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The impact of social media on customer behaviour in the hospitality industry

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NEAPOLIS UNIVERSITY PAFOS

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY.

DESPOINA POZIDOU

JANUARY 2022

NEAPOLIS UNIVERSITY PAFOS

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY.

Submitted at the School "Neapolis University Pafos" in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the Program's Degree "Digital Marketing"

DESPOINA POZIDOU

JANUARY 2022

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DECLARATION

I, Despoina Pozidou, being fully aware of the consequences of plagiarism, declare responsibly that this paper entitled “The impact of social media on customer behaviour in the hospitality industry.”, is strictly a result of my own personal work and all sources used have been duly stated in the bibliographic citations and references. Where I have used ideas, text and sources of other authors, they are clearly indicated in the text with the corresponding citation and the relevant reference is included in the bibliographic references section with a detailed explanation.

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SUMMARY

Social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter offer a variety of channels for the hotel business to sell products and services. Social networking sites include media technologies that can help with online functioning and monitoring, with the information gained being utilized to improve consumer happiness. Social media and networking may help the hotel business sell itself. In the hotel industry, customers and clients may be involved in conversation and their demands recognized through social media. Using these social networking sites, the hotel industry can engage with clients before, during, and after their vacation. Social media is still relatively new, but it has a lot of advantages, like being inexpensive, being viral, and having the ability to promote brand recognition rapidly and widely. It's also said to be capable of generating link bait, attention, and big amounts of traffic. However, it may not be appropriate for all hotel chains. The purpose of this study is to explore how social media impacts the hotel industry.

ABSTRACT

As a result of social media, the way information is created and transmitted has changed. Because of the internet platform, businesses have been able to connect and engage with potential clients. This readily available information may have an impact on consumers' purchasing decisions.

In tourism and hospitality, social media is altering the way travelers look for, find, and co-create information on travel-related items, as well as the way they make hotel-related decisions online. However, the use and effect of social media on customers' hotel decision-making processes is largely unknown. Through a quantitative approach, this study attempted to discover how social media influences customer behavior during hotel decision-making. The findings demonstrate more refined characteristics of social media and their impact on the hotel choice journey's 'Evaluation stage.' The findings indicated that consumers' search patterns for hotel information have changed, with social media playing a significant part in their decision-making process. This study adds to the theoretical knowledge of consumers' hotel decision-making processes in a technology-assisted context, as well as having implications for hospitality practitioners by demonstrating how social media may lead to more complex hotel selection decisions.

The study's significance is in determining how social media, as a marketing tool, impacts consumer behavior and how individuals utilize social media when traveling to a hotel. There will be a description of social media at all phases of the customer journey toward hotel choosing. It's critical to understand whether social media plays a significant influence in people's hotel selections, and how the ongoing expansion of social media is assisting customers in using social media to locate hotels. Many hotels can benefit from this report's insights into how to better understand their customers and how these customers may assist hotels develop brand awareness through social media.

1. Introduction

1.1. Social Media and the Hospitality Industry

It has been argued since 2006, that social media had begun to replace the traditional sources of information (Jepsen, 2006). It was later proved that social media may impact customers' purchasing behavior, as evidenced by the Input-Process-Response models. (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). In addition, Vierenga, Van Bruggen and De Valk (2009) recommended that virtual communities can influence customer behavior because they are becoming crucial networks of consumer knowledge. Nowadays, social media has seen a significant surge in popularity among internet users. For example, Facebook claims to have over 750 million active users worldwide who spend over 700 billion minutes every month on the platform. (Facebook, 2011). Also, Twitter has 175 million users, with an average of one billion tweets per week (Twitter, 2011). Lastly, YouTube users watch over 3 billion videos daily (YouTube, 2011).

Although traditional media just informs customers, social media is keeping customers encouraged, engaged and involved. When a company gets its customers interested and committed, it establishes long-term employment ties with operations. Because social media is participatory and personal, it increases the degree of customer assistance. If the situation is unfavorable, social media may be used to motivate a company to extend its offerings and make every attempt to alleviate negative sentiments.

With a large number of internet users, reputation management is a critical component of an online business. While some companies use the internet to carefully portray themselves in a manner that is appropriate for their target audience, other internet users take a more open approach. For example, Deloitte’s report, entitled "Hospitality 2015" reports that social media and new technology trends has the most important role the next five years towards the development of the hospitality industry. As more people acquire access to the internet throughout the world, these figures are expected to climb by 50% in 2015 (Deloitte, 2010). However, the growth of social media can be beneficial to customers, but it can also be bad news or an opportunity for hotels. According to Jeremy Wagstaff, a technology critic, the most effective method to get extremely good service nowadays is to tweet about how awful it is. Therefore, hospitality is a leisure industry, social media can be catastrophe and tragedy for some brands (Wagstaff, 2010).

According to Adam et al. (2007), user-generated travel and tourism content has been growth on social media in recent years, especially from people posting some holidays photos to evaluating the services they have were used during their travel on rating sites and this has contributed to the Travel 2.0 concept becoming widespread. Travel 2.0 refers to the use of the Internet by tourists to compare specific services, to obtain information about a particular tour and to share recommendations, comments and experiences through evaluation systems and customer ratings (Adam et al., 2007).

Customer behavior, in hospitality industry, has consistently been affected by the evolution of Information Communication Technologies (Poon, 1993, Buhalis, 1998), and in particular, Web 2.0 has radically changed the way consumers design and consume related products with travelling (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Kang, Gretzel and Lee (2008) said that the impact of social media will be enormous in travelling. Nowadays, TripAdvisor, arguably the number one travel related client criticism site (a form of social media), serves over 50 million users a month who is looking for travel advice and hosts over 50 million hotel reviews and people's opinions (TripAdvisor, 2011). Furthermore, it is discussed that social media plays an essential role in travelers' decision-making behavior and their search of hotel information. (Gretzel, Yoo & Zach 2011).

1.2. Purpose of the study

The social media usage is rising. Digital consumers are now spending more time on social media than ever before. Hence, it is important for the hospitality industry to have social media marketing efforts and a brand presence, especially since social media marketing has proven to be more productive and successful than traditional marketing (Jimmy Quach, 2020). Social media marketing provides a communication between consumers and buyers. This interactive part helps the business find repeat customers. Popular social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), blogs (e.g., YouTube), ranking sites (e.g., TripAdvisor) are constantly growing globally (Jimmy Quach, 2020).

The importance of the study is to understand how social media, as a marketing tool, influences customer behavior and how social media is used by people when traveling to a hotel. A descriptive overview of social media at all stages of the consumer journey towards hotel selection, will be described. It is important to understand whether social

media plays a key role in individuals' hotel choices and how the continued growth of social media is helping consumers to find hotels using social media. This report will provide many hotels with insights into how to better understand their customers and how these customers through social media can help hotels build brand awareness.

1.3. Study Objectives

Because of the flattening of Internet access, hospitality clients are acquiring significantly more influence in defining the creation and dissemination of information, the future of tourism will be focused on consumer-centric technology. In addition, it is becoming more typical for customers to utilize multiple channels at different points of the holiday planning process.

The observed scenario here, according to (de Bruijn & ten Heuvelhof, 2008), is that the web and social media in particular offer numerous chances for hospitality providers to facilitate their enterprises, as well as many opportunities for customers to connect with firms (for example, to post reviews about certain products and services). However, suppliers are still unsure how to effectively use social media information to express their ideas and ensure that they match client demands.

The most significant goal of this study is to understand the impact of social media on consumer behavior, focusing on the consumer journey towards hotel choice. "Hotel operators have hypothesized that the influence of social media and user produced information on hotel performance has been strengthening," Anderson (2012) writes in a Cornell Hospitality Report. As a result, monitoring these effects is critical in the hotel sector.

In particular, *the objectives of this research*, in other words, the actions that will be taken to achieve the goal, are as follows:

• Examine how people track, process and select information on social media before deciding on a hotel.
• Learn about the functions of social media in the context of a hotel decision.
• Provide a better understanding for both consumers and hotels of why, when and how social media has influenced decision-making.

• Identify the relationship between attitudes towards hotel advertising on social media and consumer behavior.

1.4. Research Questions

To achieve the objectives, the following *main research questions* of the research need to be answered:

1) What are the main differences between mass media marketing for hotels and social media?
2) Are social media more reliable than traditional hotel information courses?
3) Do social media play a significant role in people's choice of hotels?
4) At what stages of the hotel journey are social media used?
5) How are social media used at each stage of a hotel decision?
6) Does social media influence hotel plans?
7) How does social media help in hotel growth?

1.5. Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation has the following structure: firstly, there is a literature review chapter, where social media, its characteristics and all relevant theories about social media, hospitality industry and tourism are explained. Secondly, chapter 3 explains the methodology, provides a detailed discussion and process for collecting the data. The research is engaged people in filling online questionnaires. The choice of the quantitative approach of data collection adopted in this study since the findings will be based on a larger sample size than the qualitative method. Followed by careful statistical analysis of the results and findings. Finally, the conclusions and the answers to the basic research questions has given.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media

By definition, social media is a “web application group” based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allowing the creation and sharing of user-generated content such as text, audio and images (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Applications like, Twitter, which did not exist years ago, are a critical part of today’s media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011), and especially of hospitality industry. Social media is radically changing the way tourists and travelers, firstly search, then find and read and finally trust, as well as collectively collect information on suppliers and tourism destinations (Christou, E. & Sigala, M., 2012). Web 2.0 and social media have allowed companies and consumers to become more involved in service-related processes more than ever before (Christou, E. & Sigala, M., 2012). However, as a wide range of social media coming into play, the most popular social media for hosting industry include Facebook, TripAdvisor, Twitter and YouTube (McCarthy, L., Stock, D., & Verma, R., 2010).

Social media refers to online communities that are interactive, fluid and joint. Communities like these give members the ability to publish, monitor, evaluate, critique, create and interact with online content. In fact, social media is a phrase for virtual worlds, book marketing sites, social news, forums and virtual world (Tutent, 2008).

Not only consumer to consumer (C2C) communication, but also business to consumer (B2C) and business to business (B2B) communication may be influenced by social media (B2B). Consumer communication channels have altered dramatically as a result of social media. Consumer to consumer (C2C) communication was formerly only available through print media. Consumers may now express their expectations, views, and aspirations through a variety of media.

Hotel brands create stores on social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. In addition to creating their own account, hotels are affiliated with third-party websites like Trip Advisor to update their customer reviews. When there is more information available to leisure travelers and businesses, potential clients can find lots of offers and really find what they are searching without leaving their devices (Mckay, 2010).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classify social media into six types: Blogs, collaborative projects, Social Networking sites, Content Communities, Virtual game worlds and Virtual social worlds.

		Social Presence / Media Richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation / self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social Networking sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Linkedin)	Virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia, Wikitravel)	Content communities (e.g. YouTube, Flikr, Vimeo, Panoramio)	Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)

Table 1. Social media is divided into two categories: social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 59-68).

However, this classification system does not provide for any provision that includes three important types of social media: Microblogs (e.g., Twitter and similar applications), consumer criticism and rating websites (e.g., TripAdvisor and similar applications), as well as location-based services (e.g., squares and similar applications). For the purposes of this study, and given hospitality industry as the focus of their contexts, virtual social worlds and virtual toy worlds will not be was further studied as the literature review did not reveal any academic work examining in the context of hospitality industry and tourism.

2.1.1. Facebook

Facebook, the main source of social media, is a great way to stay successful and visible by creating a presence for an online organization. Facebook is one of the most popular social networks and almost reaching the mark of 500 million people.

Consumers, in their daily life for many reasons, are using social networks, like Facebook. Wittkower, D.E, (2010) mentioned that users of Facebook, want to keep their relationships with their friends and colleagues. Maintaining a social connection between the internet users of social networks has benefits arising from keeping contact with other people, as a result, providing social support, closeness and friendship. These

social networks permit online users, by adding them to networks of friends, to connect with these people. Networking facilitates the exchange of information and experience about a service or product between colleagues (Farook & Abeysekara, 2016).

People have a Facebook profile/account, but the hotel does not need a profile. Instead of this, the hotel is like a brand and they should have pages, and not a profile. Hotel which is using Facebook, needs to know its audience and customize its pages to suit their audience demographic. Based on this information, content and marketing campaign that are created on Facebook must have the right motivation, coverage and awareness. As a result, with the good, right and successful page of the hotel, it can rise the number of people who are interested in the brand.

2.1.2. TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor is a public website that covers the global marketplace. This website, or rather the company, headquartered in Needham, Massachusetts, was founded in 2000 by Stephen Kaufer, Saman Mortazavi and Langley Steinert. The main purpose of the website was and remains to make it easy for people who are planning travels, trips and tours to have all the information that they need and, as a result, will make it easier for them to plan their entire trip. The site has travel-related comments as well as interactive travel forums, employs over 3,000 people directly and boasts around 4.5 million monthly visitors.

For many years, TripAdvisor has had an important present in the travel and tourism industry. All hotels and travel operators around the world are listed on TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor provides to customers with lots of comments of hotels, restaurants and travelling events, so they can gain positive confidence before booking a trip. TripAdvisor ranks hotels according to three aspects: newly published reviews, number of reviews, and quality of reviews. It can sometimes be difficult to convince guests to participate and rate a hotel (unless the review is negative). Trends usually show that people are more likely to write about unpleasant and negative experiences than good ones.

However, there is no matter how many good comments a hotel has, if a traveler sees negative reviews, they will certainly be going to read it. Negative reviews have a strong impact on consumers, so it is imperative that employees respond to them. If potential

visitors see that the hotel's management ignored the comments, they will think that the management is not interested and does not really care.

2.1.3. Twitter

Twitter is an effective means of communication, where people can read or download the latest news on virtual chats and build community. The obvious advantage for the hosting industry to use social media is for this purpose of customer service and Twitter is the perfect tool for resolving customer related issues or leaving only a positive impact on the visitor with a just "thank you or welcome" tweet. However, the best in the business go even further in customer service.

The secret for hotels, to a helpful use of Twitter is to observe the following important details: a) Do some research, b) Define your goals, c) Identify a twitter profile, d) Creating social equity, e) Monitor the conversion rate ROI measurement. Research is very important and hotels that might be using Twitter should take the time to understand different types of conversations that are being actively exchanged before performing own communication plan. Hotels can use Twitter in various ways, so they can define their goals and the results that they hope to reach along Twitter usage.

Some kind of profile must be created. For instance, for a hotel, the specific account would be needed as the Twitter name should reflect the name of the organization along with a logo of the company. Twitter etiquette can build community trust and credibility as good. In order to succeed in building social equality, customer involvement is crucial. With all these means instead, monitoring the conversations will summarize the results for a better understanding of the current trends and what is entitled to the social environment. These results must always be mapped back to goals and objectives (Brito, 2010).

It is important to note, according to Raphael (2013), that "Measuring social traffic should not be confused with loyalty - attracting a reader to a website is not an easy task and it is a far from effective interaction with the brand content." Although many marketers assume that the measurement of social media Return on investment (ROI) is not possible or not necessary, Levinson and Gibson (2010) disagree with the hypothesis. They "measure success by the amount of net profit or net results generated by their marketing activities' and take into account that when measured, the results of individual

sources as well as collective sources can to always be improved. A simple way to calculate ROI is to subtract costs from the gross profit and then divide the result by the cost. Unlike from the terms of marketing, there are several types of ROI: risk reduction, reputation, customer retention, business intelligence, efficiency, differentiation, brand correlation, direct revenue, public relations and reporting, supplier skills development, long-term revenue, change of perception, innovation, more and better recruitment, customer training, staff skills development, network development, job satisfaction, job creation and trust building.

2.1.4. YouTube

As the internet continues to evolve and grow, YouTube is becoming one of the many social media platforms that hotels can analyze and improve their potential. YouTube is one video streaming channel, which hosts millions of videos and is watched by 400 million of people around the world who are actively looking for information (Shipley, 2010). Hotels can use YouTube to communicate, promote and connect with the business audience, thereby engaging new clients by making high-definition video and uploading it to YouTube. These videos can be a corporate event, speech, or demonstration of a launched new product. Once the video is uploaded, it will go viral. and ultimately the purpose of using YouTube is to attract people to a hotel.

Hotels have the ability to shoot videos and another way to promote hotel is the use of customer testimonial videos. In the process of registration, the client may be informed that a short 5-minute video might help them, such as a free drink, a lunch, or a couple of tickets to an entertainment. Because comments are so important in attracting clients to a hotel, these films have the potential to persuade a potential client to book a night at the hotel rather than one of its competitors. As a result, rather than products, the hotel's brand impression is frequently affected by experience.

2.2. Power of social media

Websites like Hotels.com, has recognized as a branding tool, to improve the profitability of independent travel bookings, and not the package purchases. Also, the world’s biggest travel community is Trip Advisor, visited every month by 32 million people. It started using social media in 2007, when it launched the “Cities I've Visited” of Facebook application and an interactive travel map used by 30 million users around the world. In 2010, based on this demand, using the Facebook Connect application on

TripAdvisor websites to deliver TripAdvisor friends. By connecting these two accounts, people can use their social network to find out which of their friends were in each city and can share a comment or offer a recommendation. For over 10 years, TripAdvisor has given some travel tips and advice from travelers' knowledge. Social media added the ability to find ways to improve this travel tip with the experiences of friends and methods to make it easier to receive and share this advice (Smith, 2011)

In today's world, social media is essential for any business, especially for the hospitality industry. Social media gives to the hotels the opportunity to build relationships with their customers, enhance the hotel's online reputation and create SEO content. Social media can support all the booking process and the decision journey, as visitors start to plan their journeys using a search engine, looking for travel inspiration on social media and also reading some reviews online. Moreover, social media has become an important instrument for hotel marketing.

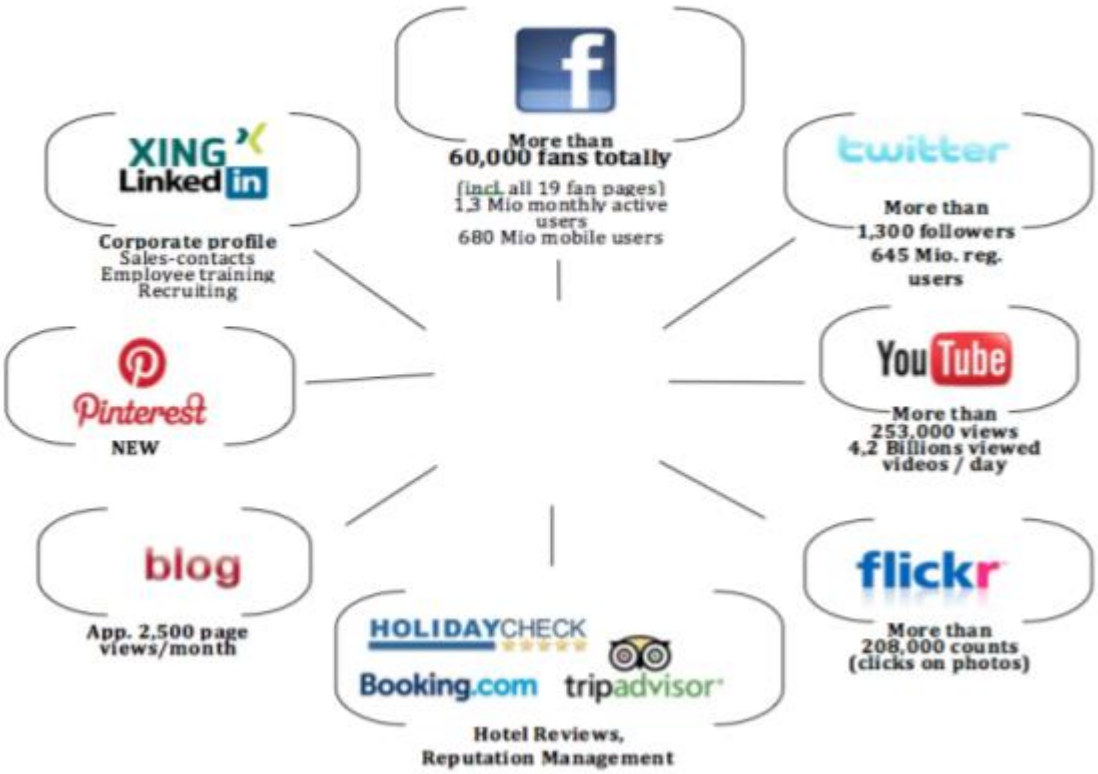


Figure 1: Statistics February 2014

2.3. Influence of social media: “Then” and “Now”

People frequently compared hotel searches between "before" (before social media) and "now" (after social media) to establish the influence of social media on hotel search behavior (hotel choice after social media). People in the pre-social media period stressed that they sought information and guidance from travel companies, made bookings over the phone, and phoned a number of hotels for specific information. Other sources of information, according to their responses to "then," included WOM, which included suggestions from family or friends, official travel books and guides, and the use of traditional Web 1.0 platforms, such as hotel websites, which were used then and are still a significant source for finding information about hotels. When it comes to using social media, clients are using lots of channels of Web 2.0 to conduct a hotel information search, with the most important channel, which is TripAdvisor, and then followed by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Nowadays, web 2.0 and social media have enabled businesses and clients to participate and involve in service-related processes more than ever in the past (Sigala et al. 2012). However, social networks are not new, their spread in various fields and the discussion in scientific circles about it has accelerated more freshly (Fuchs 2014). For example, research on social media's role as platforms for information sharing and discovery in enabling consumer liberty and producing value by sharing and exchanging personal experiences via eWOM has been conducted from a customer viewpoint (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Ayeh et al. 2012; Gohil, 2015). In the business arena, social media has gained attention as electronic tools that are transforming the traditional landscape of marketing and advertising (Sigala et al. 2012) and provide professionals a means of interaction, exchange visual and audio content to have a richer and more convenient internet chats (Community Futures 2012). In general, social media has emerged as an important platform for information exchange and interaction between companies and consumers and between users, as well as wider intermediaries, auditors and non-profit organizations (Xiang and Gretzel 2010, Sigala et al. 2012).

Today, there are a large number of social networking applications, and new networking sites and tools continue to emerge on the web (Sigala et al. 2012; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). To understand this complexity, some authors have identified the dominant types of social media. For example, Constantinides and Fontan (2008) classify five main types, including blogs, social media, content communities, forums and message boards,

and content aggregators. Kaplan and Henlein (2010) structure social networks according to their a) level of social presence and wealth of the media and b) level of self-presentation and self-disclosure, identifying six total types of social networks. In the hospitality industry, recent research has expanded our knowledge by microblogging usage (eg Twitter), review and rating sites (eg TripAdvisor) and Internet forums, some of which are especially useful and relevant to services related to tourism (Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Fotis et al. 2012; Ayeh et al. 2012; Sigala et al. 2012; Hudson and Thal 2013; Gohil 2015; Chung and Koo 2015).

2.4. Hospitality Industry and Tourism

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) describe tourism as "a cultural, social and economic phenomenon, which involves the movement of people to places out of their ordinary environment for business or personal aims". For some people, tourism describes enjoyment and leisure, a tour through the weekend away from job and some doubt the necessity for research and study. Nevertheless, for some others, tourism is a resource of job, it is a work that brings income to many people over the world, it is a source of life. Thus, it is essential to do some research, to analyze it and more carefully study it.

"Since the 1950s, tourism has become an important economic sector and a source of environmental and social change. Also, since the 1970s, it has become a field of important research and charity in many academic disciplines. The development of tourism's standards in different parts of the world reflects its stories and cultures of these countries and regions, but tourism is an almost global phenomenon […] it is an essential source of wealth for lots of countries […] it becomes a high priority for many people" (Robinson, Lück and Smith, 2013). The statement highlights the significance of tourism, which has grown significantly over the years, and the different functions of tourism around the world.

Today, "hospitality has become a commercial experience where the visitor pays for the goods and services they consume through an account" (Page, 2009). Hospitality as part of tourism "is a basic part of domestic and incoming leisure market. The constant demand for tourism enables hospitality industry to anticipate demand and classify chances to rise consumer spending, creating a wave of secondary economic consequences" (Robinson, Luke & Smith, 2013). The hospitality industry consists of two sectors: the Food and Beverage Sector (F&B) and the accommodation sector.

“The tourism industry had high hopes from the very beginning for the Internet. Tourism as an immaterial service product fully adapts to electronic data broadcast. Online ticket sales and online travel communities are reported to have a positive effect in the future expected to the fact that the appearance of the required details for the market on the internet is simple, and the price of everyday updates is relatively low” (Amersdorffer et all, 2012). This describes the amazing relationship between social media and tourism industry and how good these two can work cooperatively due to similar features.

However, the hospitality industry is an urgent target due to the expanding trend observed in the recent years, a significant number of available data on the interest and the topic it has produced. Rauch (2013) reports that one of the trends in the hotel industry planned for the year 2014 is mobile communication and social media and observes that “by paying attention to authentic ways of exploiting the emerging social / mobile applications will be very useful for those who involved in hospitality marketing.” This dissertation will explore if social media is indeed beneficial in reaching company goals and if there are any decreases in the success it promises to accomplish, taking into consideration all of the previously listed factors.

2.4.1. Hospitality Providers

The actions taken by hospitality providers in relation to a vacation location will be the subject of this section. Customers have more power as a result of IT developments, thus providers should direct their operations to meet their demands. In addition, after examining what real consumers desire from their complete holiday experience, methods will be proposed for each stage taken by providers in the holiday destination process later in this study. Furthermore, suppliers should reconsider brand building, product development, and quality assurance at each stage of the consumer engagement process.

Each phase will be specified as a transaction, and the following model will be used to define transactions:

1. Destination promotion,
2. Tourist attraction,
3. Customer acquisition,
4. Holiday presence, and
5. Aftercare.

As it will be described, this model is defined as a reaction to the consumer model, which is obtained from literature.

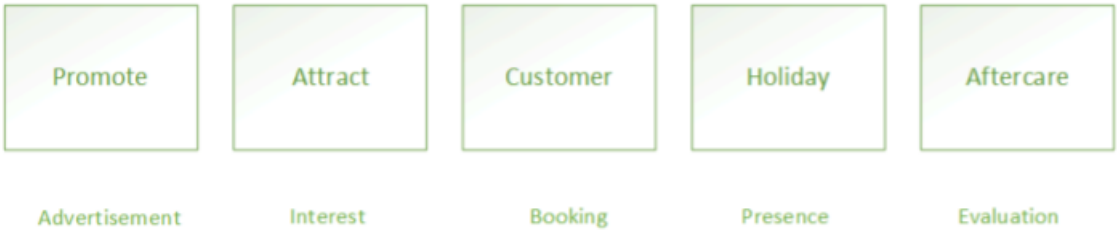


Figure 2: Transactions made by Hospitality Providers

Each transaction in the provider model corresponds to a behaviour in the consumer. This communication is necessary in order to establish a clear distinction between the sorts of information delivered and the channels via which each transaction is carried out. The steps taken by customers during the holiday decision-making process are described in the next section.

2.4.2. Consumers

It's worth noting that the clients who will be evaluated for this study are limited to the study's research sample, which consists of families who take vacations on a regular basis and have access to the Internet.

Furthermore, IT literacy is strong across the world, with more than 80% of households utilizing the Internet and a sizable majority claiming to have purchased products or services over the Internet in the recent few years. As a result, it's important to look at how these families utilize social media and the Internet, because Euromonitor data shows that they do.

Several aspects of the families will be examined in order to dive further into the description of the target demographic. These characteristics serve as consumer segmentation criteria and will aid in explaining the demands and preferences of certain family groups, resulting in the creation of the social media platform. Customers are segmented based on a variety of factors, including distance and language.

When investigating Internet activity, the age groups of the parents will be taken into account first. This research will focus on three different sorts of parent generations:

- Young – elderly (born 1946-1964)
- Families from Generation X (born 1965-1980)
- Millennials - Young families (born 1981-2000)

According to Cohen, social media is used by 84 percent of Millennials, 66 percent of Gen X, and 44 percent of the Young-elderly.

These figures demonstrate the importance for marketers to understand where their target audiences spend their time online and how these trends evolve over time when targeting them. Furthermore, Millennials have become the largest generation in history, with the highest aggregate purchasing power ($2.45 trillion globally by 2015). As a result, hospitality providers must pay special attention to the demands of this generation of travellers.

However, this does not imply that hospitality operators should just cater to Millennials. According to Nanji, the Internet is the most popular source of information for the young-elderly and seniors, outperforming television and print media by a wide margin. Furthermore, because the young-elderly have more discretionary cash than any other age group, it is important for hospitality providers to pay attention to them on social media. In 2013, eight out of ten 65 to 75-year-olds said they used the internet on a regular basis, up from five out of ten in 2005. The proportion of persons who say they've used the internet recently (in the last three months) has increased proportionally.

Moreover, while being a smaller generation than the Young-elderly or Millennials, Gen X families make up a sizable demographic that frequently spends for their children as well as for themselves. Furthermore, Gen Xers grew up with the internet. Almost everyone is online and uses social media and cell phones. According to a recent eMarketer research, "Generation X: A Forgotten Population That's Well Worth Remembering," marketers leveraging digital technology to reach customers should consider Generation X as a natural target (Boyle, 2013).
The level of education is particularly significant since it reveals whether or not a family uses web-based platforms while selecting on a vacation spot. People with lesser levels

of education are less likely to utilize the internet, according to (University of Waterloo, 2013).

2.5. Social Media in Hospitality Industry

The Internet has changed the way travel and tourism information is disseminated, as well as the way tourists plan their journeys (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Two major trends, have appeared on the internet recently, which emphasize the changes that can affect the travel and tourism system. First, Social media sites have won popularity in the use of the Internet by tourists (Pan et al., 2007). These social media websites help people to share and post their experiences of travelling, reviews and opinions that will be information source for tourists over the world. Thus, consumers have more authority in determining production and delivery of information through widespread Internet access (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Second, because of the huge number of available information, searching has constantly become a dominant use of the internet by tourists. As a result, search engines have turn into a powerful interface for accessing related information about travelling and play a decisive role in bringing together the tourism company and the tourist (Lange-Faria & Eliot, 2012).

In the tourist industry, social media plays a big role, accounting for around 11% of Google search results relating to travel and tourism. The major forums for internet users to share their adventures are virtual communities and websites with consumer reviews. (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Generally, social media has become increasingly important as a source of information and communication. Many businesses, particularly those in the hotel industry, have experienced significant changes in their marketing communication strategies. (Song and Yoo, 2016). The credibility of the content published on these platforms helps the strength of the social media (Leung et al., 2013). People can benefit from these materials, as it can provides reliable information about places and hotels (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011).

Nowadays, the hospitality industry is one of the speedy expanding industries over the world. In the past, people traveled either for religious aims or to “capture” the world, but today people travel for study, vacations, business, medicine, excursions, etc. Social media has changed aspects of booking, payments and communication. Despite its many

benefits, social media has a downside (a dark side). If used correctly, it can be beneficial, but also it can ruin the image in a short period of time.

Hospitality company's involvement in social media on the internet has proven to be a cost-effective tool for interacting with potential customers. Joining these sites provides businesses with direct access to active users without the need to add additional software or hardware. A social networking site that is easily accessible, simple and attractive, allows members to participate in unique ways. Unsurprisingly, many hotels have entered the social media space. The hosting companies actively interact with their customers by finding innovative customized solutions and very responsive and fast customer service (Kasavana, Nusair, & Teodosic, 2010). Nowadays, online customer reviews play an important role in hotel selection.

2.5.1. WOM from Social Media

"You do one nasty thing, 10 people will hear via word of mouth," there was a phrase in hotel management for decades. As a result of the rise of social media, this expression has been renamed "word of a million mouths." This statement suggests that communication spreads so quickly that it may make or kill a business. As long as they have an internet connection, social media may reach worldwide audiences in all areas of the world with no time lag and simple accessibility for individuals receiving the content (Khan, 2012).

According to Westbrook, e-WOM can be defined as "all informal communications (communications of interpersonal relationships, not those through mass-media channels that pass product knowledge from providers to consumers) directed at consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers." This encompasses both producer-to-consumer communication and consumer-to-consumer communication (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

A WOM model is defined by (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008) taking into consideration the attitude toward visiting a site, as well as the perceived social pressure and ease or difficulty of visiting that area. These three elements have a big influence on whether or not you want to go to that specific destination (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). In addition, the valence of the reviews, or whether they are good or negative, has a major impact on consumers' perceptions of the reviewed product. Awareness is also a key

aspect in the decision-making process; the more people who hear about a destination or a hospitality service, the more informed they will be. According to (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009), the persuasiveness of a message is strongest when it is transmitted to friends and family by a devoted consumer, therefore familiarity is key.

We can observe that e-WOM effects customer behavior by looking at studies on online consumer evaluations (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). People, for example, make shopping decisions based on consumer-generated information on the internet and travel selections based on online posts (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Consumer expectations, pre-usage attitudes, and even post-usage perceptions of a product or service are all shaped by personal conversations and informal exchanges of information among acquaintances, which not only influence consumer choices and purchase decisions, but also shape consumer expectations, pre-usage attitudes, and even post-usage perceptions of a product or service. This means that more e-WOM leads to increased product sales, which in turn leads to increased e-WOM and increased product sales (Khan, 2012). As a result, it's crucial to comprehend how significant e-WOM is to customers and why they use virtual opinion platforms to aid them in making purchase decisions.

2.6. Social media Success stories in the hospitality industry

Many third-party organizations handle reservations for individual hotels, multi-property groups, and resorts over the internet. NORTHWIND, a provider of Maestro Enterprise Property Management hotel software and reservation software for the industry's premier hospitality partners, is one such firm.

Many articles have been written on the Gainey Suites Hotel in Scottsdale, which has been dubbed the "social media hotel" because of how social media has helped create hundreds of room nights. This is due to the large Twitter followings, as well as online videos on YouTube and the Flickr picture sharing site, where photos of the property's attractiveness are shared. Promotions and information about special events at the hotel are promoted on Facebook, and the hotel is leveraging its position as the number one hotel on Tripadvisor.com. (Travel Industry Wire, 2010).

The Gainey Suites Hotel's general manager, Rich Newman, admits that the hotel has the freedom to get creative with social media, promote their hotels in a creative style that would not have been possible on the website, and that having the Maestro's ResWave

booking engine on the website creates links to the social media pages. These links eventually promote commerce because potential consumers may examine rich-media hotel presentations, and customers respond by placing a reservation based on the unique and personalized characteristics of what is shown online. This type of social media marketing would result in hundreds of room nights, and the hotel's food and beverage division would get a piece of the action (Travel Industry Wire, 2010).

IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group) is a global corporation that operates the world's biggest hotel chain by room count. IHG now owns, manages, rents, or franchises over 650,000 guest rooms in over 4,400 hotels in over 100 countries. In the fourth quarter of 2009, IHG implemented a social media platform. According to Kevin Hickey, IHG's global manager of lifecycle and e-mail marketing, the focus on CRM enablement and realizing opportunities lies at the center of conversation with customers (mostly due to technology) prompted the need to take a different approach to email marketing efforts and integrate the email system and enable sharing (Fletcher, 2010).

InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) has launched its second phase of mobile application strategy with the global launch of its Priority Club Rewards app for Android, putting it ahead of many of its competitors. Customers will be able to find and make or cancel reservations from any of IHG's seven brands using the new app. Following the debut of the Priority Club Rewards iPhone app in April 2010, the Priority Club Rewards Android app was released. This app has been downloaded 70,000 times or more throughout the world and has brought in approximately $3 million in income. IHG has made $2.5 million per month from the improved mobile brand websites and iPhone application (InterContinental Hotels Group, 2010).

"The expansion of mobile capabilities and their success in the marketplace in only one year proves that customers demand access to information wherever and whenever they choose," said Michael Menis, vice president, Global Interactive Marketing, IHG (Menis, 2010). Without a question, mobile marketing allows clients to be amused as well as informed about current events. (2006) (Michael and Salter).

In order to determine whether social media is effective for a medium-sized hotel, hoteliers must look at how successfully social media is used by a hotel chain or a group of properties. The majority of businesses that use social media sites will have at least a

Facebook or Twitter account, however, the Four Seasons goes above and above with social media. Take a peek at the Four Seasons' Facebook and Twitter pages. On the At-A-Glance page, one can see that there is a presence on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and mobile and web application downloads. This is not all, there is more to it with each click on the social media platform, such as:

- ✓ Twitter. Instead of a primary Twitter account, Four Seasons maintains a specialized Twitter account for each property. As it is both enjoyable and pleasant, this allows new or existing customers to have a dialogue and receive unique twitter feeds. Each facility is distinct, and localized accounts become more personal to clients, with promotions tailored to each location.

- ✓ Facebook. Instead of a corporate Facebook account, each property has its own Facebook profile and pages. The account has additional features such as a polls page, booking forms, and special deals.

- ✓ YouTube. The Four Seasons YouTube channel is a collection of short video clips. The goal is to offer potential clients a taste of a particular resort and persuade them to make a reservation.

- ✓ Widgets and Apps may be downloaded. The Four Seasons would have done its homework and opted to reach out to passengers via an iPhone application. There's also a Facebook app and a widget that can be included on a website or blog. (Brown, 2010)

The Four Seasons is doing well with social media because it can reach out to clients all around the world. For the time being, clients' social media tools and applications are fully protected. It links in with the Four Seasons brand, which stands for outstanding and memorable customer service; hence, the availability of social media provides clients a whole new perspective on customer service.

The Wyndham Grand London Chelsea Harbor hotel, another well-known hotel brand, took the initiative to advertise the property online and launched a corporate blog to boost their online visibility. Setting up branded social network accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube was one of the projects, with efforts made to administer and maintain the daily updates.

The Wyndham Grand website and blog saw a 20 percent increase in targeted traffic as a result of these measures. At the same time, sponsored social network platforms saw a 30 percent growth in "following" per month. As predicted, the number of business possibilities and queries has increased as the internet environment has grown (Brady, 2010).

2.7. Social media on the Hotel Consumer Decision Journey

There are four stages in the consumer decision journey: 1) Consider, 2) Evaluate, 3) Purchase and 4) Like (Court et al. 2009). Court et al. (2009) shows that instead of consistently limiting their options until they approve on what to buy, clients add and take off brands from the “group of favorites” considered in the “Evaluation stage”. In this stage, clients in order to meet their purchasing needs and evaluate various alternatives, begin to seek and process information from many sources, based on the information they received before making a purchase decision (Ayeh et al. 2012). However, this evaluation process demonstrates some additional difficulties in choosing a hotel (Baruka and Civre 2012).

The hotel's products and services make purchasing decisions very emotional and difficult to reproduce (Kwon et al. 2011). Hospitality providers are no longer consummate experts in the characteristics or quality of brands and products. On the contrary, online hotel reviews play an important role in facilitating the rating stage of today's consumers by providing positive and negative reviews and indirect communication between customers through review sites and blogs (Fotis et al. 2012). This is based on the main foundations of consumer behavior, namely that consumers can influence each other (Haywood et al. 1989). Although it is generally accepted that social media can influence travelers when they are making the final purchase decision, the specifics of how this process can evolve and influence behavior are less explored (Fotis et al. 2012).

Although social media is primarily used to help consumers for inspiration, choice constraints, and decision verification, hotel reviews are used to form a "set of considerations" about possible choices (Singh and Torres 2015). In this stage, hotel decisions are often influenced by positive and negative client reviews, as well as both ends of the spectrum raise client’s consciousness and can change their viewpoint in

relation to the hotel (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). For example, Verma et al. (2012) show that when a hotel receiving not positive comments, people are less likely to book the hotel, while Almana and Mirza (2013) showed that positive reviews are successful factors in purchasing conclusions.

There is a lack of knowledge of the detailed nuances that make up the customer decision journey, in particular the "Evaluation Stage", while the central role of social media in DMP has been approved in latest surveys. Cox et al. (2009) argue that the role of user-generated content in hospitality behavior is one of the darkest and most unexplored topics. At the same time, a huge volume of research has examined the impact of online comments of TripAdvisor on decision making, there is still a lack of surveys that take into account broader social media platforms on the customer decision journey (Gretzel et al., 2007, Gretzel and Yoo 2008, Vermeulen and Seegers 2009, Murphy and Chen 2014).

2.8. Hotel information search: Advantages and Disadvantages

There is a significant issue mentioned that clients, although aware of technology, do not seem to use social media unconditionally, but evaluate a number of distinct advantages and challenges in their selection process of the hotel. People rate social media as very useful sources of information for accessing updated hotel information in comparison to less dynamic and information that is outdated and content accessible on more traditional hotel and travelling channels. An added benefit is the ability to "expose" to many views and real-life experiences from users over the world at the pre-decision process. People supported the value of social media in offering fast, convenient and easy way to get essential hotel information, with TripAdvisor as a crucial platform for comparing and contrasting alternatives, as a result of the perfect choice of the hotel.

While people pointed to the extensive use of social media in the hotel evaluation process, other people raised concerns about the credibility of the content. People worry that some content may be "fake", which occasionally makes social media a "dubious tool" for consulting on important decision-making processes, for example as holiday shopping. While accessing to a wealth of hotel-related information was considered positive, the same information was seen as upsetting and in fact make the selection process of the hotel more complicated. This is due to the multitude choices of available

hotels and their conflicting ratings on social media, which in many cases takes longer than ever before to choose a hotel.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Based on the purpose of the research, the aims and objectives of the research, and the basic research questions, this part crucially discusses the methodology of this dissertation. This chapter is divided in four sections. Firstly, there is a discussion about social media, which nowadays it can be called the new age Word-of-Mouth. Secondly, the research approach, the objective and the basic research questions that need to be answered are defined. Thirdly, this chapter provides information about the research method. Followed by data collection and data analysis.

3.2. The new age Word-Of-Mouth

According to Dichter (1996), word-of-mouth is one of the most effective marketing strategies available to advertisers. And, because of its intrinsic utility, social media is an excellent venue for customer testimonials. The reader's perception of the authenticity of the comment determines the message's success. If readers believe the testimony comes from a real customer who has not been sponsored by the firm for marketing, they will have greater faith in the brand and be more likely to create a stronger link with it. The increased usage of the Internet as a marketing medium has given rise to applications like viral marketing, in which marketers reach out to customers through peer-to-peer contact. P-2-P is comparable to word-of-mouth, but because it uses the internet, information spreads exponentially and reaches a huge number of customers in a short period of time, making it a popular cost-cutting approach for marketers (Dobele, Toleman, and Beverland, 2005). Because content 13 sharing helps both message senders and recipients, purchasers urge their friends to participate in the process as well, increasing the overall number of participants. According to Wilker (2007), in the previous year, 83 percent of travelers utilized the internet to research or book their vacation, with roughly 77 percent relying on customer evaluations to make their final selection. As a result, social media is an effective instrument for spreading viral messages via word-of-mouth.

3.3. Research approach

Study approaches are research strategies and processes that cover everything from general assumptions to precise data collecting, analysis, and interpretation methodologies.

According to Patton M. (2002), the methodologies were chosen based on their ability to aid in the attainment of the study's objectives. In this regard, the quantitative data collecting methodology will be employed in this study since the conclusions will come from a bigger population size than the qualitative method.

3.3.1. Objective

The goal of this research is to determine the influence of social media on consumer behavior, with a particular focus on the customer path toward hotel selection.

In particular, the objectives of this research, in other words, the actions that will be taken to achieve the goal, are as follows:

• Before choosing a hotel, consider how individuals use social media to track, process, and choose information.

• Learn how to use social media in the context of making a hotel decision.

• Provide a deeper understanding of why, when, and how social media has affected decision-making for both customers and hotels.

• Identify the relationship between customer behavior and attitudes regarding hotel advertising on social media.

3.3.2. Basic Research Questions

The main research questions of the research that need to be answered are as follows:

1) What are the primary distinctions between traditional hotel marketing and social media marketing?

2) Is it true that social media is more trustworthy than traditional hotel information courses?

3) Does social media have an impact on people's hotel choices?

4) At what points in the hotel journey does social media come into play?

5) What role does social media play in the hotel decision-making process?

6) Does social media have an impact on hotel bookings?

7) What role does social media play in hotel expansion?

3.4. Research method

Quantitative research methods focus on objective measurements and statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data acquired through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, as well as modifying pre-existing statistical data using computing tools.

3.5. Data Collection

In the Literature Research section, the gathering of theoretical aspects was outlined, namely a content analysis of written materials was undertaken to get as deep an insight as possible into the topic at hand, taking into account relevant features. The backdrop and existing challenges were defined and analyzed using this literature review.

Furthermore, because the purpose of this study is to observe consumer behavior and preferences, data was collected through a survey that examined how individuals utilize the Internet and social media in their vacation destination decision-making process.

In October 2021, a random subset of a commercial internet research panel completed an online questionnaire survey. A link to the online questionnaire was included in an e-mail invitation issued to 120 panelists. Without any prompting, 100 members of the panel completed the questionnaire, resulting in an 83 percent response rate. A screening question ensured that all respondents had been in a hotel in the previous three years, and that they were also social media users (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) who used it for travel reasons.

3.5.1. Quantitative Research

In the sphere of tourism and hospitality, quantitative research is experiencing a significant transformation, with crowdsourced data serving as the primary driving force.

Quantitative research is a method for studying the connection between variables in order to evaluate objective ideas. These variables can then be measured using instruments, resulting in numerical data that can be examined using statistical processes. Introduction, literature and theory, methodology, results, and comments are all included in the final written report. Those who participate in this type of inquiry, like qualitative researchers, have beliefs about deductively testing ideas, putting in bias safeguards, controlling for alternative explanations, and being able to generalize and replicate the findings.

In most cases, quantitative tourism research is used to investigate and comprehend tourism-related phenomena (e.g., behavior of tourists, traveler characteristics, destination image assessment and perceptions, decision making and destination selection, demand analysis, performance measures, and general market assessment and segmentation). It does so by analyzing numerical and quantifiable primary (e.g., survey or longitudinal) and secondary (e.g., census and government sources, search engines, and organizations, or

time-series data from agencies) data using statistical or computational methods and data analytics to describe, explain, and predict the phenomenon in question.

3.5.2. Quantitative Designs

The methodologies of inquiry associated with quantitative research in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were those that invoked the postpositivist viewpoint, which has its roots in psychology. There are two types of experiments: real experiments and less stringent experiments, called quasi-experiments (see Campbell & Stanley for an early, unique book on this, 1963). An additional behavioral experimental design is used. single-subject trials in which an experimental therapy is given to a single person is given to a single person or a small group of people over a period of time (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007; Neuman & McCormick, 1995). Causal-comparative research is one sort of nonexperimental quantitative study. An investigation in which the researcher compares two or more groups in terms of a previously occurring cause (or independent variable). The correlational design is a nonexperimental research method in which researchers utilize a correlational statistic to define and assess the degree of connection (or relationship) between two or more variables or sets of scores (Creswell, 2012). Structural equation modeling, hierarchical linear modeling, and logistic regression approaches have been used to expand these concepts into more complicated interactions among variables. Quantitative techniques have become more complicated in recent years, involving numerous variables and treatments (e.g., factorial designs and repeated measure designs). They've also incorporated complex structural equation models that encompass causal routes and the detection of many variables' combined strength. Rather of covering all of these quantitative methods, I'll concentrate on two: surveys and experiments.

- **Survey Research:** By investigating a sample of a population, survey research can give a quantitative or numeric depiction of trends, attitudes, or views in that community. It encompasses cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that collect data using questionnaires or structured interviews with the goal of extrapolating findings from a sample to the entire population (Fowler, 2008).

- **Experimental Research:** Experimental study is to examine if a certain treatment has an effect on a particular outcome. The researcher determines this by giving one group a certain therapy while withholding it from another, and then comparing how both groups performed on an outcome. True experiments, in which participants are

randomly assigned to treatment conditions, and quasi-experiments, in which nonrandomized assignments are used, are both examples of experiments (Keppel, 1991). Single-subject designs are included in quasi-experiments.

3.6. Data Analysis

National and international journals, government reports, published research articles, theses, books, magazines, websites, newspapers, and other secondary sources of information were used in the data collecting process. The structured questionnaire was the major source of data gathering.

Because it serves millions of customers every day, data analytics is critical in the hotel sector. For the travel, they each have their own set of preferences, expectations, and requirements.

Data analytics in the hospitality business may assist hotels in developing a revenue management plan by utilizing data acquired from numerous sources such as the internet.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of statistical analysis and focuses on determining whether or not a community social media application is appropriate to hospitality businesses. The primary purpose of this chapter is to examine the data and describe the study's findings. The participants' demographics, as well as the conclusions, are discussed in this chapter. The study's findings are examined, and the conclusions are addressed.

It was discovered from the literature review that the hotel business is mostly reliant on people's free and leisure time. As a result, it can be seen how important clients are in this sector, necessitating the necessity to provide them with customized vacation packages. Technology plays a vital role in this market since it facilitates and real-time communication between suppliers and customers. Customers are also getting more involved in the sector since they have the ability to make comments and reviews about vacation packages and places, as well as engage with others and influence their decisions. As a result, since consumers are now an active part of the hotel sector, hospitality suppliers should focus on them.

4.2. Sample

The data for this study was obtained from people who have stayed in a hotel, during the last three years, and secondly, they have to be users of social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.) and use it for travel purposes. Online surveys provide the following advantages: (a) cheap cost, (b) interaction, (c) high respondent accessibility without time or space limits, and (d) ease of data submission and verification (Stopher, Collins, & Bullock, 2004).

The age of the respondent is from 18 and above. A total of 120 research questionnaires were recorded. From the 120 answers, only twenty respondents did not complete the questionnaire. These answers were deleted from the data, resulting in 100 respondents.

4.2.1. Demographic Profile of the respondents

When it comes to social networking site usage, gender and age are two crucial demographic aspects to consider. Marketers rely on gender as a common demographic component for segmentation (Schiffman et al., 2000). Females are thought to use social media for emotional reasons, such as making social connections, whereas males use it for

practical reasons, such as finding knowledge. When looking at how people use social media, it's clear that younger people are more likely to use it.

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of participants. A total of 100 respondents answered the survey, of which 64 were women and 36 were men, in the month of October and November, 2021. Most of the respondents are Cypriots and between the ages of 18 and 24 (about 48%), followed by about 21% of respondents between aged 25 to 34, approximately 15% aged 35 to 44, 12% of 45 up to 54 years and, finally, about 4% over the age of 55 and above. The surveyed statistics shows that 51% of respondents having bachelor's degree, 39% having master's degree, 6% doctoral degree and 4% having professional degree. The surveyed statistics shows that 53% of respondents are employed full time, 15% are students, 12% are running their own business, 10% are not earning (unemployed), 7% are employed part-time and 3% are retired. The obtained data shows that 56% of respondents are having an annual income of less than €19.999, 38% between €20.000 to €39.999 and 6% of respondents are having an annual income between €40.000 to €59.999.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

GENDER	Male	36%
	Female	64%
AGE	18-24	48%
	25-34	21%
	35-44	15%
	45-54	12%
	55+	4%
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	Bachelor's Degree	51%
	Master's Degree	39%
	Doctoral Degree	6%
	Professional Degree	4%
	Other	0%
OCCUPATION/PROFESSION	Employed full time	53%
	Employed part-time	7%

	Self-employed	12%
	Unemployed	10%
	Student	15%
	Retired	3%
ANNUAL INCOME	€19.999 or less	56%
	€20.000 - €39.999	38%
	€40.000 - €59.999	6%
	€60.000 - €79.999	0%
	€80.000+	0%

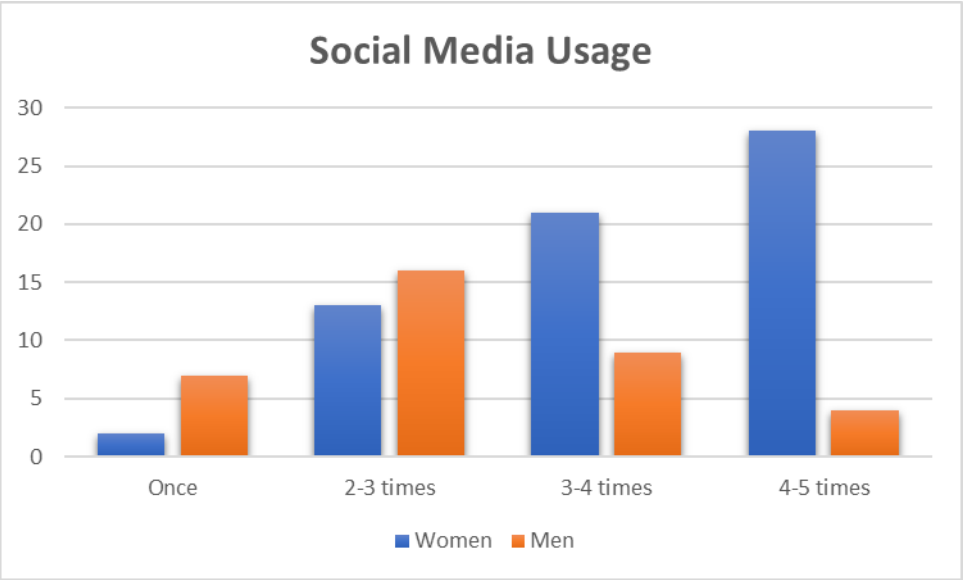
4.2.2. Social media usage

This section examines how often respondents utilize the Internet or social media to conduct holiday business. This section is significant because it is necessary to understand how people use the Internet to look for, book, and/or evaluate vacation destinations. The goal is to determine whether a social media application makes sense or if the majority of respondents prefer to engage with hospitality companies through more traditional methods.

Furthermore, it can be seen from the responses that individuals engage and interact with one another, and that other people's opinions are highly essential as a choice element. The goal of this study is to demonstrate people's social behavior, which will lead to the importance of establishing a community element, such as a forum, in a social media platform.

When asked how many times they spend on social media to gather travel information, the majority of participants say they spend between four and five times per day (32%), with 9% saying they spend only time per day. 21% of woman and 9% of men spends between three and four times per day on social media to gather travel information, and 13% of women and 16% of men spends two and three times per day on social media.

Figure 3: Social media usage (Q6)



Q7: Which one or more social networks you frequently use? (Multiple choice)

- Facebook: 93 respondents
- Instagram: 86 respondents
- Twitter: 58 respondents
- TripAdvisor: 42 respondents
- YouTube: 67 respondents
- Other: 35 respondents

Q8: What is the purpose of using social media? (Multiple choice)

- Recreation: 62 respondents
- Find interesting resources: 78 respondents
- Meet people: 58 respondents
- Share life experience with others: 38 respondents
- Other: 32 respondents

Q9: Why you use the social media and the internet when you plan your holidays?

- To obtain ideas for future travel places: 24 respondents
- To look for special deals and promotions: 2 respondents

- To look for reviews on specific hotels, restaurants, and tourist destinations: 68 respondents
- To share photos, videos, and reviews from your most recent vacation: 6 respondents

A total of 100 people responded to the survey. The majority of respondents go online to look for reviews for their holiday choices based on these. A large number of people use the Internet to get ideas for future vacation spots. People use the Internet as a source of knowledge once again. This issue also highlights the importance of electronic word-of-mouth, so providers should pay attention to any negative comments.

Q10: How do you plan to find accommodation for your holidays?
Possible answers for locating a place to stay:

- Travel agents: 7 respondents
- Newspapers, radio or TV: 2 respondents
- Family or friends: 18 respondents
- Social media or Internet: 72 respondents
- Other: 1 respondent

A total of 100 people responded to the survey. Out of them, 72 people said they use the social media and internet to discover lodging for a specific vacation. In addition, 18 respondents put their holiday information in the hands of friends and family. These responses demonstrate the utility of a social media platform, which allows users to share holiday information online as well as engage with others.

Q11: How did you book your last holiday?

- Online, using website of a travel agency etc.: 91 respondents
- Personal visit to agency: 2 respondents
- Direct phone to agency: 5 respondents
- Other: 2 respondents

A total of 100 people responded, with 91 of them opting to book online. As a result, individuals are more comfortable booking online and have faith in websites. Furthermore, an online booking feature for the platform would be useful.

Q12: If you use social media while on trip, the most likely reason is:

- To communicate with family and friends online: 81 respondents
- To obtain recommendations while travelling: 5 respondents
- To keep up with the latest news: 5 respondents
- On a daily basis, update social media (post photos etc): 8 respondents
- Other: 1 respondent

81 out of the 100 respondents, which is the total number, staying in contact with friends and family while traveling. People may continually publish images, videos, and reviews about the trip on a social media site, and their relatives can see them in real time. People may read comparable posts from other users and compare their experiences, which makes it distinct from Facebook. They may also use the site to contact with their family.

Q13, Q14, Q15, Q16, Q17: The majority of respondents use the Internet or social media to search for comments, negative reviews and recommendations by people for their trip preferences.

A total of 100 people responded to the survey. The majority of respondents agreed that they go online to look for reviews for their holiday choices based on these. A large number of people use the Internet to get ideas for future vacation spots. People use the Internet as a source of knowledge once again. This issue also highlights the importance of electronic word-of-mouth, so providers should pay attention to any negative comments.

However, these responses demonstrate the utility of a social media platform, which allows users to share holiday information online as well as engage with others.

4.3. Conclusion

To summarize the responses, it is critical for hospitality companies to maintain control over online interactions with their clients in order to be more effective. To accomplish so, they can either collect client information only from the common social media websites, outlined in the Literature Review chapter, or be active on social media networks while also implementing and advertising their own platforms where people can customize their adventures and experience.

People like to look for, book, and post reviews online, therefore a platform that combines all of these functions in one place would be a fantastic idea. Furthermore, consumers are more likely to connect with other users, and the feedback they read and provide is critical to making a final decision.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

5.1. Introduction

This section examines the interpretations of the findings. Also, social media platform, conclusions, limitations, the future and recommendations for future research are given in this section.

The hospitality industry continuing to grow and diversify over the last sixty years, and has become one of the largest and rapidly growing economic parts in the world despite the serious economic and financial slowdown (UNWTO – Tourism Highlights, 2012), and Social Media is one of the fast-moving segments on the internet, nowadays (Parra-López et al, 2010), for these reasons, the essential objectives of this dissertation are to discover if social media has any influence in hospitality industry to find out the advantages that tourists perceive from the use of social media when traveling and determine if there is a strategic chance to create value for the tourist.

5.2. Social Media platform

This part will make use of the survey responses about what respondents expect from a travel agency website. Users are familiar with the Internet in all of their travel transactions, according to the Results chapter. They also love reading and writing reviews, as well as interacting with other tourists. As a result, one option for a hospitality provider to better customer relationship management is to give all of the Internet's features in one platform. This platform should be updated on a regular basis with information entered manually by users as well as material obtained from the Internet.

The necessity for a social media platform will be examined further, followed by establishing the platform's criteria and assumptions, and finally describing the platform's structural specifications utilizing the notions and concepts provided by (Verschuren & Hartog, 2005).

5.2.1. Determining of why Social Media platform is necessary

Social media is the most often utilized route of contact between customers and hospitality providers, as evidenced by the majority of the responses in the survey. Customers look for holiday location ideas on TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Instagram,

read other people's recommendations, and may alter their minds about their original holiday destination based on these reviews. Furthermore, they publish photographs, videos, and reviews online so that others may see them and get a sense of what the vacation experience is like from actual people's perspectives.

The power has shifted to the customers as a result of the advent of social media. Brand communication occurs with or without the approval of hospitality providers, and it is now up to them to decide whether they want to participate or continue to ignore it (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

Communication, sharing, and relationship building are all vital aspects of social media. As a result, hospitality companies should include social media into their operations. For the time being, corporations have been seen gathering information from various social media websites, such as blogs, product ratings, discussion forums, and consumer comments; nevertheless, this information is dispersed and difficult to organize. Each solution concentrates on a specific aspect of the CRM process. A nice example is when a client tweets a complaint and then comments on the company's product review site at the same time. The organization cannot perceive the relationship between these posts since these two programs are implemented separately. The first scenario is that the organization deals with the same issue again, wasting time in the process. The second, and worse, is that the organization addresses two separate problems, since various teams of people may evaluate the two posts and interpret the problem differently.

The interaction between hospitality suppliers and clients is depicted in Figure 4 in a simplified manner. The cycle is explained as follows: agencies may improve depending on evaluations and feedback, which leads to higher consumer happiness. Because the customer's demands have been addressed, this may result in additional feedback and reviews, this time more favorable. Finally, the agency receives more bookings, which usually results in more evaluations and comments.

To ensure a positive rise in the cycle, hospitality companies should consider managing the complete client relationship (data, procedures, and channels) in a more planned and integrated manner. Travelers and suppliers can interact immediately because of the internet's availability. So, rather than implementing social media programs as point solutions to specific problems (customer discussion forum sites, blogging tools or

product review web pages), they may provide a platform that integrates all of these. Designing a social media platform with the purpose of allowing a corporation to identify and collect all of its consumer interactions would be one approach.

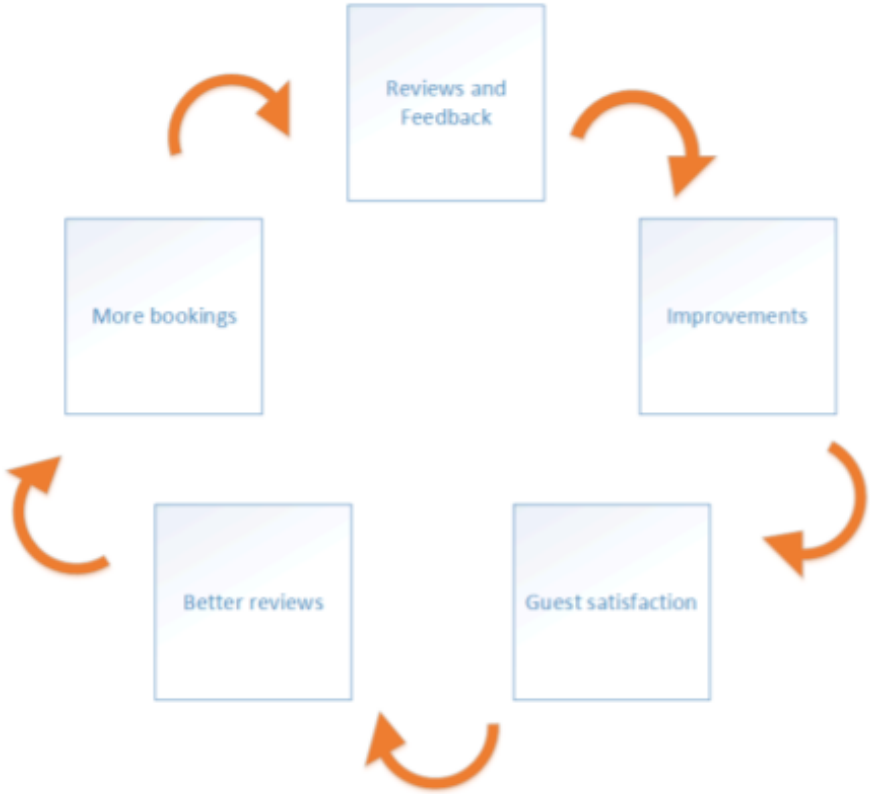


Figure 4: Customer-provider interaction

5.3. Limitations and future research

This dissertation finds that social media has an impact on customer behavior in the hospitality industry, however, the research has some limitations that can be considered a big chance for future research.

Although it is possible to obtain valid information from the data collected, the sample is mostly representative of Cypriots travelers aged 18 to 24 group. Although this age group will probably be the immediate one target for the application of social media in hospitality industry, because they are the ones that use social media the most, in the future it may be interesting to try a bigger sample that is more representative sample

over 25 years old, for comparison if the results are the same or different. It may also be fascinating to have more answers from other nationalities too.

Social media is very powerful to control. Social media can ruin the image of a hotel in a short time. It is not possible to measure the advantages of social media for a hotel. Social media has no face, so the hotel cannot be held answerable for anyone in a time of catastrophe.

However, in order to accomplish consumer data integration, the design of the social media platform must be updated and finished. Future research in this subject is likely to contribute by identifying more elements and variables to consider. For example, the platform's material can be provided in a language that is appropriate for the intended audience. As a result, customers have the option of browsing in English, Russian, Dutch, French or German. This choice may lead to the addition of more nations of interest (for example France).

5.4. Conclusion

The hospitality industry has been one of the product leaders in understanding its value the website and most significantly the value of SEO. Like natural result, the hospitality industry has embraced the potential of social media. The hotel Websites in their early stages were understood by marketers as booklet equivalent in an online environment. Today, social media is still evolving and its capabilities in this industry still remains to be seen.

Social media is an entire section of the real-time search algorithm. It produces an actual connection between businesses and people, as a result this connection creates a market trend intensity. The constant connection and relationship with the consumers will eventually turn them into ambassadors and a volunteer marketing army. The property must ensure that social media is an entire section of the overall marketing plan. If the budget and resources are made limited, then the social media sector needs to be monitored effectively. Hoteliers, who want to stay ahead of the curve, must invest today in the emerging media as the future of internet marketing (Aggarwal, 2010).

Nowadays, it's not how social media can be used to captivate people, but instead, how do people use social media to locate the source and then decide on the result. Social

media is a form of "social validation". When people do not have enough information for independent decision-making, it would lead to information source externally through family and friends.

The most important social validation comes via viral marketing when people someone who is trusted, recommends a hotel. For instance, when Facebook posts obsessed with people who have social influence, it is incredible to watch a snowball effect in action when this recommendation is disseminated. In the future, when marketing explosion will happen for the same product, social media fans will be happy to collect it.

Academics in the Hospitality & Tourism Sector, as well as academics in the subject of social media marketing, would benefit from this research. This study will also promote greater research into the topic of hotel social media marketing. This study will also be beneficial to sales and marketing experts, as they will be able to improve their present social media marketing techniques to better fit the needs of diverse groups of visitors. This study will also benefit hotel visitors because it will boost the property's social media marketing strategy.

5.5. Recommendation

The world of Web 2.0 gives to the regular consumer the chance for free speech and supports their point of view, where businesses need to have their news transparent. As details and data are easily accessible via the internet while on the move, this is crucial that businesses keep a successful and transparent online marketing campaign.

Traditional marketing has turn into less successful and productive, so people choose information of a product from an unbiased source so that they can make a decision about a business's products or services. Social media can be explained as software, web applications, tools or websites that can connect businesses and people. Some of the most famous social networking sites are YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. These sites give to people the chance to connect online with other people who maybe have the same interests, read the comments of other people and to form their own conclusion depending on what they learn from these "communities". Just like in the non-virtual world, businesses need to find ways to keep up visibility and get people to practice viral marketing.

Social media is about more than just connecting people and exchanging ideas. It has the potential to be extremely useful in marketing, messaging and people relationship. The hospitality sector and social media can be a terrific match. Nonetheless, it is regrettable that much few hotels and people are aware of this. Only a few hotels have figured out how to do it. As a result, social media strategies have changed. The hotels' projects are riddled with errors, resulting in a slew of squandered opportunities.

Insufficient social media presence for the property is a typical error made by hotels. In the hotel sector, social media is very new, and there are times when it is appropriate to use it. Hotels hide their social media presence without recognizing that they are doing it unintentionally. It defies the aim of social media's influence on businesses. Although the hotel may have a Twitter and Facebook account, these guests may not have been aware that the property had a social media presence. As a result, having visibility or some form of in-house literature (e.g., newsletters, in-room feedback cards, food and beverage outlet receipts) to inform guests about the hotel's social media presence would be an advantage to encourage existing customers to participate in the hotel's social media network opportunities.

In today's world, social media has a significant role in the hotel industry. In the virtual world, past hotel guests and possible future hotel guests influence and are impacted by one another, particularly through the use of online reviews. Having social media strategies, methods, and even a whole department dedicated to these duties looks to be a product qualifier rather than a product enhancer. Hoteliers must take social media seriously rather than dismiss it in the expectation that it will disappear.

5.6. The Future

Basically, hotels should make the most of social media because its popularity is only anticipated to grow. According to The Telegraph, people now spend one day a week on their phones, with 78 percent of the population owning one.

Amazon has recently developed 'Alexa for Hospitality,' which allows hoteliers to give a personalized and unique experience to their visitors. Alexa transforms into a virtual concierge who can help visitors with things like ordering towels, checking out, ordering room service, and getting recommendations for things to do in the vicinity.

Hoteliers are increasingly experimenting with new technology. InterContinental Hotels and Resorts is one of the first to experiment with AI technology, thanks to a partnership with Baidu, a Chinese artificial intelligence company. Intercontinental has installed AI Smart Rooms at two of its hotels in China, allowing visitors to talk to their rooms and request music, change the room's mood from "business" to "leisure," and order room service. If this technology proves to be effective, it will only be a matter of time until we see AI technology installed in nearly every hotel bedroom, conference room, and other hotel and venue space on the world.

As a result, hotels must reconsider their use of social media and technology not just to advertise their businesses, but also to improve customer service and the guest experience, which will assist to strengthen the brand's reputation and drive future growth. With technology advancing at a rapid pace, the hotel business cannot afford to lag behind.

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Appendix 1. A Questionnaire

Hello everyone,

I am a master's student in Digital Marketing at Neapolis University Pafos, in Cyprus. As a part of my dissertation, I am currently working on this questionnaire to collect information from potential respondents. The purpose of this research is to find out the impact of social media on customer behavior in the hospitality industry. However, your responses are kept anonymous and will be never published for any other purposes. It will take no more than 5 minutes.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
Despoina Pozidou
Neapolis University Pafos

Section 1: Demographics

1. What is your sex?
    - Male
    - Female

2. What is your age?
    - 18-24
    - 25-34
    - 35-44
    - 45-54
    - 55 and above

3. What is the highest degree of education you have received?
    - Bachelor's Degree
    - Master's Degree

- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree
- Other

4. What is your employment status currently?

- Employed full time
- Employed part-time
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Student
- Retired

5. What is your annual household income at the moment?

- €19.999 or less
- €20.000 - €39.999
- €40.000 - €59.999
- €60.000 - €79.999
- More than €80.000

Section 2: Social Media Usage

6. How much time you spend on social media every day?

- Within 1 hour
- 1 - 2 hours
- 2 - 3 hours
- 3 - 4 hours
- More than 5 hours

7. Which one or more social networks you frequently use? (Multiple choice)

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- TripAdvisor

- YouTube
- Other

8. What is the purpose of using social media? (Multiple choice)
    - Recreation
    - Find interesting resources
    - Meet people
    - Share life experience with others
    - Other

Section 3: Social media in tourism

9. Why you use the social media and the internet when you plan your holidays?
    - To obtain ideas for future travel places
    - To look for special deals and promotions
    - To look for reviews on specific hotels, restaurants, and tourist destinations
    - To share photos, videos, and reviews from your most recent vacation

10. How do you plan to find accommodation for your holidays?
    - Travel agents
    - Newspapers, radio or TV
    - Family or friends
    - Social media or Internet
    - Other

11. How did you book your last holiday?
    - Online, using website of a travel agency etc.
    - Personal visit to agency
    - Direct phone to agency
    - Other

12. If you use social media while on trip, the most likely reason is:
    - To communicate with family and friends online

- To obtain recommendations while travelling
- To keep up with the latest news
- On a daily basis, update social media (post photos etc)
- Other

13. On a scale of 1 to 5, indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the information search: (1: strongly disagree, 2: somewhat disagree, 3: neither agree or disagree, 4: somewhat agree, 5: strongly agree)

- I prefer social media, to collect information about travel destination.
- I search for other tourists' comments on social media, before travelling abroad.
- I pay attention mostly to the accommodation condition, tourist routes and the general situation of travel destinations, when searching for travelling information through social media.

14. On a scale of 1 to 5, indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the decision-making process:

- Other people's recommendation has an important impact on my travelling plans in social media.
- The attitude of other people has an important impact on my own information processing in social media.
- I truly believe that travelling information in social media is true and can help others.

15. On a scale of 1 to 5, indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the purchase decision:

- I will not choose to stay in some hotel because of the negative reviews.
- I will travel in hotels, which are recommended by people in social media.
- Social media influences how long and where I travel.

16. On a scale of 1 to 5, indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the post-purchase evaluation:

- There is big difference between the travel information provided by social media and the travel experience.
- I will upload and share my travelling experience to social media.

17. When you return from your vacation, how often are you leaving a review, rating, recommendation, experience or negative remark on a travel website?

- I always post comments / reviews after my holidays
- Sometimes, if I have time
- I do not post any comments or negative reviews