4-2020

The Influence of Social Media in Recommending Tourism Destinations: A Study of Kuwait

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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN RECOMMENDING TOURISM DESTINATIONS: A STUDY OF KUWAIT

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Under the Supervision of Professor Badreya Al-Jenaibi

April 2020

Declaration of Original Work

I, Ibrahim Ahmad Mohammad AlKandari, the undersigned, a graduate student at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), and the author of this dissertation entitled "*The Influence of Social Media in Recommending Tourism Destination: A Study of Kuwait*", hereby, solemnly declare that this dissertation is my own original research work that has been done and prepared by me under the supervision of Professor Badreya Al-Jenaibi, in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at UAEU. This work has not previously been presented or published or formed the basis for the award of any academic degree, diploma or a similar title at this or any other university. Any materials borrowed from other sources (whether published or unpublished) and relied upon or included in my dissertation have been properly cited and acknowledged in accordance with appropriate academic conventions. I further declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, data collection, authorship, presentation and/or publication of this dissertation.

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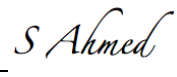
   Signature  Date 16/5/2020

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Abstract

Technology has played an essential role in both personal and business applications. In this context, the Social Media (SM) is considered to be among the most powerful communication platforms, with an impact on the supply and demand sides of tourism. The impact of SM on tourism have been studied and researched from various perspectives. Yet the volume of research suggests that few have studied the use of the SM to recommend tourism destinations in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Therefore, this dissertation intends to study the impact of SM on the intention to recommend tourism destinations based on users' post-travel attitude and behavior. Certain destination factors have been kept in mind when examining the role of SM on the intention to recommend a tourism destination. Three independent variables, two mediators and one dependent variable were integrated and the eventual a framework of this study was tested by collecting empirical data from individuals who visited Kuwait and used SM. The data were collected from self-administered questionnaires distributed to a random sample of tourists (every fifth) of different nationalities. The results supported the hypotheses and showed new findings that may form a framework for future research. This dissertation links the role of SM to recommending a visit to Kuwait, whereas most studies have focused on variables other than SM. To conclude, the findings and justifications amplify knowledge and bring out both academic and managerial implications.

Keywords: Social Media, Tourism, Quality of Airport, Safety and Security, Destination Image, Kuwait, New Kuwait.

Title and Abstract (in Arabic)

تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تزكية الوجهات السياحية: دراسة عن دولة الكويت

الملخص

لعبت التكنولوجيا دوراً رئيسياً على الصعيدين الشخصي والتجاري. وفي هذا السياق، تعتبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أحد أقوى النظم تأثيراً على التواصل وكذلك على العرض والطلب في مجال السياحة. وقد تمت دراسة وبحث العديد من الرؤى المرتبطة بدور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على السياحة. ومع ذلك، فتعتبر الدراسات حول استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تزكية المواقع السياحية محدودة. وبهذا تعتزم رسالة الدكتوراه هذه دراسة دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي المرتبط بنيّة الأفراد تقديم توصياتهم بخصوص الوجهات السياحية ووجهات السفر وفقاً للتوجهات والسلوكيات المكّونة بعد تجربتهم السفر. وقد تم الأخذ في الاعتبار عدداً من العناصر المرتبطة بالوجهات السياحية عند دراسة دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعية في التأثير على رغبة الأشخاص بتزكية وجهات محددة. وقد تم اختبار إطار العمل من خلال تجميع بيانات تجريبية من قبل زائري الكويت واستخدامهم لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. وقد تمت عملية تجميع البيانات من خلال استبيان تقييم ذاتية (بصيغة الأسئلة المغلقة) وتم اختيار العينات بأسلوب عشوائي. وقد أجابت نتائج الدراسة على الفرضيات التي وضعها الباحث إلى جانب أنها قدمت نتائجاً جديدة تتعلق بإطار العمل الخاص بالبحوث المستقبلية ومن ضمن النتائج المستنبطة هي ربط وإدراك دور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تزكية الكويت كوجهة سياحية، حيث ركزت معظم الدراسات السابقة على عناصر أخرى تختلف عن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. وأخيراً، قدمت النتائج والتبريرات إدراكاً أفضل للموضوع المطروح وتم فيما بعد مناقشة النتائج الإدارية والأكاديمية ذات الصلة.

مفاهيم البحث الرئيسية: وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، السياحة، جودة المطارات، الأمن والسلامة، صورة الوجهة، الكويت، كويت جديدة.

Acknowledgements

My sincere appreciation goes to Professor Badreya Al-Jenaibi, Professor Riyadh Eid, and Professor Ali Noor for their support and guidance, which have enabled me to enhance my research skills and develop the required knowledge in the related field.

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Sami Boudelaa and Professor Fayez Elessawy, Dr. Erdogan Ekiz, and members of the faculty for their guidance, support, and assistance in my doctorate journey in preparing this dissertation.

Special thanks go to my parents, wife, family, and true friends for giving me all kinds of encouragement and motivation.

Dedication

To my beloved parents and family and those who have always believed in me.

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List of Abbreviations

AGFI	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
ASQ	Airport Service Quality
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative fit index
CMIN	Minimum Discrepancy
CR	Composite Reliability
DA	Destination Attributes
DF	Degrees of Freedom
DI	Destination Image
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFI	Goodness of Fit Index
MLE	Maximum Likelihood Estimates
NFI	Normed Fit Index
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
QA	Quality of Airport
RMR	Root Mean Square Residual
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SandS	Safety and Security
SE	Standardized Estimate
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SM	Social Media
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SSN	Social Network Sites
TLI	Tucker–Lewis index
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Technological developments and innovations have had an immense impact on the information and communication systems of individuals and communities. Such technological advancement may be found in the use of the world-wide web. The Internet fosters the dissemination and reception of information among individuals and companies. The use of technology in the Social Media (SM) has gained admiration and adherents over the years (Sponcil and Gitimu, 2013).

The SM comprise the websites and Internet-based applications that permit users to produce and share feedback and information (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Individuals use SM websites such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, etc., to build and maintain relationships or to reconnect with lost companions (Boyd and Ellison, ibid). As a requirement for establishing connecting links, the SM collect personal data from users in the form of profile data (Pempek et al., 2009). SM communication is formed via individuals representing themselves through personal profiles. It also allows users to generate opinions, post and share content, display, and interact with friends or other online users. Each of the various SM platforms has its forum and support group. One may join an online group to compare reviews of cars, obtain parenting tips, fad diets, or compare restaurants and holiday destinations. Fischer and Reuber (2011) believe that, the SM play a major role in forming users' perceptions since the interactions between platforms such as Twitter and/or Facebook are responsible for engaging them in different areas of life. Eventually, SM will impact on the process of recommending a tourism destination.

The use of SM is widespread among young people (Perrin and Anderson, 2019). Most young people begin to express their opinions and show their independent personalities in their college years have had professors to help them raise the level of their thinking. However, the use of SM platforms has encouraged and welcomed the sharing of opinions and views with other SM users. Moreover, most university students have reached the age where they are responsible from a legal perspective for what they choose to share. In the United States, Smith and Caruso (2010) noted that, around 97% of university students actively use Social Network Sites (SNSs) every day. Another recent study in the UK found that college students spend up to six hours per day on SNSs, Facebook in particular. It is possible that college students who have not yet been recorded use SNSs even more in other parts of the world (Petre, 2014). This high level of SNS use and the addictive nature of these sites have caused great concern among the world's social science scholars (Koc and Gulyagci, 2013).

Furthermore, not only SM has gained significant attention in the field of education at university level, but it has also unlocked fresh challenges and opportunities for businesses, organizations, and individuals (Ngai, et al., 2015). Different SM platforms are used to meet the goals and objectives of different users. Facebook, for instance, connects people around the world on both a formal and informal basis. It has established a platform for users to share photos, videos, important company updates and much more (Driver et al., 2018).

Twitter is another common form of SM that allows users to express their thoughts in a very brief form. In January 2014, the total of active Twitter users reached 232 million (Reyaee and Ahmed, 2015). In November 2019, there were as

many as 330 million active monthly users on Twitter, 63% of them being between the ages of 35 and 63 (Lin, 2020). Snapchat is also a very popular SM platform. It allows users to send and receive time-sensitive photos and videos that expire upon being viewed (Stec, 2015). The number of Snapchat users has increased significantly in recent years, due to its recording ability, modality and affordance (Radcliffe and Lam, 2018). Moreover, it enables users to select certain individuals on their lists to view content. This platform was ranked the third most commonly used SM platform after Facebook and Instagram (Duggan, 2015; Utz et al., 2015).

Instagram is another SM mainstream platform. It is a photo-sharing application that allows individuals to take pictures, record videos, apply filters to an image and then post it on Instagram itself and/or another platform, such as Facebook or Twitter (Stec, 2015). According to Instagram (2016), 80% of the platform users are outside the US and the number of its active users exceeds 600 million (Al-Kandari et al., 2017). In June 2018, Instagram had 1 billion active users per month with 500 million of them actively using the platform every single day. 71% of the users were under the age of 35. The platform has grown 10 times in terms of the number of its users since 2013 (Mohsin, 2020). Further studies revealed that Instagram was the second most preferred social media site in the US after Snapchat (Clement, 2020). These platforms, although different, serve the common goal of establishing social interaction and connectivity between people all over the globe (Khan, 2017). This factor drawn the intense attention of scholars to SM and the vital role that they play in steering users' thoughts and behaviors.

Narrowing the scope of the SM towards the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, it has been documented that the Arab Knowledge Economy Report of

2015-2016 forecast a sharp increase in the number of Internet users in the Arab region. Furthermore, the GCC countries are identified as the most frequent users of information, technology, and communication in the Arab region. In 2015, Kuwait was ranked ahead of all its neighbors for the number of its mobile users, breaking the record with 94.62% of the population (ibid).

In 2012, the Internet users specifically in Kuwait reached 2,096,000. In accessing the Internet, Kuwait held 90th position globally. In 2015, the number of users increased to 3 million. Kuwait thereby attained 84th position in the world for the highest number of users accessing the Internet and 12th of all Arab countries (Arab knowledge and Economy Report, 2015-2016). Since the SM constitute a crucial factor in reshaping people's opinions and since the use of SM is extremely common in Kuwait, this research intends to explore how the SM can impact on its use to recommend Kuwait to foreigners as a tourism destination.

A survey conducted by the IT division of the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) showed that 72% of Kuwaiti citizens were found to spend more than 5 hours per day on applications of social networking.

This all shows that SM has had a huge impact on the spreading of information, mainly helping the dissemination of news by up to 65%. The survey also illustrated that SM has served to gather people's views. Up to 81% of those who use the SM believe that the issues discussed there were the ones that were mostly being talked about. Those that were less discussed were political, social and religious issues (Kuwait Times, 2016).

One of the sectors linked to the SM that have been affected by SM and SNSs and are studied in the present research is that of tourism. Travel and tourism are considered the world's greatest generator of jobs and wealth World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) report in 2000.

In 2017, the WTTC reported that travel and tourism's direct, indirect and induced impact on World Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accounted for as much as US$ 8.3 trillion, 10.4% of the world's GDP, and for 313 million jobs worldwide. Further it indicated that travel and tourism contributed US$ 1.5 trillion exports (6.5% of total exports, 28.8% of global services exports) and US$ 882 billion investment (4.5% of total investment). The travel and tourism sector grew by 4.6% which is much faster than the economy as a whole, and created 7 million jobs in 2017 alone. It should be mentioned that, in the report, out of the total travel that took place in the year, 77% was for leisure only and 23% of total travel was for business purposes as per the Travel Daily News in 2018. Yet, there are drawbacks of increased tourism that cannot be ignored when it comes to sensitive issues such as increased pollution due to tourist activities which includes all kinds of pollution including noise, air and environmental pollution as well. Moreover, the influx of tourists means more burden on the existing resources and the infrastructure in the country (Goodman, 2020).

Thus, tourism contributes to the socio-economic development of all countries. For developing countries, tourism is the source of profit. The growth of tourism contributes to the generation of revenue and the creation of jobs (Groizard and Santana-Gallego, 2018). Although the opportunities of employment increase with the increased number of tourists, it is important to note that this employment is often seasonal and so there can be seasonal fluctuations in employment forcing

people to look for jobs elsewhere when the demand is low. Further large, foreign tourist companies might operate in the local areas and take major chunks of profits back to their own home countries leaving small local businesses vulnerable (Goodman, 2020). Various factors help to develop the tourism sector. One of these is the tourist's image of the destination. The image affects tourism and travel marking positively or negatively. This image can usually be expressed via the SM.

Individuals use SM to share information with others. Sharing travel experiences through SM has also become a universal activity (Liu et al. 2018). However, the intention to recommend a destination through social media based on the quality of an airport, safety and security factors, destination attributes, and image has received less academic attention.

Based on the review of the literature (Table 1.1) very few published studies relating to the SM have been conducted in Kuwait. Therefore, one of the goals of this research is to explore the role of SM in recommending Kuwait as a tourism destination. This study seeks explanations based on certain dimensions for the role of the SM in the context of tourism in Kuwait.

This chapter first presents the problem statement, followed by the study's aim and objectives along with the research questions. It goes on to discuss the SM and the underpinning theories. The next chapter (Chapter 2) contains the literature review and presents the conceptual framework of the study with the hypotheses. Chapter 3 will cover the methodology; it outlines the process, methods of data collection, and data analyses. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the purification of measures, the descriptive analysis, model and hypotheses, testing them in turn. The last chapter (Chapter 6) contains the discussion of the findings and the conclusion.

1.2 Problem Statement

The social networking platform is one of the most powerful technological innovations of the modern world. It has changed the way in which individuals interact with each other and also changed marketers' perception of and approach to customers. However, several issues arise with regard to the use of SM. One of the main questions raised by researchers, business professionals, and the general public is the credibility of the information shared on social networking sites. Filieri et al. (2015) studied the role of trust in consumer-generated media and its influence on word-of-mouth and other recommendations. Credibility and trust are of importance when sharing information, particularly on social networking sites where personal contact is absent. People resort to social media sites to gather information that they can use to make various decisions.

A recent study by Chang and Wang (2019) on destination expectations and the effects of online advertising and word-of-mouth stated that there is a need to examine post-travel attitudes to understand their impact on satisfaction and intentions to revisit. It is necessary to learn post-travel intentions and post-travel behaviors to understand the personal intention to revisit and also the objectives of individuals in sharing their satisfaction and emotions on the SM as recommendations for others.

Another gap that the study of Chang and Wang (ibid') indicated is the lack of studies on offline intentions when sharing information. This has been identified in other studies that focused on the SM. Post-travel intentions and behaviors need to be studied through the use of social media and also offline.

The researcher examined the available literature and searched the Web of Science database; he found that very few considered SM in relation to Kuwait, social networking sites and tourism, or social networking and Kuwait and realized that this applied to related fields also.

Table 1.1 provides the search results that were found using Web of Science, a global citation database, to identify how many studies linking tourism and the SM have been published. Alternative keywords related to the SM and tourism were also used. The search was limited to the Title field and the period chosen was between 1955 and 2019. The results provided in Table 1.1 indicate that the topic of SM usage in tourism has not received adequate attention. It is also interesting to note that the studies in Kuwait related to SM are few in number. This leaves a gap in the literature that needs to be filled.

Table 1.1: Literature Search

	Number of Articles			
Title Keywords	Keyword: tourism	Keyword: destination	Keyword: travel	Keyword: Kuwait
Social media	73	38	41	0
Social networking sites	6	1	7	1
Social networking	50	21	45	2
Social networking website	0	0	2	0
Mass media	5	3	4	0
Communication	81	36	113	8

Note: search between 1955 and 2019.

Therefore, this study is considered a contribution to filling the gap in knowledge of the offline intentions to share information and understand the post-travel behavior or investigate the role of the SM in the field of tourism marketing. Moreover, the outcomes and findings will add to the available body of literature and help service

providers, businesses, decision and policy makers in the country to create and build proper strategies which meet their vision and goals.

The problems may be summarized as follows:

- Issues related to the credibility of information on SM with respect to travel and tourism.
- Limited studies on post-travel intention and behavior that use the SM to share information and experiences.
- Lack of offline and online intention of sharing information.
- Lack of studies in the usage of social media to promote tourism in Kuwait.

1.3 Research Aim

To help fill the above gaps, this research aims to study SM users' intention to recommend a destination according to the quality of the airports, the safety and security of the country, the attributes of the destination and the image of the destination. The primary aim is to study the role and use of SM in the user's intention to recommend. The research also aims to explore the offline aspect of recommendations by examining the direct impact of the above destination factors on users' intention to recommend.

1.4 Research Objectives

The research focuses on the SM user's intention to recommend travel destinations. Moreover, studies the role of the SM in sharing destination factors such as the quality of the airport, safety and security, attributes and image, with the intention of recommending the destination to others.

Furthermore, it assesses the impact of the social media on the intention to recommend by examining the effects of certain destination factors.

Moreover, it explores the mediating role of destination image between the quality of the airport, safety and security, and the destination attributes and the intention to recommend.

It looks for a framework that researchers can adopt in future studies which can be applied in other regions.

Finally, it provides recommendations both to scholars who are interested in the topic and decision-makers that will help them achieve their country's strategic goals.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions are either major or minor research themes. The major research question is:

- What is the impact on users of the social media on the intention to recommend travel and tourism destination, based on their post-travel attitude and behavior?

The sub research questions are as follows:

- Does the quality of the airport impact on the intention to recommend a destination to others?
- Does the safety and security of the country play an important role in a traveler's experience and intention to recommend a destination to others?
- What is the importance of a destination's attributes on the user's intention to recommend this destination to others?

- What role does the user's perception of the destination image have on the intention to recommend a destination to others?
- What is the role of the SM in the destination factors on the intention to recommend a destination to others?
- Does destination image have a mediating role on the intention to recommend the destination to others? between the quality of the airport, safety and security, and destination attributes

In view of the previous studies available, this study seems to be important for both academics and for the country's decision makers as regards state strategy, since many studies consider the need to examine the offline and online intention to recommend visiting a tourism destination or the post-travel intention to share information and experiences (Chang and Wang, 2019). Moreover, people's perceptions differ from region to region, there is no previous literature of this kind relating to Kuwait and there is only one study about the UAE within the GCC countries, that by Eid et al. (2019). An interesting find was made in a study by Chaulagain et al. (2019). These writers examined US residents' perceptions of visits to Cuba, reporting that a few studies supported the argument that people's perception of a country's image affects their destination image and by virtue of this their decision and intention to revisit the destination. They mention that offline communication (word-of-mouth) plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's perception of a particular destination.

The SM themselves have been embedded in and penetrated various sectors and many scholars have paid attention to the changes accompanying

internet technology. Mandrola and Futyma (2019) and Hughes (2018) have studied SM in term of healthcare. They confirmed that these technologies provide a great boost to the industry in many ways such as in supporting research and peer review through connecting professionals and allowing them to share their thoughts and perceptions. Moreover, Shareef et al. (2018) studied the same technology in term of emotional brand attachment. Within small and medium enterprises areas, SM has been examined by Dutot and Bergeron (2016). In the advertising and marketing field it is been studied by Shareef et al. (2018) and Zhao et al. (2018). Furthermore, several scholars have studied SM in contexts that are similar to this study and the results are compared in the discussion chapter (Chapter 6) of this research (Interaction: Su et al., 2018; Absorption: Scholer and Higgins, 2009; Enthusiasm: So et al., 2014; Identification: Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Attention: Lin et al., 2008).

There are other dimensions (offline) that have been covered in this research and have been studied by other scholars such as quality of airport: create positive perception of the airport among the passengers and create stronger intention in reusing the airport (Ansari and Agarwal, 2015; Bezerra and Gomes, 2015; Ali et al., 2016). Safety and security: are elements that have implications on tourists, cultural heritage, and hindrances in the potential future developments for these economies which studied by Saha and Yap (2014); Groizard et al. (2017); Groizard and Santana-Gallego (2018); Micheal et al. (2019); Eid et al. (2019). Destination attributes: scholars like Richie and Crouch (2003); Crouch (2011); Shafaei and Mohamed (2015);

Battour and Ismail (2016); Eid et al. (2019) studied attributes such as is geography, climate, culture, history, activities offered, natural structures, historical structures, or modern structures. Destination image has been studied by H. Zhang et al. (2014); Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015); Choi and Cai (2016); Hahm et al. (2018); Chaulagain et al. (2019). Finally, intention to recommend: the behavioral intentions conveying positive information, with the intention to recommend a brand, destination, or experience (Hollebeek, 2011; Hudson et al., 2015; Harrigan et al., 2017).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the various variables that are used in constructing the conceptual framework. The discussion begins with the quality of the airport, followed by the safety and security, the attributes of the destination and the destination image. Travelers are expected to share their experiences through social media, which is also discussed in this chapter. The information that is shared can influence the followers on social media. This also refers to the influence of social media on recommending a destination based on the different travel dimensions and traveler experiences.

2.2 Quality of Airport

The air transport and the quality of airports play a significant role in the development of the tourism sector of any country. Airports are also considered the places where travels begin and end. In other words, they are the country's point(s) of departures and arrivals, and thus the quality of services provided at and by the airports greatly impacts the overall experience of each and every journey (Seetanah et al., 2018).

There is a big mass of literature that discusses the concept of Airport Service Quality (ASQ). Many argue that ASQ is one of the best ways to measure the value of an airport as well as to positively influence the overall customer satisfaction, which can lead to increased and repeated use of an airport (Ansari and Agarwal, 2015; Bezerra and Gomes, 2015; Ali et al., 2016). Scholars such as Bezerra and Gomes

(2015) point out that services are different from products as services are not tangible. However, the experiences gained from products and services can lead to a psychological state of emotions that is linked to customer satisfaction. So et al. (2014) states that the psychological state can influence customer engagement with the service provider and also his/her engagement on social media.

The objective of Bezerra and Gomes (2015) study was to generally identify airports' service quality dimensions and their effects on travelers' satisfaction. The scholars surveyed one of the key international airports in Brazil and found out that the aspects of check-in, security, ambiance (e.g., lights, scents, temperature, and sounds), basic facilities, and prices are critical in influencing travelers' satisfaction, whereas the dimensions of convenience (e.g., availability and quality of food facilities, banks/ATM/forex exchange, stores, and courtesy of staff) and mobility (e.g., wayfinding, flight information, and walking distance) were of lesser importance to the travelers (ibid, p. 78).

A similar study was carried out by Ali et al. (2016), who surveyed Malaysia's Kuala Lumpur International Airport. They stressed the role of airports in the formation of travelers' first impressions of the respective nation. The scholars found a positive significance of an airport's design and physical environment in reflecting the national identity, and therefore, influencing passengers' delightful transport (ibid). Likewise, Kim et al. (2016) argued that ASQ is critical in generating positive behavioral intentions such as the repetitive use of an airport and recommending the airport to others.

The primary objective of using an airport is travel; however, the findings of Wattanacharoensil and Schuckert (2015) indicate that only 20% of passengers select

an airport for the sole purpose of travel, while the remaining 80% of passengers choose an airport to travel based on the shopping and retail facilities that the airport provides.

Service quality is also the prime focus in the marketing literature with the emphasis on providing better services to achieve customer satisfaction that leads to positive behavioral intentions. According to Saleem et al. (2017), the core meaning of service quality is the privilege and distinction that can be achieved by meeting and/or exceeding the customer's expectations, where trust plays a crucial role, too. Their research verified a positive relationship between service quality and repurchase intention, which in turn influences customer satisfaction and brand image. As quoted from Saleem et al. (ibid) "there is a positive relationship between service quality and repurchase intention, and customer satisfaction and brand image" (ibid: p. 1151). Therefore, every airport should put their efforts into acquiring a thorough understanding of their customers' needs, and thus provide a better service quality to attract customers who are more likely to reuse and recommend the airport and its services. Moreover, Prentice and Kadan (2019) stated "beyond intention to reuse the airport, service quality of airports appears important to attract other favorable behavioral intentions" (ibid: p. 42). These scholars implied that the availability of preferred facilities often help contribute to the tourism development, because facilities also influence the impression-creation process, which determines whether the travelers will choose to come back and revisit the country or not. According to Prentice and Kadan's (2019) findings, the aspects of airport facilities, servicescape, and ambiance represent significant elements in the ASQ and the dynamics of intention to revisit. Hence, Prentice and Kadan (ibid) highlighted in their concluding

remarks that “it is fundamental that airport authorities, tourism associate bodies and council representatives liaise to co-create collaborative strategies that solidify the relationship with the destination from within the airport” (ibid: p. 46).

Based on the literature above, it can be argued and recommended as well that airports should ensure that the passengers are provided with better services such as short waiting time in queues, shopping facilities, restaurants and food courts, institutions and machines providing financial services, polite and caring staff, overall services that enhances the customer experience. This is required in creating a positive perception of the airport among the passengers and thus strengthen the intention of reusing the airport. A valuable aspect of this study that the researcher will explore whether this factor has significant impact here in Kuwait like other places mentioned in the previous studies in this sector or no. The literature on safety and security will be discussed in the next section.

2.3 Safety and Security

The existing studies discussing political instability and conflicts indicate that such situations negatively impact tourism patterns. However, Eid et al. (2019) argue that the studies that examine the actual contribution of political stability and safety and security are limited. In this regard, Eid et al. (ibid) attempted to clarify the formation process of destination image by investigating safety and security as an important determinant involved in the process. “A stable political condition enhances a high demand for tourism activities,” (ibid: p. 843). Therefore, the findings indicate the importance of safety and security as higher in relation to the destination image. This also indicates that the recommendations of the travelers on social media will strongly reflect the safety stability of the country (ibid). This is also discussed by

Saha and Yap (2014) who argue that the political and social unrests tend to result in a severe deterioration of the tourism industry in the respective country/area. Political stability is a broad concept and this thesis focuses only on the dimension of safety and security.

There are specific areas that negatively affect the tourism choices because of low levels of safety and security, such as the local or regional conflicts, presence of terrorist havens or dysfunctional state structures. Undoubtedly, world conflicts are creating an issue for tourists visiting specific destinations (Eid et al., 2019). Tourism is affected by the political unrests due to internal conflicts, violence and terrorism. Tourists are highlight concerned about their safety and therefore they would select destinations where they feel safe and secure. The concern and fear of physical harm or death can create concerns in travelers who do not want to be part of the tense and stressful situations, which will lead to avoiding the destination Groizard and Santana-Gallego (2018). The scholars also point out on the unrest in the Middle East areas that reduce to travelers to countries in the Middle East where the tension is high.

In addition to this, such unease may also damage cultural heritages, sabotage potential future development, and can impact long-term prosperity in the country. An example provided is the city of Palmyra in Syria that fell into the hands of the Islamic State (IS) in May 2015, where hundreds were killed and historical monuments were destroyed. As a direct repercussion of these incidents, tourists stopped visiting such places and, subsequently, the tourism sector has suffered immensely (ibid).

Saha and Yap (2014) explored the relationship between political instability and tourism by analyzing data from 139 countries in the time span of 1999-2009 and suggested that "establishing the relationship between tourism demand and political instability and terrorism is essential concerning the importance that policy makers are attributing toward the growth of this sector" (ibid: p. 518). Furthermore, scholars such as Neumayer and Plumper (2016), Groizard et al. (2017) and Groizard and Santana-Gallego (2018) examined the phenomenon of the Arab Spring and its impact on international tourism. In specific, Groizard and Santana-Gallego (ibid) examined the connection between the destruction of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites (WHS) and resulting tourism losses, and they concluded that "protecting these [WHS] sites from the extreme socio-political conditions that affect the region is crucial for keeping the tourist attractiveness of those countries" (ibid: p. 291).

It should be noted that although conflicts may be localized, given the globalization and interconnectedness of the world, armed conflicts and terrorist attacks are not restricted to one country only because their effects tend to exceed boundaries and negatively impact the surrounding region(s). Moreover, the real-time updates about the latest incidents and events are always available: "In an information age, people became more knowledgeable of a destination by their exposure to the information received from TV, newspapers, conversations, or the social media," noted Eid et al. (2019: p. 840). Therefore, tourists are usually concerned about the security of the region as a whole, including the countries in the neighborhood. With regards to the Middle Eastern region, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the leading destination choice for international tourists. In order to maintain its attractiveness, the UAE needs to ensure that its business environment is thriving and that it has

talented workforce that is not limited to the UAE nationals only by recruiting employees from other countries. A recent study by Michael et al. (2019) focused on the competitiveness of the UAE's tourism sector. The study also pointed out that the aspect of safety and security of the UAE also plays a major role in attracting tourists to the country, which supports the underlying argument that the dimension of safety and security of any country (and its neighboring countries) greatly impacts the choice of destination and recommendations of people when selecting the destination.

The political in (stability), security, and safety that are discussed here are some of the negative attributes of the destinations that can deter traveler's choice of the destination. There are however other attributes that can contribute positively to traveler's selection of destination and these will be discussed in the next section.

2.4 Destination Attributes

The attractiveness of any place is defined by a many of factors, including the destination attributes, which attract visitors to a specific destination. The global competition among tourism destinations is fiercer than ever before, fueled by an ever-increasing mobility of travelers in general (Crouch, 2011).

Ritchie and Crouch (2003) and Crouch (2011) stressed on the significance of destination attributes with regards to the destination competitiveness that subsequently influences the choice of destination, and the intention to recommend the destination to others. In specific, Crouch (2011) analyzed 36 competitiveness attributes with the aim of identifying which of them are of greatest importance when it comes to the competitive advantage of the tourism destinations.

> "The impact of a competitiveness attribute on the relative performance of a destination is a function of both the importance of the attribute as well as the degree to which destinations vary on the attribute. Although an attribute may be considered important, it will not be a determinant of competitiveness if there is little difference among destinations on the attribute. For example, if two destinations share a similar climate, the climate will have little or no impact on the relative competitive position of either destination," explained Crouch (ibid: p. 28).

The study unveiled that the ten most determinant destination competitiveness attributes include physiography and climate, culture and history, tourism superstructure, mix of activities offered, awareness/image, special events offered, entertainment, infrastructure, accessibility and positioning/branding, respectively (ibid).

Furthermore, Ashworth and Page (2011) argued for interconnecting the urban tourism research domain with broader social sciences field, including urban studies and the concept of world cities. The scholars noted seven distinct types of urban cities that have their own set of characteristics and attributes and hence may attract different groups of visitors, i.e. historic city, cultural city, business city, sport city, nightlife city, leisure shopping city and tourist city (ibid). Essentially, many tourist attractions are available to tourists for free: "Much of the urban tourism experience appears to be a zero-price. The markets, monuments, museums and general atmosphere of the city are either free public space or provided well below cost as a public service," hence representing an important determinant of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the specific destination (Ashworth and Page, 2011: p. 10).

In another study, Eid et al. (2019) identified, among others, three basic sets of destination attributes, namely physical attributes (local attractions, cultural attractions and facilities), intangible attributes (local quality of life, information and services) and political (in)stability attributes, which are altogether influencing and determining the resulting destination image (ibid: p. 842). At times there is also a possibility of cultural clashes with the influx of tourists as they would not understand the local dressing and dining styles for example and this can cause an issue. This is true especially for conservative cultures (Goodman, 2020).

In addition, Eid (2015) executed an analysis of specific Islamic attributes impacting the destination image from a Muslim point of view. The Middle Eastern countries are largely Islamic, and these countries strongly upload the Islamic faith. Scholars such as Han et al. (2019) pointed out that countries in the Middle East (such as Saudi Arabia and Iran) and Asia (such as Japan and South Korea) have introduced an Islamic concept called Halal tourism. This is another term for religious tourism or in particular the Islamic tourism, where the tourism sector is strongly tied to Islamic rules and regulations which also extents to the type of products and services that are offered.

The Middle Eastern countries such as the Saudi Arabia and Iran have various religious attractions that particularly attract the Muslim people. Therefore, such countries stand to gain the attraction of religious tourists who seek to visit the holy places, offer prayers, and other religions' ceremonial activities. An example provided by Eid (2015) is visiting Mecca in Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj. Islam is based on five pillars and it is mandatory for every Muslim to ensure that these are practiced and upheld. Similar to Hajj is another mandatory travel referred to as Umrah. In

brief, it is essential for a Muslim person to visit Saudi Arabia at least once in their life. With around 30% of the World population having Islamic faith, Saudi Arabia attracts large religious tourists on a regular basis (Battour and Ismail, 2016).

Similarly, Shafaei and Mohamed (2015) noted that "Muslims represent a large tourist niche market," and therefore "understanding Muslim tourists' needs and behaviors is vital for tourism businesses wishing to develop and promote products that suit this market" (ibid: p. 54). The authors analyzed the Islamic brand equity and they also argued that many Muslim countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had introduced halal tourism. However, the recent developments in Saudi Arabia are contradicting Shafaei and Mohamed's statements as these developments suggest that the Saudi government is redefining its tourism strategy by opening up to new, rather Western concepts and tourist attractions such as large music festivals and concerts. Nevertheless, there are other non-Muslim countries that had adopted halal tourism in order to attract Muslim visitors by provision of Islamic-friendly products and services, such as provision of halal food, because "as Muslims are required to follow Islam and respect its values while traveling, they search for the Islamic destination attributes, such as halal food or praying facilities, which represent common needs for Muslims," concluded Shafaei and Mohamed (ibid: p. 63).

The above discussion highlighted the importance of specific destination attributes on the final choice of destination and intention to recommend the destination further. Another aspect is the destination image that is expected to influence the choice of destination and intention to recommend the destination to others.

2.5 Destination Image

The previously discussed dimensions of safety and security, destination attributes and the airport quality are simultaneously affecting the resulting image of the destination, thereby informing the traveler's final choice of the destination. However, the concept of image destination goes beyond these dimensions; it has its own factors, namely cognitive and affective. Within the conceptual framework of this thesis, the element of destination image represents a mediator.

The role of the destination image in travelers' decision-making is vital, and it determines the travel behavior of travelers (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Although there are numerous definitions attempting to conceptualize the destination image, many generally understand it as "a compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processing from various sources over time that results in a mental representation of the attributes and benefits sought of a destination" (Kanwel et al., 2019). Nearly five decades ago, Hunt would define the concept as "the impressions that individuals hold about a state in which they do not reside" (Hunt, 1971: p. 167) whereas Liu et al. (2018) would recently summarize it as "an individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings and overall perception of a particular destination" (ibid: p. 30). It is also generally argued that the destination image is contextually-based rather than relying on predetermined measures, and, as already implied, there are several destination image factors than can impact the choice of the destination.

Tourism markets and their respective actors and authorities are preoccupied with building a destination image (K. Zhang et al., 2014). Those in charge of the destinations are facing numerous challenges if they want to preserve and strengthen

their competitive advantage over other destinations. When it comes to the destination image, the perceptions of tourists matter the most and if these perceptions become even slightly negative, the outcomes can significantly hamper the overall the present and future image of the destination, as well as its business and investment potential. Indeed, the destination image plays a crucial role in developing a successful tourism market and boosting the destination marketing (Papadimitriou et al., 2018; Choi and Cai, 2016). According to Liu et al. (2018), the destination image represents an essential variable in the supply and demand balance. For marketers, the destination image constitutes an indispensable aspect of their marketing strategies. In this regard, Iordanova (2015) asserted that the destination image is shaped and reshaped over time, and it is formed by experiences and information from multiple sources. Destination marketers should therefore always strive to understand the multiple perceptions about the particular destination and use those perceptions as the basis of their plans and strategies on how to strengthen, improve, brand and market the destination (Isaac and Eid, 2018). The outcome of destination image formation is "what ends up in people's minds because of their holistic knowledge about the physical characteristics of a product, service, country based on associations, expectations, thoughts and experiences they have picked up over the years" (Jenkins, 1999). Branding a destination in an appealing way would in the end result impact the destination's overall competitive advantage in the increasingly more and more competitive global tourism environment. Importantly, a strong and positive destination image will positively influence the growth of the tourism sector of the given country as well as the country's economic growth as a whole – especially in those countries where the tourism sector is a revenue-maker.

As noted above, the destination image is a complex concept, and thus it is important to focus more intently on specific destinations. Moreover, the destination image is evaluated on both cognitive and affective elements, i.e. how an individual perceives it (in aesthetic terms) and how the individual feels about it (in emotional terms), respectively.

The cognitive destination image factor generally covers the individual's own knowledge and opinion about the given destination (Agapito et al., 2013). Most of the existing empirical research defines the cognitive component of the destination image from a multi-attribute approach. The attributes are various elements of the destination that arouse the attention of travelers, including the available attractions, environment (e.g. weather, cleanliness, etc.) and possible gained experiences (Prayag, 2009). Each destination has its own set of attributes – for example, Valek and Williams (2018) noted that visitors to Abu Dhabi perceived the city's destination image on the basis of cognitive factors such as the quality of the accommodation and services, the culture, authentic culture, cuisine and F&B experience, retail and entertainment options as well as nature (e.g. desert, sea and sunset scenery).

Conversely, the affective destination image factor takes into account the individual's feeling and emotional attachment to the destination; this becomes crucial when the individual is evaluating a destination with a view to selection (Wang and Hsu, 2010; Papadimitriou et al., 2018). The scale of attitudes is straightforward – the individual can like, dislike, or may have indifferent opinion about it. Baloglu and Brinberg (1997), however, introduced four semantic dichotomies: sleepy–arousing, unpleasant–pleasant, gloomy–exciting and

distressing–relaxing. In addition, a study by Moon et al. (2011) included further affecting continuums: friendly/unfriendly and interesting/boring.

Travelers are very likely to share their travel experiences with others. With the growth of social media, sharing of information has become easier. Travelers are also able to share their experiences with larger numbers of people through the social media. The role of the social media is discussed in the next section.

The destination image itself forms an important basis for the decision making process in destination selection as well as for a positive recommendation of the destination to friends and family and for the spread of favorable word-of-mouth. The destination image has a direct relationship with the satisfaction level of the tourists/individuals who choose to travel to the destination or have recently travelled to it (Kim et al., 2017). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) among tourists has a significant impact on the attitudes, intentions and behaviors of other tourists and the relationship between all of them has proved to be positive (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012).

2.6 Social Media

Mass communication may be defined as communicating on a mass scale. This means that information is being sent out to a great number of people all at once. But recently with the advent of an extensive range of electronic media mass communication now also means distributing information on a large scale or simply to many people all at once (Lorimer, 2002). The social media are among the most popular channels of mass communication, along with films, and the WWW 2.0.

In 2014 a study was conducted in Iran to gauge the impact of mass communication on tourism. The mass communication techniques chosen in this regard were Customer Relationship Management and Websites, both of which were linked to having a positive relationship with the growth of tourism, in particular in Iran (Zamani and Valmohammadi, 2014). Another study concerned users' perceptions of the social media based on such dimensions as participation, commonality, connectedness, conversationality and openness (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). In fact, the social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are among the most popular choices among the channels used in tourism to increase customer engagement through social networking sites. A study was conducted using quantitative data from 319 respondents to find out the effect of social media on customer engagement by tourism marketers; it found that the relationship between the two is positive (Samala et al., 2019). The social media play a vital role in the marketing for tourism by providing a means of gathering efficient and effective information and ensuring the accuracy of the information being provided by its capacity to verify this information in detail. All this can be done quite easily and the social media can be adapted to suit all the stages of marketing of tourism. These stages include attention, interest, desire and action (Alghizzawi et al., 2018). A study from Iran found that the social media help tourism marketers to advertise trips, packages, prices and destinations in a very interesting way and this allows them to increase their sales, as well as introducing destinations with great tourism potential before they have become popular among tourists (Khalilvand et al., 2016).

The use of social media extends not only to collecting information before a trip in order to choose a destinations and accommodation but also allows travelers

after a trip to anywhere to share experiences and reviews about it. Further the transmission of pictures using picture sharing applications is another way to promote tourist destinations widely on social media. Moreover most people are more likely to trust information sent by individuals and friends through the social media about their travel experiences and plans (Fotis et al., 2012). Another important study found that more than half of social media users altered their travel plans after looking at online posts from their friends that gave information about the destination. Moreover, one third of users changed their hotel booking after finding about it online. A popular website, Skyscanner.com, found in a study that more than half of SM users select their next travel destination on the basis of pictures posted by their friends on an SM site (Rathonyi, 2013). A study published in Kuala Lampur, Malaysia highlighted the positive relationship between social media and information sharing with particular regard to the tourism sector. It was found that Knowledge Management is in fact one of the most important tools for the tourism industry because it can allow marketers to display information for travelers and tourists which has significance in the process of planning their trips. In fact information acquisition is the first step in planning a trip; it involves information searches on the web and on social media platforms where returning travelers report and review their experiences. The popularity of the web and the social media channels is in fact the stepping stone to success for the tourism and hospitality industry if used to accompany a well planned strategy (Nezakati et al., 2014). This is repeated on a much larger scale where websites can be dedicated to offering traveler a chance to share their detailed reviews and also allow other potential travelers access to this raw information to plan their trips in accordance with what they have learned. Such websites include TravBuddy.com, Travellerspoint, WAYN and the largest and most popular of all, TripAdvisor

(Miguéns et al., 2008). Its entire website is built around the idea that travelers are likely to share and learn from the experiences of others and so far the website has attracted more than 10 million reviews, and covers 212000 hotels, 30000 destinations, and 74000 attractions worldwide, including suggestions for dining, transportation, accommodation, and airline travel everywhere.

The use of websites to provide detailed and particular information regarding any travel destination has also helped in gaining increased numbers of tourists, as exemplified in a study conducted in Madhya Pradesh, India (Gohil, 2015). Further, the Internet, Web 2.0 and the social media, including above all Facebook and Twitter, have been intensively used by airline companies in order to advertise (Hvass and Munar, 2012). The social media have therefore been the first choice for marketing of most companies in the tourism business around the world because of the low cost and the adaptability associated with online advertising and marketing.

In a study conducted in China it was also found using Visual Analytics data that darker colored posts made a greater impressions on readers and users of the social media and were more likely to be reposted by the users, meaning that the darker tones were able to attract bigger audiences. This was tested with the posts for visa news in the four countries used in the study that carried news of visa ease and restrictions, namely, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand and the UK. The reposts allowed the researchers to gauge the responses of the readers and target audience to each post, highlighting their negative and positive sentiments (Cheng and Edwards, 2015). This shows that an in-depth analysis of consumer responses is also a great opportunity for the tourism and hospitality sector to learn more about what types of post work best to gain the attention of the mass users and ensure that they can generate positive actions

from these impressions. Moreover platforms such as the social media and the web are seen as methods for co-creating sustainable value for the tourism industry which has identified these means as an important part of the Smart Tourism Ecosystems. The use of smart services has enabled the tourism and hospitality sector to ensure continued knowledge sharing, experiential marketing, and even after-sales services which include keeping in touch with guests after they have left and addressing their reviews or complaints (Polese et al., 2018). In this regard the ecosystem consists of all those involved with the tourism industry including hotel, booking sites (such as booking.com and Airbnb), payment platforms, airlines, agents, as well as the staff and suppliers used by hotels and those linked with it including food and laundry services.

The role of the Internet and of the social media in particular is significant in the formation of a destination image. This consists of 2 main elements: the cognitive image and the affective image. It has been observed that the information people gather from the Internet allows them to form a perceived destination image based on the ideas, beliefs and associations about it stored in their mind (Llodrà-Riera et al., 2015). It is recommended that people from the tourism sector should use a combination of information, affective and cognitive messages in order to communicate with the target audience (tourists) so that this can help to form a positive destination image in the minds of the audience.

The SM are very friendly with search engines because they allow them to repeatedly index their pages due to the frequent updates and because of the tagging and sharing activities of users of pictures, videos, messages and texts. An entire network of hyperlinks allows social media searches to appear at the top of search

engines (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). This provides an excellent opportunity to tourism marketers to use this platform to reach out immediately to the masses. It is also worth noting that many individuals from the tourism sector use SM for varying purposes, including announcements, advertising and public relations, largely achieved by the use of Facebook Groups and Twitter accounts (Munar, 2012). It was also found in research conducted via Youtube videos created by both consumers and marketers that consumer-generated videos gained more active views and comments for destination branding than marketer-generated videos did. However, it was also found the consumer generated videos did not carry exactly the same kind of branding as the marketer generated videos (Lim et al., 2012). Similarly, it was found that the people who had already visited a destination and had experience of it were not as affected by the information about it they gained through the web and social media and their beliefs were not particularly changed by it, whereas those who had no prior experience of a destination often greatly changed their beliefs about and attitudes to the destination when they had gained significant knowledge about it from the web and the social media (Marchiori and Cantoni, 2015) .

It should be noted that the social media are full of information and to break through this clutter, it is essential to use methods which enable destination promotion strategies to attract the attention of their audience and retain this attention. An example of such methods would be to introduce celebrity involvement, graphic designs and chances to win competitions. The users must be encouraged to participate, create, and share content which will allow a deeper connection with the destination image to form. The marketers of such destinations must also use podcasts, video casts, blogs and photo sharing (Kiralova and Pavliceka, 2015).

A study conducted in 2011 found how the use of social media can extend even beyond knowledge sharing and information gaining and observed that increasingly tourists also use the social media and the Internet in order to organize trips with other individuals for the sake of adventure that also save money. This collaborative approach allows them to gain more from the resources they invest in traveling (Lopez et al., 2011).

Most aspects of the social media are studied along five main dimensions, namely, interaction, absorption, enthusiasm, identification and attention. These are discussed in turn below.

2.6.1 Interaction

Interaction is considered as fundamental to customer engagement; on the basis of it individuals share their ideas, feelings, and information related to various topics (Nunkoo, 2016). Social exchange theory stresses the interaction between two or more parties with the aim of achieving benefits. The benefits can be measured by financial or non-financial measures. The interaction between two individuals is likely to continue so long as benefits result and the interaction will end when the benefits end (Su et al., 2018; Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Gensler et al., 2013; De Vries and Carlson, 2014).

2.6.2 Absorption

Absorption refers to a customer's level of attentiveness to and engrossment by a brand or product through a social media platform. This positive trait of the individual will even create an unlikely sense of the time spent on the brand through the social media platform (Scholer and Higgins, 2009; Harrigan et al., 2017).

2.6.3 Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is the strong level of excitement that the individual brings to a product, brand, or emotion. It is based on this enthusiasm that his/her level of excitement and sharing behavior in using the social media increases (So et al., 2014). Enthusiasm is a positive trait that leads to the positive behavior of interaction on social media (Harrigan et al., 2017; Gómez et al., 2019).

2.6.4 Identification

Identification refers to the association that the individual shows with a product or service. According to Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) identification is associated with self-image. This means that people will associate and identify themselves with products, brands, or images that are closely linked to their personal identity (Dessart et al., 2015; Psallidas et al., 2013).

2.6.5 Attention

Attention refers to the individuals' level of focus on actions that are performed either consciously or unconsciously on the social media platform. When an individual's level of attention is strong, it will lead to a stronger level of interaction and engagement (Lin et al., 2008; Harrigan et al., 2017; Carlson et al., 2019).

2.7 Intention to Recommend

The intention to recommend is a behavioral intention that is studied in different contexts. For example, Harrigan et al. (2017) studied behavioral intention loyalty, which focuses on conveying positive information, with the intention to recommend a brand, destination, or experience. The objective is to encourage others

because of an individual's positive memory of sharing experience on the social media. The intention behind recommending here is to encourage someone else to purchase something. In the case of tourism, the intention is to encourage others to decide to visit a destination.

Various factors of the intention to recommend have been studied. Electronic word-of-mouth is one of the common interaction factors that have been studied with regard to the intention to recommend (Hudson et al., 2015). The outcome of intention is also studied based on the loyalty factor, which is referred to as the interaction component (Hollebeek, 2011).

Park (2015) explored the effects of different forms of communication, including print and electronic communication, on the behavioral intentions of tourists. The behavioral intentions included word-of-mouth, intention to revisit, and willingness to pay more and the electronic communication comprised television, film, the Internet, social media, and mobile and print communication such as books, magazines, newspapers, and brochures. It was found that the social media, electronic forms of communication, had the highest effect on the behavioral intentions of tourists while brochures had the lowest. The author stated that "In general, electronic media are preferred among people and have a greater impact in their lives, especially in the hospitality industry" (ibid). The most interesting finding, however, was that the effect of various kinds of communication varies according to the age and gender of the audience. For example, people over 36 were more affected by television than people under 36. People are the most affected by the social media, the Internet and mobile marketing to pay more and this also noticeably influences word of mouth.

The study implied that media induced tourism can play an important role in designing positioning strategies for destination marketing.

Therefore, this research studies intention to recommend, which is interaction between people who have visited destination and others. The interaction, through the use of social media, concerns the quality of the airport, safety and security, destination attributes, and destination image.

2.8 Underpinning Theories

2.8.1 Destination Image Theory

The above dimensions of safety and security, destination attributes and the airport quality simultaneously affect the resulting image of every destination, thereby informing the traveler's final choice. However, the concept of image destination goes beyond these dimensions; it has its own factors, namely cognitive and affective. In the conceptual framework of this thesis, the element of destination image represents a mediator.

The role of the destination image in travelers' decision-making is vital, and it determines the travel behavior of travelers (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Among the numerous definitions of the destination image, many generally understand it as "a compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processing from various sources over time that results in a mental representation of the attributes and benefits sought of a destination" (Kanwel, et al., 2019; Gartner, 1993). Nearly five decades ago, Hunt (1971) defined the concept as "the impressions that individuals hold about a state in which they do not reside" (ibid: p. 167), whereas Liu et al. (2018) recently summarized it as "an individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs),

feelings and overall perception of a particular destination" (ibid: p. 30). It is also generally argued that the destination image is context-based rather than relying on predetermined measures, and, as already implied, several destination image factors can impact on the choice of destination.

Tourism markets and their respective actors and authorities are preoccupied with building a destination image (K. Zhang et al., 2014). Those in charge of the destinations face many challenges if they want to preserve and strengthen their competitive advantage over other destinations. When it comes to the destination image, the perceptions of tourists matter most and if these perceptions become even slightly negative, the outcomes can significantly hamper overall the present and future image of the destination, together with its business and investment potential. Indeed, the destination image plays a crucial role in developing a successful tourism market and boosting its destination marketing (Papadimitriou et al., 2018; Choi and Cai, 2016). According to Liu et al. (2018), the destination image represents an essential variable in the balance of supply and demand. For marketers, the destination image constitutes an indispensable aspect of marketing strategy. In this regard, Iordanova (2015) asserted that the destination image is shaped and reshaped over time, and is formed by experiences and information from multiple sources. Destination marketers should therefore always strive to understand the multiple perceptions about a particular destination and use those perceptions as the basis of their plans and strategies for strengthening, improving, branding and marketing the destination image (Isaac and Eid, 2018). The outcome of destination image formation is "what ends up in people's minds because of their holistic knowledge about the physical characteristics of a product, service, country, based on

associations, expectations, thoughts and experiences they have picked up over the years" (Jenkins, 1999). Branding a destination in an appealing way will in the end impact on the destination's overall competitive advantage in the increasingly competitive conditions of global tourism. Importantly, a strong and positive destination image will positively influence the growth of the tourism sector of the given country and thus the country's economic growth as a whole – especially in those countries where the tourism sector is a revenue-maker.

As noted in the preceding paragraphs, the destination image is a complex concept, and thus it is important to focus more intently on the specific context of a destination. Moreover, the destination image is evaluated in two different ways, cognitive and affective, as noted above; see the discussion on p.39.

Conversely, the affective destination image factor, as it has been seen, takes into account the individual's feeling and emotional attachment to the destination; see the discussion on pp. 39-40, above.

2.8.2 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) was first introduced in the 1920s by Malinowski and Mauss to describe various aspects of anthropology and social psychology (Cook et al., 2013). The theory went beyond explaining the complex relationships between people, their work environment, and the marketplace. Friendships, marriages, romantic relationships, professional associations and business transactions are all valid examples of SET in action. Generally, SET is used by scholars and academics to define people's behaviors at work. According to

Mamman et al. (2012), trust and commitment are key factors that determine social exchange among individuals in the workplace.

The theory focuses on the analysis of cost and benefits that reflect the risks and rewards resulting from social interactions between two or more parties. Mamman et al. (ibid) explained the correlation between trust and commitment. For example, when people trust their employer, they will perform their duties more loyally.

This may apply also to social media users. If the interactions among SM users are built on trust and loyalty, they will be committed and influenced by the recommendations given by their peers. Su et al. (2018) examined the impact of destination image and social responsibility on tourism. They relied on SET to define the overall satisfaction of a community through investigating people's intention to share information and recommendations about tourist destinations. Paraskevaidis and Andriotis (2017) pointed out that a practical application of SET is that a "host community tends to support tourism development when economic, environmental, and sociocultural impacts are perceived as positive" (ibid: p.29). Nunkoo (2016), however, explained that the use of SET in the tourism industry is valid when groups or individuals share and exchange stories and information with one another. In these cases, the interaction between the individuals is the X-factor that governs the implementation of SET. Nunkoo (2016) explained that trust and power are two significant constructs in the information exchanging process of recommending a destination in the tourism industry.

From the literature, six variables were chosen for testing in the present research, based on different roles. First, three independent variables are tested:

quality of the airport (Seetanah et al., 2018), safety and security (Chaulagain et al., 2019), and destination attributes (Eid et al., 2019). Second, two mediating variables are tested, namely, the social media (Harrigan et al., 2017) with their five dimensions and destination image (Chaulagain et al., 2019). Finally, the intention to recommend (Tan et al., 2018) was chosen as a dependent variable. Table 2.1 below lists the hypotheses and Figure 2.1 shows the research model.

Table 2.1: Hypotheses HIA – H10

H1A: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Interaction through the social media.
H2A: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Interaction through the social media.
H3A: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Interaction through the social media.
H1B: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Absorption through the social media.
H2B: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Absorption through the social media.
H3B: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Absorption through the social media.
H1C: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm the through social media.
H2C: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm through the social media.
H3C: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm through the social media.
H1D: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Identification through the social media.
H2D: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Identification through the social media.
H3D: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Identification through the social media.
H1E: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Attention through the social media.
H2E: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Attention through the social media.
H3E: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Attention through the social media.
H1F: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.
H2F: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.

Table 2.2: Hypotheses HIA – H10 (Continued)

H3F: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.
H2: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.
H3: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.
H4: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.
H5: Interaction through the social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.
H6: Absorption through the social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.
H7: Enthusiasm through the social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.
H8: Identification through the social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.
H9: Attention through the social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.
H10: Destination Image has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

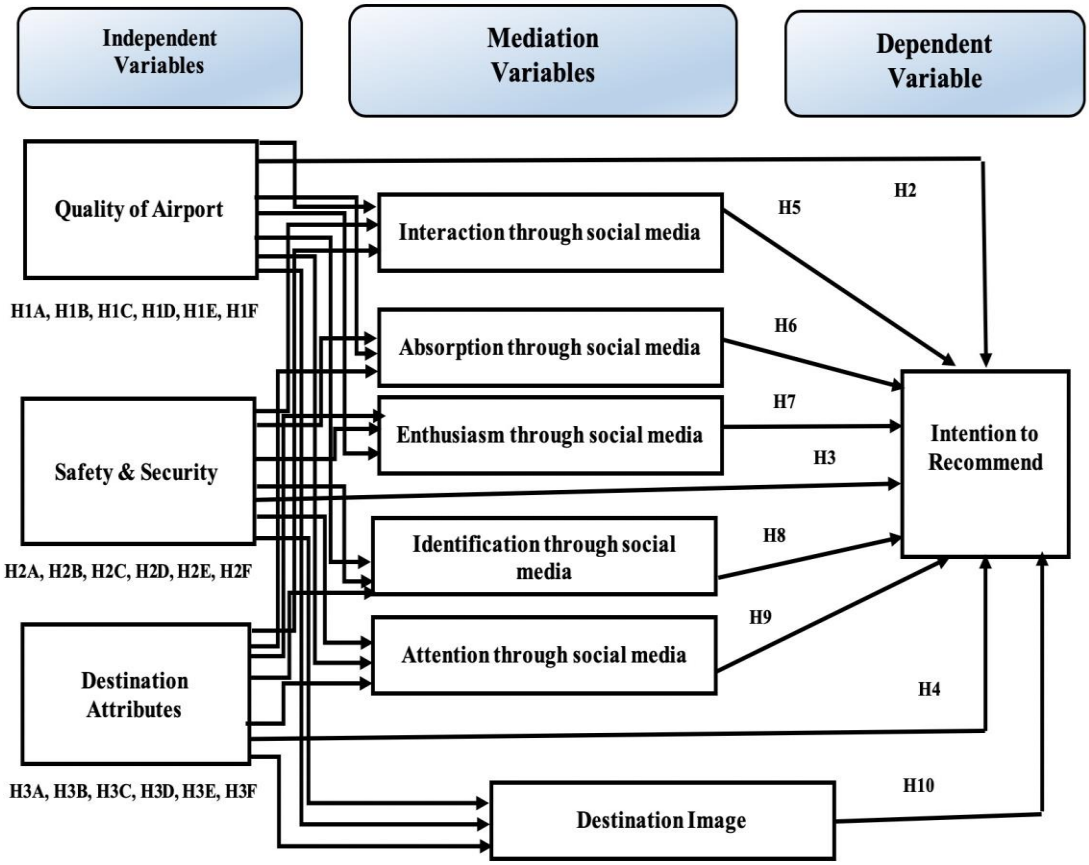

Figure 2.1: Research Model

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to study the use and role of social media in recommending the State of Kuwait as a tourism destination. Chapters 1 and 2 discussed the literature related to the research topic. This chapter focuses on the research design, research methods, sample population, questionnaire, pilot study, and data analysis. The detailed discussion of the analyzed data follows in Chapters 4 and 5.

In research, the scope of the study or the collected data can be analyzed by various methods. The main idea is to use the most proper method for the researched area in order to add value and knowledge. Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) described the research role as attempting to add knowledge through discovering new facts or relationships through a scientific research process. Therefore, every researcher needs to face the challenge of arguing persuasively that some valuable and new knowledge has been introduced. Moreover, Sekaran (1984) finds that discovering solutions and answers through systematic, critical, organized, and scientific methods is considered the aim of research.

In the humanities and social sciences, researchers usually follow qualitative, quantitative, or both methods. Some scholars use multi-method techniques (Brannen, 1992), mixed methodology (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003), or mixed methods (Creswell, 2003). In a broad sense, triangulation is defined as the use of multiple methods, mainly qualitative and quantitative methods, to check the same phenomenon and thus increase the study's credibility (Jick, 1979).

Several studies have covered certain dimensions related to the framework of this study such as that by Chang and Wang (2019), who studied word-of-mouth, destination expectations, and online advertising and Boivin and Tanguay (2019), who studied urban tourism attractiveness. Eid et al. (2019) investigated related variables as well such as destination attributes, destination image and intention to recommend. These studies used a quantitative research method since it was the most convenient for their purposes and is used in this research too.

Both primary and secondary data were used in this thesis. The primary data refer to the data collected from the participants through the surveys, while the secondary data refer to information collected from the literature and previous reports and publications. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to collect the primary data. In the following chapter the researcher discusses the usefulness of adopting the quantitative approach in the study in order to achieve the objectives of the research.

3.2 Research Design

Many research designs/strategies embody different types of research. Among the best known methods are the theoretical and the empirical and linking the two could improve the function of the social sciences by induction or deduction respectively (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996). Finding the link between the theoretical and the empirical will lead to two strategic ways of research. The inductive starts with theory, followed by research. The second, starts with research, culminating in theory. Those can be described in different terms as well, such as grand and grounded respectively, as mentioned by May (1997) and Nachmias and Nachmias (1996).

Reynolds (1971) outlined five stages in deductive research (research-then-theory): (1) modelling a development to be tested, (2) building and suggesting a number of hypotheses that may describe the relations between the constructs (3) designing the research tool to examine the framework (4) examining the framework against the gathered data, and (5) discussing and describing the model and the related theories. He goes on to say of inductive research that this strategy can be divided into four phases: investigating a phenomenon, identifying the attributes in a variety of conditions, looking for patterns when analyzing the data, and finally constructing or building up a theory if a systematic pattern has appeared. This inductive approach is generally used for developing theories, moving from specific observations to a theory or general explanation.

This dissertation began with a literature review where existing theories were used in designing the research framework to be tested against empirical data. This deductive approach has been used by researchers who rely on existing theory and studies to develop a conceptual framework. By means of this a researcher can test the hypotheses and answer the research questions (Saunders et al., 2009).

Moreover, the research strategies are also classified as explanatory, exploratory or descriptive. As mentioned earlier, the researcher followed a deductive approach which is mainly associated with the explanatory research strategy. The deductive approach allowed the researcher to use the model framework drawn from the literature to move on to the related observations about the variables in order to explain their relationships. The deductive approach fitted well with the exploratory research design applied to the study, which focused on answering the research questions according to the analysis of the data. Explanatory studies are commonly

identified with causal studies (Yin, 2009); they require analysis of the data using statistical techniques.

Quantitative or qualitative methods are used in social science research. Researchers may use these individually or together (called mixed methodology) (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). The data collected for the study can be either qualitative or quantitative based on its type. If the data came from describing situations or phenomenon in words it is called qualitative, but if they came as numbers measuring certain sets of observations the type is quantitative (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Blaxter et al., 1996; and Remenyi et al., 1998). According to Downey and Ireland (1979), it is important to understand the application of these methods since the method will affect the nature and the quality of the results, and the overall success of the research. It is recommended that scholars be aware of and well prepared in using both methods to address and study various aspects of the researched problem (Remenyi et al., 1998).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of this research is to collect data from individuals who use the social media to publish and share their travel and tourism experiences and the study adopts a quantitative method in its field work. The quantitative method and survey technique have been used by many researchers for collecting data in the context of the social media. For example, Chu and Choi (2011) collected data from 663 university students to explore the use of electronic word-of-mouth in social networking sites in China. Filieri et al. (2015) used a quantitative survey technique to collect data from a sample population that would shed light on the role of trust among travelers using TripAdvisor. Data were collected from 401 respondents. The influence of the social media in creating

expectations was quantitatively studied by Narangajavana et al. (2017) using questionnaires. They collected data from 375 respondents. Tien et al. (2018) examined the influence of customer-to-customer word-of-mouth on purchase intention in social networking sites. They gathered 77 responses after careful elimination of non-usable responses. The research focus of Chang and Wang (2019) was on understanding the effects of online advertising and electronic word-of-mouth on different levels of destination expectation. The data was collected through a quantitative survey of 354 responses. These are a few examples of studies in the field that employed the quantitative method in collecting data from a large population through self-administered survey questionnaires.

3.3 Sample

The researcher targeted a random sample of every fifth tourist visiting Kuwait in the last two years who had used SM to share tourism information. The researcher applied random sampling in the main visitor sites and attractions in Kuwait such as the Kuwait International Airport and Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre by choosing every fifth visitor and also sending the questionnaire link to every fifth contact from the contact lists. In October and November 2019, a total of 347 questionnaires were collected but 10 of them were eliminated as incomplete. Looking at the participants' profiles, the researcher found a good balance and could classify them by age, gender, nationality and more. Participants from 30 different countries responded to the study. Syrian respondents formed the largest group (5.5%), followed by participants from the UAE (5.2%).

The respondents represented several age groups, showing good variety and balance which helped to widen the range of perspectives (see Table 5.11 in Chapter

5). The sample population can be described from the screening questions in the next section.

3.4 Questionnaire

McDaniel and Gates (2002) described the questionnaire as a set of designed questions that help to achieve the research objectives when their answers have been analyzed. Questionnaires are used to gather data from a representative sample of the population in order to generalize findings about this population. According to Remenyi et al. (1998), a generalization is useful for explaining or testing hypotheses and can be considered a main use for quantitative data in managerial research.

According to Kerlinger (1986), the questionnaire survey lends itself to either exploratory or explanatory research. Exploratory research is used when there is less awareness about the variables or the topic is not well-known, while explanatory research tries to discover the causal relationships between the study's constructs.

There are several advantages in using the questionnaire as a tool, such as its cheapness, ability to reach a large population in a short time, and therefore its ability to generalize findings, and to support various descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (McClintock et al., 1979; Hammersley, 1987). However, their general disadvantage is that the fixed format of the questions does not allow much flexibility in responding to the items on the questionnaire. (Sarantakos, 2013).

The online survey, as a particular application of the questionnaire method, has several advantages:

1. It is cost-effective: Cobanoglu et al. (2001) and Kaplowitz et al. (2004) suggested that using the Internet can make the costs of distributing surveys lower

than post mail would. Although the planning phase could be unexpectedly challenging, running an Internet-based survey is well worth doing (Alessi and Martin, 2010). Moreover, surveymonkey.com, which was used in the present study, has monthly and annual charges that begin from US$ 35 (monthly subscription) and US$ 25 (annual subscription). The data can be downloaded in Excel format. Surveymonkey.com can also be downloaded in SPSS format, but this may bring unnecessary extra costs.

2. It saves time: According to Llieva et al. (2002) it is easy to distribute surveys and get responses from the participants. Moreover, it allows researchers to collect data while working on other tasks. The website address can be emailed or distributed, particularly useful for the present study since the sample population was visitors to Kuwait. Those who were in Kuwait when the data were collected were contacted in person and those who had visited Kuwait in the past 24 months were given the questionnaire link by email, phone call, or a social media application such as WhatsApp. Tablets and smartphones were offered to the visitors while they took part in the survey. SurveyMonkey has the advantage of enabling researchers to reach larger numbers of their targeted candidates (McCurrey, 2019). It can even be helpful in reaching them sooner (Varela et al., 2017).

3. It has good controls: A hard copy questionnaire was also provided to respondents and could be used for recording the data (if the respondent preferred it or if many respondents were answering simultaneously). The use of online surveys is preferred since it gives better control of its content (Evans and Mathur, 2005). For example, the questions can be marked as mandatory, so that the respondents are notified if they omit one. Moreover, Bentley et al. (2017) stated that SurveyMonkey

as a platform can be effective in delivering sampling results similar to traditional university or commercial panel platforms.

4. It is convenient: Online surveys make it easy for respondents to complete the survey.

5. It is flexible: The researcher's interaction with visitors is limited to identifying them, gaining their agreement to participating in the survey, and handing them tablet devices on which to respond. If the respondents are in doubt, then online surveys can provide instructions with help options.

6. It provides supplementary data: Online surveys provide information on how many responses have been received at any given point. It is also easy to download the data in different formats (Tenforde et al., 2010). Online survey websites such as surveymonkey.com also provide various data analyses, and overview the responses received, indicating who participated in the survey in terms of the demographics.

7. It is anonymous: In addition to all the above, anonymity may be one of the most important factors in using an online survey (Evans and Mathur, 2005). Once the tablet device is handed back, there is no evidence of whether the respondent has provided all the answers or what the response was. Personal details that might disclose the identity of the participant are not collected. Therefore, unlike hard copies, where the responses and participants can be identified, the online survey provides stronger anonymity that can build enough confidence in the participants to provide honest responses and increase their willingness to participate in the study.

The researcher collected data in the months of October and November 2019 using a self-administered questionnaire which had been used by Eid et al. (2019) and

Saunders et al. (2007) when surveying international tourists and visitors at different locations in the UAE.

The questionnaire had three sections. The first section was the cover letter/consent to participate which provided information about the purpose of the study, the questionnaire design, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. the generalizability of the findings and the information provided after the study's completion. In addition, it assured the participants that no physical, emotional, legal, spiritual or social risk would be entailed by participation

The second section of the questionnaire included precautions for screening such as:

(1) The questionnaire should be filled in by Kuwait visitors who have visited Kuwait in the last two years (If yes, please proceed with the next question. If no, you should not participate in this survey).
(2) Frequency of travelling per year (options will be provided).
(3) Using social media to share travel experiences (If yes, please proceed with the next question. If no, you should not participate in this survey).

Only tourists visiting Kuwait were required to participate in the survey. Further, only those who agreed that they had used the social media to share their travel experience would be eligible to participate in the study. The other information in this section related to demographics, such as gender, nationality, age, education qualifications, preferred social media platform, duration of use of social media per day, and total length of time since first using the social media. This section was designed with closed-ended questions using multiple options in response.

The third section related to study variables in which a 5-point Likert scale was used. The points on the scale were: (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) neither agree nor disagree (neutral); (4) agree; and, (5) strongly agree.

3.5 Pilot Study

The design of the questionnaire was derived from multiple sources in the literature (Chaulagain et al., 2019; Eid et al., 2019; Seetanah et al., 2018; Harrigan et al., 2017; Filieri et al., 2015; So et al., 2014; Eid et al., 2019) and was reviewed by three expert professors in the fields of mass communication and tourism. To ensure that the questionnaire would be understood by the sample population, the researcher distributed it to a small group. A pilot study is a small- scale study in which some participants voluntarily fill in a questionnaire. This one was completed by 30 respondents in October 2019. After the pilot study, the questionnaire was reviewed and analyzed to ensure reliability and validity and to test for:

(1) Clarity of the covering letter and content.

(2) Understandability and the need of demographics.

(3) Understandability of the items in the studied variable.

(4) The use of a 5-point Likert scale.

(5) The overall format (spacing, font type and size, layout).

(6) Number of items per variable.

(7) Overall length of the questionnaire.

(8) Any other comments to improve the questionnaire.

The feedback received from the pilot study sample was useful, and some necessary changes were made to the questionnaire, such as adding that the participants had the right not to proceed if they had not visited Kuwait in the last two years and

improving the clarity of the cover page. The comments helped to shape the final version of the questionnaire. This was designed to use an online survey platform, SurveyMonkey.com, because of its advantages in comparison to other methods.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data collected by quantitative methods are commonly analyzed using statistical software. One of the common statistical software programs is Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Some examples are found in the work of Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), who studied the effect of electronic word-of-mouth on brand image and purchase intention in the automobile industry in Iran. Harrigan et al. (2017) used SPSS to analyze the data collected on customer engagement with tourism brands via social media. Liu et al. (2018) studied the experience of sharing tourism information on social media by analyzing the quantitative data using SPSS. Further analyses were made by using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) in analyzing the data extensively in detail, applying descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The following are brief details of the types of data analysis that were employed in this research.

1. Validity: The study used Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to guarantee the statistical validity of the data. To use EFA successfully the researcher needed to meet two main requirements; (1) interval scales had to be used for measuring the constructs – this study used a 5-point Likert scale, which is the one mostly used in the social sciences literature as an interval (see for example Deeg and Van Zonneveld, 1989; García-Cabrera et al., 2018); and (2) the sample had to contain more than 100 participants (Hair et al., 2014). In addition, the validity was tested by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

A rule of thumb was used to set the cutoff factor loading value for determining which items to retain. This research maintained the cutoff value at 0.5. This meant that items with a value below 0.5 were excluded from the variable.

2. Reliability: The statistical reliability was tested by Cronbach's Alpha, based on a scale of 0 to 1. However, values that are below 0.5 are not considered reliable. Values that are between 0.5 and 0.6 are questionable. Values above 0.7 are acceptable. Values that are above 0.8 are considered strong (Nunnally, 1978). According to Hair et al. (2014), validity and reliability apply to phenomena which are tested and examined more often.
3. Descriptive: The SPSS statistical tests provided detailed descriptions of the sample gender, nationality, occupation, educational background, purpose of the visits and other data, as detailed in Chapter 4. The descriptive analysis summarizes the hundreds of responses that were received so as to appreciate the reactions within the sample as a whole. The responses revealed the background of the participants, the overall profile of the sample, the frequency analysis and the distribution of the respondents based on several characteristics, as discussed in detail in the next chapter (Chapter 4).
4. Structural Equation Modeling: Structural Equation Modeling was applied to test the goodness of fit of the model and the direct and indirect relationships in every hypothesis (Pedhazur, 1982).
5. Mediation analysis: Mediation Analysis was applied to test the mediation role of the destination image and social media and their effect on the Intention to recommend. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis was applied as well.

Chapter 4: Purification of Measures and Descriptive Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the processes of data screening and preparation. The aim was to guarantee the quality of the responses and their consequent use in the statistical tests. First, the data screening involved testing for accuracy, missing data analysis, the existence of outliers, and an examination of the distribution assumptions and checking of common method bias to guarantee that the data was precise, thorough and appropriate for a multivariate statistical analysis. Second, the descriptive tests of the data reflected some qualitative insights about the collected data in terms of their value and contribution to the objectives of the study. Third, the screening emphasized the filtration and calculation processes of the measuring tools. In this process, Cronbach alpha was used to assess the reliability of the scale measurement. Finally, the validity of the constructs was assessed and checked by factor analysis. Outputs of the statistical analysis were used for further analysis, as reported in the next chapter (Chapter 5) for testing the model and the hypotheses.

It should particularly be noted that this chapter and the next (Chapters 4 and 5) present the statistical outputs of the analysis. Chapter 6 explains and interprets the implications of the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 in the context of the literature discussed in Chapter 2. In other words, Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to the presentation and analysis of the fieldwork data, without presenting any general conclusions or comparing the statistical analysis results to those of other studies. The conclusion and recommendations of these statistical outputs are explained in Chapter 6.

4.2 Data Screening

The first step in the data analysis was to clean the data that had been collected. This is a very important step to take before initiating the analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The next step in preparing the fieldwork data for the purposes of analysis was the process of data editing, coding and entry in SPSS. The data were checked for any mistakes and oversights to guarantee that it had achieved the appropriate quality standards. Second, the research constructs were coded into a format appropriate for statistical analysis. Each construct was allocated a unique label. This step helped to set up the computer software for the analysis. Then the SPSS software was used to enter the data automatically as it was exported from the Excel sheet prepared by the online survey platform, SurveyMonkey.

4.2.1 Data

Enders (2010) stresses that missing values in the data sets used in the social, behavioral and medical sciences are quite common, but the quality of statistical analyses can be greatly affected if a large quantity of data are missing. This can bias the outputs of reviews and make them unreliable (Hair et al., 2014; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Furthermore, some statistical tests cannot be undertaken when values are missing. However, many alternative actions are available to compensate for the missing data. First, the data may not need to be changed; if the missing values are small and non-random, the data can be left as they are. Second, the missing values may be replaced. Thirdly, variables with missing values may be deleted. The latter option is recommended if the sample size is large and/or when respondents have not answered all the questions in the questionnaire. The deletion of variables with missing data is also suggested if these variables are not crucial to the research

(Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

Taking the above into consideration, an in-depth analysis of the missing data was carried out. The results reported no cases of missing data, because completed surveys were the only ones to be included, since these provided enough replies. In the present study, 347 collected responses were examined and cleaned. There were 6 questionnaires with many incomplete scale answers, while 4 questionnaires had complete scale answers but incomplete demographic replies. Thus 10 questionnaires were eliminated from the study leaving the data set with 337 respondents, which supplied material for the following analyses.

4.2.2 Outliers

Outliners are defined as odd values compared to the rest of the research data. Outliers badly affect data normality and because normality is considered a crucial assumption of several statistical tests, outliers should be noticed and fixed (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (ibid), outliers are questionnaire replies that have strangely high or low readings that make them distinctly different from other replies for the same construct (univariate outliers). They could also be a unique mixture of several replies that stand out from other replies across multiple variables, as in the case of multivariate analysis (multivariate outliers). Outliers can cause the results of a statistical analysis to be misleading by increasing error variance, reducing the power of statistical tests and biasing estimates of essential interest (Osborne and Overbay, 2004).

There are two kinds of outlier, "univariate" and "multivariate". Univariate outliers reflect responses with an odd value in one construct, while multivariate

outliers are responses with strange mixtures of scores on two or more constructs (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Once the outliers are found, there are many possible techniques for treating them. One solution is deletion. If there are few outliers, those values may simply be deleted. Furthermore, the construct can be eliminated if the question is not well constructed or many outliers are found in the same variable. As well as deletion, the value may be changed to the next highest/lowest non-outlier number. Transformation of the entire variable is also available as another way of dealing with outliers (ibid).

To check for the presence of univariate outliers in the data set, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk's tests of normality in statistical assessment were used to examine the normality of the replies, but because values with the Shapiro-Wilk test may be adopted only when the data number less than 50, further attention was paid to the values of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (see Table 4.1) showed that data significantly differed from the normal distribution (the low significance value of the test was below 0.05).

Table 4.1: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Quality of Airport	0.096	337	0.000	0.973	337	0.000
Safety and Security	0.185	337	0.000	0.882	337	0.000
Destination Attributes	0.127	337	0.000	0.949	337	0.000
Destination Image	0.123	337	0.000	0.962	337	0.000
SM Interaction	0.186	337	0.000	0.935	337	0.000
SM Absorption	0.175	337	0.000	0.939	337	0.000
SM Enthusiasm	0.153	337	0.000	0.926	337	0.000
SM Identification	0.136	337	0.000	0.957	337	0.000
SM Attention	0.180	337	0.000	0.927	337	0.000
Intention to Recommend	0.151	337	0.000	0.945	337	0.000

However, the values of the skewness (kurtosis) for all were in the range of +1.5 to -1.5 (see Table 4.3). Skewness is an assessment of consistency, or, more accurately, the lack of it, where the distribution of a data set is called symmetric if it appears the same to the left and right of the center point (Standards et al., 2001). Since data sets with high kurtosis tend to have heavy tails, or outliers, whereas data sets with low kurtosis tend to have light tails, or a lack of outliers (Standards et al., 2001) kurtosis can, therefore, be used to assess whether the acquired data are heavy-tailed or light-tailed in relation to a normal distribution. Hair et al. (2014) stated that values of skewness between -1.5 and +1.5 are considered quasi-normal. Furthermore, although the previous test gives results that are significantly different from the normal distribution, it has been reported that for large samples normality tests may yield significant results even in cases of a slight deviation from normality (Field, 2013).

Table 4.2: Partial Display of Multivariate Outliers Test Results (Mahalanobis Distance Method)

Observation number	Mahalanobis d-squared	p
243	61.430	0.000
40	58.341	0.000
178	38.518	0.000
34	31.411	0.001
131	30.524	0.001
26	28.985	0.001
20	28.723	0.001
229	27.531	0.002
7	27.381	0.002
67	26.569	0.003
312	26.163	0.004
146	25.641	0.004
21	25.203	0.005
202	24.646	0.006
106	24.551	0.006
82	24.435	0.007
96	23.539	0.009
3	23.010	0.011
36	22.723	0.012
182	22.681	0.012

The Mahalanobis Distance was compared with the Chi-square distribution with degrees of freedom equal to the number of independent variables at a significance level of $p < 0.001$. In total 3 cases were found to exhibit the presence of multivariate outliers (see Table 4.1). All 3 cases were eliminated to avoid any bias in the subsequent statistical analysis.

To examine the existence of multivariate outliers, the test of Mahalanobis distance was used with AMOS to locate any multivariate outliers in the data. Mahalanobis' distance is a metric for estimating how far each case is from the center of all the variables' distributions (i.e. the centroid in multivariate space) (Mahalanobis, 1927a). The Mahalanobis (1927b) distance test has identified 3 cases that have an outlier (see Table 4.2).

4.2.3 Normality

The normality assumption refers to the belief that the data distribution for each variable will be bell-shaped. A skewness-kurtosis approach was adopted to test the univariate normality for each variable (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2005). Using SPSS 26.0, the statistical values of skewness and kurtosis were checked and found to be so in their respective levels. As reported in Table 4.3, all the values given support the normality of univariate distribution because all the values of skewness were recognized to be below their cut-off point of 3; in addition all the values of kurtosis were found to be not more than 8 (Kline, 2005; West et al., 1995).

Table 4.3: Partial Display of Normality Test Results for all Items

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
A1	337	3.4748	0.96059	-0.688	0.133	0.348	0.265
A2	337	3.3234	1.03185	-0.467	0.133	-0.165	0.265
A3	337	3.7181	0.87325	-0.768	0.133	0.923	0.265
A4	337	3.6202	0.85109	-0.584	0.133	0.505	0.265
A5	337	3.5905	0.93141	-0.633	0.133	0.232	0.265
A6	337	3.4748	0.77159	-0.072	0.133	0.642	0.265
B1	337	4.1306	0.92301	-1.245	0.133	1.137	0.265
B2	337	4.2493	0.75012	-0.997	0.133	1.589	0.265
B3	337	4.3086	0.70691	-0.876	0.133	0.766	0.265
B4	337	4.1365	0.90258	-1.274	0.133	1.014	0.265
B5	337	4.2819	0.74446	-0.856	0.133	0.437	0.265
C1	337	3.2878	0.98664	-0.192	0.133	-0.581	0.265
C2	337	3.9347	0.95207	-0.889	0.133	0.525	0.265
C3	337	3.4421	0.96535	-0.364	0.133	-0.137	0.265
C4	337	3.6142	0.94782	-0.722	0.133	0.300	0.265
D1	337	3.2018	0.94849	-0.455	0.133	-0.203	0.265
D2	337	3.4866	0.93253	-0.493	0.133	-0.024	0.265
D3	337	3.6647	0.94980	-0.627	0.133	0.233	0.265
D4	337	3.1899	1.02331	-0.321	0.133	-0.268	0.265
D5	337	3.4303	0.92036	-0.704	0.133	0.362	0.265
G1	337	3.4718	0.87284	-0.264	0.133	-0.087	0.265
G2	337	3.6024	0.79192	-0.503	0.133	0.539	0.265
G3	337	3.6261	0.82896	-0.533	0.133	0.657	0.265
H1	337	3.3442	0.86958	-0.237	0.133	0.218	0.265
H2	337	3.2166	0.93730	-0.357	0.133	0.177	0.265
H3	337	3.5104	0.91322	-0.503	0.133	0.372	0.265
I1	337	3.5757	0.90027	-0.364	0.133	0.227	0.265
I2	337	3.5757	0.85273	-0.339	0.133	0.451	0.265
I3	337	3.6113	0.88989	-0.454	0.133	0.383	0.265
Valid N (listwise)	337						

4.2.4 Common Method Bias

The common method bias assesses the extent to which the observed variance in endogenous constructs is not only due to the relationship between the model variables, but also a result of the variance created by the method of measurement.

Such bias may result from respondents' desire to make their replies give a socially desirable image of themselves, or from a bias due to the simultaneous collection of data on both the independent and dependent variables or the vagueness in the questionnaire (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Non-biased response arises from the fact that some respondents in the target population who have refused to participate in the survey may have very different opinions, assessments or attitudes from those who took part (Malhotra et al., 2006; Rogelberg and Stanton, 2007).

4.2.4.1 Harman's Single Factor

To check for potential common method variance, Herman's Single-Factor Test was carried out. Harman's Single factor test covers all the items from all the variables with a factor analysis in order to assess whether most of the variance can be accounted for by one general factor (Podskoff et al.,2003). The program extracts a single factor to assess whether one factor could have accounted for than 50% of the variance. The results shown in Table 4.4 reflect that a single factor was able to account for only 37.323% of the variance, which is far less than the accepted threshold of 50% (Malhorta et al., 2006). This supports the view that the questionnaire replies are free from significant common method bias and that there is no problem in proceeding with the model analysis.

Table 4.4: Results of Herman's Single-Factor Test for Common Method Bias

Total Variance Explained						
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	15.675	37.323	37.323	15.675	37.323	37.323
2	3.248	7.732	45.055			
3	2.523	6.008	51.063			
4	2.493	5.935	56.997			
5	2.172	5.170	62.168			
6	1.527	3.637	65.805			
7	1.427	3.398	69.203			
8	1.095	2.607	71.809			
9	1.079	2.568	74.378			
10	1.021	2.431	76.808			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis

This part presents background information about the participants. The objective was to present a brief account of the profile of the research sample. Frequency analysis was used to distribute the respondents according to the following characteristics:

- Number of Visits to Kuwait
- Purpose of Visit
- Accompany During the Visit
- Type of Accommodation
- Gender
- Marital Status
- Education
- Occupation
- Age of Respondent
- Frequency of sharing tourism-related information on social media
- Frequency of receiving tourism-related information through social media sites
- Frequency of browsing tourism-related advertisements on social media sites to look for travel information
- Nationality

4.3.1 Number of Visits to Kuwait

The first descriptive analysis begins with the number of visits the respondent had made to Kuwait. Table 4.5 shows that 66.8% (225 participants) of the respondents were visiting Kuwait for the first time; however, 112 respondents (33.2%) had visited Kuwait before.

Table 4.5: Visiting Kuwait for the First Time

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	No	112	33.2	33.2	33.2
	Yes	225	66.8	66.8	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.2 Purpose of Visit

The second descriptive analysis was about the purpose of the visit to Kuwait. Table 4.6 shows that 34.7% of the respondents (117) had come to Kuwait to visit relatives/friends. 105 respondents (31.2%) were visiting Kuwait for the purpose of leisure tourism. Finally, 337 participants (34.1%) were visiting Kuwait for business purposes or to attend a convention.

Table 4.6: Purpose of Visit

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	Visiting relatives / friends	117	34.7	34.7	34.7
	Leisure tourism	105	31.2	31.2	65.9
	Business and conventions	115	34.1	34.1	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.3 Accompany During the Visit

Regarding to how respondents are traveling during their trips to Kuwait, Table 4.7 shows that 32.3% (109 participants) of the respondents were visiting it with their family, whereas 101 respondents (30.0%) had come alone. Only five participants (1.5%) were visiting Kuwait in an organized group. Finally, 122 participants (36.2%) were visiting Kuwait with friends (48 respondents), with their employer (40 respondents) or with colleagues (34 respondents).

Table 4.7: Accompany During the Visit

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	As a family	109	32.3	32.3	32.3
	With friends	48	14.2	14.2	46.6
	With employer	40	11.9	11.9	58.5
	Alone	101	30.0	30.0	88.4
	In an organized group	5	1.5	1.5	89.9
	With colleagues	34	10.1	10.1	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.4 Type of Accommodation

Regarding the type of accommodation for the respondents' trip to Kuwait, Table 4.8 shows that more than half of the participants stayed at a hotel/motel (184 respondents). 28.8% (97 participants) of the respondents stayed in a rented apartment. 50 respondents (14.8%) stayed with friends/relatives. Only six participants (1.8%) were on a one-day trip.

Table 4.8: Type of Accommodation

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	Hotel/motel	184	54.6	54.6	54.6
	Rented apartment	97	28.8	28.8	83.4
	Staying with friends / relatives	50	14.8	14.8	98.2
	One-day trip	6	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.5 Gender

In terms of the gender of respondents, Table 4.9 shows that more than half of the respondents (57.3%) were males and 42.7% were females. This indicates that there was almost a balance between the males and females in the sample.

Table 4.9: Gender of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	Male	193	57.3	57.3	57.3
	Female	144	42.7	42.7	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.6 Marital Status

Regarding the marital status of the respondents, more than half of them were married (55.2%). 136 of the respondents were single (40.4%). 4.2% of the respondents were divorced (14 respondents). Finally, only one respondent was a widow (0.3 %). Table 4.10 summarizes the distribution of sample by marital status.

Table 4.10: Marital Status

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	Single	136	40.4	40.4	40.4
	Married	186	55.2	55.2	95.5
	Divorced	14	4.2	4.2	99.7
	Widowed	1	0.3	0.3	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.7 Age

In terms of age, only 26 respondents were between 18 and 24 years old [7.7%], 27.9% of them were between 25 and 31 years old, 32.6% of the respondents were 32-37 years old, and 107 respondents [approximately 32%] were 38 years old or older. Table 4.11 summarizes the distribution of sample by age.

Table 4.11: Age of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	18-24 years	26	7.7	7.7	7.7
	25-31 years	94	27.9	27.9	35.6
	32-37 years	110	32.6	32.6	68.2
	38 years and above	107	31.8	31.8	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.8 Education

Table 4.12 shows that nearly half of the participants (44.8%) had earned a bachelor's degree. 98 participants (29.1%) had received Master's/PhD degrees. Approximately 9% of the survey participants (29 participants) had finished high school or not, and 59 participants had received an education diploma (17.5%).

Table 4.12: Respondents by Qualifications

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	High school or below	29	8.6	8.6	8.6
	Diploma	59	17.5	17.5	26.1
	Bachelor's degree	151	44.8	44.8	70.9
	Master/PhD Degree	98	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.9 Respondents by Occupation

In terms of occupation, Table 4.13 shows that nearly half of the participants were privately employed (43.3%). 84 of the respondents (24.9%) worked in the public sector. 55 respondents (16.3%) were self-employed and 17 respondents (5%) were unemployed. 16 respondents (4.7%) were students. Similarly, 16 respondents (4.7%) were homemakers. Finally, only 3 respondents (0.9%) were retirees.

Table 4.13: Respondents by Occupation

	Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Unemployed	17	5.0	5.0	5.0
Self-employed	55	16.3	16.3	21.3
Privately Employed	146	43.3	43.3	64.7
Work in Public Post	84	24.9	24.9	89.6
Student	16	4.7	4.7	94.4
Housewife	16	4.7	4.7	99.1
Retiree	3	0.9	0.9	100.0
Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.10 Frequency of Sharing Tourism-Related Information on Social Media

With respect to sharing tourism-related information on the social media, Table 4.14 shows that most of the respondents (67.1%) shared tourism-related information on the social media 1-3 times every month. 57 respondents (16.9%) shared tourism-related information on the social media 4-6 times every month. Finally, 54 respondents (16%) shared tourism-related information on the social media more than 6 times every month.

Table 4.14: Frequency of Sharing Tourism-Related Information on the Social Media (Per Month)

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	1-3 times	226	67.1	67.1	67.1
	4-6 times	57	16.9	16.9	84.0
	More than 6 times	54	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.11 Frequency of Receiving Tourism-Related Information through Social Media Sites

With respect to receiving tourism-related information through social media sites, Table 4.15 shows that the nearly half of the respondents (51.3%) received tourism-related information through social media sites 1-3 times every month. 87 respondents (25.8%) received tourism-related information through social media sites 4-6 times every month. Finally, 77 respondents (22.8%) received tourism-related information through social media sites more than 6 times every month.

Table 4.15: Frequency of Receiving Tourism-Related Information through Social Media Sites (Per Month)

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-3 times	173	51.3	51.3	51.3
	4-6 times	87	25.8	25.8	77.2
	More than 6 times	77	22.8	22.8	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.12 Frequency of Browsing Tourism-Related Advertisements on Social Media

With respect to the frequency of browsing tourism-related advertisements on social media sites to look for travel information, (Table 4.16 shows that the more than half of the respondents (60.2%) browsed tourism-related advertisements on

social media sites to look for travel information 1-3 times every month. 72 respondents (21.4%) did the same 4-6 times every month. Finally, 62 respondents (18.4%) did it more than six times every month.

Table 4.16: Frequency of Browsing Tourism-Related Advertisements on Social Media (Per Month)

		Frequency	Percent %	Valid Percent %	Cumulative Percent %
Valid	1-3 times	203	60.2	60.2	60.2
	4-6 times	72	21.4	21.4	81.6
	More than 6 times	62	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	337	100.0	100.0	

4.3.13 Respondents by Nationality

Finally, in terms of nationality, this study had respondents from 30 different countries, namely, Albania (0.7%), Bangladesh (3%), Egypt (6.1%), France (2%), India (9.4%), Indonesia (6.1%), Iran (2.5%), Iraq (3.2%), Ireland (1.5%), Jordan (3.1%), KSA (8.6%), Lebanon (2.1%), Libya (1.3%), Malaysia (2.2%), Morocco (2.1%), Oman (2.6%), Pakistan (4.3%), Palestine (3.6%), Qatar (2.1%), Singapore (1.6%), Spain (1.5%), Sudan (3.1%), Syria (5.5%), Tunisia (2.5%), Turkey (3.1%), UAE (5.2%), UK (3.7%), Ukraine (1.1%), USA (2.8%) and Yemen (3.4%).

4.4 Reliability Assessment

After the data entry and recording, all the research variables were cleaned by assessing their reliability and validity. According to the literature, it is very important to assess the reliability and validity of the research variables. First, a reliable and valid variable enhances the methodological rigor of the study. Second, it allows co-operative study to be done and gives support for the triangulation of outcomes.

Third, it gives a more expressive explanation of the phenomena that are being examined (Hair et al., 2014).

Item-to-total correlation was used in this research to assess reliability. The objective was to eliminate items if they had low correlation unless they reflected an additional domain of interest. This technique is considered the most common procedure used by researchers for assuring the reliability of a multi-item scale (May, 1997). The aim of item-to-total correlation assessment is to assess the relationship of a specific item to the rest of the items in the same construct. The technique helps to guarantee that the items building up the construct share a common core (ibid). In this filtration process, every item to be kept for additional analysis should score an item-to-total correlation of 0.30 or more and would then be considered highly reliable (Cooper and Emory, 1995).

Furthermore, the assessment of reliability was also considered in terms of the average correlation between items in a construct, which is a case of "internal consistency" (Nunnally, 1978). The basic equation for calculating reliability on the basis of this internal consistency is called the coefficient alpha (Cronbach's alpha). This approach has proved to be a good reflection of reliability in most research situations. Nunnally (1978) suggests that a reliability of 0.60 will be sufficient.

The following part presents the outputs of the reliability assessments which were conducted for all the measuring variables in the survey, namely: Quality of Airport (QA), Safety and security (SandS), Destination Attributes (DA), Destination Image (DI), Interaction through social media, Absorption through social media, Enthusiasm through social media, Identification through social media, Attention through social media and Intention to recommend through social media. Calculating

the item-to-total correlation and testing with coefficient alpha makes up the process of analyzing reliability. Item-to-total correlation and the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient are considered to be very common in the field of social science studies (Price and Muller, 1986).

All the items were found to have a high item-to-total correlation, above the acceptable level of 0.30. As shown in the last column of Table 4.17, below, the reliability coefficients ranged from 0.842 to 0.955 significantly higher than the acceptable level of 0.60 (Nunnally, 1978). These outputs confirm that reliable constructs were used. This research calculates the reliability for every construct. Table 4.17 shows the reliability coefficient and item-total correlations for all the study variables.

Table 4.17: Reliability Assessment for the Research Constructs

Item Code	Item	Item-total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
	Quality of Airport		0.851
A.1	The waiting room at the airport was clean	0.691	
A.2	The baggage claim facilities and delivery are efficient	0.670	
A.3	There were adequate baggage trolleys	0.490	
A.4	There were multiple check-in facility counters	0.685	
A.5	The customs and immigration facilities were efficient	0.653	
A.6	The airport has facilities for disabled people	0.625	
	Safety and security		0.917
B.1	My family will not worry about my safety when I stay in Kuwait	0.749	
B.2	People who are travelling with me will be safe	0.803	
B.3	Kuwait is a safe place to visit	0.817	
B.4	Personal security is not a problem in Kuwait	0.777	
B.5	Kuwait is a peaceful country	0.780	
	Destination Attributes		0.842
C.1	Kuwait has many touristic sites	0.722	
C.2	Kuwait has appealing local food	0.646	
C.3	Kuwait offers good value for my holiday	0.751	
C.4	Kuwait is an economically developed country	0.594	
	Destination Image		0.887
E.1	Kuwait has beautiful scenery/natural attractions	0.708	
E.2	Kuwait has interesting cultural/historical attractions	0.782	
E.3	Kuwait has interesting and friendly people	0.685	
E.4	Kuwait has an unpolluted/unspoiled environment	0.667	
E.5	Kuwait's attractions are pleasant	0.784	

Table 4.18: Reliability Assessment for the Research constructs (Continued)

Item Code	Item	Item-total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
	Interaction through social media		0.913
F.1	In general, I like to get involved in discussion about Kuwait	0.788	
F.2	I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded people who discuss Kuwait	0.863	
F.3	In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people about Kuwait	0.819	
	Absorption through social media		0.892
G.1	Time flies when I am interacting with others about Kuwait	0.785	
G.2	When interacting with others about Kuwait, it is difficult to detach myself from the conversation	0.765	
G.3	I feel happy when I am interacting with others about Kuwait	0.813	
	Enthusiasm through social media		0.955
H.1	I am passionate about Kuwait	0.900	
H.2	I am enthusiastic about Kuwait	0.915	
H.3	I feel excited about Kuwait	0.896	
	Identification through social media		0.876
I.1	When someone criticizes Kuwait, it feels like a personal insult	0.715	
I.2	When I talk about Kuwait, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'	0.735	
I.3	When someone praises Kuwait, it feels like a personal compliment	0.834	
	Attention through social media		0.904
J.1	I like to learn more about Kuwait	0.779	
J.2	Anything related to Kuwait grabs my attention	0.785	
J.3	I like learning more about Kuwait	0.864	
	Intention to Recommend through social media		0.937
K.1	I will mention my travel to Kuwait to others	0.774	
K.2	I will make sure that others know what I really feel about my travel experience	0.748	
K.3	I will make sure that others know what I really feel about my visit to Kuwait	0.757	
K.4	I will speak positively about my travel to Kuwait	0.817	
K.5	I will recommend Kuwait to other people	0.830	
K.6	I will speak positively about Kuwait to other people	0.814	
K.7	I will encourage friends and relatives to visit Kuwait	0.823	

4.5 Validity Analysis

This part presents the validity assessment and scale development for the constructs involved in the present research. A sequence of processes was followed through the scale development process. It contains the use of exploratory factor analysis. This type of procedure was conducted to guarantee the reliability and validity of the data.

With EFA, specific requirements need to be achieved before factor analysis can succeed. First, the constructs should be measured by using interval scales. Using a 5-point Likert scale in the survey questionnaire fulfilled this requirement. A number of reasons account for this use of Likert scales: [1] they communicate interval properties to the respondent, and therefore produce data that can be assumed to be interval scaled (Madsen, 1989; Schertzer and Kerman, 1985); [2] in the social science literature Likert scales are almost always treated as interval scales (see for example Deeg and Van Zonneveld, 1989).

Second, the sample size should be more than 100 since a researcher generally cannot use factor analysis with fewer than 50 observations (Hair et al., 2014). This requirement has also been met, because the study had 337 respondents.

4.5.1 Research Constructs

Based on the literature review, ten constructs were identified. Three constructs were antecedents of both destination image and social media. These factors are QA, SandS and DA. Then, five constructs represented the interaction with the SM, namely, Interaction through the SM, Absorption through the SM, Enthusiasm through the SM, Identification through the SM and Attention through the

SM. One factor was identified to represent the SM. Finally, one factor was identified to represent the intention to recommend Kuwait. To validate the constructs, the different items included were submitted to factor analysis. The results of the factor analysis tests are briefly discussed below.

4.5.1.1 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

The 42 items representing the ten constructs that are included in the research model were submitted to factor analysis. The results of EFA yielded a ten-factor solution that accounted for 76.798 % of the variance extracted. The result for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) was large at 12007.649, and the associated significance value was very small (p=0.00). This shows that the data were appropriate for factor analysis (Snedecor and Cochran, 1989).

4.5.1.2 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) for measurement of sample adequacy (MSA) gives the computed KMO as 0.912, which is adequate, and above the acceptable level (Snedecor and Cochran, 1989) (see Table 4.18).

Table 4.19: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.912
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	12007.649
	Df	861
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Analysis of survey data.

Since the above requirements were met, the researcher concluded that factor analysis was appropriate for this data set so that the procedures for factor analysis were able to proceed.

4.5.1.3 Results of Principal Component Analysis Extraction Process

The factor extraction results using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) are given in Table 4.19. It should be noted that an eigenvalue of 1.0 was used as the benchmark in deciding the number of factors (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 4.19: Principal Component Analysis Extraction Results

Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	15.641	37.240	37.240	15.641	37.240	37.240	5.514	13.128	13.128
2	3.258	7.758	44.998	3.258	7.758	44.998	4.088	9.733	22.861
3	2.531	6.025	51.023	2.531	6.025	51.023	3.643	8.673	31.534
4	2.496	5.943	56.966	2.496	5.943	56.966	3.467	8.255	39.788
5	2.167	5.159	62.125	2.167	5.159	62.125	3.072	7.314	47.103
6	1.531	3.644	65.770	1.531	3.644	65.770	2.668	6.353	53.455
7	1.425	3.392	69.162	1.425	3.392	69.162	2.638	6.281	59.736
8	1.098	2.614	71.776	1.098	2.614	71.776	2.475	5.894	65.630
9	1.084	2.582	74.357	1.084	2.582	74.357	2.405	5.725	71.356
10	1.025	2.441	76.798	1.025	2.441	76.798	2.286	5.443	76.798

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

4.5.1.4 Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

An initial (un-rotated) solution identified 42 items and eight factors with eigenvalues of more than one, accounting for 76.798% of the variance (see Table 4.19). As Table 4.20 shows, all 42 items scored communalities that ranged from 0.567 to 0.896. Therefore, it could be concluded that a degree of confidence in the factor solution was achieved.

Table 4.20: Commonalities

	Initial	Extraction
A1	1.000	0.755
A2	1.000	0.682
A3	1.000	0.567
A4	1.000	0.685
A5	1.000	0.617
A6	1.000	0.640
B1	1.000	0.716
B2	1.000	0.811
B3	1.000	0.843
B4	1.000	0.759
B5	1.000	0.797
C1	1.000	0.744
C2	1.000	0.712
C3	1.000	0.775
C4	1.000	0.610
D1	1.000	0.716
D2	1.000	0.761
D3	1.000	0.671
D4	1.000	0.693
D5	1.000	0.779
G1	1.000	0.805
G2	1.000	0.888
G3	1.000	0.836
H1	1.000	0.860
H2	1.000	0.780
H3	1.000	0.814
I1	1.000	0.870
I2	1.000	0.896
I3	1.000	0.889
J1	1.000	0.777
J2	1.000	0.798
J3	1.000	0.861
K1	1.000	0.817
K2	1.000	0.805
K3	1.000	0.873
L1	1.000	0.744
L2	1.000	0.740
L3	1.000	0.733

Table 4.20: Commonalities (Continued)

	Initial	Extraction
L4	1.000	0.780
L5	1.000	0.799
L6	1.000	0.774
L7	1.000	0.786

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

4.5.1.5 Factor Rotation and Factor Loading

Once the researcher was satisfied with the nine chosen factors, all the items loaded in the nine factors were examined. The Varimax technique for rotated component analysis was used with a cut-off point for interpretation of the factors at 0.50 or greater (Snedecor and Cochran, 1989). The results are summarized in Table 4.21 below.

Table 4.21: Rotated Component Matrix

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A1			0.797							
A2			0.739							
A3			0.615							
A4			0.803							
A5			0.717							
A6			0.729							
B1		0.762								
B2		0.824								
B3		0.855								
B4		0.783								
B5		0.803								
C1					0.742					
C2					0.768					
C3					0.761					
C4					0.672					
D1				0.720						
D2				0.702						
D3				0.623						

Table 4.21: Rotated Component Matrix (Continued)

	Component									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
D4				0.704						
D5				0.668						
G1						0.756				
G2						0.830				
G3						0.778				
H1									0.800	
H2									0.742	
H3									0.695	
I1										0.691
I2										0.749
I3										0.692
J1								0.777		
J2								0.775		
J3								0.785		
K1							0.799			
K2							0.745			
K3							0.811			
L1	0.757									
L2	0.823									
L3	0.775									
L4	0.747									
L5	0.760									
L6	0.786									
L7	0.732									

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a]
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

All the items were loaded onto the expected factors for which they were designed. Factor loadings were all higher than 0.50 so that each item loaded higher on its associated construct than on any other construct. As suggested by Hair et al. (2014), a factor loading higher than 0.35 is considered statistically significant at an alpha level of 0.05. This is supported by the discriminant validity of the measurement.

4.5.1.6 Factor Naming and Interpretation Process

The interpretation of the ten-factor solution was accomplished by relating them to the theoretical concepts of tourism and marketing literature. The ten factors can be discussed as follows:

Factor 1 consists of seven items and fits very well with the 'Intention to Recommend through SM'. This factor comprises the following items: (1) I will mention my travel to Kuwait to others, (2) I will make sure that others know what I really feel about my travel experience, (3) I will make sure that others know what I really feel about my visit to Kuwait, (4) I will speak positively about my travel experiences to Kuwait, (5) I will recommend Kuwait to other people, (6) I will speak positively about Kuwait to other people and (7) I will encourage friends and relatives to visit Kuwait. The values are closely grouped. The highest loading being 'I will make sure that others know what I really feel about my travel experience' (0.823) and the lowest loading "I will encourage friends and relatives to visit Kuwait" (0.732).

The second factor consists of five items. This factor represents the respondents' opinions regarding 'SandS'. It covers the following items: (1) My family will not worry about my safety in my stay in Kuwait, (2) People who are travelling with me will be safe, (3) Kuwait is a safe place to visit, (4) Personal security is not a problem in Kuwait, (5) Kuwait is a peaceful country. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being "Kuwait is a safe place to visit" (0.855) and the lowest loading "My family will not worry about my safety in Kuwait" (0.762).

The third factor consists of six items. This factor represents the respondents' opinions regarding 'QA'. It covers the following items: (1) The waiting room at the airport was clean, (2) The baggage claim facilities and delivery were efficient, (3) There were adequate baggage trolleys, (4) There were multiple check-in facility counters, (5) The customs and immigration facilities were efficient, and (6) The airport has facilities for disabled people. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being "There were multiple check-in facility counters" (0.803) and the lowest loading being "There were adequate baggage trolleys" (0.615).

The fourth factor consists of five items. This factor represents the respondents' opinions regarding 'DI'. It covers the following items: (1) Kuwait has beautiful scenery/natural attractions, (2) Kuwait has interesting cultural/historical attractions, (3) Kuwait has interesting and friendly people, (4) Kuwait has unpolluted/unspoiled environment, and (6) Kuwait's attractions are pleasant. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being "Kuwait has beautiful scenery/natural attractions" (0.720) and the lowest loading being "Kuwait has interesting and friendly people" (0.623).

The fifth factor consists of four items. This factor represents the respondents' opinions regarding "DA". It covers the following variables: (1) Kuwait has many touristic sites, (2) Kuwait has appealing local food, (3) Kuwait offers good value for my holiday and (4) Kuwait is an economically developed country. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being "Kuwait has appealing local food" (0.768) and the lowest loading being "Kuwait is an economically developed country" (0.672).

The sixth factor consists of three items. This factor represents the respondents' opinions regarding 'Interaction through SM. It covers the following variables: (1) In general, I like to get involved in discussion about Kuwait, (2) I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded people who discuss Kuwait, and (3) In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people about Kuwait. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being "I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded people who discuss Kuwait" (0.830) and the lowest loading being "In general, I like to get involved in discussion about Kuwait" (0.756).

The seventh factor consists of three items. This factor represents the respondents' opinions regarding 'Attention through SM'. It covers the following variables: (1) I like to learn more about Kuwait, (2) Anything related to Kuwait grabs my attention and (3) I like learning more about Kuwait. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being "I like learning more about Kuwait" (0.811) and the lowest loading being "Anything related to Kuwait grabs my attention" (0.745).

The eighth factor consists of three items and fits very well with "Identification through SM". This factor comprises the following variables: (1) When someone criticizes Kuwait, it feels like a personal insult, (2) When I talk about Kuwait, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they' and (3) When someone praises Kuwait, it feels like a personal compliment. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being "When someone praises Kuwait, it feels like a personal compliment" (0.785) and the lowest loading being "When I talk about Kuwait, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'" (0.775).

The ninth factor consists of three items and fits very well with "Absorption through SM". This factor comprises the following variables: (1) Time flies when I

am interacting with others about Kuwait, (2) When interacting with others about Kuwait, it is difficult to detach myself from the conversation and (3) I feel happy when I am interacting with others about Kuwait. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being “Time flies when I am interacting with others about Kuwait” (0.800) and the lowest loading being “I feel happy when I am interacting with others about Kuwait” (0.695).

Finally, the ninth factor consists of three items and fits very well with “Enthusiasm through SM”. This factor comprises the following variables: (1) I am passionate about Kuwait, (2) I am enthusiastic about Kuwait and (3) I feel excited about Kuwait. The values are closely grouped, the highest loading being “I am enthusiastic about Kuwait” (0.749) and the lowest loading being “I am passionate about Kuwait” (0.691).

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter covers the initial analysis of the collected questionnaires. This involved, first, encoding, editing and entering the data into SPSS. This was followed by analyses of the reliability and validity, covering all the study variables to find the extent to which the measurements were reliable and valid. Item-to-total correlation was assessed for each construct. As shown in Table 4.17, all the variables had acceptable reliability values ranging from 0.842 to 0.937, which were perceptibly higher than the acceptable cut-off point of 0.60 (Nunnally, 1978) and therefore, acceptable for further tests.

Table 4.22: Reliability Analysis of Main Constructs in the Study

Basic Constructs	Total Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Quality of Airport	6	0.851
Safety and security	5	0.971
Destination Attributes	4	0.842
Destination Image	5	0.887
Interaction through social media	3	0.913
Absorption through social media	3	0.892
Enthusiasm through social media	3	0.955
Identification through social media	3	0.876
Attention through social media	3	0.904
Intention to Recommend through social media	7	0.937

Table 4.22 presents a summary of the reliability test of the main variables in this research. The reliability and validity analyses show that measures were both reliable and valid. Finally, the researcher examined the general descriptive analysis of the respondents' profile and their response distribution. In addition, some initial explanations are also presented to start the data analysis process.

In the next chapter, several statistical tests will be used to assess the relationships between the independent variables (QA, SandS and DA), mediating variables (DI, Interaction through SM, Absorption through SM, Enthusiasm through SM, Identification through SM and Attention through SM) and the dependent variable (Intention to Recommend through SM). The aim is to test the research model and hypotheses.

Chapter 5: Model and Hypotheses Testing

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has dealt with data cleaning. It also validated the data that were collected from the survey and introduced an exploratory assessment of the different constructs that were used in the current study. This chapter covers the next and main stage of the data analysis, namely, hypotheses testing. SPSS and AMOS were used to analyze the data. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the aim of the thesis is to identify and focus on users' intention to recommend travel destinations and to study the role of the SM in sharing destination factors such as the QA, SandS, DA and DI in the intention to recommend a destination to others, to understand the impact of the SM on this intention by studying the impact of destination factors (QA, SandS, DA and DI) on the intention and to provide recommendations to decision-makers to achieve the strategic goals of the tourism marketers of the country.

Furthermore, a model that integrates the QA, SandS, DA, SM interaction, DI and intention to recommend through SM is tested. Therefore, as explained in Chapter 1, this research attempts to address six main questions. First, does the QA impact on the intention to recommend a destination to others? Second, does the SandS of the country play an important role in travel experience and the intention to recommend a destination to others? Third what is the importance of DA on a user's intention to recommend a destination to others? Fourth, what role does the users' perception of the DI have on their intention to recommend this destination to others? Fifth, what is the role of the social media in destination factors (QA, SandS, DA and DI) on the intention to recommend the destination to others? Finally, does DI have a mediating

role between QA, SandS, and DA on the intention to recommend the destination to others? Chapter 4 contributed partially to answering the previous questions; while this chapter also contributes to the full answers to the last three questions.

5.2 Measurement Models

It is crucial to recall that, as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), before examining the full latent model, an EFA was carried out in Chapter 4 using PCA with Varimax rotation. The EFA yielded a ten-factor solution that accounted for 76.798 % of the variance extracted (Chapter 4). All items loaded highly on their intended variables.

5.2.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Before checking the model that includes all the research variables together, it should be noted from a methodological point of view that individualized assessment of each of the variables was conducted (the measurement model), in order to refine in advance the elements used in their measurement. Having tested the various measures, the researcher made a CFA. This study used both a structural model and a measurement model (Hair et al., 2014).

5.2.1.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Independent Variables

In conceptualizing the independent variables, as discussed in the methodology chapter, Chapter 3, three independent variables were introduced; QA, SandS and DA – measured in six, five, four and four items respectively.

The results, shown in Figure 5.1, support the proposed three independent variables.

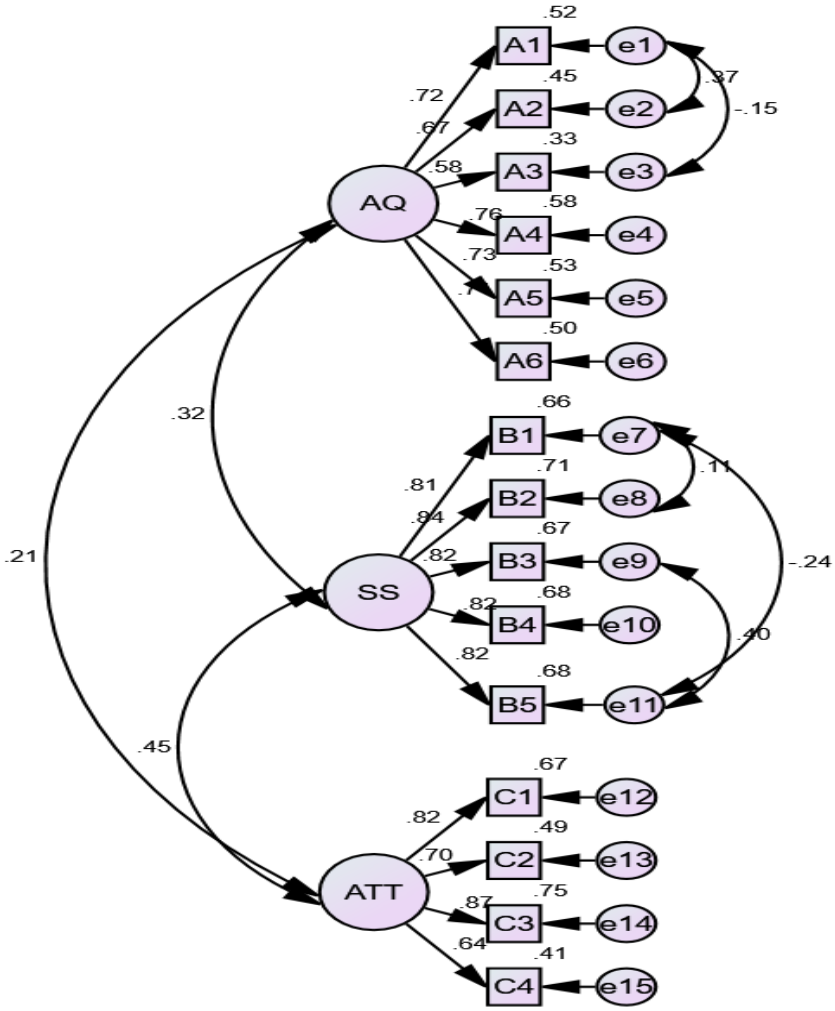

Figure 5.1: The Independent Variables

CFA was conducted to verify the theorized construct of the observed variables, namely: QA, SandS and DA. SPSS AMOS was used to carry out the confirmatory factor analysis. Figure 5.1 shows the main independent variables in this study.

It was decided that indicators with factor loading and coefficient of determination (R^2) lower than 0.5 would be eliminated. All the factor loadings on the main and constructs were high. All the factor loadings and R^2 were reasonably high. The results of the measurement model, which are the indicators of the latent variable

of Figure 5.1 are shown in Table 5.1. All the factor loadings are sufficiently high and the high values of Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) also reflect the high internal consistency and reliability of the main construct and all the sub-constructs.

Table 5.1: The Fitness Indices for HAW Antecedents

Statistic	Index value Obtained	Suggested Acceptable Level
Chi-square significance	0.07	> 0.01
CMIN/DF	2.164	< 3.0
GFI	0.908	> 0.90
AGFI	0.866	> 0.80
NFI	0.911	> 0.90
TLI	0.919	> 0.95
CFI	0.937	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.080	< 0.10

The fitness indices are listed in Table 5.1. Chi-square significance = 0.07, which is significant and reflects the goodness of fit of the suggested measurement model. Furthermore, although the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) was lower that the cut-off point of 0.80, the other indices also show that the model has a good fit and is aligned with the suggested statistic proposed by experts (Bentler, 1990; Hu and Bentler, 1995; Joreskog and Sorbom, 1982) such as Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.911 ($\geq$ 0.90), the Comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.937 ($\geq$ 0.90), the Minimum Discrepancy divided by its Degrees of Freedom (CMIN/DF) = 2.164 (< 3), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.08 (< 0.10) and the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.919 (> 0.90).

Both Cronbach's Alpha and the CR Index can take any value between 0 and 1, with values between 0.7 and 0.9 considered satisfactory (Hair et al., 2014). Table 5.2 gives a summary of values for Cronbach's Alpha, the CR Index and AVE for all the model constructs. The values suggest that all the measurement constructs are both valid and reliable and can be used for path analysis.

Table 5.2: Results of the Independent Variables Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct	Scale	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Quality of Airport	A.1	0.721	0.851	0.837	0.677
	A.2	0.674			
	A.3	0.576			
	A.4	0.670			
	A.5	0.726			
	A.6	0.705			
Safety and Security	B.1	0.815	0.917	0.914	0.825
	B.2	0.842			
	B.3	0.821			
	B.4	0.824			
	B.5	0.824			
Destination Attributes	C.1	0.816	0.842	0.845	0.756
	C.2	0.703			
	C.3	0.868			
	C.4	0.639			

5.2.1.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Mediation and Dependent Variables

Similarly, CFA was conducted to verify the theorized construct of the observed variables of the mediation and dependent variables, namely: Interaction through SM, Absorption through SM, Enthusiasm through SM, Identification through SM, Attention through SM, DI and Intention to recommend through SM. Figure 5.2 shows the main constructs.

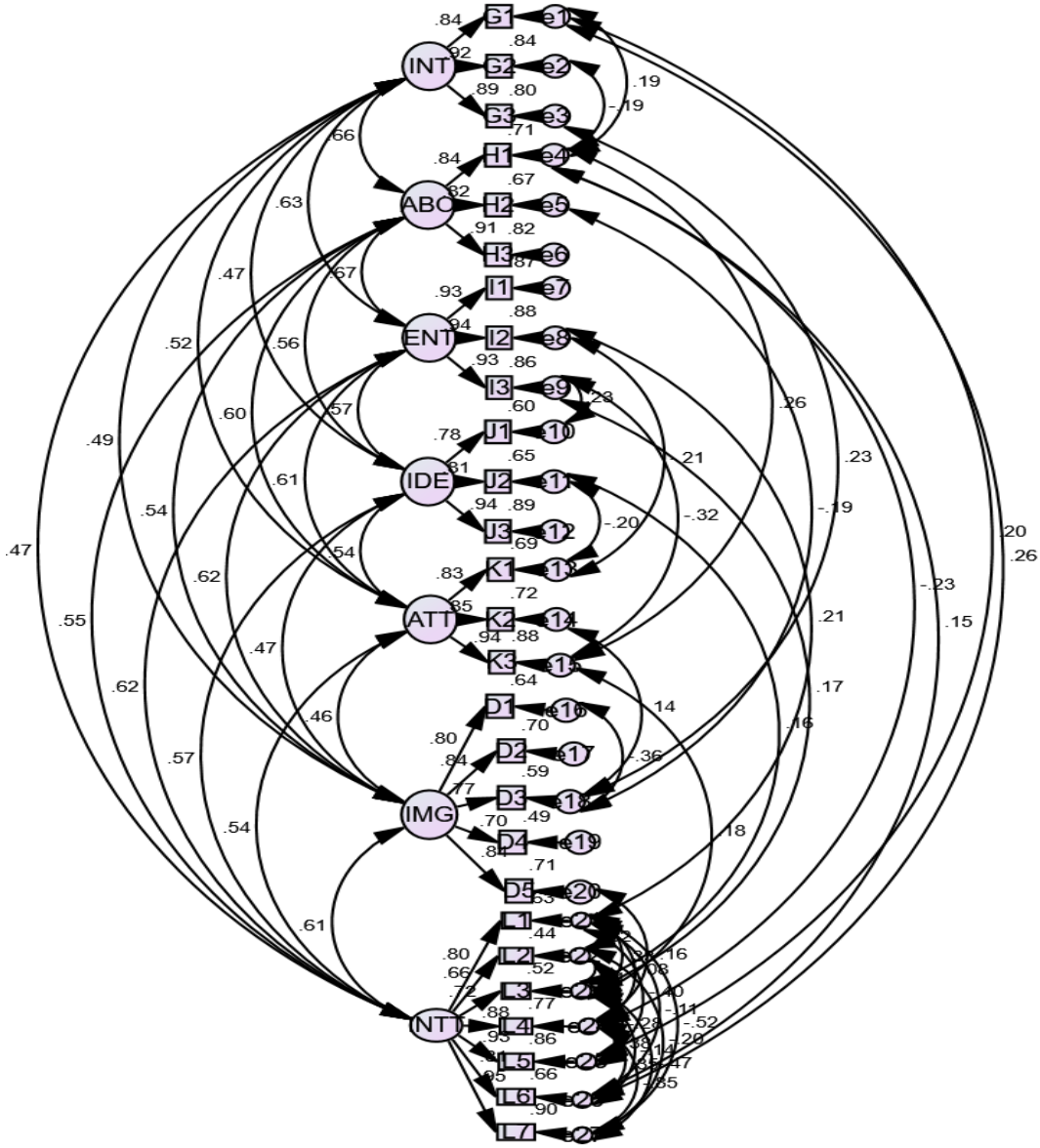

Figure 5.2: Mediation and Dependent Variables

The results, shown in Table 5.3, support the proposed constructs, comprising the mediation and dependent constructs.

Similarly, it was decided that items with factor loading and R^2 less than 0.5 would be excluded. All the factor loadings on the main variables were high. All the factor loadings and R^2 were reasonably high. The results of the measurement model which are the indicators of the latent variable of Figure 5.2 are shown in Tables 5.3

and 5.4. All the factor loadings were sufficiently high and the high values of Cronbach's Alpha, CR and AVE also reflect the high internal consistency and reliability of the main construct and all the sub-constructs.

Table 5.3: The Fitness Indices for Mediation and Dependent Variables

Statistic	Index value Obtained	Suggested Acceptable Level
Chi-square significance	0.00	> 0.01
CMIN/DF	1.921	< 3
GFI	0.901	> 0.90
AGFI	0.861	> 0.80
TLI	0.960	> 0.95
CFI	0.970	> 0.90
RMSEA	0.052	< 0.10

The fitness indices are listed in Table 5.3. Although Chi-square significance = 0.000 the other indices show that the model had a good fit and was aligned to the suggested statistic proposed by Bentler (1990), Hu and Bentler (1995) and Joreskog and Sorbom (1982); for example, the goodness-of-fit indices (GFI) for the model show that the GFI = 0.901 ($\geq$ 0.90), the Comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.970 ($\geq$ 0.90), the CMIN/DF = 1.921 (< 3), the Adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = 0.861 ($\geq$ 0.80) and TLI = 0.96 (> 0.95).

Table 5.4: Results of Mediation and Dependent Variables Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Construct	Scale	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Interaction through Social Media	F.1	0.705	0.913	0.915	0.782
	F.2	0.842			
	F.3	0.797			
Absorption through Social Media	G.1	0.708	0.892	0.891	0.732
	G.2	0.667			
	G.3	0.820			
Enthusiasm through Social Media	H.1	0.874	0.955	0.954	0.874
	H.2	0.883			
	H.3	0.863			
Identification through Social Media	I.1	0.603	0.876	0.882	0.714
	I.2	0.651			
	I.3	0.887			
Attention through Social Media	J.1	0.693	0.904	0.905	0.762
	J.2	0.715			
	J.3	0.876			
Destination Image	E.1	0.636	0.887	0.893	0.627
	E.2	0.703			
	E.3	0.594			
	E.4	0.500			
	E.5	0.712			
Intention to Recommend through Social Media	K.1	0.633	0.937	0.937	0.684
	K.2	0.442			
	K.3	0.524			
	K.4	0.772			
	K5	0.859			
	K.6	0.657			
	K.7	0.894			

Both Cronbach’s Alpha and the CR Index may score any value between 0 and 1, with values between 0.7 and 0.9 considered as satisfactory (Hair et al., 2014). Table 5.4 gives a summary of the values for Cronbach’s Alpha, the CR Index and AVE for

all the model variables. The obtained scores suggest that all the measurement variables were both valid and reliable and could be used for path analysis.

5.2.2 Convergent Validity Analysis

Convergent validity reflects how far the items of a specific construct converge or share a high proportion of variance (Hair et al., 2014). Convergent validity can be assessed by three indicators (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Liang and Wang 2004; Hair et al., 2014; Hooper et al., 2008; Čater and Čater, 2010). First, factor loading for an item is at least 0.6 and significant. Second, construct reliability is a minimum of 0.60 (see Table 4.17). Finally, AVE for a construct is larger than 0.5. Table 5.5 summarizes the results of the convergent validity analysis. Note that all of the scales had an acceptable convergent validity.

Table 5.5: Convergent Validity Results

Constructs	Composite Reliability	AVE
Quality of Airport	0.837	0.677
Safety and security	0.914	0.825
Destination Attributes	0.845	0.756
Interaction through Social Media	0.913	0.782
Absorption through Social Media	0.892	0.732
Enthusiasm through Social Media	0.955	0.874
Identification through Social Media	0.876	0.714
Attention through Social Media	0.904	0.762
Destination Image	0.887	0.627
Intention to Recommend through Social Media	0.937	0.684

5.2.3 Discriminant Validity Analysis

Discriminant validity is the uniqueness of two theoretically similar variables (Hair et al., 2014). This means that each variable should share more variance with its items than it shares with other variables. Discriminant validity exists when the variances extracted by the variables (AVE) from each variable are more than the correlations. As seen in Table 5.6, all the latent constructs had the squared root of

AVE higher than their inter-correlation estimated with other corresponding variables (the factor scores as single item indicators were used to calculate the between-variables correlations); this implied that the variables were empirically distinct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). For example, the squared root of AVE for Attention through Social Media' is 0.872, greater than any squared correlation between the other constructs, i.e. 0.413 and, 0.523, which means that Attention through Social Media as a construct is empirically distinct.

Table 5.6: Discriminant Validity Results

Correlations										
	QOA	S&S	DA	INT	ABO	ENT	IDE	ATT	DI	ITR
QOA	.822									
S&S	.273**	.908								
DA	.174**	.396**	0.869							
INT	.173**	.416**	.446**	0.884						
ABO	.258**	.379**	.423**	.594**	0.855					
ENT	.269**	.408**	.478**	.595**	.614**	0.934				
IDE	.212**	.384**	.340**	.420**	.507**	.530**	0.844			
ATT	.243**	.393**	.445**	.478**	.536**	.571**	.471**	0.872		
DI	.375**	.442**	.603**	.471**	.471**	.576**	.423**	.413**	0.791	
ITR	.250**	.452**	.423**	.463**	.512**	.590**	.544**	.523**	.553**	0.827
Coefficient Alpha	.851	.917	.842	.887	.913	.892	.955	.876	.904	.937

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); hence, Correlation is insignificant.
Note: Diagonal values (in bold) are the squared roots of AVE; off-diagonal values are the estimates of inter-correlation between the latent constructs.

5.3 Hypotheses Testing

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to examine the data. It is a multivariate analytical methodology for empirically testing sets of relationships in the form of linear causal models (Duncan, 1986; Li, 1975). The aim of the SEM approach is to examine the direct and indirect relationships of each hypothesis on the basis of knowledge and theoretical concepts (Pedhazur, 1982). SEM analysis does not set up causal relations with certainty but is used for quantitative explanations of

possible causal relationships (Borchgrevink and Boster, 1998). A path diagram represents the proposed variables among all the variables in the model. Arrows are used to symbolize the hypothesized relationships and the direction of influence in the model.

Figure 5.3 represents the suggested structural model that reflects the relationships between the variables. The value of the path coefficient related to each path represents the strength of each linear effect. The structural equation-modelling package, AMOS, was used to examine the hypotheses developed in the model. The researcher used the factor scores as single item indicators and performed a path analysis, applying the Maximum Likelihood Estimates (MLE) method, following the guidelines suggested by Joreskog and Sorbom (1982).

5.3.1 Structural-Model testing

Finally, given that the purpose of the study was to test the hypothesized causal relationships among the constructs of the model, the structural equation-modeling package, AMOS 23 was used (see Figure 5.3). The factor means were employed as single item indicators to perform path analysis, applying the MLE method, following the guidelines suggested by Joreskog and Sorbon (ibid). A more detailed analysis of the results and measures for model fit is reported in Table 5.9.

To apply the MLE method for estimating the model, the constructs must satisfy the criterion of multivariate normality (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Therefore, tests of normality, i.e. skewness/ kurtosis, were conducted for all the constructs. Table 4.3 indicates no departure from normality; most of the results are close to one (i.e. +/- 1) (ibid). Thus, once normality was confirmed for all the variables, it was

decided to continue using the MLE method to estimate the model. The reliability of the constructs was assessed by item-to-total correlations and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient (see Chapter 4) (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 4, analysis of Mahalanobis distance was carried out to examine the presence of multivariate outliers, using AMOS to identify any multivariate outliers in the data. Mahalanobis' distance is a metric for estimating how far each case is from the center of distribution of all the variables (i.e. the centroid in multivariate space) (Mahalanobis, 1927a). The Mahalanobis distance test identified 3 cases that had an outlier (Table 4.2).

The current study model explains 49.8% of the Intention to Recommend through social media and 46.6.9 % of the destination image, which indicates that this model has a strong prediction capacity.

Since there is no tentative standard of fit, the thesis presents a diversity of indices, along with suggested guidelines. The X2 test was not statistically significant at the 1% level (probability level= 0.054), which indicated an adequate fit. The other fit indices, together with the squared multiple correlations, indicate a good overall fit with the data (Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.998, AGFI = 0.880, CFI = 0.998, TLI = 0.912, NFI = 0.997, RMSEA = 0.090, Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) = 0.008). Since these indicators confirm that the overall fit of the model to the data was good, it was decided that the structural model was an appropriate basis for hypothesis testing.

To test the 27 direct hypotheses, a structural model was used. The results give support to most of the hypotheses. Table 5.7 shows the estimated standardized parameters for the causal relations.

First, although the hypothesis of the QA (H1A) (Standardized Estimate = 0.040, $P > 0.10$) was rejected; Hypotheses 2A and H3A were supported. Therefore, the suggested factor positively affects the Interaction through SM, namely, SandS (H2A) (Standardized Estimate (SE)) = 0.275, $P < 0.01$) and DA (H3A) (Standardized Estimate = 0.332, $P < 0.01$).

Table 5.7: Standardized Regression Weights

Predictor variables	Criterion Variables	Hypothesized relationship	Standardized coefficient	R^{2a}
Quality of Airport	Interaction through social media	H1A	0.040^{ns}	0.271
Safety and Security	Interaction through social media	H2A	0.275***	
Destination Attributes	Interaction through social media	H3A	0.332***	
Quality of Airport	Absorption through social media	H1B	0.146***	0.254
Safety and Security	Absorption through social media	H2B	0.218***	
Destination Attributes	Absorption through social media	H3B	0.313***	
Quality of Airport	Enthusiasm through social media	H1C	0.147***	0.309
Safety and Security	Enthusiasm through social media	H2C	0.227***	
Destination Attributes	Enthusiasm through social media	H3C	0.366***	
Quality of Airport	Identification through social media	H1D	0.101**	0.200
Safety and Security	Identification through social media	H2D	0.272***	
Destination Attributes	Identification through social media	H3D	0.216***	
Quality of Airport	Attention through social media	H1E	0.122**	0.268
Safety and Security	Attention through social media	H2E	0.227***	
Destination Attributes	Attention through social media	H3E	0.334***	
Quality of Airport	Destination Image	H1F	0.240***	0.466
Safety and Security	Destination Image	H2F	0.182***	
Destination Attributes	Destination Image	H3F	0.489***	
Quality of Airport	Intention to Recommend	H2	-0.012^{ns}	0.498
Safety and Security	Intention to Recommend	H3	0.122***	
Destination Attributes	Intention to Recommend	H4	-0.014^{ns}	
Interaction through social media	Intention to Recommend	H5	0.011^{ns}	
Absorption through social media	Intention to Recommend	H6	0.069^{ns}	
Enthusiasm through social media	Intention to Recommend	H7	0.178***	
Identification through social media	Intention to Recommend	H8	0.205***	
Attention through social media	Intention to Recommend	H9	0.153***	
Destination Image	Intention to Recommend	H10	0.224***	

Statistic	Suggested	Obtained
Chi-Square Significance	≥0.01	0.054
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	≥0.90	0.998
Adjusted Goodness-of-fit index (AGFI)	≥0.80	0.880
Comparative fit index (CFI)	≥0.90	0.998
The Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI)	≥0.90	0.912
Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)	≤0.05	0.008
Root mean square residual (RMSEA)	≤0.10	0.090

*** P<0.01, **P<0.05 and NS=Not Significant

Second, the suggested factors positively affect Absorption through SM, namely, QA (H1B) (SE = 0.146, P < 0.01), SandS (H2B) (SE = 0.218, P < 0.01) and DA (H3B) (SE = 0.313, P < 0.01). Thus, Hypotheses 1B, 2B and 3B were accepted.

Third, the suggested factors positively affect Enthusiasm through SM, namely, QA (H2C) (SE = 0.147, P < 0.01), SandS (H2C) (SE = 0.227, P < 0.01) and DA (H3C) (SE = 0.366, P < 0.01). Therefore, Hypotheses 1C, 2C and 3C were accepted.

Fourth, the suggested factors positively affect Identification through SM, namely, QA (H2D) (SE = 0.101, P < 0.05), SandS (H2D) (SE = 0.272, P < 0.01) and Destination Attributes (H3D) (SE = 0.216, P < 0.01). Therefore, Hypotheses 1D, 2D and 3D were accepted.

Fifth, the suggested factors positively affect the Attention through SM, namely QA (H2E) (SE = 0.122, P < 0.05), SandS (H2E) (SE = 0.227, P < 0.01) and DA (H3E) (SE = 0.334, P < 0.01). Therefore, Hypotheses 1E, 2E and 3E were accepted.

Sixth, the suggested factor positively affects the DI, namely, QA (H2F) (SE = 0.240, P < 0.01), SandS (H2F) (SE = 0.182, P < 0.01) and DA (H3F) (SE = 0.489, P < 0.01). Therefore, Hypotheses 1F, 2F and 3F were accepted.

Finally, although the hypotheses on the QA (H2) (SE = -0.012, P > 0.10), DA (H4) (SE = -0.014, P > 0.10), Interaction through SM (H5) (SE = 0.011, P > 0.10) and Absorption through SM (H6) (SE = 0.069, P > 0.10) were rejected, Hypotheses 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were supported and therefore can be accepted. Therefore, the following factors positively affect the Intention to Recommend through SM: SandS

(H3) (SE = 0.122, P < 0.01), Enthusiasm through SM (H7) (SE = 0.178, P < 0.01), Identification through SM (H8) (SE = 0.205, P < 0.01), Attention through SM (H9) (SE = 0.153, P < 0.01) and DI (H10) (SE = 0.224, P < 0.01).

Since the causal effects of the suggested factors may be either direct or indirect i.e., mediated via the effects of other variables, or both, the total of causal effects was computed. More specifically, the indirect effects are the multiplicative sum of the standardized path coefficients. The total of effects is the sum of the direct effect and all the indirect effects. Table 5.8 shows the direct, indirect and total effects of the suggested factors.

Table 5.8: Direct, Indirect and Total Effect

Criterion Variable	Predictor variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Interaction through social media	Quality of Airport	0.040	0.000	0.040
	Safety and Security	0.275	0.000	0.275
	Destination Attributes	0.332	0.000	0.332
Absorption through social media	Quality of Airport	0.146	0.000	0.146
	Safety and Security	0.218	0.000	0.218
	Destination Attributes	0.313	0.000	0.313
Enthusiasm through social media	Quality of Airport	0.147	0.000	0.147
	Safety and Security	0.227	0.000	0.227
	Destination Attributes	0.366	0.000	0.366
Identification through social media	Quality of Airport	0.101	0.000	0.101
	Safety and Security	0.272	0.000	0.272
	Destination Attributes	0.216	0.000	0.216
Attention through social media	Quality of Airport	0.122	0.000	0.122
	Safety and Security	0.227	0.000	0.227
	Destination Attributes	0.334	0.000	0.334
Destination Image	Quality of Airport	0.240	0.000	0.240
	Safety and Security	0.182	0.000	0.182
	Destination Attributes	0.489	0.000	0.489
Intention to Recommend	Quality of Airport	-0.012	0.130***	0.118
	Safety and Security	0.122	0.190***	0.312
	Destination Attributes	-0.014	0.295***	0.282
	Interaction through social media	0.011	0.000	0.011
	Absorption through social media	0.069	0.000	0.069
	Enthusiasm through social media	0.178	0.000	0.178
	Identification through social media	0.205	0.000	0.205
	Attention through social media	0.153	0.000	0.153
	Destination Image	0.224	0.000	0.224

5.4 Conclusion and Summary of Key Findings

This chapter covered the inferential statistics that helped the researcher to come to conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data. The chapter describes the procedures and findings of the confirmatory factor analysis, path analysis, and hypotheses testing that were used for analytic purposes.

Confirmatory factor analysis for the research constructs was undertaken mainly to validate the constructs in each stage and also to reduce the specific factors tested to a more general classification to enrich the theoretical development of the role of the social media in the tourism industry. These factors were than taken to be the most interpretable and thus were accepted as the final factor solution. The 10 factors supported in the literature review (Chapter 2) may be identified as follows:

1. Quality of Airport.
2. Safety and Security.
3. Destination Attributes.
4. Interaction through Social Media.
5. Absorption through Social Media.
6. Enthusiasm through Social Media.
7. Identification through Social Media.
8. Attention through Social Media.
9. Destination Image.
10. Intention to Recommend through Social Media.

After the results of CFA, the hypotheses for each stage were tested. The resulting summary of hypotheses testing is presented in Table 5.9 below.

Table 5.9: Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Results
Direct Hypotheses	
H1A: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Interaction through social media.	Rejected
H2A: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Interaction through social media.	Accepted
H3A: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Interaction through social media.	Accepted
H1B: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Absorption through social media.	Accepted
H2B: Security and Safety have a significant positive impact on Absorption through social media.	Accepted
H3B: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Absorption through social media.	Accepted
H1C: Quality of the airport has a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm through social media.	Accepted
H2C: Security and Safety have a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm through social media.	Accepted

Table 5.9: Results of Hypotheses Testing (Continued)

H3C: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm through social media.	Accepted
H1D: Quality of the airport has a significant positive impact on Identification through social media.	Accepted
H2D: Security and Safety have a significant positive impact on Identification through social media.	Accepted
H3D: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Identification through social media.	Accepted
H1E: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Attention through social media.	Accepted
H2E: Security and Safety have a significant positive impact on Attention through social media.	Accepted
H3E: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Attention through social media.	Accepted
H1F: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Destination Image.	Accepted
H2F: Security and Safety have a significant positive impact on Destination Image.	Accepted
H3F: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Destination Image.	Accepted
H2: Quality of the airport has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Partially Accepted
H3: Security and Safety have a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted
H4: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Partially Accepted
H5: Interaction through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Rejected
H6: Absorption through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Rejected
H7: Enthusiasm through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted
H8: Identification through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted
H9: Attention through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted
H10: Destination Image has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted

Chapter 6: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

Technological advancement is playing a vital role in both personal and professional life. Recent technological innovations such as the SM affect people's lives greatly almost every day. The use of the Internet, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are some examples of the SM that are used widely to share information, express opinions and views, criticize, share audio visuals and communicate (Seetanah, et al., 2018) with large numbers of interested people. They all permit users to share and receive feedback on almost all subjects of interest and build relationships with others as well (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Pempek et al., 2009).

The literature reveals that the use of social media is most common among young people; more than 97% of college graduates use some form of SM (Smith and Caruso, 2010; Koc and Gulyagci, 2013). Nowadays, SM has gained significant attention in academic settings for education and non-academic settings such as business for marketing and profitability. The literature for the period 1955-2019 documented many studies on SM related to the United States, United Kingdom and Europe, and the Middle East. Yet very few studies have been published about the Arabian Gulf region, particularly the State of Kuwait, leaving a knowledge gap and information deficit about the region that are worth plugging.

This study has been carried out to learn more about the influence of the SM on tourism in Kuwait. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the aim was to investigate the use and role of the SM on a user's intention to recommend the State of Kuwait as a tourism destination. In addition the aim was to:

- Identify the literature focus on a user's intention to recommend travel destinations.
- Study the role of the SM on sharing such destination factors as QA, SandS, attributes and image when they are used to recommend a destination to others.
- Understand the impact of the SM on intention to recommend by studying the impact of the above destination factors.
- Study the role of the DI on intention to recommend as it mediates the QA, SandS, and the destination attributes.
- Provide a framework that researchers can adopt in future studies.
- Provide recommendations to decision-makers to attain the strategic tourism goals of the country, especially in view of the fact that travelers are expected to share their travel experiences with others who use the SM and thus influence tourism.

It is hoped that the findings of this research as presented in the previous chapter will add value to the available literature and, from a quantitative perspective, improve the understanding of the role of the SM in recommending Kuwait as a tourism destination. The current chapter discusses the findings from the questionnaires (set out in Appendix A) in relation to previous works in the field. It then presents the limitations and recommendations of the research.

The findings discussed and presented in previous chapters of the present research relate to 6 main factors: (1) QA; (2) SandS; (3) DA; (4) DI; (5) SM, divided into 5 dimensions; and (6) intention to recommend. The first three of these are independent variables, the fourth and fifth are mediators, and the last construct is the

dependent variable. Figure 6.1 below shows the relationships between the variables and provides the research model. The sections below discuss and interpret these relationships.

6.2 Key Findings

6.2.1 Interaction through the SM

The relationships related to Interaction through social media were tested along Quality of airport, Safety and security, and Destination attributes.

H1A: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Interaction through SM.

H2A: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Interaction through SM.

H3A: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Interaction through SM.

Although the hypothesis of the QA (H1A) (Standardized Estimate (SE) = 0.040, $P > 0.10$) was rejected; Hypotheses 2A and H3A were supported. Thus, the suggested factors positively affect Interaction through SM, namely, SandS (H2A) (SE = 0.275, $P < 0.01$) and DA (H3A) (SE = 0.332, $P < 0.01$). Thus, Hypotheses 2A and 3A were supported while Hypothesis H1A was rejected.

The SET rely on the interactions between individuals which will last until this benefit ends (Su et al., 2018; Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Gensler et al., 2013; De Vries and Carlson, 2014). As seen above, hypothesis (H1A) was rejected in this study, which means that it does not support the theory. SET outlined the benefit in return as a condition, and the high QA services will return for travelers by its quick

processing. Other hypotheses that were accepted concern SandS, which are extremely important to travelers, and DA, which constitute the main reasons for visiting this country.

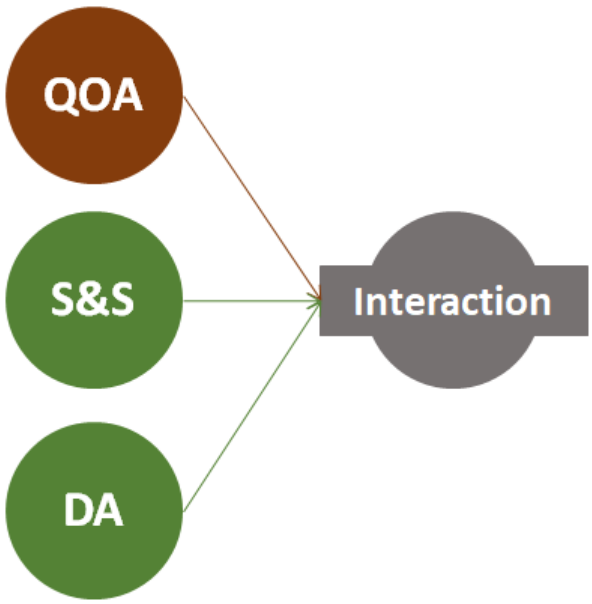

Figure 6.1: Dependent Variables to Interaction through SM

6.2.2 Absorption through the SM

The relationships related to Absorption through SM (Figure 6.2) were tested along Quality of airport, Safety and security, and Destination attributes.

H1B: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Absorption through SM.

H2B: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Absorption through SM.

H3B: Destination SM media.

The suggested factors positively affect Absorption through SM, namely, QA (H1B) (SE = 0.146, P < 0.01), SandS (H2B) (SE = 0.218, P < 0.01) and DA (H3B) (SE = 0.313, P < 0.01). Thus, Hypotheses 1B, 2B and 3B were accepted.

The three independent variables have positive significant impact on the Absorption through social media. Several scholars have discussed this, such as Scholer and Higgins (2009) and Harrigan et al. (2017), they say that it refers to individuals' considerations of the place or a brand as well, which is a positive trait.

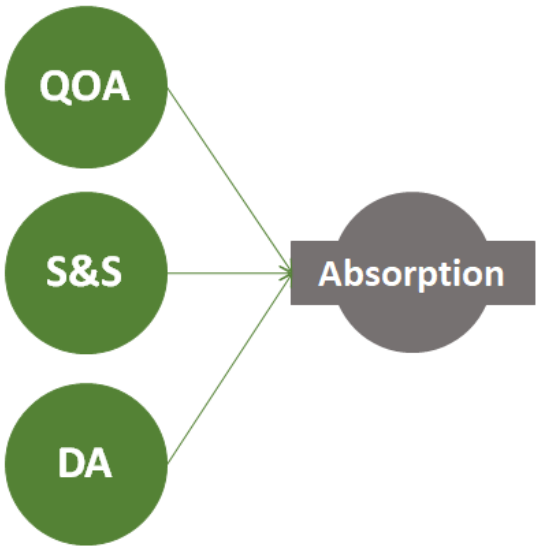

Figure 6.2: Dependent Variables to Absorption through SM

6.2.3 Enthusiasm through the SM

The relationships related to Enthusiasm through SM (Figure 6.3) were tested along Quality of airport, Safety and security, and Destination attributes.

H1C: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm through SM.

H2C: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm through SM.

H3C: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Enthusiasm through SM.

The suggested factor positively affects the Enthusiasm through SM, namely QA (H2C) (SE = 0.147, P < 0.01), SandS (H2C) (SE = 0.227, P < 0.01) and DA (H3C) (SE = 0.366, P < 0.01). Thus, Hypotheses 1C, 2C and 3C were accepted.

The enthusiasm factor is found to be one of the most critical factors through which SM users' behaviors are governed. The study has found that the level of excitement for visiting Kuwait was a major factor in people's intention to recommend it as a destination. The results showed that the QA is tested positive as a way of influencing the levels of enthusiasm. This result should cause great concern, since the facilities in Kuwait Airport are known to be old and outdated. Although the stores and shops at the departure and arrival areas at Kuwait Airport provide state-of-the-art products, the problem that people fear may hinder visitors' enthusiasm may be the level of professionalism and friendliness of the workers at the airport.

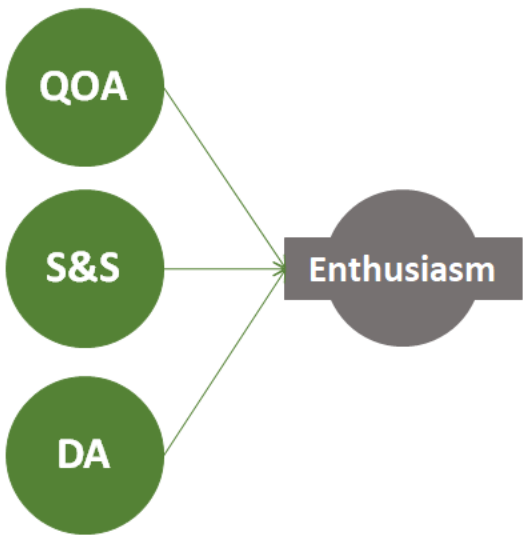

Figure 6.3: Dependent Variables to Enthusiasm through SM

6.2.4 Identification through the SM

The relationships associated with Identification through SM (Figure 6.4) were tested along Quality of airport, Safety and security, and Destination attributes.

H1D: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Identification through SM.

H2D: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Identification through SM.

H3D: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Identification through SM.

The suggested factor positively affects Identification through SM, namely QA (H2D) (SE= 0.101, $P < 0.05$), SandS (H2D) (SE = 0.272, $P < 0.01$) and DA (H3D) (SE = 0.216, $P < 0.01$). Thus, Hypotheses 1D, 2D and 3D were accepted.

The results showed a positive impact on the identification factor through SM in the areas of QA, SandS, and DA. This demonstrates that people's sense of identity is highly correlated to the quality of a product, place, or idea that they are willing to recommend. Positive recommendations are affected by personal identification with a specific item or place. In this case, SM users' judgments and recommendations might be biased in favor of what they believe themselves to be identified with.

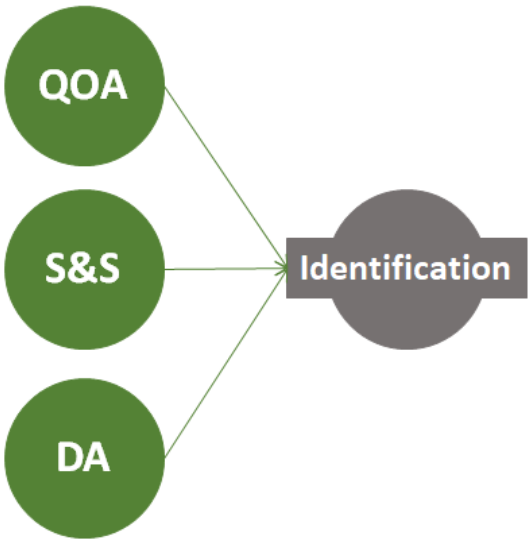

Figure 6.4: Dependent Variable to Identification through SM

6.2.5 Attention through the SM

The relationships associated with attention through SM (Figure 6.5) were tested along quality of airport, safety and security, and destination attributes.

H1E: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on Attention through SM.

H2E: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on Attention through SM.

H3E: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on Attention through SM.

The suggested factor positively affects Attention through SM, namely, QA (H2E) (SE = 0.122, $P < 0.05$), SandS (H2E) (SE = 0.227, $P < 0.01$) and DA (H3E) (SE = 0.334, $P < 0.01$). Thus, Hypotheses 1E, 2E and 3E were accepted.

On the SM people may intentionally or unintentionally pay attention to certain features, such as locations. Once they have an interest in Kuwait, for

example, they will search, look, post, and interact about it when they see a photo or comment about the country. They start to recall their experience, not only the experience they had while visiting the attractions but also when they see something related to the safety and security or to a certain level of service quality at an airport. Then individuals have a higher level of engagement and interaction (Lin et al., 2008; Harrigan et al., 2017; Carlson et al., 2019).

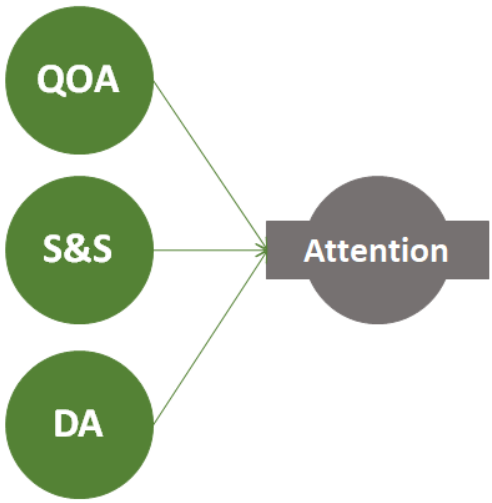

Figure 6.5: Dependent Variables to Attention through SM

6.2.6 Destination Image

The relationships related to Destination image (Figure 6.6) were tested along Quality of airport, Safety and security, Destination attributes, and Intention to recommend.

H1F: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.

H2F: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.

H3F: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.

The suggested factor positively affects the DI, namely, QA (H2F) (SE = 0.240, P < 0.01), SandS (H2F) (SE = 0.182, P < 0.01) and DA (H3F) (SE = 0.489, P < 0.01). Thus, Hypotheses 1F, 2F and 3F were accepted.

Linking the outcomes with previous studies, it can be noted that these three hypotheses are similar to those in previous studies mentioned in the literature review. Saleem et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between the quality of a service and redoing the same practice (revisiting). Furthermore, the importance of safety and security is higher than that of the destination image (Eid et al., 2019). In addition, a visitor's actual physical experience of a place's attributes will have an impact on its image (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Crouch, 2011; Eusébio and Vieira, 2013; Gannon et al., 2017). On the one hand, the touristic sites in Kuwait are among the items studied under the heading of destination attributes and they have a significant impact. However, the cultural attractions of the touristic sites were found to be non-significant aspects of the destination image in the UAE (Eid et al., 2019). This is inconsistent with the studies of tourism by Eid and Elbanna (2018) and Lee and Hsu (2013).

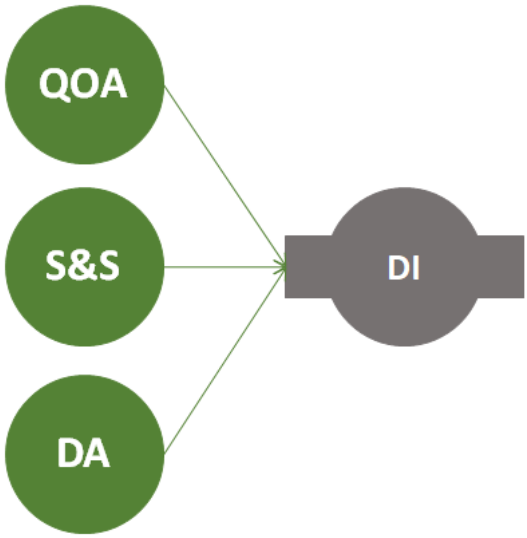

Figure 6.6: Dependent Variables to Destination Image

6.2.7 Intention to Recommend

The relationships associated with Intention to recommend (Figures 6.7, 6.8 & 6.9) were tested along Quality of airport, Safety and security, Destination attributes, Interaction through SM, Absorption through SM, Enthusiasm through SM, Identification through SM, Attention through SM, and Destination image.

H2: Quality of Airport has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

H3: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

H4: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

H5: Interaction through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

H6: Absorption through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

H7: Enthusiasm through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

H8: Identification through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

H9: Attention through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

H10: Destination Image has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.

Although the hypotheses of the QA (H2) (SE = -0.012, P > 0.10), DA (H4) (SE = -0.014, P > 0.10), Interaction through SM (H5) (SE = 0.011, P > 0.10) and Absorption through SM (H6) (SE = 0.069, P > 0.10) that were rejected, Hypotheses 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were supported and thus they were accepted. Therefore, the suggested factors positively affect the Intention to Recommend through SM, namely, SandS (H3) (SE = 0.122, P < 0.01), Enthusiasm through SM (H7) (SE = 0.178, P < 0.01), Identification through SM (H8) (SE = 0.205, P < 0.01), Attention through SM (H9) (SE = 0.153, P < 0.01) and DI (H10) (SE = 0.224, P < 0.01).

The findings of previous research (Kim et al., 2016) confirm that QA at airports is essential in creating positive behavioral intentions to recommend. Moreover, Saleem et al. (2017, P. 1151) stated that “there is a positive relationship between service quality and repurchase intention, and customer satisfaction and

brand image". In addition, Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; and Crouch, 2011 emphasized the significance of destination attributes with regard to the choice of destination and whether to recommend it to others.

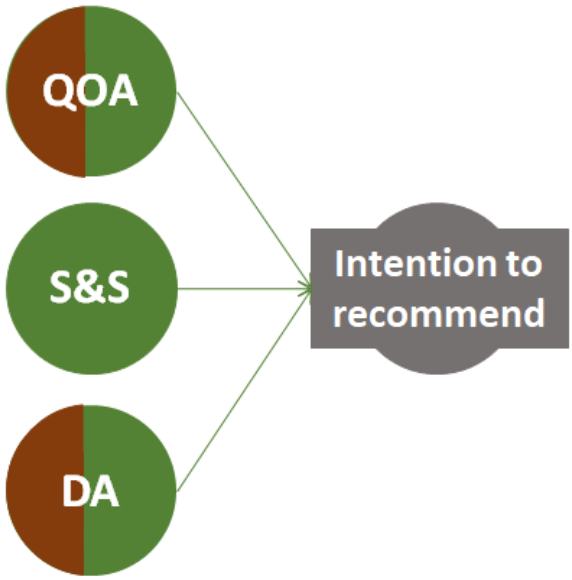

Figure 6.7: Dependent Variables to Intention to recommend

However, it was surprising to find that both QA and DA showed only a negligible negative impact on customers' intention to recommend Kuwait as a destination. However, upon closer examination of, this should not have been unexpected. This negligible negative direct effect (-0.012) of the QA is offset by the indirect positive effect (0.130) of the QA on the intention to recommend. Similarly, the negligible negative direct effect (-0.014) of the DA is offset by the indirect positive effect (0.295) of the DA on the intention to recommend. This means that it is not the QA or DA per se, but rather the improvement of the DI, through the QA and DA that lead to a stronger intention to recommend Kuwait as a destination through the SM.

Tests for the indirect (mediation) effects were conducted using bootstrapping (e.g., Iacobucci, 2008). 500 bootstrap re-samples and significance tests, based on bias-corrected 95 % confidence intervals, were used. Bootstrap analysis found a significant indirect (mediating) effect of both SM and DA on the relationship between QA and the intention to recommend Kuwait as a destination ($Y = 0.130$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, bootstrap analysis found a significant indirect (mediating) effect of both the SM and DA in the relationship between the DA and the intention to recommend Kuwait as a destination ($Y = 0.295$, $p < 0.01$). These results give partial support to Hypotheses 2 and 4.

In terms of SandS, the findings of this study support the idea that recommendations by travelers on SM will closely reflect the SandS of the country (Eid et al., 2019). Michael et al. (2019) also pointed out that the aspect of SandS of the UAE plays a major role in attracting tourists to the country. Scholars identified a positive relationship between SandS and the willingness to recommend (Roehl and Fesenmaier, 1992; Blake and Sinclair, 2003). Furthermore, Eid et al. (2019) indicated that SandS were considered more important than DI in terms of recommending a destination.

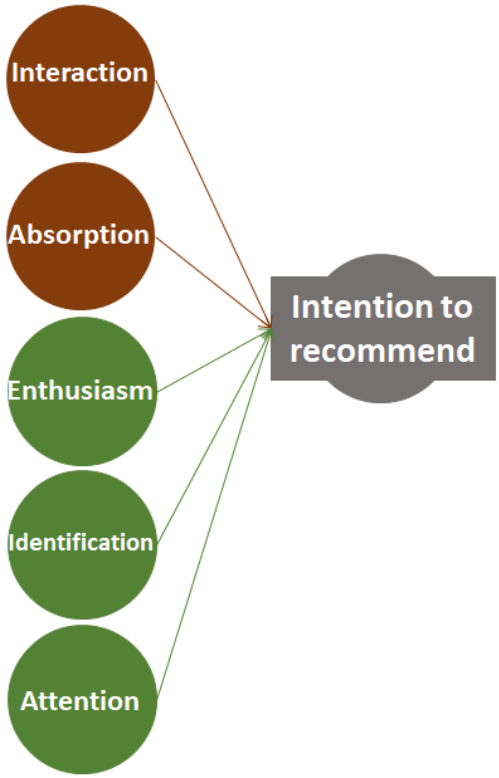

Figure 6.8: SM Dimensions of Intention to Recommend

The mediating constructs and linking the results to previous studies make it clear that the hypotheses to do with both Interaction and Absorption were rejected. However, according to the study by Nunkoo, 2016, people do share their feelings, ideas, and information related to various topics over SM. Moreover, this sharing may have an impact if it attracts a benefit in return, but the possibility should be tested and justified. Interaction between two individuals is likely to continue so long as it yields benefits and interaction will end when the benefits end (Su et al., 2018; Jahn and Kunz, 2012; Gensler et al., 2013; De Vries and Carlson, 2014). Regarding Absorption, it is rejected as well, while such scholars as Scholer and Higgins (2009) have mentioned that positive traits in people will establish an awareness of the time that they spend relating to a brand, service, or experience via an SM platform. The remaining SM dimensions –Enthusiasm, Identification, and Attention – were all accepted, as noted above, and this supports such previous studies as So et al. (2014)

who stated that a certain level of excitement will lead to positive interaction over SM. Moreover, when a person's level of attention is high, this will lead to a higher level of engagement and interaction (Lin et al., 2008; Harrigan et al., 2017; Carlson et al., 2019).

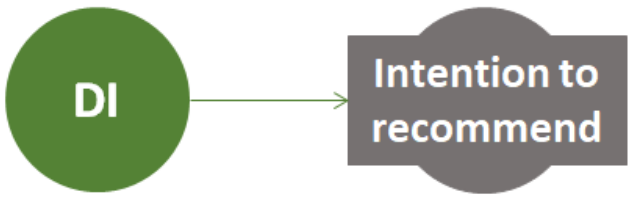

Figure 6.9: Destination Image to Intention to Recommend

Regarding the second mediator, Prayag et al. (2017) pointed out that there is a positive relationship between DI and the intention to recommend. Furthermore, the present study accepts the hypothesis that DI has a significant impact on the intention to recommend, as prior studies have also done (Chi and Qu, 2008). However, Eid et al. (2019) find instead that DI has an insignificant impact on the intention to recommend.

In conclusion, all the direct hypotheses were accepted, indicating the positive effects of the dependent variable on the independent and mediating variables, except for H5: Interaction through social media has a significant positive impact on the Destination Image and H6: Absorption through social media has a significant positive impact on the Destination Image, which were both rejected.

6.3 Research Implications

It may be helpful at this point to reflect on the findings of the research in the context of its findings. This section discusses both the academic (theoretical) and managerial implications.

6.3.1 Academic Implications

The study has not only made meaningful contribution to knowledge in the fields of SM and tourism, but also added new insights to and links between other related fields.

The theories adopted related to such areas as behavior, psychology and marketing. The SET deals with interaction between people and looks for the benefits yielded by this interaction. The DI deals with effective and cognitive divisions. The study in this regard proposed links between theories and between destination factors, and added the dimension of the social media. It has helped us to understand more of the relationships between fields and not only between variables in the same area.

Because this study outlined few of the ways in which different disciplines are linked, extra research is required to understand fully how travelers use the SM and what elements affect their behavior in using it. Furthermore, the SM use a new technology which has penetrated and been developed rapidly in the last 10 -15 years; this study considered that it added value to the science to study certain dimensions of its use. Consequently, building a theoretical framework was found to be helpful.

6.3.2 Managerial Implications

The managerial contribution can be divided into two areas. The first relates to the economic strategy of the country and the policymakers. The quality of a country's airport is the first and last point of contact for travelers and first impressions are important. According to Eid et al. (2019), the QA matters, but the present study showed that though it has no direct effect on the intention to recommend, it has a significant indirect effect. This also applies to destination

attributes as factors, which suggests that improving the QA and the country's attributes will persuade more tourists to recommend visiting Kuwait. Moreover, the SandS of visitors matter greatly and by improving them and showing visitors how the country cares about them will raise their comfort level. The decision makers can even make Kuwaiti society aware of what is needed and teach them basic life-support and first-aid skills to enable them to step in when help is needed. Showing the world initiatives of this kind and convincing others that Kuwaitis are willing to help has a positive impact. Additionally, SM has been of use more than once in political revolutions, many of which took place in Kuwait. The image of its members of Parliament has deteriorated, leading to their expulsion; this use of the SM could affect tourism even more drastically. Therefore, putting some effort into noting tourists' reviews and analyzing what they say would help in drawing up strategic and action plans for the sector.

The second recommendation concerns businesses, companies, entrepreneurs, and all organizations looking to maximize their profit. Giving more attention to what is mentioned in the SM by visitors and especially interacting with them will enhance their experience and may start creating level of loyalty in companies. Usually, the businesses that deal with tourists focus more on services than products and the service sector has very high sensitivity. Customers will switch to another service provider the moment that they feel they are not served properly. In the past businesses focused on customer relationships and had separate departments to manage them but nowadays people see new departments dealing only with the experience of customers as a whole (customer experience management). Many sectors in any country will benefit from enhancing the tourism sector, not Kuwait

alone. The telecommunication companies are competing to win the loyalty of travelers, as are the car rental companies, hotels and other forms of accommodation, restaurants, shopping malls and many other sectors. Paying attention to raising service standards is the only way to affect the amount of tourism in practice.

6.4 Limitations of the Research

The researcher's wish is that this study has contributed to the knowledge of the SM and of the tourism and marketing fields. However, like any other research, this has several limitations; but these may point to be valuable future studies. Hence, these limitations should be kept in mind.

The first limitation is the research topic itself. As shown in the literature review, few studies have focused on the SM and tourism in the GCC countries and almost none has been conducted in Kuwait. Kuwait is considered a safe, stable place, free of terrorism. Its independent variable (safety and security) was assessed using 5 items. However, this variable could be studied along more dimensions such as political stability (Eid et al., 2019) and crime rates, transportation safety, and the probability of terrorism (Sönmez and Graefe, 1998). Moreover, DI could be studied as a mediating variable that could be sub-divided into cognitive and effective constructs (Chaulagain et al., 2019).

Second, this research was deductive and applied a purely quantitative method. The data were collected through questionnaires and the perception of the participants was captured at a certain point in time. Moreover, questionnaires may allow the relationships between the variables to be predicted and outlined but cannot

identify causal relationships on a time-based dimension. Researchers could adopt a qualitative or a triangular method in order to get casual explanations.

Third, although the study used objective indicators such as the QA, SandS, DA, DI, SM, and the intention to recommend improving precision, respondents at times found it hard to remember things accurately. In quantitative methodology, questionnaires rely on the whole on respondents' self-reporting.

Last, time constraints must be considered among the limitations in this study. The nature of social science practices make it hard to measure evidence in haste. A long time would be more appropriate to capturing people's experiences with multi-methods. Even with the use of questionnaires and a quantitative method, having more time would have allowed more data to be collected and more than one survey to be held.

6.5 Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Work

Regarding the tested framework, different items could be used for testing the constructs. For example, the SM variable is studied in this research on the basis of 5 dimensions but the SM are much broader than this. Moreover, nearly all relationships were tested for direct and indirect relationships, apart from the link between the two mediators (SM and DI) whether or not they had a direct effect on each other. It is suggested, therefore that studying different variables of the SM is recommended as well as studying the relation between DI and SM.

Moreover, it would be useful to study the "Intention to revisit" as a new dependent variable or to focus on tourists who have visited the country more than once to understand their reasons for revisiting.

Furthermore, some aspects such as safety and security could have a quantification index. Specific questionnaires or studies could be conducted in several countries in the region so that countries could be ranked in terms of safety and security. This would be useful to tourism and for businesses when they set out their goals and plans.

Regarding methodology and design, both quantitative and qualitative studies should be considered since they are dissimilar, they follow different approaches, they attract different audiences and much more, to add more depth to what is known in the researched area.

It is suggested that similar studies should be conducted on neighboring countries and the findings compared to understand the differences and similarities in the hope of supporting the policy makers and business owners in these countries.

Finally, the tourism sector is sensitive and important as a source of income, while and the social media are developing too fast and have brought change to many sectors in the past decade. Therefore, it is important to keep studying those fields whether to keep the country attractive to tourists or to get more knowledge and understand the different relationships between fields.

Table 6.1: Summary Table of Accepted and Rejected Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Results
Direct Hypotheses	
H1A: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Interaction through social media.	Rejected
H2A: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Interaction through social media.	Accepted
H3A: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Interaction through social media.	Accepted
H1B: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Absorption through social media.	Accepted
H2B: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Absorption through social media.	Accepted
H3B: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Absorption through social media.	Accepted
H1C: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Enthusiasm through social media.	Accepted
H2C: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Enthusiasm through social media.	Accepted
H3C: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Enthusiasm through social media.	Accepted
H1D: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Identification through social media.	Accepted
H2D: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Identification through social media.	Accepted
H3D: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Identification through social media.	Accepted
H1E: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Attention through social media.	Accepted
H2E: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Attention through social media.	Accepted
H3E: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Attention through social media.	Accepted
H1F: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.	Accepted
H2F: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.	Accepted

Table 6.1: Summary Table of Accepted and Rejected Hypotheses (Continued)

Hypotheses	Results
Direct Hypotheses	
H3F: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Destination Image.	Accepted
H2: Quality of airport has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Partially Accepted
H3: Safety and Security have a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted
H4: Destination Attributes have a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Partially Accepted
H5: Interaction through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Rejected
H6: Absorption through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Rejected
H7: Enthusiasm through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted
H8: Identification through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted
H9: Attention through social media has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted
H10: Destination Image has a significant positive impact on the Intention to Recommend.	Accepted

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Appendices

- **Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire**

TOURISTS SURVEY ON PERCEPTION OF KUWAIT AND INTENTION TO RECOMMEND THROUGH THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Dear Participant,

As part of my academic study, I am carrying out a survey on your (tourist's) perception of the visit to Kuwait and intention to recommend Kuwait to others through the use of the social media.

Your feedback through the closed-ended questionnaire will provide understanding of your perception of your visit to Kuwait based on various factors such as quality of airport, safety and security, and images and attributes of Kuwait. In addition to this, the use of social media to recommend Kuwait to others is also explored.

I am not collecting any personal information that discloses your identity. I am collecting data from several tourists. Therefore, I assure you anonymity. The objective is to gather responses from several tourists who visit Kuwait and to understand their intention to recommend Kuwait as a tourist destination through the use of social media. Therefore, I assure you confidentiality.

The closed-ended questionnaire should take between 20 and 25 minutes to answer. So please take the time to complete this questionnaire. The information that you provide will help the tourism sector of Kuwait to improve and provide a better environment to attract tourists.

Kindly note that participation is voluntary; accordingly you may withdraw at any time from the study. There is minimal risk in participating in this study since all the data collected will be anonymous.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like further information regarding the results, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher directly as per the contact information below.

Thank you in advance for your valuable contribution to this important study.

General instructions to complete the survey

- Please answer all the questions, to the best of your knowledge
- Please tick the following statement if you agree to participate:

I agree to voluntarily participate in the study ___ Agree

Ibrahim AlKandari
PhD student – Mass communication **United Arab Emirates University**

College of Humanities and Social Science **Email: 201280021@uaeu.ac.ae**

Screening Question

- **Who should complete this questionnaire?**

The questionnaire should be filled in by Kuwait visitors who have visited Kuwait in the last 2 years through answering the following questions:

☐ Yes	Please continue with the survey
☐ No	You do not have to take part in this survey. Thank you.

Tourist Profile

Is this your first visit to Kuwait?

☐ Yes	☐ No

What is the main purpose of your visit?

☐ Visiting relatives / friends	☐ Leisure tourism	☐ Business and conventions
☐ Other		

How are you traveling in this trip?

☐ As a family	☐ With friends	☐ With employer
☐ Alone	☐ In an organized group	☐ With colleagues

In which types of establishment are you mainly staying?

☐ Hotel/motel	☐ Rented apartment	☐ Staying with friends / relatives
☐ One-day trip	☐ Other	

Demographics

What is your Gender?

☐ Male	☐ Female

What is your Nationality: ……

What is your age?

☐ 18-24 years	☐ 25-31 years	☐ 32-37 years	☐ 38 years and above

What is your education level?

☐ High school and below	☐ Diploma
☐ Bachelor's degree	☐ Master/PhD Degree

Marital Status

☐ Single	☐ Married	☐ Divorced	☐ Widow

What is your Occupation?

☐ Unemployed	☐ Self-employed	☐ Privately Employed
☐ Work in a Public Post	☐ Student	☐ Housewife
☐ Retiree	☐ Others	

Frequency of sharing tourism-related information on social media (in a month)

☐ 1-3 times	☐ 4-6 times	☐ More than 6 times

Frequency of receiving tourism-related information through social media sites (in a month)

☐ 1-3 times	☐ 4-6 times	☐ More than 6 times

Frequency of browsing tourism-related advertisements on social media sites to look for travel information (in a month)

☐ 1-3 times	☐ 4-6 times	☐ More than 6 times

5-Point Scale Statements

Quality of Airport	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
The waiting room at the airport was clean	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The baggage claim facilities and delivery were efficient	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There were adequate baggage trolleys	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There were multiple check-in facility counters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The customs and immigration facilities were efficient	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The airport has facilities for disabled people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Safety and security	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
My family will not worry about my safety when I stay in Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People who are travelling with me will be safe	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait is a safe place to visit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Personal security is not a problem in Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait is a peaceful country	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Destination Attributes	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Kuwait has many touristic sites	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait has appealing local food	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait offers good value for my holiday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait is an economically developed country	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Destination Image	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Kuwait has beautiful scenery/natural attractions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait has interesting cultural/historical attractions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait has interesting and friendly people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait has unpolluted/unspoiled environment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kuwait's attractions are pleasant	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Social Media

Interaction through social media	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
In general, I like to get involved in discussion about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded people who discuss about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other people about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Absorption through social media	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
Time flies when I am interacting with others about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When interacting with others about Kuwait, it is difficult to detach myself from the conversation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel happy when I am interacting with others about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Enthusiasm through social media	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
I am passionate about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am enthusiastic about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel excited about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Identification through social media	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
When someone criticizes Kuwait, it feels like a personal insult	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I talk about Kuwait, I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When someone praises Kuwait, it feels like a personal compliment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Attention through social media	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
I like to learn more about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anything related to Kuwait grabs my attention	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like learning more about Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Intention to Recommend

Intention to Recommend through social media	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I will mention my travel to Kuwait to others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will make sure that others know what I really feel about my travel experience	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will make sure that others know what I really feel about my visit to Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will speak positively about my travel experiences to Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will recommend Kuwait to other people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will speak positively about Kuwait to other people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I will encourage friends and relatives to visit Kuwait	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Do you have any suggestions to improve tourism sector in Kuwait?

- **Appendix 2: Ethical Approval**

UAEU

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Division of Research and Graduate Studies Ethics Approval System

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