# Testing the Impact of the Nature of Services Offered on Travel Sites and Links on Traffic Generated: A Longitudinal Survey

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**Abstract :** Background: This study aims to determine the evolution of service provision by Egyptian travel sites and how these services change in terms of their level of sophistication over the period of the study which is ten years. To the author's best knowledge, this is the first longitudinal study that focuses on an extended time frame of ten years. Additionally, the study attempts to determine the popularity of these websites through the number of links to these sites. Links maybe viewed as the equivalent of a referral or word of mouth but in an online context. Both popularity and the nature of the services provided by these websites are used to determine the traffic on these sites. In examining the nature of services provided, the website itself is viewed as an overall service offering that is composed of different travel products and services. Method: This study uses content analysis in the form of a small scale survey done on 30 Egyptian travel agents' websites to examine whether Egyptian travel websites are static or dynamic in terms of the services that they provide and whether they provide simple or sophisticated travel services. To determine the level of sophistication of these travel sites, the nature and composition of products and services offered by these sites were first examined. A framework adapted from Kotler (1997) 'Five levels of a product' was used. The target group for this study consists of companies that do inbound tourism. Four rounds of data collection were conducted over a period of 10 years. Two rounds of data collection were made in 2004 and two rounds were made in 2014. Data from the travel agents' sites were collected over a two weeks period in each of the four rounds. Besides collecting data on features of websites, data was also collected on the popularity of these websites through a software program called Alexa that showed the traffic rank and number of links of each site. Regression analysis was used to test the effect of links and services on websites as independent variables on traffic as the dependent variable of this study. Findings: Results indicate that as companies moved from having simple websites with basic travel information to being more interactive, the number of visitors illustrated by traffic and the popularity of those sites increase as shown by the number of links. Results also show that travel companies use the web much more for promotion rather than for distribution since most travel agents are using it basically for information provision. The results of this content analysis study taps on an unexplored area and provide useful insights for marketers on how they can generate more traffic to their websites by focusing on developing a distinctive content on these sites and also by focusing on the visibility of their sites thus enhancing the popularity or links to their sites.

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