1%)	49 (15.2%)	105 (18.6%)
	Email	28 (11.6%)	10 (3.1%)	38 (6.7%)
	Other*	2 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.4%)
Buy Services by (DMCs)	Frequently	86 (35.5%)	89 (27.6%)	175 (31%)
	Sometimes	92 (38%)	114 (35.3%)	206 (36.5%)
	Rarely	36 (14.9%)	82 (25.4%)	118 (20.9%)
	Never	28 (11.6%)	38 (11.9%)	66 (11.6%)
(DMCs) Change Buying Decision	Strongly Agree	50 (20.7%)	22 (6.8%)	72 (12.7%)
	Agree	58 (24%)	169 (52.3%)	227 (40.2%)
	Neutral	80 (33.1%)	92 (28.5%)	172 (30.4%)
	Disagree	20 (8.3%)	22 (6.8%)	42 (7.4%)
	Strongly Disagree	34 (14%)	18 (5.6%)	52 (9.2%)

*Other (Verbal recommendations from friends and family members)

As declared earlier the sample includes two groups (foreign and Egyptian tourists). The demographic variables

of the respondents are explained as follows (see Table 1). Basically, the foreign tourists' group represents 42.8% of the sample, while Egyptian tourists represent 57.2%. First, the majority of the foreign tourists' group are females (56.2%), and most Egyptian tourists are males (54.5%). However, the sample, in general, has no difference between males (49.9%) and females (50.1%). Second, most foreign, and Egyptian tourists in the sample are 31-40 years old (30.6% and 46.4% respectively). Overall, more than one-third of the sample (39.6%) is from 31 to 40 years old, and more than two-thirds of them (67.4%) are youth whose ages are ranging between 21 and 40 years.

Third, the results indicated that around half of the foreign tourists' group choose the website (47.9%), then the mobile (23.1%) as the most preferred DMCs. Nevertheless, the Egyptian tourists' respondents preferred social media (42.1%) then the website (39.6%). Generally, in the process of buying tourism and hospitality services, the website is in the first place, as approximately half of the total sample (43.2%) prefer the website, followed by social media (31.2%). Fourth, they (foreign and Egyptian tourists) are sometimes (36.5%) and frequently (31%) depending on DMCs for purchasing tourism and hospitality services. Fifth, according to the effect of DMCs on changing buying decisions, on the one hand, more than 50% of the respondents (44.7% of foreign tourists and 60% of Egyptian tourists) confirmed that DMCs can change their buying decisions. On the other hand, only 17% of them (22.3% of foreign tourists and 12.4% of Egyptian tourists) stated that DMCs do not change their buying decisions.

Table 2. Frequency of using DMCs in buying tourism and hospitality services

Using DMC	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
Foreign tourists	86 (35.5%)	92 (38%)	36 (14.9%)	28 (11.6%)	2.98	0.985
Egyptian tourists	89 (27.6%)	114 (35.3%)	82 (25.4%)	38 (11.8%)	2.79	0.978

In the comparison between foreign and Egyptian tourists in the frequency of utilizing DMCs when buying tourism and hospitality services, the results are clarified as follows (see Table 2). Most of foreign tourists are frequently (35.5%) and sometimes (38%) depending on DMCs for purchasing tourism and hospitality services. Egyptian tourists are also employing several DMCs for buying tourism and hospitality services (27% frequently and 35.3% sometimes). Hence, both foreign and Egyptian tourists utilize DMCs for purchasing tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination; however, the Egyptian tourists have a lower frequency than foreign tourists because (25%) of Egyptian tourists insisted that they are rarely used DMCs.

Regarding the reasons for choosing DMCs to buy tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination, the results showed that the most important reason for both foreign and Egyptian tourists is “easy buying procedure” with a percentage of 53.7% for foreign tourists and 51.7% for Egyptian tourists (see Figure 2). The second vital reason that encourages foreign tourists to choose DMCs in their

buying process is “wide variety of products” (45.5%). However, the second crucial reason that encourages Egyptian tourists to choose DMCs is “lower prices”.

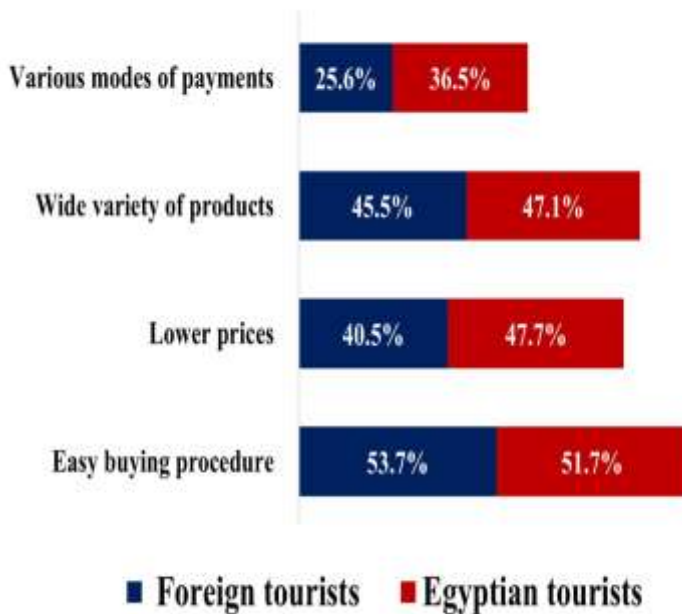


Figure 2. Reasons for choosing DMCs to purchase tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination

On the one hand, the majority of respondents verified the significant role of DMCs in changing their opinions towards buying decisions. Specifically, more than half of the Egyptian tourists' respondents (59.1%) and around half of the foreign tourists' group (44.7%) strongly agree and agree that DMCs have a substantial effect in switching their purchasing decisions (see Table 3). Nonetheless, on the other hand, the minority of the

respondents (22.3% of foreign tourists and 12.2% of Egyptian tourists) disagree and strongly disagree with that opinion, as they declared that DMCs have no role in changing their buying choice.

Table 3. The role of DMCs in changing the respondent’s opinion towards the buying decision

DMCs Change Opinion	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
Foreign tourists	50 (20.7%)	58 (24%)	80 (33.1%)	20 (8.3%)	34 (14%)	3.29	1.278
Egyptian tourists	22 (6.8%)	169 (52.3%)	92 (28.5%)	22 (6.8%)	18 (5.6%)	3.48	0.927

According to the most important DMCs influence purchase decision, the results (as shown in Figure 3) revealed the significant role of both the website and social media for foreign and Egyptian tourists. Around, 36% of the foreign tourists’ group said that the website is the most crucial DMC impact their purchasing decisions, followed by social media (30%), and mobile (21%). While email (11%) and blogs (1%) are less important for them. Regarding the Egyptian tourists’ respondents, the most vital DMCs is social media (44%) followed by the website (34%). However, they found mobile (19%) and email (3%) not at the same value for them.

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Decision Process: A Study on the Egyptian Tourism and Hospitality
Services

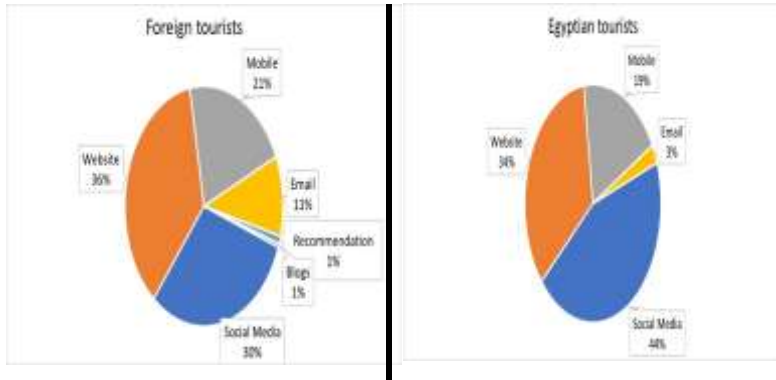


Figure 3. The most important DMCs influence purchase decision

Table 4. Distribution of respondents' (foreign and Egyptian tourists) responses on E-mail

Email		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
E1	Foreign tourists	12 (5%)	102(42.1%)	70(28.9%)	40(16.5%)	18(7.4%)	3.20	1.02
	Egyptian tourists	0(0%)	147(45.5%)	104(32.2%)	50(15.5%)	22(6.8%)	3.16	0.92
E2	Foreign tourists	14 (5.8%)	100(41.3%)	80(33.1%)	32(13.2%)	16(6.6%)	3.26	0.98
	Egyptian tourists	6(1.9%)	158(48.9%)	107(33.1%)	42(13%)	10(3.1%)	3.33	0.84
E3	Foreign tourists	38(15.7%)	80 (33.1%)	82(33.9%)	30(12.4%)	12 (5%)	3.42	1.05
	Egyptian tourists	12(3.7%)	173(53.6%)	88(27.2%)	42(13%)	8(2.5%)	3.43	0.85
E4	Foreign tourists	28(11.6%)	100(41.3%)	70(28.9%)	30(12.4%)	14(5.8%)	3.40	1.03
	Egyptian tourists	16(5%)	155(48%)	100(31%)	46(14.2%)	6(1.9%)	3.39	0.85
E5	Foreign tourists	26(10.7%)	80 (33.1%)	94(38.8%)	26(10.7%)	16(6.6%)	3.30	1.02
	Egyptian tourists	4(1.2%)	122(37.8%)	121(37.5%)	56(17.3%)	20(6.2%)	3.10	0.91
E6	Foreign tourists	16 (6.6%)	76 (31.4%)	88(36.4%)	42(17.4%)	20(8.3%)	3.10	1.03
	Egyptian tourists	8(2.5%)	135(41.8%)	106(32.8%)	58(18%)	16(5%)	3.18	0.92

The results show that 118 (48.8%) of the foreign tourists' group and 185 (57.3%) of the Egyptian tourists in the sample strongly agreed and agreed that e-mail plays an active role in building a relationship between the service provider (the travel agencies and hotels in the Egyptian destination) and the customer. Moreover, 128 (52.9%) of foreign tourists' respondents and 171 (53%) of the Egyptian

tourists strongly agreed and agreed with the fact that email contributes to brand names (Table 4). This implies that majority of the respondents believe that e-mail is an effective DMC and has a role in building brand trust and enhancing brand awareness

Table 5. Distribution of respondents' (foreign and Egyptian tourists) responses on mobile

Mobile		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
M1	Foreign tourists	38(15.7%)	84(34.7%)	72(29.8%)	34(14%)	14(5.8%)	3.40	1.08
	Egyptian tourists	8(2.5%)	170(52.6%)	75(23.2%)	34(10.5%)	36(11.1%)	3.24	1.05
M2	Foreign tourists	36(14.9%)	88(36.4%)	72(29.8%)	34(14%)	12(5%)	3.42	1.06
	Egyptian tourists	6(1.9%)	159(49.2%)	90(27.9%)	48(14.9%)	20(6.2%)	3.25	0.94
M3	Foreign tourists	10(4.1%)	48(19.8%)	114(47.1%)	40(16.5%)	30(12.4%)	2.86	1.00
	Egyptian tourists	4(1.2%)	116(35.9%)	82(25.4%)	79(24.5%)	42(13%)	2.87	1.07
M4	Foreign tourists	32(13.2%)	86(35.5%)	74(30.6%)	32(13.2%)	18(7.4%)	3.33	1.09
	Egyptian tourists	20(6.2%)	179(55.4%)	72(22.3%)	30(9.3%)	22(6.8%)	3.44	0.98
M5	Foreign tourists	18(7.4%)	64(26.4%)	98(40.5%)	38(15.7%)	24(9.9%)	3.05	1.05
	Egyptian tourists	4(1.2%)	130(40.2%)	91(28.2%)	68(21.1%)	30(9.3%)	3.03	1.01
M6	Foreign tourists	38(15.7%)	74(30.6%)	78(32.2%)	26(10.7%)	26(10.7%)	3.29	1.17
	Egyptian tourists	18(5.6%)	153(47.4%)	102(31.6%)	32(9.9%)	18(5.6%)	3.37	0.93
M7	Foreign tourists	22(9.1%)	82(33.9%)	68(28.1%)	52(21.5%)	18(7.4%)	3.15	1.09
	Egyptian tourists	14(4.3%)	163(50.5%)	90(27.9%)	32(9.9%)	24(7.4%)	3.34	0.97
M8	Foreign tourists	20(8.3%)	86(35.5%)	90(37.2%)	30(12.4%)	16(6.6%)	3.26	1.00
	Egyptian tourists	6(1.9%)	152(47.1%)	101(31.1%)	40(12.4%)	24(7.4%)	3.23	0.95

The findings further show that 124 (51.3%) of the foreign tourists' group strongly agreed and agreed that travel agencies and hotels in the Egyptian destination show a great deal of interests in mobile messages disclosing discounts and special offers (Table 5). According to the Egyptian tourists, 199 (61.6%) of them strongly agreed and agreed that the mobile DMC is characterized as providing easy accessibility to the largest number of customers. However, insignificant number of both foreign tourists 70 (28.9%) and the Egyptian tourists 121 (37.5%) strongly disagreed and disagreed that they receive SMS regarding tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination at appropriate times. This suggests that the mobile DMC provides opportunities for choosing suitable tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination and shows a great deal of interests in messages disclosing discounts and special offers. Nevertheless, there is a need to pay more attention to the time of sending SMSs regarding tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination.

Table 6. Distribution of respondents' (foreign and Egyptian tourists) responses on social media

Social Media		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
S1	Foreign tourists	20(8.3%)	122(50.4%)	84(34.7%)	10(4.1%)	6(2.5%)	3.57	0.80
	Egyptian tourists	30(9.3%)	199(61.6%)	54(16.7%)	22(6.8%)	18(5.6%)	3.62	0.94
S2	Foreign tourists	24(9.9%)	112(46.3%)	68(28.1%)	34(14%)	4(1.7%)	3.48	0.91
	Egyptian tourists	30(9.3%)	180(55.7%)	69(21.4%)	24(7.4%)	20(6.2%)	3.54	0.97
S3	Foreign tourists	38(15.7%)	106(43.8%)	78(32.2%)	14(5.8%)	6(2.5%)	3.64	0.90
	Egyptian tourists	32(9.9%)	181(56%)	74(22.9%)	16(5%)	20(6.2%)	3.58	0.95
S4	Foreign tourists	44(18.2%)	94(38.8%)	82(33.9%)	18(7.4%)	4(1.7%)	3.64	0.91
	Egyptian tourists	48(14.9%)	186(57.6%)	61(18.9%)	14(4.3%)	14(4.3%)	3.74	0.91
S5	Foreign tourists	42(17.4%)	124(51.2%)	50(20.7%)	22(9.1%)	4(1.7%)	3.73	0.90
	Egyptian tourists	38(11.8%)	186(57.6%)	63(19.5%)	16(5%)	20(6.2%)	3.63	0.96
S6	Foreign tourists	40(16.5%)	116(47.9%)	64(26.4%)	18(7.4%)	4(1.7%)	3.70	0.88
	Egyptian tourists	52(16.1%)	182(56.3%)	53(16.4%)	20(6.2%)	16(5%)	3.72	0.97

The results indicated that most of the foreign tourists in the current study 166 (68.6%) strongly agreed and agreed that social media help them to make faster decisions about the

tourism and hospitality services or the destinations they want to visit. Regarding the Egyptian tourists, most of them 216 (72.5%) strongly agreed and agreed that social media is a crucial DMC contribute to the promotion of tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination (Table 6).

Table 7. Distribution of respondents' (foreign and Egyptian tourists) responses on the website

Websites		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
W1	Foreign tourists	50(20.7%)	112(46.3%)	70(28.9%)	10(4.1%)	0(0%)	3.83	0.79
	Egyptian tourists	23(7.1%)	182(56.3%)	86(26.6%)	14(4.3%)	18(5.6%)	3.55	0.90
W2	Foreign tourists	52(21.5%)	84(34.7%)	80(33.1%)	26(10.7%)	0(0%)	3.67	0.93
	Egyptian tourists	23(7.1%)	166(51.4%)	92(28.5%)	26(8%)	16(5%)	3.47	0.92
W3	Foreign tourists	38(15.7%)	108(44.6%)	80(33.1%)	16(6.6%)	0(0%)	3.69	0.81
	Egyptian tourists	21(6.5%)	180(55.7%)	90(27.9%)	16(5%)	16(5%)	3.54	0.88
W4	Foreign tourists	66(27.3%)	72(29.8%)	76(31.4%)	28(11.6%)	0(0%)	3.72	0.98
	Egyptian tourists	39(12.1%)	172(53.3%)	76(23.5%)	18(5.6%)	18(5.6%)	3.60	0.96
W5	Foreign tourists	58(24%)	88(36.4%)	78(32.2%)	18(7.4%)	0(0%)	3.77	0.89
	Egyptian tourists	35(10.8%)	192(59.4%)	70(21.7%)	10(3.1%)	16(5%)	3.68	0.89
W6	Foreign tourists	46(19%)	104(43%)	68(28.1%)	22(9.1%)	2(0.8%)	3.70	0.90
	Egyptian tourists	33(10.2%)	202(62.5%)	64(19.8%)	10(3.1%)	14(4.3%)	3.71	0.85

The results confirmed that most of foreign tourists 162 (67%) strongly agreed and agreed that they prefer to buy directly from websites of travel agencies and hotels in the Egyptian destination. While 235 (72.7%) of the

Egyptian tourists in the sample strongly agreed and agreed that online promotion of travel agencies and hotels via the websites has given more choices for the customers (Table 7).

Table 8. Correlation between the four DMCs and the five stages of the buying process

Digital Channels	Nationality	NR	IR	E	PD	PP	Total	Hypotheses
Email	Foreign tourists	0.309**	0.228**	0.200**	0.177**	0.149**	0.254**	H1a: Supported
	Egyptian tourists	0.352**	0.257**	0.147**	0.307**	0.336**	0.315**	H1b: Supported
Mobile	Foreign tourists	0.215**	0.740**	.0195**	0.201**	0.109	0.198**	H2a: Supported
	Egyptian tourists	0.425**	0.322**	0.331**	0.351**	0.403**	0.419**	H2b: Supported
Social Media	Foreign tourists	0.414**	0.516**	0.477**	0.383**	0.448**	0.565**	H3a: Supported
	Egyptian tourists	0.680**	0.753**	0.777**	0.583**	0.695**	0.805**	H3b: Supported
Website	Foreign tourists	0.573**	0.544**	0.565**	0.343**	0.432**	0.617**	H4a: Supported
	Egyptian tourists	0.516**	0.636**	0.588**	0.507**	0.651**	0.673**	H4b: Supported

(**) Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 Level (2-tailed), N (Egyptian tourists = 323, foreign tourists = 242)

NR= Need Recognition, IR= Information Research, E= Evaluation, PD= Purchase Decision, PP= Post Purchase

To test the proposed hypotheses, the study performed the correlation test between the four DMCs (e-mail, mobile, social media, and the website) and the five stages of the buying process (need recognition, information

research, evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase decision). All the relationships are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (see Table 8). First, email has a significant positive effect on the buying process (foreign tourists=0.254; Egyptian tourists=0.315). Hence, both H1a and H1b are supported. Foreign and Egyptian tourists are depending mainly on email at the first stage of the buying process (need recognition) 0.309 and 0.352; respectively. Foreign tourists utilize e-mail for recognition and information research. The Egyptian tourists use e-mail for tasks such as recognition, post-purchase, and purchase decision.

Second, mobile has a significant positive effect on the buying process (foreign tourists=0.198; Egyptian tourists=0.419). Thus, H2a and H2b are confirmed. Foreign tourists employ the mobile basically for information research (0.740); while Egyptian tourists adopt the mobile primarily in the first stage (need recognition= 0.425) followed by post-purchase (0.403). Third, social media has a significant positive effect on the buying decision process (tourists=0.565; Egyptians=0.805); so, H3a and H3b are also supported. Foreign tourists use social media mostly for information research (0.516), followed by evaluation (0.477); however, the Egyptian tourists depend largely on social media for evaluation (0.777), followed by information research (0.753). Fourth, the website DMC has a significant positive effect on the buying process (foreign tourists=0.617; Egyptian tourists=0.673). Accordingly, H4a and H4b are also established. Foreign tourists utilize the website basically in two stages; need recognition (0.573) and evaluation (0.565). Egyptian tourists take advantage of

the website for post-purchase (0.651), followed by information research (0.636).

The results also declared the most preferred DMC in every stage from the five stages of the buying process by both foreign and Egyptian tourists (Table 8). In the first stage (need recognition), the foreign tourists' group depends primarily on the website (0.573), followed by social media (0.414); however, the Egyptian tourists use social media (0.680), then the website (0.516). In the second stage (information research), foreign tourists prefer mobile (0.740), and website (0.544). Additionally, for information research, the Egyptian tourists depend on both social media (0.753) and websites (0.636). In the third stage (evaluation), foreign tourists depend on websites (0.588), then social media (0.477); while the Egyptian tourists utilize social media (0.777) and websites (0.588). In the fourth stage (purchase decision), both foreign and Egyptian tourists rely on social media 0.383 and 0.583; respectively, followed by websites 0.343 and 0.507. In the fifth and final stage of the buying process, foreign and Egyptian tourists choose social media (0.448 and 0.695), then websites (0.432 and 0.651) for post-purchase. In general, according to the relationship between DMCs and the total process of buying tourism and hospitality services, foreign tourists depend mainly on websites (0.617), followed by social media (0.565); while the Egyptian tourists have confidence in social media (0.805), then websites (0.673).

Table 9. T-test results compare foreign and Egyptian tourists in their usage of DMCs

Digital Channels	Nationality	Mean	SD	T value	p
Email	Foreign tourists	22.79	6.092	-6.509	0.000**
	Egyptian tourists	19.67	4.152		
Mobile	Foreign tourists	25.81	6.679	0.013	0.989
	Egyptian tourists	25.82	6.305		
Social Media	Foreign tourists	21.79	4.444	0.156	0.876
	Egyptian tourists	21.86	5.133		
Websites	Foreign tourists	22.40	4.215	-2.186	0.029*
	Egyptian tourists	21.57	4.648		

(*) (**) Statistically significant results at (0.05) and (0.01)

As declared in Table 9, the t-test results indicated that there is a significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in their dependency on both e-mail (T value= -6.509; p= 0.000) and websites (T value= -2.186; p= 0.029). Foreign tourists are more reliant on e-mail and websites as crucial DMCs utilized for buying tourism and hospitality services than Egyptian tourists (Figure 4).

However, there is no significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in their reliance on both mobile ($p>0.5$), and social media ($p>0.05$).

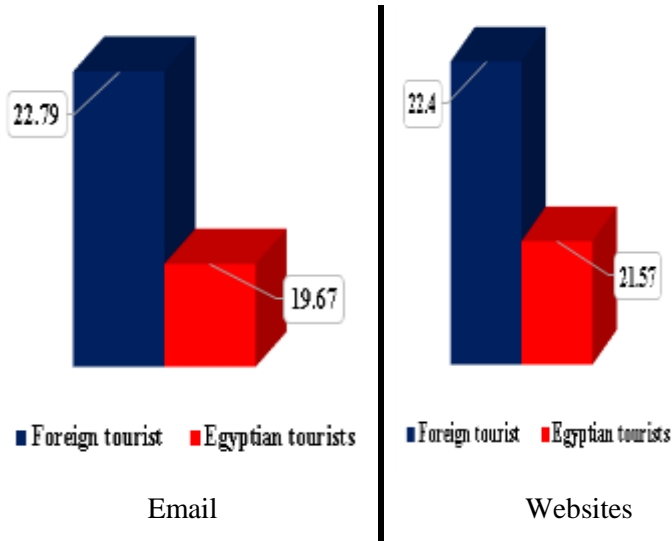


Figure 4. Difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in using E-mail and Websites to buy tourism and hospitality services

Table 10. t-test results compare between foreign and Egyptian tourists in the frequency of using DMCs and in changing their opinions towards buying decisions

Digital Channels	Nationality	Mean	SD	T value	P
Buying by DMCs	Foreign tourist	2.98	0.985	-2.263	0.024*
	Egyptian tourists	2.79	0.978		
DMCs Change Opinion	Foreign tourist	3.29	1.278	1.965	0.050*
	Egyptian tourists	3.48	0.927		

(*) Statistically significant results at (0.05)

As shown in Table 10, on the one hand, the t-test results indicated that there is a significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in the frequency of using DMCs for buying tourism and hospitality services (T value=-2.263; p=0.024). Additionally, foreign tourists use DMCs more extensively than Egyptian tourists in the buying process (Figure 5). On the other hand, there is also a significant difference between the two groups of respondents in the effect of DMCs in changing their opinions towards buying decisions (T value= 1.965; p= 0.050). DMCs have a larger effect on Egyptian tourists than foreign tourists in changing their opinions towards buying decisions.

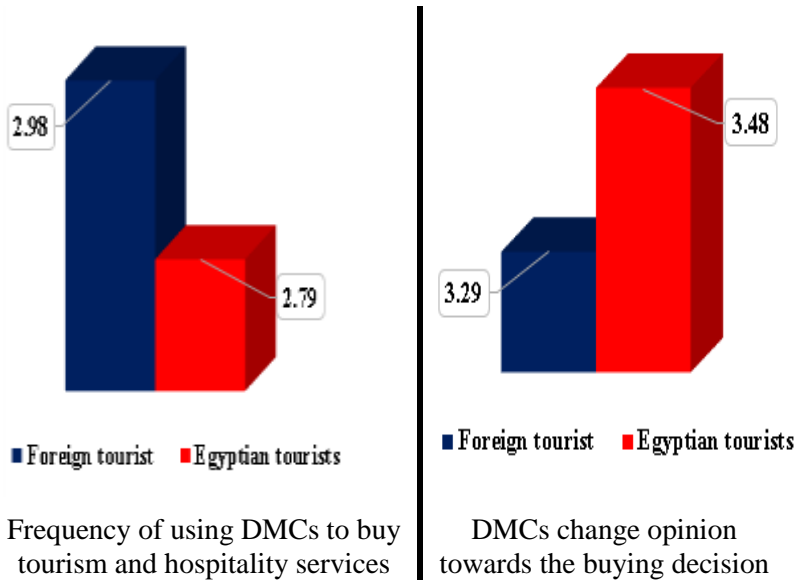


Figure 5. Comparing between foreign and Egyptian tourists in the frequency of using DMCs and in changing their opinions towards buying decisions

Table 11. T-test results compare between males and females in the frequency of using DMCs and in changing their opinions towards buying decisions

Digital Channels	Sex	Mean	SD	T value	p
Buying by DMC	Male	2.91	0.943	1.148	0.251
	Female	2.82	1.024		
DMC Change Opinion	Male	3.54	1.050	3.075	0.002**
	Female	3.26	1.121		

(**) Statistically significant results at (0.01), N (Male = 282, Female = 283)

As indicated in Table 11, on the one hand, the t-test results indicated that there is no significant difference between males and females in the frequency of using DMCs for buying tourism and hospitality services ($p > 0.05$). On the other hand, there is a significant difference between males and females in the effect of DMCs in changing their opinions towards buying decisions (T value= 3.075; $p = 0.002$). DMCs have a larger effect on males than females in changing their opinions towards buying decisions (Figure 6).

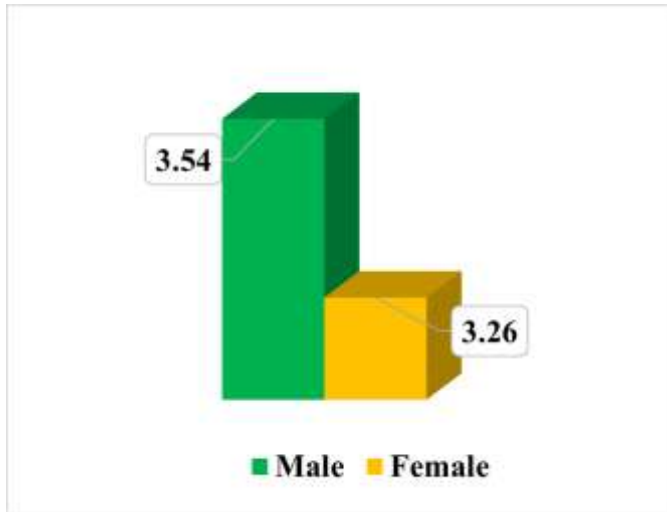


Figure 6. DMCs change opinion towards the buying decision

Table 12. T-test results compare males and females in their usage of DMCs

DMC	Sex	Mean	SD	T value	p
Email	Male	20.82	5.591	-0.794	0.428
	Female	21.19	5.750		
Mobile	Male	25.26	6.526	-2.031	0.043*
	Female	26.36	6.362		
Social Media	Male	21.77	4.931	-0.279	0.780
	Female	21.89	4.768		
Websites	Male	22.14	4.694	1.163	0.245
	Female	21.70	4.259		

(*) Statistically significant results at (0.05)

As revealed in Table 12, the t-test results indicated that there is no significant difference between males and females in their reliance on email, social media, and websites ($p > 0.5$). However, there is a significant difference between males and females in their dependency on mobile (T value= -2.031; $p = 0.043$). Females are more reliant on mobile as a vital DMC employed for buying tourism and hospitality services than males (Figure 7).

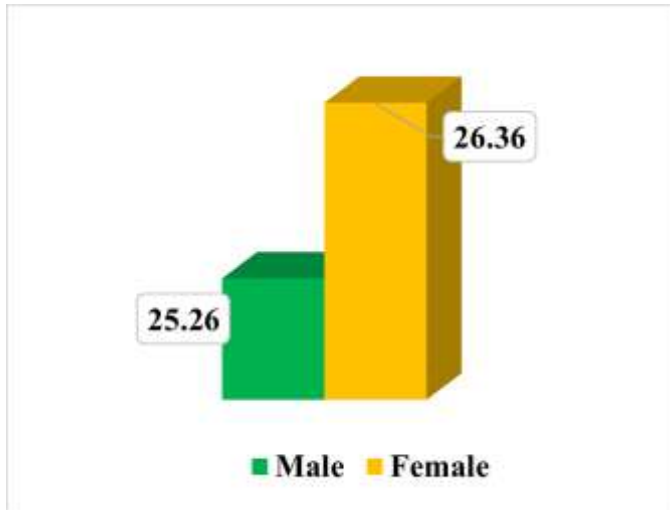


Figure 7. Difference between males and females in using the mobile to buy tourism and hospitality services

Table 13. T-test results compare between foreign and Egyptian tourists in the purchase process

Purchase Process	Nationality	Mean	SD	T value	p
NR	Foreign tourists	11.20	1.843	0.269	0.788
	Egyptian tourists	11.24	1.906		
IR	Foreign tourist	10.96	2.079	2.447	0.015*
	Egyptian tourists	11.42	2.324		
EV	Foreign tourists	14.67	3.014	3.009	0.003**
	Egyptian tourists	15.42	2.803		
PD	Foreign tourists	10.73	1.907	-1.305	0.192
	Egyptian tourists	10.50	2.217		
PP	Foreign tourists	15.12	3.263	-0.616	0.538
	Egyptian tourists	14.96	2.956		
Total	Foreign tourists	62.68	9.664	0.718	0.473
	Egyptian tourists	63.29	10.643		

(*) (**) Statistically significant results at (0.05) and (0.01)

As shown in Table 13, the t-test results revealed that there is no significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in three stages of the buying process (need recognition, purchase decision, and post-purchase) as $p > 0.5$. However, there is a significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in stage two (information research; T value=2.447; $p = 0.015$) and stage three (evaluation; T value=3.009; $p = 0.003$) (Figure 8).

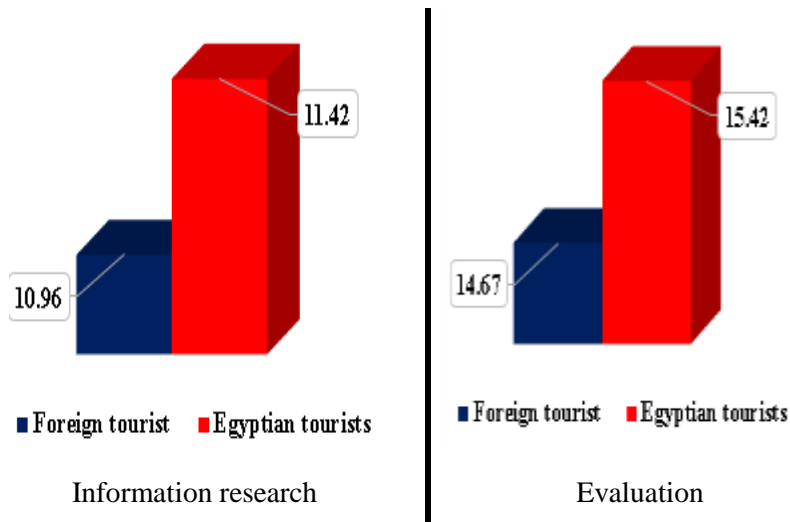


Figure 8. Difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in (IR, EV) in the purchase process

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate the effect of DMCs on the customer buying decision process of tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination for both foreign and

Egyptian tourists. Moreover, it verified the significant role of DMCs towards buying decisions and confirmed the DMCs' substantial influence on customers' purchasing decisions.

First, DMCs are crucial in purchasing tourism and hospitality services, as customers depend on it in the buying process. Findings declared that the most preferred DMCs are the website and the social media. Moreover, the results revealed the significant role of them in influencing foreign and Egyptian tourists' buying decisions. Foreign tourists depend mainly on websites to purchase tourism and hospitality services, while Egyptian tourists confirmed that social media compelled them to purchase tourism and hospitality services. Generally, in the process of buying tourism and hospitality services, the website is in the first place, followed by social media. Consequently, travel agencies and hotels in Egypt should pay more attention to these two DMCs, and concentrate their marketing efforts and fund in them, than the other DMCs.

Second, regarding the reasons for choosing DMCs to purchase tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination, the results showed that the most important reasons for customers are, 1) easy buying procedures, 2) wide variety of products, 3) the lower prices. Therefore, travel agencies and hotels in Egypt should facilitate the buying procedure through their DMCs and offer wide range of options for their products and services in reasonable prices.

Third, regarding email as a DMC, the results imply that majority of the respondents believe that e-mail is an

effective DMC and has a role in building brand trust and enhancing brand awareness. Yet, it is not receiving that much important as the websites and the social media, this might be because emails are read on a priority basis, and unimportant emails are sent to junk or spam folders due to which these targeted emails go unnoticed. According to Azeem (2012), marketers are overdoing emails that cause emails to go in spam and irritates the customers. Emails are more professional form of communication, and as compared to the mobile, fewer customers are using emails due to which they have a smaller number of customers who are habitual email users. Consequently, marketers in travel agencies and hotels in Egypt should schedule the emails and send it gradually at the appropriate times.

Fourth, the findings suggest that the mobile DMC provides opportunities for choosing suitable tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination and shows a great deal of interests in messages disclosing discounts and special offers. Nevertheless, there is a need to pay more attention to the time of sending SMSs regarding tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination. However, not insignificant number of both foreign and Egyptian tourists argued that they receive SMS regarding tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination at appropriate times. This suggests that the mobile DMC provides opportunities for choosing suitable tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination and shows a great deal of interests in messages disclosing discounts and special offers. Nevertheless, there is a need to pay more attention to the time of sending SMSs about tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination. For

instance, foreign tourists should receive the promotional SMSs before the Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve as it is the holiday season, however, Egyptian tourists should receive it before the summer and winter holidays.

Fifth, in terms of social media, the results indicated that most of foreign tourists in the current study strongly agreed and agreed that social media help them to make faster decisions about the tourism and hospitality services or the destinations they want to visit. Regarding the Egyptian tourists, the large number of them strongly agreed and agreed that social media is a crucial DMC contribute to the promotion of tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination. Accordingly, the presence of the Egyptian travel agencies and hotels on these platforms is not just about promoting the latest packages and facilities. A user will not avail the services daily, so it is essential that a business have become a part of the conversation customers are having on these platforms. Besides, travel agencies and hotels' marketers should focus on posting content, which adds value to the audiences' lives, thus, will help improve the engagement rate. Lastly, a brand should not consider all the social media platforms as one. Each of them comes with its own set of USPs. Facebook and Instagram should be the top two platforms a tourism business (Kaur, 2017).

Sixth, the results confirmed that most foreign tourists prefer to buy directly from the travel agents and hotels' websites in the Egyptian destination. Most of the Egyptian tourists convinced that online promotion of tour operators and hotels via the websites has given more choices for the customers. As mentioned before, websites

occupied the first place for foreign tourists in the process of buying tourism and hospitality services; hence, websites must be built in a way that allow customers to make a purchase without the need of any kind of assistance. They must be updated regularly keeping in view the changing customers' needs and preferences. The navigation tab should have a clear option for deals/packages to avoid an increase in the bounce rate. A good website represents the quality the business stands for and thus it should be developed and maintained.

Seventh, to test the proposed hypotheses, the study performed the correlation test between the four DMCs (e-mail, mobile, social media, and the website) and the five stages of the buying process (need recognition, information research, evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase). All the relationships are significant. Moreover, the results declared the most preferred DMC in every stage from the five stages of the buying process by both foreign and Egyptian tourists. According to the relationship between DMCs and the total process of buying tourism and hospitality services, foreign tourists depend mainly on websites, followed by social media; while the Egyptian tourists have confidence in social media, then websites. Consequently, websites and social media are very crucial in almost every stage of the buying process for both foreign and Egyptian tourists. In addition, they could change customers' opinions and their buying decisions. Further, the impact of email marketing and mobile is low as compared to the other DMCs, but this does not mean that they do not have an impact on the customer buying decision.

Consequently, it could be said that the four DMCs are complementary to each other's.

Eighth, regarding the usage of DMCs, the results indicated that there is a significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in their dependency on both e-mail and websites. Foreign tourists are more reliant on e-mail and websites as crucial DMCs utilized for buying tourism and hospitality services than Egyptian tourists. However, there is no significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in their reliance on both mobile, and social media.

Ninth, in the context of the frequency of using DMCs and their role in changing opinions towards buying decisions, results indicated that there is a significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in the frequency of using DMCs for buying tourism and hospitality services. Additionally, foreign tourists use DMCs more extensively than Egyptian tourists in the buying process. There is also a significant difference between the two groups of respondents in the effect of DMCs in changing their opinions towards buying decisions. DMCs have a larger effect on Egyptian tourists than foreign tourists in changing their opinions towards buying decisions. It's noticed that, although foreign tourists use DMCs more extensively than Egyptian tourists in the buying process. Despite DMCs have a larger effect on Egyptian tourists than foreign tourists in changing their opinions towards buying decisions, they are not using it frequently in the buying process. Thus, the role of websites and social media is very crucial in the buying process as they have the chance to change the customer buying

decisions, which confirmed the vitality of these two channels (websites and social media) in the buying process.

Tenth, results showed that there is no significant difference between males and females in the frequency of using DMCs for buying tourism and hospitality services. However, there is a significant difference between both in the effect of DMCs in changing their opinions towards buying decisions. For this reason, tourism and hospitality service providers in Egypt should bear in mind these differences and work on it.

Finally, in terms of the buying process, results revealed that there is no significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in three stages of the buying process (need recognition, purchase decision, and post-purchase). However, there is a significant difference between foreign and Egyptian tourists in stage two (information research) and stage three (evaluation), this may be due to the difference between them regarding the DMCs used in stage two (information research) and stage three (evaluation) of the buying process.

5.1. Conclusion

The current study examines four DMCs (e-mail, mobile, social media, and website). DMCs is a vast field with various factors involved that can reduce or enhance a consumer's buying behavior. Most of customers are fulfilled with the tourism and hospitality services purchased through the DMCs. Among the four DMCs presented in this research, websites and social media are very crucial in almost every stage of the buying process for both foreign and Egyptian tourists. In addition, they could change

customers' opinions and their buying decisions. Further, the impact of email marketing and mobile is low as compared to the other DMCs, but this does not mean that they do not have an impact on the customer buying decision. Consequently, it could be said that the four DMCs are complementary to each other's. In this regard, tourism and hospitality services providers in Egypt should pay more attention to websites and social media as crucial DMCs without neglecting the role of the other DMCs included in the current study (email and mobile). Moreover, the study analyzed the impact of these channels on the customer buying decision process (need recognition, information research, evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase) in the context of tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination. The results confirmed the significance of the proposed hypotheses. All the relationships were significant; each DMC has a significant positive effect on the buying process for both foreign and Egyptian tourists.

5.2. Recommendations

Tourism and hospitality services providers in Egypt should:

- Pay more attention to websites and social media as DMCs and concentrate their marketing efforts and fund in them than the other DMCs.
- Facilitate the buying procedure through their DMCs and offer wide range of options for their products and services at reasonable prices.
- Enhance the role of email as a DMC through scheduling the emails and sending it gradually at the appropriate times.

- Pay more attention to the mobile as a DMC as people use mobiles in their daily life easily and frequently.
- Bear in mind the differences between males and females in their buying behavior while doing their marketing and advertising campaigns.

Limitations and future research suggestions

The current study depended only on the questionnaire survey for data collection, future research could adopt other methods such as the interview for more detailed and in-depth data. The present study tested four DMCs in the context of the Egyptian tourism and hospitality services (e-mail, mobile, social media, and website), researchers in the future could examine other DMCs such as organic search (SEO), paid search (SEM), and display ads.

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Appendix A

- E1. I tend to purchase online via E-Mail marketing.
- E2. E-Mail marketing contributes to brand names.
- E3. E-Mail marketing plays an active role in building a relationship between the travel agencies and hotels in the Egyptian destination and me.
- E4. E-Mail marketing contributes to enhance product awareness.
- E5. I trust on that information which is sent to me via the E-Mail marketing.
- E6. I think that information I receive via the E-Mail marketing is exciting and Attractive.
- M1. Mobile marketing provides opportunities for choosing appropriate tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination.
- M2. Travel agencies and hotels in the Egyptian destination show a great deal of interests in messages disclosing discounts and special offers.
- M3. I receive SMS regarding tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination at appropriate times.
- M4. The Mobile marketing is characterized as providing easy accessibility to the largest number of customers
- M5. I get accurate information I seek about tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination via SMS marketing.
- M6. I tend to buy products through mobile apps.

- M7. I show a great deal of interest in messages disclosing discounts and special Offers.
- M8. Price offers via Mobile marketing are clear and affordable.
- S1. Social networking sites provide information for me about tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination while I am making decisions.
- S2. I subscribe on the social networking sites concerning my favorite tourism services; and I follow their updated notifications.
- S3. Social networking sites are informative before trips.
- S4. Social networking sites contribute to the promotion of tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination.
- S5. Social networking sites help me to make faster decisions about the tourism and hospitality services or the destinations I want to visit.
- S6. I read the opinions shared by friends through social networking sites before buying the tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination.
- W1. I prefer to buy directly from the travel agencies website and hotels in the Egyptian destination.
- W2. It is easier to communicate through the travel agencies and hotels website in the Egyptian destination.
- W3. Website marketing provide direct connection with users who are already interested in the products and services supplied by a particular firm.

- W4. I feel it is more secure to buy directly from the official websites of the travel agencies and hotels in the Egyptian destination.
- W5. I think having an impressive website is important to attract customer.
- W6. I think online promotion of a company through digital marketing on the websites has given more choices for the customers.

Appendix B.

- NR1. I buy only when it is necessary.
- NR2. I feel motivated to buy when I think it will meet my needs according to my previous buying experience.
- NR3. I buy the products, services when it is available at the lowest price.
- IR1. Selection of services on internet is very broad.
- IR2. I would use digital marketing channels to know more about different available options.
- IR3. I would go through various websites and/or stores to gather more information about the tourism and hospitality services.
- EV1. I took the buying decision when I feel the innovation of the product.
- EV2. I give more importance to customers' feedback while evaluating the Alternatives.

- EV3. I give more importance for the quality of the products/services offered.
- EV4. I always look for products and services that suit my desires and financial capabilities.
- PD1. Digital marketing changes my opinion towards buying decision.
- PD2. I would prefer doing an online purchase rather than going to the Travel agency and hotel in the Egyptian destination.
- PD3. I would prefer to buy from a travel agency and hotel in the Egyptian destination where I may get better price with more services.
- PP1. Shopping on the internet saves time.
- PP2. I intend to continue shopping online after positive online buying experiences.
- PP3. I would compare the quality of the services with that of the promise made through the digital marketing channels.
- PP4. I am always satisfied with the tourism and hospitality services in the Egyptian destination bought using digital channels.

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