Investigating the effect of social networks on the formation of the destination image and loyalty to the tourist destination (case study: tourists of Larnaca, Cyprus)

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Abstract
The current research was conducted with the aim of investigating the effect of social networks on the formation of the destination image and loyalty to the tourist destination (case study: tourists of Larnaca, Cyprus). The current research is a type of correlational research, which from the point of view of the goal, is one of the applied researches that was carried out in the field. The method of the present research is a survey in terms of data collection method. The statistical population of the present study included all the tourists of Larnaca, Cyprus, who, due to the lack of statistical information about these people, based on Cochran's sample size formula, in the conditions of uncertain population size; A total of 384 people were identified as the research sample. Finally, after distributing and collecting research questionnaires; 370 questionnaires were analyzed. Standard questionnaire was used in the research. In order to analyze the data, structural equation method was used. The whole process of data analysis was done in SPS, PLS software. The results of the present research showed that the performance of social networks has an effect of 0.876 on the image of the destination, which can be consider significant due to the fact that the T level is higher than 1.96. The results of the present research showed that the performance of social networks has an effect of 0.843 on the loyalty of the destination. In order to check the fit of the research model, selected indicators were used. Paying attention to social networks and its development can have grounds for improving the image and loyalty of tourists to the Larnaca, Cyprus.
Keywords: social network, destination image, destination loyalty

Introduction

Today, the Internet has become a wide platform for commercial transactions and a powerful media for marketing. Therefore, the use of Cyberspace among people is increasingly expanding, in recent years, with the expansion of Cyberspace and the expansion of Internet users, many marketing experts consider virtual communities as an opportunity to introduce companies' products and services. Cyberspace can be used as a unique tool to develop services and business performance and thereby create value (Amin et al., 2012). In this regard, the media has undergone huge changes during the last decade and the social media has attracted the attention of marketers and researchers. Companies use social media, including social sites, in order to establish direct relationships with customers, increase their website traffic, identify new business opportunities, create

brand communities, Collection and distribution of content, collect feedback from customers, and … to support their brand (Hudson et al., 2015). Social networks are one of the latest achievements of information technology as well as a new approach in marketing. On the other hand, the unlimited communication of users in these media leads to mutual effects on users. The use of these media has become an inseparable part of many people's lives and has had a direct impact on all aspects of their lives. During the last decade, the use of social media has increased significantly. (Molahosseini and Mohajeri, 2016).

The boom of social networks has been influential and important in all dimensions, including the field of tourism. The field of tourism needs to use the capacities of social networks more than ever. Today, the use of social networks plays an important and decisive role in promoting and improving the state of tourism (Arafia et al., 2021). One of the functions of social networks in the field of tourism is Introducing and promoting the tourism destination brand (Pan et al., 2021). In terms of tourism, the tourist destination has unique conditions and features compared to other destinations. Before visiting a destination, visitor observes an image of a destination as well as a set of expectations based on previous experiences, word of mouth, press reports, advertisements, and popular beliefs (Lee et al., 2021). An attractive touristy destination reflects visitors' feelings and opinions about the ability of destination to satisfy their needs and provide individual benefits (Tuskey et al., 2022).

Undoubtedly, tourism is the most important and largest set of services, which importance and dimensions is increasing day by day and occupies a higher position in the global economy (Ahmedshah and Mozafar, 2013). This is why today it is considered as an industry and is mentioned as Tourism Industry (Mtembu, 2009) And it is predicted that it will become the most profitable activity in the world and become an integral part of the industrial society and an important link in the reproduction of wealth, and it will certainly expand in the next century at a faster rate than the past and today. (Tarlow, 2014). Serious attention is paid to the category of travel and tourism as a new phenomenon in the 21st century and its importance is increasing day to day in the world (Balter, 2010). Therefore, according to the principle of diversifying the economy, it seems to be a suitable solution to solve economic problems (Lin et al., 2021). On the other hand, the social, economic and political benefits of this industry increase its importance (Safari, 2013). Therefore, considering the importance of this industry in different dimensions, it is necessary to pay attention to it.

Considering the importance of tourism destination branding, studies and researches in this field are very limited in the tourism industry. Today, tourism plays an important role in the economic development of countries. One of the strategies of countries to attract tourists from target markets is to create a destination brand for the tourism industry. The brand in the tourism industry causes memories to be repeated in the minds of tourists and the name of a specific country or region will be remembered in their minds (Sanaei and Shahabi, 2016). The importance of this issue causes the destination brand to be formed and increasing the value of the destination brand attracts tourists, investors and famous brands of tourism companies (Moghadam and Rusta, 2009). The academic researches that have been done on "how branding theory can be applied in the field of tourism" are rare (Giannopoulos and Lamprini, 2011).

The importance of improving and expanding the image of a tourist destination and its role in creating loyalty to that destination has caused efforts to be made in this field. Ambiguity regarding the function and impact of social networks on the formation of the image of the destination and loyalty to the tourist destination, made it clear that there is a research gap in this regard. This lack, while influencing the process of forming the image of the destination and loyalty to the tourist destination, leads to the lack of operational solutions in this area in the way of improving tourism in a city like Larnaca. Meanwhile, the capacities of Larnaca in the field of tourism show the need to use all available capacities in order to form the image of the destination and loyalty to the tourist destination. This problem has caused the current research to be designed with the aim of investigating the effect of social networks on the formation of the destination image and loyalty to the tourist destination (case study: Larnaca, Cyprus).

Research Methods

The current research is a type of correlational research, which from the point of view of the goal, is one of the applied researches that was conducted in the field. The method of the present research is a survey in terms of data collection method. The statistical population of the present study included all the tourists of Larnaca, who, due to the lack of statistical information about these people, based on Cochran's sample size formula, in the conditions of uncertain population size; A total of 450 people were identified as the research sample. Finally, after distributing and collecting research questionnaires; 370 questionnaires were analyzed.

A standard questionnaire was used to collect information. Thus, in order to measure the performance variable of social networks, the questionnaire of Kim et al. (2016) with 21 questions was used, which examined content factors (questions 1 to 15) and non-content factors (questions 16 to 21). The reliability of this questionnaire was found to be 0.82 in the research of Kim et al. (2016). In order to measure the destination image variable, Agarwal and Yili Yasi (2010) questionnaire with 13 questions was used, the questions of this questionnaire measured motivational image (3 questions), cognitive image (7 questions) and emotional image

(3 questions). The reliability of this questionnaire was found to be 0.89 in the research of Agarwal and Yili Yasi (2010). Also, Agapito et al.'s (2013) questionnaire with 4 questions was used to measure the variable of loyalty to the destination. The reliability of this questionnaire was found to be 0.89 in Agapito et al.'s research (2011).

In the current research, the reliability of 0.85 for the social network performance questionnaire, 0.88 for the destination image questionnaire, and 0.80 for the destination loyalty questionnaire were determined. In the analysis part of the research, the method of structural equations has been used. According to the distribution of the research sample according to the Kalmogorov-Smirnov statistical method, it is in an abnormal situation, therefore there are preconditions for the use of variance-oriented software, and PLS is one of the variance-oriented software. - The software is used. The entire process of research analysis was done using SPSS version 20 and Pls version 2 software.

Results
Table No. 1 shows the results related to the demographic characteristics of the research samples.

**Table 1:** Descriptive findings of the research

Demographic variables		frequency	percentage
Age	Under 25	84	22.7
	25 - 30	92	24.9
	30- 40	98	26.5
	More than 40	96	25.9
Gender	Male	228	61.6
	Female	142	38.4

Table No. 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the research variables.

Table 2. Summary of the statistical results of the research model

the research variables	Z	mean significance level	Average	The standard deviation
performance of social networks	1.814	0.001	2.29	0,791
destination image	1.849	0.001	2.74	0.693
Loyalty to the destination	1.882	0.001	2.57	0.661

In order to check the model, the present research was carried out in a quantitative part of structural equations. Therefore, first, the normality of the distribution of the research data was investigated using Smirnov's Klomograph test. The results of the above test showed that the level of significance in all research variables was lower than 0.05, which indicates the abnormality of the research data, and for this purpose, non-parametric statistics were used to analyze the data of this research. Therefore, in order to perform structural equations, the method of structural equations should be used using variance-oriented software such as PLS. Figures 1 and 2 show the measurement model and the significance coefficients of T, the research model, and also Table 3 shows the summary of the research model.
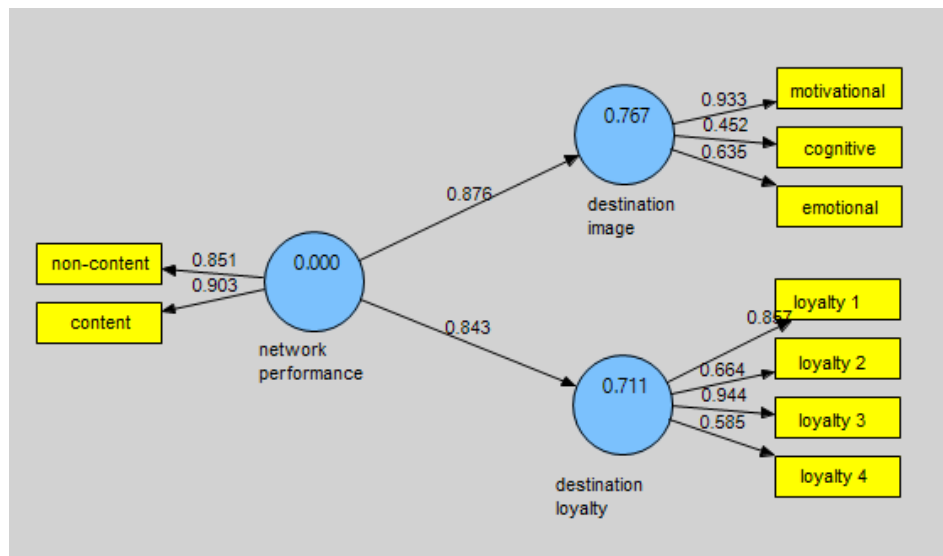
Figure 1: Measurement model
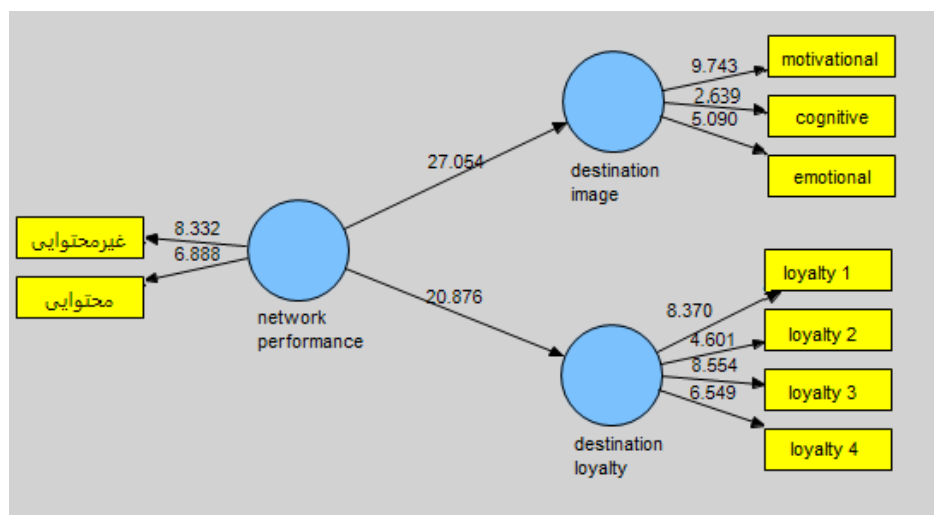
Figure 2: significant coefficients of T

Table 3. Summary of the statistical results of the research model

relationships	T	The influence of
The performance of social networks on the image of the destination	27.054	0.876
20 the performance of social networks on destination loyalty	20.876	0.843

The results of the present research showed that the performance of social networks has an effect of 0.876 on the image of the destination, which can be said to be significant due to the fact that the T level is higher than 1.96. The results of the present research showed that the performance of social networks has an effect of 0.843 on the loyalty of the destination. In order to check the fit of the research model, selected indicators were used. Table No. 4 shows the results related to the fit indices of the research model.

Table 4. Fit indices

	Destination Loyalty	Destination Image	Social Media Performance	Criteria	Status
Cronbach's alpha	0.80	0.88	0.85	More than 0.7	desirable
Combined reliability	0.88	0.91	0.89	More than 0.7	desirable
The average extracted variance	0.55	0.58	0.52	More than 0.4	desirable
The coefficient of determination	0.71	0.76		0.19=weak 0.33=moderate 0.67= strong	Desirable
GOF	0.62	0.66		More than 0.32	Desirable

According to the results related to fit indices; It can be said that the amount of this index in the variables is in a favorable situation. According to the results related to the model fit index, it was found that the research model has a good fit in all the indexes.

Discussion and conclusion

Today, the tourism industry is considered an important factor in economic growth and development. Tourism affects the country's economy by affecting national income, price changes, national trade balance and employment. Most governments are trying. to provide an important part of their national income from this industry, because the income generation of this industry is very high compared to its costs. The complexity of the tourism destination concept is due to the number of different products, services and experiences, all of which are produced, distributed and consumed by different stakeholders such as hoteliers, travel agencies, tour operators, transport companies, local authorities, residents, destination management organizations, tourists, etc. will be The battle and competition in the tourism industry to attract customers will not be based on price; Rather, it is about conquering the hearts and minds of customers. This shows that the brand will be the key to success. This issue has caused the current research to be designed and implemented with the aim of

investigating the effect of social networks on the formation of the destination image and loyalty to the tourist destination (case example: tourists of Larnaca, Cyprus).

The results of the present research showed that the performance of social networks has an effect of 0.876 on the image of the destination, which can be said to be significant due to the fact that the T level is higher than 1.96. The results of the present research showed that the performance of social networks has an effect of 0.843 on the loyalty of the destination. In order to check the fit of the research model, selected indicators were used.

This issue has been mentioned in various researches. Dedoglou et al. (2019) studied the effect of social networks on tourism destination brand awareness and its quality. Data were collected from 568 local and international tourists in Alanya, Turkey. Relationships were investigated using structural equation modeling. The results showed that the sharing components of social networks have made tourists more aware of tourist destinations and therefore companies have improved the quality of tourist destinations. Farodi et al. (2018) found out in their research after the investigations that the desirability of the destination image is reflected by the fact that the visitors pay positive attention to that website. The results indicate the importance of the destination image in increasing the intention to visit and re-recommendation. Also, visitor satisfaction has an effect on the intention to revisit and recommend the place. Dai Pierto et al. (2012) have investigated how social networks have become the main tool for obtaining quick and accurate information for choosing a tourist destination; to be able to use the benefits of these media to promote tourism goals in a global perspective. This research focuses on an advanced technology acceptance model. The findings of this research confirm the key role of social networks in the attitude and choice of tourist destinations.

In the interpretation of this issue, it is necessary to mention that the performance of social networks in content and non-content dimensions can be achieved by introducing the city of Larnaca, Cyprus to the audience and identifying and attracting the audience in this area; lead to the promotion and expansion of conditions to improve the image of the destination and loyalty to the destination. In other words, social networks can play an introductory role in the direction of formation and improvement of the situation in order to improve the image of the destination and the loyalty of the destination among the tourists of Larnaca, Cyprus. Basically, tourists need valid and reliable information about the desired destination to choose a tourist destination. They get the information they need in different ways; including mass media, such as: television, radio, satellite, internet, tourism booklets and magazines, international tourism organizations, tourism agencies in foreign countries, as well as tourists who have visited tourist destinations and They have the real experience of traveling to these destinations. The unprecedented growth of the tourism industry in the past few years and the competition at the global level, the discussion of the quality of information available in the social media of the destination has faced new challenges and the destinations are looking for more effective information strategies. The need for an effective and efficient information strategy is one of the basic challenges that arise as a result of this dynamic and evolving situation. In order to promote successfully in the target market, the destination must distinguish itself from its competitors in a favorable and appropriate way and find a position in the minds of its customers.

The key element of the positioning process is managing perception and creating an attractive and distinctive image of the destination. According to the results of this research, it is suggested that by creating applications in the field of tourism in Larnaca, Cyprus; It provided conditions to improve the performance of social networks. It is also suggested that by creating documentaries about the city of Larnaca in Cyprus and rebroadcasting them on social networks; It provided conditions to improve the image of the destination and the loyalty of the destination in the city of Larnaca, Cyprus.

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