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THE IMPORTANCE OF USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN TOURISM PROMOTION BY TOURISM AGENCIES

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ABSTRACT

New technologies are fundamentally changing the way tourism agencies communicate, and as a result, these tourism agencies have to move from traditional to digital communications, using digital tools at the same time: websites, social networks, emails, etc.
The study aimed to discuss the importance of social networking sites in tourism promotion by tourism agencies, through a questionnaire conducted on a sample of 40 tourism agencies. Through it, we have concluded that social networking sites are one of the most important methods that work to develop the tourism sector, and a basic basis through which the strategic position of the tourism agency can be improved. It is an important new element in promotion as a marketing lever to increase its reputation and improve its commercial performance by using a promotional strategy for its tourism offers and services through these networks. It also plays the role of a marketing channel and communication tool between the tourism agency and customers to meet their needs and desires.

1. Introduction.

Tourism is one of the sectors, which need a close relationship with information and communication technologies. It is also a competitive and information-intensive industry. (Khatri, 2018).

With the arrival of the big data era, massive data has penetrated into every industry and field and become an important factor of production. In the Web 2.0 environment, consumers' travel decision-making behavior relies more on the management and utilization of data and information than ever before. Through social networks, blogs, etc., dormant data on the Web flows in two directions (between users and data providers),

making it easier for users to participate in and expand information and transform it into knowledge. However, the availability of information and the creation of knowledge/wisdom do not grow at the same speed. (Malik et al., 2018)

The immateriality and simultaneity of production and consumption of tourism products determine that tourists usually search for information in order to reduce risks and uncertainties when making travel decisions. Tourists create and share destination tourism information through various social media platforms (blogs and microblogs, content or virtual communities, and social networks) (Tsiakali, 2015) consumers take tourism information on social media as an essential reference when choosing destinations. (Chung et al., 2015)

In this technologically dominated era, social media has become a real essential technique in today's marketing mix in general and in promotional tools in particular (Bashar et al, 2012; Minazzi, 2015). The era of digital society allows people to join virtual communities through social media (Zamrudi and Wicaksono, 2018) Social media is a system that offers a chance to destination marketing organizations (DMOs) with limited human and financial resources to reach visitors at the global level (Buhalis et al., 2012; Hays et al., 2013). Maintaining a presence on social media platforms has become inevitable for tourism destinations. (Tiago et al, 2019)

Social media has given consumers a novel experience. Compared with the promotional content of businesses, the emotional evaluation of destinations and their perceived credibility of tourist-generated content (TGC) may play a greater role in consumers' decision-making process (Iordanova and Stainton, 2019).used the ELM model to verify the persuasive effect of social media tourism information on tourism decisionmaking. Kapoor et al. (2022) proposed that information quality positively influences hotel stay intention. (Wang and Yan, 2022).

Social networks have become a huge source of information(Zazoua Fellah and Ghmari, 2021) and a prominent place of creating, distributing, and marketing content that is unique to the users (Sin et al., 2020) fundamentally changing individual travel plans and consumption patterns of travel and leisure. (Hudson and Thal, 2013).

According to the DataReportal, 2021, the number of internet users are 4.66 billion (59.5% of total world population), and 4.20 billion active social media users (53.6% of world's total polouadtion). Of the social media outlets, the three top platforms are Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp with the active number of users 2.74 billion, 2.30 billion and 2 billion respectively. (Berhanua and Rajb,2023)

In Algeria there are a total of 24.48 million active Internet users, or 58% of the population (datareportal, 2019), the majority of whom are active on social networking sites, which proves to what extent the use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others are anchored in everyone's daily life.

Social networks are used by a dizzying number of companies, associations and individuals. Every day, billions of publications and engagement markers are recorded. For example, every day, 4.75 billion pieces of content are shared on Facebook, 70 million photos posted on Instagram, 500 million tweets are sent. (Marrone and Gallic, 2018)

The objective of this research is to analyze the use of social networking sites in tourism promotion by tourism agencies.

It is in this spirit and with the aim of shedding light on the use of social networks as new means of communication to promote the services of tourist establishments such as tourism agencies that we deemed it necessary to direct our field of investigation into the following issue: Do tourism agencies use social networking sites for tourism promotion? How do social networks contribute to tourism promotion?

2. Conceptual Aspect of the Study.
2.1. Social networking sites.

Social networking sites are known as interactive social networks that allow their users to communicate at any time they want and in any place in the world. They appeared on the Internet years ago and also enable them to communicate visually and audioly, exchange photos, and other capabilities that strengthen the social relationship between them (Al-Dulaimi, 2011). It is a group of global networks connected to millions of devices around the world, forming a group of huge networks, which transfer enormous information at high speed between different countries of the world, and include constantly evolving information (Al-Sharhan, 2003), It is also a service available via the Internet, which works to connect a large number of users from all over the world and share and network them on one website. They communicate directly together, exchange ideas and information, discuss issues of common importance between them, and enjoy news services, instant chat, e-mail, and the sharing of text files, pictures, and files. Video and audio (Abdul Mawla, et al., 2014) ,are

also known as web-based technological applications that allow interaction between people, allow electronic data to be transferred and exchanged quickly, and provide users with the ability to find others who share the same interests (Al-Awad, 2020). It is a group of web-based applications that include content produced by the consumer, that is, the set of impressions they produce resulting from their experiences and experiences (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) .In addition, it is software that supports the communication of a group of people, enabling them to meet and dialogue using a computer connected to the Internet, and aims to establish virtual groups (Al-Arishi, Al-Dosari, 2015).

Social networking sites are electronic technological applications that exist to achieve communication and interaction between various individuals spread around the world through written and audio correspondence while achieving instant communication, which achieves the greatest benefit by bringing people together in a site for remote communication.

There are several classifications of social networks; we have chosen the simplest, which has two main categories (Kouaci and Telahigue):

- **General social networks**: they make it possible to reach a larger number of members and they are classified into three categories:

- Personal networks based on interests (Facebook). According to Dupin, "personal social networks create a social bond around individual themes and can respond to logics such as hyperlocalization or hypersegmentation" (Dupin, 2010)

- Media networks focused on the distribution of video and music content. (Youtube) (Fanelli, 2010)

- News networks focused on the dissemination of information (Twitter). They constitute sites where professionals and Internet users can mix to disseminate, relay and comment on global information. (Fanelli, 2010)

- **Specialist networks**: they are more targeted and focused more on centers of interest. They are divided into two categories. (Kouaci and Telahigue):

- Professional networks: focused on the address book and professional exchanges.

- Specialized thematic networks: specialized in sport, music, etc.

While keeping in mind that the boundary from one use to another is maintained, the authors have segmented social networks around five key uses of Internet users: (Schipounoff, March. and Boyé, 2015)

Resauter: Usually, the first name that comes to mind when we talk about social media is Facebook. With Google+, Viadeo and LinkedIn, it is one of the social networks, which above all allow their members to stay connected with their personal or professional network, or to meet new people around common interests.

Share content: Content sharing platforms above all allow Internet users and brands to share content that they have produced. They are generally specialized around a type of content: video (YouTube), photos and images (Instagram, FlickR), PowerPoint files (Slideshare).

Publish: In this category, we find all the tools that allow you to easily publish content on the Internet: blog creation platforms (Word-Press, Blogger), micro-blogging platforms (Twitter and TumblR) and wikis. (Wikipedia, Wikia)

Converse, exchange, discuss: Corresponding to this use are the tools which put exchanges at the heart of their operation, whether the exchange is done through a game of questions and answers like on Quora, Viadeo and LinkedIn or by voice like on Skype and Google Hangouts.

2.2. Tourism promotion.

According to Latif 1994, tourism promotion is defined as "an integrated set of elements used to publicize the tourist product and convince potential tourists to buy it" (Benhaddou, 2017) Tourism promotion performs one of the functions of tourism marketing, and works to stimulate tourism movement and influence the direction of tourists to a region or site. It is also considered one of the most important elements of the marketing mix, as its importance increases in tourism services that need permanent promotion of all kinds. (Zaghar, 2021)

There are two types of tourism promotion tools: classic tools and modern tools, which are summarized as follows (Hadibi and Fechit, 2022):

- **Classic tools**: They group together

- The daily press: the advantage of the daily press is the flexibility of use, the short reservation time and the credibility.

- *The magazine press*: it has the same characteristics of the daily press, except that the magazine press allows the message to last longer with more prestige.

- *Television:* allows us to reach a greater diversity of people and target them according to schedules, channels and advertising spots, it is credible since it allows us to show the real image of the tourist product.

- *Display*: the main advantage is the multiplicity of formats and types: small, large, light display, etc.

- *Radio*: has more advantages for tourist organizations, it is inexpensive and allows the message to be spread quickly and easily.

- **Modern tools include:** The advent of new technologies has brought about new tools which can be summarized as follows (Hadibi and Fechit,2022):

- *The website of the tourism player:* it is the cornerstone for promoting the tourist offer, it allows you to highlight the tourist product and increase visibility.

- *Social networking sites:* are the most influential media in our time, they allow effective communication using different criteria to multiple targets.

- *Specialized platforms*: these are sites that allow you to reference a tourist establishment and collect opinions from Internet users. These platforms also allow Internet users to book directly online in return for a commission, like booking.com, trivago.com. (Lelong and Synave, 2010)

- *Digital maps*: Digital cartography is increasingly impacting tourism with its interactive maps. Google Maps, Viamichelin, Mappy tourist establishments can personalize their maps and appear on these online supports. (Lelong and Synave, 2010).

3. Previous studies.

- A study conducted by *Mekonnen and Feven* entitled **"Integration of ICT and tourism for improved promotion of tourist attractions in Ethiopia (2018)"** confirmed that social influence, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, cost-effectiveness, competitive advantage, and facilitating conditions significantly affect behavioural intention to use ICT in the tourism sector of Ethiopia.

- Study conducted by *Sara Alouane and al* entitled **"The impact of social media on the tourist image of a country: Case of Algeria and Morocco (2021)"** The authors carried out empirical research on the impact of social media on the tourist image of a destination. Tourism professionals are gradually starting to get involved in social networks. The impact of these can change the brand orientation of a city or country. The brand image of a country or city is sensitive and can be easily affected through the reaction of Internet users who can express their dissatisfaction or satisfaction with the desired destination.

- A study conducted by *Berkani Samir* entitled **"Network marketing a lever for promoting tourism: local in Algiers (2018)"** This study aimed to know the extent of the impact of social networking on the marketing of tourism services, especially in terms of promoting local tourism, and how the marketing strategy is applied through social networking sites. Today, the Internet has become a new communication strategy for consumers of tourism services, in addition to emphasizing the importance of the Internet in the electronic economy From the data collected through this study, many results were reached, namely that social networks are rooted in the habits of Algerians, and that social networks are a marketing lever for companies wishing to increase their reputation and improve their commercial performance by using a marketing strategy through these networks while taking advantage of the trend of linking Algerian Internet users with the transmission of advertising messages, and that Facebook remains the primary network for Algerian Internet users, as it represents a means of communication for tourism offers.

- A study conducted by *Gonca Guzel Sahin* entitled **"The Effects of Social Media on Tourism Marketing: A Study among University Students(2015)"** The study aimed to discuss the importance of social networking sites in tourism marketing through a questionnaire conducted on students at the university. According to the results of the study, social networking sites have affected the tourism sector in both negative and positive aspects, as the tourism decisions of the younger generation were greatly influenced in choosing the destination. Tourism, through the comments and personal experiences of other users through social networking sites. The study recommended that employees in tourism establishments should use social networking sites as a tool for effective marketing and communication.

After reviewing the most important findings of previous studies, it became clear to us that our study was distinguished from previous studies because it differed in the way it dealt with social networking sites and their role in marketing tourism services. It also differed in studying the relationship between the two variables and highlighting the role of social networking sites in marketing tourism services. This study also differs from Previous studies in terms of the research sample that was targeted to complete the applied aspect.

4. Approach and Methodology.

Any researcher following a specific approach in his study is not a matter of chance or random choice, but rather depends on the nature of the subject of the study through which the appropriate approach is determined. In our study, we relied on the descriptive analytical method because it does not only collect information, but also analyzes and interprets it to extract its significance and identify the essence of its subject ,This is done by conducting a desk survey to build the theoretical framework of the study. In addition to conducting a field survey to collect data using a survey list directed to potential consumers who serve the purposes of the study in order to analyze it to answer the questions raised in the study.

As part of this study, we designed an electronic questionnaire, which aimed to understand the role of social networks in tourism promotion. In addition, we used Excel and SPSS software, version 19, for the analysis of the data collected.

5. Results and Discussion.

Tourism agencies play a very important role in the tourism industry since they constitute the cornerstone between the consumer and the various tourism providers tour operators, airlines, hotels, insurance companies, etc.) Hadibi, Fechit, 2022).

According to this investigation, we propose the model the influence of the use of social networks by tourist establishments (tourism agencies) in relation to the attitude of tourists.

In this part, we will analyze the results obtained from our survey, in order to better answer our problem. The analysis made it possible to collect the following information:

- **The nature of information provided by tourism agencies on social networking sites:**
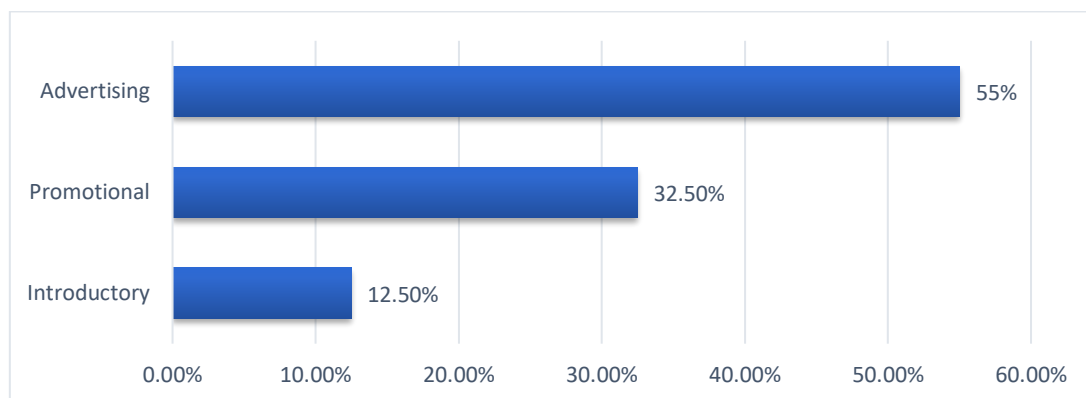

Fig. 1. The nature of information.
Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS outputs

Based on the above-mentioned data, it became clear to us that the majority of the sample agreed that social networking sites provide information about tourism affairs, in addition to their differences in their opinions about the nature of this information. Therefore, we find the equivalent of 55% who believed that the nature of this information is that it is advertising through which people can Customers know tourist places, hotel prices, etc. While 32.5% saw it as promotional for tourism services provided, such as transportation, accommodation, and other services, while the equivalent of 12.5% saw it as introductory.

These results show that traditional communication methods no longer meet the needs for a distinctive tourism service, given the great spread and popularity. Which was known by social networking sites, the most famous of which is Facebook. It is an effective means through which advertisements are designed and

published because of their impact on providing information about the tourism issue and marketing the tourism products and services provided by tourism agencies, while the advertising aspect remains the biggest reason for visiting these sites.

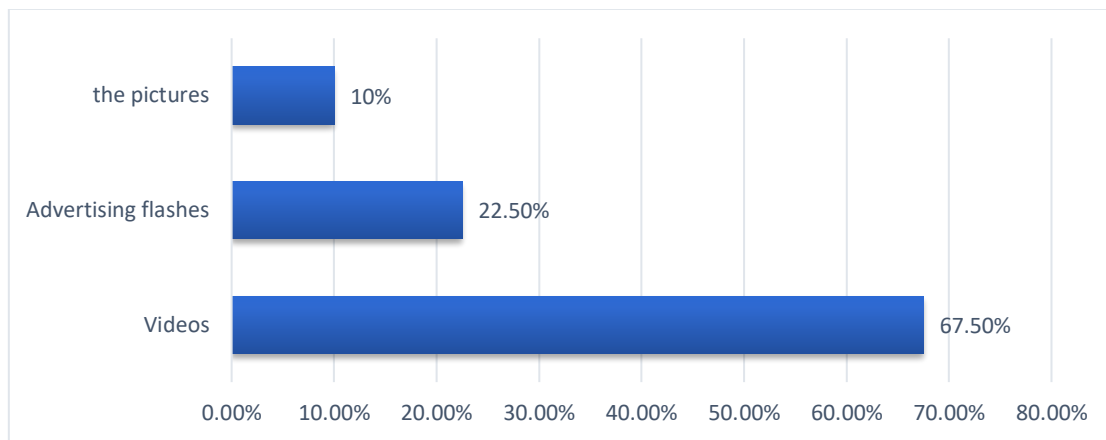- **Tools and methods used by tourism agencies to promote tourism through social networking sites:**

Fig. 2. The most influential method used by tourism agencies.
Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS outputs

We note from the results obtained and explained above that the tools and means used by tourism agencies to promote tourism through social networking sites were largely through videos, which had a percentage of 67.5%, followed by advertising flashes with a percentage of 22.5%. Finally, photos with a percentage 10% and this is because the videos present the tourist site almost identical to reality, especially while showing all the elements that would contribute to attracting tourists.

Also, through social networking sites such as: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, everyone can learn about tourism services and promote them by following electronic images and video clips, in addition to the pages and groups present on the social networking sites of tourism agencies periodically updating their information. It also continues to include recent pictures and video clips regarding services and tourist places, and the pages provide those wishing to visit any tourist site with various information about the site and the services it contains. It also enables its visitors to learn about and interact with everything new in the world of tourism. Therefore, the tourism programs displayed on the pages of tourism agencies on social networking sites help develop the agency's performance and attract the largest possible number of customers by motivating them to travel.
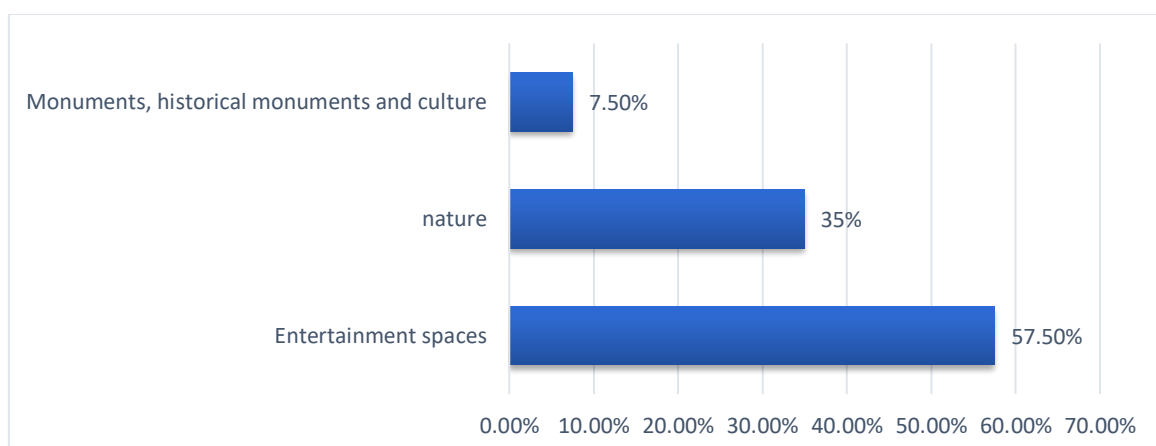
- **Aspects that interest customers in tourism:**

Fig. 3. Aspects that interest customers.
Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS outputs

The results obtained showed that what interests the clients of tourist agencies in the tourism aspect are the recreational spaces at a rate of 57.5%, followed by nature at a rate of 35%, and then the monuments, historical monuments, culture and traditions at a rate of 7.5%. This indicates that customers are more interested in the recreational spaces and nature than in the purpose this is due to the entertainment that these spaces provide, as well as nature, which contains unaltered views. Therefore, by knowing customers' impressions, tourism agencies can direct their customers to the type of tourism that meets their desires and thus gain their trust.

- **The extent to which social networking sites can be classified as an effective tool for tourism promotion by tourism agencies:**
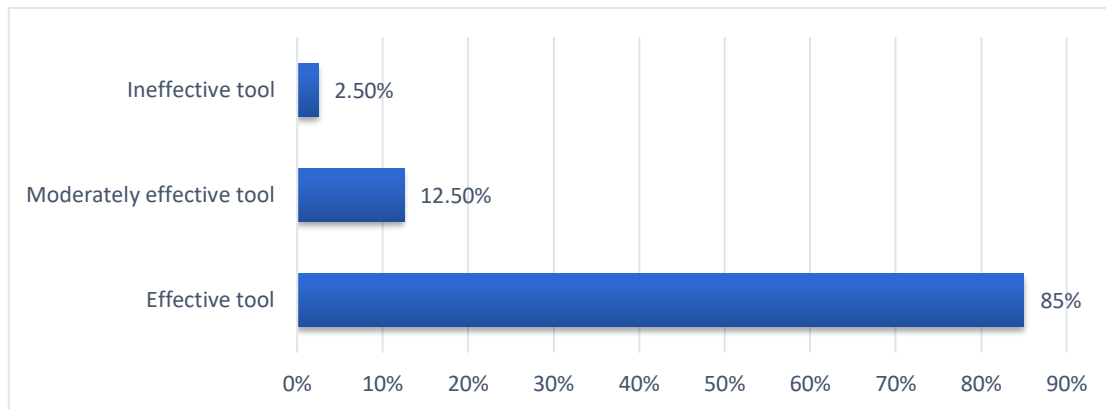
Fig. 4. The effectiveness of social networking sites for tourism promotion
Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS outputs

The results obtained regarding the classification of social networking sites as an effective tool for promoting tourism in tourism agencies showed us that 85% of the respondents acknowledge that social networking sites are an effective tool in tourism promotion, as through them they are able to know the tourism components on the one hand and the tourism services provided such as transportation and food. On the other hand, as for the percentage of the moderately effective group, it is estimated at 12.5%, followed by 2.5% of the respondents who acknowledge that social sites are considered a weak tool for them. Hence, it becomes clear to us the extent of the success of social networking sites in stimulating tourism as an effective tool for promoting tourism. It leads to stimulating tourism movement and influencing the direction of tourists to a region or site. It is also considered one of the most important elements of the marketing mix, as its importance increases in tourism services that need... To constant promotion of all kinds.

Tourism agencies have also taken to social networking sites for the success of their communication policy with customers, and this is based on the idea that customers who want to travel have their confidence established based on the information of previously traveling customers, and therefore they are willing to join the group. Therefore, social networking sites provide platforms for exchanging photos, conversations, and video clips about tourist destinations, and are a means of communication and interaction between the institution and its customers, since they meet through it without temporal media or spatial barriers, as it provides the possibility of continuous communication between them.

- **Marketing tourism services through social networking sites helps tourism agencies:**

We find that most of the respondents' answers were that promoting tourism services through the agency's social networking sites primarily helps facilitate customers' communication with the agency by knowing the places of excursions, prices offered, activities offered, and means of transportation before going out for tourist accommodation, and this was at a rate of 92.5%, followed by 50% that promoting tourism services through the agency's social networking sites helps provide advanced services. Finally, the remaining percentage of respondents, estimated at 35%, find that tourism promotion helps the customer satisfy his needs.

From this we conclude that marketing tourism services through the agency's social networking sites helps customers communicate with the agency, as it saves them time and effort and enables them to obtain sufficient information about tourism offers such as prices, discounts, and the content of the service provided.
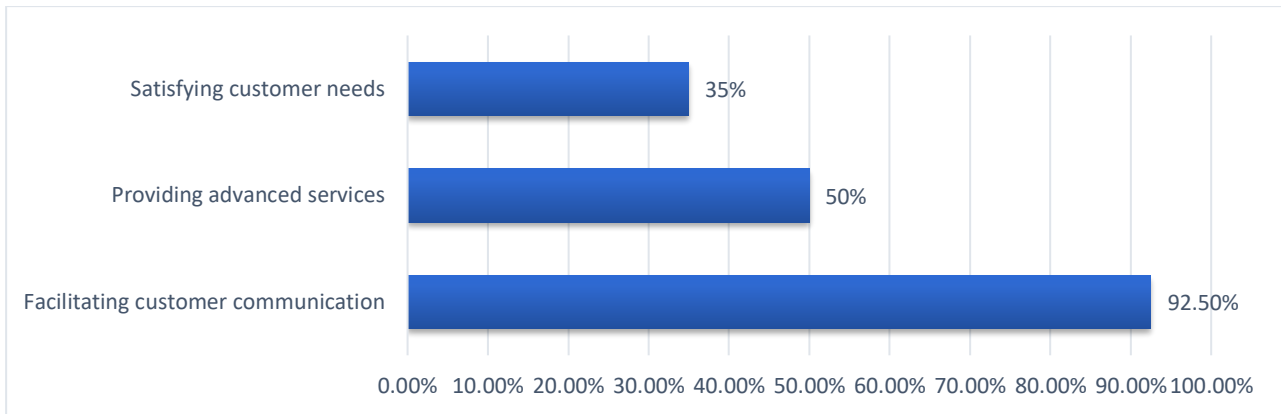
Fig. 5. Marketing tourism services
Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS outputs

Through this study, we learned about the role that the use of social networking sites by tourism agencies can play in tourism promotion, and we concluded a set of results that we summarize as follows:

- The tourism programs displayed on the pages of tourism agencies on social networking sites help develop the agency's performance on the one hand and attract the largest possible number of customers by motivating them to travel on the other hand.

- Social networking sites bring tourists closer to tourism agencies, which leads to knowing their concerns and thus gaining their trust.
- Social networking sites are considered an effective tool for promoting tourism in a large way at the present time, especially with the widespread spread of advanced technologies.
- Promotion through Social networking sites by the agency contributes to gaining more customers and thus achieving financial profit.

- The study gave a positive impression to the customers interviewed about the contribution of social networking sites in promoting tourism, based on the high percentages obtained from the study.

- Social networking sites have provided many tourism benefits and services to the masses, allowing them to learn more about them as well as view the various promotional activities provided by tourism agencies through their pages.

- Promotion through social networking sites helps introduce tourism through advertising, and this leads to attracting tourists from abroad and introducing hard currency.

- Tourism agencies rely on social networking sites to promote and introduce tourism and its services, as a result of the public interaction these sites provide and the financial profits they provide.

Through these results, we were able to answer the problem at hand, and the general result is that the use of social networking sites by tourism agencies is considered a tool for tourism promotion. It is an effective marketing method through which tourism agencies market their tourism services in an easy and low-cost way, all in order to attract the largest possible number of tourists inside or outside the country.

6. Conclusions.

In conclusion, it can be said that social networking sites have an important place in human life, as they have entered many areas of his life, including the tourism field. The latter has brought about a radical change in the marketing of tourism services and has contributed greatly to introducing these services, as their role is increasing through the process of promoting tourism offers.

Tourism promotion through social networking sites is the main key that achieves the goals of any organization. It is worth noting that social networking sites enjoy great credibility from decision-makers,

tourism companies, hotels, and all tourism service providers that use them to market their products. In addition, social networking sites have a role in tourism promotion, especially with tourism agencies, and they have an important impact through which tourists can be communicated with, providing them with information and tourist offers, future trends for tourism marketing via social networking sites have become greatly exposed and increasing for the tourism industry.

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