

The role of social networks in the choice and reservation of the hotel establishment

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ABSTRACT

Technology brings new challenges and opportunities for Tourism and Hospitality. Nowadays, social media are popular tools to searching, communicate and sharing, increasingly imposing itself as an alternative to traditional means in the choice and reservation of the hotel establishment.

Recognizing the importance of technologies, more specifically of social networks, there has been an increase in the bet of the hotel sector in the dissemination of its services through these. The main objective of this study is to verify the role of social networks in choosing and booking tourist accommodation.

An online questionnaire survey was applied. A descriptive and inferential analysis of the collected data was carried out, using the Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.0.

The findings reveal that the social media are today the main means for collecting and sharing information about tourist accommodation. However, with regard to the reservation of the establishment, although this is done preferably online, it is essentially through the online tourist agencies and the website of the establishment itself.

Keywords: Social Media; Tourism; Hospitality; Travel Plan.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, technology has advanced in multiple fields, including Tourism and Hospitality. With the development of communication technologies, the rate of use of the internet and web tools has also increased. Social media is one of the most important

promotional tools for a company, because they can meet the needs of online costumers and transform them on potencial costumers. Thus, the hotel sector has used social networks to promote itself and create a close relationship with its customers (Danias & Kavoura, 2013, Harris & Rae, 2009).

In the last years, social media have played a crucial role in user's travel, from trip planning to experience sharing. In the past, the hotel was chosen through the tour operator's catalogues and reliance on travel agents, but now people search the internet for all the information before travelling.

According to Leite and Azevedo (2017), online presence allows the sharing of content with any consumer, anywhere in the world, regardless of the time of consultation. Technological development should be seen as an opportunity for the hospitality industry. Thus, a tourism product in social media how it is spoken is becoming important fur businesses. At this point, it must examined changes in consumer behavior in social media in the process of tourism product purchasing.

In this sense, it is important and imperative that companies operating in the Tourism sector understand and assimilate the new ways of marketing their tourism products, thus promoting tourist demand in their destinations.

From this standpoint, we develop a research oriented by the question: What is the role of social networks in choosing and booking tourist accommodation? The study has the main objectives to understand the means used in the reservation of the hotel establishment and to understand the main purpose of using social networks in the preparation of the trip.

This paper describes how it is conceived as well as the main results.

2. Literature Review

Over the years there have been different attempts to define social media (Ramos, 2010, Yoo & Gretzel, 2011; Afonso & Borges, 2013; Munar e Jacobson, 2014; Fotis, 2015). According to Afonso and Borges (2013: 16) social networks are a set of online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights and means can be shared. For Munar & Jacobson (2014: 3-4) social media includes several types of online platforms, such as wikis, blogs, microblogging, social networks, review websites.

Afonso and Borges (2013) consider that social networks are very important for hotel units because they function as a channel for distributing information and also a challenge and an opportunity. In this sense, Zeng & Gerritsen (2014) highlight the important role of social networks in researching information and in the decision-making process.

Accommodation aware of the advantage they can gain from the use of social networks, use it to inform tourists, enrich their experiences (Lopes et al., 2014) and respond to their preferences. This is because, as Qualman (2009) says, the excess of information online has made people more demanding as to the type of tools used in their research.

Milović (2012), points out that it is through online information that the customer receives that he decides where to stay, so it is very important to promote the hotel unit on social networks.

Court et al. (2009) proposes a circular scheme of the consumer decision process, which can be adapted to the consumer decision process when choosing a hotel. In the first phase "Initial Consideration Set", the consumer searches for all available information about the accommodations that may interest him. Then, in the "Active Evaluation" phase, it makes a more in-depth assessment of the hotel establishments you previously selected. Subsequently, in the "Moment of Purchase" phase, the accommodation is chosen and reserved and in the "Postpurchase Experience" phase, the client assesses how his experience was, whether or not he met his expectations. Finally, in the last "Loyalty Loop" phase, if the client's expectations have been met or exceeded, the client recommends it to third parties and may repeat the experience.

In view of this model, it is essential that hotel establishments reinforce their online promotion strategy in the first two phases of this model, to captivate the customer and lead him to decide on his accommodation. However, the other phases should not be neglected, because they are the ones that will allow to generate feedback on the accommodation experience and lead others to choose whether or not to stay there.

3. Methodology

To conduct this study on the role of social networks in the choice and reservation of the hotel establishment, a questionnaire survey was applied. The survey was distributed in different Tourism forums and in several Social Networks: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn. The questionnaire was made available between April and June 2019, having obtained 233 responses.

A first version of the questionnaire was analyzed by four professors of Higher Education, tested with two elements from the same universe of the respondents and altered according to the suggestions collected and difficulties detected in completing it.

The survey aimed to record quantitatively aspects related to the use of social networks in the planning and booking of hotel establishments.

Descriptive statistics was performed using Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.0. A multivariate analysis was also performed in order to

understand the relationship between different variables, firstly analysed through the descriptive statistics. At the multivariate level, contingency tables were used in order to analyse pairs of variables and verify independency tests, through Pearson's Chi-Squared (Swinscow, 1997), with $\alpha=5\%$ (significance level):

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{j=1}^m \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{\left(n_{jk} - \frac{n_{j.} \cdot n_{.k}}{N} \right)^2}{\frac{n_{j.} \cdot n_{.k}}{N}}$$

Figure 1 – Chi-Square Statistic

Sample Characterization

Of the 233 respondents, 70.5% were female and 29.5% were male. The age group with the highest percentage of respondents was [40, 49], with 31.3% of responses; followed by the age group [31, 39], with 24.7% and “50 years or more”, with 15%.

When asked about academic qualifications, it was found that 33.5% of respondents said they had a degree, 26.9% said they had completed Secondary Education, 15.4% said they had a doctorate degree and 13.2% a degree master.

Regarding the professional situation, 66.1% of the respondents were self-employed, 12.3% were students and 10.6% were self-employed.

With regard to gross monthly income, 24.2% of respondents received a salary between € 1001 at € 1500 and 23.3% received a salary between € 501 and € 1000. It was also found that 15.9% earned a salary of up to € 500, although 13.7% earned a salary of between € 1501 and € 2000 and 10.6 earned more than € 3000.

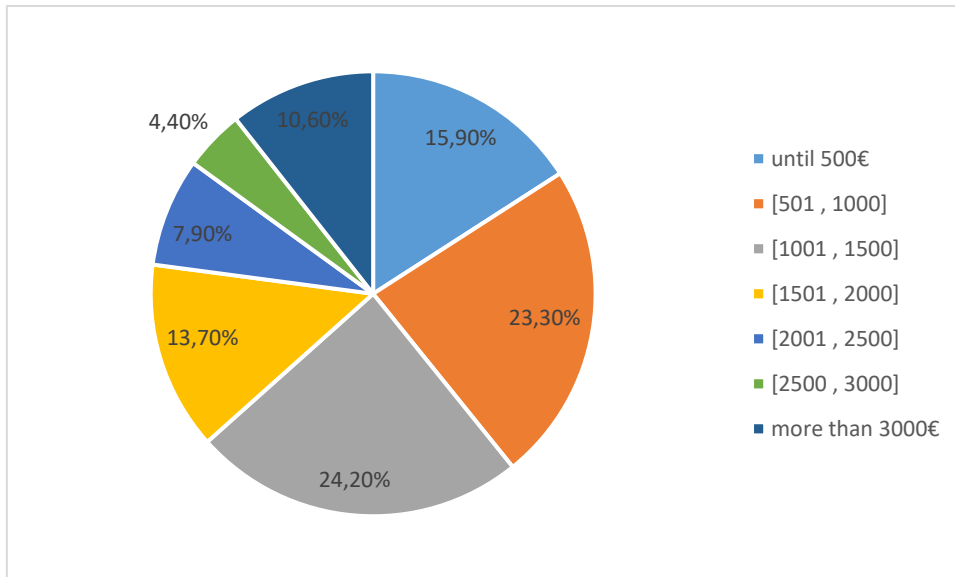


Figure 2 – Gross monthly income

4. Findings/Results Discussion

This section describes the results obtained in this study.

Analyzing graph 3, it appears that the most used social networks on a daily basis were Facebook (90.1%), Instagram (60.1%) and YouTube (47.5%).

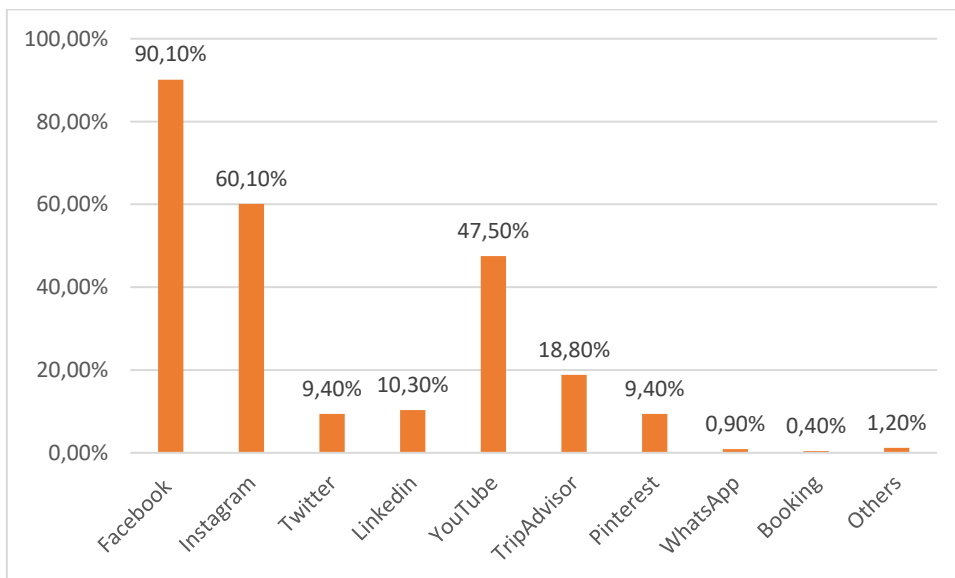


Figure 3 – Most Used Social Networks Daily

When asked which social networks they use the most, this time, to search for hotel establishments, although Facebook and Instagram continue to be two of the most mentioned (51.1% and 13%, respectively), TripAdvisor was the most pointed out with 65.5% of respondents indicating this option.

With regard to the choice of the hotel establishment to stay, it was found that online media held the preference of respondents compared to offline media.

Analyzing the responses regarding online media, the most indicated by the respondents were the online booking sites (Booking, Trivago...) (76.7% of responses), followed by the hotel establishment's own online page (44.4% responses) and social networks (30.5% of responses). With regard to offline media, friends were the main source of consultation (19.3%). Then, there are physical travel agencies (15.2%) and family (12.6%).

Through the analysis of the data collected, it is also verified that the reservation of the hotel establishment is made, preferably, through the online booking sites and the website of the hotel establishment itself. This last option has the advantage of offering more competitive prices compared to online booking sites, as it does not imply the payment of commissions by the accommodation to the Online Travel Agency (OTA).

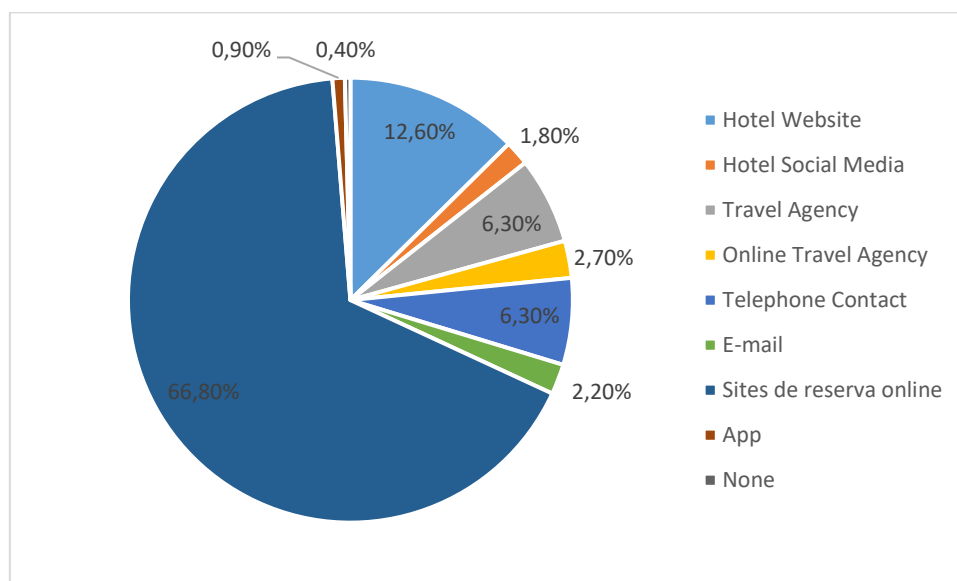


Figure 4 – Means used to reserve the hotel establishment

However, when asked about the reasons that led to this choice, the option because it is cheaper was only the 3rd most chosen, with 32.3% of responses, and the most suitable, was because it is more comfortable (presenting more 11.6% of responses). The second most indicated, with 35.4% of responses, was because it is faster.

Regarding the question “Before the trip, what is the main objective of using social networks”, the option that obtained the highest percentage of responses (40.4%) was “To search for comments from other travelers”, followed by the option “To search for information on accommodation” (35,4%).

It is also important to mention two other options: "To confirm that the choice of accommodation was a good decision" with 11.2% of responses and "To book accommodation" with 10.3%.

Respondents were also asked about the main objectives of using social networks after the trip. Analyzing the results, it appears that the most chosen option was “To rate or comment on the accommodation where you stayed” with 41% of responses, followed by the option “To share photos and / or videos with friends and other travelers” with 37.6%. The third most chosen option was “To search for information on new destinations and hotel establishments” with 18.9%.

In order to observe the non/existence of independency among variables, multivariate analysis, was also performed using the Pearson Chi-Squared Test. Contingency tables’ analyses have been used, through the independency test of Pearson Chi-Squared, in order to understand if:

- there are relationships between question 9 “During the preparation of the trip what is the main objective of using social networks” and Academic Habilitations that should be considered (p-value=0.923);
- there are relationships between question 9 “During the preparation of the trip what is the main objective of using social networks” and gender that should be considered (p-value=0.603).

The results show that for a significance level (α) of 5%, the crossings obtained a p value higher than 0.05, which means that there is no relationship between the variables crossed.

Table 1- Question 9 crossed with Academic qualifications and Gender

Variables	Academic Qualifications	Gender
	Pearson Chi-Squared Test	Pearson Chi-Squared Test
Question 9: “During the preparation of the trip what is the main objective of using social networks”	(=0.923)	(=0.603)

5. Conclusions

The findings suggest that the preference for online means in choosing and booking hotel establishments over traditional means is a reality, with online booking sites as the first choice of travelers.

Results from survey indicate that this fact is due to factors such as convenience, speed and price. Emir et al. (2016) also pointed out variables that play an essential role in the online booking decision. Thus, the quality of information, perceived interactivity, security and privacy, price and promotions and e-WOM, would act as stimuli, which would lead the customer to make the reservation online.

Regarding to the survey, before the trip, the use of social networks serves mainly to search for comments from other travelers and information about the accommodation. Reservation of accommodation through social networks is not, yet, one of the main objectives of its use, which, as noted, falls on OTA's.

With regard to "after the trip", the use of social networks serves essentially to provide feedback on the hotel accommodation where you stayed. Other studies (Court *et al.*, 2009, Schuett, 2013, Fotis, 2015,) prove that after the trip, the social media serve to share experiences, publish photos and make comments about their trip and accommodation.

Another important result refers to the non-existence of significant differences in terms of question 9 and the variables examined.

With this study, we hope to contribute to the discussion on the use of social media and their usefulness in choice and reservation of the hotel establishment.

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