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## THE INFLUENCE OF E-WOM ON EGYPTIAN PRIVATE AIRLINES TICKET PURCHASING INTENTION

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AHMED MAHMOUD MOHAMED HASSAN

RESEARCHER, FACULTY OF TOURISM AND HOTELS, LUXOR UNIVERSITY, EGYPT

SABREEN G. ABD ELJALIL

FACULTY OF TOURISM AND HOTELS, LUXOR UNIVERSITY, EGYPT

MOHAMED EZZAT

FACULTY OF TOURISM AND HOTELS, MINIA UNIVERSITY, EGYPT

### ABSTRACT

*With onset of the digital age, the airline industry has become increasingly influenced by online networks' communications. The continuous growth of social networks is visible and obvious which extend the impact of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on different online travel platforms. This research aims to investigate the factors which influence eWOM on purchase intention of the passengers travelling onboard the Egyptian private airlines. Moreover, the research questionnaire survey technique uses in this research to assess the dimensions of eWOM and passengers' purchase intention on airlines' tickets. The sample of the study are the passengers whom travelling onboard the Egyptian private airlines. Beneficial sampling techniques used in this research and structural equation modeling use to test the research hypotheses. The results of the study confirm that the eWOM has direct influence on the Egyptian private airlines' ticket purchasing intention. The most valuable result of the research is eWOM has significant importance which can be widely used by Egyptian private airlines' marketing managers in their online marketing campaigns to attract and engage more customers.*

**KEYWORDS:** Airline Industry; Corporate Image; Egyptian Private Airlines; EWOM; Purchase Intention.

### INTRODUCTION

The growth of social media and social network sites transformation from traditional word of mouth to electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Earlier WOM communication was face to face are discussed and shared among known friends and relatives. Nowadays electronic word of mouth is shared among known friends, relatives and interested communities in social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter and more blogs sites.

Online review and comments are the main source of eWOM communications, which become important tools of marketing strategies because many consumers used to search for online reviews and recommendations as the first step for purchasing online. Thus, understanding the core of eWOM is especially significant for those products and services whereby consumers potentially obtain information (search), book or buy online, such as hotels, airlines and travel packages.

The eWOM has well functioned especially in service and travel industries where it is very difficult for consumers to make a purchasing decision as they have no chance to see or try the products or services until they purchase it. Therefore, the eWOM communications through social networking plays an important role in increasing and directing the consumers' purchasing intention. Customers are used to search for useful recommendations through eWOM when they are thinking about booking hotels, travel packages and airlines' tickets. This because travelers can easily access to any information they want to know, therefore the information published by regular travelers can help them to see whether the quality of products and services they are about to buy are worth purchasing or not (Sparks and Browning, 2011).

Purchase intention is the desire to buy some products or services in the future. Purchase intention in social media has the same conception of traditional ways of buying products or services. User created contents and online electronic word of mouth are key component to create a purchase intention through social networking sites. Moreover, social media users are actively contributed in several social network sites and platforms to get current updated information about products and services. (Navitha Sulthana and Vasantha, S. 2019).

According to the statistics generated by Social bakers (2020) on usage levels of social media in the aviation industry based on Facebook fans as of September 2020, Egypt Air has the largest number of fans, at 1,425,844 fans followed by Nesma Airlines with 466,630 fans along with Nile Air has 378.667 fans, Air Cairo with 104.546 fans and Al-Massria Airlines with 91.095 fans (Social bakers, 2020). Compared to foreign airlines, the usage of social media in marketing and the awareness of its importance in Egyptian private airlines seem to be low, considering the small size of its fans. Thus, the use of airline social media by passengers is likely to increase continuously and obviously will increase the use of social media and the influence of eWOM in Egyptian private airlines' marketing strategies in Egypt.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

With the expanded aviation market competition, the Egyptian airlines whom owned by the private sector did not appear to be prepared for the ideal exploitation of the benefits of social media and its influence on the purchasing intention. This lack of readiness and exploitation is evidently appearing in the low numbers of fans and followers of the Egyptian private airlines official social networking pages and their rare official existence in the popular online travel virtual communities in the comparison with the foreign airlines which have the same capital and fleet's size. Even though there are several studies and extensive volume of literature on eWOM, it is significant to notify that eWOM is still under-researched field and needs further analysis as there is a lack of researches on this subject interested with the Egyptian aviation market.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

According to the previous review literatures, traditional WOM has moved from the real world to virtual world as "eWOM", and it becomes very important to explore how eWOM could impact the passengers' purchasing intention. Based on this, the current study will attempt to explore the main research purpose: the assessment of the impact of eWOM on passengers purchasing intention through the following hypotheses:

**H1: Corporate image mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention.**

H1/1: eWOM credibility enhances corporate image.

H1/2: corporate image enhances purchase intention.

H1/3: eWOM credibility enhances purchase intention.

**H2: Corporate image mediates the relationship between eWOM quality and purchase intention.**

H2/1: eWOM quality enhances corporate image.

H2/2: corporate image enhances purchase intention.

H2/3: eWOM quality enhances purchase intention.

**H3: Corporate image mediates the relationship between eWOM quantity and purchase intention.**

H3/1: eWOM quantity enhances corporate image.

H3/2: corporate image enhances purchase intention.

H3/3: eWOM quantity enhances purchase intention.

**H4: Corporate image mediates the relationship between perceived eWOM and purchase intention.**

H4/1: perceived eWOM enhances corporate image.

H4/2: corporate image enhances purchase intention.

H4/3: perceived eWOM enhances purchase intention.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The study aims to explore the mediating role of corporate image in the relationship between perceived eWOM (eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, and eWOM quantity) and its influence on the purchase intention for air tickets of the Egyptian private airlines.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**WORD OF MOUTH (WOM) AND ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (EWOM)**

Many researchers introduced the definitions to describe eWOM, Litvin et al., (2008) defined eWOM as "all informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers" this includes communication between producers and consumers as well as those between consumers themselves, both essential parts of the WOM flow and both obviously differentiated from communications through mass media (Litvin et al., 2008; Magalhaes and Musallam, 2014). Moreover, Hennig-Thurau et al., (2004) defined eWOM as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet".

The concept of eWOM is similar to traditional word-of-mouth correspondence except with eWOM the correspondence takes place via the internet. Given the worldwide presence of the Internet, eWOM has become an influential channel for sharing information about a company's products and services among consumers, businesses, and the general audience. Although eWOM may be viewed as an extension or natural growth of WOM, there are considerable differences between the two. For example, Huete-Alcocer (2017) observed that with WOM the receiver of information generally knows the sender of the information, and the conversation between the two is generally private. In eWOM, though, the relationship between receiver and sender is anonymous, and the information being shared between the two usually is not private and is easily accessible by anyone at any point in time even years later.

With the infiltration of the internet, a new form of WOM emerged, “Electronic Word of Mouth” (eWOM), to represent that it is transmitted online and not offline. Researchers and marketers started to use the two terms to differentiate between offline and online WOM, referring to them as “WOM and eWOM” separately. Hence, different definitions have been presented into the literature to distinguish the new form of WOM, which is discussed in the next paragraph that explains the differences and the similarities between the two concepts (Shabsogh, 2013).

There are some variables to compare between WOM and eWOM such as information source, collaboration process in passing the information in traditional WOM (Sweeney et al., 2008) affects attitude because the passer knows he/she is being recognized to the public so it might be hard on people sometimes to tell the full story and be honest hundred percent. On the other hand, eWOM source of information is completely unknown or anonymous people this way would express themselves better, receivers will relate more to eWOM because it is trustworthy, since they represent independent speeches with no barriers from being honest/reliable. Another character is receiver knowledge or experience, studies showed receiver expertise has a negative influence on E-WOM effectiveness, and other declared its positive influence. In general, with the technological advance people are getting more empowered, their potentials are rising. The volume of WOM to work inside a consumer circle become visible when the power of social connection is strong between shoppers and by how identical or varied their background, surroundings and preferences (Nam et al., 2019).

According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010) social media is also called consumer-generated media and they defined social media platforms as internet-based applications with content generated by consumers that is usually related to experience and this content is shared online for easy access by other influenced consumers. The classification of social media platforms has not been agreed upon. However, the most widely cited classification is the one that was anticipated by Xiang and Gretzel (2010) which divides social media into five main categories, virtual communities, reviews, blogs, social networks and media sharing sites. Moreover Elefant (2011) has described social media as a technology that facilitates interactive information, user-created content and collaboration.

## **THE DIMENSIONS OF EWOM INFLUENCING CORPORATE IMAGE AND PURCHASING INTENTION**

### **EWOM CREDIBILITY**

eWOM credibility is defined as the scope to which one perceives the recommendation as believable, true, or factual (Tseng and Fogg ,1999).

While Wathen and Burkell (2002) pointed out that a key early stage in the information persuasion process is the receiver's judgment of the information credibility; it regulates how much an individual subsequently learns from and accepts the incoming information. Thus, if people think the incoming information is credible, they will have more confidence to accept the eWOM comments and use them for making purchase decisions (Tseng and Fogg, 1999).

According to Wathen & Burkell (2002), the information persuasion process starts with the negotiate judgment of the receiver in terms of how credible the information source is. Furthermore, some studies confirm the significant role of eWOM's perceived credibility with the recommendation usage of consumers. In other words, consumers are more likely to follow online advice which they feel reliable and trustworthy. The debate on the information and source credibility elaborates to an even greater extent in the context of eWOM. This is believed to arise from the lack of non-verbal.

Significant researches have already confirmed the relationship between information credibility and adoption. The positive effect of receiver's perceived information credibility on readiness to accept the information of a website. In eWOM, if the reader perceives the product review/recommendation as credible, he/she will learn from and use the review. On the other hand, if it is perceived as less credible, the effect of the review will be reduced (Cheol et al., 2019).

Overall, it is widely agreed that the assessment of eWOM credibility involve a number of determinant factors which influence the creation of receiver's perceptions. Present studies expand the knowledge on credibility assessment of WOM in digital communication by investigating whether the classic determinants of messages and source credibility of traditional WOM can be transmitted into online context. Besides interpersonal theories, researchers also consider both social network theories and psychology theories in attempt to theoretically approach to the credibility assessment (Pham, 2016).

#### **EWOM QUALITY**

The quality of online discussion is described as the convincing strength of discussions, which is rooted in an informational message (Bhattacharjee and Sanford 2005). The quality of eWOM is measured based on the information characteristics, such as relevance, timeliness, accuracy and comprehensiveness (Cheung and Thadani 2010). Moreover, given the often-anonymous nature of comments online, people tend to not trust the

random review easily if there is not enough necessary information (Ratchford et al. 2001).

According to Lin, C. et al. (2013), online reviews, which are clear, understandable, and logical with sufficient reasons supporting the opinions, will have a positive impact on the purchase decision. In online communication platforms, by sharing the same opinion, consumers not only influence each other, but also stimulate people who are looking for product and brand information to try. In this sense, this study is support research by Chen et al. (2014) as they found that the greater number of eWOM, the greater impact it is on consumer buying intention. Xiaorong et al. (2011) demonstrated that eWOM's characteristics including timeliness and quantity influence consumer trust meaningfully, which then influences purchase intention positively. Nevertheless, they also claimed that those influences are different when consumer purchases different products. In terms of control variables, having experience in visiting review website proved to have a significant influence. (Xiaorong et al., 2011).

#### **EWOM QUANTITY**

eWOM quantity is defined as the total number of comments published on the social networking sites (Cheung and Thadani 2010). The volume of information customer gains from eWOM influence buying behavior. The more the customer is exposed to large quantity of eWOM the more he/she fully cover unanswered questions they have. The larger the volume of eWOM generated online or the customers are expanded to, the more likely they will recognize the brand (Litvin et al., 2008; Cheung and Thadani, 2012).

According to Lee et al. (2008) the amount of information customers received meaningfully effect on consumers decisions to purchase products and services. Furthermore, through product review websites, customers tend to believe negative comments more than the positive ones (Lee et al., 2008).

Tremendous amount of data and information can be found online because they are widely published through social networking sites which means consumers must weigh the reliability of sources to define its quality (Ahn & Sura, 2020). A large quantity of positive reviews and comments, which are perceived as non-commercial recommendations, would help people to have a stronger confidence about the product, services and brand. Consequently, a positive attitude towards the corporate brand and greater buying intention are generated. (Huyen, T. and Joyce, C. 2017).

Nevertheless nonetheless, Lee (2009) argued that the number of online reviews and discussion quality does not impact consumer-buying behavior. However, given the amount of studies mentioned above that does support reviews impact consumer behavior, eWOM quantity is expected to impact purchase intention and behaviors.

### **CORPORATE IMAGE**

According to World Intellectual Property Report (2013), the image of a brand has the tendency to impact firm's earning, consumers' intention to buy as well as their marketing's success which all will consequently impact their sustainability and profitability in the long run. In this perspective, as WOM have a vital impact to the intention of purchasing a product, eWOM have a further higher impact on the corporate image of the product as well as the intention to purchase the product of a brand due to its global proximity of distributing information (Filiari and McLeay, 2014). Moreover, a favorable reputation has a positive influence on the company's success and create good airline image which may enhance its reputation (Sageder, M. et al., 2018).

The online reputation produces information that is instantly broadcasted to any potential client, communicating a mental image of a brand or product in relation to its competitors. Ratings shared through social media influence customers' purchasing behavior and, therefore, their income and competitiveness (Rodríguez, D et al., 2015). Moreover Chen, Y. (2010) claimed that the customers' general attitudes towards an airline have a positive effect to their loyalty. In the air travel industry, companies make a lot of efforts to build influential brand images aiming to increase passengers' trust.

Airlines Companies can use market brand positioning to identify major strengths and weaknesses within their services such as comfort to seats, cleanliness, check in and boarding, airline image, and travel cost and time (Ayat, Z. and Manuel R., 2020). Therefore, the study conducted by Lucini et al (2020) based on content analysis of online opinions of airline customers, determines the dimensions of customer satisfaction, making a forecast of the possibility of recommending the airline or not. It is a very interesting study because it is based on the qualitative and quantitative opinions that customers share on the internet which reflect the influence of eWOM quality and quantity (Lucini et al., 2020).

### **PURCHASE INTENTION**

According to Sam and Tahir (2009), online purchase intention is the possibility that customer is willing to purchase a product. Also, other

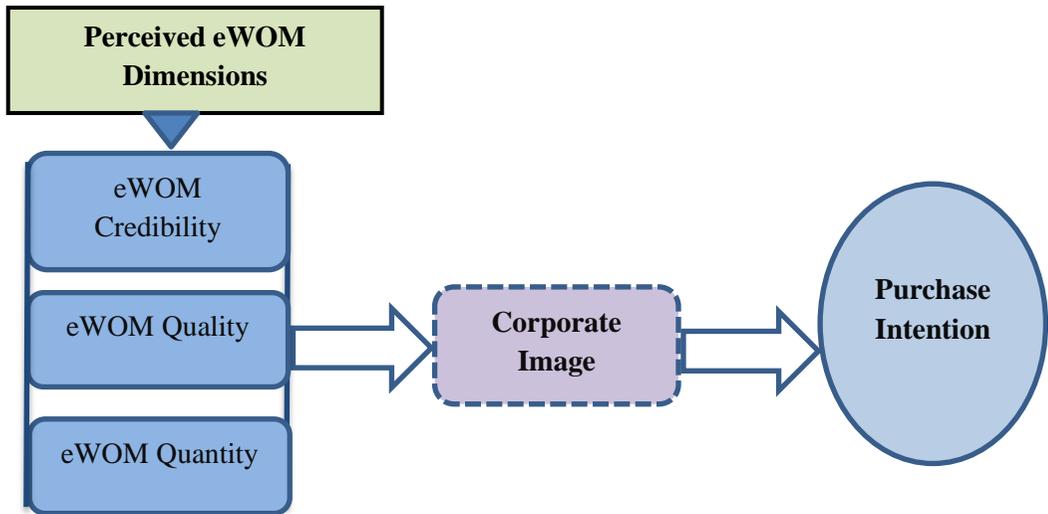
studies have defined purchase intention as the prediction of actual customers' buying behavior. Thus, companies can use customers' prediction as a direction tools to anticipate actual customers' purchase behaviors (Abdul-Muhmin, 2010). In addition, marketers can consider purchase intention as part of customers' cognitive behaviors that can cause a brand to be customers' top choice for selection (Huang & Su, 2011). Furthermore, purchase intention in the digital framework refers to situations where customers getting involve in online transaction (Zaki & Rodríguez, 2020).

As per the research conducted by Luo and Zhong (2015) that explores on the aspect of how eWOM through virtual social platforms are impacted by social relations and interaction, found that the strength of social connections whether strong, neutral or poor have the propensity to have an impact on eWOM and influence the purchase desire. Moreover, they have also found that, attitude as well as determination of choices is impacted by eWOM through social connections that are strong (Luo and Zhong, 2015).

Moreover, many studies pointed out the vital importance of social media on consumers' buying intentions (Doh and Hwang 2009). Researchers have been showing increasing interest in how consumers engage with electronic word-of-mouth and its effects on purchase decision of consumers (Almana and Mirza 2013; Lamba and Aggarwal 2014). The eWOM which is presented under the form of online review, plays two roles: presenting informant and recommender (Park et al. 2007). With the role of informant, online reviews provide product information; whereas, as being considered as a recommending provider, online reviews deliver recommendations and advices from consumers who had purchased products or experienced services before. (Park et al. 2007).

## **RESEARCH MODEL**

Based on previous studies, this study analyzes the mediating role of corporate image in the relationship between perceived eWOM (eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, and eWOM quantity) and its influence on the purchase intention. To accomplish this goal, we developed a research model, which is shown in figure No.1.



**(Figure 1: research model)**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **MEASURES**

A questionnaire was the study tool to collect data from respondents. It consisted of two parts, the first included six questions about respondents' using of social networking sites and gender, while the second section included three variables of the study perceived eWOM (eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity), corporate image and purchase intention. Perceived eWOM were divided into three dimensions measured by 11 items. The first dimension was eWOM credibility (4 items), which derived from (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). The second dimension was eWOM quality (4 items), which derived from (Park et al. 2007). The third dimension was eWOM quantity (3 items), which derived from T. Huyen. and Joyce, C. (2017). Corporate image was measured by 4 items adopted from (Abdallah, Q. 2015). A 4 item scale derived from A.Navitha Sulthana, Vasantha, S. (2019) used to measure the purchase intention. All the items in the second section were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree).

## **SAMPLE AND PROCEDURES**

Data for this study were collected from a randomly selected sample of 811 passengers whom travelling onboard the Egyptian private airlines. Questionnaires were distributed during the period from December 2019 to March 2020. Only 697 questionnaires were returned, but 57 of them were incomplete and therefore discarded from the overall sample. Only 640 questionnaires were valid and had no missing data. The respondents were informed about the objective and the purpose of this study. The questionnaires were distributed face-to-face and electronically collected by Google Drive.

## **RESULTS**

### **DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Respondents' Using of Social Networking Sites and Gender

**Table (1) Respondents' using of social networking sites and gender**

<b>1. Gender</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	363	56.7%
Female	277	43.3%
<b>2. Which is the most social networking site that you use frequently?</b>		
Instagram	87	13.6%
Facebook	393	61.4%
YouTube	65	10.2%
Tweeter	95	14.8%
<b>3. How many hours often do you visit this social networking sites on daily basis?</b>		
1 hour	70	10.9%
2 hour	113	17.7%
3 hour	164	25.6%
4 hour	250	39.1%
More than 5 Hour	43	6.7%
<b>4. What is the most activity do you usually do on this social networking site?</b>		
Chatting with my contacts	130	20.3%
Posting comments on posts	280	43.8%
Making new online friends	50	7.8%

Searching for products and services	180	28.1%
<b>5. Roughly, how many people do you know between your contacts on the social networking site whom used to travel by air?</b>		
Less than 5	32	5%
Between 6 – 10	61	9.5%
Between 11 – 15	377	58.9%
More than 15	170	26.6%
<b>6. Approximately, how many online travel groups and blogs on the social networking site you are subscribed with?</b>		
Less than 5	153	23.9%
Between 6 – 10	379	59.2%
Between 11 – 15	94	14.7%
More than 15	14	2.2%

Table (1) shows that the number of males was 363, representing 56.7% of the total sample, while the number of females was 277, representing 43.3%.

Regarding the most frequently used social media sites; Facebook ranked as the most frequently used social networking site, with 61.4% (393 respondents), followed by Twitter with 14.8% (95 respondents), then Instagram with 13.6% (87 respondents), and finally YouTube with 10.2% (65 respondents).

As for the number of hours visiting social media daily; the table highlighted that most of the sample members spend 4 hours daily by 39.1% (250 respondents), followed by sample members who spend 3 hours daily by 25.6% (164 respondents), then the sample members who spend two hours daily by 17.7% (113 respondents), followed by 10.9% of those who spend one hour daily (70 respondents), and finally those who spend more than 5 hours daily by 6.7% (43 respondents).

With regard to the most common activities carried out by the sample members on social media; posting comments on posts was the highest of these activities by 43.8% (280 respondents), followed by searching for products and services by 28.1% (180 respondents), then chatting with my contacts by 20.3% (130 respondents), and finally making new online friends by 7.8% (50 respondents).

Regarding the number of people that the sample members know from their social media contacts who used to travel by air; most of the sample members know (between 11-15 individuals) by 58.9% (377 respondents), followed by those who know more than 15 individuals by 26.6% (170 respondents), then those who know (between 6-10 individuals) by 9.5% (61 respondents), and finally those who know less than 5 individuals by 5% (32 respondents).

Regarding the number of online travel groups and blogs in which the sample members participated on social media; the table No.1 indicates that most of the sample members participated in (between 6-10) groups and blogs for traveling on the internet on social media by 59.2% (379 respondents), followed by those who participated in less than 5 groups and blogs for traveling on the internet by 23.9% (153 respondents), then those who participated in (between 11-15) groups and blogs for online travel by 14.7% (94 respondents), and finally those who participated in more than 15 groups and blogs for online travel by 2.2% (14 respondents).

**PERCEIVED EWOM, CORPORATE IMAGE AND PURCHASE INTENTION**

**Table (2) means and standard deviation of constructs**

Constructs and items		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD
<b>Perceived eWOM</b>							4.39	0.76
<b>eWOM credibility</b>							4.44	.69
Most of my contacts on my social networking sites can be trusted.	Freq.	416	198	-	17	9	4.55	.76
	%	65%	30.9%	-	2.7%	1.4%		
I feel confident about having negotiations with my contacts and any of air travelers on my social networking sites.	Freq.	354	205	23	50	8	4.32	.81
	%	55.3%	32%	3.6%	7.8%	1.3%		
The contacts on my social networking site will do everything within their capacity to help others	Freq.	407	153	19	48	13	4.40	.61
	%	63.6%	23.9%	3%	7.5%	2%		
My contacts on my social networking site always offer truthful opinions.	Freq.	391	217	-	17	15	4.49	.58
	%	61.1%	33.9%	-	2.7%	2.3%		
<b>eWOM quality</b>							<b>4.26</b>	<b>0.83</b>
The online reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking sites are clear and understandable.	Freq.	258	377	-	3	2	4.38	0.77
	%	40.3%	58.9%	-	0.5%	0.3%		
The online reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking site are helpful.	Freq.	310	290	10	18	12	4.36	0.86
	%	48.4%	45.3%	1.6%	2.8%	1.9%		
The online reviews and comments provided	Freq.	287	324	12	12	5	4.37	0.83

by air travelers on my social networking sites have sufficient reasons supporting their opinions.	%	44.8%	50.6%	1.9%	1.9%	0.8%		
Overall, the quality of each online reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking site are high.	Freq.	251	259	10	70	50	3.92	0.97
	%	39.2%	40.5%	1.6%	10.9%	7.8%		
<b>eWOM quantity</b>							<b>4.45</b>	<b>0.65</b>
The number of online reviews and comments provided by air travelers are large, inferring that the Egyptian private airlines are popular and well known.	Freq.	404	210	-	16	10	4.53	0.58
	%	63.1%	32.8%	-	2.5%	1.6%		
The quantity of online reviews and comments provided by air travelers are great, deducing that the Egyptian private airlines are safe to fly with them.	Freq.	298	303	-	19	20	4.31	0.72
	%	46.6%	47.3%	-	3%	3.1%		
I highly rank that almost recommendations concluding by the air travelers provide high quality choices.	Freq.	418	180	2	21	19	4.50	0.64
	%	65.3%	28.1%	0.3%	3.3%	3%		
<b>Corporate image</b>							<b>4.38</b>	<b>0.89</b>
The Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in the online travel groups and blogs are widely-known.	Freq.	386	214	9	23	8	4.48	0.69
	%	60.3%	33.4%	1.4%	3.6%	1.3%		
The Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in the online travel groups and blogs have a good physical presence.	Freq.	258	362	3	11	6	4.34	0.81
	%	40.3%	56.6%	0.5%	1.7%	0.9		

The Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in their official online pages and on online travel groups and blogs are reliable.	Freq.	251	361	3	16	9	4.30	0.93
	%	39.2%	56.4%	0.5%	2.5%	1.4%		
The Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in their official online pages and in the online travel groups and blogs are well liked by the air travelers.	Freq.	277	345	6	9	3	4.38	0.90
	%	43.3%	53.9%	0.9%	1.4%	0.5		
<b>Purchase intention</b>							<b>4.38</b>	<b>0.82</b>
After reading online reviews and comments, provided by air travelers whom usually travel on board Egyptian private airlines it makes me intent to purchase its tickets.	Freq.	371	242	4	16	7	4.49	0.63
	%	58%	37.8%	0.6%	2.5%	1.1%		
I keep keen to search for more reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking sites before taking the purchasing decision.	Freq.	256	356	6	17	5	4.31	0.85
	%	40%	55.6%	0.9%	2.7%	0.8%		
I always ask my contacts on the social networking sites for recommendations and suggestions according their previous experience with Egyptian private airlines before taking the purchasing decision.	Freq.	201	388	35	11	5	4.20	1.03
	%	31.4%	60.6%	5.5%	1.7%	0.8%		
In the future, I will consider the Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in the online travel groups and blogs my first choice.	Freq.	381	217	33	6	3	4.51	0.61
	%	59.5%	33.9%	5.2%	0.9	0.5		

**Table (2) reveals the means and standard deviations (SD) for each item and overall variables.**

Regarding perceived eWOM as an independent variable, the mean was 4.39, and SD was 0.76. As for dimensions of perceived eWOM, eWOM quantity was the highest with a mean of 4.45, followed by eWOM credibility with a mean of 4.44, and finally eWOM quality with a mean of 4.26.

**For eWOM credibility, the same table indicates the following:**

Concerning the statement "Most of my contacts on my social networking sites can be trusted", the percentage of acceptance was 95.9% (614 respondents) as 65% of the respondents strongly agreed (416 respondents) and 30.9% reported agree (198 respondents). While no respondent marked neutral. The percentage of disagreement was 4.1% as 1.4% of the respondents strongly disagreed (9 respondents) and 2.7% of the respondents disagreed (17 respondents). The mean value was 4.55 and the standard deviation was .76. This means that the respondents greatly accepted the statement.

Regarding the statement "I feel confident about having negotiations with my contacts and any of air travelers on my social networking sites", the percentage of acceptance was 87.3% (559 respondents) as 55.3% of the respondents strongly agreed (354 respondents) and 32% reported agree (205 respondents). While 23 respondents marked neutral by 3.6%. The percentage of disagreement was 9.1% as 1.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed (8 respondents) and 7.8% of the respondents disagreed (50 respondents). The mean value was 4.32 and the standard deviation was .81. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

As for the statement "The contacts on my social networking site will do everything within their capacity to help others", the percentage of acceptance was 87.5% (560 respondents) as 63.6% of the respondents strongly agreed (407 respondents) and 23.9% reported agree (153 respondents). While 19 respondents marked neutral by 3%. The percentage of disagreement was 9.5% as 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed (13 respondents) and 7.5% of the respondents disagreed (48 respondents). The mean value was 4.40 and the standard deviation was .61. This means that the respondents greatly accepted the statement.

Concerning the statement "My contacts on my social networking site always offer truthful opinions", the percentage of acceptance was 95% (608 respondents) as 61.1% of the respondents strongly agreed (391 respondents) and 33.9% reported agree (217 respondents). While no respondent marked neutral. The percentage of disagreement was 5% as 2.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed (15 respondents) and 2.7% of

the respondents disagreed (17 respondents). The mean value was 4.49 and the standard deviation was .58. This means that the respondents greatly accepted the statement.

**For eWOM quality, the same table shows the following:**

Concerning the statement "The online reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking sites are clear and understandable", the percentage of acceptance was 99.2% (635 respondents) as 40.3% of the respondents strongly agreed (258 respondents) and 58.9% reported agree (377 respondents). While no respondent marked neutral. The percentage of disagreement was 0.8% as 0.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed (2 respondents) and 0.5% of the respondents disagreed (3 respondents). The mean value was 4.38 and the standard deviation was .77. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

Regarding the statement "The online reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking site are helpful", the percentage of acceptance was 93.7% (600 respondents) as 48.4% of the respondents strongly agreed (310 respondents) and 45.3% reported agree (290 respondents). While 10 respondents marked neutral by 1.6%. The percentage of disagreement was 4.7% as 1.9% of the respondents strongly disagreed (12 respondents) and 2.8% of the respondents disagreed (18 respondents). The mean value was 4.36 and the standard deviation was .86. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

As for the statement "The online reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking sites have sufficient reasons supporting their opinions", the percentage of acceptance was 95.4% (611 respondents) as 44.8% of the respondents strongly agreed (287 respondents) and 50.6% reported agree (324 respondents). While 12 respondents marked neutral by 1.9%. The percentage of disagreement was 2.7% as 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed (5 respondents) and 1.9% of the respondents disagreed (12 respondents). The mean value was 4.37 and the standard deviation was .83. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

Regarding the statement "Overall, the quality of each online reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking site are high", the percentage of acceptance was 79.7% (510 respondents) as 39.2% of the respondents strongly agreed (251 respondents) and 40.5% reported agree (259 respondents). While 10 respondents marked neutral by 1.6%. The percentage of disagreement was 18.7% as 7.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed (50 respondents) and 10.9% of the respondents disagreed (70

respondents). The mean value was 3.92 and the standard deviation was .97. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

**For eWOM quantity, the same table shows the following results**

As for the statement "The number of online reviews and comments provided by air travelers are large, inferring that the Egyptian private airlines are popular and well known", the percentage of acceptance was 95.9% (614 respondents) as 63.1% of the respondents strongly agreed (404 respondents) and 32.8% reported agree (210 respondents). While no respondent marked neutral. The percentage of disagreement was 4.1% as 1.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed (10 respondents) and 2.5% of the respondents disagreed (16 respondents). The mean value was 4.53 and the standard deviation was .58. This means that the respondents greatly accepted the statement.

Concerning the statement "The quantity of online reviews and comments provided by air travelers are great, deducing that the Egyptian private airlines are safe to fly with them", the percentage of acceptance was 93.9% (601 respondents) as 46.6% of the respondents strongly agreed (298 respondents) and 47.3% reported agree (303 respondents). While no respondent marked neutral. The percentage of disagreement was 6.1% as 3.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed (20 respondents) and 3% of the respondents disagreed (19 respondents). The mean value was 4.31 and the standard deviation was .72. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

Regarding the statement "I highly rank that almost recommendations concluding by the air travelers provide high quality choices", the percentage of acceptance was 93.4% (598 respondents) as 65.3% of the respondents strongly agreed (418 respondents) and 28.1% reported agree (180 respondents). While 2 respondents marked neutral by 0.3%. The percentage of disagreement was 6.3% as 3% of the respondents strongly disagreed (19 respondents) and 3.3% of the respondents disagreed (21 respondents). The mean value was 4.50 and the standard deviation was .64. This means that the respondents greatly accepted the statement.

**The results also illustrate that the mean of corporate image as mediating variables was 4.38 and SD was 0.89.**

Concerning the statement "The Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in the online travel groups and blogs are widely-known", the percentage of acceptance was 93.7% (600 respondents) as 60.3% of the respondents strongly agreed (386 respondents) and 33.4% reported agree (214 respondents). While 9 respondents marked neutral by 1.4%. The

percentage of disagreement was 4.9% as 1.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed (8 respondents) and 3.6% of the respondents disagreed (23 respondents). The mean value was 4.48 and the standard deviation was .69. This means that the respondents greatly accepted the statement.

Regarding the statement "The Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in the online travel groups and blogs have a good physical presence", the percentage of acceptance was 96.9% (620 respondents) as 40.3% of the respondents strongly agreed (258 respondents) and 56.6% reported agree (362 respondents). While 3 respondents marked neutral by 0.5%. The percentage of disagreement was 2.6% as 0.9% of the respondents strongly disagreed (6 respondents) and 1.7% of the respondents disagreed (11 respondents). The mean value was 4.34 and the standard deviation was .81. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

As for the statement "The Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in their official online pages and on online travel groups and blogs are reliable", the percentage of acceptance was 95.6% (612 respondents) as 39.2% of the respondents strongly agreed (251 respondents) and 56.4% reported agree (361 respondents). While 3 respondents marked neutral by 0.5%. The percentage of disagreement was 3.9% as 1.4% of the respondents strongly disagreed (9 respondents) and 2.5% of the respondents disagreed (16 respondents). The mean value was 4.30 and the standard deviation was .93. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

Regarding the statement "The Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in their official online pages and in the online travel groups and blogs are well liked by the air travelers", the percentage of acceptance was 97.2% (622 respondents) as 43.3% of the respondents strongly agreed (277 respondents) and 53.9% reported agree (345 respondents). While 6 respondents marked neutral by 0.9%. The percentage of disagreement was 1.9% as 0.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed (3 respondents) and 1.4% of the respondents disagreed (9 respondents). The mean value was 4.38 and the standard deviation was .90. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

**Moreover, the means of dependent variable, purchase intention was 4.38 and SD was 0.82.**

As for the statement " After reading online reviews and comments, provided by air travelers whom usually travel on board Egyptian private airlines it makes me intent to purchase its tickets", the percentage of

acceptance was 95.8% (613 respondents) as 58% of the respondents strongly agreed (371 respondents) and 37.8% reported agree (242 respondents). While 4 respondents marked neutral by 0.6%. The percentage of disagreement was 3.6% as 1.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed (7 respondents) and 2.5% of the respondents disagreed (16 respondents). The mean value was 4.49 and the standard deviation was .63. This means that the respondents greatly accepted the statement.

Regarding the statement "I keep keen to search for more reviews and comments provided by air travelers on my social networking sites before taking the purchasing decision", the percentage of acceptance was 95.6% (612 respondents) as 40% of the respondents strongly agreed (256 respondents) and 55.6% reported agree (356 respondents). While 6 respondents marked neutral by 0.9%. The percentage of disagreement was 3.5% as 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed (5 respondents) and 2.7% of the respondents disagreed (17 respondents). The mean value was 4.31 and the standard deviation was .85. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

Concerning the statement "I always ask my contacts on the social networking sites for recommendations and suggestions according their previous experience with Egyptian private airlines before taking the purchasing decision", the percentage of acceptance was 92% (589 respondents) as 31.4% of the respondents strongly agreed (201 respondents) and 60.6% reported agree (388 respondents). While 35 respondents marked neutral by 5.5%. The percentage of disagreement was 2.5% as 0.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed (5 respondents) and 1.7% of the respondents disagreed (11 respondents). The mean value was 4.20 and the standard deviation was 1.03. This means that the respondents accepted the statement.

Regarding the statement "In the future, I will consider the Egyptian private airlines discussions (posts and comments) in the online travel groups and blogs my first choice", the percentage of acceptance was 93.4% (598 respondents) as 59.5% of the respondents strongly agreed (381 respondents) and 33.9% reported agree (217 respondents). While 33 respondents marked neutral by 5.2%. The percentage of disagreement was 1.4% as 0.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed (3 respondents) and 0.9% of the respondents disagreed (6 respondents). The mean value was 4.51 and the standard deviation was .61. This means that the respondents greatly accepted the statement.

### MEASUREMENT MODEL

The study tested the validity and reliability of all scales. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were used to test the reliability. AVE (Average Variance Extracted) was used to test the convergent validity. Table (3) shows that all values of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were higher than the minimum limit of 70% according to Hair et al. (1992). The same table also indicates that the value of AVE was more than 0.69 which is higher than the minimum value of convergent validity (0.5 or higher) according to hair et al. (2014).

**Table (3) Composite reliability, Cronbach's Alpha, AVE and VIF**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Composite reliability</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>AVE</b>
eWOM credibility	0.814	0.882	0.716
eWOM quality	0.856	0.874	0.773
eWOM quantity	0.881	0.893	0.744
Perceived eWOM	0.832	0.862	0.753
Corporate image	0.798	0.812	0.699
Purchase intention	0.857	0.849	0.727

### STRUCTURAL MODEL TESTING

The square roots of AVG for discriminate validity were tested to assess the variables validity. According to Hair et al. (2014), the square roots of AVG should be higher than the correlation between a pair of variables, as shown in bold type along the diagonal in table (4). For example, the correlation between perceived eWOM and corporate image was .716, which is less than the respective AVG of perceived eWOM (.863) and corporate image (.901). Table (4) also depicts that the square roots of AVG for all the variables are greater than the highest correlations with any other variables.

**Table (4) Squared roots of AVE**

	<b>eWOM credibility</b>	<b>eWOM quality</b>	<b>eWOM quantity</b>	<b>Perceived eWOM</b>	<b>Corporate image</b>	<b>Purchase intention</b>
eWOM credibility	0.866					
eWOM quality	0.662	0.814				
eWOM quantity	0.597	0.743	0.872			
Perceived eWOM	0.680	0.701	0.736	0.863		
Corporate image	0.569	0.663	0.714	0.716	0.901	
Purchase intention	0.781	0.712	0.722	0.655	0.758	0.881

**Bold values indicate the square roots of AVE**

**MODEL FIT**

Table (5) indicates the suggested ranges of some model fit indicators.

**Table (5) ranges of model fit indicators**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Ranges</b>	<b>Recommended by</b>
$X^2/df$	1-3	Gefer et al., 2000
Goodness of fit index (GFI)	More than .90	Chan et al., 2007
Normed fit index (NFI)	More than .90	Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001
Comparative fit index (CFI)	More than .95	Schumacker and Lomax, 2010
Tucker – Lewis index (TLI)	More than .95	Hu and Bentler, 1999
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	.05-.08	Hair et al., 2010

According to the above ranges of model fit indicators, table (6) shows that  $X^2/df = 1.991$ ,  $GFI = .943$ ,  $CFI = .971$ ,  $NFI = .933$ ,  $TLI = .967$ , and  $RMSEA = .029$ . all these values fell within the recommended ranges in table (5).

Table (6) Model shows the fit summary for the research model

**Table (6) Model fit summary**

Fit index	Model
X <sup>2</sup> /df	1.991
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	0.943
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.971
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.933
Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)	0.967
RMSEA	0.029

**Path coefficient, CR, and Sig.**

Table (7) indicates the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ), CR (Critical Ratio), and the Sig. of the model. The table shows that the perceived eWOM (independent variable) significantly and positively affect corporate image (mediator) and purchase intention (dependent variables).

**Table (7) path coefficient, CR, and Sig.**

Path	Path Coefficient	CR	Sig.
eWOM credibility → corporate image	0.762	13.512	0.000
eWOM credibility → purchase intention	0.744	11.871	0.000
eWOM quality → corporate image	0.711	8.795	0.000
eWOM quality → purchase intention	0.723	12.853	0.000
eWOM quantity → corporate image	0.816	14.658	0.000
eWOM quantity → purchase intention	0.799	10.974	0.000
Perceive eWOM → corporate image	0.781	16.254	0.000
Perceived eWOM → purchase intention	0.810	13.258	0.000
Corporate image → purchase intention	0.756	11.256	0.000

Table (7) also shows that eWOM credibility has a significant and positive impacts on corporate image as  $\beta = .762$ . Also, eWOM quality affects significantly and positively corporate image as  $\beta = .711$ . Besides, eWOM quantity impacts significantly and positively on corporate image as  $\beta = .816$ . Additionally, perceived eWOM has a significant and positive influence on corporate image as  $\beta = .781$ . Hence, H1/1, H2/1, H3/1 and H4/1 are all accepted.

As well as, table (7) reveals that eWOM credibility affects significantly and positively purchase intention as  $\beta = .744$ . In addition, eWOM quality influences significantly and positively purchase intention as  $\beta = .723$ . Moreover, eWOM quantity impacts significantly and positively on purchase intention as  $\beta = .799$ . Also, perceived eWOM has a significant and positive impact on purchase intention as  $\beta = .810$ . Therefore, H1/3, H2/3, H3/3 and H4/3 are all accepted.

Finally, corporate image affects significantly and positively purchase intention as  $\beta = .756$ . So, H1/2, H2/2, H3/2 and H4/2 are all accepted.

#### **DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT RESULTS**

Table (8) indicates that eWOM credibility explain the variance in purchase intention by 56%. while eWOM quality explain the variance in purchase intention 47%. Additionally, eWOM quantity explain the variance in purchase intention by 67%, and finally, perceived eWOM explain the variance in purchase intention 59%.

To know if the mediator variable plays a full or partial role in the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Al-Romeedy, 2019):

- A) If the indirect relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is significant, there is a mediating role for the mediator variable.
- B) If the indirect relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is insignificant, there is no mediating role for the mediator variable.
- C) If the direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is significant, there is a partial mediating role for the mediator variable.
- D) If the direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is insignificant, there is a full mediating role for the mediator variable.

According to the above four conditions, table (8) shows that corporate image plays a partially mediating role in the relationship between perceived eWOM, eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity and purchase intention because of the significance of the direct and indirect relationship between perceived eWOM, eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity and purchase intention. Therefore, H1, H2, H3 and H4 are accepted.

Additionally, table (8) reveals that eWOM credibility and corporate image explain the variance in purchase intention by 51%. eWOM quality and corporate image explain the variance in purchase intention by 42%, while eWOM quantity and corporate image explain the variance in purchase intention by 58%. Perceived eWOM and corporate image explain the variance in purchase intention by 48%. These results confirm the mediating role of corporate image in the relationship between perceived eWOM, eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity and purchase intention.

**Table (8) Indirect effect results**

Path	Effect		Significance		Outcome
	Direct effect*	Indirect effect**	Direct	Indirect	
	<b>Via corporate image</b>				
eWOM credibility → purchase intention	.56	.51	P= .022	P= .017	Partial mediation at 5%
	<b>Via corporate image</b>				
eWOM quality → purchase intention	.47	.42	P= .033	P= .041	Partial mediation at 5%
	<b>Via corporate image</b>				
eWOM quantity → purchase intention	.67	.58	P= .029	P= .023	Partial mediation at 5%

Perceived eWOM → purchase intention	Via corporate image				Partial mediation at 5%
	.59	.48	P= .040	P= .031	

\* Direct effect means the effect of independent variables (perceived eWOM " eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity) on dependent variable (purchase intention) without the existence of mediator variable (corporate image).

\*\* Indirect effect means the effect of independent variables (perceived eWOM " eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity) on dependent variable (purchase intention) in the existence of mediator variable (corporate image).Based on the above results, table (9) summarizes the test of hypothesis in this study.

**Table (9) Summary of hypothesis testing**

Hypothesis	Test
<b>H1: Corporate image mediates the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention</b>	Accepted
H1/1: eWOM credibility enhances corporate image	Accepted
H1/2: Corporate image enhances purchase intention	Accepted
H1/3: eWOM credibility enhances purchase intention	Accepted
<b>H2: Corporate image mediates the relationship between eWOM quality and purchase intention</b>	Accepted
H2/1: eWOM quality enhances corporate image	Accepted
H2/2: Corporate image enhances purchase intention	Accepted
H2/3: eWOM quality enhances purchase intention	Accepted
<b>H3: Corporate image mediates the relationship between eWOM quantity and purchase intention</b>	Accepted
H3/1: eWOM quantity enhances corporate image	Accepted
H3/2: Corporate image enhances purchase intention	Accepted
H3/3: eWOM quantity enhances purchase intention	Accepted
<b>H4: Corporate image mediates the relationship between perceived eWOM and purchase intention</b>	Accepted
H4/1: perceived eWOM enhances corporate image	Accepted
H4/2: Corporate image enhances purchase intention	Accepted
H4/3: perceived eWOM enhances purchase intention	Accepted

## **RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

This research is limiting only three main eWOM determinants such of eWOM credibility, quality and quantity, which influence the purchase intention of the passengers through mediation involvement of corporate image. There may be other factors and dimensions of online generated contents and eWOM also which are affecting the purchase intentions that can be considered for further research. Moreover, the research sample is another limitation as our sample was constructed of 640 participants only; as the amount of collected data considered medium amount in comparison with the total numbers of passengers whom travelling onboard the Egyptian private airline on yearly basis.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The main results from this study significantly indicate that the electronic word-of-mouth channel plays an important role in passengers' decision-making when purchasing their airline ticket. Based on these results, the Egyptian private airline companies should create effective social media marketing plans and develop robust online relationship strategies to ensure that potential passengers will receive information about their products and services in various electronic forms through social media networking sites in correctly, reliable manner. Moreover, they should to provide more and higher-quality information to their customers and activate positive e-WOM. In addition, that the researchers recommend that the marketing executives of the Egyptian private airlines should to take into their consideration that e-WOM follows particular directions online and many passengers are capable of sifting through vast amounts of information, screening it searching for the best products and services, collecting desired content and evaluating it in a calm, sophisticated manner.

On the other hand, by considering the pilot research result; it appears that the online official presence of Egyptian private airlines in the social media travel groups and blogs is rare. Therefore, marketing executives of the Egyptian private airlines they should to find the most clients-active travel platforms and blogs, where their potential passengers are interacting in it, so they should to enhance and extensive their official presence and professionally respond to potential passengers' inquiries in order to build and design distinctive competitive brand image that affects the passengers' purchasing intention in the future.

For the future studies or reproduction of research subject for the aviation market in Egypt, we recommend to use more variables that may affect the purchase intention other than social media benefits and corporate image. Moreover, future researchers may study the passenger's attitudes toward

using social media sites in order to gather more information as well as to forecast their buying intention.

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