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# *EVALUATING DESTINATION TOURISM WEBSITES WITH APPLICATION ON EGYPT*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tourism is not only the largest industry in the world but also the number one online segment. The emerging globalization and abundance of supply increase the level of competition and pressure on individual destinations and attractions, which makes the web a valuable tool for marketing travel and tourism (Rita, 2000; Scott and Baggio, 2009). The Web is a perfect medium for conveying information to tourists all over the world, in a direct, cost- minimizing and time effective way (Gratzer and Winiwarter , 2003).

Since Egypt is a very special tourism destination among the Arab countries, it is imperative to develop competitive representation of the country on the web in order to contend in today's dynamic marketplace.

Accordingly, the real challenge of the research is to develop a viable instrument comprising comprehensive factors that make destination tourism websites useful, comprehensive, more stimulating and visually appealing. Furthermore, the research tends to apply this instrument to the main Egyptian official tourism websites promoting the country, compared to that of other top tourism destination countries, so as to understand the defects and differences from the best ones and identify directions for improvement

with the intention of satisfying the expectations of tourists and increasing their desire to visit Egypt.

**Key words:** evaluation, destination tourism websites, Egypt, top destination countries.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

A tourist destination is considered an open system in which natural, economic, and social factors interrelate in order to attract tourists (Rodriguez-Diaz and Espino-Rodriguez, 2008).

Since the use of the Internet among online travelers is increasing, the availability of easily accessible, prompt, accurate, relevant information has become the goal of every country to become more competitive and profitable, capable of realizing the new market opportunities provided by e-tourism (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2004).

Therefore, the website design is one of the key issues to consider for achieving success in e-tourism business (Rita, 2000). A properly designed website provides great opportunities to reach new markets and to improve business efficiency (English Tourism Council 2002; Rita, 2000). Likewise, it can facilitate the travelers' planning, ensuring that they make the right choices and having an enjoyable experience. Besides, it can serve as the distribution point for all the services they will need as they plan their vacation. Consequently, it is very important to evaluate the tourism websites to improve the experience of visitors visiting the site (Rita, 2000).

### **2. Web site Evaluation:**

Website evaluation promises strategic benefits such as customer retention, positive return on investment and leadership within the fierce market competition (Park and Gretzel, 2007).

According to (Zhou and DeSantis, 2005), the following factors are highly influential to the success of a tourism website: direction information (interactive maps), accessibility to comprehensive provision of local and utility information (visa and policy information, currency consideration, time and weather conditions, effective links, index and search

engines), attractive description (using of multimedia functions, photo gallery), as well as, multilingual and multicultural user information with simple and clear wording and terminology.

Furthermore, (Chavali and Sahu, 2008) state that the important parameters which provide the basis for website evaluation are: the provision of trustworthy, dependable and reliable information content including information of attractions in and around the place, tourism related news, policies and the site visitors' number; interaction and interchange functions such as options given to visitors to share ideas, experiences and information, consultation and email facilities, website search, as well as, language translation; customer oriented webpage design covering online queries, surveys, maps, directions regarding reaching destinations and call for advertisements; promotional direction of the website; technical quality which permits ease of use and features like photographs, interactive video presentations, as well as, voice and animation which render the website more attractive, interesting and realistic to visitors (Chavali and Sahu, 2008).

In Björk (2010), information content and structure in combination with a user friendly interface are recognized as quality dimensions for tourism websites.

Park and Gretzel (2007) state that the key evaluation factors for tourism websites comprise the following:

- ◆ **Ease of Use** : usability, accessibility, navigability and logical structure;
- ◆ **Responsiveness**: accessibility of service representatives, e-mail service, reply to online reservations, contact information, availability of online help functions such as a toll-free telephone number;
- ◆ **Fulfillment**: order process, accuracy of service guarantee, billing accuracy, online booking process and confirmation;
- ◆ **Security/Privacy**: protecting information during transmission and subsequent storage, security for online purchases/reservations and privacy statement;
- ◆ **Personalization**: personalized attention, as well as, customization of offerings and information;
- ◆ **Visual Appearance**: attracting attention and conveying image aesthetics;

- ◆ **Information Quality:** variety, scope, currency, conciseness, accuracy and uniqueness of information, influence and reliability;
- ◆ **Trust:** brand recognition and consistency;
- ◆ **Interactivity:** interactive features such as virtual tours, interactive communication (chat, etc.).

Furthermore, the study of Rita (2000) describes the most important features that a website should present as follows:

- ◆ up-to-date and complete information on the destination (e.g. resorts, restaurants, weather, etc.);
- ◆ ease of navigation/usability (using limited number of elements per page);
- ◆ online booking facilities (hotels, flights);
- ◆ striking offers (toll-free number, free products and services like postcards, wallpaper, and screensavers);
- ◆ interactive tools (chat lines, stimulating consumer comments);
- ◆ banners for brand image-building;
- ◆ being attractive (video-clips, audio, photos, etc);
- ◆ databases which are built with names and addresses of customers and potential tourists who visit the site and inquire about further information;
- ◆ a vision or a mission statement;
- ◆ background texture and/or color used throughout the site should never overwhelm the text, but rather complement it.

In the study of Kaplanidou and Vogt (2004), they identify three design/technological elements that contribute to the overall website quality: ease of navigation, technological creativity and accessibility together with the quality of the content, the visual/graphical representation and the presence of interactive elements. Good navigation is a necessity of a successful website design. It is characterized by organized pages, the presence of the navigation bar on every page and the opportunity to access the home page from every sub

page within the website. Furthermore, an internal website search engine will potentially decrease search time for information and lead to higher levels of satisfaction for the website visitor. By accessibility is meant the downloading time. Download time depends on the amount of graphics employed, the type of Internet connection and the web browser used. In addition, the content influences the perceived image of the destination and creates a virtual experience for the consumer. A website should have accurate content that satisfies the user, an interactive map and contact information on the homepage, as well as, a “home” button on every page that leads the user back to the home page easily. Moreover, a successful website should provide links that work properly and send the user to the right page in a consistent way. Furthermore, every picture used in website should be accompanied by a caption to convey to the users where this area is located.

Moreover, Kalodikis and Yannakopoulos (2008) affirm five basic rules of web design: easy to read; easy to navigate; easy to find; consistent in layout and design and quick to download. As for the content of the tourism website, they add that the information provided should be simple, avoiding unnecessary details and data that complicates the download procedure. In addition, tourism websites should provide images, videos and other material that represent the local culture and physical attractions of tourism areas; destination interactive maps; relevant links and useful web pages (e.g. local tourism boards, schedules and itineraries, etc.); hotels, airlines, car rental companies; webpages in different languages (e.g. English, French). Besides, websites should use a clear font and avoid using animation that does not provide any substantial information.

Concerning the web services of the tourism website, Kalodikis and Yannakopoulos (2008) add that it should offer the possibility of online payments through the use of credit cards; provide financial facilities, discounts and special offers (new packages, etc), as well as, online reservations and weather forecasts. Additionally, a tourism website may incorporate systems to collect as much information as possible regarding users' needs and habits and customize products and services according to them. A tourism website should further adopt security methods to protect the tourists' online transactions and use web-marketing techniques to promote itself like brand building, banner advertising, ads in search engines, directories, emails and newsletters.

Moreover, the study of (Lu *et al.*, 2007) affirms that navigational menus or toolbars and site maps can help improve the navigation on a website. It also mentions that tourism websites often offer a great variety of tourism information which should be up-to-date and objective including scenery introduction, tourism news, journey recommendations, special services information, weather forecast and other relevant information.

Furthermore, different types of transactions should be carried out on the site, such as flight, hotel and tour package reservations. Having a network security certificate is also an important consideration, since it provides safety for customers' information, as well as, the communicational factor referring to contents as contact address, telephone numbers, contact e-mail and online consultation.

In addition, many visitors like to share their travel experience with others and know how others feel about the destinations or the services they are interested in. Therefore, features that facilitate the communication between the company and its customers and the communication among the travelers are important contents that tourism destinations should incorporate into their sites (Lu *et al.*, 2007)

Finally, Ho and Lee (2007) have identified five core components of e-travel service quality including information quality, security, website functionality, as well as, customer relationships and responsiveness.

#### **RESEARCH PROBLEM:**

The literature review investigated reveal that several evaluation studies have been conducted by individuals and organizations on improving the effectiveness of tourism websites which promote destinations all over the globe using a multitude of approaches. This makes it difficult to compare findings and identify factors that have consistently been used to evaluate websites (Park and Gretzel, 2007). Besides, there is no generally acceptable method for the evaluation of website success in tourism (Park and Gretzel, 2007). Thus, the purpose of this research is to contribute to this emerging body of literature by providing a comprehensive viable instrument for evaluating tourism destination websites and utilize it in examining Egypt's online representation, as well as, that of the top destination countries. It is believed that the study may be beneficial to researchers investigating tourism destination websites' evaluation. On the one hand, results from the current research can help identifying well-designed destination tourism websites, so that travelers can have confidence in these websites. On the other hand, tourism websites can use the criteria of the study to evaluate themselves and improve the drawbacks.

#### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES:**

The following hypotheses are drawn the research:

- 1- The main official tourism websites in Egypt suffer from some defects.
- 2- The top destination countries worldwide employ the website quality criteria more than Egypt.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

From the review of previous studies examining tourism destination websites, it is obvious that there is noticeable replication of the factors identifying destination tourism websites' quality and success. Furthermore, it seems to the researcher that all the criteria mentioned in previous studies refer mainly to two main components: content and structure of tourism websites. Therefore, the researcher investigated the factors and findings of previous studies and identified the comprehensive factors determining the ideal tourism destination website. These factors are considered as subcategories of the content and structure components of tourism websites, forming the basis for the evaluation of the research websites' sample. These factors are as follows:

**Concerning the content of tourism destination websites**, it should encompass the following factors: interactive elements such as interactive maps with directions regarding reaching destinations; internal search engines, contact information; up-to date and inclusive information about the destination (current climate and weather, accommodation, attractions, currency exchange rates/converter, visa and/or privacy policy); number of site visitors; options given to visitors to share ideas, experiences and information and take part in online chats, consultation and email facilities, online queries, surveys; databases and directories; the option of language translation; online reservation facilities (hotels, flights, etc.); bulletin boards (news report, newsletter), terms definition; brief paragraphs; site map; useful links and finally, advertisements and/or free products and services like postcards, wallpaper and screensavers.

**As regards the structure of the tourism destination websites**, a "home" button, a navigation-bar and sufficient white space should exist on every page. In addition, site map, contact information and a vision and/or a mission should be placed on the home page. Furthermore, multimedia functions should be used in order to be attractive (photographs with captions, videos, flash animation, striking banners for brand image-building, etc.) and

the background texture and/or color used throughout the site should never overwhelm the text but rather complement it.

The study evaluated the content and structure of ten of the main official tourism websites promoting Egypt, compared to twelve of the main official tourism websites in six of the top destination countries in 2010. This is mainly to underscore the distinctions between Egypt and these countries and propose suggestions to improve Egypt's websites to become effective destination marketing tools, as well as, to cover a diversity of tourism websites and have a more persuasive and logical interpretation of the results.

The researcher adopted the content analysis methodology in examining the websites. Content analysis methodology "is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences within texts or sets of texts and to quantify this presence in an objective manner" (<http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~palmquis/courses/content.html>). In Malhotra (1999:200), content analysis is defined as "the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of a communication. It includes observation as well as analysis". Hence, content analysis can be an effective tool to examine the content and structure of destination tourism websites.

The sample of websites was selected from the main official tourism websites of every country provided by Google search engine. The six top destination countries are France, the USA, China and Spain, as well as, Tunisia and the United Emirates as top Arab countries according to the WTO (2010) ranking.

The homepage of each of the 22 websites was thoroughly examined and the data was recorded in terms of the criteria previously determined.

#### **EVALUATION OF WEBSITES:**

1- The Egypt State Information Service: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Default.aspx>

2- The Egypt's Information Portal: <http://www.eip.gov.eg/Default.aspx>

The Egyptian Information Portal was chosen as the best information portal in 2005 in a competition organized by the Egyptian Ministry of Administrative Development for encouraging internet services.



3- The Egyptian Tourist Authority: <http://www.egypt.travel/index.php>

4- The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism: <http://www.tourism.gov.eg/default.aspx>

5-The Egyptian Tourism Federation: <http://www.etf.org.eg/>

6- Chamber of Tourism Establishments: <http://www.cte-egypt.org/default.asp>

7- Egyptian travel Agent Association: <http://www.etaa-egypt.org/Default.aspx?Id=112>

8- Egyptian Hotel Association: <http://www.egyptianhotels.org/en/>

9- Egyptian Chamber of Diving and Water Sports: <http://www.cdws.travel/Default.aspx>

10- Tour Egypt: [www.touregypt.net/](http://www.touregypt.net/)

**Table 1: Evaluation of the Main Official Tourism Websites of Egypt**

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Sites			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	%	Average %	
Content	Interactive elements	Interactive maps	√	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	√	50	70	
		Search engine	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√	X	√	70		
		Contact information	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	90		
	Accurate & inclusive information	accommodation	X	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	30	40
		weather	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	√	√	√	60		
		attractions	√	√	√	X	X	X	√	X	√	√	60		
		Currency exchange rates/converter	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	√	30		
		Visa and/or privacy policy	X	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	20		

	No. of site visitors		√	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	X	X	20	20
	Interaction with customers	Email facilities	X	√	X	X	X	X	√	√	X	√	40	35
		Online queries	X	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	√	40	
		Share of ideas & experiences	X	√	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	√	30	
		Surveys	X	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	√	30	
	Language translation		√	√	√	X	√	√	X	√	X	√	70	70
	Online reservation facilities		X	√	√	X	X	X	X	√	X	√	40	40

Source: The researcher      √= existent    X= nonexiste

**Table 2: Evaluation of the Main Official Tourism Websites of Top Destination Countries**

Content	News and/or newsletter		√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	90	90
	Terms definition		X	√	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10	10
	Brief paragraphs		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	100	100
	Databases and directories		X	√	X	√	X	X	√	√	X	X	40	40
	Advertisement		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	10	10
	Free products and services		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	√	10	10
	Site map		√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	X	√	80	80
	Useful links		√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	X	X	70	70
Structure	On the home page	Site map	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	X	√	80	90	
		Contact information	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		90

-continued-

		A vision and/or vision	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	100		
On every page		A "home" button	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	90	77	
		A	X	√	√	X	X	X	X	√	X	√	√	40		
		Sufficient white space	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	100		
Multimedia functions	Mu	Photographs with caption	√	√	√	X	X	X	X	X	√	√	√	50	70	
		Video and/or flash	√	√	√	X	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	√		80
		Striking	√	√	√	√	√	X	X	√	√	√	√	√		80
Background texture and or color not overwhelming the text			√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	100	100	

Source: The researcher      √= existent      X= nonexistent

1- France Guide.com, the Tourist Office Website for Tourism in France:

<http://www.franceguide.com/>

2- The French Tourist Office: <http://www.francetourism.com/index.htm>

3- [Visit Alsace - official website of tourism in East of France: www.tourisme-alsace.com/index.php%3Fl...](http://www.tourisme-alsace.com/index.php%3Fl...)

4- Travel and Tourism Sites for U.S. States and Territories US Government:

[http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Travel\\_Tourism/State\\_Tourism.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Travel_Tourism/State_Tourism.shtml)

5- Discover America: The official travel and tourism website of the United States:

<http://www.discoveramerica.com/ca/>

6- Beijing Website International- eBeijing.gov.cn: <http://www.ebeijing.gov.cn/>

7- National Tourism Administration of the People's Republic of China:

<http://en.cnta.gov.cn/>

8- Spain Travel Guide: <http://www.spanish-fiestas.com/>

9. TURESPAÑA: <http://www.spain.info/>

10. Government of Dubai: Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing:  
<http://www.dubaitourism.ae/>

11. UAE News and Information-United Arab Emirates: <http://www.uaeinteract.com/>

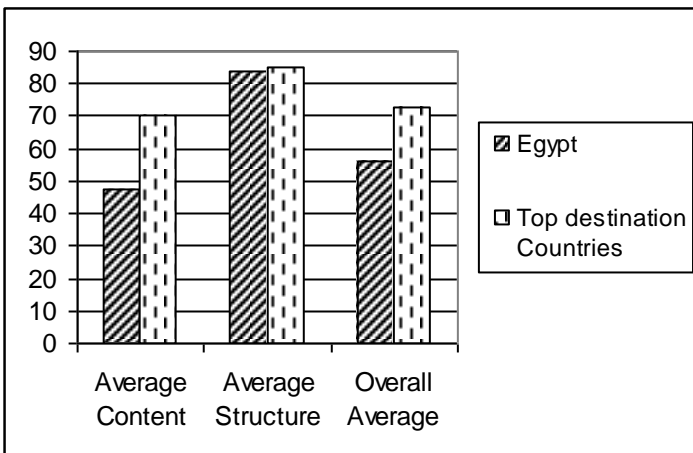
12. Tunisia Tourism Board-Official Site: <http://www.cometotunisia.co.uk/>

**Table 3: Summary of the Evaluation Results:**

	<b>Websites of Egypt</b>	<b>Websites of the Top destination Countries</b>
Average Content Criteria	47.5%	70%
Average Structure Criteria	84%	85%
Overall Average (content & structure criteria)	56%	73%

Source: The researcher

**Figure 1: Illustration of the Evaluation Results:**



## **FINDINGS AND RESULTS:**

Table 3 and Figure 1 illustrate that 56% of the evaluated websites of Egypt employ the overall criteria (content & structure) stated, of which 47.5 % pursue the content criteria and 84% use the structure ones.

On the other hand, 73% of the evaluated tourism websites of the top destination countries fix to the overall criteria (content & structure), whereas 70% employ the content criteria and 85% utilize the structure criteria.

By investigating the sites more closely (see Table 1 & Table 2), it can be noticed that 70% of the sites of Egypt reviewed offer interactive elements (only 50% provide interactive maps), while 95% of the sites of the top destination countries appreciate them.

Besides, this study found that many tourism websites ignore the number of site visitors, especially that of the top destination countries.

One phenomenon that the researcher also discovered is a significantly higher provision of inclusive and accurate information by the websites of the top destination countries when compared to the Egyptian official websites.

Furthermore, it is valuable to report that the websites of the top destination countries offer more weight to the interaction with customers' aspect than the Egyptian tourism websites.

In addition, the researcher's observation revealed that regarding the other content criteria including the provision of news, terms definition and databases and directories there were not great differences between the percentages of the tourism websites of Egypt and that of the top destination countries, except for the offering of advertisements, useful links and free products and services criteria. Moreover, it has been noticed that all the sampled websites (of Egypt & of the top destination countries) offer brief paragraphs, sufficient white space on every page and their background texture and/ or color doesn't overwhelm the text.

Moreover, it is obvious from the evaluation of the sample that all sites of Egypt (100%) provide a vision and mission on the home page, while only 67% of the sites of the top destination countries use this criterion. On the other hand, all the sites examined of the top destination countries (100%) provide photos with caption, whereas this criterion is employed by only 50% of the evaluated websites of Egypt.

Additionally, from the studied sites, it is apparent that more websites of the top destination countries offer online reservation facilities than those of Egypt.

As regards the structure criteria, it is interesting to learn that the Egyptian websites show the same percentage or a higher one than the websites of the top destination countries except for the multimedia functions criterion.

## **CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the interpretation of results, it can be observed that there are apparent differences between Egypt and the other countries of different economic level as well as culture. The websites of the top destination countries adopt the criteria for websites' quality more than Egypt, **which affirms the second hypothesis of the research.** Furthermore, the data analysis illustrates that Egypt's websites have adopted the structure criteria, to a great extent, more than the websites of the top destination countries, however; they have many weak points as regards the content criteria mentioned. **This affirms the first hypothesis of the research.**

Based on the results, we suggest the following improvements for the main websites of Egypt to bridge the gap among countries and become more effective as marketing tools:

Egypt's websites should give more weight to the interactive elements, especially the provision of interactive maps and search engines. Furthermore, the tourism websites of Egypt should provide more inclusive information regarding accommodation, weather, attractions of the country, currency exchange rates, as well as, visa and/or privacy policy.

In addition, the websites promoting Egypt should offer more facilities for the customers' interaction and surveys, as well as, more free products and services in order to be more attractive and effective and cater for visitors' needs and wishes.

Moreover, the language translation option should be more provided to reduce language barriers on tourism. Finally, the provision of the number of sites' visitors can give indication of the websites' success and more online reservation facilities can offer the visitors the opportunity to plan their trip more easily.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH:**

It is valuable to evaluate the tourism websites of Egypt after implementing the suggested changes. It is also important to investigate how cultural differences influence the tourism information seeking patterns of visitors

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