FACULTY OF TOURISM AND FINANCE

Examining Social Media User Behaviour for the Development of Accurate Social Media Strategies

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v

Resumen

Las Redes Sociales constituyen uno de los avances tecnológicos más revolucionarios de las últimas décadas. Desde su aparición, se han convertido en una parte fundamental de la rutina de la mayoría de las sociedades modernas. Debido a su impacto, el comportamiento de las personas ha sido influenciado y modificado por el contenido creado y publicado por los usuarios online (UGC, por sus siglas en inglés).

Se han llevado a cabo varios estudios sobre las Redes Sociales en los diferentes campos de investigación con el fin de ayudar a comprender este nuevo entorno. Entre muchos de los temas investigados, se encuentra el poder de las Redes Sociales como herramienta de promoción para las empresas turísticas. De este modo, ofreciendo una nueva forma de comunicación con el cliente y su influencia sobre la promoción del sector turístico han ido ganando relevancia en la década de 2020.

La industria turística se ha venido desarrollando durante siglos. Las Redes Sociales se vincularon casi al instante de su aparición con la actividad turística. Cada vez más personas empezaron a compartir la experiencia de sus viajes y esto hizo que las empresas del sector turístico intentaran adaptarse a la novedad que esto suponía, formando parte de ello y siendo conscientes al mismo tiempo que las Redes Sociales ofrecen la oportunidad de promocionarse a bajo coste. Además, se estableció una nueva forma de comunicación entre los clientes y las empresas, así como una nueva forma para los clientes potenciales de obtener información para la planificación de sus viajes y compartir sus experiencias a través del boca a boca electrónico. Las Redes Sociales se convirtieron en una herramienta perfecta para la organización del viaje.

Esta tesis ofrece información práctica que tiene como objetivo ayudar a las empresas, especialmente al sector hotelero, a desarrollar estrategias de Redes Sociales precisas. Para lograrlo, primero se ha realizado una revisión de la literatura sobre la relación turismo y redes sociales. Seguidamente se ha desarrollado un análisis empírico sobre las acciones llevadas a cabo en un alojamiento de bajo coste como parte de sus actividades en redes sociales y un análisis de los resultados obtenidos del manejo de sus perfiles de Facebook e Instagram. Este análisis ha proporcionado una visión inicial sobre cómo las empresas utilizan las Redes Sociales, así como de las preferencias, expectativas y comportamientos de los usuarios.

Para lograr una comprensión más profunda de los factores que pueden influir en el comportamiento de los usuarios respecto a las reservas online, la intención de uso de las redes sociales y la intención de viajar, se propusieron tres modelos teóricos de investigación a partir de la revisión de la literatura científica en estos ámbitos.

Estos modelos se basaron en teorías ampliamente aceptadas sobre la intención de comportamiento del consumidor o usuario. Todo esto midiendo la intención del uso de las redes sociales para la planificación del viaje, la intención de reservar un hotel online y la disposición a viajar. Se emplearon modelos de ecuaciones estructurales (SEM), empleándose mínimos cuadrados parciales para la estimación de los mismos (Partial Least Square (PLS, por sus siglas en inglés).

Los resultados obtenidos contribuyen a la literatura confirmando el impacto de las Redes Sociales en las empresas turísticas y especialmente en relación a la promoción de las mismas. En este sentido, se proporciona información sobre la intención de uso de las Redes Sociales para la planificación del viaje, así como los factores que influyen en la disposición a viajar. Además, se presentan aspectos específicos que afectan a estas determinaciones. Por último, se incluyen recomendaciones prácticas para los gestores, y se propone como futura línea de investigación un marco integrado para comprender y desarrollar estrategias precisas en Redes Sociales.

Abstract

Social Media has emerged as one of the most revolutionary technological advances of the past decades. Since it appeared, it has become an integral part of daily routines of most modern societies. Due to its influence, people's behaviours have been measurably affected and modified by the User Generated Content and by the platforms that help disseminate it. Frequent studies by researchers from varied disciplines have taken place, in order to help individuals and companies make sense of this new environment. Among numerous research topics, the potential of Social Media as a promotional channel for tourism, offering a new relation with the customers and new ways of promotion, has been gaining prominence in the 2020s.

The Tourism Industry itself has been developing for centuries. Social relations and trends lie at its core. Owing to these characteristics, Social Media became linked with tourism activities almost instantly. As more people began to share their travel experiences on social platforms, Hospitality and Tourism companies tried to adapt and contribute to it, which led to the realisation that Social Media offers tremendous marketing possibilities at a low cost. In addition, a new way of communication between customers and companies was established, as well as a new way of obtaining information and providing feedback. The trip planning process became nearly inseparable from the Social Media content.

This thesis offers practical information that aims at helping companies – particularly the accommodation sector – to develop accurate Social Media strategies. To achieve that, first, a review of the literature related to the tourism and Social Media relationship was carried out. Then, an empirical analysis was conducted on Social Media activities undertaken by a chosen budget hotel, complemented by an examination of their impact on the hotel's Facebook and Instagram channels. This analysis provided an initial insight into the ways that companies use Social Media, as well as into the target market's needs, expectations, and behaviours on those channels. Lastly, to gain a more in-depth understanding of the factors influencing user behaviour regarding online reservations, Social Media usage intention, and travel intention, three research models were proposed, in reference with the findings of the Scientific Literature Review on these topics. The models were constructed based on established theories of consumer and user Behavioural Intention, incorporating measurements of intention to use Social Media for travel

planning, intention to book a hotel online, and willingness to travel. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed as the methodology, using Partial Least Squares (PLS) for estimations.

The generated results contribute to the literature by reaffirming the impact that Social Media has on tourism-related companies and its potential for promotion. To that effect, information about individual Behavioural Intentions of using it for travel planning is provided, as well as the factors that influence the willingness to travel. In addition, specific aspects that have an effect on these intentions are presented. Lastly, practical managerial recommendations are included, and for a future line of research, an integrated framework for understanding and developing accurate Social Media strategies is proposed.

INDEX

Index of Tables

Chapter 4: Testing the Research Models, Results and Discussion

Index of Figures

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework and Research Models on Behavioural Intention in the Context of Social Media

Chapter 4: Testing the Research Models, Results and Discussion

Introduction

Thesis Objectives

The relationship between Social Media (SM) and Tourism is not a recent research topic. Shortly after the appearance of Social Networks, researchers detected this potential, and over the last several years, this field of study gained momentum and widespread interest. While in the early stages SM was mostly viewed as a recreational software for travellers to share holiday memories, soon it became evident that it was going to bring radical changes to the way tourism information is presented, businesses promoted, and relationships between customers and companies addressed.

At first, hospitality and tourism companies acknowledged the potential of these applications to leverage businesses on one hand, and damage them on the other. Yet, the User Generated Content (UGC) that circulated freely on SM channels appeared difficult or impossible to take control of. After some time, the advantages of Social Media use in terms of promotion and efficient communication with customers became prominent.

Tourism, as an industry, is highly competitive, featuring a range of commercial perils, such as product intangibility and the necessity to often "buy-before-you-try". In this type of business environment, the power of people's opinions and travel reviews proved to be greater than for the rest of the more typical industries. Hence, business owners, managers, and academic researchers have been compelled to invest time and resources into studying this relationship and building frameworks for managing tourism ventures in the complex and capricious ecosystem of Social Media. At present, this relationship is a trending phenomenon in terms of scientific research, and as such, it is a subject of abundant investigation.

While Tourism and Hospitality comprise various support sectors, one of the most significant ones is the Lodging Industry, or the Hotel Industry, also known as the Accommodation Sector. This sector was among the first ones to experience the impact of the Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) and UGC on customers' buying decisions. It became necessary for companies to take action in this regard and begin implementing Social Media strategies. Through these channels, and with reasonable strategic planning, over the years, certain companies started implementing SM programs that succeeded at reaching and engaging broad audiences quickly, in ways that were perceived as more natural, for a fraction of the cost of the traditional types of promotion.

In the case of this thesis, the investigation followed a sequence, where the primary literature research for the justification of the purpose led to a range of questions. The first proposed question was as follows:

Why should companies have profiles on Social Media applications?

From the earliest stages of SM networking, it was apparent that having a profile on SM platforms led to a fulfilment of one of the most essential human needs: the need for socialising. On the other hand, while there was a general feeling that companies should at least be present, and some ambiguous advantages were demonstrated, there was not a clear answer as to whether there was a commercially viable reason to invest in those activities. At present, there are still innumerable companies, particularly in the budget accommodation sector, that do not allocate resources or implement strategies for Social Media Marketing.

With this in mind, this study attempts to determine if there are actual benefits or reasons for companies to be present on SM networks; also, which advantages may be expected from being present; and which potential disadvantages may be incurred if not. In addition, for those companies that are actively managing their SM presence, actionable steps for making those efforts commercially worthwhile will be proposed. Subsequently, a second question emerged:

Do individuals have an intention to use Social Media applications for travel planning?

Literature Review uncovers a growing influence and importance of the EWOM and UGC in recent years. It is important to analyse to what extent SM users pay attention to and believe the information shared by past travellers. Additionally, there is a need to determine if there is an actual intention of using these online commodities for real-life travel planning; and whether these applications get selected by users haphazardly as they appear on the search engine, or they are consciously chosen for travel planning. In terms of methodology, the Behavioural Intention of individuals to use Social Media for travel planning was analysed using Behavioural Theory models, which were previously adapted to the context of this research, by introducing appropriate variables and variable relationships, supported by the literature research.

After posing the first two questions and establishing sets of variables and models for analysing the use of Social Media in relation to travel, an uncertainty arose regarding whether users tend to conclude their online engagement at the trip planning stage or if there is a significant intention to make a purchase, or in this case, book a hotel online. Consequently, the following question was posed:

How significant is the intention to book a hotel online?

While writing this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. During that period, people were neither able nor willing to travel, and therefore, no intentions to plan trips or book hotel rooms were expected to be researched, for the foreseeable period. As travelling resumed, a new variable relationship presented itself for the study: the relationship between Perceived Risk and the willingness to travel. Hence, the following question was proposed:

Are people willing to travel after COVID-19?

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on the Tourism Industry, and the psychological and financial consequences it had on the travellers and businesses are still felt in 2024. While tourism was essentially non-existent during the lockdown, the intention to travel was dramatically reduced in the post-lockdown months, as travellers were worried of getting infected and more aware of general travel-related risks. People's intention to travel and the factors that influence the willingness to travel were addressed by this study.

This thesis intends to answer the questions exposed above, by formulating hypotheses based on an exhaustive revision of the literature. An empirical research will also be presented, in the form of an actual case study of a budget venue in Seville, analysing its performance on Facebook and Instagram Social Media profiles, with a goal of understanding user behaviour in relation to their SM program. Following the analysis of the obtained results, and the confirmation or rejection of the proposed hypotheses, a discussion will proceed. Finally, a set of managerial implications and future research recommendations will be provided.

Expected Theoretical Contributions

Based on the Literature Review, a direct relation exists between the variable Perceived Usefulness (PU) and the intention to use new technology, as described in the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). The extent to which a new technology is perceived as useful will strongly influence the intention to use it. A range of other aspects affects this relationship in more indirect ways, such as the Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU), which was also derived from TAM. The Literature Review points to additional variables that can particularly affect the intention to use Social Media for travel planning, such as Perceived Trustworthiness (Cox et al., 2009) and Perceived Enjoyment (Venkatesh et al., 2000). In summary, the first expected theoretical contribution of this thesis is to identify, analyse, and describe the variables that can influence the intention to use Social Media for travel planning.

As explained in the section above, one of the main goals of this thesis is to determine if there is a propensity towards the intention to book online, as a final step of the trip planning process. The literature also proposes a set of variables that have the potential to influence this intention, such as Perceived Trustworthiness, which, simultaneously, tends to be influenced by a separate set of variables, such as Information Quality and Site Reputation. Thus, the second expected contribution of this thesis is to help identify, describe and analyse the variables that influence the intention to book a hotel online.

Lastly, the influence of Perceived Risk on the willingness to travel has been addressed by a growing body of research (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Lepp & Gibson, 2008; Reisenger & Mavondo, 2005). As a means to uncovering additional antecedents that can influence Perceived Risk, among which are the Financial Risk, Health Risk, and Destination Risk, this thesis relies on a comprehensive review of related literature (Kozak, Crotts & Law, 2007; González-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Alkier, Perić & Dramićanin, 2022; Li & Ito, 2021, Chen, Hsu & Chinomona, 2023). The main contribution in this regard will stem from identifying, describing, and analysing variables that influence the willingness to travel.

Managerial Contributions

At the time of writing this thesis, it can be confidently stated that Social Media is a significant factor for companies' performance. The ability and the habit of the SM users to share and consume content that describes experiences related to a company, or in this case a hotel, is highly relevant. This thesis aims at observing and explaining customer behaviour in relation to SM efforts of a budget hotel, by analysing a venue suitable for that end. The venue selected for the study was a budget hotel in Seville, and the SM tools used were Facebook and Instagram.

The corresponding analysis of Facebook Insights consisted of observing user responses to the published content, as well as in relation to important tourism related activities and events that took place in the city at the time, in order to gain understanding of the main factors that led to increases, decreases, and fluctuations in the numbers of followers, likes, and measurable interest. The engagement with the content was also evaluated, and its relation with the daily activities on the profile was observed, as well as the interaction with the company's website, and direct communication with customers through the messaging system on the platform. The analysis of the Instagram Insights followed an identical course. Lastly, the findings of the two platforms were compared and contrasted.

The next stage of the study focused on the level of success of the SM strategies, with an emphasis on the company. For that end, the findings obtained from the data analytics tools were linked with the company's SM activities, and then analysed, in order to draw conclusions about the specific activities that were beneficial, or needed improvement. Lastly, the research attempted to assess whether this specific company viewed Social Media as recreational software, or a tool for generating sales.

After analysing these results and the results obtained from the questionnaire conducted for the research models proposed, this thesis aimed to provide directions for understanding the initial requirements for a successful Social Media Marketing plan at a hotel. Furthermore, it offered actionable recommendations for crafting strategies that can align with the target market's behaviour and preferences.

Thesis Structure

This PhD thesis consists of five chapters, which are as follows:

Chapter 1. Internet, Social Media and Tourism.

Chapter 2. Social Media Use for Marketing Purposes. An Empirical Analysis of a Budget Hotel.

Chapter 3. Conceptual Framework and Research Models on Behavioural Intention in the Context of Social Media.

Chapter 4. Testing the Research Models, Results and Discussion.

Chapter 5. Conclusions, Managerial Implications, Theoretical Contributions, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.

Chapter 1 provides a Literature Review of the main subjects that comprise the thesis. Firstly, the history of the Internet since its earliest stages until the era of Social Media is reviewed. Secondly, the history of the Tourism Industry, its components, and the impacts on the society are presented. Lastly, tourism and the Internet are discussed as a unity, in order to better visualise how they are related, with a strong emphasis on Social Media in tourism, including the advantages and disadvantages of this relation.

Chapter 2 predominantly focuses on an empirical analysis of the SM presence of a Budget Hotel in Seville. Before the case study is presented, a literature review on the topic of Social Media use at different hotels, from the company's point of view, is performed. These hotels' practices are described and analysed. Later, the results of the case study are provided, analysed, and discussed. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on the literature review and the case study.

Chapter 3 presents the models proposed by this thesis, as well as the theories and research models that influenced them. The chapter begins with a Literature Review of the Behavioural Intention, Technology Acceptance, and Perceived Risk models and theories. Later, a Literature Review related to the research models is conducted, and the models' variables are explained. Finally, a set of hypotheses is stated.

Chapter 4 explains the methodology used for the research, then tests the research models, and later presents the results. The results are analysed, and the hypotheses are confirmed or disproved. After that, there is a discussion, which leads to the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 5 offers the final conclusions of the thesis, after the analyses of the two sets of results and their respective conclusions. The Managerial Implications follow, stemming from the results of the thesis. The Theoretical Contributions are then described, and finally Limitations and Recommendations for further research are proposed.

Chapter 1: Internet, Social Media and Tourism

CHAPTER 1.- INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA AND TOURISM

The relation between tourism and Social Media is challenging to describe in detail without first reviewing the concept of the Internet on one hand, and the origins of tourism on the other. While the Internet commenced as a combination of experiments aimed at facilitating data exchange, tourism was primarily a religious and political activity in its early stages. Nevertheless, both concepts shared one similarity in their development: they unexpectedly fulfilled deep social needs and became an essential part of average people's lives. Social Media, with social interactions at its core, ultimately became an intermediary that allowed travelling to merge together with the Internet, and the two are inseparable in the 2020s.

1.1 History of the Internet

Pinpointing exactly when, where, and how the Internet appeared is challenging, as it was not a straightforward invention but rather a result of an interplay of factors. It is believed that various experiments, performed within different layers of the society and with different aims, eventually led to the Internet's creation over a course of decades (Banks, 2008).

Shortly after World War Two, the capacities for technological development of the United States National Defence systems began to grow. The "digital revolution", on the other hand, had not yet occurred. The most advanced technological discoveries were physical tapes for storing and sharing information, and integrated, non-transferrable software packages, capable of doing linear equations over a matter of minutes or hours (Davies, 1974; Lukasik, 2010). This meant that researchers, academics, and the military were dependent on rudimentary technological devices, tied to physical locations (Davidson et al.,1977).

One of the earliest pieces of evidence of a network of computers, which dates back to the 1950s, was SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment). This was a proto-computerised radar system, developed by the US Air Force (Banks, 2008); understandably, the events related to the Cold War and its dangers were the direct trigger of technological developments of the time (Lukasik, 2010; Ryan, 2010; Banks, 2008).

In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, supported by the State Defence mechanisms and their organisation for research and development of technology called ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency), a major technological investigation was carried out; the aim was to develop a more sophisticated, location-independent computer network, which would fulfil the needs of the army and the society as a whole. Simultaneously, academic researchers were working on theoretical models for computer networking. According to Banks (2008) and Ryan (2010), the defining moment for the emergence of the Internet were the ground-breaking publications by a J.C.R. Licklider, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) researcher and professor (Banks, 2008 & Ryan, 2010); Licklider set forward to prove that the future of communications and research lay in computers, rather than telephones. By 1964, he had developed theoretical Web systems, consisting of elements that were the basis for the Internet, among which were internet routers (devices

that enable computers to connect to the internet) and online information transfer models. These concepts were named Galactic Networks[1], and they enabled a certain level of symbiosis between humans and machines. Dr Lawrence Roberts of ARPA assimilated these concepts and built upon them. Subsequently, the agency assembled a network for packet-switching – units of information that flow from an origin to a destination through electronic pathways (it should be noted that these information units were an earlier discovery of scientists Leonard Kleinrock, Donald Davis, and Paul Baran in 1965 and they served a purpose of enabling larger data to be transferred via networks by breaking it into smaller units) (Roberts, 1988; Richards, 2016).

In September 1969, a piece of data successfully travelled from one machine to another and back for the first time (Banks, 2008; Lukasik, 2010). That same year in October, Professor Leonard Kleinrock of UCLA (the University of California, Los Angeles) sent the first official electronic message to Stanford University; the message stated: "LO". As Kleinrock later explained, the intention was to send "LOGIN", but the computers "crashed" after the first two letters (UCLA100, 2023). This successful collaboration between ARPA and the academics resulted in the emergence of ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) – a multi-centred packet-switching network that finally had the capacity to serve scientists, researchers, and educational facilities, as well as to operate in extreme wartime conditions.

The early 1970s were marked by two major shifts – more particularly – who the users of the early Internet were, and in what way these services were used. Even though the Internet was still restricted to the National Defence agencies and the academic organisations, an increasing number of individuals from the academic society were starting to exchange emails, play games, and make use of online bulletin boards (Banks, 2008), which will be described in this section. By 1975, the first commercial packet switching carrier (an early Internet Provider) named Telenet was founded, under the leadership of Dr Larry Roberts (Weinstein, 2009). Over the following years, various networking trials were carried out, with the intention of bringing online services closer to private users. Before the end of the decade, average people had the possibility to join the network from home, through dial-up modems, using their existing phone lines (Roberts, 1988; Weinstein, 2009).

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[1] The book is Communications Nets, whose 2007 edition is available from Dover Publications

Finally, commercial online services, such as Von Meister's The Source, appeared in the second half of the 1970s; The Source started off as CompuCom – an information providing network that functioned from a centralised computer, which collaborated with newspaper giants, such as The New York Times, in order to deliver information to its users. Over the years, CompuCom (which was renamed to The Source in 1979) developed to a point where it enabled users to access electronic mailing, read news and horoscopes, consult TV and airline schedules, browse through various types of guides, play games, and even purchase goods (Banks, 2008). Additional services were consistently being introduced to the "Source". The company was also famed for inventing the online bulletin boards, whose popularity outlived The Source.

The bulletin boards were a form of a decentralised communication channel, where millions of users could join online discussion boards by reading and replying messages in a sequence (Rojas, 2002; Banks, 2008). Although the first discussions were limited to general computing issues, the conversations began taking different directions, and by 1985 included a wide variety of general topic areas, such as politics, dating and religion. Consequently, the bulletin boards became more attractive to average people, and this led to the creation of the early versions of Internet forums, such as Usenet – created by two students of the Duque University (Leete, 2024).

As the Internet continued to grow, the increasing volume and complexity of the information on the network prompted a restructuring of its systems (Leiner et al., 2009; Adell & Bellver, 1995). In addition, for a home-user, the amount of software that needed to be obtained and mastered in order to use the Internet was concerning. Near the end of the decade, The European Laboratory for Particle Physics at European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) sponsored a project, directed by a former employee – Tim Berners-Lee – which led to the development of the World Wide Web, in 1991 (Berners-Lee et al., 1992). At that point, this network hosted organised links and hypertext (multimedia content combined with written information) that were accessed through a "Browser" (Khanzode & Sarode, 2016). Websites, whose function was to group together pages of information for convenient viewing on screens, became the new norm for structural organisation of the Internet, making it easy for average users to get all the benefits of Web access (Latorre, 2018).

7

It should be noted that the early form of the Internet comprised only a small number of static web pages compared to that of today, which limited users to viewing information, and could in no way be modified or interacted with by the end-users (Read-Only) (Khanzode & Sarode, 2016; Latorre, 2018). This type of the early Internet was known as Web 1.0. By the year 2004, Web 1.0 evolved into Web 2.0 – a highly complex system of web pages, platforms and applications, featuring content that can be generated, modified and disseminated by users (User Generated Content) (Latorre, 2018). The concept of User Generated Content (UGC) will be described further in the following section.

At the time of writing this paper, Web 3.0 and Web 4.0 also exist. Both include complex data mechanisms and independent Artificial Intelligence systems. At present, Web 3.0 and 4.0 are commonly utilised by Software developers and users who require highly specialised Information Systems, whereas Web 2.0 is the user friendly type of the Internet intended for mass consumption (Latorre, 2018). Therefore, Web 2.0 will be used, described and discussed throughout this paper.

1.1.1 Social Aspects of the Internet

When computer networking appeared, its main objective was not to facilitate interpersonal communication, but rather to enable transmission of data among location-independent computers and to provide users with access to resources, regardless of how remotely they were stored (Nickerson, 1994). Over time, this rudimentary type of Internet evolved to a broadcasting media at first – read-only pages that educate, inform and entertain – and more recently to a social and participatory platform, where users themselves are the "media", able to collaborate and share their own artistic and informative creations, known as User Generated Content (UGC) (González-Rodríguez et al., 2021; Li & Wang, 2011; Thevenot, 2007).

As previously mentioned in the History of the Internet section, the Internet was intended to fulfil specific needs of the United States military forces and the academic society. Bagozzi, Dholakia and Klein (2007) share another point of view regarding the driving force behind the developments of the Internet; namely, the authors propose that, in its essence, the Internet was a product of people's social needs from the beginning. Namely, as mentioned in section History of the Internet, the first activity that took place on the

network was an email being sent; within two years after the creation of the Advanced Research Project Agency Network (ARPANET), emailing unexpectedly became ARPANET's main source of traffic, as opposed to data access, which would have been expected (Denning, 1989). Beside the use of emailing, bulletin boards immediately gained attention and became a medium for casual exchange of conversations between colleagues from the academic society and the military (Nickerson, 1994). Furthermore, online games became a sensation from the earliest stages (Rojas, 2002; Banks, 2008). They were played since 1973; a prime example of the social side of the Internet since its origin was the ARPANET's Star Trek tournament – it was organised every Friday night for two years, as a part of a conference, as explained by Bagozzi, Dholakia and Pearo (2007).

McKenna and Bargh (1999) agree with this premise and add that online communities are not just a separate feature of the Internet, but they actually strengthen human connections and brings people from different societies together, in any given context, such as for work, leisure, education, or social support, which could be observed since the appearance of The Source. According to Bagozzi, Dholakia and Pearo (2007), members become emotionally attached to these groups, and in them they find safety and understanding, and even form meaningful and lasting relationships with other participants.

Drawing from the above-mentioned information, and according to Marson (1997), the Internet is a result of decades of collaboration between academics, the military, the scientists, and the average individuals from different societal groups. It exists due to the joint participation of all its users and owing to the human need to socialise. Consequently, the Internet can be understood as a social achievement. The culmination of the social side of the internet is Social Media, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

1.2 Social Media

As the Internet gained an increasingly social character in the 1980s, services such as bulletin boards showed the first glimpse of social content (Leete, 2024). Nevertheless, the true potential of these Web based services was unknown until 2004, when World Wide Web 2.0 appeared (Mills & Law, 2004; Sigala et al., 2012). The interactive capabilities of Web 2.0 allowed developers to build Social Media platforms, which triumphed that same year (Latorre, 2018). The first platform to succeed was Facebook – a project of a small group of Harvard students, created with an aim to connect with their peers over a computer (Caers et al., 2013). Facebook will be described further in Social Media Applications for the Tourism Industry section.

Social Media can be understood as a set of online tools and networks used both for social activities and as an inevitable part of the commerce (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015; Wolf, Sims & Yang, 2018). The users have integrated them into their own product and service experience – before, during, and after the purchase. In turn, this state of affairs has obliged companies to change the ways they promote their products and services, revaluate their operational structure, and adapt to the expectations of Social Media users (Blackshaw, 2004).

At the time of writing this paper, Social Media offers major opportunities for advertising to the international masses at a low cost and with maximum quality standards (Türkmendağ & Türkmendağ, 2022), as well as for communicating valuable information in an effective and timely manner (Zajadacz & Minkwitz, 2020). However, it also poses a threat to any company that fails to adapt to the trends. It impacts consumers' lifestyles, consumption habits, and behaviours dramatically. Therefore, companies need to become committed to periodically evaluating, adapting, and transforming their marketing strategies in order to keep pace with the latest trends and requirements (Türkmendağ & Türkmendağ, 2022).

1.2.1 Definition of Social Media

In order to find a suitable definition for Social Media, various sources have been consulted, in addition to the information presented in the previous sections of this paper. As Nations (2021) points out, similarly to the Internet itself, Social Media cannot be defined in simple terms. Table 1.1 mentions some of the accepted definitions from the consulted sources.

Table 1.1 Researchers and definition of Social Media

Author	Source	Definition
Blackshaw (2006)	The consumer-generated surveillance culture.	*"The term Social Media is understood as internet based apps that contain user-generated content and facilitate a higher level of social interactions"*
Collis & Moonen (2008)	Web 2.0 tools and processes, in higher education: *Quality perspectives. Educational Media International*, vol 45, no 2, p. 93-106	*"a new platform which enabled users to create content, thus transforming them from readers to reader-writers and also giving them an opportunity to communicate with one another"*
Boyd & Ellison (2008)	Social Network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of computer-mediated communication,* 13, 210-230, p. 211	*"a Web based service that allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share connection, and view traverse their list of connections made by others within the system"*
Kaplan & Haenlein (2010)	Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and opportunities of Social Media, Business Horizons 53(1), P.59-68	*"a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and state of user generated content"*
Hansen (2011)	Exploring social media relationships. *On the horizon,* vol. 19, no 1, p.43-51	*"a set of online tools that support social interaction between users, facilitating the creation and sharing of knowledge and transforming monologue (company to customer) into dialogue"*

Qualman, (2013)	Are you customers becoming digital junkies? Qualman *Socialnomics: How social media transforms the way we live and do business.* John Wiley & Sons, 2012.	*"dominant digital communication channel via which consumers learn about sharing information on, and interact with brands they consider, purchase and evaluate"*
Tuten & Solomon (2013)	Social Media Marketing, Pearson (2013)	*"online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility"*
Erol et al., (2019)	Social Media and Tourism chapter 10 pp. 109-123 of Current Issues in Tourism and Hospitality Management (SRA) Strategic research academy, 2019	*"a community network (social network) which refers to a collection of individuals who are connected to one another through one or more social relationship and thus form a network"*

These definitions share common features, though they observe Social Media from different perspectives. In addition, they have been changing over time and each one attempts to summarise information that is adapted to the latest trends. In order to align with the trends that are observed at the time of writing this paper, a following definition is proposed: Social Media is a set of globally embraced online tools that allow users to build meaningful social relationships, search and disseminate information, communicate with brands and companies directly, and share User Generated Content (UGC) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Erol et al., 2019; Collis & Moonen, 2008; Blackshaw, 2006; Hansen, 2013; Chappuis et al., 2011; Qualman, 2013; Tuten & Solomon, 2013).

1.2.2 Social Media Categories

Social Media is not a uniform concept. Each of these online tools have different characteristics, which makes it important to divide them into categories. Foreman (2017) and Faustino et al. (2012) propose ten distinct groups. These are: Social Networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X) and LinkedIn), which let users connect with each other and share different types of UGC; Image and video sharing networks (Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok) built for sharing pictures and videos; Discussion Forums (Reddit, Quora, DiggS) that focus on conversations; Consumer review networks (Yelp, TripAdvisor) that are meant for reviewing products and services; Blogging and publishing networks (Wordpress, Tumblr, Medium) made primarily for presenting content; Bookmarking and content curation networks (Pinterest, Flipboard) for discovering trending topics and generating ideas; Interest-based networks (Goodreads, Houzz), created for sharing hobbies and interests with like-minded individuals; Sharing Economy networks (Airbnb, Uber), focused on trading; Social Shopping Networks (Polyvore, Etsy, Fancy), which are essentially online stores; and Anonymous Social Networks (Whisper, after school, ask.fm) – infamous networks focused primarily on anonymous content and conversations.

1.2.3 Applications

A significant change in the way users access the Internet occurred after the advancements of Web 2.0; namely, mobile phones evolved and eventually took over as the leading devices over desktop and lap-top computers (Kennedy-Eden & Gretzel, 2012).

As with the early Internet itself, the mobile applications were first limited to activities such as emailing and checking weather conditions (Kennedy-Eden & Gretzel, 2012); more recently, most websites are being challenged for their mobile-unfriendliness, while straight-forward applications are becoming the norm. The usage and usability of these pocket applications increased to such an extent that most companies and marketers found themselves obligated to reinvent their online material to suit mobile phones (Morales et al., 2014).

One of the main reasons for these changes can be pinpointed to the need for maximum efficiency and independence: information is demanded immediately and regardless of where one is located at any time (Santiago & Trabaldo, 2015; Fine & Clark, 2014); numerous services are not employee-dependent any longer, but rather automatized (Morales et al., 2014); users expect to have their questions answered immediately, issues addressed remotely, and their services hired at a touch of a button, through a device that can be stored in a pocket (Dickinson et al., 2014). In addition, uninterrupted communication and content sharing is not considered a luxury, but rather the norm: for instance, making a video call while on a jungle tour and simultaneously posting a photo online, or buying a plane ticket while listening to an online music channel from inside a pyramid are types of services that users expect to have (Santiago & Trabaldo, 2015; Fine & Clark, 2014; Shivalingaiah & Naik, 2008).

1.3 Tourism

Just as it is important to understand the Internet and Social Media for this thesis, it is also useful to review the origins of tourism and how it relates to the Internet. The following section reviews this relation and attempts to describe how human society and the tourism sector impact one another.

1.3.1 History of the Tourism Industry

Historians believe that until 6000 years ago humans mostly travelled in packs, in search for food and safety. It was at that point that both money and the wheel appeared in the Sumerian Empire. This marked the beginning of a different era – an era where humans travelled for purposes other than survival, and they were able to cover great distances (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

Approximately one thousand years later, ships started running from Egypt. Pharaohs would embark on journeys to collect solid stone from the Nile Valley, which was used to build structures such as the pyramids. These man-made wonders later attracted visitors as early as 1600 BCE (Before Common Era), thus paving the way for tourism to become viewed as a new socioeconomic sector (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997).

The attractiveness of the destinations around the Mediterranean Sea (2000 BCE - 500) triggered rapid expansion of the tourism activity (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). For instance, every four years, masses of worshipers gathered in Greece to honour God Zeus by means of athletic competitions, which eventually became the Olympic Games. Beside praying and worshipping, these early tourists would also acquire souvenirs, as well as look for cheap or unique new products to take home (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997).

By 150 BCE, an extensive road network was built in the Roman Empire – radically more efficient than the dirt roads of the past. Those roads comprised a system of 50.000 miles, and it wasn't uncommon for the Romans to travel as much as a 100 miles per day on them (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

The tourists in this period also ventured further east to see famous temples and attractions, particularly the Egyptian monuments. Greece and Asia Minor were becoming increasingly in demand, offering travellers medicinal baths, stays at seaside locations, theatrical productions, festivals, and other activities, beside the Olympic Games. Meanwhile, The Silk Road – which was a network of trade routes between the Western countries and the Far East – was attracting great attention, while at the same time helping nations develop, exchange goods, and generate wealth (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

This new world order, which included overseeing empires, making political deals, and building and maintaining roads, created a necessity for a well-structured and organised system of lodging. Bed and breakfast venues, restaurants, and resorts were becoming more common, and service quality was improving. Simultaneously, an increasing number of individuals were accumulating wealth and fantasising about exotic destinations; a need for a range of tourist services was born. Finally, the infrastructure of tourist destinations began to develop further, owing to the income generated from tourism (Page & Connell, 2006). Even though politicians, business people, festival visitors, the sick, and the advice seekers still comprised the majority of the travellers of those times, there was a new category emerging – the leisure traveller. With these occurrences taking place, tourism became an Industry.

Later historical events halted the development of this young industry for nearly an entire millennium; the collapse of the Roman Empire preceded what is known today as the Dark Ages (475 -1450) (Page & Connell, 2006). It is said that in these times only the most adventurous travellers would embark on journeys. The plague, wars, and famine changed the course of human existence. Travelling was dangerous and no longer associated with pleasurable activities, for various centuries (Page & Connell, 2006; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

Eventually, near the end of the Dark Ages, travelling gradually resumed, and pilgrims were the first to start visiting famous shrines again, such as Canterbury in England and Santiago de Compostela. By the 14th century, tourism was recovering; the first guidebooks became available, which featured detailed directions around different regions, including mentions of their inns (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

Around the 16 century, America was explored by the Spanish. Although the early explorations were performed on foot or horseback, eventually boats and canoes were employed to journey from the East to the West, and rail wagons covered the western region across the continent by the 19th century (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Lickorish & Jenkins, 2007).

The Grand Tour of Europe (mainly France and Italy) – a type of trip that was organised for diplomats, businesspeople and scholars – operated throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. It comprised tours and visits to the typical tourist attractions that offered value in the means of educational, artistic and recreational enrichment. Among those attractions were art galleries, ancient ruins and nature sites, to name a few. By the late 18th century, the working population joined the tourism scene, although usually in the form of day-trips (excursions) (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Towner, 1985).

Traveller's cheques appeared in America in 1891. Around the same time in Europe, Thomas Cook organised its first rail journey (in 1841), and a century later its first tour of Europe (Hunter, 2004). Sea travel was common by the 20th century, while regular scheduled air service began running in 1903 in Germany (16 years after the first flight took place in the USA) (Page & Connell, 2006; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). It was in 1908 that automobiles entered the travel scene in the United States with the Model T, introduced by Henry Ford. This relatively cheap vehicle revolutionised the travel industry, creating a demand for better roads. By 1920, extensive road networks were accessible to travellers, which solidified the role of automobiles as the leading form of transportation to date (Goeldner & Brent Ritchie, 2009).

Owing to all these developments, tourism has become an indispensable human activity. Among those developments, one of the main motivators for visiting a place are its attractions. The following section speaks about what attractions are, what they comprise, and how they can be classified.

1.3.2 Attractions

Tourist attractions comprise physical and cultural wealth and sites at a destination, which are perceived as worthy of visiting for leisure or informative purposes (Gunn & Var, 2002; MacCannell, 1976). They are considered to be the main factor that attracts travellers to a destination (Gunn & Var, 2002). Attractions are divided into several types: cultural, nature-related, events, recreational, and entertainment. Some examples can be seen in table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Types of attractions

Type of attraction	Examples
Cultural	La Giralda (Seville, Spain);
	Alcazar (Seville, Spain);
	Alhambra in (Granada, Spain)
Natural	Gruta de las Maravillas (Aracena – Huelva, Spain)
	Timanfaya (Lanzarote, Spain)
	Aurora Borealis (Northern Polar Belt)
Events	La Bienal de Flamenco (Seville, Spain)
	Tomorrowland (Boom - Antwerp, Belgium)
	La Tomatina (Buñol – Valencia, Spain)
Recreation	Skiing, scuba diving, diving, ice skating, yoga, cycling, camping, surfing…
Entertainment	Theme parks, festivals, events

Image plays a fundamental role in promoting tourist destinations (Crompton, 1979). Social Media is filled with imagery of attractions, which makes it an invaluable tool for these purposes (Jadhav et al., 2018). The pictures and experiences seen on SM platforms often stay in people's subconscious and over time generate a need (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). In addition, Social Media helps travellers discover and share information about specific sites. It has been observed that the capacity to influence each other by these

means is high, to the point where certain destinations and attractions become popular after appearing in Social Media (Kim et al., 2017).

In order for a destination or attraction to be as competitive and attractive as possible, it needs to be accessible. Whether that is by land, air, or water, modern transportation networks interlink most tourist spots of today. The following section expands on these concepts.

1.3.3 Transportation

Tourism involves movement of people. Any effective, affordable, and sustainable movement of people, for purposes of tourism, is improbable without a modern, extensive transportation network (Park, Seo & Ha, 2019). Likewise, any destination without suitable accessibility and a reliable transportation timetable lacks competitive qualities for the Tourism Industry (Gedekli et al., 2022). Aside from the movement of people, hotels and hospitality venues depend on a constant influx of goods to satisfy the growing demands of travellers. For these reasons, a multidimensional network of roads, airports, seaports, vehicles, and services works together at any given moment to keep the industry in smooth motion (Gedekli et al., 2022).

Although tourism certainly is a beneficiary of technological advances and of new transportation modes, it must be remembered that the origin of all this movement was the wheel (Dinu, 2018). The wheel resulted in a growth of trading potential; the growth of trading potential led to an appearance of cities; this in turn provided the infrastructure for transportation, which enabled the development of the Tourism Industry. Just as tourism and technology are interconnected, tourism and transportation, tourism and trade, and with this, the global economy, exist in a unity (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2007).

The modern traveller has a wide range of transportation modes to choose from in order to reach a destination, such as an automobile, a plane, a train, and a ship, among others. Choices can be made based on the following parameters: time, distance, affordability, availability, accessibility, safety, reliability, and comfort (Park, Seo & Ha, 2019). Firstly, it is not in the interest of a traveller to spend excess time on the road; therefore, the quickest modes of transportation are initially considered. However, if the distance or the budget does not allow for a short trip, alternative transportation methods, or a combination

of methods may be possible. Also, depending on a destination or the time of the year, the availability or the access to the optimal services can be limited. In addition, safety and reliability of local or international carriers can be a significant challenge for travellers, due to high discrepancies between different cultures' standards – the understanding of safety and punctuality varies from culture to culture. Lastly, a transportation mode that fulfils all the mentioned parameters, but fails at providing the minimum required comfort, may be discarded as well. Travelling involves finding a balance between needs and possibilities in order to source the best transportation modes that are available to, from, and at a destination. At the same time, each destination works on matching their own transportation capabilities and capacities with the demand of local and international visitors (Lumsdon & Page, 2004; WTO, 1997).

Transportation Modes

The earliest form of transportation dates back to 4000 BCE, when animals were first domesticated. Within the next 500 years, both wheeled carts and boats were invented. Even though this was a defining moment for the transportation of people, animals, and goods, it wasn't until the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century that the existing transportation modes enabled tourism to become global; thanks to the invention of the steam engine, train passengers could now visit destinations that were significantly different and distant from their own usual environments (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2007). As with the case of the Internet, transportation was not initially intended for tourism and leisure purposes; tourism was a by-product of this new travel potential, coupled with people's needs to explore and socialise.

Over the next century, bicycles, planes and automobiles appeared. As the transportation infrastructure developed further, buses became the norm for fast and economical passenger transportation. Not limited to fixed destination points, which was an issue with trains and ships, automobiles and buses revolutionised the Travel Industry. There were fewer restrictions with each new mode of transportation, making tourism a global phenomenon. Aeroplanes nearly erased the problem of borders and distance, allowing passengers from all over the world to reach nearly any spot on Earth (WTO, 1997).

From an extensive list of developments related to this modernization, increased personal safety and accessibility for individuals with physical difficulties were among the most significant ones – all vehicles are exceedingly more comfortable and safe than animal carriages or travelling on foot (Dutzik, Madsen & Baxandall, 2013). The level of convenience increases on a daily basis too, particularly since the appearance of the Internet, and later mobile applications (OECD, 2016; Rasca, Markvica & Ivanschitz, 2021). In addition, depending on one's budget, there is a wide array of experiences and price levels to choose from: train travel might offer value for money, while taxis add expediency; cruise ships and scenic trains provide wholesome experiences on one hand, and aeroplanes cover great distances quickly on the other (Dickinson & Vladimir, 1997); and lastly, economy-class services make it possible for most individuals to experience travelling, but there is no lack of possibilities for those seeing high luxury services and facilities (OECD, 2016).

Although all these modes of transportation can be said to work in unison in order to create the modern transportation network, each mode still keeps its place and purpose, serving as a supporting pillar for tourism itself, and making travelling an intuitive and location-boundless endeavour. It is safe to say that without them, tourism that is known and consumed by masses would not exist: destinations such as Maldives would never have become a possibility, due to their remoteness; activities such as skiing couldn't be performed as easily, without ways to reach the snowy locations and without the funiculars to take skiers to the top of the ski-run; and simply put – had vehicles not been invented, even the most basic survival needs, such as securing food and water, would be a challenge (Scott, Laws & Prideaux, 2008; Fennell, 2003; Honey, 1999). As humanity continues to improve its transportation modes, the idea of holidaying on the Moon is becoming reality (Parsons, 2016).

Technology and Innovation in Transportation

It can be observed that development of transportation accelerated development of the Tourism Industry, and development of the Tourism Industry benefited development of new and innovative modes of transportation (Dinu, 2018). More recently, the Internet and

the appearance of applications helped provide smoother transportation and better quality of travelling, thus benefiting the Tourism Industry as a whole. At present, transportation and technology are close to inseparable.

From real-time road traffic conditions, petrol cost and expenditure, to pollution levels and vehicle emissions, smartphones make it possible to research, control, and manage even the most specific details of one's trip (Lissy et al., 2000; Whipple, Arensman & Boler, 2009). Companies and governments develop tailor-made applications to suit the tourists' needs, as well as their own. Amenities such as automatic charging of road taxes or parking tickets are a commonplace commodity (Buhalis & Amarangana, 2015; Ghaderi, Hatamifar & Gharamani, 2019; Lee, Chung and Koo, 2018; UM & Chung, 2021). On the other hand, airlines provide fast and organised flight research systems, ticketing and baggage services, frequent flyer schemes and so on (Liu, Yuzhu & Law, 2013). While land-transportation facilities focus on improving traffic flow and conditions, airlines strive for better marketing, smoother check-ins, and ease of use. At the same time, destination management teams invest in their own all-encompassing applications that contain transportation and on-site tourist information, ticketing and booking options, and support. There are less intermediaries between the tourist and transportation services, making travelling a less stressful and more organised activity (Budd & Vorley, 2013). To add to all this, independent entrepreneurial businesses provide additional schemes, such as smart vehicle rental options, electronic tour guides, group activities, and delivery services.

At this point, when the Internet is becoming an essential part of people's lives, the way that travelling is perceived, organised and consumed is facing drastic changes – digitalisation is penetrating all steps of travel management and planning, including transportation (Loureiro, 2019). Tourists are seeing an improvement in online information quality and ticketing engines, and at the same time they are benefitting from a surge of new and innovative ways to move from one place to another (Yuzhu & Law, 2013); on the opposite end, companies and governments are benefiting from a better organised and safer way to manage and control the mass movement of humans that tourism generates (Siuhi & Mwakalonge, 2016).

Transportation as an Attraction

Transportation makes tourism possible, but it can also be an attraction in itself. An example of this are cruise ships. Although these "floating hotels" take passengers on trips to various destinations and points of interest, the main focus is on spending time on board and enjoying being there. Aside from the experience of cruising across the sea for days while passing by beautiful sites, these ships usually offer comfortable accommodation, high cuisine, and 24-hour entertainment options (Virkar & Mallya, 2018). Another example of transportation attractions is the train; from trips through the jungles of Latin America (Camargo, Gaza & Morales, 2014), to long journeys across Siberia on vintage trains (Tillman, 2002), destinations and companies are inventing numerous ways to turn these long haul trips into worthwhile experiences. Some of these trains focus on offering exquisite dining and luxury ambience; others appear to be art galleries on rails. Whichever the proposition, they try to eliminate the feeling of time wasted on the road and instead turn the transportation stage of the trip into one of the most enriching parts of the holiday (Orient-Express Hotels, 2024). Some other examples of transportation attractions are as follows: sightseeing buses, boat trips along rivers, and hot-air balloons. Metro stations and airports are working towards becoming attractions themselves in a similar way as transportation modes do, in order to minimise the amount of time not enjoyed (Kovačić & Milošević, 2016).

1.3.4 Lodging Sector

Lodging is another of the components of the Tourism Industry. Before the establishment of tourism, when Pilgrimage was one of the only motives for travelling, cathedrals and temples provided beds for these travellers (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2007). As the tourism activity evolved, and the need for different types of accommodation grew, the early types of independent lodging appeared. These facilities were referred to as tourist inns – houses where merchant travellers would stay and receive basic goods and services (Chudy-Hyski, Chudy & Krutikov, 2016).

Over time, the interest for travelling grew and diversified, and with it, the need for various longing types emerged (Medlik & Ingrams, 2000). Depending on the location, the

23

facilities, services, and image, businesses looked for ways to adapt and develop the sector further, until hotels became the standard (Chudy-Hyski, Chudy & Krutikov, 2016).

At present, there are a variety of lodging types for different niche markets: resorts, hotels, motels, theme hotels, rural houses, rural hotels, tourist apartments, hostels, boutique hotels, cottages, bed and breakfast, spa hotels, camping sites, and glamping sites are just some of the possibilities that tourists can choose from. As beneficial and needed this can be for the tourism industry, it also implies high competition. One of the valid and most accessible ways to stay competitive on the market is by means of technology and Social Media (Medlikand & Ingrams, 2000).

The activities of marketing and promoting tourism and hospitality products are different from those of most other industries, since tourism and hospitality products are primarily intangible[2]. In addition, a bed unsold today is a sale that is lost forever, due to the fact that it does not have a shelf-life (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2007). Furthermore, as opposed to physical products, once a customer has spent money on a bed or a tour, there is nothing substantial to show to others, other than the receipt. The Internet has opened the possibility for consumers to make these products seemingly more tangible, completely reviewable, and shareable (Buhalis & Licata, 2002; Buhalis & Zoge, 2007; Hall & Williams, 2008; Longhi, 2009). For these reasons, Social Media has seen a significant raise in popularity within the lodging sector.

Before the Internet era, booking the right accommodation was a challenging step in travel planning, due to it involving a significant risk, time involvement, and expense; the number of intermediaries involved in sales and promotion further complicated the transaction for both tourists and lodging facilities. Since the appearance of the Internet, this trend has changed dramatically – tourists and providers can interact instantly and with no barriers (Zeng, 2013). The accommodation industry has been among the fastest growing ones to use this type of communication with the customers (Ip, Law & Lee, 2011; Hemsley & Dann, 2015), which is presently leading towards the disappearance of the traditional travel agencies (Ying et al., 2021).

In the earliest stages, websites provided a "window" to a venue – a description of the site, its services, the surrounding areas, and so on. Booking a room was also a possibility,

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[2] Intangible products are those that are "impossible to touch, to describe exactly, or to give an exact value" (© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2023)

although the earliest booking engines were inefficient and slow compared to the systems that appeared later. Eventually, websites were replaced by platforms, such as Booking, Airbnb, Expedia, and Glampinghub, and more recently by mobile applications (Ghose, Ipeirotis & Li, 2012; Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016; Nguyen & Khoa, 2019). These platforms and applications have transformed the way tourists organise their trips, and more importantly, they have had a significant impact on the expectations of the customers before, during, and after the trip (Li et al., 2022). That is to say, travellers require to be able to rearrange their travel plans in an instant, from everywhere; in addition, they often ignore the venues' marketing strategies, and focus on the Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) and the User Generated Content that circulates freely around Social Media Platforms (Li et al., 2022; Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016; Sutanto et al., 2013). At the same time, the accommodation venues can respond to their clients in an instant, as well as evaluate feedback, push additional services, and have an open communication with their guests without the inconvenience of having to rely on intermediaries (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016). This two-way communication allows these venues to proactively improve their operations, while addressing and mitigating any issues that may occur on the spot, for nearly no financial cost. Brand awareness and purchase intention increase exponentially, the more active the venue is on these platforms. On a global scale, few tourism businesses are able or willing to exist on the market without online presence and active Social Media accounts (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga & Liu, 2017). Having said that, it is important to restate that these benefits are only obtained when the online behaviours are managed professionally. In the same way that the web can impulse businesses, an inadequate use of the Internet can destroy their reputations in an instant, or worse, compromise privacy and financial safety of their clients or of the venue itself (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

It should be noted that this thesis focuses on modernised countries; there are developing nations that do not have a high level of efficiency in the online-led tourism ecosystem, and may be able to function well. Though as a general rule, in order to stay competitive, the Tourism Industry relies on being continuously engaged in the online world. This interaction is becoming more sincere, as Social Media gradually thrives over traditional marketing methods. The benefits of this interaction, such as open communication and straight-forward online transactions, are mutual (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013; Nasihatkon, Kheiri & Mirabell, 2016; Ryals, 2008; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

1.3.5 Impacts of the Tourism Industry on Host Communities

Tourism is a social event; individuals travel to communities or areas where they will directly or indirectly have social encounters. More importantly, the destinations may be new and unfamiliar places that differ not only geographically, but also socially and culturally from the one the traveller is used to (Kim et al., 2013). This means that, beside managing schedules, expenses, safety, etc., the traveller must also manage social relationships. Oftentimes, it is necessary to behave differently from what one is used to, in order not to stand out or even cause an offence. As a result of these interactions, the tourist has an opportunity to gain an understanding and appreciation of different sociocultural groups (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Barakazı, 2023).

In the academic setting, Tourism Management closely analyses people and the way they impact destinations and its inhabitants. According to researchers, these types of activities can put the wellbeing of the locals at risk. On the opposite side, they can help people from different nations understand each other better, as well as promote positive cultural exchange (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

When speaking about the negative impacts, among the most common phenomena mentioned in the literature are the demonstration effect and acculturation; these notions refer to locals imitating behavioural patterns of the visitors, especially the ones related to consumerist mind-set (Fisher, 2016), or ultimately losing touch with and rejecting their own culture (Ritzer, 1996; Daly, Dias & Patuleia, 2021). This happens as a consequence of wanting to indulge in the same luxuries as the tourists, as well as wishing to be able to consume goods that need to be imported (Cruz, 2016; De-Juan-Vigaray, Garau-Vadell & Sesé, 2021). Even mimicking harmful attitudes, values and behaviours of the guests can result from these interactions (Page & Connell, 2006). Racial tension can arise when there are radical differences between the tourist and the host (Page & Connell, 2006). Trinketisation of crafts and art occurs, and it refers to producing mass volumes of tourist souvenirs that do not accurately represent the culture of the host destination (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). All these side effects can lead to a loss of cultural pride (Dogan, 1989; Bartolozzi, 2023), poor work conditions (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Garcia-Buades, Garcia-Sastre & Alemany-Hormaeche, 2022), and rapid and unwanted change of the local lifestyle (Page & Connell, 2006). The most dramatic consequence may be displacement,

where the hosts are obligated to leave their places of residence to make way for the development of tourism, either by governmental pressure, or due to extreme economic inequalities that stem from the influx of tourist spending (Robinson, 2012).

The positive effects can be significant, too: Theobald (2012) states rapid economic growth as the primary benefit of tourism; Goeldner and Ritchie (2009) mention improved and increased number and quality of services provided by the government; and Dogan (1989) and Daly, Dias and Patuleia (2021) claim that tourism can, in fact, preserve and revitalise cultures, rather than harm them, if managed appropriately.

1.4 Tourism Industry and the Internet

In previous sections, tourism and the Internet were described separately, in order to better understand the origin and the development of each concept. It was also stated that over time, they began to merge into a unit. The following section observes and focuses on their common aspects, as well as on how specifically tourism and the Internet interact on the market.

As explained by Poon (1993) and Sheldon (1997), technology led to changes in the operations of the entire Tourism Industry. Computer Reservation Systems (CRSs) were developed in the 1970s (Sheldon, 1997; Werthner and Klein, 1999), followed by Global Distribution Systems (GDSs) in 1980s (Xiang, Magnini & Fesenmaier, 2015). These systems allowed agencies to have a direct link with a multitude of travel service providers, such as hotels, airlines and rental companies. Through these systems, they could reserve, modify reservations, and find information for their clients (Longhi, 2008). This implied that the Travel Industry supply chain encompassed suppliers, intermediaries and end-consumers. Hotels, railways, airlines, etc. were the suppliers, while travel agencies and tour operators were the sole intermediaries in charge of serving the end-consumer (O'connor, 2000; Buhalis & Licata, 2002). The suppliers would pay fees and commissions to the intermediaries and the technology providers (Buhalis, 2004) and consumers held the suppliers and the operators responsible for the quality of services received.

Ultimately, the Internet changed the whole concept of the travel supply and demand by offering the possibility of obtaining information and purchasing products and services instantly, inexpensively and interactively, by means of one's own personal research, and applying one's own criteria (Garcés et al., 2004). Products and information that were an exclusive domain of travel agencies and tour operators became directly accessible and with nearly no barriers (Longhi, 2008). Consequently, this new environment also transformed the operational and strategic practices of all tourism companies (Buhalis, 2003).

The change occurred in part due to the nature of the travel products and services, which makes them suitable for online selling (Garin-Muñoz, 2011). Namely, products and services that have a relatively low cost and frequency of purchase, which are also intangible, have a clear value proposition, and rate highly on market differentiation, are more likely to be purchased over the internet (Peterson et al, 1997). The travel product is

less tangible and more differentiated than most other products, and therefore requires more active involvement than many other consumer goods (Bonn, Furr & Susskind, 1998; Lewis, Semeijn & Talalayevsky, 1998).

Today, tourism is considered to be one of the main large-scale international industries and consequently one of the most potent job providers on the planet. Its growth and development are directly conditioned and driven by the developments of the Internet and its services (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Haya, 2001). Apart from it being the main force for gathering information – owing to the abundance of easily accessible online services and information (Berger et al., 2007) – the Internet also breeds a new type of tourist who is more knowledgeable, seeks exceptional value for money and time invested, and demands rights to personal interaction with the suppliers in order to satisfy his or her own specific needs (Buhalis & Law, 2008). These trends have grown exponentially with the development of Web 2.0 and the mobile phone technology, which allow travellers to be in control of their own travel experiences anytime, anywhere (Mills & Law, 2004; Sigala et al., 2012).

1.4.1 Symbiosis of the Tourism Industry and Social Media

Social Media has had a major effect on the travel industry: Stackla (2019) revealed that 86% of tourists viewed UGC for travel information and ideas. Welsh et al. (2020) stated that there were over 399,000,000 independent travel-related vlogs/blogs on the internet that year. In addition, it has been known for over a decade that UGC related to travelling has been extensively shared and reviewed on every major Social Media platform with a global audience, such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). Upon observing the close relation between tourism and online platforms, various researchers, among which were Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) pointed out the necessity of developing models for managing customer relations in the Tourism business.

In essence, tourism is a hedonic practice. Therefore, consumers want to make the best travel decisions in order to maximise their experiences. They seek to do so by examining content found on the Internet, such as photographs, videos, and reviews from fellow travellers (Rageh, Melewar & Woodside, 2013). Zhang, Law and Li (2010) stated that, due to the nature of tourism, the product cannot be experienced before consumption,

which makes it inevitable for the consumers to rely on the knowledge, information, and experiences of others, as well as on the best sensory cues that can be obtained. Online travel material, such as texts, pictures, and recordings are, therefore, a vital asset for the tourism industry (Gruter et al., 2013).

From the point of view of a potential traveller, this UGC is readily available for consultation and carries immense benefits for travel planning (González-Rodríguez, Martínez-Torres & Toral, 2016). In order to understand where this content comes from and why it is created in the first place, Jose Van Dick researched this phenomenon and explained it in The Culture of Connectivity: A critical History of Social Media (2013); the author stated that posting content online is an answer to an inherent human need to manifest social life. According to this book, sharing travel experiences with friends, browsing through holiday photographs and watching home videos has always been present in society, but it has gradually been transferred from real life onto Social Media platforms (Van Dijck, 2013). It can be observed that gradually, over the years, the tendency to feel safe on these platforms has grown to such extent that the majority of people are willing to share their experiences and opinions with the world; thus, free and easily accessible information – which benefits potential travellers – is provided on one hand, and social needs get fulfilled on the other (Ana & Istudor, 2019). Furthermore, this effect has become exceedingly more prominent with the appearance of mobile phone applications. The following section will focus on the specificities of the use of mobile applications in tourism.

1.4.2 Mobile Applications and the Tourism Industry

Internet users expect a high level of efficiency and accessibility for most daily tasks, but particularly when travelling, which is an activity that takes one out of his or her comfort zone. For this reason, tourism and mobile applications are becoming inseparable: accommodation is mostly hired through platforms like Booking.com and Hotels.com; flights are bought through applications, such as Raynair, Vueling, and Lufthansa, or researched and booked through Skyscanner and Expedia; destinations and attractions are reviewed and researched through TripAdvisor, which also offers possibilities to book restaurants or buy entrance tickets; Google Maps and Google Translator are consulted throughout the day; foreign currencies are no longer a mystery and travellers expect a fair exchange rate everywhere they go; hotels are beginning to offer possibilities of checking in and even unlocking one's room door directly through applications (Murphy, Chen & Cossutta, 2016).

In addition to the wide range of specialty tools useful for specific tourism planning tasks, tourists also use the leading Social Networks extensively (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015; Wolf, Sims & Yang, 2018; Li et al., 2022). Some of the main Social Networks used in tourism are described below.

Facebook

As mentioned in the Social Media section, Facebook is a social network that appeared in 2004. Founded by Mark Zuckerberg – a Harvard student at the time – it was aimed at the students of the university and quickly gained popularity as a social networking application. Its use was later extended to high school students, and eventually anyone over the age of 13 could join Facebook. Within six years, this platform had reached over 500 million users and Google evaluated it as the world's most visited network. The following figure shows the evolution of the numbers of users in billions, from 2013 to 2023 (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Number of users on Facebook (in billions), 2013-2023
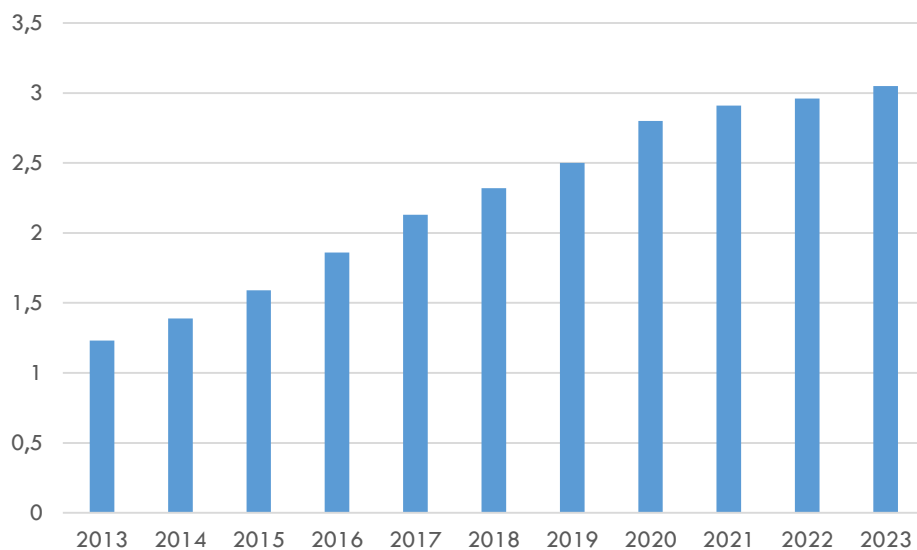
Source: OBERLO, 2023[3]

Facebook application lets users create personalised profiles, so that they may befriend other users and exchange messages, photos and comments (Caers et al., 2013*). Beside its social focus, Facebook quickly became a tool that enterprises utilised to provide information, advertise products and answer customers' inquiries, in addition to promoting and hosting user generated content (Chan & Guillet 2011; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Within two years of its invention, the application became mobile-friendly.

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[3] https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/how-many-users-does-facebook-have

By 2007, the company had entered French, German and Spanish markets, gradually becoming a global phenomenon (Villa, 2014). According to Hsu (2012), within the next 5 years, Facebook had become the leading Social Networking site. It progressed from 500 million users in 2010 to over 3 billion in 2022, out of which 200 million were business users and accounts.

Facebook enables companies, such as hotels, to serve broad international markets from a single channel. Personalised links can be attached to the venue's profile, which increases the number of direct bookings by minimising the need for intermediaries, thus creating significant financial and operative benefits for the business (Noone, McGuire & Rohlfs, 2011). Along with the usual Social Media content and services, Facebook has been offering the option of shopping on their website since 2020. In addition, the platform has demonstrated a capacity to turn an increasing number of satisfied customers into loyal ones (Capatina et al., 2018).

Since Facebook became a part of Meta – a new company that runs both Instagram and WhatsApp – the interlinking of information between these three channels has become automated (Meta, 2024).

TripAdvisor

Founded by Steven Kaufer, Langley Steinert, Nick Shanny, and Thomas Palka in 2000, TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel guidance platform (Gvaramadze, 2022; Tripadvisor, 2022). Its premise is helping travellers around the world plan and book the "perfect" trips. In 2022, TripAdvisor had over 1 billion reviews and over 8 million registered tourism businesses (accommodations, flight carriers, restaurants and attractions), and was present at 43 markets, in 22 languages (Tripadvisor, 2022). Figure 1.2 shows the number of user reviews on TripAdvisor in millions, for the period of 2014-2022.

Figure 1.2 Number of user reviews on TripAdvisor (in millions), 2014-2022
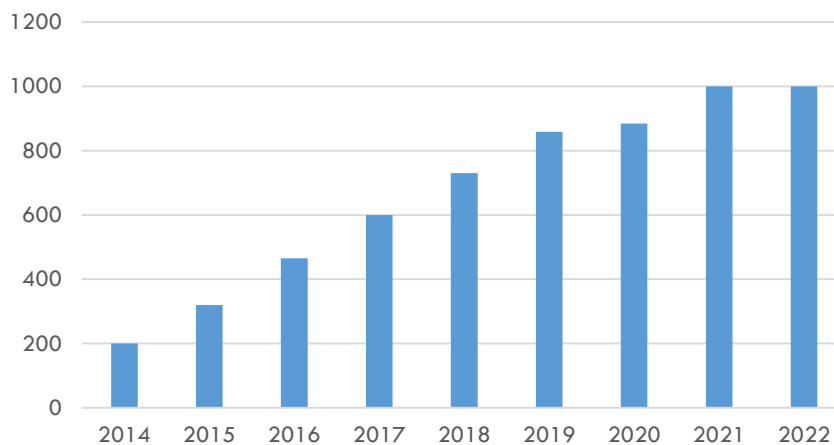
<div align="right">Source: Statista, 2023[4]</div>

The platform operates on the basis of online travel guides that offer users free overview of travel-related content (Gvaramadze, 2022). As Conrady and Bucks (2012) pointed out, TripAdvisor paved the way for Social Media to enter the Tourism Industry, by becoming the first pre-travel planning tool for the increasing number of internet-dependent travellers. Law (2006) defined TripAdvisor as a Social Media site – one that provides unbiased recommendations for hotel businesses and tourism related businesses at large, while Jeacle and Carter (2011) categorised it as a forum where travellers could share experiences. Conversely, Leung et al. (2013) recognised TripAdvisor as an instrument

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that hotel businesses had begun to utilise as a way of enticing potential guests, as well as for gaining competitive advantage. At present, in addition to hosting user generated content and business related information, this platform offers the possibility of finding accommodation deals, booking restaurants, and hiring experiences (Tripadvisor, 2022), all of which broadens the range of Social Media related services and in turn demonstrates the rapid growth of Social Media dominance within the Tourism Industry.

Despite its growing popularity over the years, researchers noted that Facebook and Twitter challenge it as potential Social Media forerunners for the tourism market (Minazzi & Lagrosen 2013). Bulencea and Egger (2013) supported these claims when they classified Facebook and Twitter as the leaders among all tourist information sites. More recently, Instagram and TikTok have taken over this position (Melati, Fathorrahman & Pradiani, 2022).

Instagram

This Social Network, which was developed by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger to simplify photo and video sharing directly from smartphones, was launched in October 2010 (Meta, 2024). By summer 2024, the application had 2.4 billion registered users, with an average daily usage time of 24 minutes per day (Shewale, 2024). According to Shewale, this translates to 45.28% percent of the world's Internet users. Figure 1.3 shows the number of monthly users on Instagram in millions, for the period of 2013-2022.

Figure 1.3 Number of users on Instagram (in millions), 2013-2022
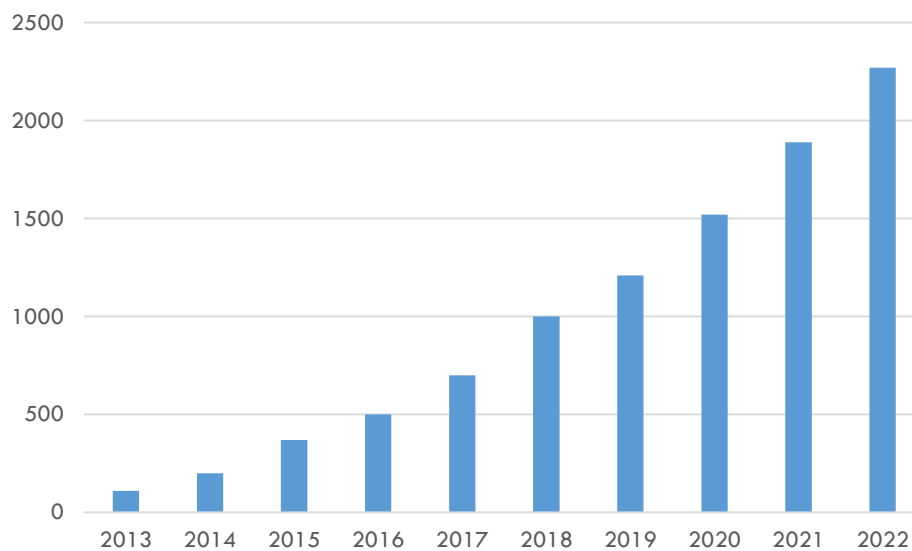
Source: BusinessofApps, 2023[5]

As TripAdvisor gradually began to lose its leading role among a plethora of Social Media applications, Instagram emerged as a tool for mobile phones with a significant competitive advantage over similar platforms (Villa, 2014; Smith & Anderson, 2018; Wozniak et al., 2017). In "Instagram Abroad: Performance, Consumption and Colonial Narrative in Tourism", Smith and Anderson regarded Instagram as one of the World's most popular and fast-growing Social Media Platforms. In addition to travel writing, Instagram adds to one's travel diaries a dimension that stimulates various senses – as Smith and Anderson point out – referring to photography, videography and sound

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[5] https://www.businessofapps.com/data/instagram-statistics/

recording at a destination. The authors added that 20% of the interviewed international travellers reported using Social Media as a "window to life".

By enabling the traveller to spontaneously capture and share experiences, Instagram inspires a build-up of particular emotions associated with a destination, rendering the application a useful tool for destination marketing (Radzi et al., 2014). Consequently, when a potential visitor browses through the application's archives in search of information, the compound system of hashtags delivers photographs and related emotions that help create a more detailed mental image of the selected destination, in comparison to verbal or written representation alone (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Radzi et al., 2014).

According to Instagram 2022, 90% of the people who use Instagram follow at least one business. Furthermore, 2 out of 3 users who responded to the questionnaire state that Instagram enables interaction between brands. (Instagram, 2024)

Twitter (X)

Launched in 2006, this social network allows its users to express their thoughts and opinions in the form of microblogging (X, 2023). By September 2023, the application had 415.3 million active users (Stacy, 2023). Figure 1.4 shows the number of Twitter (X) users worldwide, from 2019 to 2024.

Figure 1.4 Number of users on X (in millions), 2019-2024
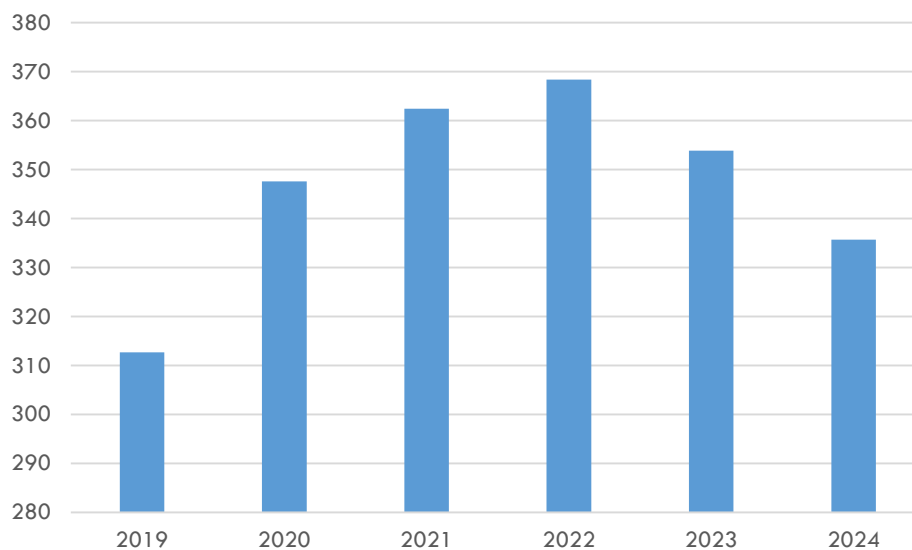
Source: Dixon (Statista), 2024[6]

Whilst barriers in communication between corporations and individuals were fading, Twitter (X) appeared as a tool that brought additional efficiency to this open interaction (Atadil et al., 2010). Short and straightforward messages allowed companies to broadcast important events in real-time, thus maintaining the clients and the general public continuously informed (Bigne et al., 2018). As Villa (2014) pointed out, this swift communication became an essential tool in strategic Social Media marketing, giving way to the appearance of a supplementary branch of blogging, known as microblogging. Twitter's name was changed to X in 2023 when the company was obtained by Elon Musk, in order to align with Musk's corporate identity (X, 2023)

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[6] https://whatsthebigdata.com/twitter-statistics/

Starwood Hotels and Resorts (@starwoodsbuzz), Hilton Hotels (@HiltonHotels) and Melia Hotels International (@MeliaHotelsIn) are said to have implemented particularly successful twitter campaigns (X, 2023).

TikTok

In 2016, a novel social media app for creating, discovering, and sharing videos, named Douyin, was launched by a Chinese company ByteDance (Li, 2021; Du et al., 2020). Gaining worldwide fame under a more international name "TikTok", it hosted 600 million users by 2020, which increased to 1.67 billion by summer 2023 (Li, 2021; Demandsage, 2024). At the time of writing this thesis, this application is available on more than 150 markets and it operates in 75 different languages. By 2023, the number of TikTok videos seen per day had reached a billion (Demandsage, 2024; Tiktok, 2023). Moreover, in June 2023, the company's representatives announced that TIME Magazine had positioned it among the 100 most influential companies of the year (Tiktok, 2024). Figure 1.5 shows the number of users in million, from 2018 to 2023.

Figure 1.5 Number of TikTok users (in millions), 2018-2023

Source: Statista, 2024[7]

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[7] https://whatsthebigdata.com/tiktok-statistics/
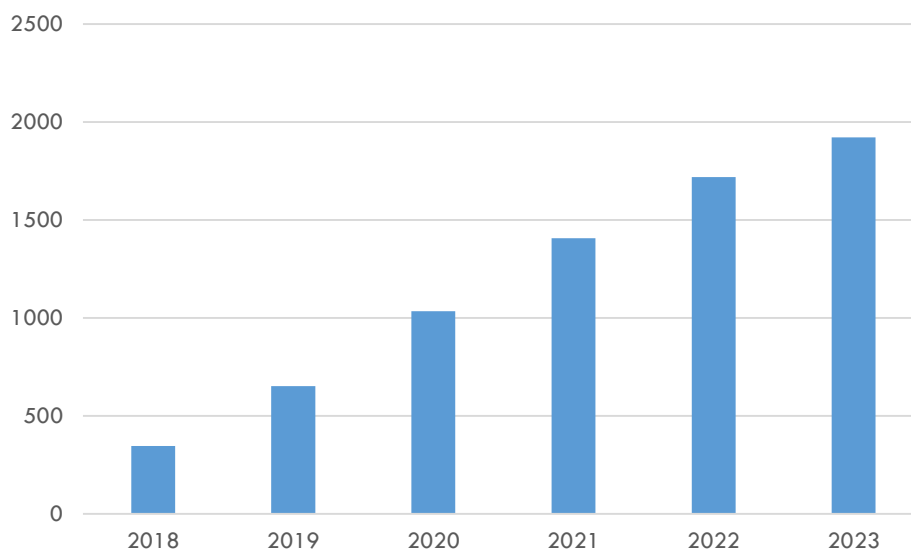
TikTok is an application built around short-form videos (Du et al., 2020), where users can upload, record, and edit films, add background music, use a variety of special effects, stickers, and filters, as well as incorporate customised templates to match specific scenarios, such as the travel template (Due et al., 2020). As with the other popular social media applications, the aspect of liking, sharing, commenting on posts, and making friends or building online communities, is an integral part of the TikTok experience (Du et al., 2020; Zihan, 2022).

According to Wengel et al. (2022), TikTok has had an effect on tourism unmatched by any other Social Media application. Content creators publish destination-related tourism videos on the platform (Gao et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2022), which are meant to be consumed by contemporary travellers in order to get inspired at the pre-travel phase, or receive input during the trip. This online environment actively participates in shaping tourists' perceptions, expectations, decisions, opinions, and experiences at a destination (Leung et al., 2013; Luo & Zhang, 2015; Pop et al., 2022).

Booking

Launched in 1996, Booking.com is considered to be one of the world's leading travel agencies, particularly in the online domain (Booking, 2023). In 2022, over 110 million travellers were using Booking, and 100 million of them were using the Booking mobile application for organising trips. Figure 1.6 represents the estimated monthly number of visits to the site, in millions, for the period of 2021-2023.

Figure 1.6 Estimated number of visits on Booking.com (in millions), 2021-2023
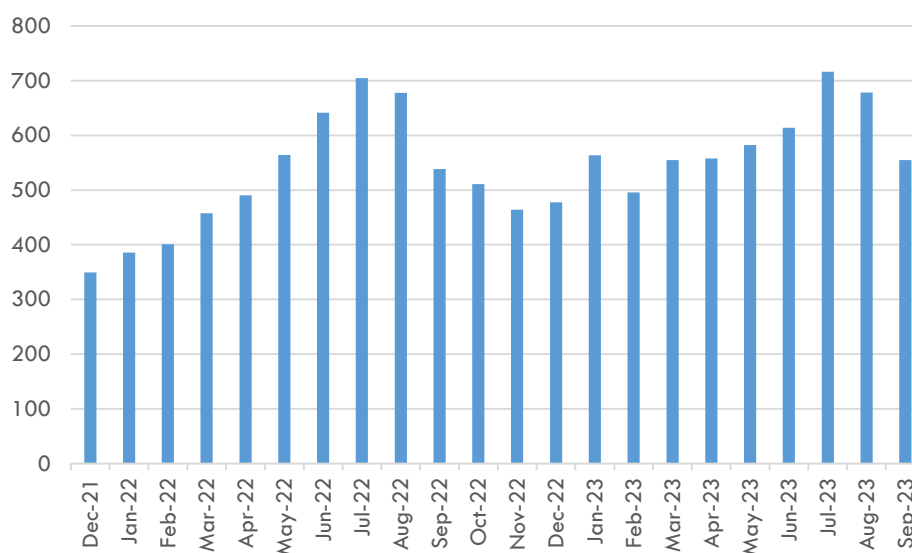
The company's main focus is on the commercialisation of lodging facilities and facilitation of online reviews (Martin-Fuentes & Mellinas, 2018); in addition, the company sells plane tickets and intermediates rental services and homestays (Curry, 2024), as well as cruise trips – starting in November 2023 (Booking, 2023). At the time of writing this thesis, Booking also owns and operates a range of online travel organisations, including Agoda, Kayak, CheapFlights, RentalCars, Momondo and OpenTable (Curry, 2024). Among the advantages of using this system for booking accommodation, Bilbil (2019) points out worldwide presence and adoption, real-time

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[8]https://www.statista.com/statistics/1294912/total-visits-to-booking-website/

integration with the hotels' reservation systems, direct payments from the consumer to the hotel, and speed and convenience. The author also states one negative side, which is the diminishment of profit margins for the business, due to high commission rates.

Expedia

Expedia is a company with a similar concept, as well as similar benefits and drawbacks of Booking. Created in 1996, it offers a broader range of products and services, including vacation packages, rail tickets, attraction tickets, and planned activities (Expedia, 2023). In 2022, the company had 48 million active users. It is also a holding company of various other agencies, numbering over 200 (Curry, 2024). Figure1.7 shows the gross bookings of Expedia in millions, for the period of 2005-2022.

Figure 1.7 Gross booking of Expedia Group (in billion U.S. dollars), 2005-2022
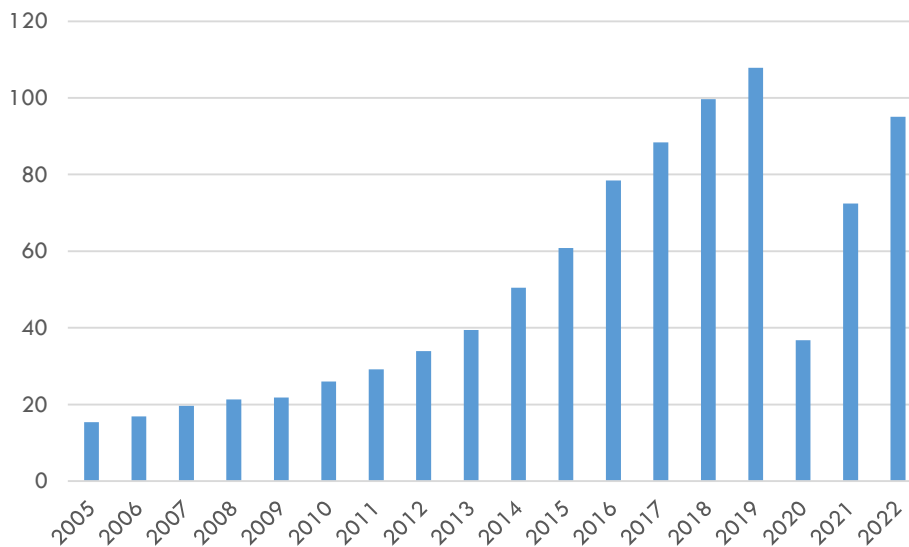
Source: Statista, 2023[9]

YouTube

Founded by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim in 2005, YouTube is fundamentally a video sharing network. It is also the world's most popular online video community. In a similar way as other Social Networks, YouTube allows sharing and discovering content, as well as interacting with other registered users (YouTube, 2024). Considering the amount of time viewers spend on YouTube, it has also become a place to grasp the attention of potential tourists and promote products to target markets (Roy et al., 2020). The number of active users on the platform was 2.7 billion in 2023 (Shewale, 2024). According to Shewale, 52 percent of the world's Internet users access YouTube at least once per month. Figure 1.8 shows the number of monthly users in millions, for the period of 2010-2023.

Figure 1.8 Monthly active users on YouTube (in millions), 2010-2023
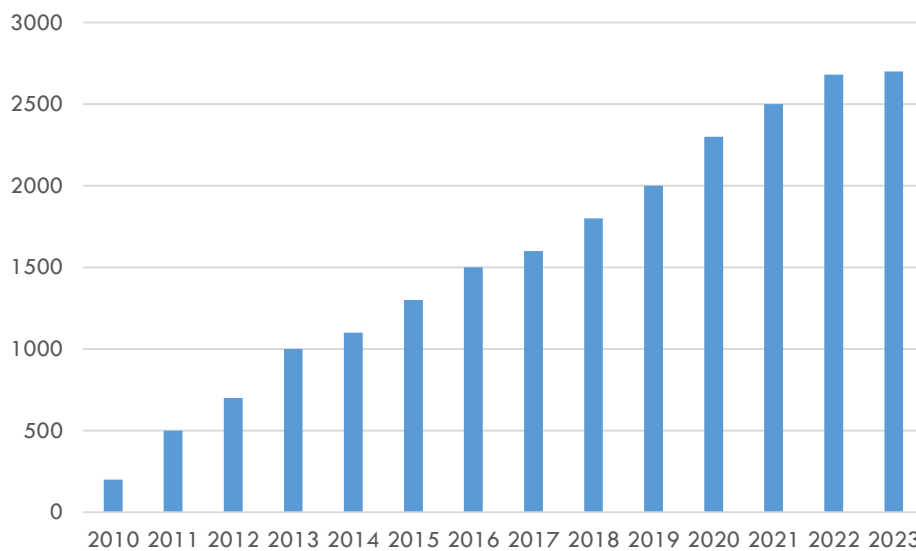
Source: Shewale, 2023[10]

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[10] https://www.demandsage.com/youtube-stats/

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the world's largest professional social network with over 80 million users from around the world (LinkedIn, 2023). It has been interconnecting professionals and helping them exchange ideas and knowledge with other participants and industry experts since 2003. A professional user-profile is needed in order to participate in this network (LinkedIn, 2023). Figure 1.9 shows the number of users in millions, from 2009 to 2022.

Figure 1.9 Number of users on LinkedIn (in millions), 2009-2022

Source: Gajic, 2023[11]

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[11] https://99firms.com/blog/linkedin-statistics/#gref
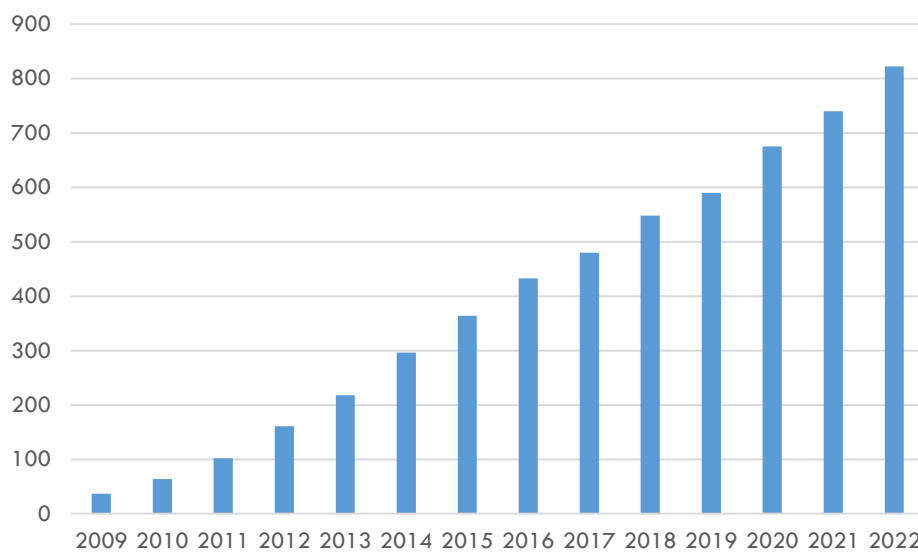
1.4.3 Social Media as a Tool for Travel Planning

Destination is a location that provides products and services for tourism consumption over the length of a tourist's stay (Eraqi, 2007). When selecting a destination, one is motivated by business and leisure needs, or by the need to visit friends and relatives[12] (Ankomah, Crompton & Baker, 1996; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989).

When choosing a destination, a future traveller starts with a wide variety of options until these are narrowed down, based on factors such as beauty, safety, accommodation, leisure options, and services available at the site (Karl, Reintinger & Schmude, 2015; Seddighi, Nuttall & Theocharous, 2001). The choice needs to match the traveller's budget and the time available to be spent on the trip. Once a few options fulfil these requirements, the majority are discarded (Roque & Raposo, 2016). The final decision can be influenced by one's own intrinsic desires and motivations, the influence of friends and relatives, or the destination's marketing and SM efforts (Moscardo et al., 1996; Paul, Roy & Mia, 2019).

Before choosing a destination, information is researched, collected and compared. It should be noted that tourism products are purchased ahead of consumption and the decision is usually made sight unseen (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985; Roque & Raposo, 2016). Additionally, tourism products have been considered as intangible – no substance is received upon purchase, but rather an experience (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). Social Media helps to present information in a way that addresses these obstacles; by means of photographs, videos, live streams, and reviews, a potential visitor can gain a close idea of what the destination is like and what to expect there (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012; Arsal et al., 2010; Carson, 2008; Munar, 2011). Even if this imagery does not always match reality, it appears more trustworthy and sincere, since it presumably comes from other customers who have already consumed the product, or are currently consuming it (Gururaja, 2015; Fridol & Arnatovic, 2011; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Icoz, Kutuk & Icoz, 2018).

Once a destination is chosen, regardless of whether the decision was influenced by Social Media or not, the Internet, the Social Media, and applications play a significant role in the next stage of the destination planning process, which is the act of organising a trip (Souza & Machado, 2017). Choosing and booking transportation and accommodation,

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[12] This section of the thesis will not focus on those who are visiting friends and relatives

deciding what to visit or what to taste, and purchasing tickets for monuments, parks, and tours, are only some of the essential activities that are often extensively administered through SM. Finding, comparing, and choosing products and services is accessible and straight-forward online (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012; Rathonyi, 2013). Reading reviews, seeing photos, watching videos, and being able to ask questions through comment sections or via direct messaging through social apps, gives a sense of lessened risk and a potential for making more accurate estimations (Tham, Mair & Croy, 2020).

Apps such as booking, SkyScanner, TripAdvisor, and Instagram are a good source for finding information or solving doubts, as well as making purchases. Even if these purchases are not made directly through the apps, the decision to book a company's service is a by-product of what was seen in the content generated by other travellers and posted on social media (Chung & Koo, 2015; Park et al., 2020). This is similar when selecting activities, finding good spots for taking photographs, choosing tour companies, deciding where to eat and drink on a specific budget, or finding out how to move around a destination; numerous questions can be answered from any location with internet connection in an instant, giving the potential customer more freedom in terms of time to plan and organise a trip efficiently in a world where the majority of people are considered to be busy and stressed in their daily lives (Souza & Machado, 2017). Even once an experience is booked, most processes are still performed from the comfort of one's phone – through apps, QR codes, maps, emails, and without the need of printing and carrying papers; this trend is becoming integrated in most travellers' lifestyles (Loureiro, 2019).

Oftentimes during a trip, motivated by needs for self-expression, promotion, and in some cases altruism, travellers share content, while other travellers simultaneously plan and take trips, search for information, and ask questions; this creates a state of constant chain of travel advice exchange (Ana & Istudor, 2019). It is a circle where someone is always travelling and posting, while others are looking for information, needing advice, or wishing to travel. In addition, once a trip is over, consumers continue to share stories and express satisfaction or disappointment, which does not only benefit those who are planning trips, but also the companies, which can see their low points, high points, apologise when it is needed, and reply when it is required (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Destination Planning in the modern environment, as well as tourism in general, cannot be imagined without Social Media – beneficial both for customers and companies.

1.4.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Use of Social Media and Applications for Tourism Activities

Social Media and applications are intertwined with tourism to a point where travelling without them would be unimaginable to most modern tourists. In addition, new lifestyle possibilities have emerged from this unity. Accommodation rental platforms such as Airbnb enable individuals to generate profit by renting out unused space to tourists, while various volunteering platforms make it possible for travellers to stay at accommodations in exchange for work. Moreover, certain transportation network companies that operate exclusively through applications (Uber, Cabify, BlaBla Car) offer either work opportunities to individuals with driving licences, or ride-sharing schemes where the driver and the passenger save on fuel expenses and simultaneously meet new people. The digital revolution has reached such an extent that certain travellers call themselves digital nomads, owing to the fact that they are able to travel and work simultaneously and indefinitely. Each day, tourism and Social Media applications grow closer and benefit travellers in innumerable ways (Liu et al., 2020; Varga & Gabor, 2021).

Social Media can serve diverse purposes within the Tourism Industry, depending on whether it is viewed from the customer's perspective or from a business viewpoint. There are certain advantages and disadvantages that are customer or business-specific, and others that are universal. In order to gain a better understanding of these effects, a brief summary of various impacts has been collected from the literature. It is presented in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Advantages and disadvantages of the use of Social Media for tourism from different perspectives

	Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Tourist	It is a source of information in the initial stages of the decision making process (Fotis, Buhalis & Rassides, 2012), as well as during and after the trip (Hudson et al., 2016; Királová & Pavlíčeka, 2015). Online communities allow travellers to access first-hand experiences and read reviews of tourist services and venues at the destination of choice (Kozinets, 1999; Kim et al., 2004, Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2002; Longhi & Christian, 2008). Social Media and User Generated Content can reaffirm or modify pre-conceived ideas and opinions on products, brands and destinations, by means of exposing hotels, destinations, tourist attractions and tourist services in a more genuine way (Starkov & Mechoso, 2008; Seth, 2012), thus helping travellers make decisions with more confidence (Hudson, Roth & Madden, 2015). Inexpensive and straightforward access to information (Verma, Stock & Mccarthy, 2012). Relation between past consumers, real time consumers and potential consumers (Longhi, 2008; Jansson, 2002).	Overly fantasised imagery within the content shown in social media (Munar, Gyimóthy & Cai, 2013).

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Companies	Ease of interaction and engagement with potential customers (Longhi, 2008; Jansson, 2002). Fast and flexible information sharing (Rapp et al., 2013). It is an economical tool for distribution and coordination of marketing material (Polatoglu, 1994). SM provides an opportunity for companies to improve their customer service or facilitate additional services at a modest cost (Verma, Stock & Mccarthy, 2012). By observing engagement patterns, businesses can learn how to frame their communication style with customers and other businesses (Rapp et al., 2013). SM allows tourism enterprises to "data mine" for travellers' ideas and opinions, which helps fulfil customers' needs better and gain a competitive advantage (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Consumer generated content can be a free way of promotion (Starkov & Mechoso, 2008); (Seth, 2012). SM can also be used to make reservations, offering an alternative to the commonplace booking platforms (Sahin & Sengün, 2015). Measurability of various aspects of the SM strategy (Kutuk , 2016).	At present, customers do not have a formal obligation to be objective in their reviews (Yang, Mai & Ben-Ur, 2012). Fantasised imagery that can be created by social media may seem advantageous at first; however, if customers' expectations aren't ultimately met, disappointed customers can generate and disseminate damaging content for the company (Radzi et al., 2014).

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Shared	Easy access to large amounts of information at a low cost (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Disintermediation - direct relations between consumers and companies (Porter, 2001). Highly responsive and prompt interactions (Kasavana, Nusair & Teodosic, 2010).	

In conclusion, quality user generated content, a well-thought-out SM strategy and positive customer reviews are highly beneficial; but the opposite can threaten a business or its staff. This imposes constant pressure to perform, which spans all layers of the company (Pantelidis, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Leung, Lee & Law, 2011).

Chapter 2: Social Media Use for Marketing Purposes. An Empirical Analysis of a Budget Hotel

CHAPTER 2.- SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR MARKETING PURPOSES. AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF A BUDGET HOTEL

Chapter 2 delves into details related to Social Media management styles, techniques, and outcomes at hotels. First, it reviews several early strategies that were established at famous chains. Then, it describes a number of case studies performed by different companies in order to analyse performance of their venues. From the Literature Review, an existing gap in literature was identified when analysing Social Media strategies for budget accommodation. To overcome this gap, this study aims at empirically analysing the Social Media efforts as marketing strategies at a budget accommodation venue, by means of a case study. Finally, it goes into the details of the Case Study, by providing guidelines for achieving better performance.

2.1 Introduction

In the early 2000s, when the link between tourism and Social Media became apparent, numerous research papers appeared on topics of the economic and strategic implications of this relationship. Regardless, experts were facing challenges and failing to develop a sustainable strategy that would guarantee businesses to manage the Social Media environment with a sufficient level of consistency (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Leung et al., 2013). At the same time, social applications were rapidly gaining popularity (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). According to Sigala (2011), a minority of companies were capable of thriving, while the rest failed to implement strategies that yielded positive results on Social Media. According to Chan & Guillet (2011), the principal causes of this failure were lack of corporate communication and insufficiently centralised access to the business's Social Media channels.

In later stages of Social Media development, it was shown that simply being present and actively participating on Social Media channels brought positive outcomes for hotels, particularly for recognising guests needs and expectations, distributing hotel information and reaching potential guests (Wang & Fesenmaier 2004). Sigala (2011) attempted to isolate specific outcomes of a successfully implemented social media strategy. Understanding the customer's profile, monitoring and maintaining online reputation, attracting new customers, increasing online presence, delivering information, increasing perceived reliability of hotel's product and services thanks to first-hand information, answering customer inquiries, feeding real-time information, starting businesses through Electronic Word of Mouth, and allowing customers to express themselves, among others, were the advantages proposed by the author, which summarised the increasing social media authority within the Hotel Tourism Industry.

2.2 Review of Different Hotels' Social Media Strategies

A study by Lanz, Fischhof & Lee (2010) reviewed early Social Media Programmes that were carried out at several hotels and hotel chains. According to the study, Starwood Hotels and resorts were the first hotel corporation to introduce a networking website with a live Social Media campaign. Beginning in 2006, the campaign encouraged tourists to share travel experiences with the global audience. Furthermore, in 2008, Aloft Hotel Chain – a subsidiary of Starwood Hotels and Resorts – successfully imported the chain's properties onto a trending online application called Second Life, which enabled potential clients to explore Aloft Hotel's venues in a computer generated world before making decisions (Lanz, Fischhof & Lee, 2010)

Hyatt Hotels and Resorts formed a community site in 2006, with an intention to cater specifically to the gold Passport Loyalty Club members (Lanz, Fischhof & Lee, 2010). In addition, Hyatt Careers' Facebook page was compiled to assist the company in addressing an additional type of potential customers – the future employees (Hyatt Hotels & Resorts, 2019). By 2022, the chain had presence on 5 Social Media applications: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. The company's Instagram profile had over 246 thousand followers and 2.100 posts by June 1st, 2022. Hyatt's Facebook page was followed by more than 642 thousand people and liked by more than 681 people on June 1st, 2022. On Twitter, the company tweeted over 17.200 thousand tweets with almost 90 thousand followers by June 1st, 2022; additionally, there is a special twitter account called Hyatt Concierge, which serves as an online concierge to guide customers (Hyatt, 2022).

By 2009, Sheraton utilised Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, blogging platforms, and direct emailing schemes to offer customers a chance to win free holidays at one of the Sheraton's Luxurious properties, in exchange for sharing travel experiences through Social Media (Sheraton, 2024). At the time of writing this article, since Sheraton belongs to Marriott, it is included in the Marriott Social Media Campaign called Marriott Bonvoy and at the same time has its own Social Media profile on Instagram with over 170 thousand followers and 453 posts by June 2022. A Facebook page that customers can also book through has over 586 thousand followers and more than 464 thousand people stating that they stayed at one of these accommodations. The company's Twitter account is followed by almost 85 thousand people and features 13.700 tweets on June 1, 2022. Sheraton also

has Social Media profiles, as well as LinkedIn and YouTube channels. Although, it should be noted that the last video uploaded to YouTube was 2 years before writing this paper.

Marriott Hotels and Resorts[13] followed by launching campaigns on twitter, Facebook and YouTube, with the purpose of celebrating 50 years of Hawaiian statehood and granting free holidays on the island (Lanz, Fischhof & Lee, 2010; Marriott 2019). At the time of writing this article, Marriott is a part of the Bonvoy campaign, although similarly to Sheraton, it also has separate profiles – Marriott Hotels and Marriott International. Marriott Hotels has more than 508 thousand followers on Instagram and has published content over 187 times. It is possible to book through their Facebook page, which has over 2.590 "likes" and over 2.620 people follow the profile. More than 495 thousand people state that they had stayed at one of these accommodations at some point. All this data dates to June 1st, 2022 (Marriott Social Media). The company has LinkedIn and YouTube profiles too. At the same time, in June 2022, Marriott Bonvoy Instagram account had 287 posts and over 1.5M followers (MarriottHotels, 2022; @Bonvoy, 2022). The Facebook page is liked by more than 3 million people and has more than 3 million followers (MarriottHotels, 2022; @Bonvoy, 2022). The twitter account numbers 642 tweets and it has 202 thousand followers (MarriottHotels, 2022; @Bonvoy, 2022). In addition to these Social Media applications, the company is active on LinkedIn and YouTube.

An example of a less known brand that has focused extensively and successfully on Social Media campaigning is Tui Blue[14] – a hotel chain that created a Social Media program that involves hiring a person to live at the hotel with all the benefits included, in exchange for sharing the experience on Social Media. The test run of this campaign was in 2021, and it was scheduled to be repeated in 2022 (@Tuiblueislacristina, 2022).

In the earliest stages of Social Media, most research publications addressed the general aspects of these media, in relation to human needs and behaviours (Van Dijck 2013). As Social Media began to branch out into various industries, the need for its effective management prompted a wide range of studies, specific to each of the affected sectors (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2018). According to the authors, the Hotel and Tourism Industry has been widely explored regarding its relation to Social Media, with a recent focus on

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[13] ©1996 – 2022 Marriott International, Inc. All rights reserved. Marriott Proprietary Information
[14] 2022, Tutiplen https://www.instagram.com/tuiblueislacristina/

specific applications, which reshaped the way tourism Businesses interact with clients. Among a growing number of these applications, TripAdvisor, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were found to dominate the sector (Mašić & Kosar, 2016; Sanliöz, Özgen & Kozak, 2015; Hsu, 2012; Villa, 2014; Smith & Anderson, 2018).

2.3 Review of Studies Related to Social Media and Hotel Management

The following section contains a review of several studies that explore the relationship between Social Media and hotels. Each study approached the topic from a different perspective, due to the varied locations, sizes, managerial styles and categories of the hotels assessed.

The reviews are organised chronologically. By reviewing them in order, the reader can gain a better grasp of how the topic has evolved over time, as well as which innovations were becoming adapted over the years. Moreover, the findings will substantiate the case study performed for this thesis. As a result, a more in-depth understanding of the implications of Social Media Management for budget hotels will be gained.

Study 1: "How Travellers use online and Social Media channels to make Hotel-Choice Decisions. McCarthy, Stock & Verma, 2010"

In this study, researchers attempted to "explore the impact of Social Media on evolving customer preferences within the hospitality Industry" (McCarthy, Stock & Verma, 2010). More specifically, to obtain the data on where customers searched for accommodation, and in case it was online, from which sources, and how they interacted with those sites. The survey participants were a small number of academics and industry experts, and in addition, a nationwide online survey was carried out in the United States (McCarthy, Stock & Verma, 2010).

The results concluded that there was different behaviour between customers planning a business trip versus those planning a leisure trip. Customers who travelled for business purposes relied primarily on their companies' recommendations and 40% chose accommodation recommended by their organisations. On the other hand, leisure travellers asked friends and relatives for advice, but the results showed that a significant number of these travellers chose search engines such as Google and Yahoo, as well as booking websites such as Expedia and Kayak, for their primary information sources (McCarthy, Stock & Verma, 2010).

In terms of gender behaviour, results showed that women were more likely to consult reviews on TripAdvisor and more likely to read both professional and customer reviews than men (McCarthy, Stock & Verma, 2010).

All traveller categories showed a different Social Media usage pattern depending on the destination planning phase: In the early phases, the majority of customers used online search engines; in the middle phases, they used hotel brand websites, online travel agencies, and reviews from TripAdvisor predominated; hotel brand websites and online travel agencies were preferred for finalising the Bookings (McCarthy, Stock & Verma, 2010). The results obtained by this study provided descriptive insights into customers' preferences for information sources when choosing accommodation at that time.

Study 2: "Hotel Websites, Web 2.0, Web 3.0 and online direct marketing: The case study of Austria. Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013"

The purpose of this research was to measure and compare the online presence and marketing activities of two sets of hotels: large hotels on one hand, and the smallest hotels and hotel chains in Austria on the other. In order to perform this research, data about all the hotels in Austria was collected from various sources such as TripAdvisor and Google Places; a random sample was then selected and 75% were three to five star hotels (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013). The research also ventured into Web 3.0 area, an aspect that will not be addressed here due to the nature of this thesis.

To obtain results, researchers measured the usage of Facebook, Google+, HolidayCheck, Instagram, Pinterest, TripAdvisor and several other platforms that represented the main Social Media channels related to hotels at the time. The findings uncovered that 53% of the hotels were already exploiting opportunities offered by Web2.0, and their websites contained links to one of more of their Social Media channels; moreover, 68% of the active ones were linking their page to Facebook, of which 42% were three-star hotels and 59% were four or five-star hotels (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013).

On the contrary, the results showed that 1 and 2-star hotels were significantly less responsive to the development of new web technologies. This was due to the nature of these venues and their limited budget, which implied that higher involvement was needed to provide adequate on-site service quality (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013).

60

The study also concluded that most hotels' websites showed substantial room for improvement regarding the usage of the latest online tools, strategies and technologies made for increasing visibility on search engines, such as Google (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013). For future studies, the researchers noted that the sample should be bigger and should include all of Europe, rather than only Austria (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013).

Study 3: "Social Media Marketing in hotel companies: case study of an innovative approach to customer relationship management via Facebook at Maistra Inc. Croatia by Tiganj and Alerić, 2013"

Maistra Group is a hospitality company that runs hotels, resorts and camping sites. The intention of this group's study was to determine if there was any difference between user engagement at Maistra's corporate Facebook fan page and the individual camping sites' pages (Tiganj & Alerić ,2013).

At the time of the research, Maistra Group was a leading hotel company in Rovinj and Vrsar, Istria, and its Social Media activities were managed by an independent marketing department. This department was a back office entity without direct contact with customers. In order to gain a more intimate response from the guests, the Marketing Management team instructed the Entertainment staff to personally engage in conversations via Facebook with the guests (Tiganj & Alerić ,2013). Interestingly, this indicates that Social Media was still seen as a leisure activity at the time.

The metrics considered for the study were: number of people sharing the page content; instances of linking the page externally; posting to the page's wall; liking, commenting, or sharing a post; answering to a question posted; mentioning someone; and photo-tagging, among others. This was measured over a period of one year (Tiganj & Alerić, 2013).

The results obtained demonstrated that Facebook fan pages of Maistra's individual facilities were more engaging than those of Maistra's corporate Facebook page (Tiganj & Alerić, 2013). The reason behind this was that, while the fan pages of the individual facilities offered information related to the organisation and details about events, they also provided engaging social content. Even though the Corporate Page included the exact

same useful information, the input that was made from the front office staff proved to be significantly more engaging for the public (Tiganj & Alerić ,2013).

Maistra Group's study emphasised one of the main mistakes related to managing Social Media in hotels, which was the evident lack of professionalism and an absence of effective work delegation. Typically, Social Media is performed as an extra task by any employee willing to do it, which can be seen in most of the case studies that this thesis addresses, including the one performed for the thesis itself.

Study 4: "Selling Rooms Online: The use of Social Media and Online Travel Agents. Inversini & Masiero, 2014"

Seeing that the literature at the time suggested that Social Media could directly encourage online bookings for hotels, Inversini & Masiero (2014) decided to test this relationship in their region of operation. The researchers collected data by sending online questionnaires to hoteliers in the Ticina (Inversini & Masiero, 2014) and the results showed that 79.4% of the hotel reservations were truly made either online or mediated by the Internet (via email, hotel website, etc.). Booking.com was responsible for 51.2% of the bookings.

The study found a significant positive effect from being present on Booking.com and on Social Media for online sales. It also showed that this relation was evident to the hoteliers, due to their sales records (Inversini & Masiero, 2014). In addition, as the study suggested, hoteliers perceived that the Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) such as Booking.com benefited more from the venues' Social Media presence than vice versa, and that active Social Media presence was essential for successful hotel operations (Inversini & Masiero, 2014). It was demonstrated that an effective Social Media strategy could result in an increase of hotel occupancy, whereas Booking.com generated traffic that was purely demand-driven (Inversini & Masiero, 2014).

For the study limitations, the researchers cautioned that the results were confined to the destination under study and that further research in different geographic locations and tourist contexts should be carried out (Inversini & Masiero, 2014).

Study 5: "The Marketing effectiveness of Social Media in the hotel industry: A comparison of Facebook and Twitter. Leung, Bai, and Stahura, 2015 ".

In this research, two social media sites – Facebook and Twitter – were tested with an aim of assessing the effectiveness of Social Media marketing for hotels. The platforms were specifically selected by the researchers for being the most useful and most used tools for marketing purposes (Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015).

The research method was an online survey and the results showed that a positive experience on a hotel's Social Media channel significantly influenced the attitude about the hotel brand, furthermore stimulating an intention to make a reservation (Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015). The study also concluded that if a hotel was to achieve a favourable attitude toward its social media page, the customers experience had to be enhanced by making the social media pages more interesting, appealing, and informative; ideally, the page should be an experience in itself (Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015). In addition, this study concluded that different social media sites shared the same marketing mechanisms, and that same marketing strategies could be used on different sites (interestingly, the case study performed for this thesis found data that contradict these particular findings). As a result, Leung, Bai, and Stahura (2015) suggested that the only significant factors were the customer experience and the brand building. In a similar way as in the previous studies in this summary, the researchers suggested that more hotel brands and social media sites should be studied in further research.

Study 6: "Social Media and Hotel E-Marketing in Iran: The case of Parsian International Hotel. Nasihatkon, Kheiri and Miralbell, 2016"

For this study, the relationship between the use of Social Media, blogs and community content was explored on one hand, and managing the electronic marketing of Parsian Hotels on the other (Nasihatkon, Kheiri & Miralbell, 2016).

Quantitative data was collected through a survey of the Marketing Department members of the Parsian Hotels Corp, and a questionnaire was handed out to the marketing officers, aimed at assessing their usage of different platforms (Nasihatkon, Kheiri & Miralbell, 2016). The data obtained singled out Facebook as the most popular choice, with 68% of

marketers using it for over 10 hours a day. On the opposite side of the spectrum were personal blogs that showed minimal engagement (Nasihatkon, Kheiri & Miralbell, 2016). The study also concluded that the use of social media, content communities and blogs, had a direct and positive influence on the electronic marketing success. Most significantly, it was demonstrated that extensive use of Social Media led to a better understanding of the customers, and that the use of social media was the single most influential variable in Parsian Hotel electronic marketing (Nasihatkon, Kheiri & Miralbell, 2016).

The researchers proposed that designing a website where to share videos and photos, as well as to chat, tag and have a circle of friends, could increase the users' desire for online shopping and would allow the hotel's marketers to define a more focused marketing plan, as well as a more qualified relationship with their customers (Nasihatkon, Kheiri & Miralbell, 2016). For the study limitations, the researchers mentioned that investigation was conducted in a specific hotel class. Consequently, lower star accommodation venues needed to be studied.

Study 7: "The Influence of Social Media on the Consumers' Hotel Decision Journey. Varkaris and Neuhofer, 2017"

For this Research, social media users in the United Kingdom were interviewed. The participants were asked to compare the way they researched hotels before Social Media existed with the methods they used through Social Media (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

The results demonstrated that friends and family, travel guides and hotel websites were consulted the most before Social Media (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017); TripAdvisor, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube dominated at the time of the study (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). In addition, consumers preferred to combine different channels in order to benefit from a wider range of diverse user generated content, which came from travellers who had already visited the place, explored the hotels, and provided objective and authentic reviews. Even though websites were still used for hotel research, Social Media was preferred over traditional sources, as it gave more genuine insights into cleanliness, location and proximity to places. Additionally, Social Media platforms were perceived as convenient and easy to skim through (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

The majority of the participants demonstrated a tendency to trust Social Media content, but there was a level of suspicion that some of it may be created by companies to improve their status, or by competitors to create a bad image of the other companies. Regardless of the negative aspects of using social media, the participants felt that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

It is also interesting to point out that, at that time, the level of trust in Social Media content was already being tested and found to vary: the most trusted content was the one generated by families and friends; the second most trusted was the one coming from other users; and the least trusted material was the one clearly coming from companies (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). The results also revealed that, even though disliking Social Media content did not necessarily lead to excluding a hotel, it did generate hesitance; on the other hand, a lack or non-existence of content played a critical role in the selection process of a hotel and in the possible absence of confidence (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). The study demonstrated that hotels needed to assume the importance of Social Media content and digital strategies (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

As for the limitations of the study, the researchers recommended testing the influence of specific Social Media channels and their respective content on the overall consumer decision journey process (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

Study 8: "Hotel Social Media Metrics: The ROI Dilemma. Michopoulou and Moisa, 2019"

This study aimed to find out if hoteliers were mostly measuring success of their Social Media strategies by mere numbers of followers, or focused their efforts on obtaining a return of investment (ROI) from Social Media marketing programmes (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

Field experts in Social Media with strategic and operational exposure were selected for interviews; all were managers of large hotels in the Greater Manchester area (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). From the participants, only 7% had an exclusive Social Media position within a hotel chain, whereas the rest managed it as an addition to their duties. More specifically, they were often in charge of other operational tasks, such as sales and guest services. As demonstrated by this research, it was not feasible for those

professionals to take full control of the hotels' Social Media programmes, and as a consequence, the accounts often remained inactive, or were managed by multiple individuals. This resulted in a lack of consistent content on the channels, thus fragile Social Media presence (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

The research showed that a growing demand for a more strategic approach towards Social Media was urgent, as well as a continuous search for better practices. It was also demonstrated that Social Media management was still not included in the overall business goals; as a matter of fact, the interviewees revealed that the average percentage of marketing investment directed toward Social Media was 0%.

Facebook and Twitter were the main platforms used by the hoteliers in Manchester, but Instagram, LinkedIn, Periscope and Tripadvisor were also mentioned (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). The respondents stated that, due to the lack of resources available, spreading over various social media platforms was not beneficial, and that presence on fewer platforms rendered better performance and content management. In addition, they agreed that the success on social media was measured through customer engagement, new followers, new content response, user interaction, feedback and regular conversations (Ryals, 2008; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

For future research, Michopoulou and Moisa, (2019) suggested focusing on a more diverse sample and considering the upper management's point of view. In addition, the efficacy and suitability of particular social media platforms, as well as their applicability as marketing tools, should be discussed.

2.4 COVID-19 and its Impact on Social Media and Tourism

As COVID-19 pandemic occurred during the case study, it affected the results and the direction that this thesis was taking. For that reason, a brief description of the pandemic is provided.

In January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared an international health emergency. By March 11, global pandemic was announced (Williams, 2021). The number of infected individuals was increasing rapidly and as a result, the World Health Organisation recommended a social distancing policy with a goal of reducing the spread of the infection (WHO, 2020). Activities that involved gathering of people or unnecessary contact between individuals who did not live together were restricted (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020). To ensure that this was fulfilled, governments eventually implemented strict lockdown policies, which implied a temporary closure of all facilities and public areas not related to food and health services. In addition, free movement between regions and countries was restricted (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020). The Tourism and Hospitality Industry was at a direct risk, since it depends entirely on human movement and the world was in a lockdown (Jaipuria, Parida & Ray, 2021).

It is understood that tourism is directly or indirectly affected by numerous external factors, such as politics, economics, and environmental concerns (Backer & Ritchie, 2017; Cakar, 2018). The industry was devastated by the COVID-19 crisis (Jaipuria, Parida & Ray, 2021). The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates a tourism-related loss of approximately $2,4 trillion in 2020 and a loss of up to 75 million jobs (WTTC, 2024). Apart from the damage that was caused by these factors – with the online media and social media being the main sources of information at the time of the pandemic – the topic of COVID-19 temporarily eliminated positive feelings towards tourism. In addition to movement restrictions, health concerns, and economic difficulties, the potential traveller was receiving extremely negative tourism-related imagery. The romanticism of travelling was replaced with heightened risk perception and an absence of a desire to travel (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020).

In addition to health concerns, COVID-19 posed financial and psychological risks. There were scenarios where holiday makers had to pay hospital fees and PCRs unexpectedly, to extend a stay due to the lockdown; or to miss flights, bookings, and have entire trips cancelled. These situations sometimes had high financial and emotional repercussions. In

67

addition, being trapped at a destination, or involved in risky behaviours related to the pandemics, caused significant stress to families and friends of those who travelled at the time (Chinazzi et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2012).

COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated both potential benefits and risks stemming from Social Media communication (Kim et al., 2020; Mayer et al 2021; Zhai, Luo & Wang, 2020; Zhou, Ibrahim & Mohamed, 2022). It was shown that COVID-19 has ultimately enhanced consumers' use of digital media, who often preferred it over other communication channels that were insufficiently transparent regarding the pandemic (Pachucki, Grohs & Scholl-Grissemann, 2022), and this situation unexpectedly made users less hostile towards Social Media Marketing strategies as well (Moorman & McCarthy, 2021; Platon, 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Social Media played a crucial role in disseminating lockdown policies and was a rich and valuable source of all COVID-19 related information. The overall interest in Social Media increased notably over the course of the pandemic (Ali Taha, et al., 2021).

2.5 Social Media Marketing in Budget Accommodation

From previous sections, a lack of related literature on Social Media Marketing for the Hotel Businesses was particularly noticeable, and effective strategies for Social Media management were not extensively investigated. To overcome this deficiency in literature, the present research aims at bridging the Social Media Marketing gap that exists between upscale hotels and budget accommodation venues (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013), by delivering practical guidelines that budget enterprises can follow, in order to increase their Social Media presence.

Particularly, this research aims to evaluate the effects that Social Media can have on a budget hotel. This study provides budget accommodations with a good understanding of why Social Media is beneficial for the budget accommodation sector; how they can gain popularity in Social Media; and make right decisions when applying the same or different strategic principles to different SM applications.

2.5.1 Methodology

For the purpose of this thesis, Social Media efforts and activities of a budget hotel were examined in two stages: the first stage was in 2019, on a daily basis, for two months; the second stage was in 2022, also on a daily basis, for the same period. The second stage was not in the initial plans. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes that the Tourism Industry suffered, it was decided that the research for this thesis should be repeated, in order to gain a more up-to-date perspective. Moreover, upon detecting the impact of major events of the SM activity, the second period of the study was extended to include the Feria de Sevilla – one of Seville's most prominent festivals.

In order to achieve that goal, the study adopted a descriptive research design and relied on primary data analysis, and in addition, it was guided by the literature review on the topic. Quantitative data was acquired from the statistical services provided by Facebook and Instagram over a period of 2 months (16/02/2019-16/04/2019) at a budget accommodation venue in Seville. Various global events happened between 2019 and 2022, more specifically the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected much of the tourism

industry. For this reason, the same 2-month period between February and April, but in this case for the year 2022, was analysed and later compared with the results obtained in 2019, in order to observe the possible effects of the pandemic.

For both periods of the research (2019 and 2022), the Social Media tasks were carried out by an employee of the hotel. In 2019, these tasks were delegated to one of the receptionists, who was also a photographer. All Social Media responsibilities were performed as an extra task. For the second part of the research in 2022, due to the pandemic, the number of staff members going to work was limited and multitasking was a must; therefore, the work related to Social Media was suspended.

Seville, as a destination, is well-known in Spain and abroad, with a steady increase in popularity and in tourism arrivals[15]. There was an observable growth of the budget accommodation sector shortly before the pandemic (Visitasevilla, 2023). In 2018, the city was named the World's "Best Destination for your Travel Plans Next Year"' by Lonely Planet Magazine. In late 2018, Seville Hosted the European Film Awards, followed by Goya Awards (Spain's most prominent film award festival), the WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council) 2019, and the MTV Awards. UEFA Europa League 2022 also took place in Seville; Red Hot Chili peppers performed in June 2022; and Dior Cruise Collection presentation 2022 was hosted (VisitaSevilla2022). In 2023, the Latin Grammy Awards were held in Seville; this was the first time that this event took place outside of the United States (Visitasevilla, 2023).

This study refers to "Posts" and "Stories" throughout, which at the moment of the study are considered to be the motor of Social Media. Posts refer to any type of material that was shared, whether it was a photograph, a message, or a video recording, whereas stories are usually temporary updates that combine the rest of the posts in an attractive way or create new promotional material that draws attention to the profile[16] (West, 2021).

Particularly in tourism, photographs with short messages have been among the most commonly used type of posts, and more recently reels (Villa, 2014; Radzi et al., 2014), as this type of content combines the informative aspects of micro-blogging (such as that seen in Twitter) and the appeal of spontaneous traveller's expressions. Stories appeared on Instagram platform in 2016, achieving immediate success (Cyca, 2018; Aida, 2020).

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[15] www.visitasevilla.es

[16] https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-stories

This feature allows users to post groups of related photos, videos, or live appearances, knowing that the publication will inevitably vanish in 24h (Read, 2023). By 2017, the possibility of saving the stories was integrated into the application (Instagram, 2023). Although not as prevalent as on Instagram, Facebook stories also provide potential for promotion (Aida, 2020).

Table 2.1 Insights tool's main metrics

Facebook	Instagram
Most Engaged post	Profile Visits
Stories	Reach
New Page Likes	Impressions
New Followers	Followers
Click to website	Following
Page Reach	Number of posts per day
Page View	Stories
Rate Score	Top Locations
Posts	Age Range
Total Likes	Gender
Page Visit	Stories
Total Followers	New Followers

In order to analyse the data collected on Facebook, an integrated statistical research tool called "Facebook Insights" was used. The tool can generate some of the essential categories of data, related to the channel's visitors' behaviour: the "Page Reach" unit refers to the number of people who viewed any of the company's posts, within a selected time period. "Page View" represents the number of times the company's profile page was opened in total; "Most Engaged Post" calculates the number of times people engaged with the company by means of "reactions", "comments", and "shares" of the company's posts. In addition to this data, Facebook also provided counts of "New Page Likes", "New Followers", "Clicks to Website", "Phone Number Clicks", "Clicks to Get Directions", "Page Button Clicks", "Past Posts" that shows engagement and likes, and "Total Likes".

Facebook's host company "Meta" also offers Meta Businesses Suite, which is a Facebook tool that helps companies organise and manage their businesses (Meta, 2024). It was observed that in 2022, there were two metrics that changed: "Page Likes" became "Followers", and "Page Views" became "Page Visits", as seen in Meta Business Suite (Meta Business Suite, 2023)[17].

Similarly, Instagram provides its own statistics research engine, under the name of Instagram Insights. The provided data sets closely resemble Facebook's Categories. The user has the possibility to: obtain information about the number of "Profile Visits" within a period of time; find out about the "Reach", which represents the number of Instagram users that viewed any of the content; observe behaviour related to "Feed Posts", "Instagram Stories", "Promotions", and so on. In addition to monitoring user behaviour, it is also possible to obtain information regarding demographic profiles of the engaged populations, including "Top Location" (by city and country), "Gender", and "Age Range" (general age range, as well as age range per gender). The main metrics referred to for the purposes of this investigation are shown in Table 2.1.

2.5.2 Results

The data was collected on a daily basis, rendering two sets of results: results from 2019, which will also be referred to as Phase One, and those from 2022, which will also be referred to as Phase Two. A descriptive analysis of the metrics referred in Table 2.1 is presented for Facebook and Instagram, being analysed in each phase, and also providing a comparison between both phases. Additionally, possible effects that each application can have on the other will be discussed.

Over the course of the 2-month research in 2019, a total of twenty-one posts were published on the hotel's Facebook page, and twenty on its Instagram page. Compared to the general agreement that one post per day should be the minimum, this was a third of the desirable posts (Social Report, 2018). By the end of the research, the number of followers had increased in both applications. In the case of the two-month period of the year 2022, the research rendered insufficient data, due to the COVID-19 related drop in

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[17] The company's own analytics software that assists users in managing both Facebook and Instagram Social Media activities and marketing campaigns

Social Media (SM) activity – no posts were published on either of the hotel's Social Media accounts, except for seven stories that appeared on Instagram. In the extended period of the second stage, as an exception, one Instagram post was published during the Feria festival, as well as two additional Instagram stories. The reason for the extended period was clarified in the Methodology section.

At the beginning of the two-month research in 2019 (Phase One), the Facebook page had 980 total likes, whereas that number was 1019 at the end. This can be seen in Table 2.2[18]. In 2019, the total number of followers of the Facebook page could not be measured[19], as that metric was being replaced in Facebook Insights; instead, the total number of Page Likes was utilised. In 2022, the metric Total Followers was introduced. For February 2022, the number of Total Followers for the Facebook page was 1.076 (Table 2.3). The results for the Phase Two showed that the number of Total Followers had a tendency to grow and experienced an increase by the end. On the other hand, the total number of Page Likes was 1079 and it fluctuated over that period, with a tendency to decrease. The period ended with the same number of Page Likes (Table 2.3), whereas the followers started at 1.076 and fluctuated, with a tendency to increase, numbering 1.099 at the end of the period. The reason for this effect was the transition in the metrics from Page Likes to Followers that Page Likes were replaced by the Total Followers metric.

The hotel's Instagram account had 270 Followers in the beginning of Phase One, which rose to 375 by the end of the phase (Table 2.4). The same effect could be seen in Phase Two, which started with 584, and by the end the account had 599 followers (Table 2.5). Interestingly, despite the inactivity of the account due to the pandemic, there was a continued growth during the period not covered by the research (April 2019 to February 2022). It is also important to mention that, due to the pandemic, the hotel was closed from March 2020 until July 2021 and during this period both social media profiles were inactive; yet, an increase in the number of followers was seen from the data.

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[18] The Complete tables can be viewed in the Appendix AI-AIV
[19] In January 2021, Facebook Page Likes were replaced with Followers; the company stated: "When someone likes your Page, they'll also automatically follow it".

Table 2.2 Daily evolution on Facebook Metrics: February-April 2019

	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	...	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr	17 Apr
Total Likes	980	982	983	983	983	984	985	986	...	999	1007	1007	1011	1012	1013	1015	1015	1015	1015
Page Reach	33	74	60	538	105	195	65	20	...	150	389	57	223	376	251	195	85	92	203
Page Views	2	13	4	6	11	4	12	10	...	6	10	3	15	9	5	8	5	8	4
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	...	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note: For practical reasons, only data from the beginning and the end of the period analysed are displayed (first and last week of the period). "..." refers to the period not displayed: 23-Feb to 9-Apr. The complete data collection is included in Appendix AI

Table 2.3 Daily evolution on Facebook Metrics: February-April 2022

	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	...	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr	17 Apr
Total Likes	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	...	1076	1076	1076	1077	1078	1078	1079	1079	1079	1079
Total Followers	1076	1075	1075	1074	1074	1074	1074	1074	...	1099	1099	1099	1099	1099	1099	1099	1099	1099	1099
Page Reach	15	14	14	8	8	14	13	10	...	9	2	3	0	4	2	5	2	0	2
Page Views	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	...	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	...	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note: For practical reasons, only data from the beginning and the end of the period analysed are displayed (first and last week of the period). "..." refers to the period not displayed: 23-Feb to 9-Apr. The complete data collection is included in Annex AII

Table 2.4 Daily Evolution on Instagram Metrics: February-April 2019

	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	...	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr	17 Apr
Followers	270	272	282	281	288	289	286	286	...	346	351	351	354	358	357	354	352	358	352
Profile Visits	128	123	130	117	70	61	76	76	...	103	102	96	81	57	57	55	63	65	61
Reach	312	315	319	328	284	270	287	287	...	256	291	271	265	295	295	302	285	285	300
Impressions	1266	1133	1150	1015	860	847	847	1198	...	843	1012	776	846	1344	1344	1444	1193	1193	1496

Note: For practical reasons, only data from the beginning and the end of the period analysed are displayed (first and last week of the period). "..." refers to the period not displayed: 23-Feb to 9-Apr. The complete data collection is included in Annex AIII

Table 2.5 Daily Evolution on Instagram Metrics: February-April 2022

	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	...	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr	17 Apr
Followers	584	584	584	584	584	584	584	584	...	590	590	590	588	588	588	589	589	588	587
Profile Visits	1	1	0	0	4	0	2	2	...	1	5	5	5	6	1	5	7	4	5
Reach	7	4	1	1	5	4	5	5	...	4	4	5	132	157	28	122	162	57	5
Impressions	21	13	2	2	114	11	22	53	...	16	33	34	145	192	51	629	890	267	1496

Note: For practical reasons, only data from the beginning and the end of the period analysed are displayed (first and last week of the period). "..." refers to the period not displayed: 23-Feb to 9-Apr. The complete data collection is included in Annex AIV

To provide a clear picture on the evolution of followers in Facebook and Instagram in the two periods and for comparative purposes, graphical illustrations are displayed to this end. As seen in Figure 2.1, which represents the number of Facebook "Total Likes" and Instagram followers in Phase One, there was a tendency for both metrics to grow.

Figure 2.1 Comparison of the number of Followers, Facebook and Instagram 2019
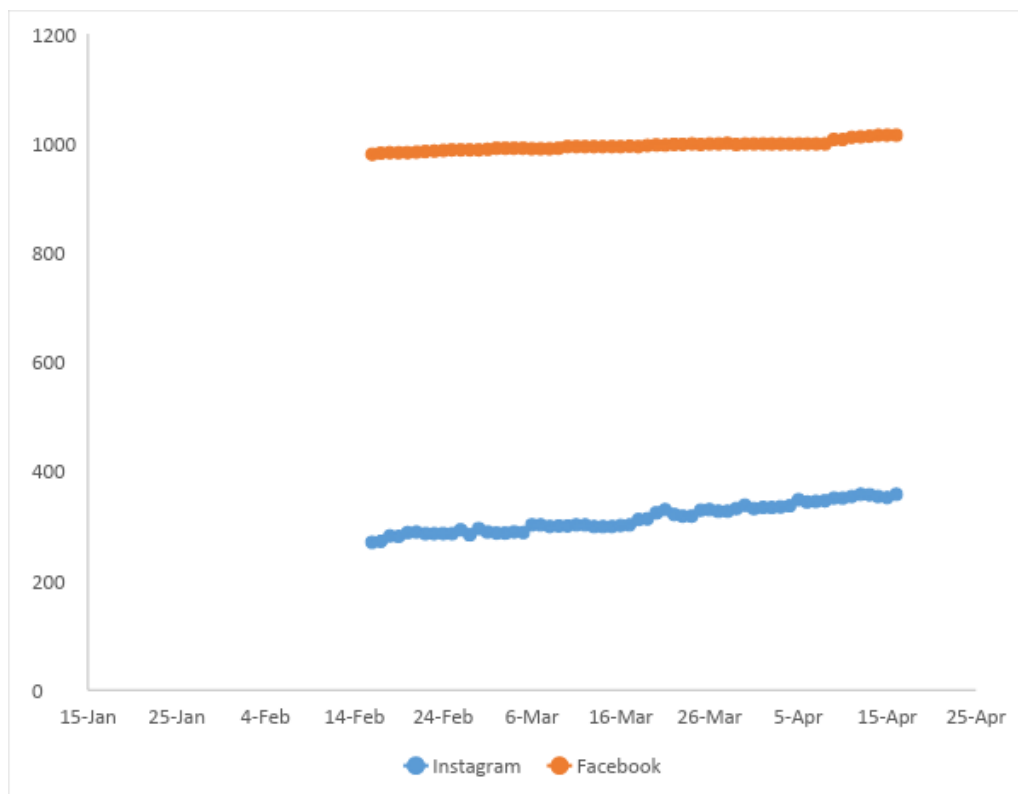
On the other hand, when looking at the evolution of the daily variation in the numbers of followers and likes, it can be observed that the number of followers on Instagram fluctuated more than on Facebook, having its highest peak on March 6 and the lowest on February 24, and between March 16 and 26 (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Variations in the number of Followers, Facebook and Instagram 2019
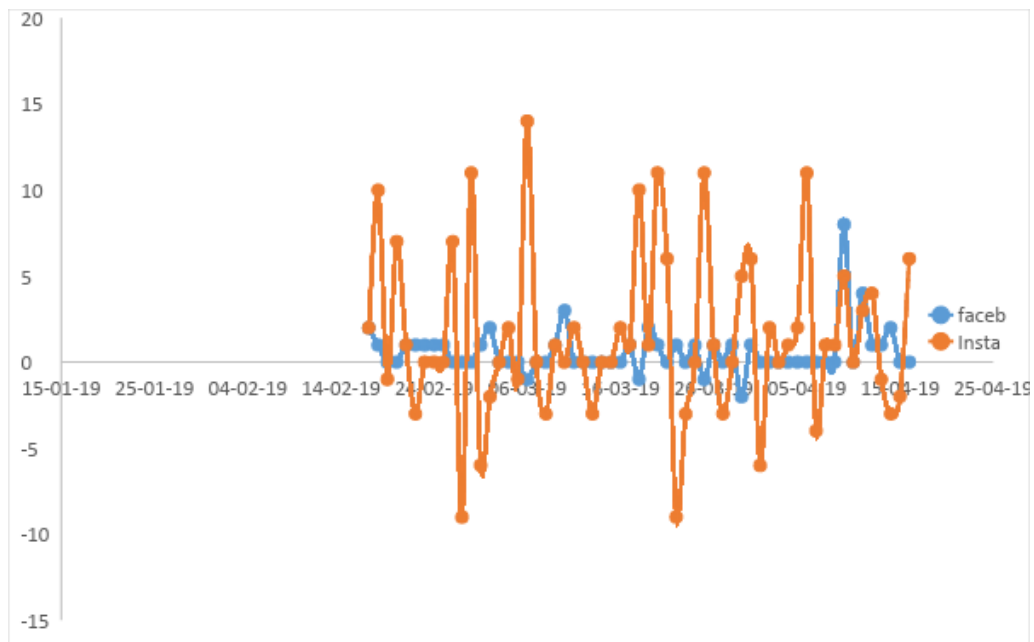
Figure 2.3, which depicts Phase Two (year 2022), shows tendencies related to the numbers of followers for both Social Media profiles. The numbers were stagnant, with a slight increase from April 8. If the evolution per day is observed, it does not show the same pattern as in Phase One, due to the inactivity of the accounts. In addition, even though Instagram showed more fluctuations than Facebook, both demonstrated an insignificant level of change.

Figure 2.3 Comparison of the number of Followers, Facebook and Instagram 2022
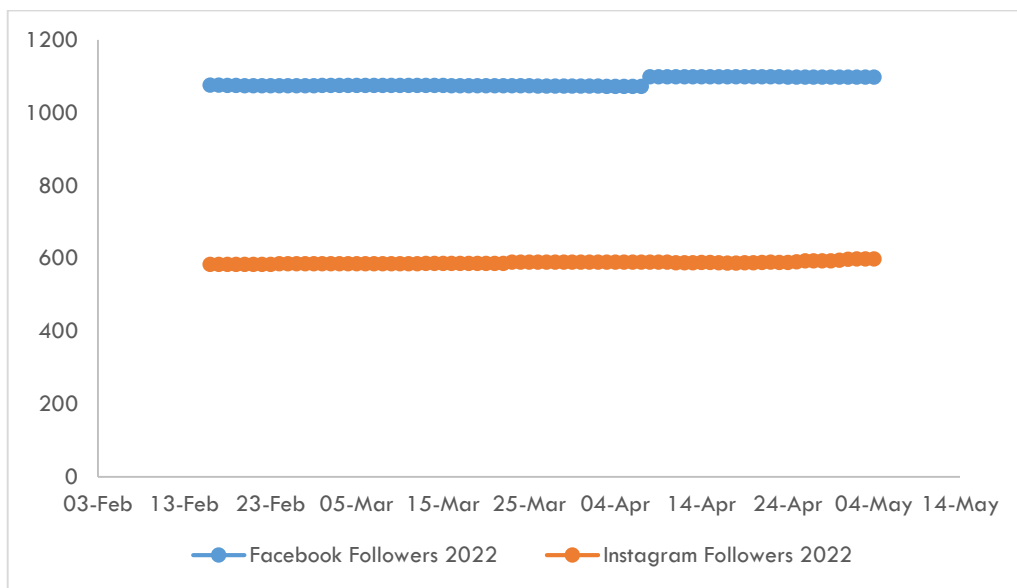
When focusing on the daily variation on the number of followers, the only significant observation was that Facebook had a noticeable peak on April 8, which was Viernes de Dolores[20] – an important event related to Holy Week, and the first one after the pandemic (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4 Variations in the numbers of Followers, Facebook and Instagram 2022
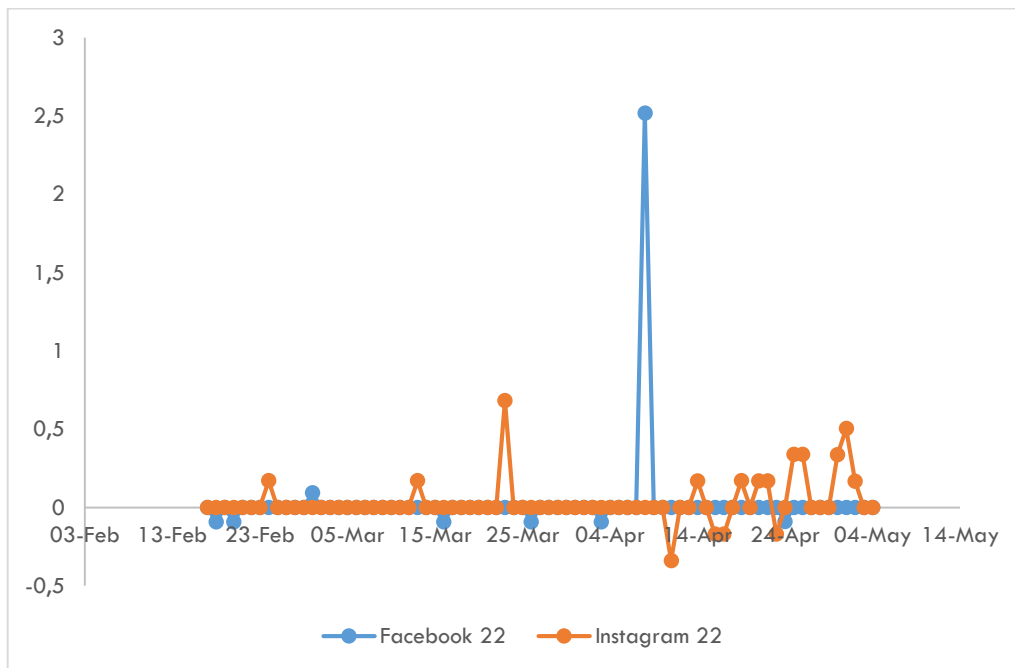
Figure 2.5 represents a comparison between the number of followers and likes on Facebook for both phases. In Phase One (year 2019), the numbers were steady, with a tendency to grow. Phase Two (year 2022) was similar, although the tendency to grow was slightly less perceivable than in Phase One. On the other hand, in Phase Two, a peak could be observed on April 8, which was the beginning of the Holy Week celebration after the pandemic.

Figure 2.5 Comparison of the number of Followers, Facebook 2019/2022
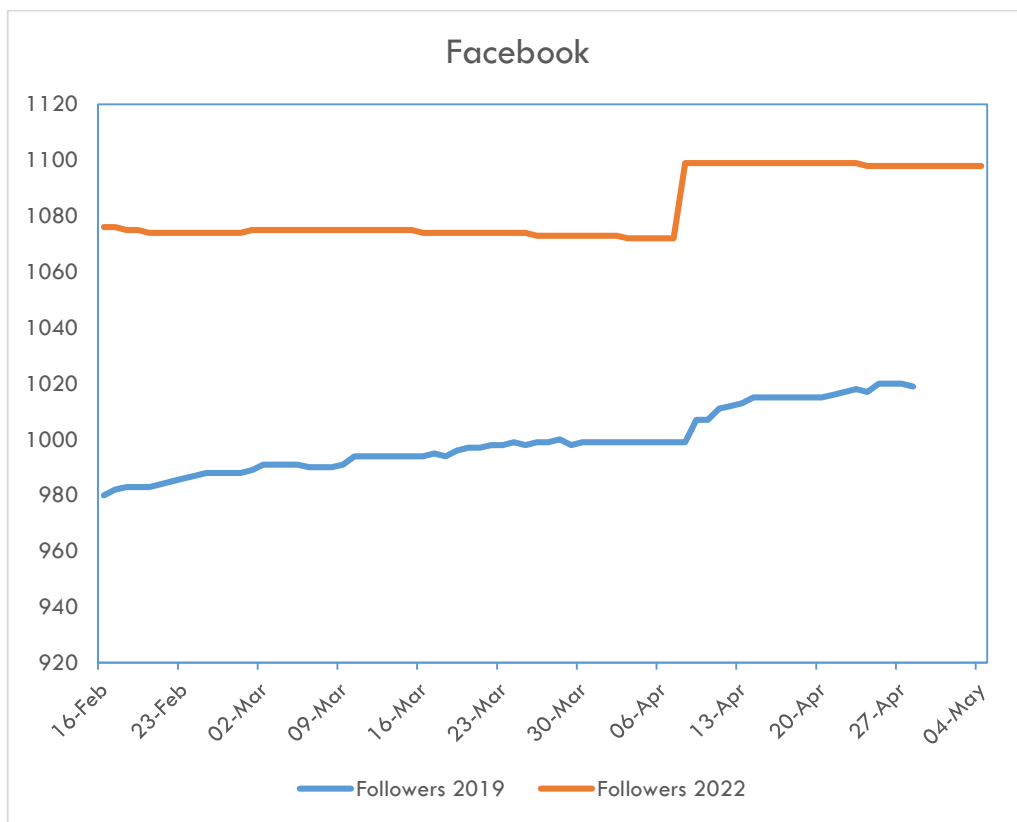
Figure 2.6 shows the daily variation rate in the numbers of followers for Facebook, for both phases. In 2019, it fluctuated more than in 2022; the April peak was noticeable too, but not nearly as significant as the one in 2022.

Figure 2.6 Variation in the number of Followers, Facebook 2019/2022
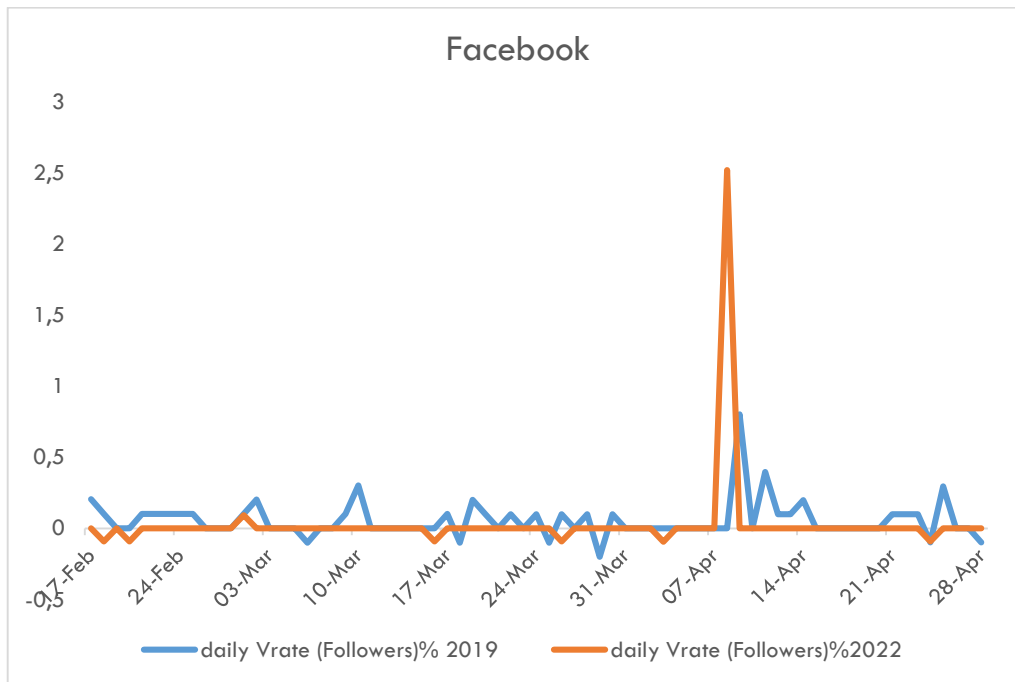
Figure 2.7 compares the numbers of followers on Instagram in both phases. Phase One (year 2019) showed a noticeable tendency to grow – slightly more pronounced than in Phase Two (year 2022), where an increase in the number of followers for the Instagram profile was almost non-existent. Figure 2.8 shows daily variations in the numbers of followers for Instagram, for both phases. The 2019 phase showed significantly more fluctuations than the 2022 phase, with considerably more pronounced peaks and drops.

Figure 2.7 Comparison of the number of Followers, Instagram 2019/2022
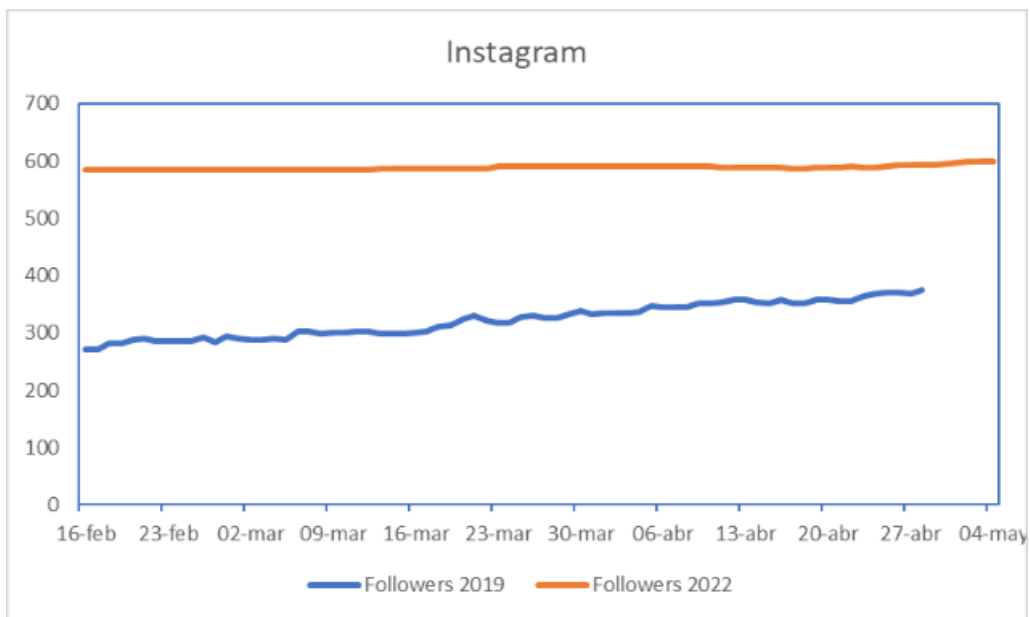
Figure 2.8 Daily variations in the number of Followers, Instagram 2019/2022
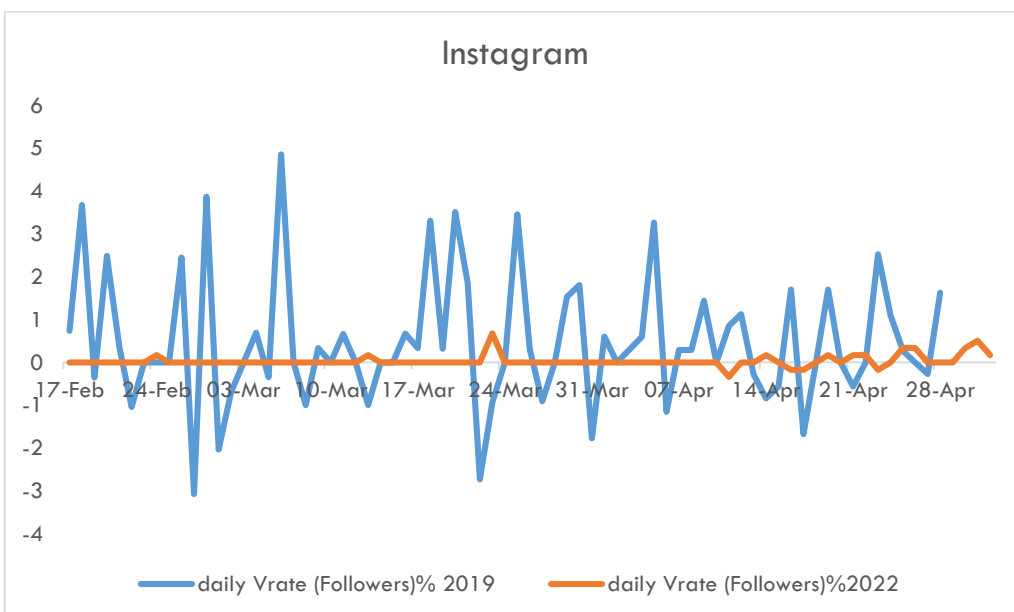
Once the Followers metric has been analysed, it is also relevant to focus on other metrics such as Page Reach and Page Views. Page Reach is a key indicator that shows how many users visualise the content each day, and is linked to building brand awareness, generating leads and increasing sales; analysing Page views plays an important role in increasing visibility and credibility on the platform (Meta, 2023). On Facebook, in Phase One (Table 2.2), both Page Reach and Page Views fluctuated significantly, where the Page Reach was always higher than the Page Views. The highest Page Reach (561) was on March 10, a day after a post of a staff member speaking about her life and the reasons why she chose Seville for her Front Desk internship (Table 2.6; Figure 2.9). That day the hotel's Page views were 13, which was also among the highest of the whole phase. The post was shared twice and had a total of 22 likes, which made it the most liked post of Phase One.

On February 19 there was another peak in the Reach (538). In this case, the Page Views were 6. Such high Reach was probably related to a post that was published the day before, stating that the hotel was chosen as one of the best ones in Seville (Table 2.6; Figure 2.9), since no posts were published on February 19.

For the case of 2022 (Table 2.3) the highest Reach (15) and Page Visits (6) for Facebook were on February 16. On that day there were neither Posts nor Stories on the account. On April 7 and 8, there were 6 Page Visits too, but with a reach of 10 and 9 respectively.

There was one story posted on Facebook in 2019; the day after, Page Reach and Followers increased. In 2022 no Stories were posted. Due to such limited data, no observations will be made about Facebook Stories.

Table 2.6 Most popular posts on Facebook. Period: February to April 2019 and 2022

	Facebook		
	18-February 2019	10-March 2019	15-February to 22 of April 2022
Number of Posts	Best Hostels Seville 2019 in a travel magazine	A photograph of a staff member with a personal story attached	No post published
Stories	No Story published	No Story published	No post published

In the case of Instagram in 2019 (Table 2.4), the metrics to be analysed are Reach and Impressions, which correspond to Facebook's Page Reach and Page Views described above. The Impressions were always higher than the Reach and the Profile Visits; the highest Impressions were recorded on March 15 (1535); the Reach that day was 312, which was among the highest in Phase One, and Profile Visits were 86 – not among the highest of the Phase One. The day before, there was a Post with a photograph of the rooftop garden (Table 2.7; Figure 2.9), with 75 Likes, which likely caused this increase. The highest Reach was 330 on March 21; that day, the impressions were 1302; there was only one Story and no posts published; however, one of the most popular posts (111 Likes) appeared the day before and it was a photograph of friends having a celebration at the hotel's rooftop terrace (Table 2.7; Figure 2.9). The day with the most profile visits (132) was February 16 – one day before the Zurich Marathon[21] took place in the city.

In 2022 (Table 2.5) the highest Impressions on Instagram were 890, on April 16, exactly on the most popular day of the Holy Week celebration ("la Madrugada")[22]. The highest Reach (194) for the period was on April 7 – one day before the Holy Week celebration began. The highest number of Profile Visits (14) was also recorded on April 7; although there were no Posts or Stories published that day, it was several days before the Holy Week celebration. When Phase 2 ended (February to April), it was decided to keep gathering information in order to analyse the activity during Feria de Sevilla, as described in the Methodology section. In this period, it was observed that neither the Reach nor the Impressions were the highest. On the other hand, the profile visits reached their highest value on the 8th of May (20 visits); this was the day that the only post of the study for 2022 was published – a photograph showing decoration for Feria de Sevilla, with the "guest message corner" in focus (the "guest message corner" was an area in the common living room where customers could leave sticky notes, sharing their feelings and experiences at the hotel). This post received only 13 likes and 4 comments (Figure 2.9).

A total of 7 Stories were published on Instagram in Phase Two, in contrast with the 19 that were published in Phase One. The statistical results for Phase One revealed no significant difference in Profile Visits, Reach or Impressions on the day of posting Stories, but there was an increase of Reach and Impressions the day after. During Phase Two, a

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[21] https://www.zurichmaratonsevilla.es/
[22] Thursday night before Holy Friday: it is the most important moment of Holy Week in Seville, when numerous processions can be attended in the city centre, throughout the whole night

84

significant increase in Reach and Impressions could be observed on the day of posting the Story, as well as the day after. There was no significant impact on Profile Visits, apart from an occasional increase.

Table 2.7 Most popular posts on Instagram. Period: February to April 2019 and 2022

	Instagram		
	20-March 2019	02-April 2019	06-April 2022
Number of Posts	A group of friends celebrating	One member of the staff	No post published
Stories	No Story published	Hostel life	Good Morning

Table 2.8 Summary of the most relevant findings from the results drawn from tables and figures

	2022 Period – Similarities with 2019	**2022 Period – Differences from 2019**
Facebook	Number of Followers: grows	Number of followers: growth less perceivable and fluctuates less
	Page Reach higher than Page Views	Less fluctuations between Page Reach and Page Views
	Highest Page View for both periods due to an event in the city	
	Facebook Insights measures Total Likes	Facebook Insights measures Total Followers
Instagram	Number of followers grows	Number of followers: growth less perceivable
	Impressions higher than Reach and higher than Profile Visits	Less fluctuations between Number of Impressions, Reach and Profile Visits
	Highest Profile Visits after a post: friends celebrating	Highest Profile Visits at the time of a city event

Figure 2.9 Most liked photos, Facebook and Instagram 2019/2022
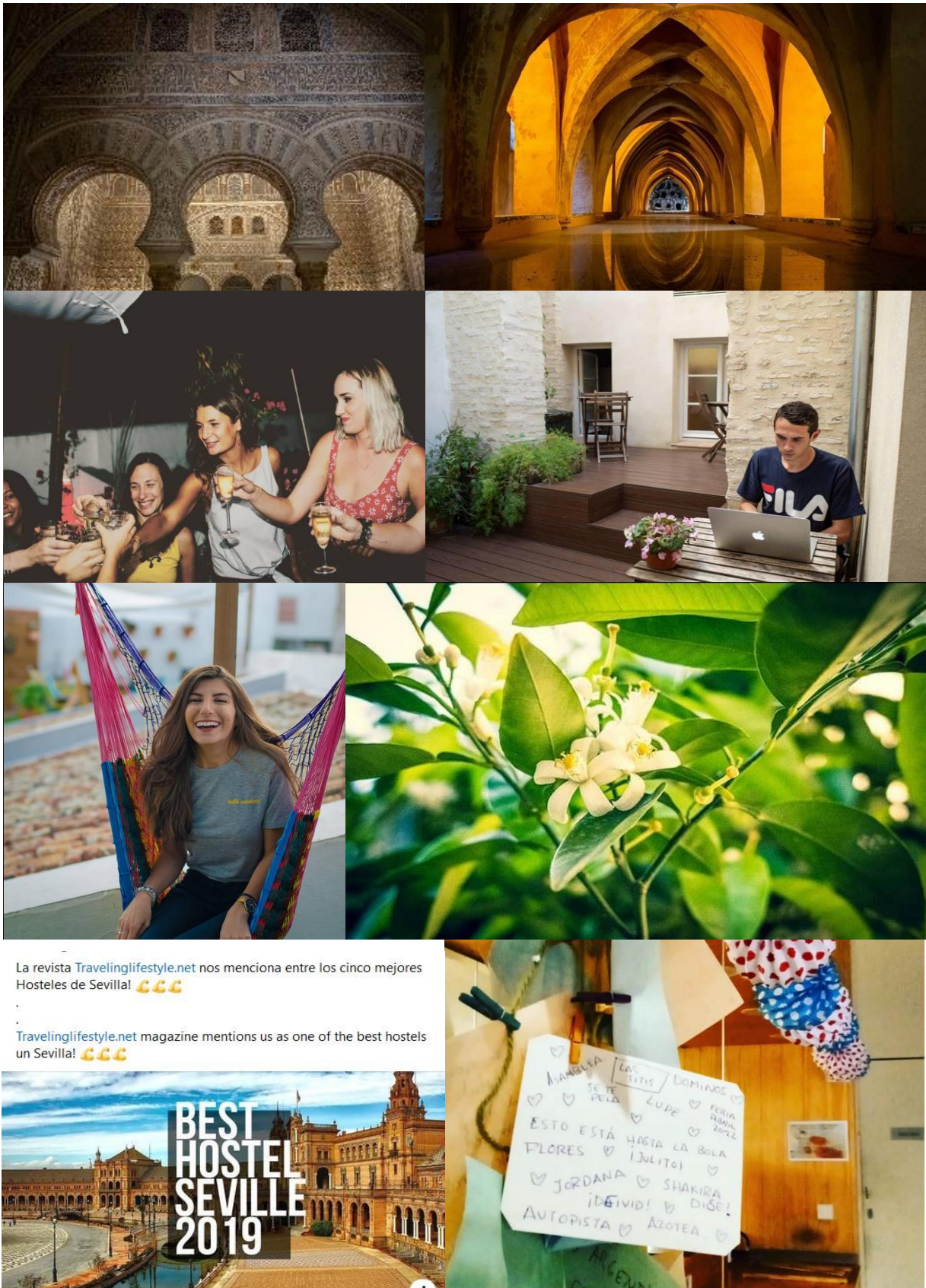
Resource: Social Media Managerial Implications for Budget Accommodation Venues: Use of Social Media Platforms More Effectively and Efficiently. Dominguez Navarro and Gonzalez Rodriguez, 2019

Next, a correlation analysis was conducted, aiming at statistically identifying possible relations between some metrics that were obtained for Facebook and Instagram. In the case of Facebook, it was tested whether Page Reach was associated with Page Views or not, which helped determine whether people who saw a post ended up viewing the page or not. It was also tested if Page Views were related to Page Likes, which gave an insight into the proportion of those visitors who did open the page and decided to Like it. For Instagram, the variables that were compared were Page Reach and Profile Visits (the same as Page Reach and Page Views for Facebook); Impressions and Page Views, which indicates if people who clicked on a post ended up opening the page as well; and Profile Visits and New Followers (the same as Facebook's Page Views and Page Likes). These findings helped understand the behaviour of the followers better, as well as to decide how to shape the strategy differently for the future.

In 2019, as it can be seen in Table 2.9, the attention generated from posts on Facebook showed a weak correlation between Reach and Page Views [correlation (page view, page reach) = 0.2984]. With this finding, it can be concluded that high Reach does not Necessarily have a relation with a high number of Page Views, or in other words, that people who saw a post did not end up opening the page. On the other hand, the number of Page Views demonstrated a moderately positive correlation with the number of new Page Likes [correlation (page view, likes) = 0.5026], which indicates that new Page Likes are related to the number of Page Views, and also means that half of those who viewed the page also clicked Like on it.

In 2022, the same correlation was tested. As mentioned in the Methodology section, there were no posts that year. The correlation between Page Views and Page Reach showed a weak positive correlation [correlation (page view, page reach) = 0.2970], which was slightly lower than the one in 2019. The other correlation which was calculated in order to compare 2019 with 2022 was between Page Views and the number of new Page Likes, and it resulted in a negative weak correlation [correlation (page view, likes) = -0.1475] (Table 2.9), which means that Page Likes decreased, while Page Views increased. As mentioned above, the most probable reason is that in January 2021 Page Likes were replaced with Followers, and Page Views with Page Visits on Facebook (Meta, 2023).

The valid correlation to include in this case would be between Page Views and New Followers [correlation (page visit, New Followers) = 0.4312], showing a similar correlation to the one between page Views and Page Likes in 2019, though lower due to the inactivity of the profile (Table 2.8).

Table 2.9 Correlation of Facebook metrics

	Facebook		
	Reach	New Page Likes	New Followers
Page View 2019	0.2984	0.5026	
Page View 2022	0.2970	-0.1475	
Page Visits 2022			0.4321

In case of Instagram, Table 2.10 shows that Profile Visits and Impressions had a weak positive correlation in 2019 [correlation (profile visit, impressions) = 0.1658], which indicated that Impressions did not lead to Profile Visits, or in other words, that seeing posts generally did not motivate people to open the profile. A weak positive correlation between Reach and Profile Visits was also noted in 2019 [correlation (page reach, profile visit) = 0.3216]. Lastly, a weak correlation between Profile Visits and New Followers was observed in 2019 [correlation (profile visit, new followers) = 0.063], which proved that barely anyone who clicked on the profile ended up becoming a follower, contrary to Facebook.

In 2022, the relation between Profile Visits and Impressions was also positive and more significant [correlation (profile visit, impressions) = 0.3605]; Reach and Profile Visits were moderately correlated [correlation (page reach, profile visit) = 0.4923]; and Profile Visits and New Followers showed an insignificant correlation [correlation (profile visit, new followers) = 0.0835]. Considering that the profile was inactive in 2022, it is likely that the minor increase in all variables is due to the higher number of Instagram users in general, and unrelated to the hotel.

Table 2.10 Correlation of Instagram metrics

	Instagram		
	Page Reach	Impressions	New Followers
Profile Visits 2019	0.3216	0.1658	0.063
Profile Visits 2022	0.4923	0.3605	0.083

In addition to the metrics and correlations described above, additional statistical data was obtained from Facebook and Instagram Insights, among which was time of posting and follower demographic profile, among other; more specific details can be reviewed in tables in the Appendix AI-AIV. This data demonstrated that the most popular time for all posts on Facebook was lunchtime. It should be noted, however, that lunchtime was habitually the most active period of the day for this hotel's page, regardless of what was being posted. The statistical data also revealed that on weekends and holidays the page received significantly more visits than on regular days. This trend was also observed in 2022 before and during holidays or city events, as reviewed above. Unlike Facebook, there was no available data on Instagram Insights regarding the exact time each post was published in 2019; in 2022 this option was implemented, and it could be noted that the most active periods were from lunchtime until the evening, with no difference regarding specific days, possibly due to the lack of content being posted. In 2019, little significance concerning the best time of the day for posting was observed on the Instagram application. Furthermore, the response rate to a post remained similar for that period. Only a slight drop in response was noted between 3:00 am and 6:00 am, whereas a minor increase usually occurred between 15:00 and 21:00 (occasionally until midnight). Regarding particular days of the week, no fluctuations were recorded.

Another significant finding was the low number of Clicks to Website, which showed that not many people reached the hotel's booking engine. However, information about prices and availability was consistently sought through Facebook's private messaging system. Moreover, direct reservations were often attained through the exchange of Facebook messages. It was also documented that the number of private messages from customers

was positively related to the increase of Social Media activity on the account. In the case of Instagram, Clicks to Website were non-existent at the beginning of the experiment, whereas in the second part of the experiment there was activity. Near the end of the 2-month period, Instagram Insights continuously reported 1–2 clicks per day. Finally, the data that was gathered about the demographic profile for the Instagram account revealed that 60–61% of all of the audience were female users, which was nearly identical for the period of the 2022 research – consistently around 60.2%. The age range was 25–34 towards the end of the first part of the study, whereas in 2022 this marker changed to the 35-44 range. Facebook Insights was not sharing this type of information in 2019. In 2022 it became available; however, this aspect was of no use for the research in 2022, due to the fact that no posts or stories were published during this part of the experiment. In a similar way as on Instagram, over 65% of Facebook audience were female users and the interest according to age range was equal for 25-34 and 35-44. Male presence was higher in the second age group.

2.5.3 Discussion

Upon reviewing the information gathered on Facebook and Instagram, as well as from the Literature Review, it can be concluded that Social Media has a tendency to increase in number of users every year (Stacy, 2023). The results obtained from the hotel case study demonstrated that, despite the cessation of activity due to COVID-19 and the lack of content in 2022, the number of followers did not decrease. However, Michopoulou & Moisa (2019) highlight the importance of consistent activity on the chosen Social Media channels, which is essential for maximising engagement of the existing audience and for attracting new followers. More importantly, not any activity is valid; as it can be understood from the literature, the efforts of numerous businesses was often misguidedly focused only on gaining Social Media followers – an objective that does not necessarily translate to engagement and success (Conversion Rates Experts, 2024; Biswas, Patgiri & Biswas, 2022).

At the time of writing this paper, the goal of a well-managed Social Media business profile is engagement – a measurement of how people actually interact with the accounts and its content. Some specialists would go as far as to state that without engagement social media is just media (Eckstein, 2021). Having said that, it is important to be aware that

Social Media platforms were created for everyone; the point being that while individuals may see great benefits from it as a leisure activity, for companies Social Media has the potential to be an invaluable resource for reaching and engaging with a tremendously large audience, through increased brand visibility, which in turn can render high customer loyalty and an improved perception of the product (Türkmendağ & Türkmendağ, 2022). The important part for companies is to accept that Social Media needs effective management (Zajadacz & Minkwitz, 2020).

Apart from the natural growth of user numbers, the comparison of the case studies from year 2022 and 2019 demonstrated that, even with no activity, the hotel's profile was gaining some audience. Statistically seen, as user numbers increase by year, so does the probability that the metrics will increase too, as it can be observed in tables (2.2, 2.3, 2.4 & 2.5). For this reason, it is important to note that, although metrics such as followers, Reach and Impressions rose on both profiles in both phases of the study, the profile visits did so significantly less, which revealed a deficiency in engagement (Conversion Rates Experts, 2024)[23]. On numerous occasions, the increase in page views/visits was a result of a broader online research that was happening due to major city events and it had no connection to the hotel's Social Media activities (Inversini & Masiero, 2014).

The hotel that was examined for the purposes of this research – as mentioned in methodology – was a budget accommodation venue in the centre of the capital city of Andalucia, Seville. The lack of financial resources that is often related to running this type of hotels (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013), coupled with the high competition among the numerous lodging facilities in Seville City Centre, makes Social Media an invaluable tool for obtaining higher visibility, for differentiating the business on the market, and for influencing potential customers to consume the product – i.e. to book a room (Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015).

In case of the examined hotel, the Social Media profiles were used as an outdated, static, monologue media (Khanzode & Sarode, 2016; Latorre, 2018), rather than a tool for achieving marketing goals, which were neither evident nor specified, but vaguely implied; several behaviours were observed on the hotel's profiles: firstly, the company had presence on Facebook and Instagram, as these channels were assumed to be the most used ones at that time, and both profiles were treated identically, with the same content,

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[23] https://conversion-rate-experts.com/cro/

at the same time, with no variants – which is known as Multi-Posting; in addition, the only time a person was addressed directly on the profiles was when specific customers were addressed through messages regarding service requests or complaints.

Had the audience been exactly the same on both channels, an identical approach to both platforms could have been acceptable, even though it is known that each platform itself benefits from content specifically crafted for it (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). In case of the hotel examined, drawing from the reactions to the posts, it was apparent that the audience was not the same – what was popular on Instagram was not necessarily popular on Facebook (table 2.6; Table 2.7); and the Impressions and Reach on Instagram were always higher than on Facebook, even though the number of followers was lower. The most successful post on Facebook was a photograph of a staff member; however, certain factors must be taken into consideration: since the company is a small business, many of the followers were the staff, the friends and the family; in addition, the Facebook profile was created earlier than the Instagram profile, therefore the number of friends, relatives, staff members and ex-staff members was higher than on Instagram. The second most liked post was one that mentioned the hotel in a travel magazine list; as it was the case with the post mentioned above, this news was shared extensively among friends and family, and it is likely that this was the reason for its outstanding popularity. Interestingly, on the Instagram profile, both posts gained little attention. Aside from these two posts, photographs that featured monuments performed the best on Facebook. In the case of Instagram, this research found that posts that involved people and depicted everyday lifestyle at the hotel were the most liked ones. All this information points out to two different types of audience and the possibility that the quantity of followers of Facebook may not indicate quality, since family, friends, relatives and staff are not the target audience. On the other hand, if a conscious effort is invested into encouraging and motivating this audience to share content, information can be spread. In the case of the hotel examined, however, Facebook posts were seldom shared.

Once it is determined that the markets are different, there is a possibility to craft two different Social Media Strategies needed to generate success on both profiles (Inversini & Masiero, 2014; SproutSocial, 2023; Kozielska, 2023; Macarthy, 2021). Facebook and Instagram Insights offer a range of statistical tools that help a company evaluate the audience's reactions, by reviewing demographic information, preferred content, best time for posting, etc. (Table 2.1) (Meta, 2023; Kozielska, 2023; Forsey, 2023). At the company

that was examined, these tools were not utilised by any means; posts were published at random and by various people, regardless of the followers' and customers' preferences, which resulted in a lack of consistency and a vague image (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

With the above factors in mind, and upon reviewing the literature, it is suggestive that a professional Social Media channel requires a focused strategy that is crafted through analysis and evaluation of: audience, content, delivery time, goals and objectives, platforms available, and number of platforms that respond to the needs of the same audience or the different audience (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017; Kozielska, 2023; Forsey, 2023; Inversini & Masiero, 2014; SproutSocial, 2023; Macarthy, 2021). Companies should be inclined towards attracting and retaining a valuable group of followers that engage with the profile (ISL, 2019; Eckstein, 2021).

Reflecting on the comments discussed above, a company should also consider the following actions when crafting a Social Media strategy (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017; Inversini & Masiero, 2014) : re-evaluate the product (corporate philosophy, services, and culture); analyse the target markets (demographic profiles, Social Media habits and overall needs of the targeted groups); study the Social Media platforms and the correct ways to use them (learn and examine specific details related to each chosen Social Media platform and its users); focus on engagement and not on follower numbers (by creating content that interests the audience); evaluate results and adapt on an on-going basis; and ultimately, whenever possible, have a professional Social Media manager. Never think of Social Media as a task that staff members can "figure out" between themselves (Kozielska, 2023; Forsey, 2023; SproutSocial, 2023; Macarthy, 2021; Conversion Rates Experts, 2024; Biswas, Patgiri & Biswas, 2022; Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

2.5.4 Conclusions

As seen from the Literature Review and the Case Study, Social Media has proven to play a role in travel planning and decision making processes of most travellers (Nasihatkon et al., 2016; Hudson et al., 2016). Abundant Social Media strategies have appeared to help companies cope. For instance, Hotel Speak[24] recommends: embrace your location, get to know your staff, present your rooms and facilities, show the details, present the food and

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[24] www.hotelspeak.com

beverages offered, and encourage people to post about you. Simple and straight-forward strategies have proven to be convenient for gaining followers and discovering what Social Media has to offer (Qualman, 2016). However, companies and researchers have tried to understand Social Media more in-depth over the years (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Leung et al., 2013). Elaborate strategies that could guide users towards allocating and managing these online resources have been developed, with a clear aim of broadcasting correct information, promoting goods and services, building brand image, and so on, oftentimes with a low investment (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Leung et al., 2013). At the same time, Social Media platform developers have supported these efforts by attaching valuable data analytics tools to their products (Türkmendağ & Türkmendağ, 2022). Informed handling of these tools and resources has led various companies towards better brand recognition, heightened customer satisfaction and retention, and overall business success. In addition, direct messaging, which accompanies these applications, has enabled companies to address customers' inquiries directly and efficiently (Zajadacz & Minkwitz, 2020). All these assets have also aided businesses in building loyal communities, and they are minimising the need for Tourism Industry intermediaries (Murphy, Chen & Cossutta, 2016).

As it was described in the Review of Different Hotels' Social Media Strategies section, large hotel chains have large marketing budgets; their Departments of Marketing and Communication, as well as Community Managers, dedicate numerous labour hours towards maintaining the image of the company, strengthening brand identity, and communicating corporate messages to the public. Social Media, in these venues, usually started as a small extension of broader marketing strategies (Lanz, Fischhof & Lee, 2010). Clients were already aware of what their preferred brand had to offer, and they were "fans" of the company. Through basic Social Media activities, upscale hotels and resorts were initially able to maintain their loyal fans informed, as well as to attract new ones with relative ease (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Leung et al., 2013). Beyond that purpose, there was no pressure to excel and adapt in the ever-changing Social Media realm (Nikou et al., 2016). However, over time, Social Media has expanded to a point where it is replacing traditional marketing and media channels (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017), while at the same time travel applications are making travel agencies obsolete (Ying et al., 2021). As Garrido-Moreno et al. (2018) explained, effective and professional management of Social Media is becoming a must.

For hotel chains and large venues, these challenges can be solved by reallocating budget to include Social Media management, as it was explained in Section 2.3 (Review of Studies Related to Social Media and Hotel Management). In case of budget venues, on the other hand, such budgets are unavailable (Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013). Moreover, brand-awareness is low and the image can appear vague, in the "sea" of similar establishments that exist at popular tourist destinations (Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015). To complicate the situation further, before Social Media, there was no affordable outlet to help present the business to travellers. As a result, it can be observed that Social Media applications grew in popularity at budget venues, since with low investment, achieving exposure became possible (Ip, Law & Lee, 2011; Hemsley & Dann, 2015). It is becoming a requirement rather than a choice to be present on these channels, considering that most competitors are likely already there, and tourists are expecting it (Li et al., 2022). Despite these possibilities, budget venues need to find ways to successfully implement strategies and manage Social Media, as it was observed from the Case Study of this paper.

Social Media can be the tool that bridges the gap between the budget and the upscale lodging businesses, by allowing all companies to make their best efforts and take advantage of a whole range of services and analytic tools, disposable for a fraction of the cost of traditional media channels and marketing teams (Türkmendağ & Türkmendağ, 2022). On the other hand, a poorly crafted or non-existent Social Media strategy comes with the risk of gaining followers who are not truly interested in the company and who are not actual future clients, thus missing the purpose and rendering Social Media strategies that are frail, cumbersome, or even detrimental to the business's reputation.

2.5.5 Recommendations

Budget venues are encouraged to diligently refer to analytical tools, such as Facebook and Instagram Insights, and consider the benefits and drawbacks of different strategies discussed in this article. As a general rule, visible daily activity was recommended, in the form of posts and stories. However, lack of activity did not cause engagement to drop significantly, as it was witnessed in the second stage of the research. The important aspect appears to be the amount of attention that was put into crafting a SM plan with a clear direction; in the early stages of building the SM strategy and assets, the posts should cover various topics and appear at different times of the day, which helps obtain data about the

96

customers' preferences. Further on, once the customers' preferences are established, a strategy should be crafted accordingly, as it was shown in the first part of the experiment. In case of the hostel that was assessed, photographs featuring people were preferred in the first period of the experiment, and when tagged, they encouraged new friendship requests and new followers. At the time of writing this thesis, Stories were more popular than pictures and Reels were growing in popularity. As previously mentioned, the second stage of the research did not generate enough data to be analysed.

Liking and following accounts and content that match the company's own values is vital, as well as engaging with content about the venue, posted by others. In addition to Social Media presence, the company needs to revise the accounts regularly – making sure that friends, followers, and groups followed match the culture and philosophy of the venue. Revising the account and its followers can also provide important information about the target market's needs, allowing the company to form a strategic Social Media program. Lastly, the program should not resemble a marketing campaign, but rather a social expression of the venue's culture and services.

In the current Social Media environment, an Instagram profile is not only an advantage, but a must. As a general rule, a successful account on Instagram needs to have more followers than profiles it follows. In addition, a company needs to keep track of who its followers are, due to the fact that many users follow and "unfollow" profiles at random, in an attempt to gain followers, as shown in the first part of the experiment. In this hostel's case, the posts that gained the most attention on Instagram in the first part of the experiment were the ones that provided a sense of community – photographs of people, celebrations and lifestyle. On the other hand, Facebook thrived on practicality. Answering private messages promptly and publishing posts with useful information proved to attract travellers to the hostel's page and increase the number of direct reservations. At present, Facebook "Stories" are gaining significant attention – possibly due to the fact that Facebook is currently not overcrowded with this type of posts; this makes them a potentially powerful tool for rapidly improving visibility of a profile. But it is important to note that they are not as popular as Instagram stories. Instagram tends to attract a younger audience and stories seem to fit this group, if crafted accordingly.

On a final note, the option of linking Instagram and Facebook posts has shown to render unsatisfactory results, due to factors such as age difference between the average users of the two platforms. Users of different Social platforms have specific expectations for the type of content that should appear on their preferred platform. Therefore, each account should match those needs, be unique, and not feature multi-posted content, or at least have it modified to suit each platform.

2.5.6 Limitations

Although this research has generated useful insights for Budget Accommodation venues, it is presented with limitations, which may be overcome in future research. Firstly, the study took place over a period of 2 months in different years, between the peak and shoulder seasons; in the second round of the experiment, social media activity on the profiles of the hostel was nearly completely absent, as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis. For future research, it would be beneficial to establish a longer and wider timeframe.

In addition, the research focused solely on Facebook and Instagram profiles of a well-established budget venue, in a city with a well-developed Tourism Industry. More than one venue of equal category should be analysed in order to maximise the reliability of the findings. Other Social Media channels need to be looked into, as well.

From the ethical standpoint, it would be reasonable to take into consideration the feelings of guests towards being monitored on Social Media. In the early stages of the experiment, even though sharing content was a matter of free choice, not all those who participated were aware that their informative and creative inputs were being used for research and promotional purposes. However, it is safe to say that a great majority of Social Media users are now made aware that this type of media monitors their activities, whether directly through smartphones and computers, or via information about user privacy that is continuously exposed to the public. Moreover, users are not able to join any of these platforms without formally agreeing to these terms.

It has also been noted that venues have started to publish questionnaires on their social media profiles, since this is a way to reach more audience, while getting some valuable information. However, more genuine and precise information could be obtained from real guests, if that venue would consider disseminating physical questionnaires, which would additionally demonstrate genuine efforts to increase customer satisfaction through data collection. This could serve not only as a step forward towards more ethical data evaluation, but it could also: broaden the scope of collected information; help strengthen the brand's integrity; and promote stronger bonds with customers. Therefore, a study that evaluates challenges and opportunities of combining traditional collection of information with online data analysis – with the goal of fashioning a successful and more ethical Social Media strategy – is recommended.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework and Research Models on Behavioural Intention in the Context of Social Media

CHAPTER 3.- CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH MODELS ON BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In Chapter 1, the general history of the Tourism Industry and its relation to the Internet and Social Media were overviewed. Chapter 2 spoke about various Social Media studies and strategies that were implemented at different hotels and hotel chains, and it analysed the case of a particular hotel in Seville. Chapter 3 analyses the factors that govern the relationship between Tourism and Social Media, by reviewing principles that guide marketers towards crafting successful strategies for the tourism product, in relation to Social Media. To this end, the widely recognised theories on consumer behaviour, technology acceptance models, and risk perception have been reviewed, highlighting their premises, main goals, and advantages and drawbacks. In addition, drawing from the theoretical framework analysed, the revision of the Literature Review will enable the proposal of several research models with the aim of identifying the antecedents of travellers' intentions to use Social Media for travel planning, intentions to book a hotel online, and the influence of perceived risk on the willingness to travel. The conceptual research models derived will be tested empirically in the next chapter.

3.1 Theoretical Framework for Consumer Behaviour. A Literature Review

In order to better understand the Behavioural Models used for this thesis, it is helpful to briefly overview the study of Consumer Behaviour. In essence, the study of Consumer Behaviour stemmed from the needs of companies to begin scientifically analysing customer attitudes and behaviours towards their products and services. In order to step forward from the instinctive ways of commerce and the strictly economy-driven lines of thought of the past, researchers in the mid-20th century began focusing on the sociological and psychological aspects of purchasing behaviour. Being able to understand and predict how people relate to commercial products on a personal and societal level became an ample topic for discussion, and the studies continue to date. That is to say, through behavioural models, researchers try to isolate specific individual traits, social norms, and other factors that guide or influence purchasing decisions and product usage behaviours. With this information, marketers attempt to target the market in a more dedicated way, as well as to better fulfil the needs of customers. It should be noted that the behavioural models have a broad appeal for a wide range of disciplines other than commerce, among which are public relations, healthcare, education, personal development, and so on.

The theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour, as well as the Technology Acceptance Model and Risk Perception theories, which have been employed in a wide range of diverse literature concerned with customer behaviour, will be introduced. The aim is to design potential investigation models that can give insight into the intention to use Social Media for travel planning and booking online, and estimate perceived risk related to travel intentions – a necessary element for formulating managerial recommendations.

3.1.1 Theory of Reasoned Action

The first Behavioural Model that provided the base for the models referred to in this paper was the Theory of Reasoned Action. Created by social psychologists Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1975, the Theory of Reasoned Action is an early model that proposes a straightforward behavioural theory; it suggests that performing a behaviour is likely to happen if there exists an intention to do so in the first place (Me & RD, 2012). Intention signifies subjective readiness and probability of performing a behaviour (Fishbein &

Ajzen, 1975). In order for this intention to be high, according to the Theory of Reasoned Action, two conditions need to be fulfilled: there has to exist a positive personal attitude towards the behaviour on one hand, and the social opinion about that behaviour (the subjective norm) should be positive on the other. If the attitude towards the behaviour is negative, as well as the subjective norm, it is highly unlikely that there will be an intention to perform that behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In addition, an attitude can be positive, while the subjective norm is negative, and vice versa. A case-specific combination of these aspects eventually leads to a formation of a behavioural intention or the lack of it, which in turn may or may not result in the performance of that behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This model can be seen in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Theory of Reasoned Action
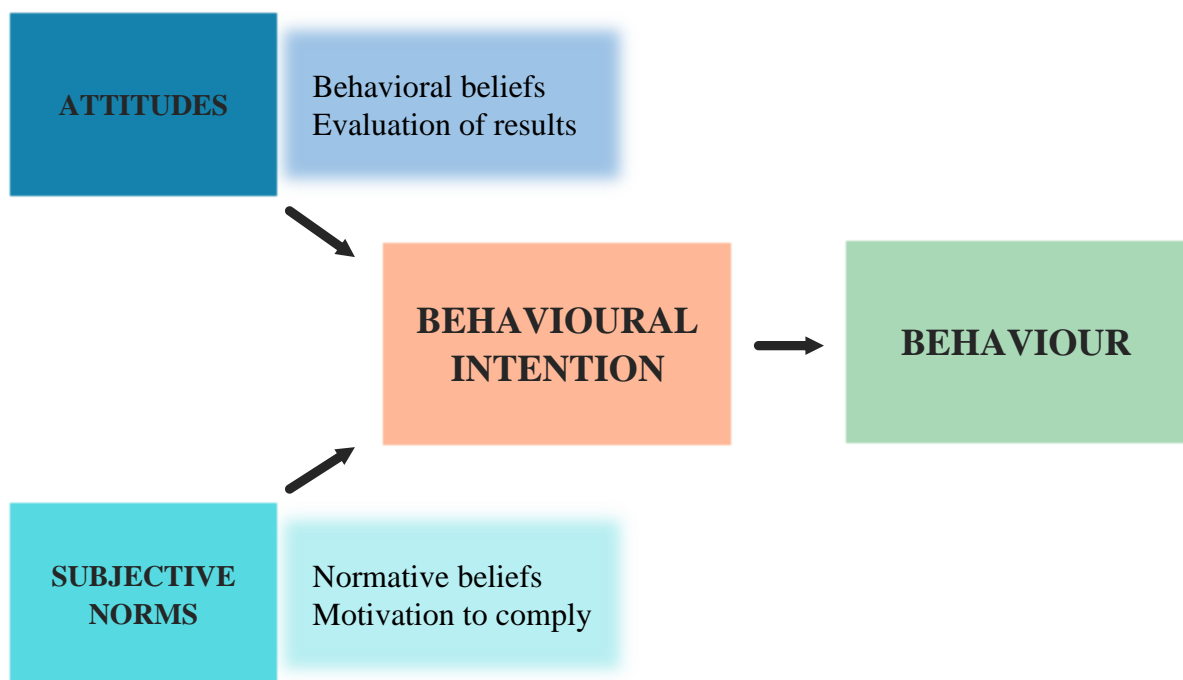
Source: Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975

The attitudes that affect behavioural intention in this model are further grouped under two distinct concepts: the concept of behavioural beliefs and the concept of evaluation of results. Behavioural beliefs imply the personal thoughts, opinions and beliefs about that behaviour – in broad terms – what one expects that behaviour to feel like and what outcomes it may lead to (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The evaluation of results is related to

the opinion regarding those outcomes or results of that behaviour – whether one thinks that the results of that behaviour are more likely to cause benefit or harm. A behaviour that is evaluated may be travelling by aeroplane: a positive behavioural belief would be that flying feels exhilarating; and a positive evaluation of results would be the benefit of getting from point A to point B quickly and safely, which is clearly positive. On the other hand, a negative behavioural belief could be that flying is uncomfortable or frightening, while a negative evaluation of the results could be that air travel causes more stress than comfort, or that the risks related to flying outweighs its benefits. Behavioural beliefs and the evaluation of results are often interlocked and there does not have to be a distinct separation between them (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980).

Subjective norms are also split into two groups: the normative beliefs and the motivation to comply. Both concepts broadly consider the influences that the society may or may not have on one's intention to perform a behaviour. Normative beliefs describe the opinions of one's social circle, as well as those of the general society, regarding that behaviour – how friends, family, neighbours, or the society that one lives in relate to it, how they behave, and what opinions they may have (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991). Motivation to comply refers to one's level of desire to take into account those beliefs and opinions – how inclined and motivated that individual is to perform what the social group expects. Here, it is important to clarify that these subjective norms may or may not reflect reality – they represent one's subjective view of how society relates to that behaviour. A behaviour that is being analysed, for instance, could be one's church-going habits: in this case, if the normative belief of one's social group implies that the church is a "bad" thing, it will be easy not to go to church if one doesn't want to, and vice versa; but if the family's normative belief is that church-going is necessary, one might be inclined toward performing that behaviour, regardless of his or her own beliefs, and vice versa. The motivation to comply, on the other hand, refers to one's inclination towards bending his or her will to that of the significant ones or the society; in the church-going example, the person's social group may be actively participating in church activities and be vocal about it; nevertheless, if that individual is not often concerned about the opinions of others, he or she would not be likely to perform that behaviour, despite the level of pressure; on the opposite end, if that individual does not personally relate to the church, but has high internal motivation to comply – or in this case to follow what the family does – he or she

may eventually join the church; therefore, a change of behaviour will have taken place, due to societal pressures and regardless of one's own beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Me & RD, 2012).

Ultimately, this model attempts to explain and predict behaviour intentions. Therefore, in addition to specifying attitudes and subjective norms, the model takes into account the impact that each specific attitude or norm is likely to have on the individual, in order to quantify the behavioural intention (Figure 3.1). For instance: the behaviour in question may be political activism; the behavioural intention to be tested is the intention to become a member of a specific political party. For this example, one of the behavioural beliefs is that joining the political party would be boring, rather than exciting; in addition to boredom as a feeling, the model would also consider how boring that activity feels, on a scale. Regarding the outcome evaluation, one of the variables could be that joining the political party is useless as opposed to useful; the variable would also be measured on a scale. The same scale is given for the normative beliefs (e.g. my friends and colleagues think that it is important to be politically active) and the motivation to comply (e.g. I value my friends' and colleagues' opinions regarding politics). When all the variables are collected and analysed in a methodical way, the behaviour intention is then estimated numerically, and it may or may not result in the proposed behaviour; i.e. this model only estimates the level of intention and does not guarantee the outcome. As it can be expected, there is no model that can guarantee behaviour, as neither human beings nor life are static (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

According to Hale, Householder & Greene (2002), the formulation of the behaviour intention for the Theory of Reasoned Action can be seen in equation (1).

$$BI = (AB)W1 + (SN)W2 \qquad\qquad (1)$$

Where: BI: behavioural intention; AB: the individual's attitude toward performing the behaviour; W: empirically derived weights; SN: the individual's subjective norm related to performing the behaviour

In summary, according to the Theory of Reasoned Action, a behaviour is predicated by a behavioural intention, which can be stronger or weaker, depending on one's personal attitudes and social pressure. This theory has certain limitations: firstly, it views humans as coherent beings who, in theory, use rational, straight-forward thinking; and secondly, the model does not take into account if one has the ability to perform the analysed behaviour, whether due to psychological and physiological reasons, or to a lack of resources, among other reasons (Hale, Householder & Greene, 2002). In order to account for these factors, Icek Ajzen developed a more complete model in 1985, called the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

3.1.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour is one of the most widely used models for predicting various types of consumer behaviours – as well as general human behaviours – to date (Sheppard et al., 1988; Alwahaishi & Snasel, 2013). In addition to the concepts established in the Theory of Reasoned Action, it also considers the capacity of an individual to perform the behaviour that is being studied. As it was concluded, the intention to perform a behaviour is not enough to lead to the performance of that behaviour when one does not have control over the factors that surround that behaviour. With this in mind, the newer model includes a concept named Perceived Behavioural Control (Ajzen, 1985). Before explaining the model, it is important to make a following observation regarding the added concept: as it was already mentioned when describing the subjective norms, these concepts do not analyse the objective reality, but rather people's own unique perceptions of reality, which are always biassed to an extent (Triandis, 1977; Sarver, 1983; Liska; 1984). This is why both concepts are named accordingly – Subjective and Perceived – two attributes that imply a certain level of bias (Ajzen, 1985).

Figure 3.2 The Theory of Planned Behaviour
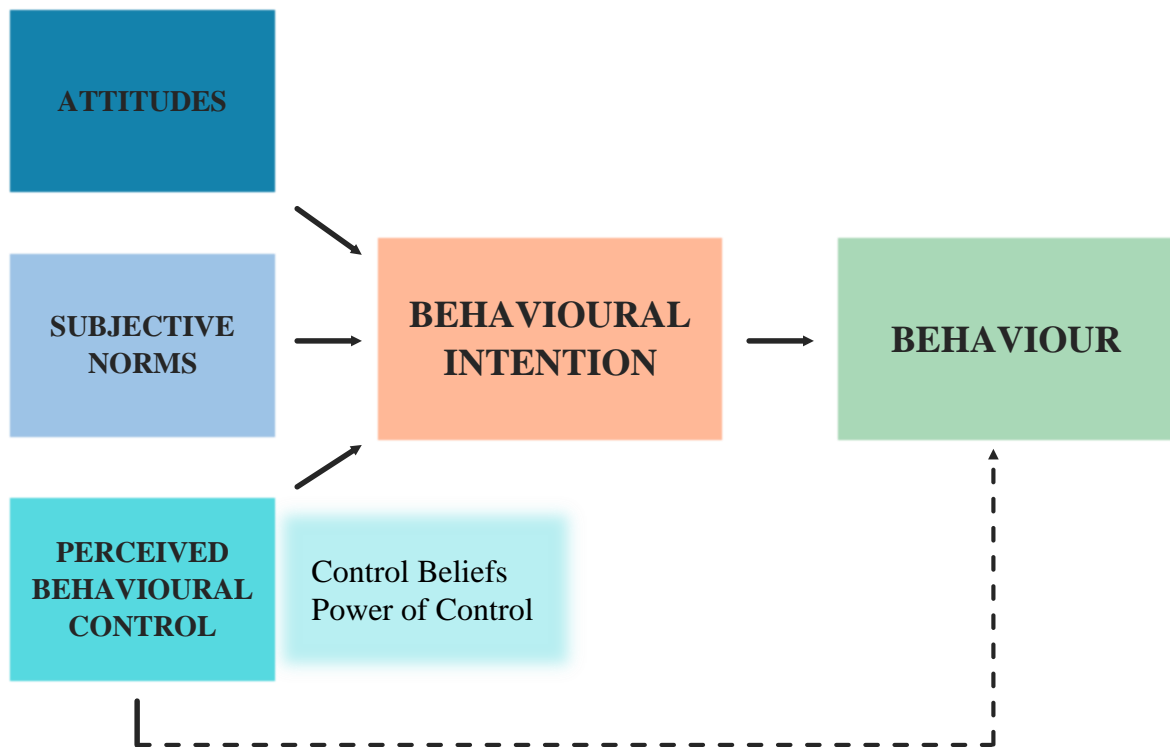
Source: Ajzen, 1985

According to Ajzen (1985), the concept of perceived behavioural control that was introduced into the Theory of Planned Behaviour stems from older behavioural theories related to learning and interpersonal behaviour, and it most closely resembles the self-efficacy theory. Postulated in 1977 by psychologist Albert Bandura, the self-efficacy theory refers to one's belief that he or she has skills and means necessary for the fulfilment of a specific task. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is the single most significant predecessor for modifying behaviour. Building on these theories, Ajzen defined Perceived Behavioural Control as the level to which an individual believes that conditions and barriers that act outside his or her control exist and impact his or her capacity to perform a behaviour. As with the two older constructs, the Perceived Behavioural Control is usually divided into two sets of beliefs: control beliefs and power of control factors. Control beliefs refer to the individual's belief that those obstacles do or do not exist and may include: a perception of personal capacity or incapacity to perform the behaviour, and a perception of an existence or non-existence of outside factors that make the behaviour difficult to impossible or easy and possible to perform; the power of control implies the extent to which the individual believes those factors would enable or hinder

110

the behaviour performance (Ajzen, 1985; Miller, 1956). Figure 3.2 proposes a formula for numerically estimating behavioural intention using the Theory of Planned Behaviour model.

According to Hale, Jerold; Householder, Brian; Greene, Kathryn (2002), the formulation of the behaviour intention for the Theory of Reasoned Action can be seen in equation (2).

$$BI = (AB)W1 + (SN)W2 + (PBC) \qquad (2)$$

Where: BI: behavioural intention; AB: the individual's attitude toward performing the behaviour; W: empirically derived weights; SN: the individual's subjective norm related to performing the behaviour; PBC: Perceived Behavioural Control.

The Behavioural Control is also the only one of the three constructs that the author considers as an objective modifier of behaviour execution, in addition to a subjective set of beliefs that leads to behavioural intention; that is to say, while perceived factors stem from an individual's construct of reality and have an impact to shape the behavioural intention, objective factors outside of one's control have the power to directly affect the behaviour execution in a positive or negative way. Some of the external factors may be: the realistic level of the individual's skills and abilities, which may differ significantly from the one assumed; practical factors related to accessibility and resources, which render the behaviour impossible or more possible than expected; and certain environmental factors and conditions, such as climate or political situation, which can impact one's behaviour directly (Ajzen, 1985).

In addition to the constructs that were added to the Theory of Planned Behaviour in order to improve predictability and controllability of behaviour, the author proposed several additional concepts in posterior research. Namely, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are not isolated constructs that influence an individual independently and without connection; rather, they interfere and impact each other continuously (Ajzen, 1988). For instance, a parent's opinion may shape child's attitudes and obscure the beliefs that would naturally develop over a lifetime; likewise, an unexpectedly positive experience after the performance of a behaviour, which additionally increased the perceived behavioural control, may in turn convince the

111

significant others to change their views on a certain behaviour, while simultaneously improving the attitude of the individual towards it. Moreover, once a behaviour has been performed, the outcomes that follow that action could positively or negatively impact the feelings towards that behaviour; consequently, this would modify every single part of the equation: the expectations of those outcomes may not match the reality, therefore attitudes would change; the individual's social group may respond differently to what was previously expected, thus subjective norms would be altered. With all this in perspective, and upon realising that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control have a direct impact on behaviour and are also directly impacted by the behaviour, it can be concluded that this model should be treated as a feedback loop rather than a linear model (Ajzen, 1988).

There are certain occasions when perceived behavioural control cannot be considered a valid measurement tool. As Ajzen explains, when an individual is uninformed or misinformed about a behaviour, the perceived sense of control does not match the real control of the behaviour or the results of that behaviour, thus no valid data can be obtained. Additionally, when unpredictable elements appear, or the availability of resources alters unexpectedly, the correlations proposed by this model become altered. The author goes further to specify the ideal conditions under which a study based on The Theory of Planned Behaviour model should be performed: firstly, "the measures of intention and perceived behavioural control must correspond to or be compatible with the behaviour that is to be predicted"; secondly, "the intentions and perceived behavioural control must remain stable in the interval between their assessment and observation of the behaviour"; and lastly, "the prediction of behaviour from perceived behavioural control should improve to the extent that perceptions of behavioural control realistically reflect actual control" (Rosalind & Templin, 2010; Ajzen, 1985).

On a final note, as it was previously mentioned, behavioural intentions do not inevitably lead to the behaviour. Abundant research has been done on the topic; however, limited success was achieved with regards to measuring the translation of intention into action. Most of the difficulties are due to a range of ever-changing factors and unpredictable circumstances, measurement inconsistencies, and discrepancies between people's thoughts, personalities, moods, emotions and actions, coupled with the constant influx of information and outside influences. Nevertheless, Ajzen (1988) Sheppard, Hartwick & Warshaw (1988) assure that when appropriate theoretical framework of the model is

112

followed and the study or intervention is performed with maximum methodological accuracy, human behaviours can be predicted and even modified with reasonable accuracy. In addition, Web 3.0 and 4.0 and corresponding technologies, such as Machine Learning, have shown promising initial results with regards to highly accurate prediction and modification of human behaviour.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has been widely used and acknowledged by researchers and various modifications of the system have been proposed, in order to better adapt it to various topics being researched (Hung, Chang & Yu 2006). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is one of those modifications, which is exclusively directed toward the aspect of the acceptance of technology and the factors that lead to that acceptance, and are ultimately preceded by behavioural intention. This model will be used extensively in the study conducted for this thesis. Therefore, it is important to make a brief mention of the most significant features that render TAM appropriate.

3.1.3 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

TAM's appeal lies in the premise that technology has an undeniable potential to improve various aspects of people's daily lives and workplace performance, by bettering one's efficiency, productivity and independence, while providing the added benefit of comfort. As discussed in Social Media and Tourism chapters, this is particularly true in case of travelling. In order to achieve these benefits, beside creating valuable technological tools, developers and researchers need to access theoretical frameworks that can help understand the subjective processes that occur at the moment of accepting or rejecting new technology; as Lucas (1975) stated, the user acceptance or the lack of it is a major influence or obstacle to the success of information systems (Davis, 1989). Initially, researchers utilised the existing behavioural models for this purpose, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). However, a model that was more specifically directed towards the acceptance of technology was required. In 1989, Davis came up with a new model that was derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action; the model was simplified and modified to include aspects exclusive to this area of research (Davis, 1989; Abu-Dalbouh, 2013).

In its most bare form (Figure 3.3) this new model (TAM) omits all factors not related to the immediate individual experience of the product, and analyses two essential premises: Perception of Usefulness (PU), which implies the extent to which one believes that the analysed technological system can improve his or her performance, and Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU), which refers to the amount of effort that must be put into understanding, using and mastering it (Davis, 1989). These aspects closely resemble the Attitudes from the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Perceived Behavioural Control concepts[25] from the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Omwansa & Waema, 2012; Baroudi, Olson & Ives, 1986; Davis, 1989). In addition, Davis's model adopts the attitude measurement scale from TRA – a system that allows the interviewee to rate statements on a seven-point scale (Davis, 1989; Rauniar et al., 2014; Lai, 2017).

Figure 3.3 Technology Acceptance Model, simple form
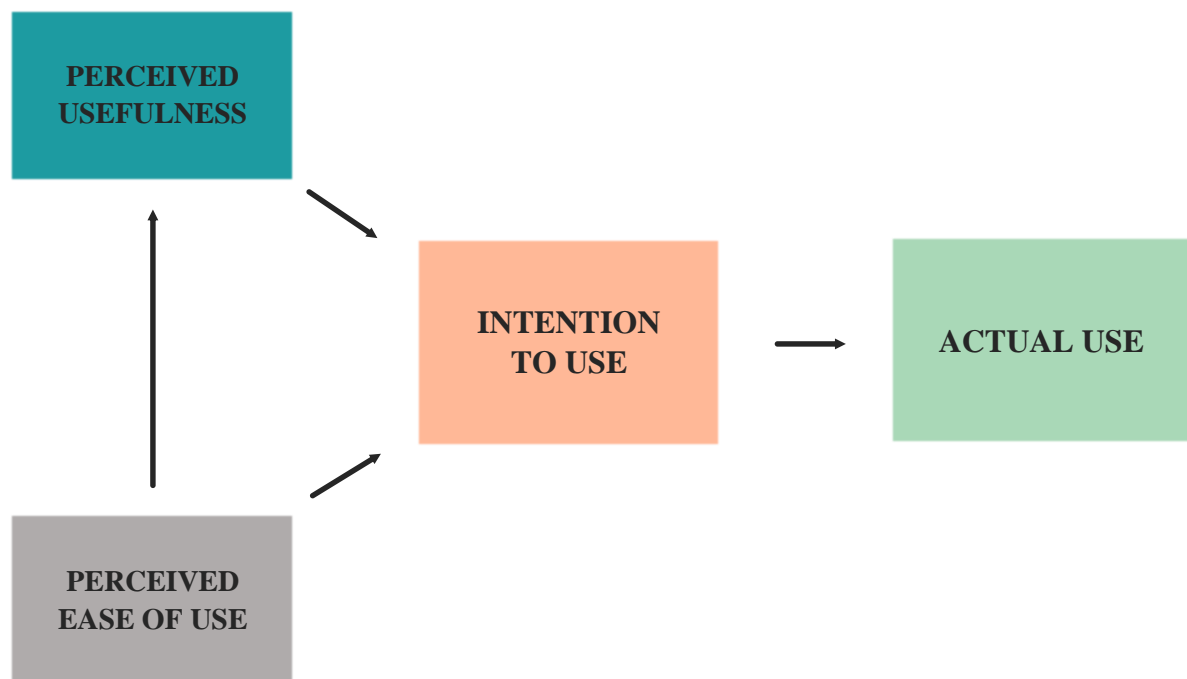
Source: Davis, 1989

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[25] One's believing that factors outside of his or her control impact his or her capacity to perform a behaviour satisfactorily

114

Depending on the study at hand, additional factors that impact the Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use may be employed. These factors are the External Variables, which are also understood as the design features of the system, and Attitudes Toward Using the Technology, which mirror the Attitudes concept from the TRA model (Davis, 1989; Fishbein & Azjer, 1975). The extended form, which is based on the simple model presented in Figure 3.3, is displayed in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)
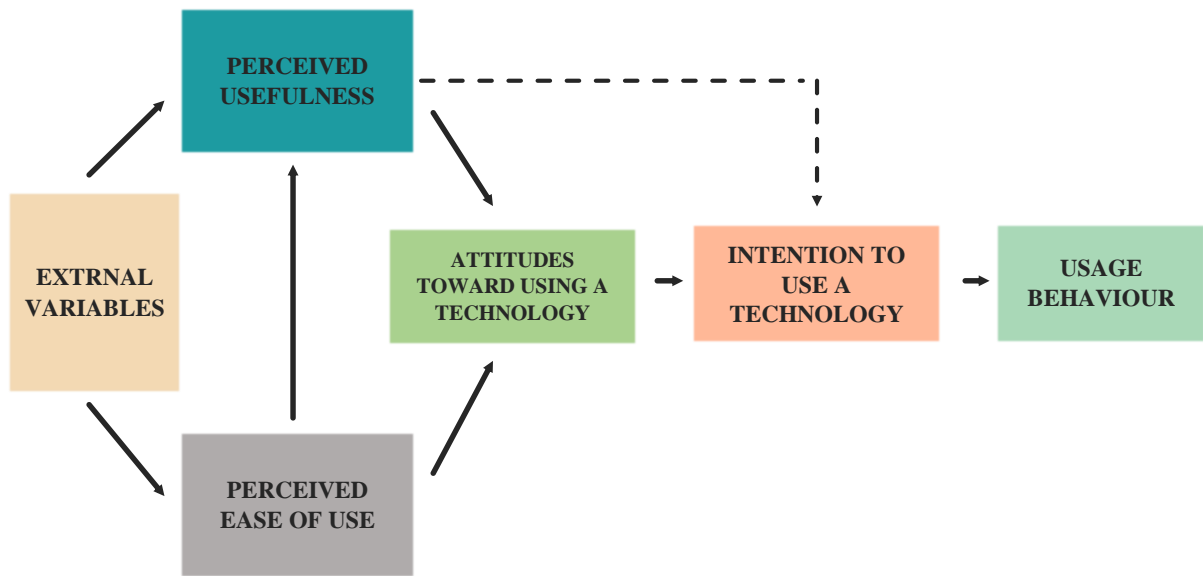
Source: Davis, 1989

When considering the aspects of the two essential premises of the model (Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use), for the specific case of new technology acceptance, the author of the model explains that there is usually a "trade-off" between the two. Namely, a high level of PU can justify a low PEoU – significant effort can gladly be invested into learning a new technology if that technology is perceived to be highly useful. The opposite, however, is not always true; even though it was demonstrated that the PEoU has a direct positive correlation with the PU, a complete lack of PU cannot be compensated by high PEoU (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 1996).

According to numerous researchers, and despite the model's undisputed success within the Information Systems research and development sector, TAM has been criticised for its oversimplified approach and limited value as a research tool. In response to that, the

model was modified and extended a number of times, both by the authors, and by various other theorists. For the purpose of this thesis, two variants will be observed: TAM 2 and TAM3. Both extensions carry the same fundamental principles as TAM, but with numerous added variables that help explain and predict user behaviour better, depending on the contextual aspects of the research.

Technology Acceptance Model 2 (TAM 2)

While Perceived Usefulness (PU) was confirmed to be strongly correlated with the intention to use new technology, factors that help explain and understand where PU comes from were not accounted for in TAM (Venkatesh, 2000). In order to understand what leads or motivates people to perceive a technology as useful, as well as to help developers direct their efforts better, a set of external variables and moderating factors were added to the model (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). The external variables are as follows: Subjective Norm, Image, Job Relevance, Output Quality, and Result Demonstrability. The moderators would be: Experience and Voluntariness.

Subjective Norm refers to the same factors as those in TRA and TPB; interestingly, over the course of various years, the Subjective Norm proved not to always have a direct influence on behavioural intention in the Information System field (IS), especially when the moderating factor of Experience with various technological tools was high (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Malhotra & Galleta, 1999; Taylor & Todd, 1995; Mathieson, 1991). Image implies the status of an individual within the social group, which in the case of the IS sector would normally be one's colleagues and other IS professionals (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Moore & Benbasat, 1991; Rogers, 1983). For this particular construct, TAM 2 found a strong correlation between Image and Perceived Usefulness (Figure 3.5). In other words, social status proved to empower one to attain goals that may otherwise seem daunting (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). The third variable is Job Relevance, and it denotes the belief that the technology implicated will benefit one's job performance, or that it is directly related to one's job (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Black, Kay & Soloway, 1987; Norman, 1987). Output Quality is another one of the variables, and it entails the overall benefits that come as a result of the quality of the technology implicated, as well as the technology's effect on the quality of one's output (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1992). Lastly, Result Demonstrability refers to the internal

116

conviction of an individual that the new technology has benefited him or her (Moore & Benbasat, 1991). When those benefits are not evident, one may reject the technology implicated (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). In addition to the external variables and the Experience moderator, another moderator that could directly impact Behavioural Intention was taken into consideration, under the premise of Voluntariness – "the extent to which potential adopters perceive the adoption decision to be non-mandatory" (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

Figure 3.5 Technology Acceptance Model 2 (TAM 2)
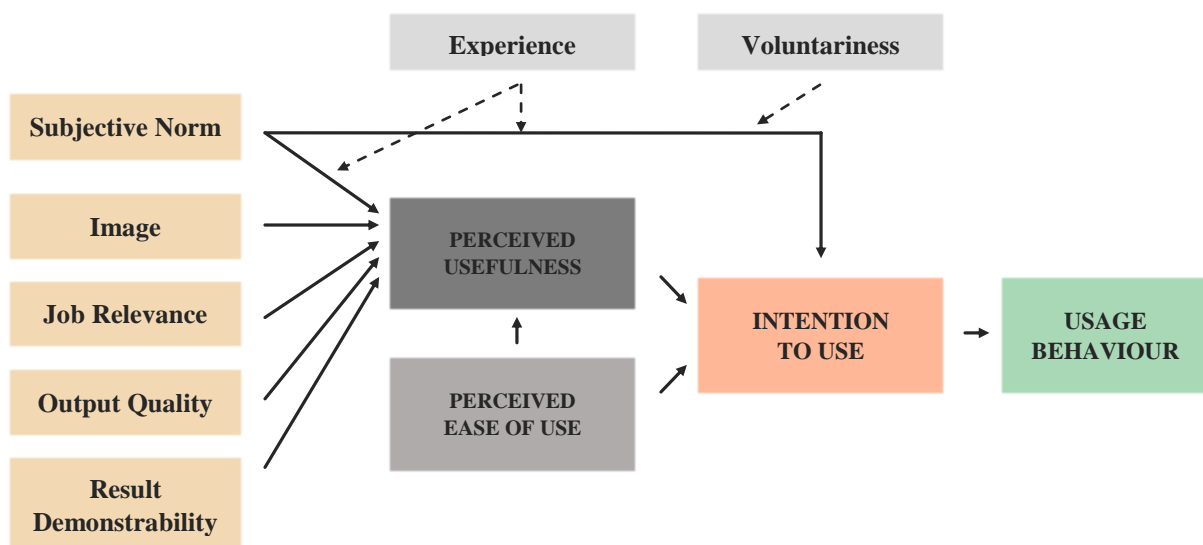
Source: Davis & Venkatesh, 2000

Technology Acceptance Model 3 (TAM 3)

Devised by Venkatesh and Bala (2008), TAM 3 focuses on analysing extensive and specific information related to the adoption of technology, in order to assure more certain and consistent predictions. This model maintains all the basic aspects of TAM, introduces variables that expand on the Perceived Ease of Use concept (PEoU), and preserves the variables from TAM 2 that focus on Perceived Usefulness (PU). The additional variables of TAM 3 are labelled Anchoring factors, and they represent the initial impressions of the EOU of new technology. According to Marikyan & Papagiannidis (2023), the Anchoring Factors are as follows: Computer Self-Efficacy, which refers to one's general level of comfort with the use of computers; Perception of External Control, signifying the

117

perception of having access to resources; Computer Anxiety, which implies fear linked with the use of technology; and Computer Playfulness – a concept that denotes one's "degree of cognitive spontaneity in microcomputer interaction" (Webster & Martocchio, 1992). The Experience and Voluntariness moderators from TAM 2 were kept, while two Adjustment Factors – Perceived Enjoyment and Objective Usability – were added; these represent the level of pleasure and the effort that one relates to the new technology, and they apply only after sufficient experience with it has been gained (Marikyan & Papagiannidis, 2023). In addition, TAM 3 postulates that Experience has the potential to modify not only the Subjective Norm, but also an extensive set of relationships between variables: Computer Anxiety, Computer Playfulness, Perceived Enjoyment, and Objective Usability, in relation to PEoU; PEoU in relation to EU; and PEoU in relation to Behavioural Intention (Marikyan & Papagiannidis, 2023). In conjunction with these findings, prior research in Information System and psychology had established high importance of actual behavioural experience in shaping the evolution of beliefs, such as PEoU (Doll & Ajzen, 1992; Davis et al., 1989; Fazio & Zama, 1978; Venkatesh & Davis, 1996). The model is displayed in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6 Technology Acceptance Model 3 (TAM 3)
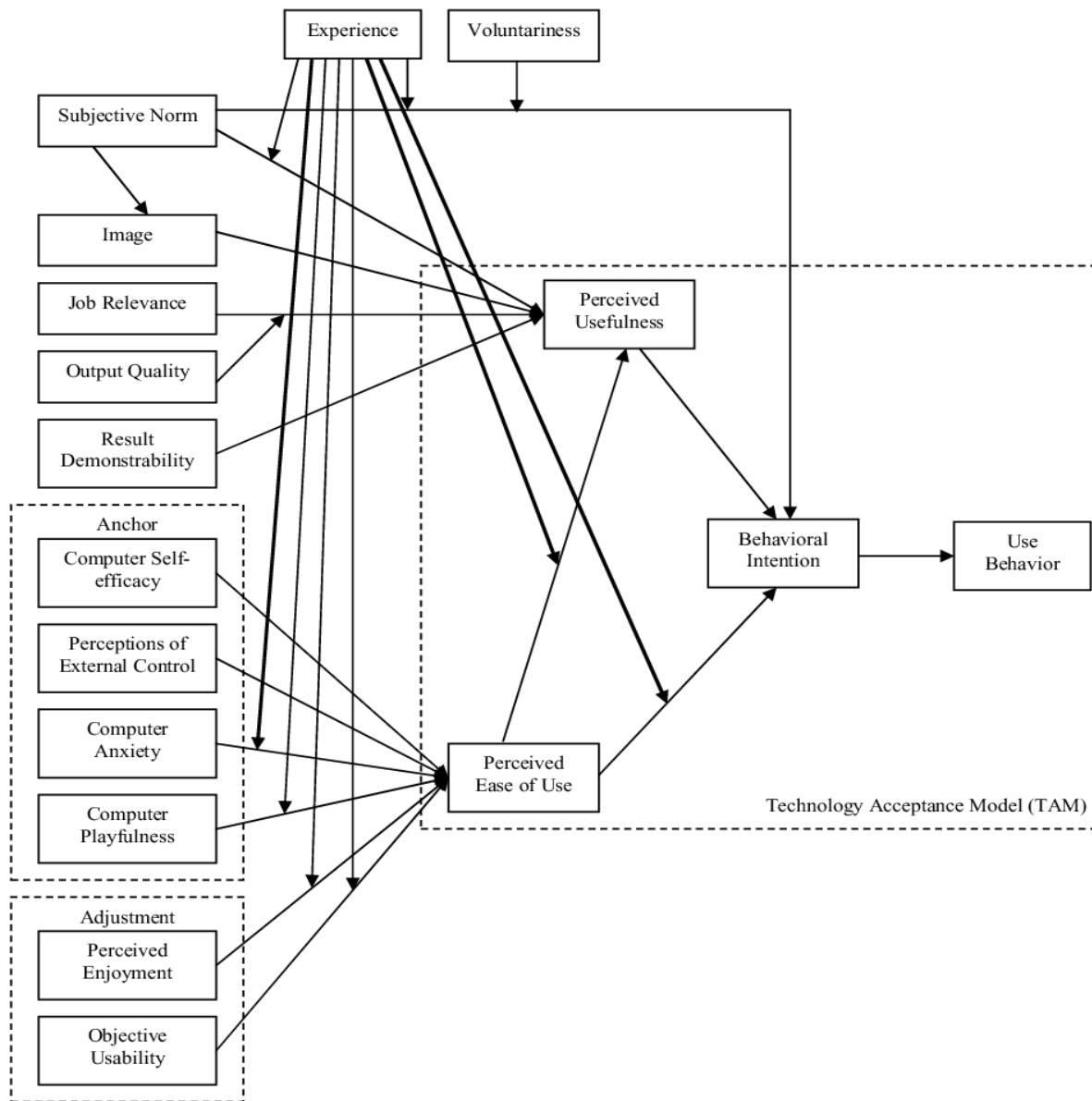
Source: Venkatesh & Bala, 2008

119

3.1.4 Perceived Risk Theories

The concept of risk represents the possibility of negative outcomes that can occur in relation to one's activities. As Wilkie and Pessemier (1973) explained, consumers have shown to often act on information that is less than complete and lacks substantial evidence, and as a result, they are frequently faced with significant risk or uncertainty. Therefore, for companies and individuals involved with any type of business, understanding risk can improve the potential to predict, analyse and influence customer behaviour from yet another angle. This section will review early risk perception studies, before focusing on tourism-specific models.

It was Bauer (1960) who first defined perceived risk as "the consumer's perception of the consequences derived from his actions which cannot be foreseen with certainty, and some of which are likely to be unpleasant". The researcher also developed a model for predicting consumer behaviour in relation to risk perception. This model classifies perceived risk into four types: economic risk, which represents buyer's concern with the financial dangers of a purchase, such as losing money; social risk, which refers to possible social repercussions of a purchase for the buyer, including social humiliation and disapproval; psychological risk, which indicates a threat to one's self-esteem of self-image that can result from a purchase; and physical risk, which involves the possibility of being injured by or incurring physical harm related to a product or a service. As Bauer explained, consumers weigh these risks against the potential benefits before making purchases. Various researchers proposed additional dimensions to Bauer's model over the following decades, including but not limited to: performance, which represents the risk that a purchase will not match the expectations; time, which can be understood as the risk that the consumption of the product may be too time consuming; and loss, which refers to the fear that by taking a course of one action, the consumer will miss out on a better opportunity (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004; Assael, 1995; Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995; Mowen & Minor, 1998).

With perceived risk as the central component of the framework, Bauer paved the way and served as a reference for the analysis and prediction of consumer decision making behaviour and risk perception in a wide range of industries and human activities. Years later, the Tourism Industry also began drawing the attention of researchers. In tourism, perceived risk is understood as the chance that something may go wrong during a trip

120

(Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997) and the possibility that a tourist may not be able to predict the consequences or negative results related to making travel decisions (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004; Chen, Qiao & Liu, 2009). Some of the first models that studied risk perception in tourism were based on the early consumer behaviour models and they analysed how attitudes shaped the intention of behaviours, in terms of favourable or unfavourable predispositions towards making certain holiday choices (Moutinho, 1987; Han, 2015). However, it was concluded that, due to its highly complex nature and the numerous sociocultural, geographical, political, and other factors that impact travelling, risk management for tourism required a multi-disciplinary approach. Therefore, psychological theories of needs and motivation, various types of sociological research, and wide ranging insights into the economic aspects of predicting and managing customers' behaviour in relation to risk perception were joined together in the late 1980s and the early 1990s in order to come up with substantiated models for tourism risk perception management (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998; Slovic, 1987; Xie & Xu, 1996). Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) pioneered these investigations.

Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) claimed that for every travel process, every tourist destination, and each tourism activity, there was an element of risk involved. In order to develop that theory, the authors conducted an enquiry about the types of risk that could be encountered on a trip: a group of travellers were asked to specify a range of risks based on their past experiences. Some of the types that were defined were categorised as equipment, financial, physical, psychological, social, satisfaction, and time risks. Afterwards, using factor analysis, the researchers grouped all the detected risks under three base dimensions, specifically fashioned for the Tourism Industry: risks related to Physical Equipment, risks concerning the Vacation itself, and Destination-related risks. The authors also classified travellers based on individual risk perception into the following three categories: Risk Neutral, which represents travellers who generally did not perceive tourism or their destination of choice as risky; Functional Risk, which applied to travellers who were mostly aware of the possibility of mechanical, equipment, and organisational risk; and Place Risk, which referred to travellers who were inclined to perceive overall tourism activity as risky and their destination of choice as dangerous. To complement the findings of Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992), Sonmez and Graefe (1998) proposed additional factors that could predict which destinations to avoid: these were Health risks, Political Instability and Terrorism risks. Later on, various other researchers

categorised risk factors in mutually associable dimensions, such as Physical and Equipment, Natural and Artificial, Invisible and Catastrophes, Terrorist Attacks and Public Health risks (Chen, Qiao & Liu, 2009; Moreira, 2007; Sheng-Hshiung, Gwo-Hshiung & Kuo-Ching, 1997; Wu, Wang & Li, 2001). In addition, Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty (2009) incorporated risk factors such as Novelty, Travel Inconvenience and Deterioration of tourist attractions – factors that were not considered by other studies – into the theory. A wide range of psycho-social factors, such as individual's personality, culture, and nationality also showed to significantly modify perceived risk related to travelling and destinations (Carr, 2001; Seddighi, Nuttall & Theocharous, 2001) and these can fluctuate dramatically depending on the time of the study, the current social environment, and the type of information that is popular on various media sources at the time (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007). As is the case with the previous behavioural studies, tourists' attitudes tend to be analysed as perceptions (Rittichainuwat et al., 2018; Tasci & Sonmez, 2019; Rejda & McNamara, 2021); all studies described in this section were based on perceptions rather than the actual risk conditions.

In conjunction with perceived risk, various researchers have proposed an additional variable to explore, which is trust. As Luhmann (1988) explained, when risk is perceived and coupled with uncertainties, such as lack of information, yet action must be taken, consumers have nothing left to rely on but trust. If the level of trust is insufficient, it is unlikely that a transaction will occur, or even that a promotional message will be consciously processed. In addition, trust was demonstrated to have a direct co-dependent relationship with company's performance, customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, and economic outcomes, such as transaction costs; without trust, the relationship between a customer and a company is in danger (Handy, 1995; Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; Balasubramanian, Konana & Menon, 2003). Hence, trust is a key element of social capital (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995), and as previously mentioned, it is closely related to customer risk perception. Therefore, it will be analysed further in this thesis, alongside risk perception.

3.2 Proposed Research Models

The aim of this section is to identify a series of relationships that are thought to exist between tourism and Social Media (SM). Three models have been proposed based on the previous literature review on theoretical models to test: the intention to use SM for travel planning, the influence of SM on online hotel bookings and the influence of perceived risk on willingness to travel. Justifications for the use of the given models will be given.

3.2.1 Model 1. Influence to use Social Media for Travel Planning

The first model studies the Intention to Use Social Media for travel planning. In addition, it aims to clarify if individuals are using Social Media applications when planning trips (in the pre-trip stage). Numerous research papers have addressed this topic in recent years, each one from a unique point of view (Chan & Guillet, 2011; Lu, Chen & Law, 2018; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Hudson & Thal, 2013; Liang et al., 2020; Mooethy et al., 2021; Santos, 2022). The proposed model 1 (Figure 3.7) aims to address these factors and it is based on TAM (Figure 3.3), its versions (Figure 3.4, 3.5 & 3.6), and with the added Trustworthiness variable – a type of relation which, to the best of the author's knowledge, has not been addressed in-depth by previous research papers.

In order to propose a model that tests the intention of individuals to use Social Media for travel planning, a wide range of studies has been examined. Among the first and most definitive findings that could be extracted was the impact of the User Generated Content[26] (UGC) when seeking travel related information, which was similar to that of offline recommendations and Word of Mouth (WOM). In addition, the UGC has been described as a type of content that features more authentic, updated, enjoyable and reliable information than traditional information sources (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Liang et al., 2020; Yoo, Gretzel & Zach, 2011; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). On the other hand, Cox et al. (2009) observed that, even though Social Media was

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[26] User Generated Content is the content that an individual publishes voluntarily on Social Media Platforms, such as comments, photographs, etc. (McKenzie et al., 2012)

used for travel planning by more than half of the research participants, the information obtained from this type of media was not perceived as either trustworthy or reliable, when compared to the traditional sources. Moreover, according to the authors, Social Media was primarily used during the information search stage of the travel planning process. Among the authors' recommendations for future research, Cox et al. (2009) prompted additional analysis of Social Media's perceived credibility and trustworthiness.

Numerous studies followed up by measuring specific aspects of the influence of Social Media on travel planning. One of them was a study by Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides (2011), which focused on the usage of SM by different sociodemographic communities, as well as the SM usage habits throughout different stages of the travel planning process, in countries of the former Soviet Union. Contrary to the results obtained in the study by Cox et al. (2009), Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides (2011) found that Social Media was employed extensively in each stage of the travel planning process. The researchers also pointed out that Gretzel & Yoo (2008) had similar findings in terms of differences of Social Media use among particular nationalities, as well as in their use of SM for the travel planning process. Furthermore, Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides (2011) asserted that these differences were significantly more evident when comparing distant national cultures; the authors suggested that additional cross-cultural studies should explore the findings that Social Media use for Travel Planning differs among markets with cultural differences.

In a related study, by analysing data using the Consumer Decision Journey Model (based on Court et al. (2009)), Hudson and Thal (2013) confirmed that SM played an influential and valuable role during all stages of the travel planning process. In these findings, the researchers pointed out that the majority of tourism companies were not engaging consumers in a meaningful way through Social Media platforms (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Chan & Guillet, 2011) – a finding that was determined as well by the Empirical Study presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that marketers should not only focus on the "Consider" and "Buy" stages of travel planning, but rather target all of the stages outlined in the Decision Journey Model (Edelman, 2010; Hudson & Thal, 2013). In their recommendations, Hudson and Thal (2013) prompted further research that would propose updated theories for guiding marketers in the digital world, as well as new models that would focus on understanding the behavioural responses of tourism consumers to Social Media. In an answer to that, Moorthy et al. (2021) constructed a model based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the

124

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) for a research that examined the use of Social Media by the Millennials in Malaysia for travel planning of domestic holidays. Among other findings, the authors concluded that, in order to gain a better understanding of the relation between perceived use and perceived ease of use, a different version of TAM should be devised, with additional constructs (Moorthy et al., 2021).

On a final note, it is beneficial to refer to a SM study by Lu, Chen and Law (2018): this study scrutinised 105 articles on Social Media and Hospitality, published between 2004 and 2014 and pointed out several issues. Firstly, research pertaining to the field of Social Media in relation to Hospitality and Tourism was in its early stages and in need of further development. Secondly, there were research gaps in various industry sectors on topics beyond online reviews and research methods. Thirdly, there was a lack of research that focused on the pre-trip activities and those during the trip. Lastly, the body of literature available on the topic suffered from a lack of input from credible sources.

Building on the information exposed above, it can be established that Social Media – as a new and highly expansive field of study – is in constant need of scientific research. Moreover, the adoption and usage of the new technologies is both changeable and highly unpredictable. It is safe to say that, regardless of the scope of investigation related to the subject, the evolution of the Information Systems is happening at a pace that maintains businesses and researchers in a state of urgency. In order to cope with these circumstances, one possibility is to break the research up into more manageable niche topics and address them accordingly, from a multi-disciplinary point of view. That is one of the challenges that this thesis is attempting to respond to.

Upon reviewing the literature, and following the suggestions drawn from compatible sources, the proposed model is displayed in Figure 3.7, and intends to contribute to the field by bridging gaps exposed in the paragraphs above.

Figure 3.7 Proposed Research Model 1. Intention to use Social Media for Travel Planning
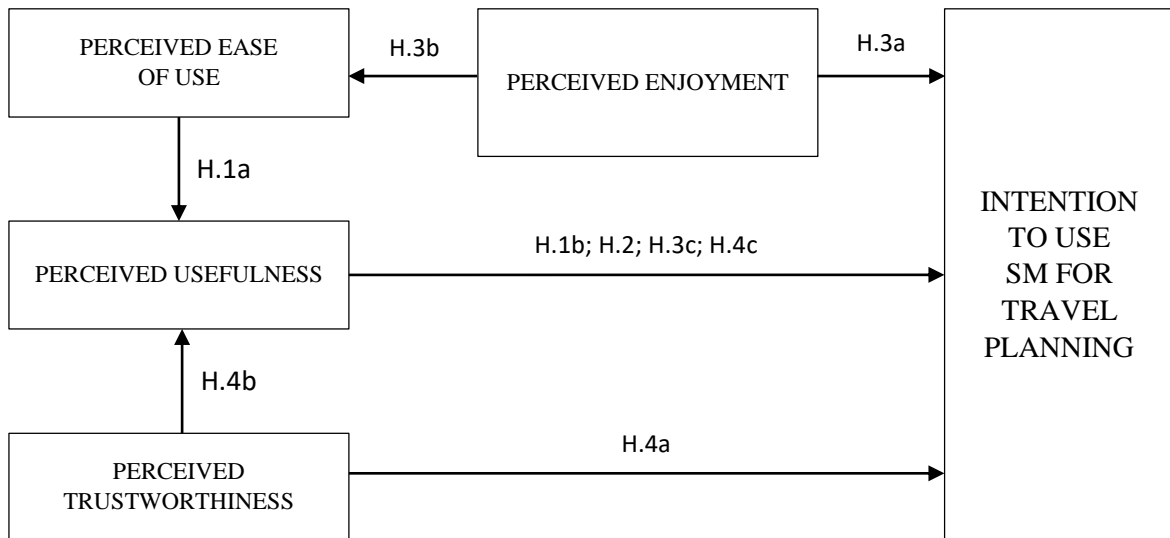
Model 1 (Figure 3.7) is derived from TAM and TAM 3, with an added variable of Trustworthiness. The new variable should provide some answers as to whether Social Media is perceived as reliable and trustworthy or not; in addition, insights into how perceived trustworthiness influences the Perceived Usefulness will be given.

As explained in the Literature Review of the Theory Models, the Technological Acceptance Model has been extensively employed for studying technology acceptance and usage, and it has been supported by numerous analyses that have demonstrated its validity (Bertrand & Bouchard, 2008). However, as it was among the first ones to be designed, this model has drawbacks (Nysveen, Pedersen & Thorbjørnsen, 2005): its use is largely limited to organisational context and has low applicability to everyday life measurements; it also has limitations for explaining various forms of technology, particularly more innovative ones (Lule, Omwansa & Waema, 2012). For this reason, additional versions of TAM were developed subsequently and variations of it are continuously being introduced. The latest modification of the official TAM was TAM 3, devised by Venkatesh and Dalis in 1996. As described in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) section, TAM considers Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU) as variables that have a direct impact on the intention to perform a certain behaviour. The model proposed for this thesis is based on a combination of TAM and TAM 3, with the PU of the model being borrowed from TAM 3. Two additional variables

will be tested for their relation with PU and PEoU: Perceived Enjoyment and Trustworthiness. The way this relation influences the intention to perform a behaviour will be observed.

With these factors in mind, the following hypotheses have been drawn:

H.1a When Social Media is perceived as easy to use it influences Perceived Usefulness

H.1b There is an intention to use Social Media for travel planning when it is perceived as easy to use through Perceived Usefulness

H.2 When Social Media is perceived as useful this has an influence on the intention to use it for travel planning

Perceived Enjoyment (PE) was introduced as an intrinsic factor by Davis et al. (1992), and can be defined as "the extent to which the activity of using technology is perceived enjoyable in its own right, apart from any performance consequences that may be anticipated". In a complex environment of information and communications such as Social Media applications, affective factors that focus on enjoyment or fun may have more impact than PU of the technology on users' behaviour.

Having these aspects in consideration, it was decided to test this relation with the following hypotheses:

H.3a There is an intention to use Social Media for travel planning when this activity is perceived as enjoyable

H.3b When the activity is perceived as enjoyable this will have an influence of the Perceived Ease of Use

H.3c There is an intention to use Social Media for travel planning when this activity is perceived as enjoyable through Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use

The last variable to introduce to Model 1 is the Perceived Trustworthiness variable (PT). According to Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953), trust can be defined as "the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate to assertions he/she considers most valid". It has the potential to influence intention and change attitudes (Willemsen et al., 2011). Trust has also been considered one of the main precursors of perceived usefulness (Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003; Wu & Chen, 2005), as it represents a

127

perception of a guarantee that the other party will provide what had been promised (Ganesan, 1994). Furthermore, travellers must have trust in the chosen online community if they are to perceive the information and the advice as useful. It is postulated that prospective travellers' perception of trustworthiness of content generated sources will have a positive effect on their attitudes toward the use of content generated media for travel planning, as well as on their perception of the usefulness of the content (Willemsen et al., 2011). Upon establishing the influence that trustworthiness can have on PU, and having in consideration that it has already been used as a variable in other theoretical models (Rauniar et al., 2014), the decision was made to associate Trustworthiness with TAM.

To test its relationship with the variables described, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H.4a There is an intention to use Social Media for travel planning when it is perceived as trustworthy

H.4b When Social Media is perceived as trustworthy this influences the Perceived Usefulness

H.4c There is an intention to use Social Media for Travel planning when it is perceived as trustworthy through Perceived Usefulness

3.2.2 Model 2. Intention to Book a Hotel Online

The second model analyses the influence of Social Media (SM) on the Intention to Book a Hotel online. One of the core principles that guides this section is the following: a business should use social media with the main goal of selling its products (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). The proposed model 2 (Figure 3.8) observes the business-consumer relationship in a similar fashion as Model 1 (Figure 3.7), with an emphasis on perceived trustworthiness, reputation and information quality – a set of relationships that are not covered enough in the literature.

Various research papers have studied the relation between SM and the Intention to Book online, and a number of empirical studies have been executed on the topic of how to use SM to attract customers (McCarthy, Stock & Verma, 2010; Stavrakantonakis et al., 2013;

128

Tiganj & Aleric, 2013; Inversini & Masiero, 2014; Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015; Nasihatkin, Kheiri & Miralbell, 2016; Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). However, despite the wide body of research and the nearly unconditional global usage of Social Media in the industry, it has been noted that hospitality businesses continuously fail to formulate reliable strategies. This could be seen in the study performed for this thesis, as well as in the summaries of the studies described in section Review of Studies Related to Social Media and Hotel Management. Past research has suggested that factors stemming from lack of trust and inadequate or missing information may be the cause (Cox et al., 2009; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Liang et al., 2020). That is to say – Social Media serves as an information source, or a "shop window" for these businesses; and since consumers often have no choice but to rely on incomplete information (Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973), risk and uncertainty are unavoidable (Peter & Tarpey, 1975; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Fondevila-Cascon et al. (2016) and Kim et al. (2017) emphasise trust as one of the more significant variables when booking a hotel online. Ahmad and Sharma (2023) explored booking intentions based on the Model of Information and Service Quality (De Lane & Mclean, 2003). Deviating slightly from the premise that information and trust are the core values that lead to booking a hotel online, Ahmad and Sharma quoted information quality and service quality as crucial for this activity.

For the purpose of formulating Model 2 (Figure 3.8), the following factors have been taken into consideration: firstly, in a paper that investigated factors that affect users' intention to book a hotel through Social Media, Theorachidis et al., (2020) measured Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU) with TAM and concluded that the correlation was low; therefore, it could not serve as a fundamental factor in the intention to book a hotel through Social Media. Secondly, the authors also stated that trust was the driving force behind consumers' intention to book online. In the recommendation section Theorachidis et al., (2020) suggested that other theories for predicting hotel consumers' intentions to book online were warranted. Lastly, there are a number of studies that explore the relation between intention to book a hotel online in relation to the User Generated Content, specifically focused on the Electric Word of Mouth (eWOM) (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Kim et al., 2017; Janet al., 2023; González-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Salomeh et al., 2022).

It is a relationship that has been explored extensively. Taking all these factors into consideration, while following the lines of recommendations from previous researches, as well as considering the findings stated in the previous paragraph, neither PEoU nor the eWOM variables will be addressed by this model; instead, a model that measures the intention to book a hotel online through Social Media, based on Perceived Trustworthiness through the antecedents of Information Quality and Site Reputation and the intention to book online is proposed (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8 Proposed Research Model 2. Intention to Book a Hotel Online
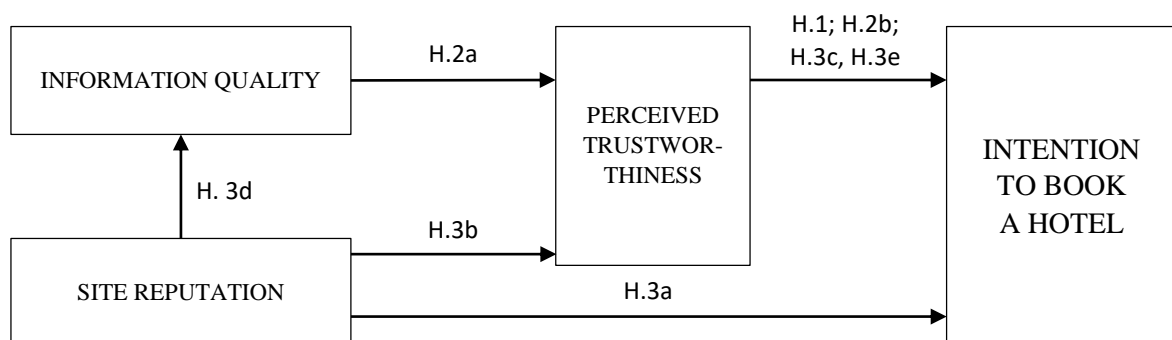
Trust can be defined as a subjective norm, a subjective probability, the willingness of an individual to be vulnerable, dependence on parties other than oneself, and a person's expectation (Lohman, 1989). According to the author, it is a mechanism that one develops to reduce the complexity of human conduct in situations where people have to cope with uncertainty. Furthermore, trust is considered to be essential in exchange relations, as it is a key element of social capital (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). It is related to the company's performance, satisfaction, competitive advantage and the economic outcomes, among which are transaction costs (Balasubramanian, Konana & Menon, 2003; Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; Handy, 1995) and search cost[27] reduction (Gulati, 1995). It also plays a key role in e-commerce, where a transaction is unlikely to happen when there is no Perceived Trustworthiness.

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[27] Search cost refers to time and other resources invested in researching and finding products, sellers, suppliers, business partners, etc.

130

Trustworthiness signifies the level of confidence individuals have in the source that they are hoping to receive a products/services/information from; it represents the trust towards a provider, and the honesty and integrity that receivers expect from it (Bristor, 1990; Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003). In an e-commerce setting, it has been demonstrated that higher trustworthiness of online content results in more purchases. In addition, if consumers perceive an online source as highly trustworthy, they are more likely to consciously receive a commercial message and believe its content (Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2009). In the Hotel and Tourism Industry, the products carry an added complexity of intangibility. This implies that tourists, when searching for travel-related information, focus on previous experiences of other consumers, rather than professional knowledge (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008; González-Rodríguez et al., 2022). The final expectation is that the seller will fulfil all the specified services and commitments, and in addition, that these transactions will happen under the requirements and limitations of appropriate behaviour, according to tourist expectations (Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003)

In order to study the case of the relation between perceived trustworthiness and the intention to book online, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H.1 Perceived Trustworthiness influences the intention to book a hotel online

An additional construct that is related to trust is Information Quality, which is an antecedent of Perceived Trustworthiness in the proposed model. Namely, the more the customers perceive information as valid and complete, the more they will be inclined to perceive the seller as trustworthy (Febriane, Wibowo & Agrippina, 2022). In the e-commerce world, this information often translates to content. As described in the literature, an impression of low quality content leads to perception of a service failure, whereas high quality content benefits Perceived Trustworthiness (Alnawas & Al Khateeb, 2022).

It is widely accepted that the quality of information found on the Internet is not unified; one can be presented with facts, assumptions, speculations, and even deceitful propaganda (Pack, 1999). As a result, online shoppers have become knowledgeable about where to seek reliable and substantial information, and will judge a Website based on the quality of information it provides, as well as how this information is presented (Miranda & Saunders, 2003).

The hypotheses proposed are:

H.2a Information Quality influences Perceived Trustworthiness

H.2b Information Quality has an influence on the intention to book a hotel online through Perceived Trustworthiness

An additional factor that can aid Perceived Trustworthiness or do the opposite is the seller's reputation (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994; Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky & Saarinen, 1999). It indicates whether the seller in question has a tendency to fulfil obligations towards clients in a timely and appropriate manner or not. In addition, the reputation factor indicates how likely it is to have one's expectations unmet, and what type of response from the seller will follow in case that occurs (Sharif, Kalafatis & Samouel, 2005). A positive reputation helps the consumer assume that the specific seller is trustworthy and reliable, whereas a negative one leads the consumer towards possibly disregarding a seller. In other words, the reputation influences the perception of trustworthiness related to interacting with and purchasing from the vendors in question, while simultaneously influencing the intention to make the transaction (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Ganeson, 1994).

The following hypotheses have been proposed for site reputation:

H.3a Site Reputation influences the intention to book a hotel online

H.3b Site Reputation influences Perceived Trustworthiness

H.3c Site Reputation influences the intention to book a hotel online through Perceived trustworthiness

H. 3d. Site Reputation influences Information Quality

H.3e. Site Reputation influences the intention to book a hotel online through Information Quality and Perceived Trustworthiness

3.2.3 Model 3. Influence of Perceived Risk in the willingness to Travel

During the process of writing this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic happened, as it was mentioned in this paper. This situation offered researchers an opportunity to test the relationship between perceived risk and the willingness to travel from an extreme perspective. This type of findings enables a thorough evaluation of the customers' behaviours related to travelling before, during and after the pandemic, as well as the ways people's willingness to travel changes in different circumstances. Numerous studies observed Perceived Risk in relation to travel intentions in the past decades (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Lepp & Gibson, 2008; Reisenger & Mavondo, 2005), and since COVID-19, this trend has increased exponentially (Chen, Xia & He, 2020; Rostiani, 2021; Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2022; Mirić & Marinković, 2023; Ertas & Kirlar-Can, 2022; Alkier, Perić & Dramićanin, 2022).

Perceived Risk negatively affects the intention to travel – the higher the Perceived Risk, the lower the intention to travel (Caber et al., 2020). Research shows that this perception varies notably among different age groups, genders, cultures and educational levels (Kozak, Crotts & Law, 2007; Reichel, Fuchs & Uriely, 2007; Alkier, Perić & Dramicanin, 2022; González-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Li & Ito, 2021; Ertas & Kirlar-Can, 2022).

Research related to Perceived Risk and willingness to travel after COVID-19 tends to analyse specific regions or places (Alkier, Perić & Dramicanin, 2022; Li & Ito, 2021; Chen, Hsu & Chinomona, 2023; Mlozi, 2023). Since there are studies that stated that once the pandemic was over individuals started to go back to travelling like before, the evolution of individuals' perceived risk and willingness to travel is still under study (Li & Ito, 2021), and since risk perception plays a key role in willingness to travel, it is important to keep researching about it for purposes of market investigation (Chen, Xia & He, 2020; Ertas & Kirlar-Can, 2022; Li & Ito, 2021).

Figure 3.9 Proposed Research Model 3. Perceived Risk and Willingness to Travel
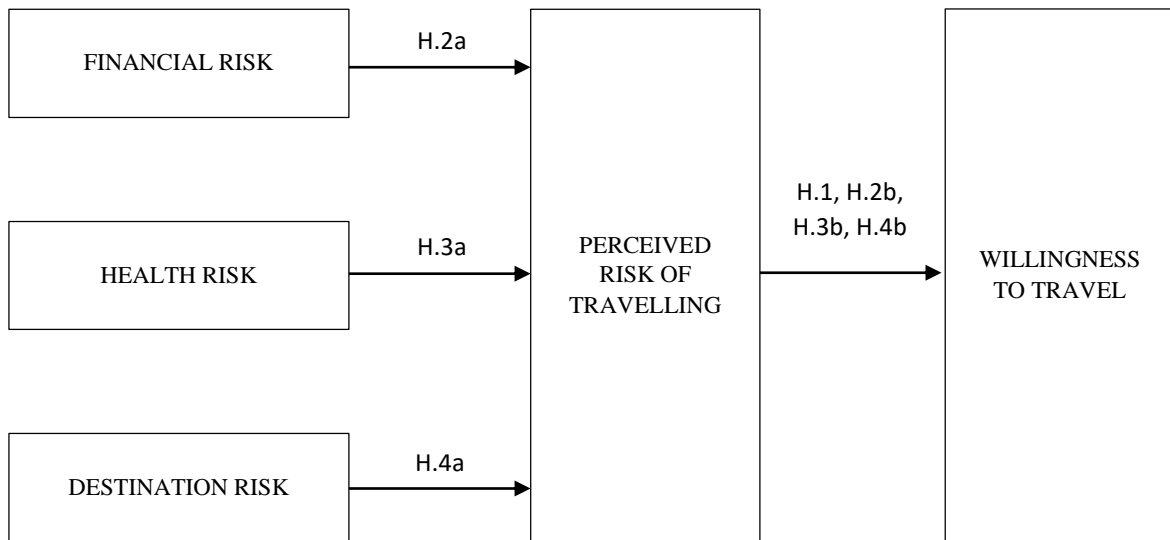
For the specific case of tourism, there are different analyses depending on the sector related (transportation, accommodation, or leisure). Tourist Perceived Risk has been measured adopting a multi-dimensional evaluation approach (Cui et al., 2016; Park & Tussyadiah, 2017). According to the literature review, risk can be divided into following categories that influence Perceived Risk: physical, financial, performance, social, time, and risk of loss (Assael, 1995; Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995; Mowen & Minor, 1998; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004).

Perceived risk has a direct influence on the willingness to travel in this model.; thus, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H.1 High perceived risk decreases the willingness to travel

Considering that this research was performed immediately after COVID-19, three specific categories were chosen for this model to measure the impact of COVID-19 on the Perceived Risk and willingness to travel. These categories are as follows: Financial Risk (FR), Health Risk (HR) and destination risk (DR). It is important to clarify that the model is not exclusive for situations related to infectious diseases, and it can be applied to any travel-related risks, including natural disasters, terrorist attacks and political unrest, among others.

134

Financial Risk

FR is the possibility that money will be lost in relation to a trip (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992) or that a trip will not provide value for money. The perceived financial loss can range from simple activities, such as eating an unsatisfying lunch at a restaurant, to complex situations, such as needing to be repatriated due to injury on a mountain trek. Drawing from the investigation performed by Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992), a Financial Risk for the example of COVID-19 would be the unexpected additional expenses from having to receive a medical treatment at a destination in case of getting infected. It could also be the expense of having to spend an unplanned amount of days at a destination due to other factors such as adverse environmental conditions and transportation strikes. High insurance costs may be incurred at destinations with higher risk profiles, as opposed to safe and developed ones – a destination with a higher risk of robbery, presence of dangerous infectious diseases and terrorist attacks can increase the travel insurance fee, thus leading to a rejection of a destination in the trip-planning stage.

The following hypotheses have been proposed for the relation between Financial Risk with Perceived Risk in the willingness to travel:

H.2a Financial risk leads to high perceived risk

H.2b Financial risk has a negative influence on the willingness to travel, where this relationship is mediated by the perceived risk

Health risk

The mobility of international tourism can introduce new infectious diseases to the world's populations, and tourists can bring unfamiliar pathogens from remote areas to their home countries (Richter, 2003). While several empirical papers examined the effects of global health issues on travel intentions (Nazneen, Hong & Ud Din, 2020; Wen et al., 2020), their results describe the impact of the pandemic on the attitudes toward different types of travel. The first group of factors is related to tourists' trust in tourism providers, governmental officials, health-care institutions, and knowledge about the risk. For instance, trust significantly affected tourist behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic period, and it is anticipated that regaining trust in the institutions would take time after

the COVID-19 pandemic (Cori et al., 2020; Slovic, 2020). Tourists' knowledge about risks also affects risk perceptions (Ropeik, 2011). Unknown risks are usually perceived as more frightening than the known ones. In the case of SARS and the COVID-19 pandemic, the fear of new and unknown viruses, coupled with contradictory information about the origin and outcomes, had significant negative effects on tourists' perceptions, attitudes and behavioural intentions.

Health risk perception has been acknowledged as one of the major concerns in international travel as it could threaten the safety of not only tourists but also host communities (Wilks, 2006). Tourists are often exposed to health risks while travelling abroad, particularly in unfamiliar destinations. The WHO (2012) categorised travel health risks into environmental risks, exposure to blood and body fluids, infectious diseases, injury and violence, and psychological health. The COVID-19 pandemic made the safety of international travel a global concern (WHO, 2020b). The pandemic plagued more than 210 countries across the globe and caused extremely high economic damage to the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2020). The Tourism Industry is vulnerable to global risks that can lead to perceived travel risks (Ritchie, 2009). It is defined as the possibility that a trip will lead to physical danger or injury (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992).

For this research, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

H.3a Health risk influences the perceived risk positively

H.3b High health risk decreases the willingness to travel, where this relationship is mediated by the perceived risk

Destination Risk

The destination variable is assessed through two risk types from the Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992) research. These types would be the socio-psychological risk, which measures the impact of the tourist's friends' and family's opinions on one hand, and the performance risk on the other (Fuchs & Reichel 2006), which comprises uncomfortable weather, crowded sight-seeing, possible strikes, inappropriate tourist facilities, unfriendly

locals, discourteous hospitality employees, and a dislike of the food (Assael, 1995; Mitchell & Vassos, 1998; Mowen & Minor, 1998; Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997; Mountinho & Witt, 1995).

Drawing from the study of Roehl and Fesenmaier (1992), the following hypotheses are proposed:

H.4a Destination risk influences the perceived risk positively

H.4b High destination risk decreases the willingness to travel, where this relationship is mediated by the perceived risk

3.3 Justification for the Models

If trying to condense all the goals exposed in the previous sections and chapters, the end goal was to develop a framework for elaborating efficient Social Media strategies for the Accommodation Sector. In order to achieve that, this study followed the travel planning process of travellers – from the beginning until the end.

Before an accommodation is booked online, a traveller is first in a position of seeking reliable and trustworthy information about a destination. In that research, he or she examines and compares various available options. Research Model 1 tests the influence of Social Media during the process of the initial travel planning, by means of a modified Technology Acceptance Model, with Perceived Trustworthiness variable added. This allows researchers, SM managers, and marketers to obtain and compare a set of variables, discover which ones are the most significant ones for attracting the customer, and focus on those variables when crafting a Social Media strategy. At the same time, the less significant variables remain in the model, the reason being that technology and SM change constantly, as explained in the Literature Review. Both predictable factors (such as experience gain) and unpredictable factors (such as market trends) make it implausible to formulate an integrated SM strategy that consistently works equally well at different types of venues, periods and situations.

Once the traveller has used Social Media resources in order to find reliable information, the next step of the process would be to make an online booking. The SM manager, on the other end, would have gained insights into the target customer's intention to use Social Media for travel planning and the factors that attracted him or her to book. Now, it is essential to verify the probability that the traveller will make a booking, and which aspects will have led to that decision. In order to provide those insights, Research Model 2 relies on the premise that Perceived Trustworthiness is preceded by the antecedents of Information Quality and Site Reputation, as explained in the previous sections. The model tests perceived reliability and credibility of the sources as antecedents of trustworthiness on one hand, and the intention to book online on the other. Along with the information gained from Research Model 1, the SM manager obtains insights into how to attract a customer and later influence him or her to make a booking.

Research Models 1 and 2 were the only models proposed for the thesis, initially. However, during the COVID-19 crisis, the tourism activity diminished to a point where there was little related activity, which drew attention to an additional construct that should be considered by tourism companies: Perceived Risk and its impact on the willingness to travel. Research Model 3 was based on the example of COVID-19. Nonetheless, risk is implicated in all travel activities, as it was described in Perceived Risk Theories section, and it varies among destinations, cultures and demographic profiles. This model allows for a broad range of measurements related to Risk Perception and is in no way limited to the COVID-19 case. It aims at providing information that can serve as a set of guidelines that help managers and marketers measure and mitigate travel-related Perceived Risk. Together with the information obtained from Models 1 and 2, the outcome of the research is a methodology for crafting a strategy that aims at improving customer trust, reducing perceived risk, and increasing the number of online bookings.

Chapter 4: Testing the Research Models, Results, and Discussion

CHAPTER 4.- TESTING THE RESEARCH MODELS, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the models proposed in Chapter 3 will be tested. In order to do that, the data collection process is described, as well as the sample that was selected, and the used methodology. Lastly, the results are revealed and discussed in reference with the literature reviewed in Chapter 3. Conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study are included.

4.1 Sample Collection

For the design of the empirical investigation of this thesis, a questionnaire was compiled, with a focus on obtaining information that was required for completing the research models, and for testing the proposed hypotheses. First, to communicate improvements in the wording and readability of questionnaires, a pilot test involving a sample of 30 individuals was carried out in Spain. Then, the official questionnaire was distributed online – via email, Facebook and Instagram, and guests of various hotels throughout the city were personally asked to participate.

The methods used for data collection were based on nonprobability sampling, which does not consider validity and probability of the sample, and is not applicable to descriptive studies; it is, however, appropriate for a wide range of explorative studies, including sociological studies (Small, 2009). The bulk of the sample was obtained by convenience, approaching participants haphazardly; linear snowball sampling was also employed, which is a method used for increasing the statistical sample by encouraging referrals (Malhotra, 2004). In total, 240 questionnaires were processed, 233 of which were valid, in the period between October 2021 and November 2022. The obtained results aided in describing the Social Media usage patterns of the respondents, as well as their sociodemographic profiles.

The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms, which is a platform for creating online forms and surveys by means of data compilers and design tools; the platform also permits the analysis of the obtained results via raw data or factual summaries (Google, 2023)[28]. The survey questions were answered by clicking on one of the proposed choices. Depending on the topic, the possible choices were: yes/no, scales of one to seven, and time intervals. A "filter" question – Do You Use Social Media? – was included at the beginning of the questionnaire, with the purpose of automatically excluding the non-users from the survey.

This survey structure was chosen considering the immediate and automatic transfer of the answers into the database, as well as for the convenient nature of online questionnaires for both the participants and the researchers. By focusing on online questionnaires

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[28] https://www.google.com/forms/about/

exclusively, human errors were eliminated, while the data collection, transfer, and processing were quicker and less costly than in the case of physical surveys and field studies.

4.2 Sociodemographic and Social Media Use Results

The objective of this section is to describe the sociodemographic profile and the behaviour of the Social Media users represented in this study. The obtained sample has the following characteristics:

70,90% of the participants were female Social Media users. It should be noted that the predominance of female respondents was also observed in other research (Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy, 2007; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis, Buhalis & Ressides, 2011; Mendes-Filho et al., 2018; Dominguez-Navarro & González-Rodríguez, 2020). According to age groups, 14.63% of the respondents were less than 25 years old; 59.60% were 25 to 39; 17.51% were 40 to 53 years old; and 16.56% were 54 and above. The Majority of the participants (70,10%) started using Social Media more than 8 years ago; almost all the respondents (91.45%) use it daily; and 34.80% spend more than 10 hours a week on Social Media channels. In addition, 57,70% of the respondents use SM for 1 to 3 hours or more per day. This translates to 80% of those under 25 using it for more than 3 hours a day, and 77,78% of those 54 and older using Social Media for 1 hour per day or less.

4.3 Scales of Measurement

The information validity of the scales of measurement employed in the empirical investigation conducted for this thesis relies on theoretical fundamentals and empirical evidence that demonstrated functionality of the framework in past studies, and consequently its validity and reliability. In this section, the items of the scales will be corrected and adapted to the activity, context and time that defines the behaviour to be investigated, i.e. the user behaviour on Social Media channels.

Perceived Ease of Use

The variable Perceived Ease of Use was defined as the amount of effort that must be put into understanding, using and mastering the specified technology (Davis, 1989). In addition, works of Casaló, Flavian & Guinaliu (2010), Tom Dieck et al. (2017) and Ayeh, Au & Law (2013) were considered, who pointed out the relation between PEoU and the Perceived Usefulness (PU) in the case of Social Media (SM) and travel planning. Upon reviewing the study of Ayeh, Au & Law (2013) it was also understood that the PEoU, when using User Generated Content (UGC), had a positive impact on PU, which means that if travellers perceive the UGC as easy to use, this will enhance their attitude and the belief that using it is beneficial for travel planning.

In case of the study at hand, these factors determine the extent to which a person believes that using UGC will enhance his or her travel planning (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013) through the belief that using a certain platform will be effortless, and that SM provides enhanced convenience for information research and travel planning. In this research, the items defined by Ayeh, Au & Law (2013) were used to define the items scale, as well as those from the research of Casaló, Flavian & Guinaliu (2010). They were adapted to this research and measured through the following items.

Table 4.1 Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU)

	Perceived Ease of Use
Items	It's easy to use content in Social Media to plan my trips. It's easy to learn how to use Social Media. It's easy to find the information needed in Social Media. Social Media is clear and understandable in terms of content. Overall Social Media is easy to use.

Perceived Usefulness

The Perceived Usefulness variable used in this study is based on TAM (Davis, 1989) and also defined as the perception of a traveller that UGC can benefit the travel planning process by helping one make better travel decisions (Xiang, Magnini & Fesenmaier, 2015). Various tourism-related research papers support the premise that PU impacts the Use Intention (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013; Casaló, Flavian & Guinaliu, 2010; Huh, Kim & Law, 2009). For instance, Tom Dieck et al. (2017) found that PU impacted the intention to use UGC for travel planning, while Ayeh, Au & Law (2013) suggested that when UGC is perceived as useful, travellers are likely to have a favourable attitude towards using UGC for travel planning (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). Ultimately, the travellers who perceive SM as useful are more inclined to express positive attitudes towards adapting it for travel planning compared to those who do not perceive it as useful (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013; Persico, Manca & Pozzi, 2014; Workman, 2014). The Items for this research are based on the studies of Casaló, Flavian & Guinaliu (2010) and Mendes-Filho et al. (2018). These were adapted to the research and measured by the items shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Perceived Usefulness (PU)

	Perceived Usefulness
Items	Social Media networks help me resolve doubts when I plan a trip.
	Social Media helps me plan a trip in a more efficient way.
	Social Media helps me save time when I plan a trip.
	The content provided by other users in Social Media networks is important for my travel plan.
	Using User Generated Content while performing travel planning activities is significant to me.

Perceived Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be described as subjective perception of the "goodness or morality of the source" (Fogg & Tseng, 1999). In the online context, it is the belief that the information is not ill-intentioned, false, or biassed. For the specific case of tourism and social networks, PT can be referred to as the trust that the explored content is not meant to deceive travellers, but rather share honest experiences. As such, it can directly influence people's thought and modify their needs (Ohanian, 1991; Willemsen et al., 2011). Therefore, it is suggestive that the perception of trustworthiness has a positive effect on the intention to use Social Media content for travel planning. For this research, the Items defined by Ayeh, Au & Law (2013) were used. These were adapted to the research context and measured by the Items shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Perceived Trustworthiness (PT)

	Perceived Trustworthiness
Items	I believe Social Media networks are trustworthy. I believe Social Media networks are reliable for online bookings.

Perceived Enjoyment

The PE variable has been included with relation to TAM. It can be understood as the degree to which users derive enjoyment from the use of specific technological systems (Van der Heijden, 2004). For this research, the extent of PE drawn from the use of SM, and the influence of this relationship on travel planning, will be tested. In addition, the PE from the perspective of user motivation to use SM will be viewed. More specifically, SM can be used to either fulfil extrinsic motivations – e.g. complete a task – or intrinsic motivations – e.g. to enjoy the act of casual browsing through content (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1992). Thus, the intrinsic motivators in this case imply the PE derived from using the technology, rather than a result that is hoped to be obtained from that action.

The Items to measure this variable (Table 4.4) were borrowed from the Items of Ayeh, Au & Law (2013), and adapted to the context of the research.

Table 4.4 Perceived Enjoyment (PE)

	Perceived Enjoyment
Items	Social Media networks are a convenient channel for me to collect information. Travel info search through Social Media is a pleasant experience. I have fun through the info search using Social Media.

Intention to Use Social Media

The willingness to perform a specific behaviour, which in this case is the use of Social Media for travel planning, is what TAM refers to as intention (Davis, 1989). This intention is influenced by a set of different variables, or antecedents, as it was described in Section 3.1. The antecedents allocated to the new model for the purpose of this research are PU, PEoU, PT, and PE, and two items were formulated to test this intention (Davis, 1989; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). The said intention is a result of an individual's attitude toward a technology and his or her perception of its usefulness, ease of use, and in this specific case, trustworthiness and enjoyment. A study by Lee & Paris (2013) was addressed in order to extract items appropriate for this model. The two items were adapted to the context, and they can be seen in table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Intention to Use Social Media (IUSM)

	Intention to Use Social Media
Items	The content provided by users on Social Media while planning a trip offers security in my choice. The content provided by users on Social Media while planning a trip helps in my choice.

153

Information Quality

The quality of the information about a product is a key factor that influences the potential customer. Numerous indicators of Information Quality have been proposed, among which are: relevance, understandability, adequacy (Park, Lee & Han, 2007) and usefulness (Bovee, 2004). For the model proposed by this research, the intention was to test the Information Quality, while the criterion was the information being of the right kind, at the right time (Yang, 2012). Also, reliable and timely information was to be tested (Wang, 1998; Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015).

Reliability was tested as a measure of trust, since the two are closely linked – i.e. if information is perceived as reliable, the customer will trust its content (Salaü & Flores, 2001). Timely information was considered to be one that is up-to-date, and current (Nelson, Todd & Wixom, 2005; Filieri & McLeay, 2014). In the tourism sector, particularly, the online information is considered to be significantly timelier than information from traditional sources (Filieri & McLeay, 2014).

Table 4.6 Information Quality (IQ)

	Information Quality
Items	I think Social Media networks provide timely information.
	I think Social Media networks provide reliable information.

154

Site Reputation

As Doney & Cannon (1997) explained, and in consistency with the literature review described in section 3.2.2 of this paper, Site Reputation is considered to be the consumer's perception of the business; i.e. the extent to which buyers believe that the seller is honest and concerned about customers. Companies with a good reputation (Chiles & McMackin, 1996), which are also familiar to customers and well-known (Anderson & Weitz, 1989; Ganesan, 1994), usually benefit from high customers' intention to purchase (Quelch and Klein, 1996). The items of the questionnaire used for this research were based upon the items of Jarvenpaa and Vitale's way to test reputation (Jarvenpaa & Vitale, 2000) and Gefen's definition of item familiarity, which states that it is "an understanding, often based on previous interactions, experiences, and learning of what, where and when others do what they do" (Gefen, 2000).

Table 4.7 Site Reputation (SR)

	Site Reputation
Items	I think Social Media networks are well known.
	I think Social Media networks have a good reputation.
	I am familiar with Social Media Networks.

155

Intention to Book a Hotel Online

It is understood that once an accommodation has been evaluated and selected, it is the individual's motivation that will ultimately lead to the intention of booking a hotel online (Chen, Phelan & Jai, 2016). This translates to one's desire or lack of it, and the willingness to book online, based on the information that one has obtained (Nabila, 2019). As explained in-depth throughout section 3.1, and according to Kim, Ferrin & Rao (2007), this intention is a predictor of a consumer's actual behaviour or purchase decision. The items of the questionnaire were based on the same items used by Chiang & Jang (2007) and Kim, Kim & Park (2017), in relation to the intention to book online.

Table 4.8 Intention to Book a Hotel Online (IBHotel)

	Intention to Book a Hotel Online
Items	I like the idea of booking my accommodation online.
	My willingness to book accommodation online is very high.
	The probability that I would consider booking an accommodation through Social Media is very high.
	The likelihood of booking hotels through Social Media is very high.

Financial Risk

In the tourism sector, Financial Risk represents all the potential economic consequences stemming from unexpected expenses of a trip (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011). It also refers to the possibility that the money invested in a trip will be lost (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992), or that the trip will not provide "value for money" (Chi & Qu, 2008).

This research paper focuses on Financial Risk in the sense of unexpected extra expenses that may occur during a trip, and the possibility that the trip would not provide value for the price. The items used for the model are based on the research of Fuchs & Reichel (2006) and their measurement techniques for Financial Risk.

Table 4.9 Financial Risk (FR)

	Financial Risk
Items	I think that the cost of travelling is higher than before. I'm afraid there will be some unexpected expenses. I'm afraid of not getting good value for money.

Health Risk

Various studies have been performed on the topic of tourist health in relation to the travel risk perception (Jonas et al., 2011; Kozak, Crotts & Law, 2007; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009). These studies usually classify this risk based on its distinct types, such as: the fear of injury or illness during a trip (Liu & Gao, 2008), or what Liu and Gao refer to as medical risk – the risk of not being able to ensure timely medical assistance. In addition, pathogens such as bacteria, viruses and parasites, different types of epidemic crises, radioactive contaminants, toxic spills, and anything that threatens health care, can be considered a travel Health Risk (Li, 2010).

For this study, the Health Risk variable was tested following premises: the worry that the facilities will not be sanitary (Xu, Xu & Wang, 2013; Zhang, Wang & Yu, 2017; Yi et al., 2020); the worry that one will get sick during the trip (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Dolnicar, 2005; Liu & Gao, 2008; Chen, Qiao & Liu, 2009); and the fear that one will not get timely treatment during the trip, if needed (Liu & Gao, 2008; Li et al., 2014; She et al., 2016).

Table 4.10 Health Risk (HR)

	Health Risk
Items	I'm worried about getting sick during my trip.
	I'm afraid of not getting timely treatment for illness during the trip.
	I'm worried that the accommodation's facilities will not be sanitary.

Destination Risk

For the Destination Risk variable, the study includes three items: the Social Risk item, which represents the possibility that friends and family will have a negative opinion related to the trip or develop a negative attitude towards the trip or the traveller (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Zhan et al., 2020); the Performance Risk item, which refers to inappropriate tourist facilities, discourteous hospitality employees, possible strikes, or uncomfortable weather conditions (Assael, 1995; Mitchell & Vassos, 1998; Mowen & Minor, 1998; Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997; Mountinho & Witt, 1995); and the third item, which applies to a fear that the services will not be good (Zhan et al., 2020).

Table 4.11 Destination Risk (DR)

	Destination Risk
Items	I'm afraid that if I travel, the people who care about me will be anxious. I'm afraid that the tourist facilities will not be good. I'm afraid that the tourist service will not be good enough.

Perceived Risk

When planning a trip, Perceived Risk can impact the selection of a destination or its avoidance, due to a variety of factors (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998); one of them are global pandemics. As discussed in the Methodology section of Chapter 2, a global pandemic occurred during the course of writing this thesis. Having reviewed FR, HR and DR, and having included these variables in the model upon reviewing a wide range of analyses related to Perceived Risk when travelling – particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic – additional COVID-related Perceived Risk items were included, drawing form a research by Sanchez-Cañizares et al. (2020).

Table 4.12 Perceived Risk (PR)

	Perceived Risk
Items	I feel more averse to travelling because of the risk from the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the current situation, I prefer to avoid travelling to large cities. Given the current situation, I prefer to shorten the duration of my potential trips.

Willingness to Travel

The WT variable is defined as the traveller's intention to participate in certain travel activities (Kozak, 2001). This intention to travel might be influenced by the risk factors – situations that may have a negative impact on one's trip and influence travel decisions. These uncertainties can produce anxiety to the future travellers, and consequently diminish the Willingness to Travel (Beerli & Martín, 2004).

The items for measuring this variable were borrowed from the research of Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum (2020). They were adapted to the context of the research and measured by the items shown in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13 Willingness to Travel

	Willingness to Travel (WT)
Items	I'm willing to travel during a pandemic.
	If the policy does not prohibit it, I am willing to pay for tourism during the pandemic.

161

4.4 Methodology

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the hypotheses involved in the three research models exposed in Chapter 3. SEM technique belongs to the second generation of statistical techniques, which allow researchers – particularly in the area of Social Sciences – to include variables that are not directly observable but are measured indirectly by means of indicators (Hair et al., 2021). Structural Equation Models are classified as models based on covariance (CB-SEM) and models based on variance (PLS-SEM). Models that are based on covariance are predominately used to confirm theories or compare alternative theories. As a result, causal relations of a model of structural equations are established in accordance with one existing solid theory. Structure Equation Models based on variance are utilised to develop theories in exploratory research. When the main objective is the application of Structural Equation Modelling, with the purpose of predicting endogenous constructs or identifying predictable variables and exploring causal relationships, variance-based structural equation modelling is justified (Henseler, 2018). Furthermore, PLS-SEM appears as an alternative to models based on covariance when the subject of the research is more exploratory in nature than confirmatory, when there is little knowledge about structural model relations or with regards to the measurement of constructs, and otherwise when the assumptions required by CB-SEM are not accomplished in relation to data normality, sample size, or non-complexity of the model.

The three research models proposed (Chapter 3) have been estimated by means of Partial Least Square criteria. PLS-SEM estimates the model's coefficients (casual relations), through the maximisation of the explained variance of the endogenous variables. The use of PLS-SEM is justified by the following issues (Hair et al., 2021):

- Sample characteristics. PLS-SEM can attain high levels of statistical significance when the sample size is small. Contrary to CB-SEM, large samples are not necessary, and this method does not require the assumption of normality, although a bigger sample guarantees more accurate estimations.

- Model Characteristics. PLS-SEM permits a simultaneous inclusion of constructs measured with a single item or with multiple items. PLS-SEM is highly recommended when the structural model is complex, involving direct and indirect relationships.

162

- Characteristics of the PLS algorithm. The main objective is to minimise residual variance or to maximise the explained variance of the Endogenous Constructs. The algorithm is efficient as a means of detecting a significant relation within a population.

The PLS-SEM model was adopted for the purpose of this research, mainly due to the lack of knowledge about the casual relations of the models proposed in the context of social media usage and its effect on the use of social media for travel planning and online hotel booking intention.

Structural equation modelling is evaluated in two stages by means of: evaluation of the measurement model; and the evaluation of the structural equation model (Henseler, Hubona & Ray, 2016; Henseler, 2018).

Evaluation of the Measurement Model

The researcher decides between two types of measurement model specifications: reflective measurement models and formative measurement models. The main characteristic of the reflective measurement model is that indicators represent effects of a subjacent construct. All the indicators should be caused by the same construct, and therefore, they should be strongly correlated. On the other hand, the formative measurement models are based on the assumption that the indicators cause the construct. The indicators should not be strongly correlated and each formative indicator would capture one specific aspect of the domain construct (Hair et al., 2021).

Based on literature review and because all the variables are behavioural constructs, all constructs (in the three research models) have been defined as reflective models. For the reflective constructs validity is valued if the construct measures what it was originally intended to measure, and reliability if it is stable and consistent. The evaluation of the reflective measurement models includes composite reliability (Internal consistency) and the individual reliability of the item, as well as the mean-variance obtained to evaluate the convergent validity. Furthermore, Fornell-Lacker criterion was used for the discriminant validity, in addition to cross-lodgings and the HTMT coefficient (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations) (Henser, Ringle & Standsted, 2021).

163

1. Reliability of individual items. Standardised factor loadings are analysed to evaluate the reliability of individual items (λ). Consequently, λ^2 is the shared variance between the indicator and construct, also known as communality. According to Carmines and Zeller (1979) an indicator can be accepted as a part of the construct when its factorial load is higher than 0.707. Falk & Miller (1992) state that the limit for λ is higher than or equal to 0.5. However, it is also said that the limit shouldn't be rigid in the initial stages of the development of measurement scales (Hair et al., 2021).

2. Reliability of the construct that allows evaluation of the internal consistency of all the indicators when measuring the construct. The traditional criterion for measuring the internal consistency is Crobanch's alpha. The scale is reliable if the values are higher than 0.7. Given that Crobanch's alpha coefficient is very sensitive to the number of items and normally underestimates the internal consistency, it would be more appropriate to use the composite reliability, ρ_c. According to Nunnally (1978), the values of the composite reliability should be higher than 0.7 in the early stages of the research, with a more precise value of 0.8 for the basic research.

3. Convergent Validity states that the indicators of the same construct should share a high proportion of the variance (Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009). Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which is defined as the proportion of the variance that a construct obtained from the indicators, is used to measure the convergence validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Fornell and Lacker 1981 recommend for this measure not to be higher than 0.5.

4. Discriminatory Validity refers to the level in which a construct is different from other constructs. The criteria used to evaluate the validity of the discriminating factors are: (1) Fornell-Lacker criterion; (2) Cross-Loadings; and HTMT criteria.

   - Cross-Loadings: Correlations between a construct and its indicators. Every indicator should have a higher load for its own construct than for the others.

   - Fonerll-Lacker Criterion states that an indicator should share more variance with its indicators than with other constructs. Hence, it can be

164

observed if the correlations between constructs are lower than the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

- According to Henseler et al. (2021), both Cross-Loadings and Fornell-Lacker criteria present certain limitations because it was proved that they do not identify the lack of discriminant validity in most of the cases. Therefore, HTMT is proposed and then utilised to assess the discriminant validity of the constructs in the empirical studies.

5. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT). An estimation of the existing correlation between two reflective constructs, drawn from the correlation of each item with the remaining ones that belong to the same construct, and the correlation of each item and the items that belong to the remaining constructs. HTMT values lower or equal to 0.9 show discriminant validity between the constructs.

Structural Model

Once the measurement model has been evaluated, then the structural model must be evaluated too. The statistical significance of the relations involved in the model must be analysed.

The aspects required for the evaluation of the structural model can be resumed in the following statements:

1. The statistical significance coefficients of the causal relationships of the models. T-student statistics and confidence intervals can be used to test the null hypothesis of non-significance against the alternative hypothesis of statistical significance.
2. Collinearity analysis. The estimation of the model requires that explanatory variables must not present exact collinearity. A Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) below the threshold 3.3 indicates that there are not signals for a high multicollinearity among the explanatory constructs (Petter, Straub & Rai, 2007).
3. Goodness of fit. The calculation of the errors' square root (Root Mean Square Residual) was recently proposed as the indicator of goodness of fit in PLS-SEM (Henseler et al., 2014). A value lower or equal to 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) or

0.10, where this threshold is less conservative (Henseler, Ringle & Sardsted, 2021) are recommended.

4. The Coefficient of Determination, R^2, linked to each dependent variable, represents the variance proportion explained by the set of all the predictable variables. Coefficient R^2 varies between 0 and 1. The closer it is to the value of 1, the better the explanatory capacity of the predictable variables. Since the determination coefficient is highly influenced by the number of casual relations established in the model, an adjusted determination coefficient (R^2_{adj}) is used. This facilitates the adjustment of the bias produced by the inclusion of causal relations.

5. The cross-validated redundancy measure Q^2 for the dependent variables enables the assessment of the predictive relevance of the research model (Hair et al., 2017). A Stone-Geisser test (Q^2) greater than zero implies the value shows predictive relevance (Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009).

6. When a relevant exogenous construct is not included, the f^2 effect size facilitates the analysis of the effect on the explanatory variance of an endogenous construct (Cohen, 1998). As a rule, the f^2 thresholds of 0.002, 0.15 and 0.35 respectively represent small, medium and big effects of the exogenous variables over the endogenous ones (Cohen, 2013).

For the purpose of this research, analysis of collinearity, the statistical significance of the parameters, the calculation of the coefficient of determination, the f^2 effect size, the Stone-Geisser test (Q^2) and the model's goodness of fit (SRMR) have been conducted.

4.5 Results

Research Model 1 to explain Intention to Use Social Media

Measurement Model assessment.

All indicators of the constructs (Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, Perceived Trustworthiness, and Intention to Use Social Media) have loadings above 0.80, CRs are over 0.9 and AVEs over 0.70 (Table 4.14). Therefore, the constructs meet the requirement for internal consistency and convergent validity. From Table 4.15 the constructs also meet the discriminant validity requirement HTMT are below 0.90[29]. Hence, the constructs differ from other constructs.

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[29] Although, as mentioned, Fornell-Lacker and Cross-Loading criteria offer certain limitations when assessing discriminant validity, they have been also obtained, confirming the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 4.14 Measurement Model assessment

	Weight	Load	CR	AVE
Perceived Trustworthiness			**0.92**	**0.852**
TR1: I believe Social Media networks are trustworthy	0.519***	0.916		
TR2: I believe Social Media networks are reliable for online bookings	0.564***	0.931		
Perceived Usefulness			**0.966**	**0.85**
PU1:Social Media networks help me resolve doubts when I plan a trip.	0.217***	0.907		
PU2:Helps me plan a trip in a more efficient way	0.215***	0.921		
PU3:Helps me save time when I plan a trip.	0.216***	0.925		
PU4:The content provided by other users in social media networks is important for my travel plan	0.224***	0.954		
PU5:Using user's content when making travel plan activities is significant to me	0.211***	0.902		
Perceived Enjoyment			**0.955**	**0.877**
PE1:Social Media networks is a convenient channel for me to collect information	0.355***	0.905		
PE2:Travel info search through Social Media is a pleasant experience.	0.359***	0.961		
PE3:I have fun through the info search using Social Media.	0.354***	0.943		
Perceived Ease of Use			**0.947**	**0.781**
PEoU1: It's easy to use content in Social Media to plan my trips.	0.233***	0.839		
PEoU2:It's easy to learn how to use Social Media.	0.265***	0.932		
PEoU3:It's easy to find the information needed in Social Media.	0.236***	0.883		
PEoU4:Social Media is clear and understandable in terms of content.	0.238**	0.883		
PEoU5:Overall Social Media is easy to use.	0.231***	0.881		
Intention to Use Social Media			**0.965**	**0.902**
IUGCAC1:The content provided by users in Social Media while looking for accommodation offers security in my choice.	0.364***	0.941		
IUGCAC2:The content provide by users in Social Media while looking for accommodation help in my choice	0.358***	0.955		

Notes: Note:*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 4.15 Assessment of discriminant Validity using HTMT

	PU	IUGAC	PEoU	PE
INTENTION TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA	0.851			
PERCEIVED EASE OF USE	0.807	0.717		
PERCEIVED ENJOYMENT	0.842	0.791	0.881	
PERCEIVED TRUSTWORTHINESS	0.875	0.754	0.77	0.818

Structural model assessment.

First, VIFs are below the threshold 3.3, which indicates that there are no signals for a high multicollinearity among the constructs. Regarding the significance of the causal relationships, the results from Table 4.16 (and Figure 4.1) can be described as follows: Perceived Ease of Use has a significant influence on Perceived Usefulness (β=0.450, p-value=0.000), thus supporting hypotheses H1. Perceived Ease of Use influences the Intention to Use Social Media through Perceived Usefulness (β=0.289, p-value=0.0012); Hypothesis H1b is supported. Perceived Usefulness has a significant influence on Intention to Use Social Media (β=0.642, p-value=0.000), which supports hypothesis H2. However, Perceived Enjoyment does not have a direct influence on Intention to Use Social Media (β=0.046, p-value=0.3766), thus not supporting hypothesis H3a. Perceived Enjoyment has a significant influence on Perceived Ease of Use (β=0.829, p-value=0.000). Hence, H3b is supported. Perceived Enjoyment has a significant influence on Intention to Use Social Media through Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness β=0.240, p-value=0.000). Hypothesis H3c is supported. Perceived Trustworthiness does not have a significant effect on Intention to Use Social Media (β=0.067, p-value=0.316). Hypothesis H4a is not supported. Perceived Trustworthiness has a significant influence on Perceived Usefulness (β=0.472, p-value=0.000), thus supporting hypothesis H4b. Perceived Trustworthiness has a significant influence on Intention to Use Social Media through Perceived Usefulness (β=0.303, p-value=0.000). Hypothesis H4c is supported.

Regarding f^2 values, the strong effects are observed in the following relationships: Perceived Ease of Use on Perceived Usefulness ($f^2 = 0.379$), Perceived Trustworthiness on Perceived Usefulness ($f^2 = 0.416$), Perceived Usefulness on Intention to Use Social Media (($f^2 = 0.209$) and Perceived Enjoyment on Perceived Ease of Use ($f^2 = 0.209$). The model shows a minor impact of Perceived Ease of Use on Intention to Use Social Media ($f^2 = 0.008$); Perceived Enjoyment on Intention to Use Social Media (($f^2 = 0.001$), and Perceived Trustworthiness on Intention to Use On Social Media ($f^2 = 0.005$).

Q^2 values are 0.603 for Perceived Usefulness, 0.590 for Intention to Use Social Media and 0.522 for Perceived Ease of Use, a predictive power for the endogenous variables. Furthermore, SRMR value as a goodness of fit for the research model is below 0.08 (SRMR=0.069), showing that the model specification is within the thresholds that are considered satisfactory. The coefficient of determination of Perceived Ease of Use is 0.522; for Perceived Usefulness it is 0.603 and for the Intention to Use it is 0.590, revealing a good explanatory power of the predictor variables on the predicting variable.

Table 4.16 Structural Model estimates

	Coeff.	t-value	p-value	Supported
H1a: Perceived Ease of Use→Perceived Usefulness	0.450***	7.577	0.000	Yes
H1b: Perceived Ease of Use→Perceived Usefulness→Intention to Use Social Media	0.289***	5.725	0.000	Yes
H2: Perceived Usefulness→Intention to Use Social Media	0.642***	4.724	0.000	Yes
H3a: Perceived Enjoyment-→Intention to Use Social Media	0.046ns	0.298	0.766	NO
H3b: Perceived Enjoyment-→Perceived Ease of Use	0.829***	29.76	0.000	Yes
H3c: Perceived Enjoyment→Perceived Usefulness→Intention to Use Social Media	0.240***	4.043	0.000	Yes
H4a: Perceived Trustworthiness→Intention to Use Social Media	0.067ns	1.003	0.316	No
H4b: Perceived Trustworthiness→ Perceived usefulness	0.472***	8.59	0.000	Yes
H4c: Perceived Trustworthiness→Perceived Usefulness→Intention to Use Social media	0.303***	5.642	0.000	Yes

Notes: Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Bootstrapping based on n=5000 subsamples. A two-tailed test for a t-Student is applied.

Figure 4.1 Structural Model for Intention to Use Social Media for travel planning
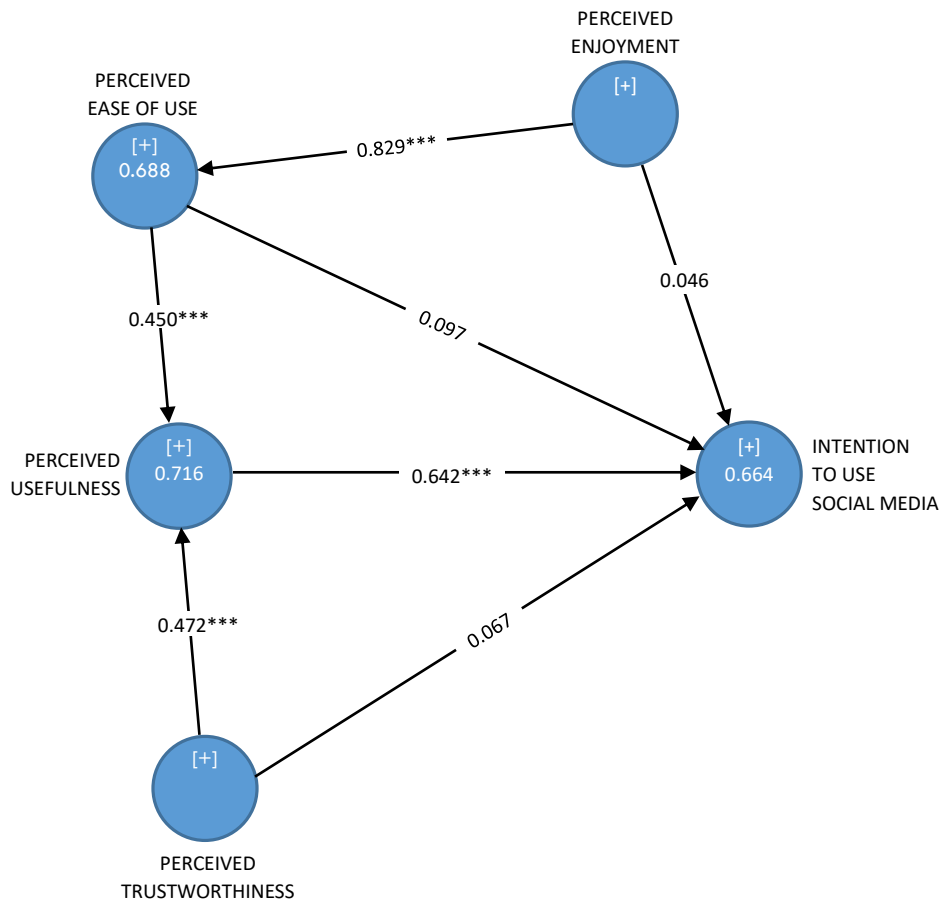
Research Model 2 to explain Intention to Book a Hotel Online

Measurement Model assessment.

All indicators of the constructs (Information Quality, Site Reputation, Perceived Trustworthiness, and Intention to Book a Hotel) have loadings above 0.70, CRs are over 0.80, and AVEs over 0.60 (Table 4.17). Therefore, the constructs meet the requirement for internal consistency and convergent validity. From Table 4.18 the constructs also meet the discriminant validity requirement HTMT, being below 0.90[30]. Hence, the constructs differ from other constructs.

Table 4.17 Measurement Model assessment

	Weight	Load	CR	AVE
Perceived Trustworthiness			0.92	0.852
TR1: I believe Social Media networks are trustworthy	0.515***	0.915		
TR2: I believe Social Media networks are reliable for online bookings	0.568***	0.931		
Site Reputation			0.966	0.624
SR1: I think Social Media networks has a good reputation	0.338***	0.725		
SR2: I am familiar with Social Media Networks	0.499***	0.846		
SR3: I think Social Media networks are well known	0.419***	0.795		
Information Quality			0.868	0.768
IQ1: I think Social Media networks Provide Timely information.	0.479***	0.961		
IQ2: I think Social Media networks provides reliable information	0.656***	0.916		
Intention to Book a Hotel			0.912	0.7
IBHotel1: I like the idea of booking the accommodation online.	0.212***	0.760		
IBHotel2: -My willingness to book accommodation online is very high.	0.182***	0.757		
IBHotel3: The probability that I would consider booking an accommodation through Social Media is very high.	0.375***	0.923		
IBHotel4: The likelihood of booking hotels through Social Media is very high	0.367**	0.880		

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[30] Fornell-Lacker, and Cross-Loadings criteria also confirm the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 4.18 Assessment of discriminant Validity using HTMT

	IQ	IBHOTEL	SR
INTENTION TO BOOK A HOTEL	0.593		
SITE REPUTATION	0.782	0.729	
PERCEIVED TRUSTWORTHINESS	0.891	0.730	0787

Structural Model assessment.

First, VIFs are below the threshold 3.3, indicating that there are no signals for a high multicollinearity among the constructs. Regarding the significance of the causal relationships, the results from Table 4.19 (and Figure 4.2) can be described as follows: Perceived Trustworthiness influences the Intention to Book a Hotel (β=0.526, p-value=0.000), thus supporting hypotheses H1. Information Quality influences Perceived Trustworthiness (β=0.292, p-value=0.000); Hypothesis H2a is supported. Information Quality influences the Intention to Book a Hotel through Perceived Trustworthiness (β=0.154, p-value=0.000), which supports hypothesis H2b. Site Reputation influences the Intention to Book a Hotel (β=0.188, p-value=0.008), supporting hypothesis H3a. Site Reputation influences Perceived Trustworthiness (β=0.582, p-value=0.000). Hypothesis H3b is confirmed. Site Reputation influences Information Quality (β=0.737, p-value=0.000). Hypothesis H3c is confirmed. Site Reputation influences the Intention to Book a Hotel through Perceived Trustworthiness (β=0.306, p-value=0.000). Hypothesis H3d is supported. Site Reputation influences Intention to Book a Hotel through Information Quality and Trustworthiness (β=0.113, p-value=0.001). Hypothesis H4e is supported.

Focusing on the effect size f^2 values, the high effect size corresponds to the relationships: Site Reputation on Information Quality ($f^2 = 1.182$), Site Reputation on Perceived Trustworthiness ($f^2 = 0.475$), and Site Reputation on Intention to Trust ($f^2 = 0.416$). The medium effect size corresponds to Perceived Trustworthiness on Inattention to Book ($f^2 = 0.191$) and Information Quality on Perceived Trustworthiness $f^2 = 0.120$), while the lowest effect size is observed in the influence of Site Reputation on Intention to Book a Hotel (($f^2 = 0.024$).

Q^2 values are 00.404 for Information Quality, 0.313 for Intention to Book a Hotel, and 0.567 for Perceived Trustworthiness, which indicates a predictive power for the endogenous variables. Furthermore, the SRMR value as a goodness of fit for the research model is below 0.8 (SRMR=0.067), showing that the model specification is within the thresholds that are considered satisfactory. The coefficient of determination of Information Quality is 0.543 of Perceived Trustworthiness is 0.674 and od Intention to Book a Hotel Online is 0.470, showing a good explanatory power of the predictor variables on the predicting variable.

Table 4.19 Structural Model estimates

	Coeff.	t-value	p-value	Supported
H1: Perceived Trustworthiness→Intention to Book a Hotel online	0.526***	7.07	0.000	Yes
H2a: Information Quality→Perceived Trustworthiness	0.292***	5.725	0.000	Yes
H2b: Information Quality→Perceived Trustworthiness→Intention to Book a hotel online	0.154***	3.554	0.000	Yes
H3a: Site Reputation→Intention to Use Social Media	0.188***	2.684	0.008	Yes
H3b: Site Reputation→Perceived Trustworthiness	0.582***	8.8188	0.000	Yes
H3c: Site Reputation →Perceived Trustworthiness→Intention to Book a hotel online	0.306***	5.801	0.000	Yes
H3d: Site Reputation→Information Quality	0.737***	18.892	0.316	Yes
H3e: Site Reputation→Information Quality→Trustworthiness→Intention to Book online Hotel	0.113***	3.257	0.001	Yes

Notes: Note:*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Bootstrapping based on n=5000 subsamples. A two-tailed test for a t-Student is applied.

174

Figure 4.2 Structural Model for Intention to Book a Hotel Online

INFORMATION QUALITY

[+]
0.543

PERCEIVED TRUSTWORTHINESS

[+]
0.674

0.292***

0.737***

0.582***

0.526***

SITE REPUTATION

[+]

0.188***

[+]
0.470

INTENTION TO BOOK A HOTEL
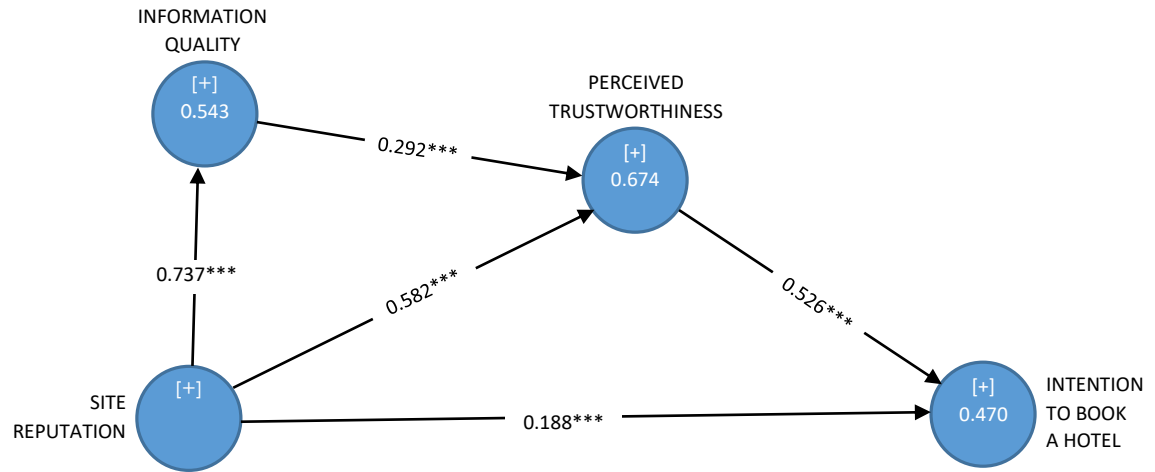
Research Model 3 for Willingness to Travel

Measurement Model assessment.

All indicators of the constructs (Financial Risk, Health Risk, Destination Risk, Perceived Risk and Willingness to Travel) have loadings above 0.74, CRs are over 0.89 and AVEs over 0.65 (Table 4.20). Thus, the constructs meet the requirement for internal consistency and convergent validity. From Table 4.21 the constructs also meet the discriminant validity requirement HTMT being below 0.80[31]. Hence, the constructs differ from other constructs.

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[31] Fornell-Lacker, and Cross-Loadings criteria also confirm the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 4.20 Measurement Model assessment

	Weight	Load	CR	AVE
Destination Risk			**0.894**	**0.737**
DR1: I'm afraid that if I travel the people who care about me will be anxious. Destination Risk	0.408***	0.878		
DR2: I'm afraid that the tourists' facilities will not be good	0.407***	0.810		
DR3: I'm afraid that the tourist service will not be good enough	0.352***	0.886		
Financial Risk			**0.847**	**0.651**
FR1: I think that the cost of travelling is higher than before.	0.365***	0911		
FR2: I'm afraid there will be some unexpected expenses	0.329***	0.929		
FR3: I'm afraid of not getting good value for money	0.533***	0.769		
Health Risk			**0.905**	**0.762**
HR1. I'm worried about getting sick during my trip.	0.405***	0.911		
HR2: I'm afraid of not getting timely treatment for illness during the trip.	0.419***	0.929		
HR3: I'm worried accommodations facilities will not be sanitary.	0.315***	0.769		
Perceived Risk			**0.911**	**0.773**
PRTRAV1: I feel more averse to travelling because of the risk from the COVID-19 pandemic	0.366***	0.882		
PRTRAV2: Given the current situation, I prefer to avoid travelling to large cities.	0.353***	0.865		
PRTRAV3: Given the current situation, I prefer to shorten the duration of my potential trip	0.417***	0.890		
Willingness to Travel			**0.921**	**0.854**
WTRAV1: I'm willing to travel during pandemic	0.459			
WTRAV2: If the policy does not prohibit, I am willing to pay for tourism during the pandemic	0.619			

Table 4.21 Assessment of discriminant Validity using HTMT

	DR	FR	HR	PR
FINANCIAL RISK	0.666			
HEALTH RISK	0.757	0.733		
PERCEIVED RISK	0.688	0.544	0.739	
WILLINGNESS TO TRAVEL	0.302	0.093	0.284	0.449

Structural Model assessment.

First, VIFs are below the threshold 3.3, which indicates that there are no signals for a high multicollinearity among the constructs. Regarding the significance of the causal relationships, the results from Table 4.22 (and Figure 4.3) can be described as follows: Perceived Risk negatively influences Willingness to Travel (β=-0.387, p-value=0.000), hence supporting hypotheses H1. Financial Risk positively influences Perceived Risk (β=0.025, p-value=0.711); Hypothesis H2a is not supported. Financial Risk negatively influences Willingness to Travel through Perceived Risk (β=-0.010, p-value=0.714). Therefore, hypothesis H2b is not supported. Health Risk positively influences Perceived Risk (β=0.434, p-value=0.000), which supports hypothesis H3a. Health Risk negatively influences Willingness to Travel through Perceived Risk (β=-0.168, p-value=0.000). Hypothesis H3b is supported. Destination Risk positively influences Perceived Risk (β=-0.168, p-value=0.001), thus supporting hypothesis H4a. Destination Risk negatively influences Willingness to Travel through Perceived Risk (β=-0.117, p-value=0.005). Hypothesis H4b is confirmed.

Regarding the f^2 values, the highest effect size corresponds to the relationships Health Risk on Perceived Risk ($f^2 = 0.317$), Perceived Risk on Willingness to Travel ($f^2 = 0.326$), and the lowest medium effect size corresponds to Destination Risk on Perceived Risk ($f^2 = 0.12$); and the small effect size correspond to Financial Risk on Perceived Risk ($f^2 = 0.01$).

Q^2 values are 0.348 for Perceived Risk and 0.113 for Willingness to Travel, which indicates a predictive power for the endogenous variables. Furthermore, SRMR value as a goodness of fit for the research model is below 0.08 (SRMR=0.084), showing that the model specification is within the thresholds that are considered satisfactory. The coefficient of determination of Perceived Risk is 0.348 and of 0.113 for Willingness to Travel.

178

Table 4.22 Structural Model estimates

	Coeff.	t-value	p-value	Supported
H1(-): Perceived Risk→Willingness to Travel	-0.387***	7.117	0.000	Yes
H2a(+) Financial risk-→Perceived Risk	0.025ns	0.371	0.711	No
H2b(-): Financial Risk→Perceived Risk →Willingness to Travel	-0.010ns	0.367	0.714	No
H3a (+): Health Risk→Perceived Risk	0.434***	5.385	0.000	Yes
H3b (-): Financial Risk→Perceived Risk →Willingness to Travel	-0.168***	4.835	0.000	Yes
H4a (+): Destination risk→Perceived Risk	0.303***	3.469	0.000	Yes
H4b (-): Destination Risk→Perceived Risk →Willingness to Travel	-0.117***	2.816	0.005	Yes

Notes: Note:*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Bootstrapping based on n=5000 subsamples. A one-tailed test for a t-Student is applied.

Figure 4.3 Structural Model for Willingness to Travel
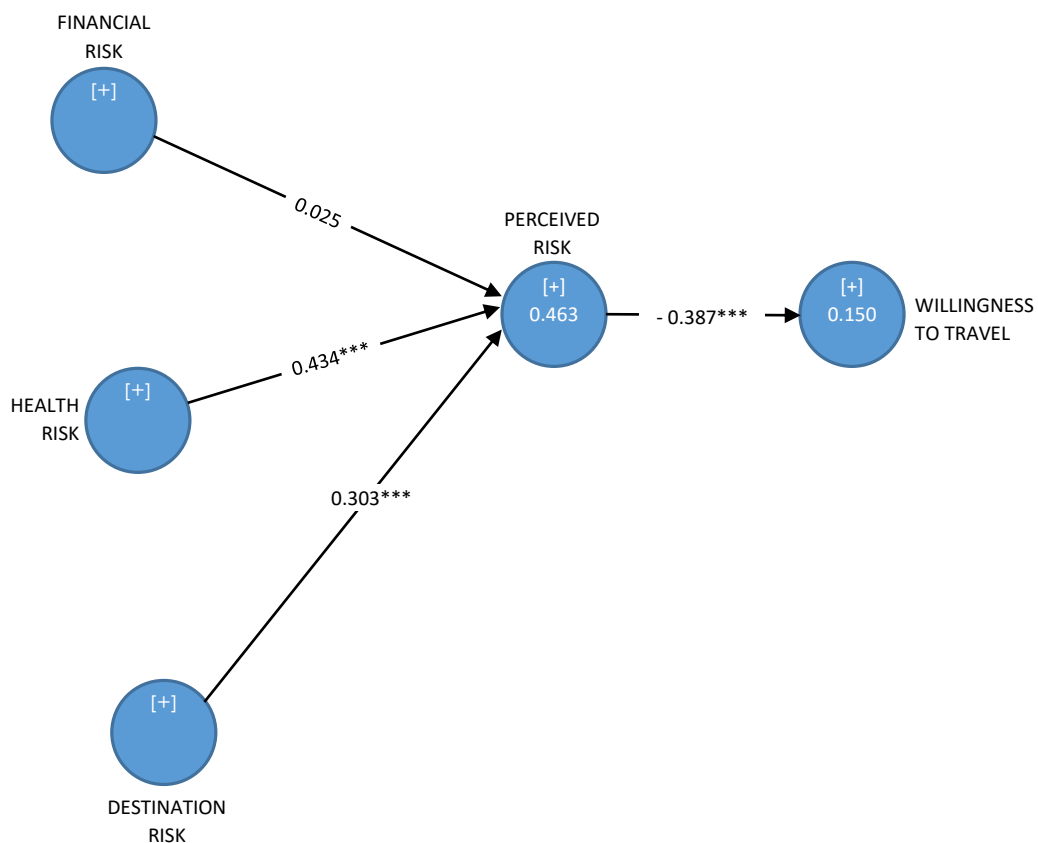
4.6 Discussion

Social Media has become an invaluable source of information, as well as a part of people's everyday routines in recent years. Numerous research papers have attempted to analyse the relationship between Social Media and tourism, and the influence of Social Media on the trip planning process (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Lu, Chen & Law, 2018; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Hudson & Thal, 2013; Liang et al., 2020; Mooethy et al., 2021; Santos, 2022). Despite the elevated number of these studies, there is a lack of consensus on how Social Media impacts travel behaviour (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013).

4.6.1 Intention to Use Social Media for Travel Planning

Model 1 (Figure 3.7) of this paper introduces new factors into the widely used Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), among which are Perceived Enjoyment (PE) and Perceived Trustworthiness (PT). It looks into the way these two variables influence Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU), and ultimately the intention to use Social Media (SM) for Travel Planning. The results support the conventional TAM related PU and PEoU (Davis, 1989). In addition, they demonstrate that individuals have intentions to use SM for Travel Planning when it is perceived as useful (PU), while the PEoU positively influences the PU, and thus creates the intention to use SM for Travel Planning. These findings closely reflect those proposed by Davis (1989) in TAM, and they have been supported by numerous other studies (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013; Cox et al., 2009; Singh & Srivastava, 2019; Tandon, Ertz & Bansal, 2020; Cheunkamon, Jomnonkwao & Ratanavaraha, 2020; Wang et al., 2024).

Another variable added to TAM for the proposed research model of this paper (Figure 3.7) was Perceived Enjoyment as a generator of the intention to use SM for Travel Planning when the act of using SM is perceived as enjoyable. This, however, proved to be a weak predictor of behaviour intention; hence, Social Media being perceived as enjoyable in itself does not positively influence the intention to use it for Travel planning – a condition that was demonstrated by other studies, too (Mathieson, Peacock & Chin, 2001; Venkatesh, 2000; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). On the other hand, PE did have a positive effect on the Social Media applications being perceived as easy to use (PEoU). Additionally, when using SM applications is perceived as enjoyable (PE), it is more likely

180

to be perceived as easy to use (PEoU); this in turn results in an increased perception of usefulness (PU), which generates a higher intention to use these applications for Travel Planning. As it can be seen, although the direct correlation is not significant, indirectly, PE does influence the proposed behavioural intention. This finding supports those of various other studies that demonstrated a positive influence of PE on users' intentions (Lee, Chung & Kang, 2008; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013; Collier & Kimes, 2013; Christou, 2015; Tandon, Ertz & Bansal, 2020).

An additional variable used in the proposed model of this research was Perceived Trustworthiness (PT). As discussed in section 3.1.2, a number of earlier studies suggested that the content found on Social Media is perceived as more reliable and trustworthy than the traditional media sources (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Liang et al., 2020; Yoo, Gretzel & Zach, 2011; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Other researchers, such as Cox et al., (2009), found that this type of content was not perceived as trustworthy. To address this gap in the literature, the Perceived Trustworthiness (PT) variable, aimed at testing the influence on intentional behaviour through PU, was proposed. PT by itself showed to have no impact on the intention to use Social Media for Travel Planning. On the other hand, there is a significant increase of Perceived Usefulness (PU) when SM is thought to be trustworthy (PT). This demonstrates that PT, through PU, indirectly influences the intention to use applications for Travel Planning. Therefore, PT showed to have an indirect influence on the Behavioural Intention.

As Davis (1989) proposed, PU impacts the Behavioural Intention, whereas PEoU is one of the main influences. Hence, the hypothesis of the model of this thesis concurs with the theory of TAM. Conversely, and as previously shown in other studies that tested the trustworthiness of SM content compared to traditional information sources, the hypothesis tested by this study showed that trustworthiness has a significant influence on PU, indirectly influencing the intention to use applications for travel planning; yet, it does not directly influence the behavioural intention (Cox et al., 2009; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Liang et al., 2020; Yoo, Gretzel & Zach, 2011; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The finding that PT of these applications does not significantly influence the intention to use them for Travel Planning may indeed support the premise that SM applications are not perceived as trustworthy, as Cox et al. (2009) suggested.

4.6.2 Intention to Book a Hotel Online

Analysing factors that lead individuals toward booking online is necessary to address the relationship between booking online and the site's perceived trustworthiness, since a number of studies found a correlation between these two variables (Berry, 2000; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014; Fam, Foscht & Collins, 2004; Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2009; Kim, Kim & Park, 2017; Salameh at al., 2022). It can be considered that the higher the PT, the higher the intention to book online will be (Theorachidis et al., 2020), as it was also seen in the hypothesis of this study (Berry, 2000; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014; Fam, Foscht & Collins, 2004; Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2009; Kim, Kim & Park, 2017; Salameh at al., 2022; Theorachidis et al., 2020).

In Model 2 (Figure 3.8), two variables were introduced as antecedents of Perceived Trustworthiness: these are Information Quality and Site Reputation, which were found to play an important role in defining the influence of PT (Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015; Salameh et al., 2022). Various studies also pointed out a significant correlation between Information Quality and Perceived Trustworthiness (Kuan, Bock & Vathanophas, 2008; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014; Hsu, Chang & Chen, 2012; Filieri, 2015; Wang et al., 2015; Wang & Yan, 2022; Salameh, 2022). In the questionnaire, these variables were presented to the respondents, as follows: when the information is reliable and timely, it will be perceived as relevant and lead to high Perceived Trustworthiness, which in turn will have a positive influence on the intention to book a hotel online (Kim, Kim & Park, 2017; Chiang & Jang, 2007; Berry, 2000; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014).

When an SM application is perceived as familiar, well known, and with a good reputation, there will be a tendency for the intention to book a hotel online to increase, which coincides with the findings of various other studies (McCoy et al., 2013; Kim & Lennon, 2013; Akdeniz, Calantone & Voorhees, 2013; Hamid et al., 2016). This hypothesis was tested for the model showing this relation, which at the same time demonstrates an indirect relationship between Site Reputation and Perceived Trustworthiness, leading to an intention to book online. Hence, Site Reputation was treated as an antecedent of PT, influencing online purchase behaviour (Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015; Salameh et al., 2022). Simultaneously, Site Reputation influences the perception of Information Quality positively, as consumers tend to believe that when a company has

earned a good reputation, there will be little risk of loss due to misleading or dishonest information (Akdeniz, Calantone & Voorhees, 2013). In other words, it can influence the intention to book a hotel online, by positively influencing the Information Quality variable, which increases the Perceived Trustworthiness, which in turn generates an intention to purchase online (Kim, Kim & Park, 2017; Chiang & Jang, 2007; Berry, 2000; Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015; Salameh et al., 2022).

4.6.3 Perceived Risk and Willingness to Travel

The relationship between Perceived Risk and willingness to travel has been a popular topic in the field of risk management for tourism, and numerous researchers have studied it extensively (Maritz, Yeh & Shieh, 2013; Sharifpour, Walters & Ritchie, 2014; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Caber et al., 2020; Chen, Xia & He, 2020; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021). In essence, risk represents uncertainty about the consequences of an action. There are various dimensions of Risk Perception, some of which are: Financial, Health, Natural, Psychological, Destination, and Political among others (Moutinho, 1987; Roehl & Fesemaier, 1992; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Dolnicar, 2005; Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Liu & Gao, 2008; Xu, Xu & Wang, 2013; Cong et al., 2017; Yi et al., 2020). The hypotheses of Model 3 (Fig 3.9) tested the relationship between Perceived Risk and willingness to travel at post-COVID time, when individuals were starting to go back to their routines and beginning to travel. Three dimensions that influence Perceived Risk were chosen to draw hypotheses.

The First dimension was the Financial Risk of travelling at times of COVID-19. As opposed to a wide body of literature, where the Financial Risk is the dimension considered to carry the most weight (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Boksberger, Bieger & Laesser, 2007; Gong & Liang, 2019; Zhan et al., 2022), the study performed for this thesis did not support this hypothesis; the Financial Risk did not significatively increase the Perceived Risk, and it had no effect on the willingness to travel.

From the three hypotheses proposed, the second dimension (Health Risk) showed to have the strongest influence on Perceived Risk. COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on tourism and the way travellers returned to travelling. Particularly at the beginning, the potential consequences of getting infected made Health Risk the biggest concern of all

183

the Perceived Risk dimensions and their influence on willingness to travel. As a result, numerous studies have looked into this topic (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020; Chen, Xia & He, 2020; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2021; Zhan et al., 2022; Zhou, Ibrahim & Mohamed, 2022; Akritidis, McGuinness & Leder, 2023; Hisamuddin, Albattat & Kassim, 2023).

The third dimension was Destination Risk. This dimension measured the subjective importance of the quality of service and facilities, as well as the importance of the way friends and relatives felt about the trip. The findings of the study supported the hypothesis that these dimensions influence Perceived Risk and willingness to travel. Older studies also supported this premise (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Gong & Liang, 2019; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021). Owing to the intangibility of the tourism products, the uncertainty is additionally noticeable (Gong & Liang 2019; Boksberger, Bieger & Laesser 2007; Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Zhan et al., 2022).

4.7 Conclusions

The proposed research models were formulated to gather information about consumer behaviour, and to help create superior Social Media marketing strategies for tourism companies, particularly hotels. In addition, this thesis aimed at incentivising the use of Social Media for tourism promotion. The research models and the tested hypotheses generated results that largely supported the expected premises, as per literature. At the same time, several hypotheses did not meet the expectations, although the findings made sense within the context of the time and place where the study was carried out. The sociodemographic exploration confirmed the extensive use of Social Media by all participants, particularly the youngest ones – many hours a day, on a daily basis; therefore, the tested sample was considered highly appropriate for the investigation.

As mentioned in previous sections, the proposed research models studied the consumer behaviour from two perspectives: first, seeking a general overview of the intention to use Social Media for travel planning; and second, offering a more focused exploration of different variables that led to the intention to book a hotel online. COVID-19 interrupted the study; but rather than deterring it, it provided an insight into a need for collecting additional information that could provide new information about specific aspects of travelling at times of such major events, including particular concerns of travellers and their willingness to travel.

From the results of Model 1 (Figure 3.7), upon testing all the hypotheses, the most important finding was the confirmation that there was a strong intention to use Social Media for travel planning, which was also supported by the literature (Cox et al., 2009; Casaló, Flavián & Guinalíu, 2010; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). Despite the fact that this particular finding may be viewed a common knowledge, it is still important to test these relations, considering that SM applications are in a constant change – new ones appear often, and with different parameters, which makes it essential to visualise how the target markets are reacting to them, whether the adoption was easy or not, and if there is a desire to continue using them, or perhaps the clients may switch to different ones in the near future. More specifically, from the perspective of this research, studying these relations will help focus the SM strategy. Rather than investing time and effort into selling products (in this case a hotel room) through Social Media due to the subjectively perceived

popularity of certain tools, the SM staff will first be able to find out if there is an intention to use them in the first place.

As explained in Chapter 3, and following an extensive literature review of the theories of consumer behaviour, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was selected to test these hypotheses. The relationship between Perceived Usefulness (PU) and the intention to use a technology, proposed by the model, was tested, and demonstrated a significant positive correlation, reinforcing the theory that when something is perceived as useful, this will influence the adoption of that technological advancement (Davis, 1989; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). In case of the Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU), direct relation with the intention of using SM for travel planning was not confirmed, which shows that the single aspect of ease will not directly lead to using the application for a specific purpose, contradictory to what the literature review had expressed (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh, 2000). This finding may be related to the increasing number of available applications, and the fact that using them in a casual way is a part of modern life, reducing the capacity of these applications to directly influence behavioural intentions. A possible conclusion that can be drawn from this is that individuals are focusing on other aspects to influence their behavioural intentions. On the other hand, even though this relation was found to be weak, another TAM relation was still strong: when an application is perceived as being easy to use (PEoU), this increases its Perceived Usefulness (PU), and indirectly leads towards the final goal, which is the behaviour. The mentioned findings were as expected, considering that numerous studies proved these relationships over the years (Davis, 1989; Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1992; Venkatesh, 2000; Cox et al., 2009; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013).

Given that Social Media is solidifying in people's everyday lives and that the related applications are not a new territory anymore, individuals are becoming highly experienced in their use, which breeds an environment where it is fun to use them. Hence, it was suitable to also observe the influence of Perceived Enjoyment (PE) on the user behaviour. Surprisingly, the user enjoyment alone did not show to be significant enough to influence the intention to use SM applications for travel planning. On the other hand, it did strongly influence the PEoU. This meant that when an application was perceived as enjoyable (PE), it was indirectly perceived as useful (PU), which led to the intention of using it. In other words, the more fun the Social Media application was, the bigger was the possibility that many people would use it for any purpose. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is crucial to take notes of the SM trends and analyse which applications

186

are the most popular ones among the targeted market. This also highlights the importance of placing the right content on the Social Media profiles, and making sure that it is perceived as fun and enjoyable, as well as easy to understand, which in turn means more useful (PU).

Another important topic that has been a matter of various studies is the relation between trust and buyer intention, particularly for the case of the tourism product (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Cox et al., 2009; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). The findings of this thesis showed that Perceived Trustworthiness (PT) of the SM material was not a significant factor for influencing the intention to use the technology for travel planning; however, it did influence the Perceived Usefulness of the material (PU), which in turn indirectly influenced the intention, as it was explained earlier in this section. As with the Perceived Enjoyment, it is also essential to pay attention to which Social Media applications may be more suitable for the company's target market in terms of the Perceived Trustworthiness; if the target market is already using one application rather than another, automatically, this application will be more trusted, and therefore selected by more individuals, regardless of its suitability for the task, or the lack of it. This is due to the social nature of SM, where there is a high level of human involvement, community spirit, and trend setting, which makes it easier to trust the popular choices. Upon consulting the proposed models and concluding that Perceived Trustworthiness positively influences Perceived Usefulness, and with it the intention to use the technology, it can be concluded that it is highly beneficial to focus on those applications that have already earned the community's trust.

In summary, from the behavioural model, or Model 1 (Figure 3.7), the following conclusion can be drawn: when companies look for the best SM applications to be present on, they should take into consideration which aspects directly and indirectly influence the individuals' intention of using them for travel planning. The usefulness of the process (PU) was shown to be the most significant aspect for the selection of the SM applications; moreover, certain characteristics, such as Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU), user enjoyment (PE), and trustworthiness (PT) proved to increase the Perceived Usefulness (PU), and therefore affect the intention to use the applications. Focusing on these aspects will increase the companies' probabilities of success in SM marketing.

187

After the first step of the research, which explores the intention of travellers to plan their trip using Social Media, while also establishing the factors that influence those decisions in the process, it is highly beneficial to find out if there is an intention to complete the buying process online, and why. Research Model 2 (Figure 3.8) specifically examines the consumer behaviour when booking online, and tries to identify the factors that influence these processes. As discussed in Chapter 3, this aspect was tested through the relationship between Perceived Trustworthiness (PT) and the intention to book online, with Information Quality and Site Reputation as the antecedents.

One of the main conditions for this intention – which is a trusting relationship between a company and a customer – was widely observed in the literature (PT) (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Cox et al., 2099; Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). On that note, it should be remembered that the tourism product, such as a hotel room or a guided excursion, is intangible – bought before the consumption – which creates an environment of added uncertainty for the consumer, where the benefits and drawbacks are constantly weighted against each other, often by consulting online sources. As discussed on several occasions throughout the Literature Review, Social Media offers a subjectively more natural approach to the information than the traditional sources. Individuals were shown to perceive the electronic word of mouth (EWOM) and the User Generated Content (UGC) as more trustworthy than the official companies' information and marketing material (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2011; Cox et al., 2009). Users share their experiences through these applications, providing opinions to the potential travellers, whether good or bad. Consequently, companies have established the importance of monitoring these opinions, by being present on the right SM channels, and treating them as a valuable source of information. In addition, utilising those channels proved to offer a possibility to build closer relationships with customers in less time.

From the findings of the second model of this study, and since the uncertainties need to be resolved, it can be noted that there are specific aspects related to an online site or online information that, when increased, can result in a higher perception of trustworthiness (PT). More specifically, when the information is perceived as being of high quality – featuring reliable and timely material – this will increase the PT. Social Media applications provide companies with an opportunity to have a direct approach to customers, and they enable instantaneous and last minute customer service, which makes it easier to offer information that is timely and reliable, and therefore perceived as being

of high quality. In addition to the Information Quality antecedent, the Site Reputation was found to increase the PT, and consequently the intention to book. That is to say, if a company is well-known and with long-standing good reputation, individuals tend to trust it more; although this is a long term effort, Social Media does offer the opportunity to work on the company's reputation in faster and affordable ways, by creating a community and keeping it engaged with the right type of content, ultimately resulting in a positive feedback and improved company or product reputation.

As it was established in Chapters 3 and 4, travelling inevitably involves uncertainty, not only while planning, but also during the trip (Moutinho, 1987; Han, 2015; Tsaur, Tzeng & Wang, 1997; Chen, Qiao & Liu, 2009). Potential travellers have to assume various risks, among which are financial, health, political risks, and others. As unlikely as it was to have a worldwide pandemic interrupting the process of this thesis, this also proved to be a useful event for exploring the relation between Perceived Risk and willingness to travel. Due to these circumstances, a number of studies measured this relationship and indicated the influence of Perceived Risk on the willingness to travel (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992; Kozak, Crotts & Law, 2007; Reichel, Fuchs & Uriely, 2007; Chen, Xia & He, 2020), which also highlighted the importance of looking for and paying attention to those less explored and less expected relations when crafting marketing strategies. Despite the fact that past research papers consistently emphasised the influence of Financial Risk on the willingness to travel, this study concluded that it was the Health Risk that influenced it the most, while the Financial Risk had the least significance on the willingness to travel, under those circumstances. Hence, in addition to establishing the impact of the Perceived Risk on willingness to travel, specific aspects related to the travel risk – which depend on the current state of affairs and factors inherent to each destination – need to be evaluated, since the society's perceptions of risk proved to alter dramatically depending on the moment.

On a final note, it can be concluded that it is always beneficial to evaluate and address the weak points of a company, such as those related to the destination itself, price, size, services, facilities, location, as well as the global risks that can impact travelling at large. In addition, the willingness to travel should be measured in order to create strategies that mitigate potential issues, while helping broadcast the right type of information to reduce uncertainty and increase Perceived Trustworthiness within the community of the potential customers.

189

Social Media has impacted the lives of most people; and as tourism is a major part of those lives, SM has changed the way people experience tourism. The models proposed in this research paper studied the behavioural intention of using SM resources for travel planning and booking online, and for both cases, the intention was proven. It can be concluded that Social Media applications, in terms of tourism promotion for companies, should not be ignored, and need to be an integral part of marketing strategies. Otherwise, individuals will continue using them, and companies will miss the chance to connect and be a part of that relationship.

In this study, the participants' sociodemographic profiles were used as a control variable. For future research, it would be beneficial to carry out a multigroup analysis for each model, in relation to specific variables, such as the participants' residence, and analyse them according to the Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1989). In addition, a multigroup analysis by age group should be performed, and the two (the age and residence factors) should ultimately be combined and analysed. A bigger sample size would improve the statistical validity. Lastly, a model that combines the three models proposed in this study would be interesting for facilitating future marketing strategies. In this case, the moderating role of the variable Perceived Risk should be explored, as well as the relationship between the willingness to travel and the intention to book online, with Perceived Trustworthiness as a moderating variable.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Managerial Implications, Theoretical Contributions, Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

CHAPTER 5.- CONCLUSIONS, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS, THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis aimed at proposing improved Social Media Marketing strategies for the Hotel Industry by crafting guidelines that companies could follow and apply to their SM profiles. This final chapter offers the research Conclusions, Managerial Implications, Theoretical Contributions, and Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research that were drawn. The proposed set of guidelines can be utilised by any accommodation venue, since they were fashioned with an intention to be adaptable for each company's needs.

5.1 Conclusions

In order to have an overview of the importance of Social Media at the present time, a Literature Review was carried out, focused on the early developments that preceded it. According to the literature, the early related technologies appeared with a goal of improving the conditions of human life and comfort, in any way possible. As explained in Chapter 1, the Internet was an undertaking of the United State Defence and Security departments, in conjunction with the academic society and its research and development requirements. While it is important to state that the theoretic frameworks of the Internet were established by the academics, the United States National Defence had a major contribution in the technological side of these developments, being as it was seen as an opportunity to gain a significant military advantage on an international level (Davies, 1974; Banks, 2008; Lukasik, 2010).

A number of years had passed before the Internet was finally used by the "regular individuals". However, as soon as it entered people's lives, its overall character began drifting away from being strictly professional, and towards being highly social. The attention was on the possibility of sharing knowledge and performing leisure activities, such as playing games with people who were often strangers, and regardless of where they were located. Connecting with individuals who shared one's interests, and without the barrier of physical location, revolutionised the information-sharing aspect of life, to say the least. Highly specific topics, which were difficult to find or out of reach entirely before the Internet appeared, now became accessible on forums and bulletin boards, constantly expanding and improving through people's participation (Rojas, 2002; Banks, 2008; Weinstein, 2009). As described in the first part of the literature review, which was focused on the origins of the Internet, it can be concluded that the Internet was an answer to social needs, as well as the basic human desire to expand and improve. This early open interaction on a global scale showed to offer significantly greater outcomes than it was initially imagined, as it will be seen below. In addition, it can also be concluded that the unprecedented power of these technologies came from fact that it grew out of people's needs, rather than being pushed onto the market; and when a product or a service inherently fulfils needs and wants, it is much easier for it to be accepted, used, improved, and internalised by the users.

While the Internet developed towards becoming more technologically efficient, easier to use, and accessible to a growing number of people, the users' needs for increasing the scope of their social interactions grew too. In the early stages, the simple act of accessing information on a computer felt like a great achievement. Yet after several years, searching for information, sharing opinions on bulletin boards, playing games, and communicating through emails was not enough to fulfil the demands of the users, or the urge to explore the possibilities further. The turning point was the appearance of Facebook: what was initially a social page for university students, soon became an answer to the ever-expanding social needs that helped establish Social Media as an entity that lies within the very fabric of modern society. The fulfilment of the need to connect in an instant, share one's life, and be able to socialise continuously has changed the lives of a vast number of people, particularly since the development of mobile applications. It can be said that all these developments impacted human society on numerous levels, including socially, politically, and commercially. Those who do not have an inclination towards using technology, particularly in business and politics, are finding themselves with no choice: adapt and learn to use it effectively, or be left out.

Tourism as an industry has been gradually developing since the early origins of the civilisation. Initially, humans were nomads, with a need to move for survival, as well as for social necessities. Over time, the nomadic nature became more sedentary, but this change was supported by technological inventions, such as transportation. Trading, pilgrimage, political, and social needs incentivised human beings towards travelling further and more often, which in turn led to the development of the infrastructure and the means for the appearance of the Tourism Industry (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Page & Connell, 2006).

Tourism Industry can be said to differ from most others, as it involves a number of other sectors, as well as vast national, regional, or global resources, from public transportation, airlines, trains and ships, to accommodation, restaurants, tourist offices, monuments, infrastructure, and even natural wealth. It is a highly complex mechanism of interdependent participants. To complicate matters further, tourism depends entirely on people and social interactions; if there are significant changes in any aspect of people's lives and needs, those are quickly translated to the Tourism Industry. All these factors need to be monitored and managed successfully, regardless of which part of the tourism chain one is in.

In addition to socialising, learning about new cultures, trying new things, and having new experiences, the modern tourists usually want to share all these moments with friends and families. This social aspect of tourism corresponds to the context of Social Media, since both fulfil a similar set of needs, which was discussed in the Literature Review. For this reason, Social Media and tourism have been developing hand-in-hand. First, the ability to share posts containing information or snippets from one's holidays with friends and family provided a type of freedom that surpassed the location, time zones, or even the need to make calls. Just by scrolling through posts, one's significant others could know whether that person was enjoying, or on the contrary, facing problems, or even being in trouble during the holidays. Secondly, Social Media users could feed the need of belonging to a community and receiving recognition and acceptance, which are essential parts of human nature (Van Dijck, 2013; Ana & Istudor, 2019). The once closed community of friends, relatives, and neighbours, was expanded by large and numerous communities of social platform users, with whom one could share common interests, information, problems, solutions, and so on, without ever having to physically meet. Over time, the online content on these platforms grew in value and quality, and at the same time, it promoted an ever-growing level of interaction between users from around the world, while also allowing companies to get useful feedback from these interaction (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015; Wolf, Sims & Yang, 2018; Li et al., 2022). This online content became recognised as one of the most valuable information sources of the present, replacing outdated promotional material with first-hand experiences and reviews, coming from what may be considered as equals – users of the platforms – rather than companies trying to sell.

Over time, users became highly accustomed to the mobile applications. At present, it is a common, everyday habit to interact with the User Generated Content (UGC) and to take it into consideration when looking for travel information, planning trips, or choosing which accommodation to stay at (Murphy, Chen & Cossutta, 2016). Companies are becoming increasingly aware that this has had repercussions on their businesses, as it influences the behaviour of their target markets; but there is often a general lack of understanding and effective management in that regard (Inversini & Masiero, 2014; Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). While at first the efforts were directed towards mitigating the negative effects of the free opinions that circulated the Social Channels, eventually SM management teams shifted the focus on the opportunities that the UGC could bring

to businesses, under the condition that they were sharing the appropriate type of content, on the right platforms, supported by data analysis. Finally, as the topic gained more relevance, as well as commercial and political importance, researchers became involved. A range of strategies and frameworks has been developing ever since.

In this thesis, the primary focus was on the relationship phenomenon of Social Media, Tourism, and more specifically, the accommodation sector. To that end, Chapter 2 commenced by reviewing various hotels' early adoption strategies for Social Media Marketing. As it could be expected, most of these early adopters were 4 and 5-star hotels – usually famous chains with excellent reputation and marketing departments – which began incorporating Social Media into their marketing strategies. These venues usually created Social Media profiles on different SM applications and started publishing content related to their operations; but as it was discussed, the early efforts mostly revolved around fulfilling the market's requirement of SM presence, rather than formulating proactive strategies for optimising its benefits and opportunities. Although, a few of these hotels did try to gain new customers and promote the company's loyalty schemes. The next part of the revision of the literature featured summaries of case study articles that analysed the use of Social Media by a range of different accommodation venues, from varied parts of the world, and the managerial implications of their findings. In most of these studies, it was documented that, even though the venues made efforts to succeed, there was an evident lack of consensus regarding the factors that led to that success, a lack of relatable frameworks for managing these applications, and an absence of applicable operational strategies. Most venues delegated SM marketing as an extra task to the managerial department, with little financial investment or strategic planning attached to it. The general impression was that SM presence was needed; yet, SM management was not viewed as significant enough for an investment of resources (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019).

Following the revision of the literature, including both the famous hotels' strategies and the case studies of the various venues' SM efforts, it was decided to perform a separate analysis for this thesis. As mentioned, the 4 and 5-star hotels had marketing departments involved in the research, and reputations that gave them competitive advantage in the field. A more needed topic of research, as taken from the literature review, was the case of budget accommodation venues without marketing departments; a study was performed, aiming at discovering how these venues could take advantage of the SM

applications to make them a useful tool for promotion and communication with guests. A budget hotel at a famous tourist destination, Seville, was selected for the purpose. Its Social Media activities were monitored, and the data showed that, even though the SM profiles of the venue were not active enough, there was a tendency for the numbers of followers to grow. Although this could be viewed as a success, upon analysing the results, it was demonstrated that this perceived achievement was due to the popularity of Facebook and Instagram applications themselves, and due to the increase in numbers of the SM users in general, rather than the appropriateness of the SM strategies of the venue.

More specifically, the Facebook and Instagram profiles were analysed over the course of 2 months, twice: once before, and once after the COVID-19 lockdown. During the lockdown, as the hotel was closed and no employees were in charge of the SM accounts, the profiles had almost no input. Nevertheless, when comparing the two periods, it was observed that the follower response was very similar. Particularly, in periods when big events were taking place in the city, more interactions with the profiles were recorded. This showed that travellers accessed those profiles in order to look for information, rather than interact with the company's content, since the company was not actively participating on the platforms (Inversini & Masiero, 2014).

Another observation was that depending on the Social Media application, different content attracted attention. Two reasons were proposed for this condition: firstly, each application likely has a different type of audience; secondly, as is the case with most venues of this type, the followers were in large proportion the employees, the owners' friends and family, and the friends of the employees, especially on Facebook. It was concluded that having an audience that actually thinks and observes, and potentially wants to make bookings, in addition to crafting content adapted to the venue and the market, would have been a more suitable and effective tactic for the company. Furthermore, being liked and cheered by friends and family does not serve any purpose, if the goal is to reach measurable business targets by means of Social Media. This example was a demonstration of the common misconceptions regarding the use of SM for companies, coupled with a lack of vision and understanding of it as a marketing tool.

In the specific case of this study, it was concluded that the employees that managed the company's profiles were not SM professionals, but the staff who had to deal with it as an extra task. There was a lack of strategic direction, an absence of a professional approach,

199

and no consistency or posting schedules; instead, the posts were appearing when the employees would have a bit of free time, with no theme or topic, unrelated to the current trends (irrelevant), and without the consideration of data analytics. The most apparent conclusion was that, rather than celebrating the content's misguided impression of success, it was essential to estimate if it reached its final goal – selling hotel rooms – which it most likely did not. The lack of understanding of the potential of Social Media at budget venues, in terms of a means for promotion and an opportunity for providing better customer service, was evident.

When SM is managed professionally, the benefits are ultimately financial, including the elimination of commissions of the OTAs, and an improvement of the company's reputation. Yet, a large portion of budget venues, including the one studied here, continues to overlook these advantages, and takes a basic, defensive approach, with the main focus of maintaining the minimum level of presence and promotion, in a market that needs and wants to interact with SM content of the highest quality. Upon reviewing the literature and conducting the case study, additional advantages of Social Media for the hospitality industry became apparent. The results of Chapter 2 prompted further research in the direction of the behavioural intention studies, particularly in the field of Social Media use in relation to tourism.

Chapter two focused on the Facebook and Instagram insights in order to gather statistical records about users' relation with the budget hotel's Social Media profiles. The findings provided an overview of the user behaviour, and at the same time offered insights into the company's SM habits. Combined, the study covered social network tendencies, user behaviour as a direct response to company's activities, and user behaviour as a reflection of the company's performance. Considering the wide impact of this relation, it was decided to first study user behaviour as a general term to gain a better understanding of consumers and purchasing methodologies, and henceforth be able to collect more specific data for crafting better Social Media Marketing strategies for hotels.

A review of behavioural models was carried out in Chapter 3, which further led to the development of research models that would fulfil the aims of this thesis. In addition, COVID-19 occurred at the time of writing, and with this, a long period of travel restrictions followed. As a consequence, tourists developed a new type of apprehension towards travelling. In the light of these unique circumstances, a decision was made to use

the situation to test the relationship between the willingness to travel and the Perceived Risk of travelling. A questionnaire was produced, which explored the influence of COVID-19 on the Tourism Industry, and on the traveller's perceptions of risk related to travelling during and after the pandemic.

The study of Behavioural Intention, which aims at predicting and influencing individuals' tendencies toward certain behaviours, have been a topic of research for decades, if not centuries. The ability to understand how people behave under different circumstances, especially when these are unexpected or do not follow patterns, can provide guidance in all subjects, including economy, psychology, sociology, medicine, politics, and so on.

For this thesis, three research models were proposed to test the sequence of the intention to use Social Media for travel planning, which can potentially lead to the intention of Booking a hotel online, or be affected by Perceived Risk with regards to the willingness to travel. Based on the findings that stemmed from the results of the analysis of the Social Media applications in Chapter 2, it was decided that it would be appropriate to approach the behavioural intention of using Social Media for tourism with a more in-depth analysis. More particularly – exploring its use for trip planning in the pre-travelling stage, getting information through research and comparison, and finally moving on to the idea of finalising the transaction online. The main question to be answered was whether there would be a booking online, which is essentially the most desirable outcome of an effective SM strategy.

From the results of the employed Behavioural Intention models presented in Chapter 4, it was concluded that there was an intention of individuals to use Social Media for travel planning, as well as for making bookings online. The models also exposed that the Behavioural Intention was present, though with a range of aspects influencing it, such us Perceived Trustworthiness, Perceived Usefulness, Enjoyment, Quality of Information, and Company's Reputation. Hence, the findings of Chapter 2 were reaffirmed, outlining the importance for the companies to understand SM and modify the approach to their own social profiles. Once more, statistical data showed that it is not sufficient to only be present on SM networks; rather, a set of factors needs to be measured, analysed and taken into consideration in order to craft an effective and competitive SM strategy that has goals and a direction, and can be monitored and modified according to the needs of the target market.

201

The findings of the research demonstrated various possibilities that Social Media applications offer to companies. At the same time, it provided insights into what conditions should be met in order for the individuals to feel comfortable enough to use these applications for making online transactions. The importance of a comprehensive behavioural analysis was reiterated, if the goal is to accurately analyse the needs, expectations and intentions of the company's customers.

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic occurred at the time of writing this thesis, and travelling was neither allowed nor desired in most cases, there was a realisation of a significant threat that companies face regarding the concept of Risk Perception. The final research model of the study, which was presented in Chapter 3, attempted to contribute the literature by testing the growingly popular and at the time highly relevant relationship between Perceived Risk and willingness to travel. It should be noted that this relationship has been a matter of study for decades (Fuchs & Reichel, 2006; Lepp & Gibson, 2008; Reisenger & Mavondo, 2005; Kozak, Crotts & Law, 2007), although the COVID-19 phenomenon brought it to the foreground. The findings of the model demonstrated that Perceived Risk always influences the willingness to travel; on the other hand, the factors that influence Perceived Risk itself vary depending on the moment, which makes it beneficial for companies to test this relationship and create strategies that address and help mitigate the factors, or the information, which may have led to the elevated perception of risk. Social Media is a potent tool for addressing these issues, as it was proven during the pandemic, when the SM information was significantly better received than that of the traditional media channels. Although the pandemic is over, the travellers are now more alert than before, and more aware of the possible risks related to travelling (Li & Ito, 2022). To that effect, it is essential to keep the customers informed about current affairs in the most genuine and transparent way possible, and demonstrate that the company is aware of the situation and taking the steps necessary to ensure good conditions for its customers, rather than avoiding controversy and maintaining an idealised image of the business. To a modern and highly informed traveller, this obviously idealised information lowers the Perceived Trustworthiness variable towards a company, while for a company, it can potentially create an environment where customer expectations are too high to be met.

Social Media is a potent and versatile tool for all companies, especially the ones with low resources for marketing. It can be as cheap as one wants it to be, or even free, offering direct communication with customers and a realistic potential to reach vast audiences. As concluded from the case study, there is a will of the individuals to use it for planning trips and booking hotel rooms; the missing link on the market is an educated approach of the companies towards it, without which it is impossible to understand and gain all the benefits and opportunities stemming from SM networking. Casual company profiles need to be addressed and transformed to professional ones, and all SM strategies need to be backed by data analysis. The secondary goal should be building highly engaged communities, while the primary goal is always straightforward: selling rooms.

5.2 Managerial Implications

As it was stated, the sociodemographic results in Chapter 3 showed that all of the individuals involved in the study used Social Media regularly, with an emphasis on the youngest generation, who demonstrated an extensive use of these applications, every day, for several hours. Secondly, the proposed research models demonstrated that there was a need to have Social Media Marketing strategies based on the utility, but enhanced by high Perceived Trustworthiness and Perceived Enjoyment; in other words, users hoped to find Social Media profiles that are easy, reliable, and fun to use. Considering that the final goal of the business was to sell rooms, an essential prerequisite for this was a high Quality of the Information presented on the Social Media profiles, which translates to reliable information, always presented and updated on time. Additionally, the good reputation that is built over the years of a company's impeccable performance was addressed; this particular aspect can also be expedited through Social Media, by ensuring a consistent flow of content that generates positive impressions, transparency, and engagement, and thus builds up the company's reputation quickly.

Next, it is possible to build a strategy that delivers additional focus and effectiveness, by analysing the insights and statistical records of all the used applications, discovering which ones are preferred by the target market, selecting the most suitable ones for the business, and disregarding the rest. The same scrutiny should be done with the content, in order to discover what brings the best results, while always keeping in mind the core values of trustworthiness, usefulness, enjoyment, quality, and reputation, with a consistent focus on engagement, and less on the number of followers, which have shown to be oftentimes misleading.

Furthermore, companies need to be consistent with the customer service on Social Media, as it is one of the fastest and most convenient tools for answering requests and fulfilling needs effectively and efficiently. Additionally, any tourism company should be duly informed about the latest events that may influence the tourism activity, and try to have a contingency plan for most situations. Ultimately, the Social Media applications could and should be employed as a means for a "holistic" type of communication, but they are also a promotional channel; and with that in mind, companies need to craft long term strategies and have lists of time-bound achievements that ought to be fulfilled. On the other hand, all strategies should also be revised periodically, in order to adapt to the circumstances, while always keeping the companies' goals as a priority, and well-defined.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis offers a review of the literature, with reference to the relation between tourism and Social Media. It contributes to the literature by exploring the insufficiently researched field of budget accommodation venues. In addition, it proposes and analyses three new research models, based on the Literature Review of the most widely used behavioural models and their derivatives, including the Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Technology Acceptance Models and Perceived Risk theories. Though based primarily on these classical behavioural theories, the proposed models offer new variables aimed at gathering more focused information and measuring those variables' relationships with the tested behavioural intention.

Chapter 2 proposes a framework for analysing Social Media applications. This framework can be applied to a wide range of Social applications in order to evaluate their performance and research their usability for the Hotel Industry.

Chapter 3 offers a more comprehensive framework that is meant for analysing companies' performance, by first designing precise marketing strategies, and later analysing their performance, using the framework proposed in Chapter 2. In its final form, it allows for an in-depth study of the behavioural intention related to travel planning and booking intentions through Social Media.

5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This thesis has generated new and invaluable insights for the diverse aspects of the Social Media and Tourism relationship. It offers novel information about the Social Media usage for budget accommodation venues, via an exploration of the behavioural intention to use it for travel planning and for making online bookings. In addition, under the unexpected circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, factors of Perceived Risk in relation to the willingness to travel were analysed. In order to produce recommendations for future research, the limitations of this thesis should also be taken into consideration.

In the case of the study presented in Chapter 2, the timeframe was only two months, on two different occasions (in years 2019 and 2022). It would be beneficial to establish a longer timeframe. In the same chapter, the analysis of the Social Media applications was focused only on Facebook and Instagram, for a budget accommodation case, in a highly developed and widely popular tourist destination. For future studies, more than one venue should be assessed, at one location; more than one venue should be assessed, at various locations; additional Social Media applications should be looked into for both cases, measuring the performance for one location, as well as for various locations; comparison and contrast of these findings should be proposed.

In Chapter 3, a questionnaire was carried out over a period of one year, rendering 233 valid responses. A bigger sample is recommended. In addition, the place of residence was not a factor to be studied; it could be beneficial to take this factor into consideration in future research, for the purpose of analysing behaviour depending on the respondent's sociocultural profile. In addition, the respondent's age and the Social Media use in relation to his or her place of residence should be explored.

The proposed research model Figure 3.7 tests the intention to use Social Media for travel planning in the pre-trip stage. It would be beneficial to study the use of Social Media during the trip-stage as well, and especially during the post-trip stage, which would provide insights into the intention to share UGC on Social Media. Moreover, the intention to "tag" and "hyperlink" hotels in that stage should be investigated.

The research model presented in Figure 3.8 focuses on measuring the intention of booking a hotel room online. It would be beneficial to also study the intention to book other tourism products, such as tickets for tourist attractions, restaurants, shows, and transportation, through Online Travel Agencies, company websites, and directly through Social Media profiles.

The Perceived Risk in relation to the willingness to travel model was provided to test the intentions and perceptions at the time when travelling was recently resumed, shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be beneficial to apply this model to other travel related risks, such as crime, wars, infectious diseases, and terrorist attacks, among others, with an aim to better understand the travellers' Perceived Risk under diverse circumstances.

The results obtained from the analysis in Chapter 4 provided insights for the development of a new integrated model. The new model should enable an in depth study of Behavioural Intention related to travel planning and booking intention. Here, the variable Perceived Risk can be used as a moderator for all the relations that influence Behavioural Intention.

This integrated model can also be employed for an analysis of cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (2001). As the author stated, different cultural aspects of every nation affect organisations in various ways. Hofstede included six key aspects of national cultures in country comparison scales, including: the power distance index (PDI), individualism vs. collectivism (IDV), motivation towards achievement and success (MAS, formerly masculinity versus femininity), uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), long term orientation versus short-term orientation (LTO), and indulgence versus restraint (IND). These key variables have a profound influence on the organisational goals and decision making processes of each country (Hofstede, 2001). Social Media, as it was discussed throughout the thesis, is an activity with an intense focus on social aspects. Since its appearance, individuals have modified their behavioural patterns in order to include it into their everyday lives (Gravili, 2016). A new line of research, focused on these cultural dimensions, which can facilitate or interfere with the processes that impact Behavioural Intention, may help render deeper understanding of the intention to use Social Media for travel planning and booking online. With these insights, companies and organisations should be able to craft strategies with a stronger focus on their target markets. In addition, the psychosocial aspects and behaviours of individuals will be better understood within the context of cultural dimensions.

APPENDIX

Table AI. Daily Evolution on Facebook Metrics: February-April 2019

	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	24 Feb	25 Feb	26 Feb	27 Feb…
Most Engaged Post[32]	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
New Followers	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	33	74	60	538	105	195	65	20	15	0	4	228
Page Views	2	13	4	6	11	4	12	10	6	0	8	4
Rate Score	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9
Posts	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Total Likes	980	982	983	983	983	984	985	986	987	988	988	988

	…28 Feb	01 Mar	02 Mar	03 Mar	04 Mar	05 Mar	06 Mar	07 Mar	08 Mar	09 Mar	10 Mar	11 Mar…
Most Engaged Post	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	1	1	1	0	0	0		0	1	3	1
New Followers	0	1	1	1	0	0	0		0	1	3	1
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	50	193	30	14	16	200	28	260	34	95	561	99
Page Views	2	4	5	4	6	3	1	5	6	2	13	4
Rate Score	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9
Posts	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Total Likes	988	989	991	991	991	991	990	990	990	991	994	994

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[32] Post engagement: The number of times that people engaged with your page's post through reactions, comments, shares and more.

	…12 Mar	13 Mar	14 Mar	15 Mar	16 Mar	17 Mar	18 Mar	19 Mar	20 Mar	21 Mar	22 Mar	23 Mar…
Most Engaged Post	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	0
New Followers	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Page Reach	52	242	44	169	337	117	76	308	207	292	123	41
Page Views	7	3	3	7	5	4	5	13	7	4	5	11
Rate Score	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9
Posts	1	0	1	0	0	0	1*	0	1	0	0	0
Total Likes	994	994	994	994	994	995	994	996	997	997	998	998

*multiple photographs

	…24 Mar	25 Mar	26 Mar	27 Mar	28 Mar	29 Mar	30 Mar	31 Mar	01 Apr	02 Apr	03 Apr	04 Apr…
Most Engaged Post	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
New Followers	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	21	548	85	51	86	34	201	36	27	253	29	232
Page Views	7	11	3	6	8	6	11	8	8	5	3	6
Rate Score	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total Likes	999	998	999	999	1000	998	999	999	999	999	999	999

213

	…05 Apr	06 Apr	07 Apr	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr…
Most Engaged Post	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	0	0	0	8	0	9	1	1	2	1	0
New Followers	0	0	0	0	8	0	9	1	1	2	1	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	185	49	82	150	389	57	223	376	251	195	85	92
Page Views	3	7	8	6	10	3	15	9	5	8	5	8
Rate Score	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9
Posts	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total Likes	999	999	999	999	1007	1007	1011	1012	1013	1015	1015	1015

	…17 Apr	18 Apr	19 Apr	20 Apr	21 Apr	22 Apr	23 Apr	24 Apr	25 Apr	26 Apr	27 Apr	28 Apr
Most Engaged Post	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	0	3	0
New Followers	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	0	3	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	203	203	60	20	7	97	256	24	24	359	87	171
Page Views	4	8	8	13	2	8	5	12	12	8	7	5
Rate Score	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9	4,9
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total Likes	1015	1015	1015	1015	1016	1017	1018	1017	1020	1020	1020	1019

Table AII. Daily Evolution on Facebook Metrics: February-May 2022

	15 Feb	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	24 Feb	25 Feb	26 Feb	27 Feb…
Most Engaged Post		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Followers	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	9	15	14	14	8	8	14	13	10	9	8	11	8
Page Views	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rate Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Likes	1080	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079	1079
Page Visits		2	4	2	0	0	1	1	0	3	1	2	2
Total Followers	1,076	1,076	1,075	1,075	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074

	…28 Feb	01 Mar	02 Mar	03 Mar	04 Mar	05 Mar	06 Mar	07 Mar	08 Mar	09 Mar	10 Mar	11 Mar…
Most Engaged Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Followers	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	5	9	8	11	13	7	5	6	7	4	3	8
Page Views	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rate Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Likes	1079	1079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079
Page Visits	0	3	2	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total Followers	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,075

	…12 Mar	13 Mar	14 Mar	15 Mar	16 Mar	17 Mar	18 Mar	19 Mar	20 Mar	21 Mar	22 Mar	23 Mar…
Most Engaged Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Followers	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	10	7	3	6	3	2	1	2	2	3	4	2
Page Views	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rate Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Likes	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,078	1,078	1,078	1,078	1,078	1,078	1,078	1,078	1,078
Page Visits	3	1	0	1	1	3	0	0	2	0	0	1
Total Followers	1,075	1,075	1,075	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074	1,074

	…24 Mar	25 Mar	26 Mar	27 Mar	28 Mar	29 Mar	30 Mar	31 Mar	01 Apr	02 Apr	03 Apr	04 Apr…
Most Engaged Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	4	-6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0
New Followers	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	7	4	4	3	2	1	3	6	1	1	4	1
Page Views	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rate Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Likes	1,082	1,077	1,077	1,077	1,077	1,077	1,077	1,077	1,077	1,077	1,076	1,076
Page Visits	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
Total Followers	1,074	1,073	1,073	1,073	1,073	1,073	1,073	1,073	1,073	1,072	1,072	1,072

	…05 Apr	06 Apr	07 Apr	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr…
Most Engaged Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
New Followers	0	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	1	3	10	9	2	3	0	4	2	5	2	0
Page Views	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rate Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Likes	1,076	1,076	1,076	1,076	1,076	1,076	1,077	1,078	1,078	1,079	1,079	1,079
Page Visits	0	3	6	6	1	0	4	2	0	2	0	0
Total Followers	1,072	1,072	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099

	…17 Apr	18 Apr	19 Apr	20 Apr	21 Apr	22 Apr	23 Apr	24 Apr	25 Apr	26 Apr	27 Apr	28 Apr…
Most Engaged Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Followers	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	2	7	2	2	5	1	2	11	3	2	3	5
Page Views	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rate Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Likes	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079
Page Visits	6	4	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total Followers	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,099	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098

	…29 April	30 April	1 May	2 May	3 May	4 May	5 May	6 May	7 May	8 May
Most Engaged Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Page Likes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Followers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clicks to Website	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Page Reach	4	3	1	4	0	2	2	2	2	0
Page Views	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rate Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Posts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Likes	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079	1,079
Page Visits	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total Followers	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098	1,098

Note: The data from May represents the extended period due to la Feria

Table AIII. Daily Evolution on the Instagram Metrics: February-April 2019

	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	24 Feb	25 Feb	26 Feb	27 Feb…
Profile Visits	132	128	123	130	117	70	61	76	76	70	60	65
Reach[33]	314	312	315	319	328	284	270	287	287	290	252	259
Impressions[34]	1315	1266	1133	1150	1015	860	847	847	1198	1217	991	1146

	…28 Feb	01 Mar	02 Mar	03 Mar	04 Mar	05 Mar	06 Mar	07 Mar	08 Mar	09 Mar	10 Mar	11 Mar…
Profile Visits	61	62	46	39	41	55	55	67	70	104	113	101
Reach	251	292	275	267	261	281	281	313	280	312	322	300
Impressions	862	1030	778	731	713	942	942	1194	1075	1421	1486	1216

	…12 Mar	13 Mar	14 Mar	15 Mar	16 Mar	17 Mar	18 Mar	19 Mar	20 Mar	21 Mar	22 Mar	23 Mar…
Profile Visits	102	85	85	86	61	61	50	58	57	60	53	57
Reach	301	277	277	312	314	314	302	324	308	330	271	275
Impressions	1218	1383	1385	1535	1314	1314	1222	1474	1123	1302	1013	1094

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[33] The number of individual accounts that have seen any of the posts
[34] The number of times that all posts were seen

	…24 Mar	25 Mar	26 Mar	27 Mar	28 Mar	29 Mar	30 Mar	31 Mar	01 Apr	02 Apr	03 Apr	04 Apr…
Profile Visits	57	57	54	61	65	58	73	70	72	67	70	82
Reach	275	279	284	298	261	252	275	269	270	236	256	286
Impressions	1096	1103	1116	1138	991	960	1205	1098	1106	847	1029	1139

	…05 Apr	06 Apr	07 Apr	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr…
Profile Visits	102	102	104	103	102	96	81	57	57	55	63	65
Reach	265	265	260	256	291	271	265	295	295	302	285	285
Impressions	881	881	863	843	1012	776	846	1344	1344	1444	1193	1193

	…17 Apr	18 Apr	19 Apr	20 Apr	21 Apr	22 Apr	23 Apr	24 Apr	25 Apr	26 Apr	27 Apr	28 Apr
Profile Visits	61	61	61	61	51	51	57	57	61	61	68	69
Reach	300	300	309	309	291	291	308	308	296	296	294	312
Impressions	1496	1457	1457	1457	995	995	1218	1219	1256	1256	1222	1457

220

Table AIII. Daily Evolution on the Instagram Metrics: February-April 2019 (continued)

	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	24 Feb	25 Feb	26 Feb	27 Feb…
Followers	270	272	282	281	288	289	286	286	286	286	293	284
Following	317	318	324	323	324	324	324	325	325	0	328	329
Nº posts/day	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	…28 Feb	01 Mar	02 Mar	03 Mar	04 Mar	05 Mar	06 Mar	07 Mar	08 Mar	09 Mar	10 Mar	11 Mar…
Followers	295	289	287	287	289	288	302	302	299	300	300	302
Following	331	332	334	336	338	343	350	352	353	352	352	351
Nº posts/day	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1

	…12 Mar	13 Mar	14 Mar	15 Mar	16 Mar	17 Mar	18 Mar	19 Mar	20 Mar	21 Mar	22 Mar	23 Mar…
Followers	302	299	299	299	301	302	312	313	324	330	321	318
Following	353	354	359	362	362	362	366	369	373	373	374	375
Nº posts/day	1	0	1	0	0	0	1*	0	1	0	0	0
Stories	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2

*multiple (3) photographs

221

	…24 Mar	25 Mar	26 Mar	27 Mar	28 Mar	29 Mar	30 Mar	31 Mar	01 Apr	02 Apr	03 Apr	04 Apr…
Followers	318	329	330	327	327	332	338	332	334	334	335	337
Following	377	378	383	388	398	398	400	402	407	415	417	421
Nº posts/day	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Stories	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0

	…05 Apr	06 Apr	07 Apr	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr…
Followers	348	344	345	346	351	351	354	358	357	354	352	358
Following	426	426	429	429	432	430	432	433	433	432	433	433
Nº posts/day	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1

	…17 Apr	18 Apr	19 Apr	20 Apr	21 Apr	22 Apr	23 Apr	24 Apr	25 Apr	26 Apr	27 Apr	28 Apr
Followers	352	352	358	358	356	356	365	369	370	370	369	375
Following	433	433	433	433	436	436	384	385	384	384	385	386
Nº posts/day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table AIII. Daily Evolution on the Instagram Metrics: February-April 2019 (continued)

	16 Feb	17 Feb	18 Feb	19 Feb	20 Feb	21 Feb	22 Feb	23 Feb	24 Feb	25 Feb	26 Feb	27 Feb…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	59% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	59% female	59% female	59% female	59% female	59% female	59% female

	…28 Feb	01 Mar	02 Mar	03 Mar	04 Mar	05 Mar	06 Mar	07 Mar	08 Mar	09 Mar	10 Mar	11 Mar…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60% female	59% female	59% female	60% female	61% female	62% female	62% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	61% female

	…12 Mar	13 Mar	14 Mar	15 Mar	16 Mar	17 Mar	18 Mar	19 Mar	20 Mar	21 Mar	22 Mar	23 Mar…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-35	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	62% female	62% female	62% female	62% female	61% female	61% female	59% female	59% female

	…24 Mar	25 Mar	26 Mar	27 Mar	28 Mar	29 Mar	30 Mar	31 Mar	01 Apr	02 Apr	03 Apr	04 Apr…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	59% female	59% female	60% female	59% female	59% female	60% female	59% female	59% female

	…05 Apr	06 Apr	07 Apr	08 Apr	09 Apr	10 Apr	11 Apr	12 Apr	13 Apr	14 Apr	15 Apr	16 Apr…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	59% female	59% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female

	…17 Apr	18 Apr	19 Apr	20 Apr	21 Apr	22 Apr	23 Apr	24 Apr	25 Apr	26 Apr	27 Apr	28 Apr	29 Apr
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-35	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	61% female	61% female

Table AIV. Daily Evolution on the Instagram Metrics: February-May 2022[35]

	16-17 Feb	17-18 Feb	18-19 Feb	19-20 Feb	20-21 Feb	21-22 Feb	22-23 Feb	23-24 Feb	24-25 Feb	25-26 Feb	26-27 Feb	27-28 Feb…
Profile Visits	1	1	0	0	4	0	2	5	6	6	4	4
Reach	7	4	1	1	5	4	5	6	5	5	8	9
Impressions	21	13	2	2	114	11	22	53	90	64	23	31

	…28 Feb-01 Mar	01-02 Mar	02-03 Mar	03-04 Mar	04-05 Mar	05-06 Mar	06-07 Mar	07-08 Mar	08-09 Mar	09-10 Mar	10-11 Mar	11-12 Mar…
Profile Visits	4	3	2	0	1	2	4	4	1	3	3	2
Reach	7	5	3	1	1	3	4	3	2	2	3	4
Impressions	23	11	7	2	8	13	9	5	3	4	6	25

	…12-13 Mar	13-14 Mar	14-15 Mar	15-16 Mar	16-17 Mar	17-18 Mar	18-19 Mar	19-20 Mar	20-21 Mar	21-22 Mar	22-23 Mar	23-24 Mar…
Profile Visits	6	7	5	6	5	1	6	7	4	4	4	5
Reach	5	6	8	7	2	1	4	4	6	7	4	3
Impressions	53	40	23	59	44	2	25	26	123	123	25	41

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[35] Note: The data from May represents the extended period due to la Feria

	…24-25 Mar	25-26 Mar	26-27 Mar	27-28 Mar	28-29 Mar	29-30 Mar	30-31 Mar	31 Mar-01 Apr	01-02 Apr	02-03 Apr	03-04 Apr	04-05 Apr…
Profile Visits	4	4	4	5	5	3	5	6	3	4	9	3
Reach	4	4	4	3	6	8	5	3	2	4	5	7
Impressions	23	103	104	5	12	14	132	130	24	27	18	15

	…05-06 Apr	06-07 Apr	07-08 Apr	08-09 Apr	09-10 Apr	10-11 Apr	11-12 Apr	12-13 Apr	13-14 Apr	14-15 Apr	15-16 Apr	16-17 Apr…
Profile Visits	7	14	8	1	5	5	5	6	1	5	7	4
Reach	186	194	11	4	4	5	132	157	28	122	162	57
Impressions	193	232	53	16	33	34	145	192	51	629	890	267

	…17-18 Apr	18-19 Apr	19-20 Apr	20-21 Apr	21-22 Apr	22-23 Apr	23-24 Apr	24-25 Apr	25-26 Apr	26-27 Apr	27-28 Apr	28-29 Apr
Profile Visits	5	4	5	7	5	4	5	3	2	4	2	3
Reach	5	3	2	3	2	3	3	4	5	3	3	2
Impressions	33	28	14	33	21	11	11	6	45	42	3	123

	…29-30 Apr	30 Apr-01 May	01-02 May	02-03 May	03-04 May	04-05 May	05-06 May	06-07 May	07-08 May
Profile Visits	2	2	15	18	7	0	2	3	20
Reach	1	1	147	163	18	2	3	2	126
Impressions	121	18	275	308	52	2	8	10	219

226

Table AIV. Daily Evolution on the Instagram Metrics: February-May 2022 (continued)

	16-17 Feb	17-18 Feb	18-19 Feb	19-20 Feb	20-21 Feb	21-22 Feb	22-23 Feb	23-24 Feb	24-25 Feb	25-26 Feb	26-27 Feb	27-28 Feb…
Followers	584	584	584	584	584	584	584	584	585	585	585	585
Following	579	579	579	580	580	580	580	580	580	580	580	580
Nº posts/day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	…28 Feb-01 Mar	01-02 Mar	02-03 Mar	03-04 Mar	04-05 Mar	05-06 Mar	06-07 Mar	07-08 Mar	08-09 Mar	09-10 Mar	10-11 Mar	11-12 Mar…
Followers	585	585	585	585	585	585	585	585	585	585	585	585
Following	580	580	580	580	580	580	580	580	580	580	580	580
Nº posts/day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	…12-13 Mar	13-14 Mar	14-15 Mar	15-16 Mar	16-17 Mar	17-18 Mar	18-19 Mar	19-20 Mar	20-21 Mar	21-22 Mar	22-23 Mar	23-24 Mar…
Followers	585	586	586	586	586	586	586	586	586	586	586	590
Following	580	581	581	581	581	581	581	581	581	581	581	582
Nº posts/day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	…24-25 Mar	25-26 Mar	26-27 Mar	27-28 Mar	28-29 Mar	29-30 Mar	30-31 Mar	31 Mar-01 Apr	01-02 Apr	02-03 Apr	03-04 Apr	04-05 Apr…
Followers	590	590	590	590	590	590	590	590	590	590	590	590
Following	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582
N° posts/day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	…05-06 Apr	06-07 Apr	07-08 Apr	08-09 Apr	09-10 Apr	10-11 Apr	11-12 Apr	12-13 Apr	13-14 Apr	14-15 Apr	15-16 Apr	16-17 Apr…
Followers	590	590	590	590	590	590	588	588	588	589	589	588
Following	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582	582
N° posts/day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	*	0	5	*	0

*the same one as the day before

	…17-18 Apr	18-19 Apr	19-20 Apr	20-21 Apr	21-22 Apr	22-23 Apr	23-24 Apr	24-25 Apr	25-26 Apr	26-27 Apr	27-28 Apr	28-29 Apr
Followers	587	587	588	588	589	590	589	589	591	593	593	593
Following	582	582	584	584	585	585	585	585	585	585	585	585
N° posts/day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	…29-30 Apr	30 Apr-01 May	01-02 May	02-03 May	03-04 May	04-05 May	05-06 May	06-07 May	07-08 May
Followers	593	595	598	599	599	599	599	599	599
Following	585	585	585	585	585	585	585	585	585
N° posts/day	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Stories	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0

Table AIV. Daily Evolution on the Instagram Metrics: February-May 2022 (continued)

	16-17 Feb	17-18 Feb	18-19 Feb	19-20 Feb	20-21 Feb	21-22 Feb	22-23 Feb	23-24 Feb	24-25 Feb	25-26 Feb	26-27 Feb	27-28 Feb…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	59.9% female	59.9% female	59.9% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female

	…28 Feb-01 Mar	01-02 Mar	02-03 Mar	03-04 Mar	04-05 Mar	05-06 Mar	06-07 Mar	07-08 Mar	08-09 Mar	09-10 Mar	10-11 Mar	11-12 Mar…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female	60.2% female

	…12-13 Mar	13-14 Mar	14-15 Mar	15-16 Mar	16-17 Mar	17-18 Mar	18-19 Mar	19-20 Mar	20-21 Mar	21-22 Mar	22-23 Mar	23-24 Mar…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-35	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60.2% female	60.3% female	60.3% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female

	…24-25 Mar	25-26 Mar	26-27 Mar	27-28 Mar	28-29 Mar	29-30 Mar	30-31 Mar	31 Mar-01 Apr	01-02 Apr	02-03 Apr	03-04 Apr	04-05 Apr…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female	60% female

	…05-06 Apr	06-07 Apr	07-08 Apr	08-09 Apr	09-10 Apr	10-11 Apr	11-12 Apr	12-13 Apr	13-14 Apr	14-15 Apr	15-16 Apr	16-17 Apr…
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60% female	60% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female

	…17-18 Apr	18-19 Apr	19-20 Apr	20-21 Apr	21-22 Apr	22-23 Apr	23-24 Apr	24-25 Apr	25-26 Apr	26-27 Apr	27-28 Apr	28-29 Apr
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.1% female	60.5% female	60.5% female	60.5% female	60.5% female	60.5% female	60.5% female	60.5% female	60.3% female

	…29-30 Apr	30 Apr-01 May	01-02 May	02-03 May	03-04 May	04-05 May	05-06 May	06-07 May	07-08 May
Top Locations	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville	Seville
Age Range	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34	25-34
Gender	60.3% female	60.3% female	60.3% female	60.3% female	60.3% female	60.3% female	60.3% female	60.3% female	60.3% female

230

AV. Questionnaire (English)

Part 1: Demographic Data

1. I give my voluntary consent to take part in this study

    Yes

    No

2. How old are you?

    Date:

    Month:

    Year:

3. Gender

    Female

    Male

    I prefer not to say

Part 2: Social Media and Social Media Use

Over recent years, the ways we plan our trips have changed. Social Media has been gaining importance in the travel planning process.

1. Do you use Social Media?

    Yes

    No

2. Do you use Social Media to look for information?

    Yes

    No

3. When did you start using social media?

More than 8 years ago

From 5 to 8 years ago

From 3 to 5 years ago

From 2 to 3 years ago

From 1 to 2 years ago

From 6 to 12 months ago

From 3 to 6 months ago

Less than 3 months ago

4. Do you use it weekly?

No

Yes less than an hour

Yes, between 1 and 4 hours

Yes, between 4 and 10 hours

Yes, between 10 and 30 hours

Yes, between 30 and 60 hours

5. Do you use it daily?

No

Yes, less than 15 minutes

Yes, between 15 and 30 minutes

Yes, between 30 and 45 minutes

Yes, 1 hour

Yes, 2 hours

Yes, 3 hours

Yes, more than 3 hours

Part 3: Attitude towards Social Media for travel planning

Please rate the following statements from 1 to 7 (1 being the lowest = Strongly disagree, and 7 being the highest = Strongly agree).

1. Perceived Trustworthiness

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
TR 1	I believe Social Media networks are trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TR 2	I believe Social Media networks are reliable for online bookings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Perceived Usefulness

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
PU1	Social Media networks helps me resolve doubts when I plan a trip	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PU2	Socia Media helps me plan a trip in a more efficient way	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PU3	Social Media helps me save time when I plan a trip	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PU4	The content provided by other users in social media networks is important for my travel plan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PU5	Using User Generated Content while performing travel planning activities is significant to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. Perceived Enjoyment

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
PE1	Social Media networks is a convenient channel for me to collect information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PE2	Travel info search through Social Media is a pleasant experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PE3	I have fun through the info search using Social Media	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

233

4. Perceived Ease of Use

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
PEoU1	It's easy to use content in Social Media to plan my trips.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PEoU2	It's easy to learn how to use Social Media.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PEoU3	It's easy to find the information needed in Social Media.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PEoU4	Social Media is clear and understandable in terms of content.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PEoU5	Overall Social Media is easy to use.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. Intention to Use Social Media

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
IUGCAC1	The content provided by users on Social Media, while looking for accommodation, offers security in my choice.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IUGCAC2	The content provided by users on Social Media, while looking for accommodation, help me make my choice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part 4: Booking accommodation online

The safety and reliability of Social Media and its content is often questioned. Please rate the following statements from 1 to 7 (1 being the lowest = Strongly disagree, and 7 being the highest = Strongly agree).

1. Perceived Trustworthiness

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
TR1	I believe Social Media networks are trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TR2	I believe Social Media networks are reliable for online bookings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Site Reputation

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
SR1	I think Social Media networks has a good reputation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SR2	I am familiar with Social Media Networks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SR3	I think Social Media networks are well known	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. Information Quality

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
IQ1	I think Social Media networks Provide Timely information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IQ2	I think Social Media networks provides reliable information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. Intention to Book a Hotel

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
IBHotel1	I like the idea of booking the accommodation online	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IBHotel2	My willingness to book accommodation online is very high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IBHotel3	The probability that I would consider booking an accommodation through Social Media is very high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IBHotel4	The likelihood of booking hotels through Social Media is very high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part 5: Willingness to Travel

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Travel Industry and the way we plan our trips. Please rate the following statements from 1 to 7 (1 being the lowest = Strongly disagree, and 7 being the highest = Strongly agree).

1. Destination Risk

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
DR1	I'm afraid that if I travel the people who care about me will be anxious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
DR2	I'm afraid that the tourists' facilities will not be good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
DR3	I'm afraid that the tourists' services will not be good enough	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Financial Risk

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
FR1	I think that the cost of travelling is higher than before	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
FR2	I'm afraid there will be some unexpected expenses	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
FR3	I'm afraid of not getting good value for money	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. Health Risk

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
HR1	I'm worried about getting sick during my trip	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
HR2	I'm afraid of not getting timely treatment for illness during the trip	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
HR3	I'm worried accommodations facilities will not be sanitary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. Perceived Risk

		Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
PRTRAV1	I feel more averse to travelling because of the risk from the COVID-19 pandemic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PRTRAV2	Given the current situation, I prefer to avoid travelling to large cities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

AVI. Questionnaire (Spanish)

Parte 1: Información demográfica

4. Doy mi consentimiento voluntario para formar parte de este estudio

   Sí

   No

5. Fecha de nacimiento

   Día:

   Mes:

   Año:

6. Género

   Mujer

   Hombre

   Prefiero no decirlo

Parte 2: Las Redes Sociales y su uso

En los últimos años, la manera de planificar nuestros viajes ha cambiado. Las Redes Sociales tienen un lugar cada vez más importante en estos procesos.

6. ¿Utilizas las Redes Sociales?

   Sí

   No

7. ¿Usas las Redes Sociales para la búsqueda de información?

   Sí

   No

8. ¿Cuándo empezaste a usar las Redes Sociales?

        Hace más de 8 años

        Hace entre 5 y 8 años

        Hace entre 3 y 5 años

        Hace entre 2 y 3 años

        Hace entre 1 y 2 años

        Hace entre 6 y 12 meses

        Hace entre 3 y 6 meses

        Hace menos de 3 meses

9. ¿Usas las Redes Sociales semanalmente?

        No

        Si, menos de 1 hora

        Si, entre 1 y 4 horas

        Si, entre 4 y 10 horas

        Si, entre 10 y 30 horas

        Si, entre 30 y 60 horas

10. ¿Usas las Redes Sociales diariamente?

        No

        Si, menos de 15 minutos

        Si, entre 15 y 30 minutos

        Si, entre 30 y 45 minutos

        Si, 1 hora

        Si, 2 horas

        Si, 3 horas

        Si, más de 3 horas

Parte 3: Actitud hacia el uso de Redes Sociales para la planificación del viaje.

Por favor puntúe de 1 a 7 las siguientes preguntas, siendo 1 el menor valor (Totalmente en desacuerdo) y 7 el mayor (Totalmente de acuerdo).

6. Confianza Percibida

		Totalmente en desacuerdo					Totalmente de acuerdo	
TR 1	Creo que las Redes Sociales son de confianza	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TR 2	Creo que se puede confiar en las Redes Sociales para reservar por internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. Utilidad Percibida

		Totalmente en desacuerdo					Totalmente de acuerdo	
PU1	Las Redes Sociales me ayudan a resolver dudas cuando estoy planificando el viaje	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PU2	Las Redes Sociales me ayudan a planificar el viaje de una forma más eficiente	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PU3	Las Redes Sociales me ayudan a ahorrar tiempo cuando planifico el viaje	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PU4	El contenido publicado por otros usuarios en las Redes Sociales es importante para la planificación de mi viaje	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PU5	El contenido publicado en las Redes Sociales es importante para la planificación del viaje	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. Disfrute Percibido

		Totalmente en desacuerdo					Totalmente de acuerdo	
PE1	Las Redes Sociales son un buen canal para recoger información	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PE2	Me gusta buscar información para el viaje en la Redes Sociales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PE3	Disfruto buscando información para mi viaje en las Redes Sociales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

9. Facilidad de Uso Percibido

		Totalmente en desacuerdo						Totalmente de acuerdo
PEoU1	Es fácil usar el contenido de las Redes Sociales para planificar mi viaje	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PEoU2	Es fácil aprender a usar las Redes Sociales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PEoU3	Es fácil encontrar la información que necesito en las Redes Sociales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PEoU4	El contenido presentado en las Redes Sociales es claro y entendible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PEoU5	En general las Redes Sociales son fáciles de usar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

10. Intención de usar las Redes Sociales

		Totalmente en desacuerdo						Totalmente de acuerdo
IUGCAC1	El contenido publicado por otros usuarios en las Redes Sociales me da seguridad cuando busco alojamiento mientras busco alojamiento	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IUGCAC2	El contenido publicado por otros usuarios en las Redes Sociales me ayuda en mi elección en la búsqueda de alojamiento	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Parte 4: Intención de Reservar un Hotel Online

Por favor, conteste a las siguientes preguntas sobre sus hábitos a la hora de reservar alojamiento en internet, siendo 1 el menor valor (Totalmente en desacuerdo) y 7 el mayor (Totalmente de acuerdo).

5. Confianza Percibida

		Totalmente en desacuerdo						Totalmente de acuerdo
TR1	Creo que las Redes Sociales ofrecen información de confianza	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TR2	Creo que se puede confiar en las Redes Sociales para reservar por internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Reputación Online

		Totalmente en desacuerdo						Totalmente de acuerdo
SR1	Las Redes Sociales tienen buena reputación	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SR2	Estoy familiarizado con las Redes Sociales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
SR3	Las Redes Sociales son bien conocidas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. Calidad de la Información

		Totalmente en desacuerdo						Totalmente de acuerdo
IQ1	Creo que las Redes Sociales ofrecen información actualizada	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IQ2	Creo que las Redes Sociales son de confianza	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. Intención de Reservar alojamiento por Online

		Totalmente en desacuerdo						Totalmente de acuerdo
IBHotel1	Me gusta la idea de reservar mi alojamiento por internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IBHotel2	Mi predisposición a reservar alojamiento por internet es muy alta	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IBHotel3	La probabilidad de que considere reservar un alojamiento a través de las Redes Sociales es muy alta	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IBHotel4	La probabilidad de que reserve alojamiento a través de las Redes Sociales es muy alta	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part 5: Disposición a viajar

COVID-19 ha afectado la industria del turismo, así como las maneras de planificar un viaje. Por favor puntúe de 1 a 7 las siguientes preguntas, siendo 1 (Totalmente en desacuerdo) y 7 el mayor (Totalmente de acuerdo).

5. Riesgo del Destino

		Totalmente en desacuerdo				Totalmente de acuerdo		
DR1	Me inquieta que mis familiares y amigos se preocupen si viajo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
DR2	Me preocupa que las instalaciones turísticas no estén en buenas condiciones	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
DR3	Me preocupa que los servicios turísticos no funcionen correctamente	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Riesgo Económico

		Totalmente en desacuerdo				Totalmente de acuerdo		
FR1	Creo que viajar ahora es más caro que antes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
FR2	Tengo miedo de que surjan gastos imprevistos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
FR3	Temo no obtener buena relación calidad/ precio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. Riesgo de Salud

		Totalmente en desacuerdo						Totalmente de acuerdo
HR1	Me preocupa poder enfermar durante mi viaje	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
HR2	Me preocupa no conseguir tratamiento a tiempo si me pongo enfermo durante mi viaje	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
HR3	Me preocupa que el alojamiento no esté en buenas condiciones higiénicas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. Riesgo Percibido

		Totalmente en desacuerdo						Totalmente de acuerdo
PRTRAV1	Me siento más reacio a viajar por el riesgo de COVID-19	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PRTRAV2	Debido a la situación actual, prefiero no viajar a ciudades grandes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

245

246

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249

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