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Airlines' websites credibility: Perceptions and determinants

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Abstract

Determinations of website credibility are especially important when financial transactions, such as the purchase of airline tickets, are being considered by users. The success of most Web sites today depends on whether users perceive the site to be credible. If users think a site lacks credibility, they will abandon the site and seek to fill their needs in other ways (Fogg, 2003). There is a gap in the literature related to the perceptions of website credibility in non-western contexts. The bulk of the literature addresses the perceptions of western internet users (Fogg et al., 2001, 2003). Additionally, studies conducted in a Middle Eastern, or specifically Egyptian context, investigate the effect of factors related to the real environment such as culture, internet familiarity, gender, and age on the perception of customers towards e-commerce rather than factors related directly to the online or the offline presence of the company (El Said, Hone & Ali, 2005; El Said & Galal-Edeen, 2009). If the factors that influence website credibility are indentified, and we understand how credibility perceptions influence online consumer behaviours, it becomes easier to promote the development of websites that encourage online purchases. The targeted websites are airline websites; however, the study may encourage Egyptian website designers in other fields to make design and structural changes that will improve the perceived credibility of their websites.

Keywords: Websites, Credibility, Airlines, Trust

Introduction:

Information is in our everyday life. Everyday people receive information more than they use. Mass media, books, electronic sites and mates contribute to a high extent to the daily flow of information; however, not all information has the same value. We will find out that some information is of a greater value and trustworthiness than others. Modern man's challenge is how to find out which information is characterized with higher credibility (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008).

One of the most powerful instruments in the provision of information is the World Wide Web. It allows users to get access to information to almost any topic they want to explore. When typing words in a search engine window millions of topic-related websites appear on the screen. Netcraft (2009) claims that there are around 224,000,000 websites which contain thousands of associated web pages. In addition, it is worth mentioning that any group or individual is capable of creating a website whereas the resources needed are not expensive and, although there are official technical standards on the web, there are no requirements for website authors to state their names, date of web site publication or what type of information they intend to provide to the general public (Netcraft, 2009). The quality of Internet information is not formally regulated which results in the fact that whenever a web page is viewed more, the higher it may appear in search engine results. This, simply, means that information of different quality is equally accessed and viewed by the general public. Such a situation is considered unique for people trying to decide which information is more credible.

Electronic commerce in Egypt is still emerging and overwhelmed by both structural and cultural obstacles (EIU, 2004; El Nawawy & Ismail, 1999). It has been found that the great part of the Egyptian customers consider internet shopping quite risky. Egyptians tend to have trust in shopping by receiving items in hand and paying for them in cash and do not feel safe in completing commercial transaction on the internet (El Said, Hone & Ali, 2005). A global consumer satisfaction survey conducted by the Nielsen Company (a global information and media company) as part of a global online consumer survey (2008), ranked the Egyptian consumer as the least happy internet consumer (5.4 points out of 10).

While there is some literature of cultural differences in the e-commerce use in the Arab countries, it is unclear to what degree they will impact online consumer behaviour in the longer term. Little research provides some recommendations for designing websites in this culture. However, these recommendations are base on experience rather than the empirical

evidence. Cultural diversity makes it unrealistic to rely on personal experience of interface designers. So far, researchers have reached no agreement concerning a reliable approach for the design of the websites for cross-cultural use.

As a result of the preceding considerations it becomes quite clear that there is a need for research on airlines' websites credibility as perceived by the Egyptian online consumers. The results of such research can lay the foundations for model testing in the future as well as it may be a guide for website developers to produce websites which will encourage the people in Egypt to shop online.

Research objectives

1st objective: ***To define factors related to the online and offline presence of the airline companies and identify other factors related to the Egyptian context that influence Egyptian website users' perceptions of airlines' websites credibility.***

It seems reasonable, in light of the impact of culture on consumer behaviors, that the factors that affect website credibility in one culture may not be equally important in another. This makes it important to identify and evaluate factors influencing the formation of Egyptian users' perceptions towards website credibility.

2nd objective: ***To test the role of trust in the relationship between the website credibility factors and online purchase intentions***

The researcher's second objective is to find out the effect of the websites credibility perceptions on trust perceptions, which in turn, affect users' online purchase intentions. Gefen, Benbasat and Pavlou (2008) stated trust as an attitudinal and control belief promoting the buyers to purchase intentions and to engage in a transaction with an online seller. The intention to buy depends on the level of trust towards the provider which, in turn, depends on the provider's perceived trustworthiness (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995).

3rd objective*: Establish an integrated model that guides the website designers in Egypt to promote the development of websites that encourage online purchases.*

According to the Nielsen Global Report (2009) online purchases are not common in the Middle East. "Almost half (47%) of online consumers indicate that they have never made an online purchase" (p. 9). This has important implications for businesses. If the influencing factors are indentified, and we understand how credibility perceptions influence online consumer behavior, it becomes easier to promote the development of websites that encourage online purchases.

Literature Review:

Websites credibility

Internet became a main component in people's lives today. Internet has multiple phases of uses today such as sending e-cards, paying bills, managing finances, shopping on line (WWW or web), and checking news sites to keep update with the current events on the whole world (Ha, 2009). However, using of the internet for financial transactions involves risk. Anywhere in the world, when a person accesses a website, the creditability of the website should be judged by the individual (Fallows, 2005). It is very important for the internet users to determine the website credibility especially when they conduct financial transactions, such as the buying of airline tickets. The success of most Web sites today relies on whether users perceive the site to be credible. People will not use the website in case if they think the site lacks credibility, and will seek to find other ways to meet their needs. (Fogg, 2003).

There are many concerns about website credibility come up. Today, there are plenty of information is available and easy to access about the effective ways to determine how the information in the website is accurate and safe to use (Engle, 2005). According to (Metzger, 2007) in the past, "the costs of information production and dissemination on a mass scale limited the number of information sources to established businesses with enough capital to justify and sell an information product" (p. 17). This is no longer right because now any individual using a reasonable technological ability can become an Internet user or seller. This is important because the type of gate-keeping legitimacy described by Metzger (2007) is not necessary to provide Internet content. Information posted on the web are different and may not be checked for accuracy and it may lack accountability indicators such as peer review, author identity, and established reputation (Lazar, Meiselwitz, & Feng, 2007; Metzger, 2007) There is no way to determine author compliance because there is no universal standards for posting information online (Lazar, Meiselwitz, & Feng, 2007; Metzger, 2007; Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003). Many web sites operate without oversight or editorial review. Additionally, website information may be easily changed, plagiarized, distorted, misinterpreted or created anonymously under false pretences (Lazar, Meiselwitz & Feng, 2007; Metzger, 2007; Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003). This makes Internet credibility an important issue, especially when considering Burbules (1998), who suggests that the similar design formats shared by many websites creates a "levelling effect" which makes all of the available data on the website have the same level of accessibility, and might give all authors the same level of credibility in the minds of some Internet users.

What is the meaning of "website credibility"? According to Brajnik (2001), website credibility is difficult to be defined. Palmer (2002) mentioned that user trust and repeated use of a website is related with ease of navigation and the website's content. There is a positive relationship between product information, ease of navigation, and the perceived credibility of websites (Long & Chiagouris, 2006; Pournpitakpan, 2006). Elliott and Speck (2005) and Lazar, Meiselwitz, and Feng (2007) also support the contention that consumer perceptions of website credibility are strengthened by ease of use and accessibility of product information. Fogg (1999) mentioned that despite the ease of navigation and the website's content are positively correlated with the perception of credibility, all are not important in case if the website is unbelievable.

According to Fogg (1999) website designers who strive for credibility "gain a strategic advantage" over those who do not (p. 37). Fogg (1999) and Fogg and Tseng (1999) defined the website credibility as "believability". Fogg and Tseng (1999) reported that the perceptions of website credibility are based on two factors, trustworthiness and expertise. Trustworthiness refers to the goodness or morality of the sources and can be described with terms such as well intentioned, truthful, or unbiased (Fogg & Tseng, 1999). Websites display signs of trustworthiness when they give users a clear and immediate idea of their content and purposes and presenting themselves in a definite and transparent manner (Fogg, 2003; Kim& Monn, 1998; Ratnasingham, 1998). Expertise refers to perceived knowledge of the source and can be described with terms such as knowledgeable, reputable or competent (Fogg & Tseng, 1999). A website can be considered expert when it facilitates straightforward interaction on the part of both skilled users and novices, when it shows usefulness and user-friendliness (Guido, Prete & Sammarco, 2010).

Website credibility dimensions:

Credibility is commonly attached to objects of assessment reflecting the fact that assessments of these objects differ (Kiousis, 2001). Studies of credibility of Web-based information distinguish among source, message, and medium credibility.

Source Credibility*:*

Source credibility can be defined as a multidimensional construct of the message sender. The message sender should have certain qualities such as having a deep knowledge of a specific topic (expertise). The sender of the message is reliable (trustworthiness) (Guido, Prete & Sammarco, 2010).

The credibility of web-based information, comparing to the other sources of information, may be less reliable due to the unique quality of the web environment (Flanagin

& Metzger, 2000) A relative lack of professional monitoring of its content threaten web-based information, that easy to be altered, and lacks established reputations for many information sites which may be difficult to detect (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Those factors have placed the burden of the assessment of credibility of sources, messages, and the media that deliver them on the shoulders of the consumer (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Metzger et al., 2003).

Message credibility:

Message credibility explores how message or information characteristics influence perceptions of believability (Metzger, 2007). The message structure and content is the main dimension of message credibility (Weingarten, 2007). Aspects of message content such as accuracy, use of evidence and citations, comprehensiveness, and currency have been shown to affect perceptions of the credibility of information online (Rieh & Belkin, 2002). Fogg et al., (2003) stated that there are several characteristics that affect and play a vital role in the credibility assessments such as navigability, organization, and message delivery basics, like the presence of typographical errors.

Media credibility:

Media credibility concentrates on the credibility or believability of the different media channels through which a message is sent (Metzger, 2007). Research on the early stage about credibility studied how modifications in source characteristics may impact people's motivation to perceive the credibility of certain themes (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Kelman & Hovland, 1953). Several studies have been conducted about cross-media comparisons to assess the credibility of digital media compared to other communication channels. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found that the traditional mass media (e.g., newspapers and magazines) are perceived as more credible than the Internet and Web. On the other side, some other research has found the opposite results (Thomas, Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Thomas, Johnson &Kaye, 2004).

Understanding credibility of the web as a medium involves taking into consideration more specific features of the medium itself. Rieh and Belkin (2002) mentioned that some traditional sources to assess credibility such as author's credentials, and references might not always exist on websites. Moreover, the web is a highly visual medium with considerable variation in colour, design, and layout. Fogg et al., (2001) mentioned that for the web, evaluations of credibility are made more by how a site looks than by what it says. With the World Wide Web becoming an important medium to reach target audiences, most

organizations believe that a website has the potential to distribute to the media and strategic public (Jo, 2005).

Credibility, trust and trustworthiness:

It is difficult to discuss credibility without mentioning trust (Rieh & Danielson, 2007). Tseng and Fogg (1999) stated that, although credibility and trust have sometimes been used reciprocal, they should not be considered the same. According to Ou & Sia (2009) trust is defined as the belief that online users place in an internet seller that encourage them to carry out an internet shopping transaction even at the risk of a loss. Tseng and Fogg (1999) added that trust is different from credibility because "trust indicates a positive belief about the perceived reliability of, dependability of, and confidence in a person, object, or process" (p. 41). In the field of HCI, trust refers to dependability whereas credibility is synonymous with believability.

Regarding the distinction or differences between trust and trustworthiness, both concepts entail the perception consumers have towards the company and its employees. Gefen, Benbasat and Pavlou (2008) acknowledged that trust is an attitudinal belief; trusting the online seller endorses the buyers' purchase intentions to engage in a transaction with this online seller. Trust is the general opinion towards a company and its employees while trustworthiness describes how the employees and the organization are viewed by the customers during the service delivery. A consumer can trust employees of a company but not the company itself which highlights the importance of trustworthiness. The intention to buy depends on the level of trust towards the online seller which in turn depends on the seller's perceived trustworthiness (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Trustworthiness is most important for effective marketing efforts in online business. Studies have shown that actual purchase and financial risk are both promoted by trustworthiness. Trustworthiness mediated the influence of the perceived risk on intention to buy partially (Buttner & Goritz 2008). This would be helpful for online marketing because when the company is trustworthy this would make the customer to make purchase without having to think about financial risk.

Theoretical frameworks of credibility assessment

The success of any websites relies on how users perceive the site to be credible. Many theoretical frameworks defined how people assess the credibility of the online information (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008). The prominence-interpretation theory has been developed by Fogg (2003) from a several research projects on Web credibility conducted for four years at the Stanford Web Credibility Research Lab. The theory assumed that two things happen when individual assess credibility online. People often recognize something at the beginning (prominence) then they make a judgment about what they recognize (interpretation). Fogg (2003) identified prominence as ''the likelihood that web site element will be noticed or

perceived" (p. 722). Fogg (2003) claimed that five factors affect prominence: involvement, topic of the web site, task of the user, experience of the user, and individual differences of users. He added that interpretation, which is the second component of the theory is ''a person's judgment about an element under examination'' (p. 723) or, in different word, the evaluation of a web site components whether good or bad. Users' assumptions, skills and context are examples of many factors that affect interpretation. He stated that users do not interpret the same web site elements in the same way as culture plays a role in making these judgments. When individual evaluates a website, the process of prominence and interpretation occurs several times as new aspects of the site are continually noticed and interpreted making a continuous process of credibility assessments (Fogg, 2003).

Furthermore, Rieh's (2002) model examined two different types of judgments, predictive and evaluative. While Fogg's (2003) theory described the credibility assessment process from the point when a user recognizes something in a web site to the point when the user makes a judgment, Rieh's model started earlier at the point at which a user makes a predictive judgment first about which web site will contain credible information or not and follows that with the evaluative judgments in which the user expresses preferences for website. Rieh's (2002) mentioned that users use their earlier knowledge for making prognostic judgments while their evaluative judgments are based on the features of information.

Wathen and Burkell (2002) introduced another model of credibility assessment. They stated that users rate the credibility of the medium based on some visual characteristics such as appearance, interface design, and organization of information (Wathen & Burkell, 2002) then rate the source and the message. The evaluation of a source is often made in terms of its expertise, trustworthiness and credential. The message is evaluated in terms of content, relevance, currency, accuracy, and tailoring. The last stage of the process involves the interaction of presentation and content. Wathen and Burkell's model is also iterative given that the users create judgments of the initial surface of web sites and source cues through the interactions with web sites.

Airlines' websites credibility

Air transportation is considered a main component in the nation's economic and cultural growth (Hassan, 2009). Almost 735 million passengers travelled by air in United States between March 2007 and February 2008 and the value of domestic flights doubled

from 1993 to 2002 (BTS, 2008). As airlines are trying to shift their customers from traditional booking channels to more cost-effective online channels, online airline booking has spread all over the world (Lubbe, 2007). The airline industry has been transformed by the internet (Bakos & Yannis., 1997). Online bookings give consumers convenience, flexibility, and choice. The internet allows airlines websites consumer's 24-hour access to airlines, which is important in expanding the market and keeping the industry competitive (Bakos & Yannis., 1997; Economides & Apostolou, 2009). Consumers are free to choose the airline company with which they will book their tickets. For airlines to succeed it is necessary that their websites are perceived as credible by customers. However, many airlines companies still not have sufficient knowledge to design a good website. Many airlines websites lack of the required information, do not organize the information or even they do not update their websites regularly (Law & Leung., 2000).

Several studies have been conducted to examine airlines websites. Benckendorff (2006) investigated the effect of the content of airlines websites on the perception of users in Australia and New Zealand. The study found 28 attributes are important in any airline content were divided into the 7 factors including value-added services, targeted information, advanced booking features, basic look and book features, trust and interaction, in-flight options, and frequent flyer programs. While the Beckendorff (2006) study is important, it is necessary to note that the study investigated the importance of content features of airline websites on the perceptions of users without consideration other factors that may affect forming these perceptions.

Apostolou and Economides (2009) developed the airline site evaluation framework (ASEF) consists of five categories including: site finding, interface, navigation, content, and technical aspects. They found differences between respondents in the different regions, and therefore provides useful material for this study.

Moreover, Chu (2001) studied Internet users' needs and expectations regarding airline websites in Hong Kong. Respondents categorized their needs into three categories; information, interactivity, and attractiveness. Users stated that they like to find detailed information about destination, flight and route schedules, and accurate prices on the airline website. Additionally, users desire that the content of websites be attractive. Chu (2001) study indicates that in order for websites to be credible they must meet users' needs and expectations.

There is a gap in the literature related to the perceptions of airlines website credibility in non-western contexts. The bulk of the literature found addressing airlines website

credibility addresses the perceptions of western internet users. Because of this, the goal of this dissertation is to identify factors affecting airlines website credibility perceived by Egyptian airline travellers using, or trying to use, airline websites to book their tickets online.

Websites credibility in Egypt

There are several reasons make Egypt an interesting case to study in this research. For the political and cultural considerations, Egypt is the centre of the Middle East and Arabic world. There are many reasons make Egypt a very attractive market to foreign investors since the beginning of the economic reform policy that has been applied in 1991. Furthermore, geographically Egypt is close to the big markets in Europe and the Arabian Gulf, as well Egypt has 88-million strong domestic market. As an example of an Arab country, it represents a cultural group that have not been adequately investigated by previous research of websites credibility.

The number of the internet users in Egypt increased very fast in spite the fact that internet in Egypt is relatively new (Kamel, 1998). According to the World Bank, World Development Indicators (WB, 2010) there are about 16, 6 million internet users in Egypt in 2009 (21% of the Egyptian population comparing with 83, 2% and 79.1% in UK and USA respectively). Several cultural hurdles (EIU, 2004) and lack f awareness from the Egyptian consumer's (El Nawawy & Ismail, 1999) hindered the E-commerce in Egypt and delayed it to the immaturity stage. El Said, Hone and Ali (2005) acknowledged that the greater part of Egyptian users perceive a high level of risk in online shopping. El Said, Hone and Ali, (2005) mentioned that Egyptians prefer to receive the purchased items by hand and check it physically before pay for it. Also, Egyptians prefer to pay cash on delivery, and the majority of them did not feel secure completing commercial transactions over the internet. Egyptians perceive too much doubt associated with online shopping, and compared with other ways, buying from the internet would be more risky.

Loch, Straub and Kamel (2003) investigated the cultural inducements and obstacles to use of the internet in the Arab world. The study used a questionnaire answered by 100 Arab internet users, 85% of the participants were Egyptians, and they found that culture could be a hurdle to use of the internet in Arab countries because of the family oriented nature of Arab culture (Hofstede, 1997; Economides & Apostolou, 2009). Loch, Straub & Kamel, (2003) reported that the majority the participants perceived using the internet is a threaten factor to the family which may negatively impact on community and family life. Hasan and Ditsa (1999) supported these finding and performed a qualitative study in Arab and Middle Eastern

countries, taking into consideration Hofstede's (1991) uncertainty avoidance (UA) dimension (1991). Hasan and Ditsa (1999) interviewed representatives of the information technology (IT) community in some Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Turkey and compared their findings with Australia. The study found that the high uncertainty avoidance of Middle Easterners is one reason for resistance to IT (Hasan & Ditsa, 1999). Websites designed for low-context western cultures are unsuited to the high-context culture of the Middle East (Hasan and Ditsa, 1999, Hofstede, 1991).

Despite the fact that Egypt has been ranked among the top 10 countries for internet use in Africa, it is still considered one of the medium penetration countries, as the internet usage rate is only 21 % of the population (WB, 2010). El Said, Hone and Ali, (2005) mentioned that although there several cross-cultural studies has been conducted between non western and western cultures, they rarely considered perceptions of internet use in certain Arabic cultures. Although Egypt is the biggest Arabic country and its population is almost one third of the Arabic world, there are very few research has been conducted about consumer behaviour in e-commerce in Egypt (El Said, Hone & Ali, 2005). This is important because Egypt now leads the Arab world in terms of internet use. This means that Egyptian companies increasingly need to make use of this chance to sell their goods online (El Said, Hone & Ali, 2005). However, there is no enough data and is currently known about factors that affect online purchasing within Egypt. In particular, several research highlighted the role of culture in most of these research studies as having a significant effect on perceptions and attitudes of Egyptian users towards this technology while ignoring the effect of the other factors related to the online or the offline presence (Shoib & Jones, 2003). Hofstede's (1991) discuss the uncertainty avoidance and collectivism versus individualism is particularly relevant. Lack of trust is considered an important problem in the online environment in Egypt. Most Egyptians are doubt about doing business with people they have never met before, therefore it is hard for Egyptians to deal with companies over the internet without personal interactions or without any personal communications. Furthermore, using visa card online is considered a phobia among most of the Egyptians most Egyptians because of the fear of personal data violation (Shoib & Jones, 2003).

Despite the fact that Arab countries have several evidences of cultural differences in the e-commerce adoption, it is uncertain to what degree they will impact online consumer behaviour in the longer term. Moreover, research is missing providing any websites design recommendations for this culture. While there are available guidelines for designing interfaces for intercultural use, most of these guidelines are based on experience rather than

on empirical research. However, it is unrealistic to rely on intuition or personal experience of interface designers due to cultural diversity. To date, researchers have reached no agreement concerning a reliable approach for the design of interfaces for cross-cultural use.

According to the discussion above, it is vital and important to conduct research on Egyptians' perceptions of websites credibility. Such research can lay the foundations for future model testing. It will also help to guide the designers of websites for use within this culture.

Methodology

This study is a part of a larger study aiming to expand the understanding of the meaning of airlines' websites credibility and determine its factors in the Egyptian context. As mentioned earlier there is a shortage in literature investigating this phenomenon in certain cultures, such as the Egyptian culture, which is considered in this research. As (Shoib & Jones, 2003:440) stated researchers who are interested in studying e-commerce in the Arab markets are thus "*Researchers interested in IS in non-Western settings are thus reliant on a fragmented and not easily accessible literature that presents a potentially distorted picture of IS practice in these regions*". Therefore, an exploratory qualitative phase (using semi structured interviews) is argued to be needed at the beginning of this research to generate in-depth information about airlines' websites credibility for the considered culture as it is not appropriate to build the research model of the current research based on the available literature only.

The study will adopt semi-structured interviews with Egyptian online users who booked, or tried to book, their airlines tickets online. This type of interviews was selected as the means of data collection because of two primary considerations. First, they are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding factors affecting Egyptian online users' perceptions of airlines' website credibility where no sufficient literature is available. Second, the varied professional, educational and personal characteristics of the sample group did allow the use of a standardized interview questions for all of them but instead adjust some questions for some respondents when needed. Interviewees were Egyptian online users who booked, or tried to book, their airlines tickets online. Sharing the same culture and language with the interviewees enabled the researcher to gain detailed information about their experiences easily using Arabic language which is their mother tongue.

The study adopted 20 semi-structured interviews with Egyptian online users who booked, or tried to book, their airlines tickets online. Half of these interviews (10 interviews) were conducted with Egyptians who reside in Egypt and has had experiences in air travel before while the other half was conducted with Egyptians who reside outside Egypt (England). The purpose was to find out the differences between the two groups' perception of airlines' websites credibility.

The interviews included two main sections. In the first section the questions were general and aimed at obtaining general information about the respondents including their years of internet use, the purpose of using the internet, problems found with internet use and their online shopping habit. In the second section, interviews questions have been designed to find out the factors that affect the interviewees' perception regarding the airlines websites credibility. The aim of this section was to assess which factors affect the ways Egyptians perceive the credibility of the airlines websites that warrant further investigation in the quantitative phase. At the end of the interviews, the interviewees were asked whether they prefer to fly with Egypt Air or not and how they perceive the credibility of its website. Considering Egypt Air in this study is an example for an Egyptian Airlines website. As the interviews were semi- structured interviews, the interviewer prepared a guide including the outlines of the topics that will be covered during the interview with some suggested questions.

Findings:

There is a great deal of debate, and some agreement about factors affecting airlines websites credibility perceived by the interviewees in Egypt and England. However, findings revealed that those factors could be grouped in the following categories:

Factors Related to the offline presence of the airline company

Security, product quality, and customer service were the deciding factors in whether to use a specific site for online purchases for interviewees in England. This emphasis was also present, and perhaps even more important when purchasing airline tickets. All of the participants have traveled by air, and all have purchased airline tickets. When asked for their airline preference KLM (30%), Lufthansa (20%), Egyptair (20%), and Saudi Arabian Air (10%) were mentioned. Egyptair was the second choice for 30% of interviewees. In response to a question about why a particular airline was the preferred choice the answers varied, however, one specific factor emerged as very important. Price was specifically mentioned by 60% of interviewees, and variables closely related to customer service were mentioned by 30%. Only for 10% was the quality of the services the deciding factor. The variables

considered related to customer service include the availability of halal food (40%), generous wt. allowances (30%), no discrimination based on ethnicity, country of origin, or socio-economic status (10%), and comfort (10%).

All of the participants in Egypt have also travelled by air, and all have purchased airline tickets. When asked for their airline preference 50% had flown on more than one airline and preferred Egyptair, however, 30% of interviewees had only flown Egyptair, so had no grounds for comparison. KLM was preferred by 10% and British Air by 10%. The second preferences, for those interviewees who had flown on airlines other than Egyptair, were KLM (20%) followed by Saudi Arabian Air, British Air, and Egyptair (10% each). In response to the question of why a particular airline was the preferred choice the answers varied, however, for interviewees residing in Egypt comfort was mentioned first by 30%, with quality of services mentioned first by 20%. Service quality was the second reason given by 40% of participants, with variables closely related to service quality, such as the availability of halal food (30%), generous weight allowances (20%), and reputation (20%). Price was specifically mentioned by only 20% of these interviewees, which is quite different from the findings for interviewees in England.

Factors Related to the online presence of the airline company

For the majority of the interviewees in England (70%) the factors related to the appearance of the website, such as colours and pictures are not important. The most important factor according to 90% on the interviewees is that the website functions well. The following list of factors is followed by the percent of interviewees that specifically mentioned it. The total is more than 100% because some interviewees mentioned more than one factor. They include: the writing font (70%), site clear and information easy to see (40%) and the organization of the website (60%). Relatively few of the interviewees in England mentioned specific factors related to website technical characteristics in England.

The most common factor related to the internet itself mentioned by interviewees in Egypt (90% of the interviewees) was quality of the internet service. One interviewee stated: *"It's no use worrying about the websites until we have an internet that works"*. The availability and speed of the internet in Egypt was generally reported to be poor and difficult for consumers to use. Moreover, 70% of interviewees reported fear of hackers and lack of trust in the security of internet payments in Egypt. For example, one interviewee stated that he will never buy online in Egypt unless he makes sure first that if money stolen the bank could return it back. For the majority of the interviewees (80%) the factors related to the appearance

of the website, such as colours, pictures and the writing font are not important. What is important is that the website operates properly. Links should work, pages should open rapidly, and information should be current and reliable. They confirmed that if they faced any problems with the airline website they will leave this site and book online with another airline website.

Infrastructure factors in Egypt

Interviewees in England acknowledged that the internet in England is generally perceived as trustworthy and increasingly utilized for making purchases. Overall, however, the interviewees in England are generally satisfied with the internet services available, they trust internet transactions if the website is known, and are willing to make purchases online in England. This is very different from the perceptions of the interviewees currently living in Egypt.

Interviewees in Egypt voiced concerns about use of the web rarely voiced, or certainly not voiced so strongly by the interviewees in England. For example, trust in the overall security of the web is very low. Of the interviewees in Egypt 80% report making online purchases when they were out of Egypt but never buys online inside Egypt and 20% report that it is OK to make online purchase even in Egypt. The most common purchases relate to education, with 50% reporting purchase of such items as books, tuition payments, and payment for TOEFL exams. Some of the problems with internet shopping cited by Egyptian interviewees include an inability to check the quality of products (20%), the fact that in Egypt, merchants do not provide a return guarantee for faulty or misleading products (30%) and they added that mail service in Egypt are unreliable, expensive, and time consuming and it is very hard to deliver items purchased online. Other internet problems perceived by Egyptian interviewees include slow connection speed (40%), broken connections (20%), limited internet service (20%), and different services available. Only 10% of interviewees report no problems using the internet in Egypt.

The following figure highlights the research model:

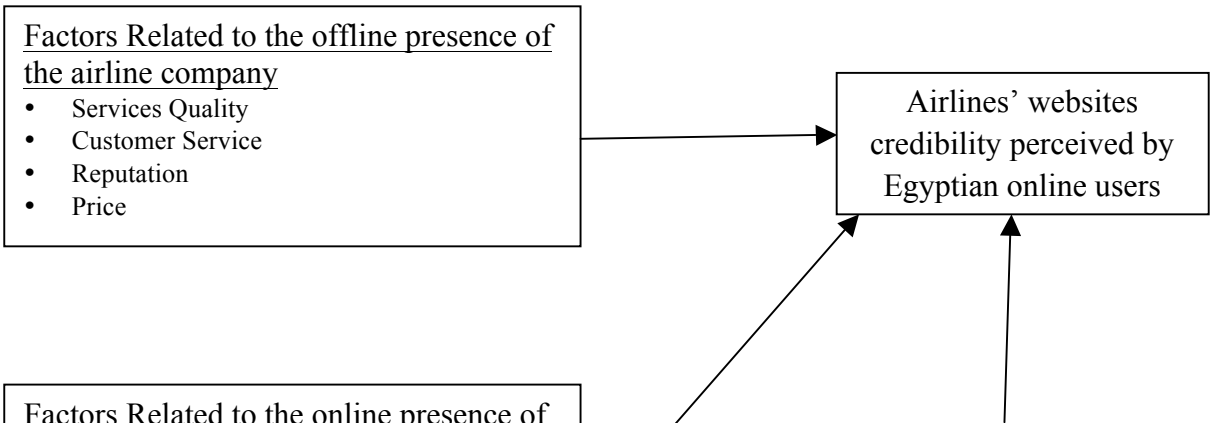

Figure 1: The Research Model

Limitations and future research

In terms of generalization, this study is based on qualitative interviews with 20 Egyptian online users, thus complementary findings from both quantitative and qualitative sources of information will contribute to future applications in the research of the airlines websites credibility. In addition, further research with groups of different educational and social backgrounds is important in understanding how Egyptian users assess credibility online.

Likewise, cross-cultural comparisons could add interesting information in order to understand which elements have a more universal appeal, and whether these determinations vary across content areas or disciplines? Also, studies which observe people under natural settings are important in understanding how people assess credibility under time constraints. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) stated that observing people under certain processing constraints could produce different results.

This paper provided a framework of the factors affecting airline websites credibility perceptions. These factors were classified into 3 categories, namely factors related to the offline presence of the airline company, factors related to the online presence of the airline company and other factors related to the Egyptian context. These factors have not been studied before together in one framework. Thus, this framework, still preliminary and in need of refinement and evaluation, suggests how to consider these factors in the enhancement of the online purchase intentions.

Conclusion

Findings revealed that there are three main factors shaping the airlines websites credibility perceived by the Egyptians online users. The first factor is related to the offline presence of the airline company. It covers four dimensions: services quality, customer

services, reputation and price. The second factor is related to the online presences of the airline company which covers four dimensions: User Interface design, Technical Characteristics, Website Content and Security and privacy. The third factor reflects the role of the Egyptian context in shaping Egyptian online users' perception of the airlines websites credibility.

Interviewees in England were unanimous (80%) in support of using the internet to shop online in England. A high percentage of them (80%) revealed that the internet in England works well and they do not have any concerns about online trust, online payment or hackers. However, they confirmed that this has happened in England and they never buy online in Egypt.

On the other hand, 80% of the interviewees in Egypt assured that they don't encourage online shopping. The same high majority of participants are unlikely or very unlikely to reveal personal information when requested online. Interviewees mentioned that the main reasons that discourage them to buy online are lack of trust, lack of credit card security. A higher percentage (90%) reported that the quality of internet services in Egypt is very poor and they will not shop online till they have internet that works.

Also, there was a general consensus among interviewees whether in Egypt or in England that people in Egypt do not have the culture of online shopping. They added that to improve the online shopping concept in Egypt, Egyptian users should believe in its importance and start practicing it.

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