

## The Mediating Role of Co-Creation Tourism Experience on Promoting Sales via Social Media Platforms: Egyptian Travel Agencies Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to discuss the impact of the co-creation tourism experience on promoting sales and to examine how travel agencies can allow their customers to participate through social media platforms in developing and designing their trips. To do so, a survey was implemented among a set of travel agencies in Egypt, who are based on the concept of co-creation tourism experience through social media platforms to boost their sales. Using structural equation modelling, this study examines how social media platforms influence sales promotion by studying the mediating effect of the co-creation tourism experience. The proposed model was tested on a sample of 177 travel agencies. The results have demonstrated the effective role of the co-creation tourism experience as a mediating factor in boosting sales of Egyptian travel agencies via social media platforms. Therefore, many travel agencies have tried to exploit the social media tools to assist tourists' involvement in value creation systems to promote their sales and keep their competitive position in the tourism field.

### INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten years, the tourism industry has seen rapid change since the spread of social media platforms and the advent of online tourist producers (Abou-Shouk & Lim, 2010; Sigala, 2016; Berrada, 2017). As a result, the number of intermediaries has even decreased, and the competition has increased between tourist producers and the stakeholders that are looking for innovative strategies to ensure they remain in the tourism market (Alakoski & Tikkanen, 2016).

In the light of technological developments, the digital generation has witnessed a change in their lifestyle, consumption, and purchasing behavior. They have become more active and interactive on social media channels (Abou-Shouk & Lim, 2010; Berrada, 2017; Sigala, 2016).

With the spread and diversity of tourism products, it has become difficult to satisfy the digital customer who has begun to compare, evaluate, and select the most appropriate product for his needs and expectations (Leung et al., 2013; Berrada, 2017). Previous studies have clarified that retaining a customer can be up to ten times

cheaper than attracting a new one (Kohler et al., 2011; Berrada, 2017). Therefore, tourist producers have to make an effort to design memorable and innovative experiences in order to attract and retain customers (Elsharnouby & Mahrous, 2015; Alakoski & Tikkanen, 2016; Berrada, 2017; Sigala, 2016). These factors have contributed to pushing tourist producers to ask a significant question about how to provide a memorable and innovative tourism experience for the customer (Berrada, 2017; Sigala, 2016).

In such a competitive environment, travel agencies need to distinguish themselves from others to remain competitive in the tourism market (Hua et al., 2017). Nowadays, new technologies are pushing travel agencies to develop their marketing strategies to enhance their position and ensure their sustainability (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Berrada, 2017). Therefore, tourist producers have focused on innovation as an effective approach that has contributed to developing the production process (Buonincontri & Micera, 2016; Berrada, 2017). Keller (2004) has pointed out that innovation in the tourism industry began to develop in the 19th century with the first trip by Thomas Cook. Later, the agency developed the structure of the trip by allowing tourists to organize their trips according to their needs and desires (Keller, 2004).

Amabile (1996) explained innovation as "*the successful implementation of creative ideas in any organization or company*" (p.6). While, Eraqi (2013) defined innovation as "the successful exploitation of an idea that adds value to the customer/tourist and generates an economic return for the business or firm" (pp.108-109), Innovation is seen as a major axis for any travel agency that wants to ensure its growth and sustainability. On the contrary, if the travel agency is not innovative, it faces the possibility of becoming uncompetitive in the tourism market (Slivar et al., 2016).

Indeed, the advent of the Internet as an information-sharing tool has facilitated the work of tourists who are looking for a memorable tourism experience (Mazaheri et al., 2011; Berrada, 2017). Therefore, tourists always prefer to create their own tourism products by participating in value co-creation with tourist producers (Berrada, 2017; Sigala, 2016). These facts push tourist producers to use innovative strategies to create unique activities and experiences that have been called "co-creation tourism experiences" (Salvado et al., 2011; Sigala, 2016; Berrada, 2017).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Media platforms**

No doubt, the popularity of social media has contributed to the emergence of a new form of e-commerce (Abou-Shouk & Lim, 2010; Goshadze & Sánchez, 2016; Hua et al., 2017). It is mainly due to the role of social media in empowering users to make changes in several activities, such as sharing and creating information and facilitating social networking within online pages (Minazzi, 2015; Goshadze & Sánchez, 2016; Hua et al., 2017). Not surprisingly, the continuous growth of social media platforms' users' numbers attracts the attention of tourism businesses and marketers as a powerful marketing tool to increase tourism sales (Minazzi, 2015; Goshadze & Sánchez, 2016; Samanta & Bg, 2017).

According to a survey conducted by Harvard Business Review in 2010, 79 percent of businesses use social media. However, the majority of the agencies stated that they are not aware of the right ways to use them. Also, the majority of businesses (85 percent) reported that they currently have pages on social media platforms in order to advertise their brands, goods, and other services (87 percent) or to provide users a way to interact (76 percent) (Minazzi, 2015).

Similar findings were found in the tourism industry. Since the beginning of the participative web age, managers have regarded social media as an effective promotional tool. Recently, social media has become an interactive tool to promote customer interactions, relationships, and engagement (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Tussyadiah & Zach, 2013; Minazzi, 2015; Goshadze & Sánchez, 2016; Sigala, 2016; Samanta & BG, 2017).

***HI:** Social media platforms have a positive effect on promoting sales.*

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "*a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0*" (pp.60-61). Since the early 2000s, when the participative web (also known as Web 2.0) appeared, social media has become the main standard for users to look for and exchange facts, opinions, and experiences with others (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Tussyadiah & Zach, 2013; Goshadze & Sánchez, 2016; Sigala, 2016; Hua et al., 2017; Sabanaeva, 2017).

Recently, consumers who are planning their trips have been enjoying the features of social media like personal blogs and virtual tourist communities in addition to information offered by tourist providers or destination marketing organizations (DMOs) (Tussyadiah & Zach, 2013; Sigala, 2016; Hua et al., 2017; Samanta & Bg, 2017; Sabanaeva, 2017). Social media generally has the following main features that allow tourists to share resources and engage effectively in designing their experiences (Sigala, 2016):

- **Sharing:** Social media allows tourists to exchange multimedia content (text, images, and videos) on a global scale.
- **(Virtual) Presence:** Social media can be accessed from any smartphone, at any moment, and from any place. It provides a feeling of constantly being connected to others and omnipresence; visitors never feel lonely, because they can share their experiences on social media.
- **Conversations:** Social media allows tourists to interact with one another and share their tourism experiences. Tourists' conversations and interactions may have a huge effect on the co-construction of content, which influences how visitors think about, choose, and compare their own trips.
- **Identity:** By posting information, sharing, and communicating with others, tourists can create and enhance their own identity. One of the main motivators for using social media is the building of self-identity.
- **Relationships:** Tourists may use social media to recognize, network, and exchange opinions with others, which allows them to form friendships and relationships with them.

- **Groups:** Using social media platforms, tourists may create and join groups within which they can connect, cooperate, and co-create value. Tourists can use their power and resources to exert a significant impact on the economy and society by joining specialized groups.

In light of the dominance of social media platforms, the tourist has become more aware and has essential tools that help in enhancing the tourism experience through a set of interactions that occur at all the stages of the trip (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Goshadze & Sánchez, 2016; Sigala, 2016):

- **The first stage (Before the trip):** tourists can check the information by reading travel content, feedback, and travel experiences, along with engaging with others, to learn about tourist attractions and their experiences there, prepare their own tours, and choose the right tourist service providers (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Sigala, 2016). This allows tourists to reduce their risks of preparing and buying something that does not fit their needs, desires, and expectations, while also creating fast and effective customized tourism experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2012). Tourists get a "virtual experience" when they look at and exchange tourism information and experiences on social media platforms, which is usually mentioned as a technology-mediated experience (Neuhofer et al., 2012).
- **The Second Stage (During the Trip):** social media allows tourists to remain updated and/or communicate with others (e.g., locals, relatives, etc.) to post their tourism experiences, access travel services, and prepare for their trips along the route, which enhances their tourism experience and their desire for constant communication with their family and friends (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Sigala, 2016).
- **The Third Stage (After the trip):** social media provides a forum for tourists to revive and build memories of their travel experiences by posting multimedia content (text, images, and videos). By doing this, tourists not only enhance their own tourism experience but also establish an online archive full of tourism experiences that others can use to design and organize their trips (Neuhofer et al., 2012).

### **Co-creation**

The concept of value co-creation was associated with the amount of customers' knowledge and experience that is or maybe a source of value and competitiveness for the company (Salvado et al., 2011; Minazzi, 2015; Ercsey, 2017; Antón et al., 2018; Oxenswärdh, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Wong & Lai, 2019). In fact, the participation of customers in the co-creation process is a significant strategy for companies that are competing to fulfil customers' needs and seeking to obtain the largest market segment (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Mathis et al., 2016; Berrada, 2017; Oxenswärdh, 2018). The company can activate the concept of innovation in the production and distribution process by allowing the customer to participate in adding value to their products and services (Kim et al., 2019).

Therefore, the company will ensure the personalization of its product and its adjustment to the needs and expectations of its customers (Mathis et al., 2016; Berrada, 2017; Oxenswärdh, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Dolan et al., 2019; Wong & Lai,

2019). Neuhofer (2016) has expanded on the definition of co-creation and provided a comprehensive evaluation of customer engagement by showing the differences and similarities between three terms belonging to co-creation.

#### **a. Customer Involvement Process: Crowdsourcing**

The term "crowdsourcing" appeared for the first time in 2006 as a popular concept in many sectors, especially with the rise of the Web 2.0 and social media platforms (Neuhofer et al., 2012). Crowdsourcing is considered a tool for improving an organization's data that is available on its website (Sigala, 2016). In the light of crowdsourcing, organizations put their data online for customers to use as a reference team to improve the data (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Sigala, 2016).

Most organizations seek to obtain customer feedback and suggestions to correct errors and add new information. Geiger et al. (2011) have defined crowdsourcing as a "*term that embraces a number of approaches based on the integration of a large and open crowd of people.*" In the tourism field, the most popular websites using crowdsourcing are the Official Tourism Website of Great Britain (VisitBritain) and the Airbnb platform (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Sigala, 2016).

#### **b. Customer Involvement Process: Co-Production**

Recently, "co-production" has become the most commonly used term in many industries. Some researchers have described it as an exchange mechanism between companies and consumers to produce the right product (Neuhofer et al., 2012). Co-production depends on customer presence to receive the service after providing appropriate information to obtain the service more effectively (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Sigala, 2016). In the accommodation sector, the customer could choose between a pre-defined set of choices like pillows, newspapers, and meals to fit their personal preferences.

In this case, hotels almost did not offer new services to guests but offered the best available choice for them (Neuhofer, 2016). Arica and Kozak (2019) have explained co-production as "*the way of providing input to the production by the businesses and the customers throughout the whole production process and maximizing both supply and demand outputs from these inputs*" (p.85). In another definition, the co-production role of the customer was defined as the production partner (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Neuhofer et al., 2012; Yang, 2015; Sigala, 2016; Arica & Kozak, 2019).

#### **c. Customer Involvement Process: Co-Creation**

Initially, the co-creation term emerged from a service-dominant (S-D) logic approach as a marketing tool that depends on the participation of customers to create their own experience (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Barreto & Campo, 2018; Sigala, 2016; Wong & Lai, 2019; Kim et al., 2019). The role of the customer has evolved from a goods-dominant logic approach to a more interactive process with a service-dominant (S-D) logic, which has influenced the relationship between companies and distribution systems (Payne et al., 2009; Shaw et al., 2011; Eraqi, 2013).

Co-creation activities involve the participation of customers in the development, design, and marketing phases of the product or service up to the consumption phase by sharing their ideas, opinions, and experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Grisseemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Eduardo & Panyi, 2015; Campos et al., 2018; Barreto & Campo, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Wong & Lai, 2019). Co-creators are those customers who are capable of offering their experiences to serve themselves and other customers

(Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Munar, 2011; Mohd-Any et al., 2015; Sigala, 2016). The role of customers did not limit them to only co-producing but also co-consuming with other customers (Chung et al., 2015; Ercsey, 2017). On the other hand, there is a dark side to the co-creation approach when the customers post a backlash that may lead to service failure (Míguez-González & Fernández-Cavia, 2015). Sometimes, competitors exploit these customers who gift their time and intellect to serve their organizations (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Ind & Coates, 2013; Mathis et al., 2016; Campos et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019).

Many researchers have referred to the co-creation term in several studies. According to the study by Prahalad and Ramaswamy in 2004, co-creation was defined as "a management initiative or an economic strategy that depends on interactive relationships between a company and a group of customers to create a rich experience" (Berrada, 2017, p.21). Value co-creation with customers is considered a dynamic and creative social process that depends on collaboration between companies and customers who are seeking to develop or create new products and services (Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Neuhofer et al., 2012; Antón et al., 2018; Ercsey, 2017; Mikalef et al., 2017; Berrada, 2017; Oxenswärdh, 2018; Kim et al., 2019). While Benapudi and Leone (2003) have asserted that co-creation was not limited only to a customer's participation as a physical aspect but may extend to include the psychological aspect (Mathis et al., 2016; Sigala, 2016; Oxenswärdh, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Dolan et al., 2019; Wong & Lai, 2019).

### Co-creation Tourism Experience

Since the beginning of the emergence of social media platforms, most travel agencies have sought to build closer relationships with their customers (Salvado et al., 2011; Berrada, 2017; Mikalef et al., 2017; Chen & Lin, 2019; Abd El Halim, 2021). Buhalis and Licata (2002) confirmed this strong relationship by conducting a survey in which they emphasized that social media is providing a better experience and service for the customer as their interaction with travel companies could be more useful, as clarified in the table (1).

**H2:** *Social media platforms have a positive effect in supporting Co-creation experience in tourism.*

**Table1**

The influence of social media platforms on co-creating tourism experience

Stages of Co-creation Tourism Experience	The influence of social media platforms
How is experience value created?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tourists can co-create tourism experiences on social media by interacting, communicating, and sharing travel resources.</li> </ul>
Experiences are continually forming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media provides a repository of previous experiences, which in turn creates modes and perceptions that affect the co-creation experience. It's important to think about how the co-creation experience goes beyond the temporary value to involve all of the tourists' accumulated and previous impressions that can affect how they think about,</li> </ul>

continued

	understand, and evaluate future tourism experiences.
When/where co-creation of experience occurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-creation experience occurs between the tourist and the company during all the phases of the tourists' trip.</li> <li>• Social media can be accessed from any smartphone, at any moment, and from any place. It provides a feeling of constantly being connected to others and omnipresence.</li> </ul>
Who creates experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media platforms play a main role in co-creating the tourism experience depending on anthropomorphism effects.</li> </ul>
The co-creation experience is seen as both a community and an individual activity at the same time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumers, societies, businesses, and a variety of other stakeholders.</li> </ul>
Why is it important to co-create experiences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using social media platforms to enhance and enrich tourism experiences.</li> <li>• Using social media platforms as part of the actual travel experience.</li> <li>• Using social media platforms to reflect and represent one's personality</li> </ul>
Co-creation of what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is a result of a cumulative sensation shaped by different tourism experiences for tourists.</li> <li>• The tourism experience is seen as an authentic experience since it is co-created by the visitors themselves.</li> <li>• A socially constructed tourism experience that is formed by individual efforts.</li> </ul>

Source: Sigala (2016).

Tourism experience is the cornerstone of the tourism industry (Lončarić et al., 2017). Many tourist providers are seeking to offer authentic tourism experiences to become an immortal memory in the minds of tourists (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Lončarić et al., 2017; Berrada, 2017; Antón et al., 2018; Chen & Lin, 2019; Abd El Halim, 2021). In the light of the co-creation of tourism experience, travel agencies must regard tourists as major participants in the development of the product and service through transferring their tourism experience, and not consider them as mere spectators (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Grisseman & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Mathis et al., 2016; Berrada, 2017; Antón et al., 2018; Chen & Lin, 2019; Abd El Halim, 2021).

Many travel agencies have involved tourists in different creative processes to create a product or service in order to promote their tourism sales and keep their competitive position in the tourism field (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Nambisan & Baron,

2009; Grisseemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Mathis et al., 2016; Lončarić et al., 2017; Antón et al., 2018; Abd El Halim, 2021). The co-creation of the tourism experience contributes to creating value for all stakeholders in the tourism industry (Lončarić et al., 2017; Dolan et al., 2019). Hence, the service provided will have greater value when all stakeholders are involved in developing it (Lončarić et al., 2017; Abd El Halim, 2021).

**H3:** *Co-creation tourism experience positively mediates the relationship between social media platforms and sales promotion*

To ensure the success of travel agencies, Neuhofer et al. (2012) state that it is important to consider who is engaged in the co-creation process and where and how technology plays its role in co-creating experiences. In this context, the tourist is a core part of the experience, and as the tourist does not experience the destination in isolation, the travel agencies, friends and family, and other co-consumers engage with the tourist on different social networks in order to exchange their experiences in this virtual world (Payne et al., 2008; Fesenmaier & Xiang, 2017; Dolan et al., 2019).

Co-creation occurs physically when the visitor transfers their experience to his family and friends and other consumers by word of mouth, and virtually when a visitor travels with a mobile device that is connected to the virtual world, where they can interact with other co-consumers through different social networks (Payne et al., 2008; Antón et al., 2018; Dolan et al., 2019).

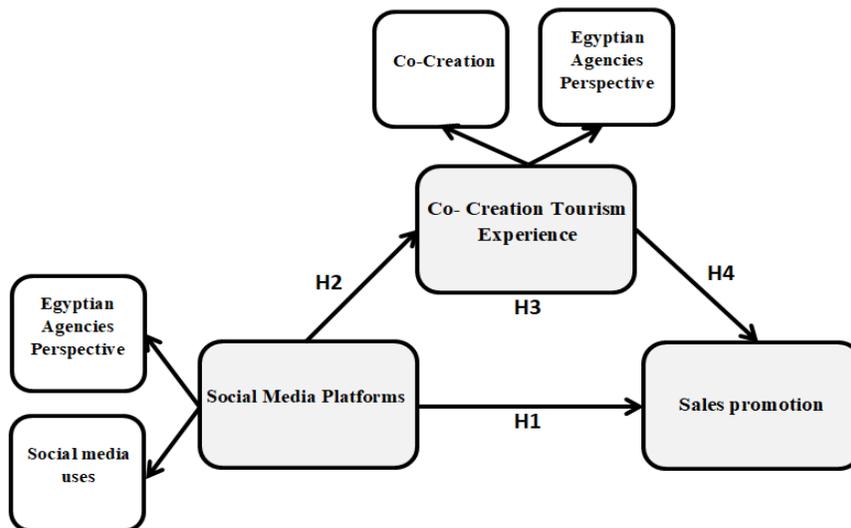
During recent years, travel agencies have used social media to plan and deliver co-creation opportunities in tourism experiences, which allow tourists to engage as value co-creators at all stages of the trip (Payne et al., 2008; Sigala, 2016; Fesenmaier & Xiang, 2017; Antón et al., 2018). The value chain operations reflect the processes whereby customer-generated content and resources are used to enrich and enhance the tourism experience (Sigala, 2016). Customer involvement in the co-creation tourism experience can range from very passive to very active, such as (Sigala, 2016):

- Reading and viewing comments made by other customers in order to design a unique experience.
- Commenting, posting, discussing, and evaluating other customers' comments.
- Creating and contributing materials and activities (for example, creating a forum, joining a virtual community, and uploading a video/photo).
- Using the company's infrastructure not only to create its experience, but also to produce, distribute, and promote it.
- Becoming a tourist entrepreneur, especially with the spread of the sharing economy phenomenon, whereby users become hoteliers, restaurateurs, or travel guides, selling and supporting their own services online.

Furthermore, the use of social media has created new mechanisms (e.g., crowdsourcing, co-production, co-creation) of how, where, and when customers can participate in developing their experience (Sigala, 2016). Hence, co-creation implies

that both businesses and tourists need to share and combine their resources in order to co-create value (Payne et al., 2008; Sigala, 2016). By offering their resources and engaging in the value-creation process, customers have become partial employees (prosumers) (Buonincontri & Micera, 2016; Berrada, 2017). Therefore, social media has become an important tool for co-creating value that brings benefits to both parties (agencies and tourists) (Sigala, 2016). The tourists can create more customized and enjoyable experiences, gain more satisfaction by monitoring the content and controlling the quality of their experiences through the co-creation of tourism experience itself (Sigala, 2016).

Companies gain benefits by employing consumers as partial employees and complementing procedures that were previously conducted only by the company. For example, market research is enhanced with available online customer databases and by creating customer contact points that allow for customer participation in designing a travel experience, which is perceived and handled as both a customer learning and a customer experience value enhancement tool (Lončarić et al., 2017; Dolan et al., 2019).



**Fig. 1.** The theoretical framework of the study and hypotheses.

## DATA AND METHODS

This paper has been carried out to analyze the theoretical framework and test the hypotheses in order to explain the causal relationships among variables as clarified in the previous figure. Therefore, this paper relies on a survey as the data collection method. The survey included a set of items to measure three main constructs: the effect of social media platforms on sales promotion, the role of social media platforms in supporting co-creation experiences, and the mediating role of co-creation tourism experiences in sales promotion. This study has been conducted in the extended period between 15 December 2020 till 11 February 2021. This study has been based on an online survey only due to the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic during this period.

The current study's sample is comprised of Egyptian travel agencies. A comprehensive list of these agencies is available from the Egyptian Travel Agents Association (ETAA). According to their statistics database that was launched in 2020, there were 1168 category (A) travel agencies in Egypt.

This study has depended on the purposive sampling method to select the research target sample (Egyptian travel agencies who have official pages on social media platforms to promote their trips) in order to implement the study objectives. To determine the actual sample size for the current research study, the study relied on the following formula (Thompson, 2012):

$$n = \frac{N \times p(1-p)}{\left[ \left[ N-1 \times (d^2 \div z^2) \right] + p(1-p) \right]}$$

Where

- N = Sample Size
- Z = Standard Z = 1.96 (Z value corresponding to the level of confidence required).
- D = Error Accepted level = 0.05.
- P = Probability Level = 0.50

Based on the previous formula, the appropriate sample size is 278 companies. Indeed, of the 278 Egyptian travel agencies that have received the questionnaire, 177 (64%) have answered it correctly, of which 101 were excluded because too many questions were not fulfilled.

### Questionnaire design and Measurement Items

In the current study, the questionnaire is comprised of three main sections that have a set of original items that have been adapted from previous literature and reliable sources and adjusted to fit the present study, for example, eleven items on social media platforms (Larsen & Guiver, 2014; Gössling, 2016; Javed et al., 2020), fourteen items on co-creation tourism experience (Gentile et al., 2007; Campos et al., 2018) and five items on sales promotion (Madasu, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Javed et al., 2020). Multi-items were based on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure all variables of the study. To test the validity of the content, the study relied on a pilot study. After designing a list of items, sales managers in Egyptian travel agencies and academic experts were asked to evaluate and modify items to make the questionnaire ready for distribution.

### RESULTS

Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Kline (2011) have proposed a two-step approach for testing the interrelationships between latent constructs (social media platforms with co-creation tourism experience, social media platforms with sales promotion, and co-creation tourism experience with sales promotion) by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as shown in Figure 2 and structural equation modelling (SEM). Moreover, matrices estimates for total, direct, and indirect effects have been tested to

measure the mediating effect (Nunkoo et al., 2013). The Sobel's test (1982) method was used to test the significance of indirect effects as clarified in table (5). Before performing SEM analysis, several assumptions were tested to ensure that there was no missing data or significant outliers were found in the study. Furthermore, the normal distribution of the observed items was achieved based on the findings of skewness and kurtosis that were mentioned in the following table (2).

**Table2**

Measurable Items: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Standardized and Unstandardized Factor Loadings.

No	Measurable item	M	SD	SK	KR	SL UNSL)	literature
<b>SMP</b>	<b>Social media platforms</b>	4.368	0.678	-2.55	7.11		
<b>Egyptian agencies perspective</b>							
<b>SMP1</b>	Social media platforms have contributed to making our company more famous than before.	4.197	0.761	-1.20	2.860	0.788 (1.000)	(Larsen and Guiver, 2013; Gössling, 2017; javed et al., 2020)
<b>SMP2</b>	The size of our customers has increased after we created our pages on social media platforms.	4.316	0.777	-1.35	2.852	0.822 (1.065)	
<b>SMP3</b>	Social media platforms have facilitated direct communication with customers.	4.344	0.797	-1.51	3.156	0.82 (1.09)	
<b>SMP4</b>	Social media platforms help us in developing tourism products.	4.288	0.805	-1.36	2.604	0.836 (1.122)	
<b>SMP5</b>	Social media platforms are considered the most effective marketing tools.	4.361	0.793	-1.50	3.067	0.852 (1.127)	
<b>Social media uses</b>							
<b>SMP6</b>	We monitor customers' ratings after a trip.	4.440	0.789	-1.80	4.118	0.867 (1.14)	(Larsen and Guiver, 2013; Gössling, 2017; javed et al., 2020)
<b>SMP7</b>	We follow customers' reviews on a trip.	4.384	0.804	-1.67	3.573	0.865 (1.16)	
<b>SMP8</b>	We prefer to rely on the experience of our customers' reviews of trips.	4.406	0.800	-1.67	3.548	0.868 (1.157)	
<b>SMP9</b>	We seek to respond to customers' complaints via social media platforms.	4.440	0.796	-1.71	3.597	0.862 (1.144)	
<b>SMP10</b>	Customers' feedback helps us improve our service and programs.	4.429	0.816	-1.76	3.628	0.832 (1.133)	
<b>SMP11</b>	We use social media platforms to promote our domestic trips.	4.440	0.782	-1.74	3.964	0.815 (1.062)	
<b>CTE</b>	<b>Co-creation tourism experience</b>	4.480	0.723	-2,58	7.21		
							continued

Co-creation							
CTE12	We encourage customers to share their tourism experiences, like videos and photos, via social media platforms.	4.259	0.790	-1.40	3.058	0.833 (1.000)	(Gentile et al., 2007; Campos et al., 2018)
CTE13	We take customers' experiences into consideration to solve any problems.	4.355	0.827	-1.47	2.559	0.791 (0.995)	
CTE14	We depend on customers' experience in planning and organizing trips in the future.	4.423	0.850	-1.66	2.824	0.842 (1.087)	
CTE15	We benefit from customers' experiences shared on social media in our advertising campaigns.	4.339	0.824	-1.50	2.772	0.834 (1.045)	
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CTE16	Customers' experiences influence the decision-making process in our agency.	4.367	0.843	-1.58	2.808	0.861 (1.103)	(Gentile et al., 2007; Campos et al., 2018)
CTE17	Customers' experiences help us direct tourism demand toward specific trips.	4.412	0.821	-1.70	3.363	0.858 (1.071)	
CTE18	We allow customers to organize the trip programme based on their previous tourism experience.	4.474	0.819	-1.83	3.652	0.886 (1.102)	
CTE19	We prefer interacting with customers in order to co-create value for our trips.	4.480	0.812	-1.92	4.187	0.887 (1.095)	
CTE20	The value created by customers helps us to enhance our relationship with them.	4.502	0.812	-1.93	4.078	0.892 (1.101)	
CTE21	The value created by customers helps in entering the digital generation in the tourism labor market.	4.446	0.817	-1.81	3.740	0.88 (1.093)	
CTE22	The value created by customers helps in generating new distribution channels.	4.468	0.819	-1.87	3.911	0.875 (1.089)	
CTE23	The value created by customers influences their retention and loyalty.	4.508	0.840	-2.12	4.905	0.883 (1.127)	
CTE24	The value created by customers influences the decision-making processes of other customers.	4.474	0.833	-1.91	3.906	0.88 (1.113)	
CTE25	Customers' experiences improve the company's reputation and its image for other customers.	4.514	0.833	-2.04	4.282	0.904 (1.145)	
SP	<b>Sales promotion</b>	4.366	0.818	-2,39	6.22		

continued

<b>SP26</b>	Customers' experiences have helped in attracting new customers.	4.305	0.864	-1.70	3.713	0.869 (1.000)	(Madasu, 2013; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014; javed et al., 2020)
<b>SP27</b>	The value created by customers contributes to earning other customers' trust in our company.	4.333	0.921	-1.81	3.615	0.902 (1.106)	
<b>SP28</b>	Customers show a willingness to purchase trips that we design based on the experiences of other customers.	4.412	0.888	-1.89	3.930	0.904 (1.07)	
<b>SP29</b>	Our sales have increased at a faster rate after creating our pages on social media platforms.	4.355	0.893	-1.87	4.147	0.897 (1.068)	
<b>SP30</b>	Tourism demand has grown significantly on domestic trips after displaying customers' experiences.	4.423	0.895	-2.09	4.867	0.901 (1.074)	

The table (2) displays the mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and Standardized factor loadings of the measurable items of the current model, While Table 3 shows the values of Cronbach's alpha, and the average variance extracted (AVE), construct reliability (CR), and correlation analysis of latent constructs as shown in the following table.

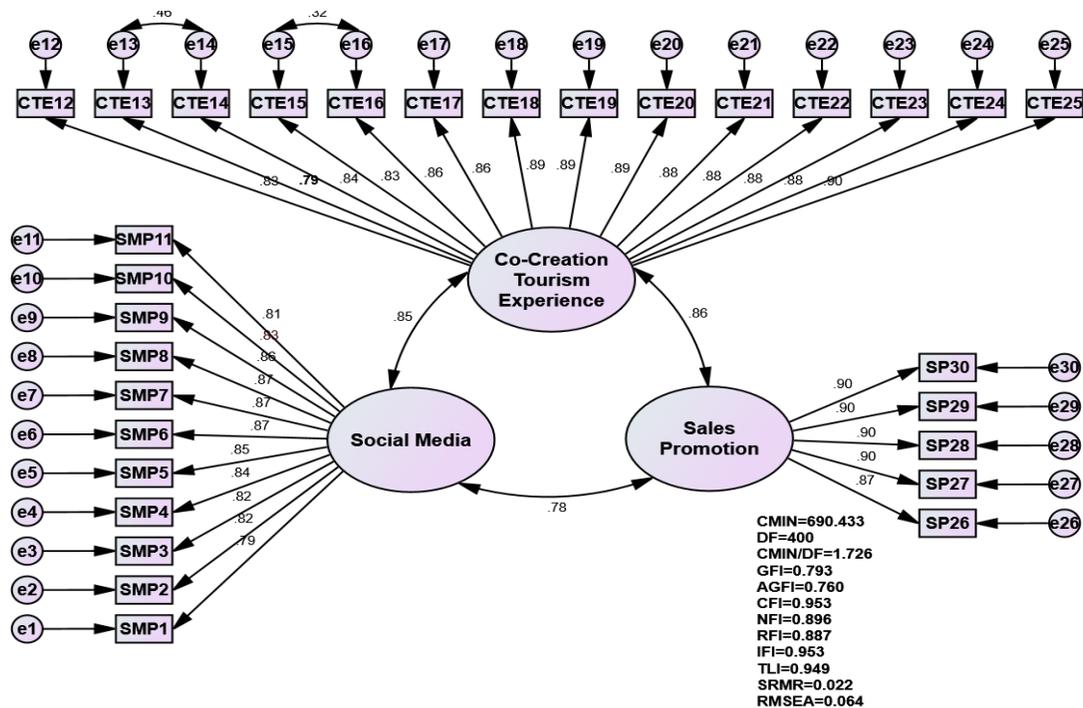
**Table 3**

Reliability, Validity, Correlations, and Square roots of AVE

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>SMP</b>	<b>CTE</b>	<b>SP</b>
<b>Social media platforms (SMP)</b>	0.963	0.704	0.963	0.839		
<b>Co-creation tourism experience (CTE)</b>	0.977	0.978	0.748	0.830	0.988	
<b>Sales promotion (SP)</b>	0.952	0.800	0.952	0.753	0.834	0.894

Remark: AVE - average variance extracted, CR - construct reliable, Italic front -  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ .

Upon analyzing the previous data, it was found that Cronbach's alpha of the latent constructs ranged from 0.953 to 0.977. Based on the main guidelines, these values are above the recommended loading value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). AVE values have ranged from 0.70 to 0.97, which indicates adequate convergent validity. Furthermore, the CR values have ranged from 0.74 to 0.96. Also, the square root of each AVE is larger than its constructed correlations. In addition, the standardized factor loadings are statistically significant. Consequently, the measures for the proposed three factors have achieved convergent and discriminant validity and high reliability.

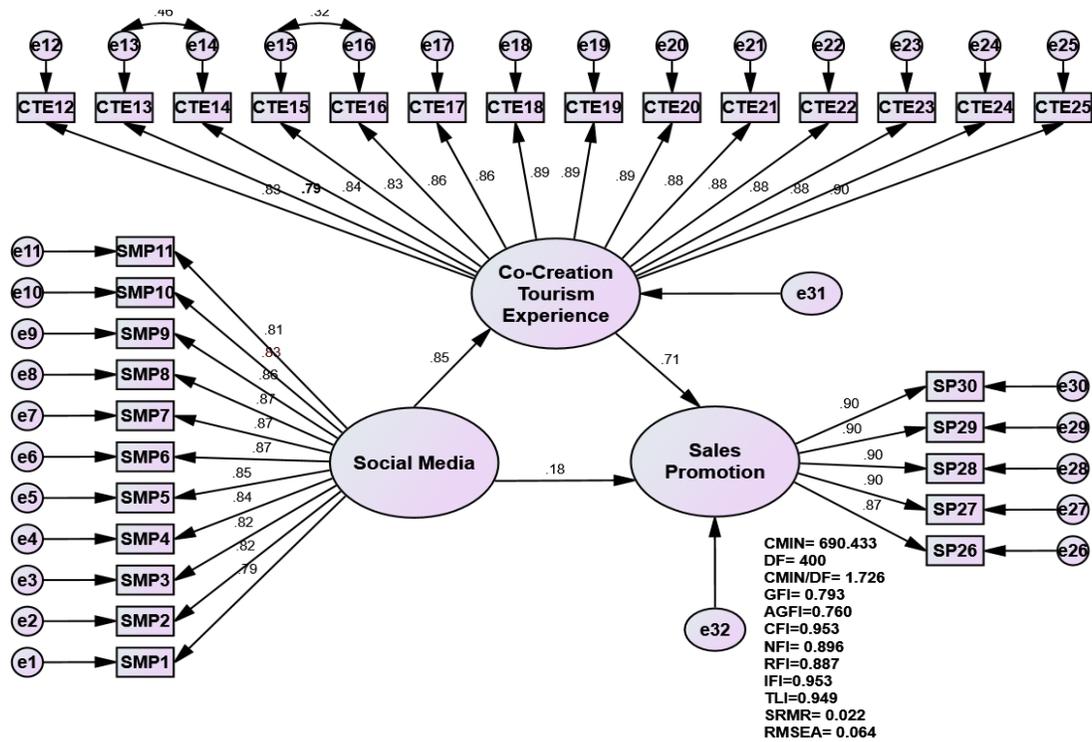


**Fig. 2.** Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of a Measurement Model

A CFA of the measurement model was done to determine if the acquired data fit the hypothesized measurement model (He & Song, 2009; Hair et al., 2010). The proposed model consists of three latent constructs that are measured by thirty items as shown in Figure 2. The results of the measurement model have revealed that it was a good fit:  $\chi^2 = 690.433$  ( $p < .000$ );  $\chi^2/DF = 1.726$ ; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.064; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.95; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.94; incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.95.

**The Structural Equation Model**

After checking the dimensions and factor loadings of the proposed model, the structural equations model (SEM) is utilized to determine the relationships between the latent variables (He & Song, 2009; Aktepe et al., 2015; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016). For the construction of the current proposed model, we used IBM SPSS AMOS 24. According to the following figure, the results have proved that social media has a weak positive effect on sales promotion for domestic tourism, where ( $\beta=0.18$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), while social media has achieved a strong positive effect on supporting co-creation experiences ( $\beta=0.85$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Also, co-creation experiences have attained a strong positive effect on sales promotion for domestic tourism, where = ( $\beta=0.71$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). The current proposed model is based on the theoretical analysis that has been presented above, remaining as follows (Figure 3). Thus, the results of the structural equations model have supported Hypotheses 1 and 2.



**Fig. 3.** Structural Equation Model

Table 4 summarizes the estimated regression coefficients that have been obtained in the final structural model. Indeed, all the path coefficients in the proposed model were positive and important, except for one path (Social Media → Sales promotion).

**Table 4**

Regression coefficients estimated (standardized and unstandardized solutions).

Predictor variable	Criterion variable	
	Standardized (Unstandardized) Coefficients	
	Co-creation tourism experience	Sales promotion
Social media platforms	0.852 (0.934*)	0.177 (0.222*)
Co-creation tourism experience		0.713 (0.813*)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.690	0.696

\*p < .05

**Mediation analysis**

To assess the mediation role of the co-creation tourism experience, three regression analyses were calculated in order to examine the direct, indirect, and total effects as shown in Table 5. The significance of the indirect effects was then estimated using Sobel's test. As presented in the table, Sobel's test findings were significant. It can be indicated that the co-creation tourism experience significantly mediates the relationship between social media platforms and sales promotion of domestic tourism. Hence, Hypothesis 3 was supported by the data. The results of all hypotheses tests are shown in Table 6.

**Table 5**  
Mediation effects of Co-Creation Tourism Experience

Mediator	Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Sobel's Test Z Score	Standard Error	P
Co-Creation Tourism Experience	Social media platform → Co-creation tourism experience	<b>0.852</b>	-	<b>0.852</b>	<b>10.7409</b>	<b>0.0707</b>	<b>0.000</b>
	Co-creation tourism experience → Sales promotion	<b>0.713</b>	-	<b>0.713</b>			
	Social media platform → Sales promotion	<b>0.177</b>	<b>0.760</b>	<b>0.784</b>			

**Table 6**  
Results of hypotheses tests.

Results of hypotheses		
<b>Hypothesis 1</b>	<b>H1:</b> Social media platforms have a positive effect in promoting domestic tourism.	<b>Supported</b>
<b>Hypothesis 2</b>	<b>H2:</b> Social media platforms have a positive effect in supporting co-creation experience in tourism.	<b>Supported</b>
<b>Hypothesis 3</b>	<b>H3:</b> The co-creation tourism experience mediates the effect of social media platforms on promoting domestic tourism	<b>Supported</b>

## CONCLUSIONS

The current study seeks to explore the role of social media platforms in promoting sales, with co-creation experience considered to be a mediator in the link between those factors through H1, H2, and H3. To test the hypotheses, this study has sought to identify the significance of each path coefficient, calculate standardized and unstandardized regression weights, composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extracted.

According to the findings that have been obtained, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha value for three latent constructs have exceeded 0.9, which refers to good internal coherence for each measuring factor. Similarly, the average variance extracted values for all latent constructs have exceeded 0.7, which means the validity of all variables is confirmed and the findings of the survey match with the theoretical framework.

According to the findings of this study, social media has a weak positive effect on sales promotion; this has required a mediator to enhance sales promotion. According to the findings of the theoretical framework, the use of social media has created new mechanisms (e.g., crowdsourcing, co-production, and co-creation) of how, where, and when tourists can participate in developing their experience.

In the light of the dominance of social media platforms, the tourist has become more aware and has essential tools which help in enhancing the tourism experience through a set of interactions that occur at all stages of the trip, such as;

- Social media-enabled tourism experiences (when customers are empowered to join and interact in the company's value co-creation processes).
- When social media becomes a part of the tourism experience itself (the use of social media during the trip is the main major purpose of having a tourism experience).
- When social media has become a tool to have a virtual experience based on feedback and experiences of other tourists,
- Tourism experiences are formed by social media (when social media allows us to interact among various stakeholders to create an authentic tourism experience).
- Social media-assisted tourism experiences (when customers share their own experiences to help others design and organize their trips).

Therefore, many travel agencies have tried to exploit the social media tools for assisting tourists' involvement at any phase of the trip and value creation systems to promote their sales and keep their competitive position in the tourism field. In the context of this study, structural equation modelling (SEM) has demonstrated the effective role of social media platforms and co-creation tourism experiences in promoting sales of Egyptian travel agencies. According to this, social media has achieved a strong positive effect on supporting the co-creation experience ( $\beta=0.85$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), and o-creation experience has attained a strong positive effect on Sales promotion for domestic tourism where ( $\beta=0.71$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). The current study, the co-creation tourism experience, has proven that it has the ability to create value and the service provided will have greater value when all stakeholders (tourists, travel agencies, and destinations) are involved in developing and improving the tourism experience.

### **Limitations and future research**

Actually, the first limitation that relates to this study is exploring the impact of the co-creation tourism experience on promoting the sales of Egyptian travel agencies without differentiating between international and domestic trips. Thus, future researchers should conduct a comparative study between the two types to identify the most influenced type by the co-creation variable. Moreover, the current study has indicated the benefits generated for travel agencies that have applied the co-creation experience in sales promotion and ignored the perceived benefits of the co-creation experience for e-tourists. Therefore, future studies should study the impact of the perceived benefits of the co-creation experience on the purchasing power of e-tourists. It should be noted that this study has focused on co-creation experience only as a mediating variable to promote tourism sales. Thus, future plans should include other mediating variables that would promote the sales of tourism service providers. In the future, it is also possible to study the impact of the co-creation tourism experience on the purchasing power of the smart tourist depending on a set of mediating and moderating variables in another model in the same context.

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## الدور الوسيط للإبداع المشترك في التجربة السياحية في ترويج المبيعات عبر منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي: من منظور وكالات السفر المصرية

رانيا عرابي

مدرس بقسم الدراسات السياحية

المعهد العالي للسياحة والفنادق وترميم الآثار أبو قير - الاسكندرية

المعلومات المقالة	المخلص
<b>الكلمات المفتاحية</b> الإبداع المشترك؛ التجربة السياحية، ترويج المبيعات؛ منصات التواصل الاجتماعي.	تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مناقشة تأثير الإبداع المشترك للتجربة السياحية في ترويج المبيعات، ومناقشة كيف يمكن لوكالات السفر السماح لعملائها بالمشاركة من خلال منصات التواصل الاجتماعي في تطوير وتصميم رحلاتهم السياحية. اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على المنهج الكمي لدراسة العلاقة بين المتغيرات الخارجية والداخلية. كما استعانت الدراسة بالمسح الميداني من خلال توزيع مجموعة من الاستبيانات على العينة المختارة والتي بلغت 177 وكالة سفر في مصر، هم من يعتمدون على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي المختلفة للترويج لمبيعاتهم السياحية. اعتمدت الدراسة الحالية على نمذجة المعادلة الهيكلية للبحث في تأثير منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على ترويج المبيعات من خلال الوسيط وهو الإبداع المشترك في التجربة السياحية. حيث أظهرت النتائج الدور الفعال والهام للإبداع المشترك كعامل وسيط في زيادة مبيعات. لذلك، حاولت العديد من وكالات السفر استغلال أدوات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي المختلفة لمساعدة عملائها الحاليين على المشاركة في خلق قيمة إضافية للرحلة السياحية وجذب عملاء جدد لتعزيز مبيعاتهم والحفاظ على مركزهم التنافسي في مجال السياحة.

**(JAAUTH)**  
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