Articles and essays

Use and Influence of Social Media on Trip Planning: a quantitative study*

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Abstract

The expansion of the internet and the rise of digital media have transformed interpersonal communication and human and commercial relations. Social media are today popular tools to communicate, share and express personal opinions and they have increasingly become alternatives to traditional media in the process of trip planning and decisions, allowing almost real-time information update. This study aimed to measure the use and influence of social media during the tourism trip planning process and the level of trust that tourists attribute to these online tools, compared with other available sources of information. The applied methodology was developed by adapting a previous study conducted by Fotis, Buhalis, and Rossides, with descriptive and critical analyses of the results, and it is justified by the need to expand the observation to other markets in order to learn about the specificities of each group. This study used nonprobability sampling, mainly focused on residents of the city of Belo Horizonte, with voluntary online participation. The findings demonstrated the frequent use of social media in all stages of trip planning among respondents, with these tools being considered the most reliable sources of information, only behind official tourism websites and recommendations of relatives and friends.

Keywords: Social media; Trip planning; Tourism.

Resumo

Uso e Influência das Mídias Sociais no Planejamento de Viagens: um estudo quantitativo

A expansão da internet e a ascensão das mídias digitais transformaram a comunicação interpessoal e as relações humanas e comerciais. As mídias sociais são, hoje, ferramentas populares para comunicar, compartilhar e expressar opiniões pessoais e cada vez mais se estabelecem como alternativas aos meios tradicionais no processo de planejamento e decisão de viagens, permitindo uma atualização, quase em tempo real, das informações. O objetivo geral do estudo foi medir o uso e a influência das mídias sociais durante o processo de planejamento de viagens turísticas, bem como o nível

de confiança atribuído pelos turistas a essas ferramentas on-line, comparativamente a outras fontes de informação disponíveis. A metodologia aplicada foi desenvolvida a partir da adaptação da pesquisa feita anteriormente por Fotis, Buhalis e Rossides, com análises descritivas e críticas dos resultados, e se justifica pela necessidade de ampliar a observação para outros mercados a fim de conhecer as especificidades de cada grupo. A amostragem foi não probabilística, concentrada majoritariamente em residentes da cidade de Belo Horizonte, com participação voluntária on-line. Os achados demonstraram o uso frequente das mídias sociais em todas as fases do planejamento de viagens entre os respondentes, sendo essas ferramentas consideradas as fontes de informação mais confiáveis, atrás apenas dos sites oficiais de turismo e indicações de parentes e amigos.

Palavras-chave: Mídias sociais; Planejamento de viagens; Turismo.

Resumen

El Uso y la Influencia de los Medios Sociales en la Planificación de Viajes: un estudio cuantitativo

La expansión de internet y el auge de los medios digitales han transformado la comunicación interpersonal y las relaciones humanas y comerciales. Los medios sociales son hoy herramientas populares para comunicar, compartir y expresar opiniones personales, y cada vez más se establecen como alternativa a los medios tradicionales en el proceso de planificación y decisión de viajes, permitiendo una actualización de la información casi en tiempo real. El objetivo general fue medir el uso y la influencia de los medios de comunicación social en el proceso de planificación de viajes, así como el nivel de confianza asignado por los turistas a estas herramientas *online* en comparación con otras fuentes de información disponibles. La metodología fue desarrollada mediante la adaptación de las investigaciones llevadas a cabo por Fotis, Buhalis y Rossides, con análisis descriptivos y analíticos de los resultados, y se justifica por la necesidad de ampliar la observación a otros mercados con el fin de conocer los detalles de cada grupo. El muestreo es no probabilístico, concentrado en residentes de la ciudad de Belo Horizonte con participación *online* voluntaria. Los resultados muestran el uso frecuente de los medios sociales en todas las etapas de la planificación de viajes entre los encuestados, con estas herramientas siendo consideradas las fuentes de información más confiables, sólo detrás de los sitios oficiales de turismo y de indicaciones de los familiares y amigos.

Palabras clave: Medios de comunicación social; Planificación de viajes; Turismo.

INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to measure the use and influence of social media during the tourism trip planning process and the level of trust that tourists attribute to these online tools, compared with other available sources of information. This study is justified by the need to understand the relation between Brazilian users and social media while performing their tourism activities, since, according to a similar study conducted by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), cultural differences influence this interaction.

The expansion of the internet and the rise of digital media have transformed interpersonal communication and human and commercial relations. Tourism, as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon (UNWTO, 2008), is affected by people's behavioral changes as they relate to each other and develop desires and

ambitions. The way tourists decide about and plan their trips have significantly changed, since now they have different influences and select different tools and sources of information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In tourism, users are inspired by trips of friends or contacts from their social networks and learn about possible different activities, services or even equipment available in destinations of their interest. The digital tools have ensured greater autonomy for trip definition and planning, and have become essential in the decision process, even if buying tourism services have been performed through companies or professionals operating in this sector. Parra-López et al. (2011) identify the use of the internet to search for information, communicate, or simply as a distraction, observing that tourists dedicate time to analyze elements that enrich their experience, and to express opinions and share information.

In recent years, a growing number of studies have been conducted in an attempt to understand the different nuances of the dynamics between tourists and social media during a trip planning process, which have recognized the influence of individual markets due to local cultural characteristics (Gretzel et al., 2008). Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012) compared the results of their study with the population of the former Soviet Union to the indicators found by Cox et al. (2009) regarding the use and reliability of social media among Australians. Data from the study conducted by Cox showed that tourists use online tools predominantly before the trip, after choosing a destination, and that online tools are less reliable than traditional sources of information (official tourism websites or travel agencies). Data collected in the study among Russians contradict this relation, pointing to social media as more reliable sources and relating their use to the post-trip period to share experiences and pictures with friends and/or other tourists.

This study intends to raise discussions to drive national scientific production focused on the use of social media for research and decision making regarding the tourism activity.

THEORETICAL REFERENCE

Social media

Social media are web applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0[1] that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content (UGC) or user-created content (UCC) in a participative and collaborative manner, consolidating the initial goal of the internet, that is, be "a platform to facilitate information exchange between users" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). They are one of the fastest growing segments on the web, with tools that enable users to search, organize, share, note, comment and contribute to content in different environments (Parra-López, 2011). Social media are more than a new form of communication; in fact, they are part of every online environment built from

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1. Web 2.0 was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end users have used the World Wide Web, that is, a platform on which content and applications are not created and published by individuals, but instead continually modified by all users in a participative and collaborative way (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

the input of the participants. According to Machado (2015), these tools offer users a new communication platform that is similar to word of mouth, which can generate consumer empowerment. Its progression is dynamic and, despite different proposals, there is no determinant classification of its types (Parra-López, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The classification adopted in this study is the one from the study conducted by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), using standard observation of social media: blogs, microblogs (ex.: Twitter), trip evaluation websites (ex.: booking.com and TripAdvisor), picture and video sharing websites (ex.: YouTube, Flickr), wikis (ex.: Wikipedia and Wikitravel), and social networks (ex.: Facebook).

Social media have had an exponential increase in popularity among internet users and an increase in content usage and sharing, replacing traditional sources of information (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). For Xiang and Gretzel (2010), with the UGC, consumers have acquired greater power of choice over the information they access and how to obtain it. And if individuals use the internet for various purposes, Parra-López et al. (2011) understand that tourists also use social media to express opinions and share information.
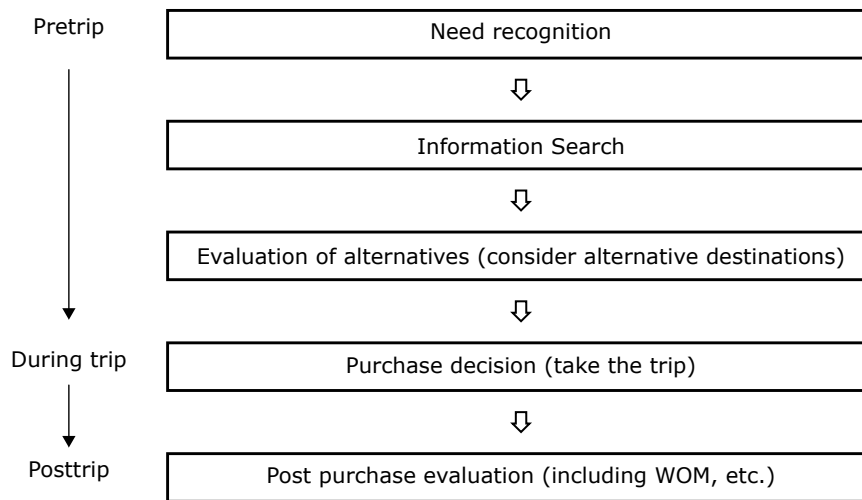
SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOURISM

Trip planning processes stages and types of use

In studies about the trip planning process, Cox et al. (2009) suggest an adapted model of trip consumption in three stages (Figure 1): the first would be the 'pre-trip period,' a phase of recognition and information search to minimize risks and make proper decision based on different sources; the second would be 'during the trip,' the trip itself; and the third 'post-trip' period, or the evaluation phase.

Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012) suggest a fourth stage by dividing the pre-trip period into two: (1) before selecting a destination, and (2) after selecting a destination, assigning different search intentions to each one:

- Before selecting a destination: the user seeks information to have ideas of where to go on vacation or for a holiday, to narrow down destination options and confirm the choice.

- After selecting a destination: the user seeks ideas and information about accommodation and leisure options.

Figure 1 – Model of trip consumption decision making process

Pretrip	Need recognition
	⇩
	Information Search
	⇩
	Evaluation of alternatives (consider alternative destinations)
	⇩
During trip	Purchase decision (take the trip)
	⇩
Posttrip	Post purchase evaluation (including WOM, etc.)

Source – Cox et al. (2009), adapted from Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1990)

Influence of social media on trip planning

The use of online travel communities has increased to obtain information for the trip planning and decision making process. However, there is no consensus on how such communities, reviews and opinions available on social media affect the behavior and choices of tourists (Casaló, Flavián & Guinalíu, 2011). Parra-López et al. (2011) attribute the use of such applications to the value perceived by the consumer, reflecting in their loyalty, satisfaction and intention to recommend and return. For Casaló, Flavián & Guinalíu (2011), the trust and usefulness of the advices on online environments are decisive for the intention to follow such information. This attitude confirms the findings of the authors above, who state the consumer preference for informal sources when making decisions, such as online travel communities, traveler reviews and recommendations on social media, in relation to formal sources such as official tourism websites, agencies and advertising campaigns.

Social media are channels of intense information exchange where users are able to easily access large amounts of data that are relevant to their needs. Then, the trust to be established is also seen as the sensation generated in the traveler during the decision-making process, since the tourism product is intangible before consumption and the search for information about the destination and/or activities reduce risks and increase the traveler's security (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012; Parra-López et al., 2011). When choosing a trip destination, a tourist receives consciously, or not, different incentives and information related to the travel and destination. As a consumer and due to the intangible character of the tourism product, a traveler is strongly motivated to obtain information to clarify his/her choice (Parra-López et al., 2011). Content present on social media acts as sources that generate interest when presenting images, data and experiences (Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012).

This study aims to measure the use and influence of social media during the stages of trip planning process (before, during and after) and the level of

trust that tourists attribute to these online tools when compared with other available sources of information. When reproducing the study conducted by Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides (2012), we also try to analyze two hypotheses raised by the authors:

H1: social media are predominantly used before the trip to seek information; and

H2: information about trip on social media is more reliable than advertisements of media vehicles, travel agencies and official tourism websites.

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire used in this study was based on a free translation from the English version, adapted from the instrument produced and used by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012). The questions to characterize the sociodemographic profile were based on the *Pesquisa brasileira de mídia 2015: hábitos de consumo de mídia pela população brasileira* [2015 Brazilian media survey: media consumption habits of the Brazilian population) (Brasil, 2014], issued by the Department of Social Communication of the Presidency of the Republic. For the subjective questions, we used the seven-point Likert scale adopted in the original study.

Besides the sociodemographic data, the questionnaire was organized in two constructs, according to previous studies on the subject and the study objectives:

1) Use of the internet and social media – based on the *Pesquisa brasileira de mídia* (Brasil, 2014);

2) Use of social media in trip planning – to determine: a) period of research on social media and type of use of the tourist; b) perception of the influence from online tools on trip choices; c) changes in trip plans influenced by the UGC; d) trust in the different sources of information on social media when planning a trip.

The questionnaire was built on Google Forms platform and was available online from October 27 to November 6, advertised on the most popular social media among Brazilians: Facebook, Instagram, Google+, Twitter, and Whatsapp (Brasil, 2014), and through email.

A total of 657 questionnaires were collected, twelve of which were repeated, leading to a sample of 635 people. Considering the valid questionnaires, five groups of respondents were observed, according to the answers to the four screening questions (Table 1).

Table 1 – Sample groups

Group	Key question	Number of respondents
Group 1: Does not use the internet.	How often do you use the internet?	1
Group 2: Does not use social media.	How often do you use social media?	11
Group 3: Has not traveled in the last 12 months.	Have you taken any LEISURE trip in the last 12 months?	128
Group 4: Did not use social media in trip planning process for the last trip.	Based on your LAST leisure trip, did you use any social media to plan and share information before, during or after the trip?	78
Group 5: Study focus.		417

Souce – Research data

The results were analyzed on SPSS Statistics 22.0 for descriptive observation of the sample, followed by a statistical analysis with data cross-check, in order to answer the study question: What is the influence of social media on the trip planning process of users and how do they perceive the reliability of available information? These cross-checks were performed using the chi-squared test (x^2), which shows possible associations of independent variables. The t test was used to identify a different cultural component between this study and the original study mentioned above, indicating possible discrepancies among the findings, which shows if the mean values of the same variable in two independent samples are significantly different.

The categories used in the description of the results were determined after observing the frequency of responses to a grouping adapted to the study data that allowed the sample understanding. However, for the statistical analysis, some adjustments of the categories were required. Following the conditions of the chi-squared test regarding the number of categories, ideally reduced in cross-checks and with no less than ten individuals each, the sociodemographic variables (age, schooling, and income) were recoded. For the t test, the variables of age and schooling were recoded for the comparison of findings from both studies. In the group of schooling categories, the interviewees presenting fundamental education (five subjects) were discarded, since they did not fit the other categories and were not representative within the sample.

RESULTS

Sample profile

The mean age of the interviewees was 34.3 years, with the predominance of the age groups of 18 to 25 years (33.1%) and 26 to 35 years (28.2%). The remaining respondents were aged 36 to 45 years (17.5%), 13 (1%) were aged 46 to 55 years, and 8.2% were over 55 years. Therefore, the sample had a broad

age distribution. Most respondents were female (58%), and 43.3% were male. The predominance of female participants was expected, as observed by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), due to their increased willingness to voluntary participation in interviews, and possibly because of their role in travel decisions. The sample presented incomplete higher education as predominant education (30.7%), followed by higher education (27.7%), which can be explained by the fact that the questionnaire was distributed to the researcher's contacts, with influence on the education profile of the study participants. Other levels of schooling were: incomplete fundamental education (0.3%); complete fundamental education (0.5%); incomplete high education (2.0%); complete high school (7.4%); technical course (3.0%); specialization (16.4%); MBA (1.4%); master's degree (7.2%); doctor's degree (2.7%); and postdoctoral degree (0.6%).

The interviewees are Brazilians, predominantly living in Brazil, most of them in Minas Gerais (91.7%). Belo Horizonte, the city where the researcher lives, accounts for 72.4% of the participants. The average monthly family income (Graph 1) of 551 respondents who answered this question is R$ 7,120.68, showing unusual high values above R$ 30,000.00. The median income shows this change, when presenting the value of R$ 5,500.00. To help analyze the obtained data, the answers were based on the current minimum wage of R$ 880.00.

Graph 1 – Range of monthly family income of the interviewees
(per minimum wage) (n = 551)
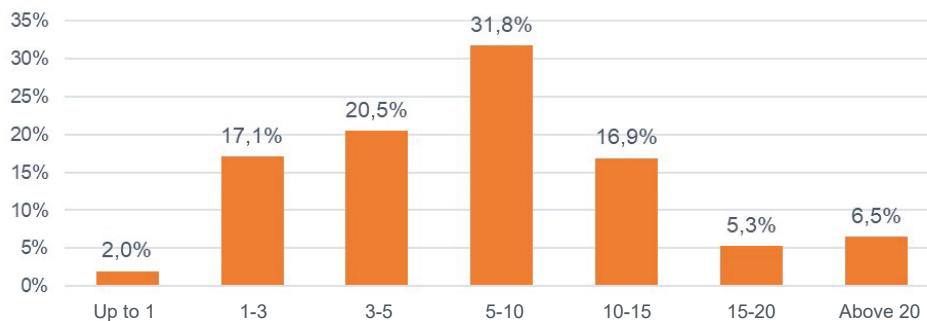
Souce – Research data

The representation was close to the baseline study (n=346), which was conducted with residents of former Soviet Union countries, particularly Russia, and was characterized by most female participants aged 25 to 39 years (the study did not report if the participants had achieved or not a school degree). This fact enables possible conclusions about the cultural component in the different behaviors of tourists regarding the use of social media while planning their trips.

Use of internet and social media

Among all 635 respondents, only one (0.2%) participant did not use the internet, while almost 97% accessed the web daily (91% more than once a day

and 5.8% seven times a week); 2.6% reported using it a few times a week, and 0.5% less than once a week. Despite such distributed numbers among the options, the use of social media presented a similar behavior: almost 90% reported daily use: 78.6% used it more than once a day, and 8.2% seven times a week (Table 26). Only 11 (1.7%) of 634 interviewees who answered this question said that they did not use social media.

Table 2 – Use of social media on the daily routine

	Frequency	**Percentage**
Never	11	1.7%
Less than once a week	7	1.1%
Once a week	7	1.1%
Twice a week	3	0.5%
Three times a week	16	2.5%
Four times a week	11	1.7%
Five times a week	16	2.5%
Six times a week	12	1.9%
Seven times a week	52	8.2%
More than once a day	499	78.7%
Total	634	100%

Souce – Research data

Instant messaging applications and Facebook were identified as the most popular social media among the respondents (Graph 2), reported by 88.1%, followed by YouTube (82%). Among the tools focused on tourism, the most frequently mentioned were Decolar.com (31.9%), Booking (25.2%), and TripAdvisor (24.6%). It should be noted that this question allowed more than one answer.

Graph 2 – Social media used by the interviewees (n = 634)
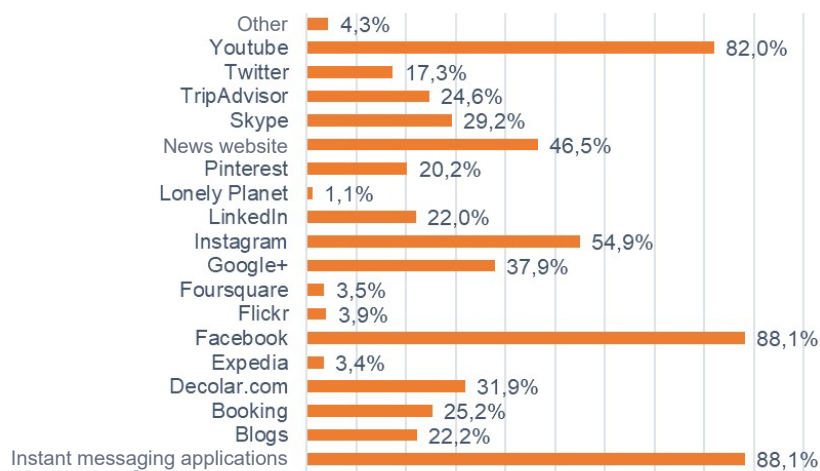
Souce – Research data

The use of the internet and social media in the sample showed an intense habit: 97% of the respondents connect to the web daily and 78.7% use some social media more than once a day. The percentage of internet access is considerably higher than that found in the national sampling study (Brasil, 2014), of 37%, which is explained by the different approaches used, since in the study ordered by the Department of Social Communication of the Presidency of the Republic, the interview was conducted at home located in all Brazilian states, with a representative sample of the Brazilian population. Although there were no data in this study about the frequency of social media use among the Brazilian population, a high use was reported in the study conducted by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), in which almost 50% of the respondents reported access to some social media several times a day. Of note, these authors chose to distribute the questionnaire online, as in this study.

Among the most frequently used social media among the interviewees, the behavior of the sample repeated the national standard, showing a greater use of Facebook and instant messaging applications, although in PBM (Brasil, 2014), these tools did not present similar high values (83% for Facebook and 58% for instant messaging applications). The PBM did not include specific tourism tools. However, regarding the use of general media, the reports presented a similar profile, not in values, as already discussed regarding the different study approaches, but in the selection of the most used tools (Table 3).

Table 3 – Comparison of most frequent social media

	Brazil (2014)	Current study
	n = 18300	n = 634
Facebook	83.0%	88.1%
Applications	(WhatsApp) 58.0%	88.1%
YouTube	17.0%	82.0%
Instagram	12.0%	54.9%
Google +	8.0%	37.9%
Twitter	5.0%	17.3%
Skype	4.0%	29.2%
LinkedIn	1.0%	22.0%
Other	1.0%	4.3%

Souce – Research data

Use of social media in trip planning

Group 3 (see Table 1) was set up based on the third screening question (Have you taken any LEISURE trip in the last 12 months?), as 128 participants (20.5%) answered 'no' and had the interview interrupted. Among the 495 participants (group 4) who took at least one trip, 81.6% chose a national destination and 84.2% (417 respondents, group 5) used some social media for trip planning and/ or sharing travel information.

Confirming the frequent use of social media in a trip planning process, there is a high influence of these online tools on the trip-related choices as almost

70% of the respondents attributed to these tools values of 5 and above (on a 1-7 point scale), that is, above the mean value (Table 4). In addition, 48.4% of the respondents reported they had changed their original trip plans based on the online content, although most of them (36.7%) had only made minor changes (Table 5), and 30.9% said they did not make any changes based on the information on social media, which raises the hypothesis that they seek only complementary elements to the decisions already made regarding the trip.

Table 4 – Influence of social media on trip

	Frequency	Percentage
1	9	2.2%
2	13	3.1%
3	26	6.2%
4	78	18.7%
5	142	34.1%
6	82	19.7%
7	67	16.1%
Total	417	100%
Mean	5.03	

n = 417, 7-point Likert scale: 1 = none, 7 = very strong influence
Souce – Research data

Interviewees who used social media to plan their trips in the last twelve months (n=417) indicated a mean score of 5.03 (Likert scale) for the influence of such tools on trip-related choices, while in the study by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), using the same scale, the mean was 4.84. This difference is statistically significant (t test, p=0.006, 95% confidence interval), showing that the surveyed Brazilians attribute greater influence to these technological resources on their trip choices. When analyzing the use of social media in trip planning, no statistically relevant relationships were found at the 95% confidence level among income, schooling and sex of the interviewees. The variable of recoded age (aged 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, and over 46 years) showed a significant difference between the groups, x^2 (p=0.006), indicating greater use of the tools by interviewees aged 26 to 35 years.

Table 5 – Changes in trip plans influenced by content observed on social media

	Frequency	Percentage
I'm not sure, I don't remember.	86	20.6%
I didn't change my original trip plan.	129	30.9%
I made some changes in the original trip plan.	153	36.7%
I made significant changes in the original trip plan.	46	11.0%
I completely changed my original trip plan.	3	0.7%
Total	417	100%

Souce – Research data

The influence of social media was measured through five statements to observe more clearly how online information changed the choices of tourists. The original study presented only four statements, and this study added a new statement to cover possible specific groups. Again, the behavior of the sample was similar to that found in original study (Table 6). Both studies show that most interviewees report changes in the original plans, even though Brazilians provided a large number of uncertain answers.

Table 6 – Comparison of changes made to trip plans due to influence of social media content

	Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides (2012)	Current study
	n = 273	n = 417
I'm not sure, I don't remember.	2.2%	20.6%
I didn't change my original trip plan.	33.7%	30.9%
I made some changes in the original trip plan.	49.5%	36.7%
I made significant changes in the original trip plan.	14.7%	11.0%
I completely changed my original trip plan.	–	0.7%

Source – Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), adapted.

This way, in both studies, although the participants did not give a maximum score to the influence of social media while planning a trip – mean of 4 to 5 on a 7-point scale –, most respondents said that they had changed some aspect of their trip based on social media content. Even so, about one third of participants from both studies seem to use online information only to complement their trip planning without changing the original plans.

Social media in different trip stages

To better recognize and understand the reason for using social media during a trip process, the study conducted by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012) lists twelve statements, distributed among the four trip stages as understood by them: before the trip and before choosing a destination; before the trip and after choosing a destination; during the trip; after the trip). In this study, the authors decided to add some statements in relation to the original study to better identify the nuances of trip stages and the behavior of participants/tourists (Table 6). For comparative purposes, only the statements included in both studies are displayed (Graph 3).

For the respondents of this study, the most recurrent motivations were the search for information before the trip, mainly "about attractions and leisure activities" (81.5%), and post-trip sharing the experience with "friends and/or other tourists" (81.3%). Before choosing where to go, the search is focused on finding options of destination (66.7%) and confirming the destination (68.6%).

Before the trip, accommodation options are analyzed online by most interviewees (77%), which does not happen with meals (44.8%). During the trip, the reasons for using social media were searching for information about attractions in the tourism destination (67.6%) and specific information (60%), that is, of particular interest of the tourist, and to keep contact with friends (60.9%). Comments and analyses of the trip on specific media obtained lower values (24.9%).

Table 7 – Use of social media during the trip (n=417)

Before the trip – before choosing a destination	
In the beginning of the search, to have ideas of where to go on vacation/holiday.	66.7%
To narrow down options of destinations.	14.4%
To confirm my selected destination.	68.6%
Before the trip – after choosing a destination	
Looking for ideas and information about accommodation options.	77.0%
Looking for ideas and information about attractions and leisure activities.	81.5%
Looking for ideas and information about meals.	44.8%
During the trip	
Looking for ideas and information about attractions and leisure activities.	67.6%
Looking for ideas and information about meals.	48.7%
To find information about specific attractions and leisure activities.	60.0%
To make comments and analyze my trip experience.	24.9%
To keep contact with friends.	60.9%
I visited social media that were not related to information about my trip.	41.7%
After the trip	
To share my experiences and pictures with my friends and/or other tourists.	81.3%
To analyze and comment about my trip destination and accommodation place.	38.8%
I regularly visit social media related to tourism to have ideas for my next trips.	31.9%

Souce – Research data

Graph 3 – Comparison of social media use before the trip, after choosing a destination

Fotis, Buhalis e Rossides (2012)   Current study
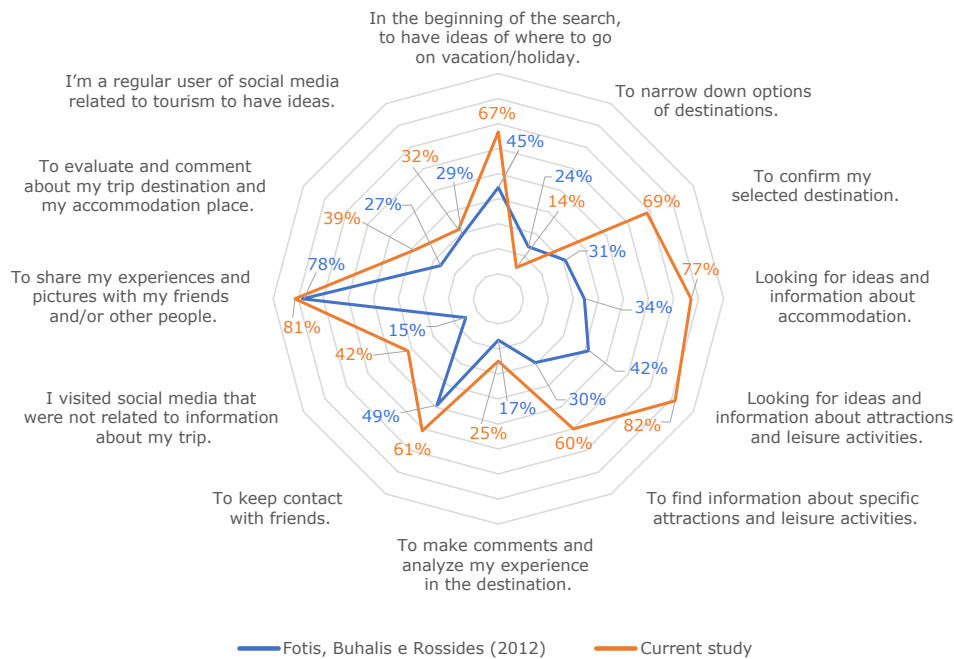
Source – Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), adapted.

The behavior of the two samples is similar in terms of distribution of references of social media use in different trip stages. Although the values are not always close, the interviewees of both studies are more likely to present the same uses. The only motivation that did not show such similarity was the intention to narrow down destination options before the trip and before destination is chosen, when the original study showed a higher percentage than the current study. In all other variables, in different proportions, a higher percentage of use by Brazilians was obtained.

When observing the variables and trip stages, the findings of Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides showed that the main use of social media related to the trip happens predominantly after the trip, when they share their experience, according to 78% of the interviewees. Although Parra-López et al. (2011) confirm this finding in their study, and although such motivation was high in the current study (81.3%), it was not the variable of highest value, since the most mentioned variable refers to the pre-trip period when the tourist searches for leisure information (81.5%). Again, for such differences, Parra-López et al. (2011) showed a lack of consensus on the motivation to use social media in the trip planning process and their power to influence decisions. Cultural nuances can be understood as the potential explanation of these variations, as suggested in the original study.

Trust in social media

For the interviewees, the trust in social media information is, on average, still in the range of indifference (4.78). As this questionnaire used a 7-point Likert scale, 1 to 3 correspond to different degrees of lack of trust; and 5 to 7 refer to trust levels. Thus, 4, the middle of the scale, refers to indifference, when the

interviewee does not consider the information found online as fully reliable or fully unreliable. The sources of information presenting higher mean values were "friends and relatives" (5.63) and "official tourism websites" (5.18), although they also obtained values very close to the middle of the scale (Table 8).

Table 8 – Mean values of trust in different sources of information about trip

	Mean	SD
Friends and relatives	5.63	(1.41)
Information provided by other tourists on the internet	4.78	(1.17)
Information on social media	4.78	(1.22)
Official tourism websites	5.18	(1.16)
TV programs and documentaries, radio programs or newspaper/magazine articles	4.84	(1.20)
Travel agencies	4.65	(1.35)
Advertisements on TV, radio, newspaper or magazine	4.35	(1.26)

n = 417, 7-point Likert scale: 1 = I don't trust at all, 7 = I fully trust

Souce – Research data

The perception of trust of the sample from this study showed a more conservative audience, which attributes more credit to traditional sources. Sources related to the marketing of travel products (agencies; TV, radio, newspaper and magazine advertisements) were indicated with suspicion and received the lowest values on the Likert scale. Social media were characterized by intermediate trust.

Compared with the study by Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), the degree of trust is significantly different for all the sources presented in the questionnaire (Table 9). Despite indicating friends, relatives and other tourists on the internet as reliable sources, the interviewees were less secure in terms of social media than the residents of the former Soviet Union countries. On the other hand, they considered the other sources better. Thus, this study contradicts the findings of the original study, which found greater trust in social media, more than travel agencies and official tourism websites.

Table 9 – T test regarding trust in potential sources of information about trip

	t	df	Sig. 2 extremities	Mean difference	95% confidence interval of difference	
					Lower	Higher
Friends and relatives	-12.778	416	.000	-.729	-.84	-.62
Other tourists on the internet	-6.258	416	.000	-.373	-.49	-.26
Social media	2.019	416	.044	.114	.00	.23
Official tourism websites	13.244	416	.000	.817	.70	.94
Programs and documentaries	14.927	416	.000	.874	.76	.99

(continues...)

	t	df	Sig. 2 extremities	Mean difference	95% confidence interval of difference	
					Lower	Higher
Travel agency	11.949	416	.000	.825	.69	.96
TV, radio, newspaper and magazine advertisements	11.982	416	.000	.795	.66	.93

Souce – Research data

Social media as sources of information were the variables that presented the smallest difference between the two studies, which raises the hypothesis of the global action of these tools, which are able to stimulate their use in all groups, diluting cultural factors that determine other aspects in the life of the individual.

Hypotheses

The findings described and analyzed in this study are, therefore, in agreement with the first hypothesis of Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012) indicating that social media are predominantly used before the trip to seek information, an assumption based on the literature, but which contradicts the data found by the authors. The second hypothesis, of travel information on social media is more reliable than the advertisements on traditional media, travel agencies and official tourism websites, was confirmed in the previous study and partially rejected in this study, since the reliability of social media for travel information is not greater than that of official tourism websites, according to the Brazilians interviewed.

FINAL REMARKS

This research fulfilled its objective to measure the influence of social media on trip planning in the studied sample and identify the level of trust attributed by the interviewees to online information. Data of both studies were compared to recognize the relationship of cultural particularities with differentiated behaviors. The statistical analysis of this study found a large use of different social media in all trip planning stages, with pre-trip predominance, as well as sharing of information and pictures after the trip. The reliability of information available on social media was positive and its power of influence trip planning was recognized by most interviewees.

The intention of this study was to raise points of discussion and encourage new studies in the national context to promote well-founded decisions regarding tourism activities, either by the authorities in charge of public policies in the tourism destination, or by travel agents and other groups interested in tourism. Despite the search for the development of a structured study, based on statistics, this study presents limitations related to the generalization of the results to the Brazilian population, since the questionnaires were answered by volunteers,

constituting a non-random sample, with great concentration on the city of Belo Horizonte. However, the data collected may be useful to continue the discussion about the relationship between tourism and social media, encouraging the production of new studies on this theme.

Based on the findings of this study, further investigation is suggested, of both academic and practical nature, to recognize the demands of users of official tourism websites and then, direct assertive investments in this potential tool, which is considered reliable. It is important to consider the contributions of tourists on the different social media for targeted strategic actions that build and consolidate a good relationship between the various agents involved in tourism activities and, in addition, encourage and promote the use of social media in trip planning.

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