

Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management

**CO-CREATION OF TOURISM EXPERIENCES AND THE USE OF
SOCIAL MEDIA (ICTS) AS KEY TOOLS FOR INNOVATION AND
VALUE CREATION IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Raquel da Fonte Barata da Silva

A Dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master in Management of Services and Technologies

Supervisor:

Professor Mónica Mendes Ferreira, ISCTE Business School,
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Abstract

Portugal is an emerging tourism market, being worthy of attention. Besides, the tourism industry has been connected to fast changes due to the influence of social media (Web 2.0) on the lives of consumers and the shift in the economic value from products and services to the staging of experiences. This study aims to analyze the effect that several types of social media platforms (as mediators) have on the co-creation of tourism experiences (before, during and after) and the consequent satisfaction, happiness, memorability and motivation to share it online. For that effect, an online survey was developed and conducted on a sample of 410 national and international tourists.

The findings showed that the use of social media has a more significant effect while planning the trip, serving as a source of inspiration for the next trip and of information about the chosen destination. Moreover, it also leads to a substantial increase in the satisfaction that tourists feel towards the trip, since the expectations are met by what they experience during the trip, which generates a greater level of happiness and memorability. This is crucial since it leads to a greater perception of value, a positive image of the destination, a bigger willingness to recommend and share the experience with followers.

This makes it important for Portuguese tourism service providers and tourism department to understand how Portugal is being represented on social media pages and the reasons that motivate tourists to share their experiences online, thus influencing their followers to visit.

Keywords: Tourism; Travel behavior; Technological (social media) innovation; Co-creation

JEL Classification: L83, M31 & O32

Resumo

Portugal é, atualmente, um mercado turístico emergente, sendo uma área importante a analisar. Além disso, a indústria do turismo tem estado ligada a mudanças rápidas devido à influência das redes sociais (Web 2.0) na vida dos consumidores e à mudança no valor económico, de produtos e serviços para a criação de experiências. Este estudo pretende analisar o efeito que vários tipos de redes sociais (mediadores) têm na cocriação de experiências de turismo e a consequente satisfação, felicidade, memorabilidade e motivação para as partilhar *online*. Assim, foi realizado um inquérito online a uma amostra de 410 turistas nacionais e internacionais.

Os resultados mostraram que o uso das redes sociais tem um efeito mais significativo no planeamento da viagem, servindo como fonte de inspiração para a próxima viagem e de informação sobre o destino escolhido. Além disso, também leva a um aumento substancial na satisfação que os turistas sentem em relação à viagem, uma vez que as expectativas correspondem ao que eles vivenciam durante a viagem, o que gera um maior nível de felicidade e memorabilidade. Isto é crucial porque leva a uma maior perceção de valor, uma imagem positiva do destino, uma maior disponibilidade para recomendar e partilhar a experiência com os seguidores.

Isto torna importante que os prestadores de serviços de turismo e o departamento de turismo português compreendam como Portugal está a ser representado nas redes sociais e as razões que motivam os turistas a partilhar as suas experiências online, influenciando assim os seus seguidores a visitar o destino.

Palavras-chave: Turismo; Comportamento de viagem; Inovação tecnológica (redes sociais); Cocriação

Classificação JEL: L83, M31 & O32

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Index

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Relevance of the research.....	1
1.2. Overall objectives.....	4
1.3. Scope of the dissertation.....	4
1.4. Outline of the dissertation.....	5
2. Literature Review.....	6
2.1. Consumer behavior and decision-making.....	6
2.2. Co-creation.....	7
2.3. Experience co-creation.....	8
2.4. Tourism: an industry of experiences.....	10
2.5. Consumer behavior in the context of tourism.....	16
2.6. Tourism experience co-creation.....	19
2.7. Motivation in the context of tourism.....	25
2.8. The role of the ICTs in the tourism experience co-creation.....	26
2.9. Social Media and its impact on the tourism experience.....	30
2.10. Types of Social Media.....	34
2.10.1. Social Networking Sites.....	34
2.10.2. Social Networking Sites in the context of tourism.....	36
2.10.3. Consumer Review Websites.....	38
2.10.4. Consumer Review Websites in the context of tourism.....	38
2.10.5. Content Communities.....	39
2.10.6. Content Communities in the context of tourism.....	40
2.10.7. Microblogs.....	41
2.10.8. Microblogs in the context of tourism.....	42
2.10.9. Blogs.....	43
2.10.10. Blogs in the context of tourism.....	44
2.10.11. Internet Forums.....	45
2.10.12. Internet Forums in the context of tourism.....	45
2.11. Concluding thoughts.....	46
3. Methodology and Findings.....	52
3.1. Research strategy.....	52
3.2. Data analysis.....	54

3.3. Data collection and analysis.....	60
3.4. Findings	61
3.4.1. Demographic analysis.....	61
3.4.2. Travel behavior analysis.....	61
3.4.3. Behavior towards Social Media analysis.....	62
3.4.4. Analysis of the process of co-creating a trip through Social Media.....	62
3.4.5. Analysis of the use of Social Media in the different stages of the trip	64
3.4.5.1. Use of Social Media before the trip	65
3.4.5.2. Use of Social Media during the trip.....	66
3.4.5.3. Use of Social Media after the trip	67
3.4.6. Consequences of using Social Media as a mediator in tourism experience co-creation	67
3.4.6.1. Motivations to share the tourism experience on Social Media	67
3.4.6.2. Satisfaction towards the trip	69
3.4.6.3. Happiness towards the trip	70
3.4.6.4. Memorability and uniqueness of the trip.....	71
3.4.7. Types of Social Media platforms	74
4. Conclusions.....	75
4.1. Conclusions.....	75
4.2. Academic implications.....	80
4.3. Managerial implications.....	81
4.4. Limitations and Future research.....	83
Bibliographic References	85
Appendix.....	99

List of Tables

Table 1 - Summary of the key concepts analyzed in the Literature Review	47
Table 2 - Measurement model of the study	58
Table 3 - Findings on the use of social media before the trip	65
Table 4 - Findings on the use of social media during the trip	66
Table 5 - Findings on the use of social media after the trip	67
Table 6 - Summary of the findings of the study	72
Table 7 - Findings on the demographic variables.....	111
Table 8 - Findings on the travel behavior variables	111
Table 9 - Findings on variables linked to the behavior towards Social Media	111
Table 10 - Findings on the reasons for the increased satisfaction	112
Table 11 - Findings on the reasons for the increased happiness	112
Table 12 - Findings on the reasons for the memorability of the trip	113
Table 13 - Findings on Instagram.....	113
Table 14 - Findings on TripAdvisor	113
Table 15 - Findings on Travel Blogs	114
Table 16 - Findings on YouTube.....	114
Table 17 - Findings on Facebook	114
Table 18 - Findings on the reliability of several social media platforms as sources of information	115
Table 19 - Findings on the behavior of the tourists towards posting on social media while travelling.....	115
Table 20 - Findings on the motivations to share the travel experience online	115

List of Figures

Figure 1 - Connections between Decision-making and behavior variables of the Tourism Consumption System (TCS)	11
Figure 2 - Conceptual model of the study	55
Figure 3 - Findings on the process of creating a travel experience	63
Figure 4 - Findings on the analysis of the use of Social Media in the different stages of the trip.....	64
Figure 5 - Findings on the main reasons for satisfaction towards the trip.....	69
Figure 6 – Findings on the main reasons for happiness towards the trip	70

Chapter I – Introduction

1.1. Relevance of the research

In contemporary times, important concepts like co-creation and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs, from now on these initial will be used) are being developed and incorporated in the strategy of companies in many industries, in order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage based on innovation and customization of value creation.

One of the industries that has been connected to fast changes and alterations due to the Web 2.0, other technologies and the “*progression of economic value*” (Pine & Gilmore, 1998: 4), from products and services to the staging of experiences, is the tourism industry.

As claimed in the UNWTO (World Tourism Organizations) Annual Report of 2017, the year of 2017 “*was a record year for international tourism.*” (UNWTO, 2018: 10). Indeed, the international tourist arrivals increased for the eight year in a row and destinations around the world welcomed 1.323 million international tourist arrivals, with a positive variation of 84 million when compared with 2016 (UNWTO, 2018). Between 2008 and 2017 “*393 million more people travelled internationally for tourism*” (UNWTO, 2018: 11).

The needs and expectations of this market’s customers is also changing at a fast pace. Indeed, modern tourists want to use the ICTs, and the access to several sources of innovation, to take control over the process of designing, producing and consuming the tourism experience. This means that technology has affected the consumer behavior and level of control (Tan *et al.*, 2014). As a matter of fact, the tendency to a shorter vacation time, to give more importance to the “*value for money*” and the alterations in the lifestyle have led to more independent, individualistic, and informed tourists (Poon, 1993).

This is where the concept of experience co-creation comes in, as a strategy based on innovation that leads to a higher level of value creation and to a differentiation from other destinations or tourism service providers in an industry with an intense level of competition (Berrada, 2017).

The access to the customers’ opinions, desires, and expectations provides a sustainable competitive advantage, since it prepares the companies and touristic destinations to future trends and needs, and leads to the creation of customized and unique

travel experiences. The ICTs are more and more a tool that facilitates the integration of tourists and their personal resources in the value creation process, giving the possibility to enrich the tourism intense experiences (Dekhili & Hallem, 2016). According to Pan *et al.* (2007), the Internet, particularly the Web 2.0, empowers the tourists, in a way that it allows them to gain control over the design, preparation and consumption of the tourism experience, and delivers a new platform where consumers can communicate and generate content, causing an online word of mouth.

Amongst the innovations that came from the Web 2.0, social media is one that increasingly affects the design and production of tourism experiences, as it serves as an important and reliable source of information for potential tourists (Yoo *et al.*, 2007; Litvin *et al.*, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

As stated in the Universal McCann global research, “*social media represents a big improvement over Web 2.0 as a term to describe the changes that have impacted the internet.*” (Smith, 2008: 10).

According to Litvin *et al.* (2008), social media are instruments that not only allow the sharing of personal content and the establishment of digital connections with others, but also the decrease of uncertainty when it comes to the preparation of a future trip since the traveler can already rely on the experience of other tourists on the destination, thus facilitating the decision-making process. Besides, as stated by Gretzel *et al.* (2006), social media platforms motivate tourists to share their personal experience, in a post-travel phase, whenever they desire, thus becoming a part of a virtual travel community (e.g. a travel blog). An example of this is the fact that when it comes to gathering information about unknown destinations, potential tourists find travel blogs more reliable than the advice given by family members and friends (Tan & Chen, 2012; Lee & Gretzel, 2014).

Even though many researchers have developed many papers on these concepts and their relevance, like Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009), Xiang and Gretzel (2010), and Berrada (2017), not every tourism service provider or tourist is completely aware of them and the impact that co-creation and social media might have on the tourist’s satisfaction and happiness, the ultimate goal of the tourism experience.

The fact that the city of Lisbon has received, in 2019, the award for leading city break destination, and that Portugal was voted Best Destination in Europe at the World Travel Awards Europe, for the third year in a row (Visit Portugal, 2019) was one of the reasons why this study can be relevant. Indeed, a better understanding on how the social

media affects the tourists' satisfaction and loyalty towards the destination and the reasons that motivate tourists to share their experiences and pictures, thus influencing their friends and relatives to become potential tourists, might be useful for the tourism department and tourism service providers. According to an article in the journal *Negócios*, Lisbon is the second European city with a bigger growth in tourism, with an increase of 10,6% between 2009 and 2017, and according to a study made by *Mastercard*, called the Global Destination Cities Index, is one of the top European cities chosen to travel in leisure (Murgeira, 2018). In addition, between January and May of 2019, the number of guests in Portugal has increased in 6,6% and the revenues, from the tourism industry in Portugal, in 5,9% (Turismo de Portugal, 2019).

To sum up, the research developed on this thesis may be an important contribution since it might help the destinations and travel companies to know how to deal with the tourists, that have an active participation and enjoy being immersed in the tourism experience, to know how to manage the online information about the best places to visit, eat and sleep that tourists can find on the internet in platforms and apps, like TripAdvisor, and also how to stimulate the participation of the tourists in the co-creation process by sharing their experiences with other tourists and friends. All these aspects are crucial for tourism companies and destinations since the antecedents of tourism experience co-creation can prevent the value destruction, by knowing the customer's needs and adjusting to their wishes in all possible scenarios (Chathoth *et al.*, 2014a; Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang & Koo, 2015).

Regarding the structure of the thesis, after the introduction in which the context of the research and the problem being analyzed is defined, there comes an overview of the literature that contains the definition of the key concepts approached on the thesis that are crucial for the development of the hypotheses and conceptual model. The methodology used in the practical section of the dissertation will be based on an online survey, since it is a reproducible and an effective process of data collection that suits the goals of the present study. The primary data obtained is then going to be examined through statistical methods that are going to provide information about the variables being investigated. Afterwards, there is a description of the principal results of the analysis, i.e., of the theoretical and practical implications, followed by a discussion of them in the conclusion.

1.2. Overall objectives

To better understand the experience co-creation and the impact of social media platforms (technology) in the tourism experience, some of the types of social media that affect the tourism industry the most are going to be analyzed in this dissertation, when it comes to the way in which they influence the active participation of the tourist, interaction with the service providers, the act of sharing the experiences with others, and the tourist's satisfaction, happiness and loyalty to the location. That being said, the specified objectives of this dissertation are to:

- Explore the way in which the social media platforms have contributed to the active participation of potential tourists in the design, production and consumption (enjoyment) of the tourism experience, i.e., the way in which tourists have gained control over the travel process through the use of social media as a reliable source of information;
- Reveal the different functions that the social media platforms assume in the different phases of the tourism experience, namely, the before, during and after the trip phases;
- Providing a deeper understanding on what motivates the tourists to share their tourism related experiences, stories, pictures, videos, etc., thus generating content accessible to many followers and becoming a source of information that allows potential tourists to make an informed decision;
- Reveal which types of social media have a greater impact on the co-creation of the tourism experiences, thus providing an understanding of potential implications for tourists' satisfaction (i.e., the implications on the balance between the tourists' expectations and what occurs in the tourism experience) and happiness, as well as the tourists' loyalty towards the destination.

1.3. Scope of the dissertation

Since the main objective of this study is to comprehend the impact that the different types of social media platforms (technology) have in the active participation of the tourists in the travel planning and their satisfaction with the overall tourism

experience, the methodology used in the empirical section of the thesis will be based on survey (quantitative approach), since it is a reproducible and an effective process of data collection that suits the goals of the present study, i.e., that allows the analyses of the consumer behavior and level of involvement, across different ages, genders and nationalities.

The primary data obtained, after the survey has been answered by a sample of 410 national and international tourists, will later be examined through statistical methods that are going to provide information about the related causal associations between the variables being investigated.

1.4. Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is composed by the introduction of the topic that is going to be studied in the dissertation and its relevance, the identification of the research questions, which are going to allow the fulfilment of the objectives (overall and specified). The previously mentioned overall objectives are also exposed in this section of the dissertation. To conclude the chapter, the scope, the methodology, and structure of the dissertation is presented in a brief manner.

The second chapter of the dissertation regards the literature review. This means that it presents an overview of the literature concerning the key concepts to this study, i.e., the concepts of co-creation, experience co-creation, tourism, tourism experience co-creation, the role of the ICTs in tourism experience co-creation, the social media and the impact on tourism experience, and the types of social media. This is the section where the contextualization and characterization of the tourism industry and the definition of the key concepts (previously mentioned) is made.

In the third chapter the practical side of this dissertation is presented. Thus, according to what was examined in the previous chapters, the hypotheses of the thesis are presented, as well as the instruments used in the study and the sample. That being said, to conclude this section the results of the methodology are presented and described and the validation of the proposed hypotheses is initialized.

Lastly, in the fourth chapter the conclusions of the analyses are formulated, as well as its contributions (academic and managerial implications) and limitations that might attended in future research.

Chapter II - Literature Review

This section presents an overview of the literature with emphasis on the concepts of consumer behavior, co-creation, experience co-creation, tourism, tourism experience co-creation, the role of the ICTs in tourism experience co-creation, the social media and the impact on tourism experience, and the types of social media.

2.1. Consumer behavior and decision-making

The understanding of the consumer behavior, especially when it comes to the buying decision making process, is crucial both for the marketplace and the academia. This comes from the fact that it “*enables marketers to better understand the reasons behind the consumers’ actions in the marketplace, and therefore provide insights on how to influence consumers at various stages of their buying or consumption process*” (Fotis, 2015: 73). This concept can be described as “*the processes involved when individual select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, or experiences to satisfy needs and wants*” (Solomon, 2015: 28). The needs and wants mentioned by Solomon (2015) can be either of a functional nature (utilitarian) or of a hedonic nature (related to the emotions and experiences).

Several scholars, like Schiffmand and Wisenblit (2015), define the decision-making process as a set of phases that lead to the consumer’s definitive selection, i.e., the *input*, *process* and *output* phase. The *input* stage regards the phase where the consumer is influenced by the information sources, according with the sociocultural characteristics (like the awareness of a need or product through social media). Furthermore, the *process* stage centers on how the consumer makes decisions and evaluates the alternatives, based on the information that they search. Finally, the *process* phase is linked to the purchase, which occur after the decision, and the evaluation that comes with the acquisition (Schiffmand & Wisenblit, 2015).

According to Solomon (2015), the level of involvement might lead to different decisions, and this concept might be affected by objective, situational, and/or personal factors (needs and desires). Munar and Jacobsen (2012) stated that a higher level of involvement is linked to affective and cognitive decision making (like in the planning of a trip), whereas lower levels of involvement are usually connected to routine consumption decisions.

Different types of consumer behavior lead to the formation of several segments and segmentation strategies. The criteria that differentiates the consumer behavior can be sociocultural (like the social classes), demographics, geographic, and psychographics (like the individual's personality, lifestyle and motivations that affect the management of the information) (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015).

Today, with the influence of the Web and social media, distance and time no longer stand between the costumers and the companies since they now interact online and the firms are more aware of the changes that occur in the behavior of their consumers (Solomon, 2015).

2.2. Co-creation

According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), the concept of co-creation appeared because of a shift in the paradigm of value creation, which came from a significant shift in the consumer behavior. The abundance of information has turned the decision-making process into a more important and sophisticated process to the current consumers (Solomon, 2015).

This is an important concept which is currently at the center of many researches in many fields and industries is the co-creation of value (Berrada, 2017). In reality, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a) were the first researchers who concluded that there was a shift regarding the origin of value paradigm, from a *firm-centric* perspective (where the company has total control of the value chain) to a *customer-centric* perspective. According to the latter, customers are active participants in the process of co-creating their products and services, through direct interaction with the company and a consequent customization to their needs and expectations. The active role, that consumers now play on the value creation process, came from the existence of information, the possibility to network, globalization and the wish for experimentation, activism and responsibility over the choices they made (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) stated that companies need to function in the field of innovation, rather than just focusing on reaching value by cutting costs and being efficient in an operational level. According to the previously mentioned authors, co-creation re-thinks the price of the experience based on value, and not costs, going past customization and expressing its dynamics through several channels.

Co-creation is at the basis of Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), which states that at the center of the economic trade there are services instead of products (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), and it may happen anywhere in the value chain (Van Limburg, 2012).

That being said, co-creation can be defined as a demand-centric process which contains a direct interaction amongst at least two resource-integrating actors that create something in a collaboration that benefits all parts (Frow, Payne & Storbacka, 2011: 1-6). This business strategy based on innovation allows organizations to cultivate products and services that meet the current market trends, thus providing a source of competitive advantage and value, which comes from the customers' knowledge and expertise (Berrada, 2017).

Despite all the previously mentioned benefits that co-creation brings to the companies and their competitive advantage, managers should still consider the risks associated to the concept, to make sure that mistakes will not be made.

According to Verhoef, van Doorn and Beckers (2013: 1) there are three areas of apprehension. The first one regards the need to protect a strong brand reputation. The researchers state that *“strong brand reputations are generally built through consistent, effective marketing, and companies should weigh the potential for misbehaving customers to undo their careful efforts.”* The second area is linked to a high demand uncertainty. These researchers claim that, since firms are more likely to ask the costumers opinion when the market circumstances are changing, the companies are in risk of failing since *“customers in fast-changing markets often don't know what they want or what they'll like.”* The last area of concern is related to the amount of initiatives. This means that *“experience shows that the quality, quantity, and variety of input decrease as the frequency of engagement increases.”* (Verhoef, van Doorn & Beckers, 2013: 1).

2.3. Experience co-creation

Addis and Holbrook (2001) have stated that experiences are an important element in the life of the modern customer and have proven to be very helpful when it comes to comprehending the consumer behavior.

According to Vinerean (2014: 48), the concept of consumer behavior can be defined as a *“behavior that consumers display in the research, acquisition, use, evaluation, and disposition of certain products and services from which they expect to fulfill all their expectations and needs.”* That being said, this is a crucial concept to be

studied by experience providers since it dictates how each consumer chooses to use their efforts, time and financial resources to meet their wishes (Vinerean, 2014). Over the last decade, especially with the growing influence of ICTs, the dimensions that involve the consumer behavior have been altering at a fast pace and companies need to monitor the requirements of the consumers, to make sure that their needs have not changed (Vinerean, 2014).

As stated by Carù and Cova (2003), over the past decades several experience definitions have been developed, from a sociological, psychological or anthropological view.

Services are becoming more commoditized and staging experiences is the “*progression of economic value*” and the next competitive battle for B2B and B2C industries, i.e., the most advanced mean to generate value (Pine & Gilmore, 1998: 4; Grönroos, 2008). Indeed, the satisfaction of the consumers comes from turning an *essentialist* notion of the product to a *relational* notion, in which the product is in an experiential network (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The previously mentioned authors state that this happens because innovation becomes more about experiences, rather than products, in a way that it is in the field of experiences that consumers can co-create customized outcomes, thus retaining their individuality and producing unique value. Morgan, Lugosi and Ritchie (2010) also claimed that customers are no longer looking for simple products and services, which are currently more exchangeable and replicated, but rather for the experience attained by the consumption of products and services.

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998: 99), this happens because “*experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level*”, particularly in the case of experience co-creation, where the consumer assumes the role of an active resource, involved in the creation of value and memorable experiences, from the planning of the tourism experience to the arrival home (Torres, 2016). This type of experience can be described as an “*escapist*” one (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), since the customer displays an active participation, assumes a crucial role in the process of creating the experience, and is highly connected to environment, i.e., is immersed in the experience. According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2014) the conceptual “*building blocks*” of co-creation of value are the dialogue (between consumer and firm), the access to the product (which entails that the consumer does not have to own the product to enjoy it), the calculation of the risk of said product, and the transparency (to reduce uncertainty and increase the level

of trust that comes from a reduced *asymmetry* in the information shared between consumer and firm). Binkhorts and Den Dekker (2009: 314) state that each individual human being is “*a starting point*” when it comes to experience co-creation, thus acquiring more power over the narrative of the process.

Buhalis and Foerste (2015) refer to experience co-creation as a new paradigm propelled by innovation, in a way that it delivers an innovative way to comprehend the way in which experiences are created and by whom. This concept constitutes a procedure through which customers establish conversations and include their personal resources (cultural, intellectual and physical) with the resources from the organization to design and stage a unique experience (Mathis, Kim, Uysal, Sirgy & Prebense, 2016; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a).

2.4. Tourism: an industry of experiences

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), the tourism industry is one of experiences, i.e., it does not sell a particular service or product, but rather a set of experiences that take place in the “*stages*” that exist in the tourism destination. It is important to clarify that when referring to “*stages*”, Pine and Gilmore (1998) were referring to the set of products and services that create the setting of the experience.

Binkhorst (2005) defines the tourism industry as one of the pioneers in the experience design and creation and one of the biggest generator of experiences. Zàtori (2013: 12) even claims that “*experience is the cornerstone of tourism, its alpha and omega*”.

According to Morgan, Lugosi, and Ritchie (2010), “*tourists are increasingly in search of experiences by not only purchasing products and services but rather striving for the experience obtained by consuming products and services*” (Neuhofner, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2013: 546). The tourism experience is essential for most individuals because it constitutes a unique and personal way to create value by fulfilling the need to “*escape*” the routine, meet new destinations, new people and new cultures, thus engaging on an emotional and physical level (Yang & Mattila, 2016).

In the tourism industry, there are several participants: the tourist, the tourism service providers at the destination (the providers of information, accommodation, food, entertainment, etc.), tourism firms (agencies that may help the consumers in the planning and design of the trip), other actors (like friends, family, other tourists, and internet users,

who may influence or get influenced by the tourist’s experience), and other producers of external sources of information about the destination (like the marketers that manage advertisement about it) (Neuhofe, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012; Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017).

A theory called **tourism consumption system (TCS)** was developed by Woodside and Dubelaar (2002: 120), and it can be defined as “*the set of related travel thoughts, decisions, and behaviors by a discretionary traveler prior to, during, and following a trip*”. This system regards the indirect and direct ties between the interdependent variables connected to a tourism experience (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002). Furthermore, Woodside and Dubelaar’s study (2002) shows how the tourists’ background variables (such as demographic, social, and psychographic variables) influence the travel decisions made throughout the rest of the tourism experience, whether in first-time and repeat visitors. In the first phase, the variables that influence the pre- and during-travel behavior are analyzed, in the second stage, the during- and post-travel are studied well, and in the third phase the analysis regards the relationships between the post-travel and future intentions behavior, as described in Figure 1 (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002).

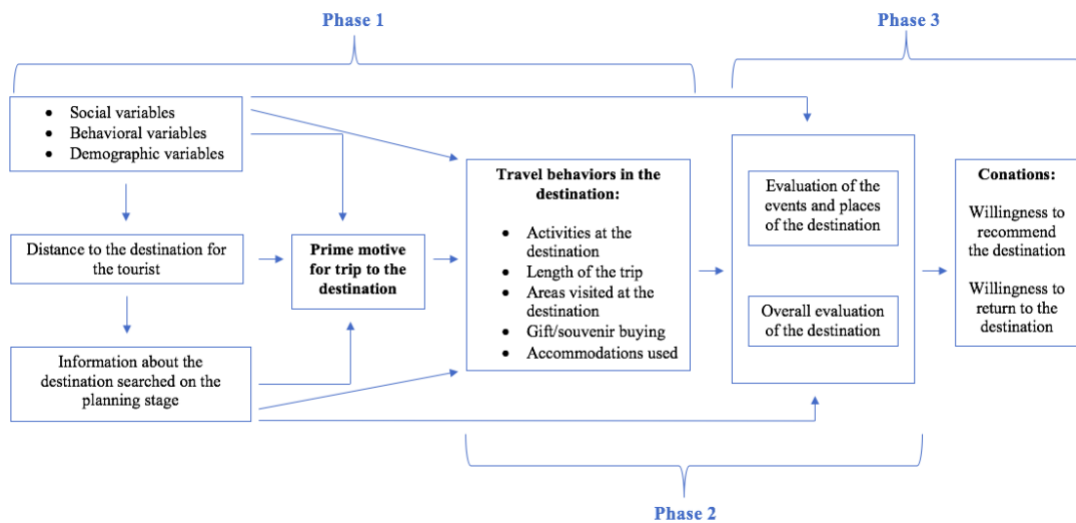


Figure 1 – Connections between Decision-making and behavior variables of the Tourism Consumption System (TCS)

Source: Adapted after the TCS suggested by Woodside and Dubelaar (2002)

When it comes to the tourist concept, the tendency to a shorter vacation time, to give more importance to the “value for money” and the alterations in the lifestyle have led to more independent, individualistic, and informed tourists (Poon, 1993). Despite of that, holiday trips are more fundamental than ever, since the increasing stress and pressure

at work and in the daily routine makes individuals' search for shorter but more frequent trips abroad (World Tourism Organization, 1999).

Moreover, Masberg's research (1998) showed that pleasure and vacation are the words that better define a tourist. According to McCabe and Foster (2006), the concept of tourists is often used in daily and common interactions and discussions and is related to the consumption of a specific kind of location (McCabe & Stokoe, 2004).

As stated by Bronner and de Hoog (2014: 12), "*holidays, in particular the main summer holiday, can be positioned closer to being a necessary good than to being a luxury good during an economic crisis. This finding is contrary to studies in the nineties (Melenberg & van Soest, 1996), when tourism was a luxury good for households. A change seems to have occurred as regards the necessity of a holiday. Many vacationers are prepared to sacrifice expenditures on a variety of products just so as to keep on going on holiday*".

A study developed by Yu, Kim, Chen and Schwartz (2012) showed evidence that the tourist's gender and social class is connected to the tourist self-categorization. For example, travelers of the male gender and with a lower income are less probable to see themselves as tourists (Yu, Kim, Chen & Schwartz, 2012).

As stated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2008a: 10), the definition of tourism and tourist, both in a domestic and international context, depends on three dimensions: geographical, temporal and purpose of the trip, i.e., "*a visitor is a traveler taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited. These trips taken by visitors qualify as tourism trips. Tourism refers to the activity of visitors*". The previous statement mentions the three types of purposes to travel: the **leisure travel**, which includes travelling on the holidays, for recreation sports, cultural events, etc.; the **business travel**, which includes travelling for meetings, exhibitions, and conferences (i.e., business reasons); and the **visiting family members and friends** (or other personal reasons) **travel** (UNWTO, 2008a).

Regarding the leisure travel, there are several types of tourism, including religious tourism (related to religious festivals, devotions, temples and churches), art and culture (linked to the exploration of monuments and traditions of villages and towns), sun and sea (connected to relaxing at a beach, taking a walk, read a book or party by the sea, surfing, etc.), nature (related to the interest in mountains, vast plains and a diversity of

landscapes and species), health and well-being (linked to the use of nature's components to take care of the well-being and to get away from the routine), nautical tourism (connected to the interest in sailing and other water sports), gastronomy (related to the curiosity in the country's cuisine), outdoor activities (associated to the pleasure of experiencing several activities surrounded by nature, like golf, surf or bike rides, and escape the routine), short breaks (when the tourist has limited days off and wants to know new locations), etc. (Visit Portugal, 2019).

Furthermore, when it comes to the temporal dimension, UNWTO (2008a: 10) also states that “A visitor (*domestic, inbound or outbound*) is classified as a tourist (or an overnight visitor) if his/her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise”. This statement also includes the three types of tourism, i.e., the domestic tourism, which occurs when an individual has a travel experience in his own country; the inbound tourism, which happens when a visitor from another country comes into a certain destination where the tourism is being analyzed; and the outbound tourism, which is when an individual from a country, in which the tourism is being analyzed, travels to a different destination for a tourism experience (UNWTO, 2008a).

When it comes to the geographical dimension, UNWTO proposed four aspects to take into consideration when analyzing the usual environment, namely the “*frequency of the trip*”, “*duration of the trip*”, “*the crossing of administrative or national borders*” and “*distance from the place of usual residence*” (UNWTO, 2008a: 18).

Regarding the tourist profiles, because of the globalization and the evolutions of the information and communication technologies (ICTs), a new kind of consumer is emerging, which strongly affects the tourism industry (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015). These new consumers belong to the ‘C-generation’ or the connected generation, since they are always connected to their social media profiles (networks) and other ICTs through their electronic devices (like laptops, smartphones and tablets (Dimanche, 2010), even when they are on vacations. These consumers, that are not restricted to an age group, are also known as ‘C-consumers’ and are always in connected to stay in touch with their friends and family and to get access to online content. These active consumers, that take control over the process of designing the experience, lead to the concept of tourism experience co-creation, which leads to innovation and unique value creation. They can also be referred as ‘cross-channel’ since, when communicating and purchasing, they might use several channels and easily change between them (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015). The other tourist profile that has emerged since the late 20th century is

the 'green consumer', i.e., the tourists that pay "*attention to environmental degradation, pollution, and to the overall impacts of human behaviour on global warming and the natural environment*" (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 120), supporting environmental causes and choosing their tourism products and services based on the influence that they might have on the environment. Tourism service providers and destinations are also more focused on sustainability because of "*the government regulations, competitive pressure and customer demand*" and because they believe that tourists might prefer 'greener' companies (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 121).

As claimed in the UNWTO Annual Report of 2017, the year of 2017 "*was a record year for international tourism.*" (UNWTO, 2018: 10). All in all, the international tourist arrivals increased for the eighth year in a row and destinations around the world welcomed 1.323 million international tourist arrivals, with a positive variation of 84 million when compared with 2016 (UNWTO, 2018). Between 2008 and 2017 "*393 million more people travelled internationally for tourism*" (UNWTO, 2018: 11).

Regarding the inbound tourism to the EU-28 (the 28 countries of the European Union), as stated in the Volume 1 of the *Enhancing the Understanding of European Tourism*, in the first ten months of the year of 2017 it got up to 428 million international tourist arrivals, 8% more when compared to the same phase of 2016 (UNWTO, 2018).

According to António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, "*every day. More than 3 million tourists cross international borders. Every year, almost 1.2 billion people travel abroad. Tourism has become a pillar of economies, a passport to prosperity, and a transformative force for improving millions of lives. The world can and must harness the power of tourism as we (the United Nations) strive to carry out the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.*" (UNWTO, 2018: 16).

When it comes to the global tourism markets, it is predictable that, by 2030, new popular destinations in Asia and the Pacific will have their market share significantly increased, thus causing the reduction of the market share of the "*traditionally top destination regions*" in Europe and North America (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 116).

According to the Future Foundation Report (2015) the traveler's profile is going to change as well by 2030, in a way that their decisions will be based on behavioral patterns (like their specific values, customs, wants and needs, regarding the tourism experience), instead of being based on classic socio-demographic ones. As stated on the Future Foundation Report (2015: 66) it is expected "*a huge chance in how travellers*

select destinations, consume travel services and make purchasing decisions. Macro consumer trends and technological change will drive travellers to adjust spending patterns, with significant knock-on impacts for the travel industry”.

The Future Foundation Report (2015: 32-61) also identifies six traveler ‘tribes’, i.e., six types of tourists that have different needs and expectations towards a tourism experience, that are going to constitute the market by 2030. Those ‘tribes’ are the ‘simplicity searchers’, i.e., tourists for whom “*a sense of ‘adventure’ will be less important than the ‘basics’, whether that be the simple pleasures of good food and good weather, or taking in the iconic cultural landmarks*”; the ‘cultural purists’, i.e., the tourists who “*use their travel as an opportunity to immerse themselves in an unfamiliar culture*” getting away from the ‘touristy areas’ in order to visit the ‘real’ aspects of the destination they are visiting; the ‘social capital seekers’, i.e., tourists who “*naturally structure their holiday activities and guide their behaviors with their online audiences in mind*”; the ‘reward hunters’. i.e., a ‘tribe’ that “*seek out wellness experiences dedicated solely to their own relaxation and self-improvement alongside hedonistic excess and extreme self-indulgence*”; the ‘obligation meeters’, i.e., travelers whose objective is to “*meet this client, to attend this seminar, to have this surgical procedure surgery, to shop at this store, to be at this event, to catch up with this person*”; and the ‘ethical travellers’, i.e., a type of consumer that “*may avoid particular airlines, even air travel entirely, because they are concerned about anthropogenic climate change and the state of the planet*”. Being able to comprehend how tourism markets are progressing is crucial for destination management in a way that it can give vital information about it to the tourism managers. In fact, by analyzing the different needs of each market segment in the tourism industry, destination managers and tourism service providers will be able to design a strategy proper to each segment, thus “*better meeting customers’ needs, achieving a differentiated position for the tourism brand, (...) focusing on those areas where improvements are better acknowledged by tourist*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 116). That being said, if tourism service providers and destination managers wish to create valuable, unique and personalized experiences to the consumers, an accurate market segmentation (i.e., the formation of smaller groups of potential travelers within the market, according with their similar needs, behavior, etc.) and target selection needs to be made, as well as an analysis over the “*travel data demand and the factors that affect international and national demand*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 126). As markets are evolving, traditional variables, like the geographic and demographic ones, are not taken in

consideration for the process of market segmentation but rather other differentiating and measurable variables such as willingness to pay, the tourists' needs, motivations and behavior, etc. Each segment must be large enough, stable over time, reachable and accessible (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015).

2.5. Consumer behavior in the context of tourism

In 1976, Wahab, Crompton, and Rothfield made the first endeavor to model the **consumer behavior** in the tourism context, describing tourists as “*rational decision-makers who try to maximize their utility when purchasing tourism products.*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 107). This means that, according to these researchers, tourists make decisions and evaluate their future actions based on an analysis of the costs and benefits of each option, selecting the one that delivers a more affordable value proposition (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015). In order to successfully manage tourism, both tourism service providers and researchers, according to Moore *et al.* (2012), need an in-depth comprehension of the tourist experiences and behavior.

Mathieson and Wall (1982) claimed that process of creating a tourism experience can be portrayed as a “*sequential process which starts when tourists feel the desire or need for travel, and which is followed by an information quest, an evaluation of that information and finally the travel decision.*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 107). The way in which internal factor, such as motivations, involvement, attitudes, and intentions, might affect the tourists' behavior and attitude regarding the destination was analyzed by Azjen and Driver, in 1992.

The **decision-making** process in tourism context might not correspond exactly to the general process. Martin and Woodside (2012) claim that this key concept might not be entirely rational, i.e., might not follow the five steps of the “grand models” of the consumer behavior (the identification of the need or desire, the search of available information, the evaluation of the alternatives, the purchase of the chosen product and the evaluation that occurs after the consumption). Smallman and Moore (2010) suggested that the “grand models” of consumer behavior are often not capable of separating tangible products from services, which are more heterogeneous, intangible, inseparable and not perishable (Morgan & Pritchard, 2012). In fact, the travel decisions are more complex, have a higher level of uncertainty and risk (thus becoming more sophisticated), and include not only the planned and though through decisions made before the trip but also

the unplanned ones made before and during the trip, which makes the *conventional decision-making process* not appropriate for all the occasions (Moore *et al.*, 2012). Besides, travel related decision are a more dynamic and ongoing process, and not a simple input-output model, involve a significant amount of problem solving, and the costs included are often higher, which leads to the tourists being more involved in the process (Smallman & Moore, 2010; Martin & Woodside, 2012).

When it comes to the **information sources**, they can be external sources, i.e., online word-of-mouth, books and advertisement, or internal sources, i.e., the tourist's knowledge and memories from former experiences and past information explorations, about the same or a comparable destination (Fodness & Murray, 1999). The information search is crucial to decrease the perceived uncertainty and risks and the cognitive dissonance (Choi *et al.*, 2012). The recommendations (word-of-mouth) from friends, family and people with high credibility, who have evaluated the destination after the tourism experience, are some of the most influential sources, due to the social bonds (Luo & Zhong, 2015). After analyzing this and other internal sources, tourists usually move on to valuable external sources when planning a trip, thus using several channels in the process (Shunying, 2018).

That being said, when it comes to the travel decision-making process the following steps were suggested by Martin and Woodside (2012): the detection of the need and desire to travel, the planning that occurs before the trip (i.e., the choice of a destination and the reservation of the trip, the accommodation, etc.), the experiences that happen at the destination (like the activities and places visited and consequent evaluation, both planned and unplanned) and, finally, the evaluation of the trip at the post-travel stage and the future intentions that come with it. Gardiner and Kwek (2017) remarked that, unlike the general decision-making process, the travel related one is often more of a group decision (friends, family) rather than an individual one, i.e., the travel behavior also depends on situational elements, like the travel companions at the destination (Choi *et al.*, 2012).

These researchers highlight the fact that the tourism experience process continues after the purchase of the tourism products, with the planning of the trip, the experience itself, and the post-travel phase (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015). Indeed, after the destination choice and the initial phase, the post-purchase search of information is more meticulous and specific to the chosen destination (Choi *et al.*, 2012), such as information about local events, museums, weather, food, etc.

Hyde and Lawson (2003) stated that the “*independent travellers are a growing market*”, i.e., more and more travelers are “*willing to take risks in choosing vacation elements, (...) enjoy experiencing the unplanned, and (...) experience and evolving itinerary*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 110).

The more recent analysis of the consumer behavior, although hard because of the online setting and the recommendations from family, friends, travel agents and so on, is key for the tourism industry, since the decision-making process is now highly influenced by emotions and personal motivations (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Hence, there is a need to study all the variables that effect a consumer (i.e., what makes a tourist choose a certain holiday destination), in distinctive phases of time, as tourists are often changing their requirements (Vinerean, 2014). The previously mentioned factors might be “*motivators, factors that influence the decision-making process, segmentation of the tourist market, the economic situation from different countries, patterns, habits of consumption, etc.*” (Vinerean, 2014: 47). The concept of **motivation** will be further analyzed later this chapter.

The previously mentioned concept of **perception** is also key when analyzing the tourist behavior, since the perception that tourists have on the destination throughout the tourism experience strongly impacts the destination image, the quality of the service (when compared with their expectations), their satisfaction and involvement (Cohen *et al.*, 2014). Besides, “*tourism behavior research on perceptions mainly investigate tourists’ cognition in the perceptual process, followed by affective and conative dimensions*” (Shunying, 2018: 12), where the conative dimension is connected to commitment. Furthermore, the choice of destination, the satisfaction and fulfilment of the needs with the experience and the post-travel evaluation and intention to return and/or recommend is intensely influenced by the destination image and the tourist’s subjective perception about it (Stylos *et al.*, 2016). The previously mentioned author also claimed that the destination image formed in the post-travel stage of the tourism experience is more complex and accurate than the one formed at the planning stage, since it changed after the experience and with the influence of the external elements. That being said, it is important for the tourism service providers at the destination to accomplish a positive image and guarantee a high level of service quality (Wang & Hsu, 2010).

Finally, a **positive behavioral intention** in the tourism context is connected to the desire to return to the same place, recommend it to potential tourists and state optimistic things about the destination, in person and online (Chen & Tsai, 2007). These authors

define the concept of behavioral intention can be defined, in a general context, as “*an individual’s subjective judgement for planned future behavior that represents the expectations of a specific pattern of behavior and the likelihood to act*” (Shunying, 2018: 12). Nevertheless, some tourists, whose behavior is linked to novelty and diversity seeking, might not return to the same destination, even though they are satisfied with the tourism experience and may recommend it to others (Bigné *et al.*, 2009a).

Since tourists are now changing their behavior at a fast pace, becoming more demanding, unmanageable and complicated, the behavior analysis is becoming more complex and less stable (D’Urso, Disegna & Massari, 2016).

2.6. Tourism experience co-creation

Tourism experience is an important concept connected to the tourism industry. Volo (2009) claimed that in contemporary literature is possible to encounter multiple definitions of the tourism experience, however the meaning and extent of this concept cannot be traced to a single theory. According to Matos (2014), this happens because some authors believe that the concept is too ambiguous, and others that tourism experiences are too complex, what makes it hard to identify and identify.

For instance, Mossberg (2007) supports that it is possible to find two approaches to study tourism experience. On one hand, there is the *social science approach* which suggests that something distinctive from their day-to-day routine is desired by the tourists, i.e., they are looking for authentic experiences in contrast to the daily life, wishing “*to get off the beaten path*” (MacCannell, 1973: 592). On the other hand, there is the *marketing/management approach* which states that since tourists are involved in several interactions or relationships with tourism service provision they are recognized as consumers and that the products and services are purchased, throughout the experience, not only for the advantages that they bring to the consumer, but mostly because of what they represent.

Volo (2010: 301) says that “*the tourist experience is defined as an occurrence experienced by a person outside the ‘usual environment’ and the ‘contracted time’ boundaries that is comprised of a ‘sequence’ of the following events: sensation, perception, interpretation, and learning*”. The concept of **perception** can be defined as the process on “*how individuals select, organize and interpret the stimuli in a meaningful and coherent way*”, i.e., who the individual sees the presented products and services,

(Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015: 114) and is crucial in the analysis of the tourists' behavior. According to Solomon (2015), the tourist perception on a travel experience is strongly affected by five basic sensations, such as sight, smells, taste, textures, and sounds. Besides, perception is also influenced by expectations and prior experiences (personal elements), which lead to different behaviors and reactions towards the same sensations and stimuli (Li & Cai, 2012). The tourist perception about the destination occurs through different stimuli during the three stages of the tourism experience, i.e., the **planning and design stage**, when the tourists get earlier information about it, the **travel experience itself**, and the **post-travel evaluation phase** (Cohen *et al.*, 2014), since, as the name suggests, the tourism experience is an experiential product (Luo & Zhong, 2015).

The tourism experience, according to Walls *et al.* (2011: 19), can be characterized as a “*multidimensional construct comprised of a number of external and internal factors that shape and influence consumer experiences, which can exist only if the participating consumer is willing and able to participate*”.

According to Mathis *et al.* (2016: 63), Bjork and Sfandle (2009) state that the tourism experience can be defined as “*an individual perception generated in the context of interactions and resource integration in a tourism context*”, i.e., the point in which the tourist production and consumption meet (Andersson, 2007).

The tourism experience starts when the consumers search and gather information about a certain tourism destination, before purchasing the set of products and services that are going to be a part of the experience. According to Caldito, Dimanche, and Ilkevich (2015: 112), a tourism destination can be described as a system that is composed by two key elements, i.e., the “*resources and attractors*” of the destination, and the tourists “*for whom the destination is developed*”. Besides that, there are also the interactions made between the consumer and the reservation systems and other service providers, the moment of the travel to the destination, and the usage of the products and services in the place of accommodation and the destination in general (like the visits to monuments and leisure spaces and the interaction with residents, other tourists and local service providers) (Watson *et al.*, 2004).

Due to the changes in the market and customers' needs the tourism strategies keep evolving, nonetheless the main objective is always to assure customers' satisfaction with every element of the tourist experience and the consequent loyalty to the destination (Berrada, 2017).

It is important to differentiate customers' satisfaction from customers' happiness. On one hand, the tourist's satisfaction regards the comparison made between the actual performance (the experienced service quality of the destination) and the expectations created by the tourist and is related to a certain experience that happened on a given period (Giese & Cote, 2000), i.e., the tourist's satisfaction is accomplished "*if the overall tourist experience matches the expectations that have been formed by personal needs, previous experience and various marketing messages*", thus perceiving quality and a high level of performance when it comes to the tourism services (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 114). A positive destination image and a high level of satisfaction towards the experience lead to a higher motivation to recommend the destination to friends and family (Bigné *et al.*, 2001). Besides, high levels of satisfaction, perceived value with the tourism experience and destination image and past experiences lead to a greater willingness to return to a certain destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

On the other hand, the tourist's happiness is, according to Hellen (2010), based on the predisposition to live positive emotions and satisfactory experiences. Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005) suggest that pleasure, engagement and meaning are the three different types of happiness and Brakus, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) believes that it is possible to find a link between these three types of happiness and the four scopes of experience, i.e., affect, intellect, sense and behavior.

More engaging experiences lead to a higher level of satisfaction, which becomes even more positive as time passes by and it gets enhanced in the tourist's memory (Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Howell *et al.*, 2012), leading to an increase in the tourist's happiness.

Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011) stated that expectations, motivations, and interests might vary between different tourist segments and different "*nationality, culture, social class, travel experience, etc*" (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 126). According to Caldito, Dimanche and Ilkevich (2015: 114) "*tourism managers have to implement segmentation strategies to identify their potential visitors' needs and wants, and subsequently develop the right positioning strategies to reach the selected target markets*".

A study conducted by Buonincontri *et al.* (2017: 274), on the main antecedents and consequences of the co-creation of tourism experiences, lead to the conclusion that this process can "*influence tourists' attitudes on spending more money for a more experiential and co-created visit of a destination*", because of the level of satisfaction and happiness that comes with the co-created tourism experience. Besides, the satisfaction

that comes from this innovative process also leads to a positive word-of-mouth and a positive destination's image (Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017).

Nowadays, to achieve that ultimate goal (satisfaction), the destinations and tourism service providers must acknowledge that postmodern tourists are more demanding and looking for enriching new experiences, customized to their specific needs and desires. This means that tourists are more active in designing and planning their trips, no longer wanting to simply be passively served by the tourism industry (Tan *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, for the co-creation process to be implemented on the creation of unique tourism experiences, there are several elements that need to exist (Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017). For instance, the tourists need to have access to external sources of information that allow the consumer to make autonomous and responsible decisions about the chosen destination and the design of the trip (**active participation**), through recommendations of friends and family members (word-of-mouth) or through references from experienced individuals that produce consumer generated content (related to the destination) on ICT platforms, like social networks and tourism blogs (Fotis, 2015). Besides, there needs to be an **interaction between the tourism service providers and the tourist** (pre-exchanged discussion) and a tourist-interaction platform that facilitates the process, so that the firms and destinations understand tourists' needs and expectation, thus creating a more personal and satisfying experience (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012; Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017). Lastly, to enable the co-creation of tourism experiences for other potential tourists, the consumer must **share the experience with others**, in order to influence them and give them the knowledge they need to actively participate in the design of their own trips (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012; Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017).

Therefore, the tourist experience co-creation is a crucial strategy for the tourism industry and tourism destinations and “*an innovative way to live differently the tourist experience*” (Berrada, 2017: 18).

That being said, if tourism firms intend to innovate they need to integrate the customers in the process of value creation instead of focusing on their internal resources or their market position (Berrada, 2017).

Through tourism experience co-creation, tourists participate in the process of designing and producing a trip according to their goals and expectations, thus creating a unique and memorable experience, since it allows the realization of their dreams and fantasies (Lichrou *et al.*, 2008). The fact that the tourism experience engages the consumers emotionally is what makes it so memorable, pleasant and intense (Lashley,

2008). This happens because, during the tourism experience, the tourists fulfill their need to be amazed, challenged, surprised and get help in the process of self-development (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015). Indeed, memorability is one of the outcomes of the experience and regards the “*vividness and the long-lasting character of the tourist’s recollections of the experience*” (Kim, 2010; Marschall, 2012; Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle & Scott, 2018: 393). This sensation, that is a natural result of the tourism experience, is subjective and intangible, and is going to affect the perception that consumers have about the destination, the way in which they recall its details, and also the way in which they will transmit that experience to a third party, whether in an informal conversation with friends or family, or in formal reviews shared on social media and platforms such as *TripAdvisor* and *Booking* (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Andrades & Dimanche, 2014). When it comes to memory, it is possible to say that “*once arrived at a destination, memory influences the actual tourist experience, especially for the seasoned traveler, because the recollections of other journeys, the positive or negative impressions gathered and events encountered at similar destinations elsewhere, provide an involuntary comparative context against which the present experience is measured*” (Marschall, 2012: 2217). Besides, this author also refers, that in a lot of cases, memory plays a significant role when the tourist chooses the next destination, since they often make that selection while considering places connected to their past or to positive memories of a past trip.

Some authors believe that certain objects and tangible structures, like souvenirs, photographs and ‘*found objects*’ are “*containers of memory*”, since they embody memories of certain locations and moments in time, therefore connecting personal experiences to collective memories (Sturken 2007). The intangible aspects of a tourism experience, “*sites of memory*”, such as smells, sounds, and performances, also affect the memorability of it (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). The “*travelling memory*” only exists through the act of traveling, i.e., through movement (Erll, 2011: 11).

The memorability and level of engagement of the tourist consumers also depends on the interactions that occur during travel and that lead to a set of relationships being developed on location (Minkiewicz *et al.*, 2013; Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013; Bertella, 2014). This social dimension of tourism experiences must be “*carefully designed, integrated and managed to ensure an emotional connection, loyalty and satisfaction*” (Lugosi & Walls, 2013: 52), since it has a significant impact on the perceived quality of the service (Mohr & Bitner, 1995). This is due to the pleasure that most tourists take out

of socializing and sharing emotional experiences, being this the motivation to seek the social dimension of the tourism experience (Kreziak & Frochot, 2011). The level of expenditure is another important concept when it comes to tourism experience and it can be defined as the amount of money that tourists are willing to spend before (during the design stage) and during the trip (Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). With tourists willing to pay a higher price in exchange for higher value, it is important to improve and differentiate the tourism experience through co-creation and the use of technology (Darmer & Sunbo, 2008; Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009).

The tourism experience co-creation lets tourist do things instead of just looking at them, establish relationships and connections to other people, explore “multi-sensory” environments, and participate in experiences for self-development (Eraqi, 2011; Rihova, Buhalis, Moital & Gouthro, 2014).

The degree in which the tourists actively involve themselves (by combining resources) during the experience co-creation in each of the previously mentioned stages of tourism experience strongly influences the outcome of the process and the degree in which the experience corresponds the tourists’ expectations (Grissemann & Stokburger-sauer, 2012; Chathoth *et al.*, 2016). The active participation of the tourist in the design, production and consumption of the experience might regard emotional, mental, or physical involvement and be enhanced by the usage of their skills and personal resources (Bertella, 2014). This involvement is highly influenced by emotions and cognition (making tourists feel interested, aroused or motivated), which leads to a higher level of perceived personal value and genuineness at an existential level (Mathisen, 2013). Thus, involvement can be defined as a motivational variable that mirrors the decisions that tourists make based on their values and objectives (Richins & Bloch, 1986) and on how relevant the tourism product or activity is for them (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014) and leads to higher levels of customer loyalty and perceived value, which generates a greater satisfaction, according to the studies conducted by Chen and Tsai (2008). Indeed, “*when tourists come back to a destination and recommend it to their peers, they heavily contribute to a destination sustainability and competitiveness*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 112).

Also, high levels of motivation lead to tourists being more involved in the tourism experience (Clements & Josiam, 1995), which makes them more likely to travel. Yoon and Uysal (2005) stated that “*motivated behaviours result from tourists’ biological or psychological needs, desires and wants*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 110).

2.7. Motivation in the context of tourism

Motivation is a key concept in the tourism industry and can be defined as “*a cause of human behavior, (...) a disposition or a state of need that drives individuals toward types of action that are capable of satisfying those needs*” (Li & Cai, 2012: 475). In truth, its analysis is pivotal for aspects such as segmentation, positioning, etc.

The hierarchy of needs, suggested by Maslow (1943), is one of the most significant theories regarding the consumer behavior and their motivations. This managerial tool identifies five categories of basic needs mutual to all people, from lower-level needs to higher-level ones, i.e., physiological, safety and security, love and belonging (social), esteem, and self-actualization needs.

When it comes to the tourism context, Gnoth (1997) stated that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is not enough to analyze the motivations and decision-making in tourism, since it is a general tool. As a matter of fact, “*travel motivation has always been considered as the essential part of the dynamic process behavior*” (Li & Cai, 2012: 475).

The ‘pull and push model of motivation’ is a well-accepted theoretical framework regarding the concept of motivation, which derived from Maslow’s hierarchy and claims that tourists travel due to some pull and push factors (Dann, 1977; Uysal, Li & Sirakaya-Turk, 2008). The **push factors** can also be called internal motivations or motives and are connected to the internal wishes and emotions that make tourists want to travel, like the personal desire to escape the routine, develop relationships or pursue novelty; on the other hand, the **pull factors**, also known as external motivations or forces, are the “*tourism destination attributes and situational conditions*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 111), i.e., external factors like the local culture climate, history, attractions, etc., that make tourists want to visit a certain destination and gives it the perceived value (Gnoth, 1997; Kim & Lee, 2002, Prebensen *et al.*, 2012). The pull factors tend to receive and fortify the prior push factors (Li & Cai, 2012; Prebensen *et al.*, 2012). Because of the push factors, in order to motivate potential tourists to visit a certain destination, it is important to build a strong and appealing image and positioning of the destination in the mind of the consumers, since it influences the tourist in a direct and string way (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015). In reality, “*destinations develop and build their value proposition based upon their core resources and attractors, and these represent external motivating factors for tourists*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 112). Therefore, tourism service providers should analyze the tourists’ preferences and opinions, identify the

external factors of a destination that should be promoted to meet the tourists' expectations and desires.

Caldito, Dimanche and Ilkevich (2015: 112) have highlighted the fact that tourists are influenced by different types of motivations towards the different stages of the tourism experience co-creation process. During the initial stage of planning the trip the motivations "*work as initiators of the purchasing phase*", for example, when potential tourists feel the desire to leave their routine. At the second stage of the process, i.e., when the tourist experiences the planned trip at the destination, different motivations might lead the tourists to choose certain activities and cultural locations to visit. Lastly, during the post-travel stage the motives that make the traveler want to communicate about the tourism experience also differ, from the desire to give advices to the need to share important memories with friends and family (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015).

The emerging markets in tourism and the rising attention on countries with different cultural backgrounds, attractions and resources, lead to the importance of analyzing and investigating the travel motivation not only in Western countries but rather in a worldwide manner (Li & Cai, 2012).

Besides, in contemporary times, tourism motivations are strongly affected by information and other content generated on ICT (e.g. social media) (Fotis, 2015) and travel experiences can be enhanced, generate a higher level of value and be more personalized not only by experience co-creation but also by using technology, which may also lead to the creation of new kinds of tourism experiences (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012).

2.8. The role of the ICTs in the tourism experience co-creation

Information and communication technologies (ICTs), like the Internet, virtual communities, immersive virtual worlds or social media, have a significant role in tourism experience co-creation and its success, since these tools simplify and mediate the process by allowing the consumer to be more involved in each step of the consumption (Wang, Park & Fesenmaier, 2012). According to the Global Digital Report 2018 (2018: 9), "*with more than 4 billion people using the internet for an average of 6 hours each per day, digital has become an essential part of everyday life for most of us. (...) As a result, brands need to evolve beyond today's siloed approach to digital, and build seamless digital integration into everything they do.*".

ICTs lead to a paradigm shift in the tourism industry, which Buhalis and Jun (2011) named as *e-tourism*, which changed the practices adopted by tourism service organizations and the functions of the stakeholders involved in the process.

According to Živković, Gajić and Brdar (2014: 758), *“from the ‘static web’ and unidirectional flow of communication until ‘the second phase’ of web 2.0 and bidirectional communication, new levels of relations have started up.”*

The term Web 2.0 was formerly created by DiNucci (1999: 32) which marked the conversion of the web from *“screenfulls of text and graphics”* to a *“transport mechanism (...) through which interactivity happens”*. Constantinides and Fountain (2008: 232) described Web 2.0 as *“(...) a collection of open source, interactive and user-controlled online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social progress. Web 2.0 applications support the creation of informal users’ networks facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing the efficient generation, dissemination, sharing and editing/redefining of content.”*

It was due to the appearance of Web 2.0, social networking and mobile internet that value co-creation started to gain more relevance and the customers stopped being a passive subject of the producers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003), turning into connected consumers searching for valuable and extraordinary experiences enriched by technology (Tsiotsou & Ratten, 2010). It was the appearance of a subdivision of Web 2.0 applications, called *social media*, that led to the major repercussions of Web 2.0, i.e., the empowerment of the consumer and the enlargement of Word of Mouth (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), being the Web 2.0 *“not only a mass medium, but a platform that has a much broader role and function than any of the traditional mass media.”* (Fotis, 2015: 38).

Indeed, tourists are using the information and communication technologies (ICTs) to analyze, compare, evaluate, and choose the destination that better suits their expectations, desires, and needs, thus gaining control over the process (or over part of it), responsibility for their choices and feeling more independent (Berrada, 2017). The tourism industry benefits from technological innovations, since it requires a significant amount of information, in an intense way (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). As a matter of fact, according to Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2007), ICTs have fundamentally altered the nature of tourism experiences, i.e., experience co-creation has become richer and been multiplied (Gretzel & Jamal, 2009).

ICTs are also crucial for the structure, strategy and operations in tourism firms (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Through several platforms such as websites, mobile technology, travel guides, portable city guides, etc. (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009), Information systems bring a chance for organizations in the tourism industry to establish a closer and more meaningful collaboration with the consumers, which leads to the development of personal, uniquely designed, compelling, innovative and valuable experiences (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012; Berrada, 2017).

That being said, technology provides a platform of communication (Buhalis & Law, 2008) that leads to the co-creation of a more valuable and innovative experiences from not only an *economic-functional* but also a *cultural and ideological perspective* (Cova & Dalli, 2009) by spreading their circle of activity to the virtual space (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012) and guaranteeing a superior level of information, enthusiasm, transparency, and centrality in the tourist in the co-creation process (Chathoth, Ungson, Harrington, Altinay & Chan, 2016).

ICTs are a crucial tool when it comes to comprehending the **three major stages of tourism experience** in which value is consumed and the tourist connects with other actors, like friends, family, community, firms (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014), which are: planning (before the trip), tourism (during the trip), and memory (after the trip) (Watson *et al.*, 2004). During the first stage, the tourist, who is globally connected thanks to the tools provided by the Internet, gathers new information about the touristic destination (like what to visit, where to eat and sleep, and so on) by using the diversified web sources and the interactions with friends, family members or other tourists, before “purchasing” the tourist experience. It is also during this first stage that tourists interact with the reservation systems and other service providers through the Internet (Watson *et al.*, 2004). In the tourism stage tourists use their mobile devices to access information anywhere and in real time about the destination and the available services, thus expanding to the usage of ICT’s service while moving (Schmidt-Belz, Nick, Poslad & Zipf, 2003), in order to adjust activities and give recommendations. This means that mobile technologies lead to the enhancement, intensification and co-creation of experiences in any place and at any time (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012). Finally, in the memory phase the process turns to a C2C tourism experience co-creation, since tourists extend their trips in time and space by sharing their stories and experiences at the destinations in person or using ICTs, after reflecting on the experience they lived and thinking about the good memories (Watson *et al.*, 2004; Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015). By sharing their tourism experiences

during the post-travel stage, tourists are “*active in creating, reinforcing or devaluating destination images*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 116). This way, destinations and tourism service providers which are able “*create and manage quality experiences*” are going to take great advantages out of the tourists’ inputs (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 116). ICTs have brought new opportunities for a combined co-creation of tourism experiences in every stage of the process, which leads to a significant increase in the value created (Wang *et al.*, 2012).

With the ICTs, the tourism experience becomes “*an almost real-time shared adventure that is co-constructed with the connected social network of tourism providers, friends, followers and other tourists online*” (Buhalis, Neuhofer & Ladkin, 2012: 550).

The social dynamics during the tourism experience also influence the outcome of the experience co-creation and the Web 2.0 and social media have turned ICTs into a broad area “*of computed-mediated social networking and Internet users’ collaboration.*” (Sigala, 2009: 3). The relationships established with known (friends and family) and unknown (other users of the internet or tourists) subjects influences the memorability of the experience and the success of the value co-creation (Buonincontri, Morvillo, Okumus & Niekerk, 2017). As a matter of fact, tourists appreciate the ability to reinforce friendships, meet new people, embrace new cultures and share information and stories (Buonincontri, Morvillo, Okumus & Niekerk, 2017). After the trip, during the memory stage, appears the need to maintain the friendship established between the tourist and his network, which can be fulfilled through ICTs, according to Buhalis and Foerste (2015). This tool allows the tourist to share thoughts, recommendations, questions, and memories of the trip that they consider relevant and to respond to the environment in an accurate way (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

To comprehend how tourism organizations and destinations can “strategically enhance experience and value”, Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2013) have developed a Tourism Experience Value Matrix, which differentiates four types of experiences that differ in terms of intensity of co-creation and technology. The researchers concluded that the highest value proposition for tourists can be accomplished through the maximization of the elements of co-creation and technology, i.e., the *fully technology-enhanced tourism experiences*, the most differentiated type where the tourist is very involved, mirroring the social and interactive scopes, and uses ICTs to enhance the process. Furthermore, in the matrix there are other types of experiences, namely, the *conventional tourism experience*, an approach centered in the company and with a moderately low level of consumer

participation and technology used, the *co-creation tourism experience*, which admits a high involvement and participation from the tourist but is restricted to “*interactions and engagement in the real world and offline spaces*”, and the *technology tourism experience*, which is related to a high usage of technology but is predominantly “*company-centric*”, i.e., the technology is mostly used to make the company processes and the service delivery easier (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2013a: 551).

In the development of the current thesis there is going to be a focus on a subsection of ICTs, the social media. According to Verhoef, van Doorn and Beckers (2013), the rise of social media has brought important chances for firms to engage with their costumers, thus leading to the consumer’s participation on the value creation process, by brainstorming product ideas for example. This led to a low-cost path to innovation.

2.9. Social Media and its impact on the tourism experience

As stated in the Universal McCann global research, “*social media is an important shift, as it summarizes the importance of interaction, the consumer and the community. The term emphasizes the idea that as a collective it can have as much impact as any traditional media platform.*” (Smith, 2008: 10). In fact, the social networks have brought a new tool, worldwide, for destination marketing as they become an everyday need for consumers (Luo & Zhong, 2015). Indeed, the phenomenon of social media is currently very important since it leads to a more “*accessible and less technical*” internet, thanks to the “*innovations in web development, computing technology and the proliferation of broadband*”, causing an effect on the media consumption “*therefore shifting the emphasis from professional content producers to the consumer.*” (Smith, 2018: 10).

Nowadays the usage of social media is increasing substantially, as its popularity continues to rise, but a review on the literature developed around this concept shows that there is still lack of consensus when it comes to the terms used to define social media. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) claim that this happens mostly because this is still a recent topic, still being researched and analyzed, and because of the diversity of terms used to portray social media.

Constantinides and Fountain (2008) stated that social media is a synonym of **Web 2.0**, i.e., different terms that refer to the same concept and platform. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), on the other hand, claim that these are two different terms. The previously mentioned authors claim that Web 2.0 is the “*ideological and technological foundation*

in the form of a platform that enabled the evolution of social media and still enables their operation.” (Fotis, 2015: 38).

Virtual reality, social networks, and online communities (like YouTube, Wikipedia, and Facebook) are referred by Jansen *et al.* (2009) as ***Social communication platforms*** and ***Social communication services***, whereas Akehurst (2009) uses the term ***Social Web site*** to refer to these online communities.

Kim *et al.* (2010: 216) also refer to the websites where people “*form online communities, and share user-created contents*” as ***Social Web site***. However, according to Fotis (2015: 40), when Kim *et al.* (2010: 216) stated that *Social Web sites* were the “*union of social networking and social media sites*”, they were showing a “*borderless perspective*”.

Another term that appears in travel literature and ICTs, to define social media, is the concept of ***Social Networks*** (Fotis, 2015). Social networks are, according to Miguéns *et al.* (2008: 1), “*online communities of people who share common interests and activities.*”. Similarly, Cox *et al.* (2008: 2) define social networking as “*pages that contain user-generated content in various formats.*”. Nevertheless, some authors, like McKinsey (2009), claim that social media is wider than social networking sites, as this is just a subsection of social media, i.e., “*online system that allow users to become members, create a profile, build a personal network connecting them to other users with whom they exchange on a frequent basis skills, talents, knowledge, preferences and other information*” (Fotis, 2015: 40).

Other scholars, such as Dhar and Chang (2009: 300), refer to social media as ***user generated content***, i.e., “*the conjunction of blogs and social networking websites*”. However, the Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD) states that *user generated content* is connected to the content traded within social media and not the social media itself (Fotis, 2015). Nevertheless, Burtch and Hong (2010: 1), refer to *user generated content* as “*information contributed voluntarily by an average Internet user that is subsequently capable of being observed by some third party.*”.

Lastly, Fischer and Reuber (2011) describe social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, with the term ***new social media***. This is appropriate only if the term *social media* has been applied to other forms of media (Fotis, 2015).

Additionally, ***consumer generated media*** is a term used by scholars like Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006); Gretzel *et al.* (2008); Mangold and Faulds (2009) and Yoo and Gretzel (2011) to describe social media. Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006: 2) define

consumer generated media as “*a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumer’s intent on educating each other on products, brands, services, personalities and issues.*”. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that this term limits social media to consumer review websites, like TripAdvisor, and specific content, like a blog about a person’s experience in the marketplace. This is due to the fact that the term *consumer* limits the generated content to products and services, or the actions that the consumer took on the marketplace (Fotis, 2015), since a consumer is “*a person who purchases goods and services for personal use.*” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018) [online].

As stated by many scholars, such as Xiang and Gretzel (2010), a formal definition of social media, that would serve as an umbrella for all the previously mentioned terms, should be developed, to better comprehend the affect that it has on the consumer behavior (Fotis, 2015). For instance, Solis (2007) defines social media by highlighting its connection to interaction and conversation, i.e., the author states that social media are “*(...) online tools that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people.*” [online]. Likewise, Universal McCann (2008) describes social media as “*(...) online applications, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interaction, collaboration and the sharing of content.*” (Smith, 2008: 10).

Other scholars, like Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) choose to define social media not by focusing on the interaction aspect of it, but rather on the content of its platforms, i.e., they state that social media is “*a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.*”.

Hoffman *et al.* (2013: 29) explained social media as “*the set of web-based and mobile tools and applications that allow people to create (consume) content that can be consumed (created) by others and which enables and facilitates connections*”.

When it comes to the tourism industry, the broad amount of online travel information accessible has given more power to the tourists towards taking control over the planning and consumption of the trip, which lead to a change in their behavior (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Sigala, 2011). This happens because social media platforms provide fast and detailed information and experiences about the destination and its tourism products and services (i.e., local resources, places of interest, i.e., attractors, and other insider tips), provided by experts and other travelers (who have visited a certain

destination or remained at a certain hotel), thus creating well informed tourists (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The information encountered in social media is more trustworthy, contemporary and pleasurable to read than the information provided by travel agencies, according to Ye *et al.* (2011). This is most likely due to the fact that the experiences and recommendations that potential tourists find on social media is a real experience of a past traveler and not a story arranged by a marketer (Sparks & Browning, 2011).

An increasing number of tourists are re-creating and sharing their trip experiences, photos and stories on social media, like *Instagram*, *YouTube*, and so on (Munar & Jacobson, 2014). The social media comprise different people, content, practices and technologies (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) and constitutes a key aspect to facilitate the value co-creation in tourism experience, both in B2C and C2C, since it influences the decision making of other tourists who have access to the information shared by tourists who have previously visited the destination and to the performance of the tourism suppliers and destinations (Kang & Schuett, 2013; Leung *et al.*, 2013). Also, according to researchers like Wasko and Faraj (2005), the virtual environment provided by internet platforms and social media encourages and facilitates the sharing of information and know-how, whether it regards aspects that constitute public knowledge or others of a private individual-related nature, like personal stories and emotions felt on the trip (Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

The level of knowledge shared by the tourists depends on a crucial behavioral aspect, the motivations, whether they are personal or social (Sun *et al.*, 2012). On one hand, the social motivation is linked to a sense of belonging, a social identity, the provision of an advice (or the search for advice), the share of a positive or negative experience to gain social benefits, community advancement, and reciprocity (Sun *et al.*, 2012). On the other hand, there is the personal motivation, which can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Wang, Li, Li & Peng, 2014). The first regards the act of sharing information for altruistic purposes, i.e., for the tourists' satisfaction and interest. The latter, according to Wang, Li, Li and Peng (2014), is not precisely linked to the objective of sharing, but rather to the gain of monetary recompenses, the acquisition of a compliment, the establishment of a reputation or a new friendship.

According to a study developed by Fotis (2015) there are six types of motivations that lead to the self-expression of tourists on social media. The first one is the show-off factor, i.e., the fact that tourists like to think that their followers take pleasure in knowing what they do on their trips; the second one regards the desire to share unique experiences,

since they are so incredible that they need to be publically shared; the third type of motivation is the need to share the truly happy moments with their friends and family through social media. In addition, tourists might share their tourism experiences on social media as a way to “invite” potential tourists to live the experience by recommending certain activities or places. The fifth one regards the convenience of the process of sharing the stories and photos of the trip through social media, since it is easily accessible and might also work as a mean to store important content, i.e., photos or videos of the trip. The last motivation factor concerns the fact that tourists are expected, by their followers on social media, to share the contents of their trip (nowadays it is seen as a social norm).

2.10. Types of Social Media

Xiang and Gretzel’s (2010) research revealed that, when looking for travel information, tourists often turn to search engines and social media platforms, like microblogs, blogs and social networking.

According to Kane (2011) the photos and videos uploaded and the comments written in travel blogs, and other types of social media, help tourists build a social identity, by sharing “*their interpretation of the destination at the time*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 116).

In a study, conducted by Fotis (2015), the author claims that that, amongst all the types of existing social media applications, there are eight that are more related and have more effect on the tourism experiences. These types are the social networking sites, content community websites, blogs and microblogs, consumer review websites, and Internet forums. In this section of the literature review these social media applications are going to be defined and linked to the tourism context.

2.10.1. Social Networking Sites

This type of social media application, also known as social network sites (SNS), “*are the most widespread type of social media and their popularity continues to increase worldwide*”, according to authors like Richter and Koch (2008), Belanche *et al.* (2010) and Universal McCann (2010) (Fotis, 2015: 56). As stated in the Global Digital Report 2018, the number of social media users around the world in 2018 is of about 3.196 billion, up 13 percent year-on-year, and almost all users access these platforms through their

mobile devices. According to Kemp (2018: 3), the author of the Global Digital Report 2018, a lot of this growth has come from the fact that “*two-thirds of the world’s 7.6 billion inhabitants now have a mobile phone*”, due to the existence of cheaper smartphones and mobile data plans.

Boyd and Ellison (2007: 211) defined Social Network Sites as “*(...) web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.*”. So, according to these researchers, most users join the social networking sites to support social relations that already existed offline (Fotis, 2015).

On the other hand, Richter and Koch (2008: 1-2) defined the Social Networking Site by focusing on its functions, i.e., the researchers claimed that SNS are “*application systems that offer users functionalities for **identify management** (i.e. the representation of the own person e.g. in the form of a profile) and enable furthermore to keep in touch with other users (and thus the administration of own contacts).*”. Besides the management of the levels of access rights and information input, Richter and Koch (2008: 4), also acknowledged five other functionalities common to all SNS. These are the **expert search**, i.e., the use of a search box to get suggestions about other users and to have the “*possibility to search the network according to different criteria*”; the **context awareness**, i.e., highlights the common interests and contexts amongst users, thus creating a common trust; the **contact management**, i.e., SNS “*combines all functionalities that enable the maintenance of the (digital) personal network*”; the **network awareness**, i.e., SNS gives awareness about the status update, news feed and other aspects of the network; and the **exchange** functions, which regard the ability to exchange information amongst users, whether through messages (directly) or through shared photos or other types of posts (indirectly).

Belanche *et al.* (2010: 322) shared a more restrictive definition, since they focused on individuals with the same interests, i.e., “*Online social networks are defined as groups of people who share a common interest and are totally or partially connected to others by the Internet (e.g., Facebook, MySpace).*”. A global survey in 54 countries, made in 2010, showed that 65% of people use SNS to find old friends, 70% to send messages to close friends and 53% to find new acquaintances (Universal McCann, 2010).

This type of social media can have open access, or show a restricted access, like Facebook, where there is a minimum age requirement. After the registration, a profile is created, by using a set of personal descriptions and photo. On the previously mentioned profile, which can be of public access or private (only a set of followers have access), the user can post comments, photos, videos, update their status, etc. As stated by Boyd and Ellison (2007), through SNS users can also form digital connections with people they already know or who are strangers. These connections may require acceptance from both parties, like in the case of LinkedIn, or be one-directional, as in the case of Academia.edu. Some SNS, like Facebook, also include messages, games, etc.

According to a study conducted by Dreamgrow, the most popular Social Networking Sites and Apps are, currently, Facebook and Instagram (Kallas, 2018). Other examples are Google+ and LinkedIn. According to Chaffey (2018), the most visited social networks do not alter in a significant way from year-to-year anymore, since the social networks are currently well established. The Global Digital Report 2018 shows that, in fact, Facebook dominates the *social landscape*. In a base of 1.952 US smartphone owners, with more than 18 years old, about 63% have accessed this social network app. Facebook's other platforms, i.e. FB Messenger and Instagram, show a penetration of 47 % and 27 %, respectively (Kemp, 2018). Facebook is also the social network with the biggest level of engagement in this study, with an average of 15 days accessed on a monthly basis, followed by Instagram (owned by Facebook), with an average of 11 days accessed monthly (Chaffey, 2018).

When it comes to the levels of engagement per follower, a study conducted by TrackMaven, which studied 51 million posts from 40.000 different companies over 130 industries, showed that Instagram dominates, with an average between 51 and 70 interactions per Post per 1.000 followers (Chaffey, 2018).

2.10.2. Social Networking Sites in the context of tourism

As stated by Živković, Gajić, and Brdar (2014), one of the most important roles of Social Networking Sites is to motivate tourists to share posts about their tourism experiences, their opinions, photos and comments, becoming an important source of information for other users who want to travel to that destination. This way, the future tourists have an idea on how their trip is going to be, if it can fulfil their needs and expectations, thus decreasing the uncertainty and assuring their future satisfaction with

the tourism experience. In truth, “*as social media becomes increasingly expressive, consumers are able to increasingly influence other consumers with their own opinions and experiences.*” (Živković, Gajić & Brdar, 2014: 759).

A study conducted by eMarketer (2010a) showed that 13% of US female travelers used Facebook to check a site or venue, 57% to share videos and/or photos related to the trip, and 38% to post comments about their tourism experience or a status update.

An online research conducted in 2012 (on 4.600 travelers across the US, Europe and Asia Pacific) showed that Facebook has a significant influence on the choices that tourists make. The research revealed that 40% of the tourists chose to post a review on an activity or attraction that they went through on their trip and about 76% posted vacation photos on this social network.

Enter and Michopoulou (2013) stated that Social Networking Sites, like Facebook and Instagram, are, generally, not used to find information before the trip, but rather during and after the tourism experience, in order to communicate with family and friends during the trip and share the experiences.

Instagram, currently with eight years of existence, has beyond 500 million active users that share, on average, 80 million photos *per day* (National Geographic, 2017). This shows how SNS users have an “*appetite for imagery*” and how Instagram influences travel decisions nowadays (National Geographic, 2017). A recent example was the fastest tourism growth in the small alpine town of Wanaka, New Zealand (an increase of 14%), after the tourism board invited “*social media trendsetters with large followings*” to share posts about their experiences on the town.

In fact, even though Facebook is still a SNS with a significant influence, “*people engage with Instagram 10 times more than with Facebook, which is why an estimated 48.8 percent of brands in the United States are on Instagram, with that number predicted to rise to 70.7 percent in 2017.*” (National Geographic, 2017) [online]. According to Johan Lolos, a tourism photographer, this happens because Instagram provides a more realistic expression and more inspiration than a tourism *brochure*.

Instagram has allowed tourists and tourism photographers to share their experiences, thus creating communities that connect people with common interests and that like to share aspects of their lives and comment on environmental and social issues.

2.10.3. Consumer Review Websites

Fotis (2015: 62) states that consumer review websites (CRW) are “*social media applications that enable users to upload product related reviews and ratings. CRW can offer a wide range of features, from uploading comments and pictures, and from a product or service rating on a single variable, to an impressive range of features such as wish-lists, price comparisons, advanced search, multi variable ratings, (...) and more.*”.

There are two distinct types of consumer review website. On one hand, there are the standalone websites, like Yelp and TripAdvisor, that exist to collect consumer feedback and present it to other users. On the other hand, there are the websites, like Booking.com, Airbnb.com, Amazon and eBay, where the ratings and reviews are embedded content and the main function of the site is the sales of goods and services. In this case, the reviews view to facilitate the decisions made by the consumers (Fotis, 2015).

Several studies suggested that consumers not only consider online reviews, but are also significantly affected by them when making a certain purchase (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Dellarocas *et al.*, 2007), even more than conventional reviews and recommendations (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). In fact, according to Dellarocas *et al.* (2007), the revenues of a movie can be predicted based on its online ratings made a few days after the opening weekend. Duan *et al.* (2008: 1007) claim that this occurs because the reviews act as “*underlying word of mouth*” that pushes the revenues of the movie. In 2009, Dhar and Chang also showed that the user-generated content is helpful when it comes to forecast of the value generated by music sales made online.

Furthermore, Lee (2009) stated that “*the quality of the arguments (i.e. supported with facts versus emotional and subjective arguments) used in reviews have a positive impact on purchasing intention; and the quantity of reviews have a positive effect on purchasing intention, since large number of reviews denote popularity of a product.*” (Fotis, 2015: 63).

2.10.4. Consumer Review Websites in the context of tourism

In 2014, 67% of the US tourists searched and read reviews from other tourists during the process of creating and designing the tourist experience (Google, 2014).

Gretzel and Yoo (2008) claim that tourists access the online reviews during the travel planning process, thus reducing the risk and rising the confidence about what they

decided, especially when it comes to the selection of the accommodation. According to these researchers, travelers are likely to avoid tourism services or places that receive bad reviews.

Sparks and Browning (2011: 64) stated that “*positively framed reviews focusing on interpersonal service evidence higher levels of trust, and together with numerical ratings increase trust and booking intention.*”. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) claim that negative reviews can bring benefits to lesser-known hotels and other accommodations, since they generate awareness.

Živković, Gajić & Brdar (2014: 780) conducted an online research across the US, Europe and Asia Pacific and found that “*social media has a big influence on travel decisions as 44% of respondents strongly agreed that Internet reviews posted by travel bloggers helped them about the initial decision of vacation destinations.*”. Also, in the same online research, the authors found that the electronic word of Mouth (eWOM) “*can solve problems and doubts during the travel and it can help discover what tourists think and say about their experience.*”.

In the tourism industry, TripAdvisor is the leader amongst the CRW related to travel, since in every month about 456 million people visit TripAdvisor to design and assess a trip (Kinstler, 2018). This CRW shows more than 661 million reviews and opinions which regard a wide selection of travel ads around the world (about 7.7 million airlines, accommodations, restaurants and experiences). This means that this is the CRW that most frequently helps tourists decide about where to sleep, eat and what to visit (TripAdvisor, 2018).

Yelp is also one of the most popular CRW, with a monthly average of 34 million visitors that visited through an app, and of 75 million visitors that visited Yelp through the website for mobile devices (Yelp, 2018).

2.10.5. Content Communities

According to Fotis (2015: 60), content communities can be defined as “*web-based applications that enable users to share media content such as videos, photos, documents and presentations, music and web links.*”.

When it comes to content communities where users can share videos we can find as examples YouTube, Vimeo and Dailymotion, and when it comes to sharing photos, Pinterest, Flickr, Picasa, and Fotolog are some of the current examples. Regarding music

ilike and ping are some of the most used content communities, and concerning documents and presentations, slideshare.net is an example.

Of all the content communities that can be found online nowadays, the most popular one is YouTube. As a matter of fact, in 2018 YouTube became for video watching what Google became for search some years ago (Dogtiev, 2018). According to an online article about the YouTube revenue and usage statistics in 2018, YouTube has more than 1.8 billion people registered on the site in order to check it on a daily basis and see some videos, between the 5 billion videos uploaded onto the platform (Dogtiev, 2018). As stated in the previously mentioned online article, “*every 60 seconds more than 300 hours of HD quality video is being uploaded to YouTube to contribute to already massive collection of 1.300.000.000 videos.*”.

Amongst the content communities used to share photos, Pinterest is one of the most popular ones in 2018 (Aslam, 2018). According to an online article by Omnicore, the total number of monthly active Pinterest users is 250 million, and 81% of those users are Females (Aslam, 2018).

In 2010, Jin *et al.* conducted a study on the upload and viewing trends of photos in Flickr. Through this study, they were able to analyze the coverage, acceptance and popularity of products on a global scale. The researchers stated that every upload and view of a photo or video on a content communities counts as an “*implicit vote*” against or in favor of the matters portrayed (Fotis, 2015: 60). Furthermore, this fact meant that the opinions and needs of social media users can be known through the aggregation of data on the “*votes*”, thus allowing “*prediction and forecasting in areas like politics, economics and marketing.*” (Fotis, 2015: 60).

2.10.6. Content Communities in the context of tourism

Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) claimed that the photos and videos uploaded onto content communities (which help the tourists when it comes to creating their travel narratives) are likely to affect the tourism experiences. As stated by the researchers, content communities are used to know more about the chosen destination (since the photos and videos uploaded help to ‘transport’ the potential tourists to the destination) and tends to increase the tourist’s interest on it. Besides, the photos and videos also “*generate mental pleasures*” (Fotis, 2015: 61). This means that, on one hand, the content communities allow tourists to fantasize about destinations where they have never been,

and, on the other hand, allow travelers to re-experience the destinations they have previously visited. That being said, for Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) the content communities enable the sharing of tourism experiences, thus offering an online access to the destination (acting as a mode of “transportation”).

Furthermore, Reino and Hay (2011) stated that videos in content communities like YouTube are important sources of information about the destination, local activities, thus being an important tool for holidaymakers and tourists who are looking for advices and guidance in the planning of the tourism experience.

According to YouTube data, travelers are devoting more time viewing online videos than ever before. In point of fact, the views of travel-related videos increase up to 118% over year. Besides, with the increasing use of smartphones, tourists access to travel-related videos anytime and anywhere (Crowel, Gribben & Loo, 2014).

Travel-related photos posted on Flickr and Pinterest are also an important tool when it comes to forecasting the tourist’s behavior (Fotis, 2015). In fact, researchers like Clements *et al.* (2010) claimed that “*a user’s geotagged photos in Flickr can predict the favourite locations in another unvisited destination for either the same user or for any other user with similar travel preferences, to obtain a personalized travel recommendation.*” (Fotis, 2015: 61).

2.10.7. Microblogs

Jansen *et al.* (2009) identified common aspects that all microblogs share, i.e., the fact that all posts shared are short messages, with a limited number of characters; the instant messaging, supported by multiple platforms (like e-mail); and the fact that users of microblogs subscribe to other users to receive their posts on their own pages. By allowing an immediate reaction after buying or consuming a certain product or service, microblogging applications lead to feedback on the concrete experience (Jansen *et al.*, 2009).

Microblogs were also defined as “*internet based applications which allow users to exchange small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links.*” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011: 106). This is a type of social media between traditional blogs and social networking sites, with a “*high degree of self-presentation/self-disclosure and a medium to low degree of social presence/media richness.*” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011: 106). These researchers stated that Twitter is the largest microblog in the

current times and the motor for development of microblogging. According to an online article published on *statista* (2018), in the third quarter of 2018, this microblogging service had an average of 326 million monthly active users who send, on average, 500 million tweets per day (tweets are messages up to 280 characters and that might content links, photos or videos).

As stated by Java *et al.* (2007), users of Twitter can be divided in three categories, i.e., information seekers (who seek information, URLs and news reports), friends (who chat with other users), and information sources (who talk about their daily routine and share information). This researcher also claimed that microblogs are a fast way of communicating and are frequently updated.

In Twitter the users can become “followers” of a certain people, without the need for their approval, thus receiving their tweets on their page. The tweets are available to all users and can be read and retweeted, thus being pushed by followers moreover to their personal followers. Like all the other microblogs, in Twitter the connection with the followers does not oblige reciprocation (Yardi & Boyd, 2010).

Through the use of an # before a concept or expression in a microblog can create a community where a certain topic is discussed amongst several users. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) claim that one of the success factors of this type of social media is the fact that “*they offer a platform for virtual exhibitionism and voyeurism, as all posts are accessible through search engines, therefore becoming public knowledge.*” (Fotis, 2015: 54).

2.10.8. Microblogs in the context of tourism

Microblogs have been described as a crucial tool to “*identifying and monitoring expression of travel and tourism related sentiment.*” (Fotis, 2015: 55).

Microblogs, like Twitter, are also an important instrument for tourists and tourism organizations (Hay, 2010), in a way that they can be used to know more about the destination and furthermore as a “*reminder mechanism for past and future trips offering promotions and functional information*” (Fotis, 2015: 55). Besides, microblogs can also serve as an online platform where tourists and tourism service providers may communicate at the destination. Hay (2010) also mentions that Twitter is often used as “*a group formation platform consisting of potential travelers to a destination who are*

sharing information, particularly useful for first-time visitors and single travelers.” (Fotis, 2015: 55).

The users of Twitter use the tourism context information that they find on this microblog during the decision-making process, depending on the reliability, credibility, expertise, and knowledge of the source and depending on the degree of involvement (Sotiriadis & van Zyl, 2013).

This type of social media differs from others because the relationships established between users do not require reciprocation, which means that users reach a wider range of information related to travel, outside of the network of friends and family (Fotis, 2015).

2.10.9. Blogs

The origin of the term is still debated amongst scholars, in fact, most of them believe that it first appeared in 1999 as a shortened form for the term “weblog” or “we blog” (Jamie Spencer, 2018), coined by Peter Merholz (Wikipedia, 2018).

A blog can be defined as a journal or online diary that exists on a personal website, which can be either exist within a hosting platform or be a stand-alone website (with their own http address). This personal website can hold text, videos, photographs, music, animated GIFs, and links to other websites related to the entries, which are regularly update onto the blog. The previously mentioned entries are presented in reverse chronological and express, in a personal way, an idea/thought or a story/personal experience (Akehurst, 2009; Lin & Huang, 2010; Spencer, 2018). In addition, according to researchers like Safko (2010), it is the spontaneous upload of personalized posts, where bloggers transmit their feelings, that makes the readers think that they know and are close to the blogger.

As stated by Smudde (2005), there are four types of blogs, i.e., the personal blogs, the blogs of a certain industry or topic, the corporate blogs and the publication based blogs, which are controlled by journalists. Fotis (2015) suggests a fifth kind of blog, i.e., the professional blogs. Furthermore, Thevonet (2007) contemplates an additional type, which are the collaborative blogs, i.e., a “*blog hosting platform*” (Fotis, 2015: 50) where the users can generate their own blogs or upload an entry, like the travelblog.org.

Litvin *et al.* (2008) claims that this type of social media can be defined as “many to many” when it comes to the scope of communication, and as asynchronous, regarding the type of interactivity. Akehurst (2009) stated that most part of the blogs in the internet

are meant for consumer to consumer communication, i.e., most of the personal and stand-alone blogs. Besides there are also blogs meant for business to consumer communication, business to business communication, government to business communication and government to consumer communication.

According to Jamie Spencer (2018), “*since a blog can exist merely for personal use, sharing information with an exclusive group or to engage the public, a blog owner can set their blog for private or public access*” [online].

Hsu and Lin (2008) claimed that the “*ease of use, enjoyment, altruism and reputation*” (Fotis, 2015: 50) are the factors that influence the blog readers the most, when it comes to finding them more trustworthy than traditional media, whereas “*the social factors such as community identification significantly influence users to continue posting to blogs*” (Fotis, 2015: 50).

According to a study conducted by Onishi and Manchanda in 2010, the blog activity about the launch of a certain product is predictive of market outcomes and “*during the product’s pre-launch blogs and TV advertising act synergistically in the sense that advertising spurs blogging activity*” (Fotis, 2015: 51).

2.10.10. Blogs in the context of tourism

Pan *et al.* (2007: 42) affirmed that travel blogs, i.e., blogs specific to a certain industry, show “*kaleidoscopic aspects of a visitor’s experience at the destination*”, since they expose “*experiential and subjective in nature perceptions*” (Fotis, 2015: 51) connected to the tourism experience and products, like the places where the visitor ate, slept (accommodation), etc., serving as online (digital) word of mouth. Bosangit *et al.* (2009: 62) defined blogs as “*expressions of tourism consumption*”.

Studies conducted by Mack *et al.* (2008) indicated that the word of mouth received by strangers, i.e., through the posts read on travel blogs, are usually less reliable than word of mouth coming from friends, family members or acquaintances, with whom they share strong social ties. Furthermore, the previously mentioned studies showed that this behavior is more common amongst readers who do not post information on blogs, whereas the readers who often post on blogs perceive the trustworthiness of personal and corporate blogs as analogous to the one of traditional word of mouth.

Yoo *et al.* (2009) stated that the user generated content (UGC) that affects travel planning the most is the one posted on official bureau websites, followed by travel agents' websites, review websites, travel company websites and travel blogs.

On the other hand, studies conducted by Del Chiappa (2011) found that OTA websites incorporating reviews and travel blogs are the most reliable and that influence company image and tourists' decisions the most.

Wang (2012) claimed that the components that affect the blogger's perception of the image of a destination the most are the aspects that facilitate the interactions between tourists and bloggers, and the ones that build affective images, i.e., provision of appeal, and cognitive images, i.e., provision of guides.

According to Lee and Gretzel (2014), when it comes to tourism experiences in unknown destinations, studies have shown that travel blogs provide more reliable information than family members and friends.

2.10.11. Internet Forums

Bickart and Schindler (2001) stated that internet forums were a strong source of consumer info, even before the expansion of social media.

According to researchers like Laughlin and MacDonald (2010) and Carbonaro (2011), internet forums are "*web-based virtual spaces*" in which several users with similar interests and needs post messages, questions or answers that lead to asynchronous debates, "*organized in threads and user-created topics*" (Fotis, 2015: 66).

2.10.12. Internet Forums in the context of tourism

When it comes to the tourism industry there are two types of internet forums, i.e., the stand-alone websites, like the Flyertalk, where users discuss their flights and loyalty programmes, and the internet forums inserted within tourism related websites, like the TripAdvisor's Travel Forum and CruiseCritic.

As stated by Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) tourists participate in internet forums related to the travel industry to fulfil "*social, psychological and hedonic needs*" (Fotis, 2015: 67).

Likewise, Prendergast *et al.* (2010) indicated that "*the similarity between the users's interest and the forum's topic, as well as the user's attitude towards the forum*

found to have a direct relationship with intention to purchase the product discussed in the forum” (Prendergast et al., 2010 in Fotis, 2015: 67).

Internet forums related to tourism experiences have proven to be helpful when it comes to giving tourists a chance to connect with the residents of the destination, during the phase prior to the trip where the tourists search for information about local food and other recommendations (Arsak et al., 2010). The internet forums are also very helpful in the decisions made during the trip, like the schedule of the museums and other places of interest. Besides the residents of the destination, in the internet forums the users can also find information on issues like means of transport and the best accommodation, provided by knowledgeable tourists (Arsak et al., 2010).

2.11. Concluding thoughts

When it comes to the acceptance and usage behavior connected to social media, these are concepts that are continually changing (Universal McCann, 2008). In the context of tourism, there is an appropriate amount of research on the impact of social media on the behavior of the tourist during the entire tourism experience. Nevertheless, “*the significant impacts of social media on tourists’ decisions are not well documented*” (Liu et al., 2013: 8). In the next chapters of this dissertation, a study on the impact of social media on the tourists’ decisions and active participation on the creation of their (and others, through online word-of-mouth) tourism experience, as well as the consequences this process of co-creation. This study is going to be conducted through a macro approach, i.e., it is not going to focus on a specific social media application but rather on several of the most popular, such as Instagram, YouTube, TripAdvisor, etc., and, furthermore, analyze the overall impact of social media during all the stages of the tourism experience.

A summary of the literature review can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of the key concepts analyzed in the Literature Review

	Tourism Context
Consumer Behavior	<p>Mathieson & Wall (1982); Smallman & Moore (2010); Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015)</p>
	<p>The tourism experience can be portrayed as a “<i>sequential process which starts when tourists feel the desire or need for travel, and which is followed by an information quest, an evaluation of that information and finally the travel decision.</i>” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 107).</p>
	<p>The decision-making process in the tourism context is more complex and sophisticated, it includes not only the planned and thought process in all decisions made before the trip but also the unplanned ones made before and during the trip and have a higher level of uncertainty and risk.</p>
	<p>Tourists are more involved in the process.</p>
	<p>Morgan & Pritchard (2012)</p>
	<p>Tourism experiences are more heterogeneous, intangible, inseparable and not perishable.</p>
	<p>Martin & Woodside (2012)</p>
	<p>Steps to the travel decision-making process: the detection of the need and desire to travel, the planning that occurs before the trip, the experiences that happen at the destination and, finally, the evaluation of the trip at the post-travel stage and the future intentions that come with it.</p>
	<p>This key concept might not be entirely rational.</p>
	<p>Fodness & Murray (1999)</p>
<p>Information sources can be:</p>	
<p>External sources, i.e., online word-of-mouth, books and advertisement, or internal sources, i.e., the tourist’s knowledge and memories from former experiences and past information explorations, about the same or a comparable destination.</p>	
<p>Choi et al. (2012)</p>	
<p>The information search is crucial to decrease the perceived uncertainty, risks and the cognitive dissonance.</p>	

After the destination choice and the initial phase, the post-purchase search of information is more meticulous and specific to the chosen destination. For example, searching information about local events, museums, weather, food, etc.

Chen & Tsai (2007)

A **positive behavioral intention** in the tourism context is connected to the desire to return to the same place, recommend it to potential tourists and state optimistic things about the destination, in person and online.

Solomon (2015); Li & Cai (2012)

The tourist perception on a travel experience is strongly affected by the five basic senses, which are sight, smells, taste, touch, and hearing.

Perception is also influenced by expectations and prior experiences (personal elements), which lead to different behaviors and reactions towards the same sensations and stimuli.

Mathis et al. (2016)

The tourism experience can be defined as “*an individual perception generated in the context of interactions and resource integration in a tourism context*” (Mathis et al., 2016: 63).

Neuhofner, Buhalis & Ladkin (2012); Tan et al. (2014); Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015); Buonincontri et al. (2017); Berrada (2017)

Co-creation processes lead to the creation of unique, personal and memorable tourism experiences. It is “*an innovative way to live differently the tourist experience*” (Berrada, 2017: 18).

There are several elements (antecedents) that need to exist:

Co-creation

Active Participation: the tourist is active in the process of designing and planning the trip throughout the stages of tourism experience, according to their goals and expectations.

Interaction between tourists and Tourism Service Providers: Pre-exchanged discussion through a tourist-interaction platform, to know the tourists’ needs and expectations.

Share the experience with others: influence potential tourists and give them the knowledge they need to actively participate in the design of their own trips, “*when tourists come back to a destination and recommend it to their peers, they heavily contribute to a destination sustainability and competitiveness*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 112).

One of the consequences is the **tourist’s satisfaction**, which is accomplished “*if the overall tourist experience matches the expectations that have been formed by personal needs, previous experience and various marketing messages*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 114).

Hellen (2010); Howell et al. (2012)

Another consequence is the tourist's happiness which is based on the predisposition to live positive emotions and satisfactory experiences.

More engaging experiences lead to a higher level of satisfaction, which becomes even more positive as time passes by and it gets enhanced in the tourist's memory, leading to an increase in the tourist's happiness.

Motivation

Uysal, Li & Sirakaya-Turk (2008); Prebensen *et al.* (2012); Li & Cai (2012); Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015)

The "push and pull" model is a well-accepted theoretical framework regarding the concept of motivation in the tourism context.

Push: Connected to the internal wishes and emotions that made tourists want to travel, like the personal desire to escape the routine, develop relationships, etc.

Pull: External factors like the local culture, climate, history, attractions, etc.

Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015)

Tourists are influenced by different types of motivations towards the different stages of the tourism experience co-creation process:

In the **initial stage** of planning the trip the motivations "*work as initiators of the purchasing phase*" (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015: 112).

At the **second stage** of the process, i.e., when the tourist experiences the planned trip at the destination, different motivations might lead the tourists to choose certain activities and cultural locations to visit.

Lastly, during the **post-travel stage** the motives that make the traveler want to communicate about the tourism experience also differ, from the desire to give advice, to the need to share important memories with friends and family.

Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin (2012); Fotis (2015); Berrada (2017)

In contemporary times, tourism motivations are strongly affected by information and other content generated on ICT (e.g. social media).

Travel experiences can be enhanced, generate a higher level of value and be more personalized not only by experience co-creation but also by using technology. This may also lead to the creation of a new kind of tourism experiences.

Tourists are using the information and communication technologies to analyze, compare, evaluate, and choose the destination that better suits their expectations, thus gaining control over the process.

Social Media

Information systems bring a chance for organizations in the tourism industry to establish a closer and more meaningful collaboration with the consumers, leading to the development of personal experiences.

Wang, Park & Fesenmaier (2012)

ICTs simplify and mediate the process by allowing the consumer to be more involved in each step of the consumption (chain).

Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2003)

It was due to the appearance of Web 2.0, social networking and mobile internet that value co-creation started to gain more relevance and the customers stopped being a passive subject of the producers.

Watson et al. (2014)

ICTs are a crucial tool when it comes to comprehending the **three major stages of tourism experience:**

Planning: the tourist gathers new information about the touristic destination by using the diversified web sources and the interactions with friends, family members or other tourists and, also, to interact with the reservation systems and other service providers.

Tourism: tourists use their mobile devices to access information anywhere and in real time about the destination and the available services, to adjust activities and give recommendations.

Post-travel: tourists extend their trips in time and space by sharing their stories and experiences at the destinations, in person or using ICTs, after reflecting on the experience they lived and thinking about the good memories the destination has brought them.

Buhalis & Foerste (2015)

Social media allows the tourist to share thoughts, recommendations, questions, and memories of the trip that they consider relevant and to respond to the environment in an accurate way.

Blackshaw & Nazzaro (2006)

Consumer generated media, a term used to describe social media, is “*a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumer’s intent on educating each other on products, brands, services, personalities and issues.*” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006: 2).

Solis (2007)

Social media can be defined as “*(...) online tools that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people.*” [online].

Buhalis & Law (2008)

Social media platforms provide fast and detailed information about the destination and its tourism products, experiences and services, provided by experts and other travelers, thus creating well informed tourists.

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010)

Social media can also be described as “*a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.*” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61).

Xiang & Gretzel (2010)

The social media comprise different people, content, practices and technologies and constitutes a key aspect to facilitate the value co-creation in tourism experience, both in B2C and C2C. It clearly influences the decision making of other tourists who have access to the information shared by tourists who have previously visited the destination. This also applies to the performance of the tourism suppliers and destinations.

Ye et al. (2011)

The information encountered in social media is more trustworthy, contemporary and pleasurable to read than the information provided by travel agencies.

Sun et al. (2012); Wang, Li, Li & Peng (2014)

The level of knowledge shared by the tourists depends on a crucial behavioral aspect, the motivations, whether they are personal or social (sense of belonging, a social identity).

The personal motivations can be:

Intrinsic: sharing information for the tourists’ satisfaction and interest.

Extrinsic: the gain of monetary recompenses, receiving compliments, the establishment of a reputation or a new friendship.

Fotis (2015)

Fotis’s (2015) study claims that that, amongst all the types of existing social media applications, the social networking sites, content community websites, blogs and microblogs, consumer review websites, and Internet forums have a bigger influence on the tourism experiences.

Source: Author’s elaboration

Chapter III – Methodology and Findings

This section presents and describes, in-depth, the research process, taken in consideration the overall objective, the specified objectives and the consecutive research questions. This means that in this chapter all methodological decisions made are going to be justified and critically debated and the conceptual model of the study is going to be presented. After that, the data collected from the survey will be analyzed and Hypothesis verified.

3.1. Research strategy

The research questions, presented in chapter I, were tested by using a **quantitative approach** in which data was gathered through a web-based survey collection. This web-based survey (found in section B in the appendix) was chosen as a research method due to its suitability to the purpose of the study conducted on this dissertation. The research subject carries an interactive dimension, so the questions in the survey aim to generate interest and curiosity from the respondents. Additionally, the quantitative approach (articulated in graphics and numbers), was selected because it is used to examine or confirm theories, which is the objective of this study, and to elaborate generalizable realities about the subject of tourism experience co-creation through social media. The fact that this approach was used in the studies that influenced this dissertation the most (Berrada, 2017; Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017) is another factor that lead to the selection of this approach. Furthermore, in this study, the **deductive approach** was followed, since this research aims to test a combination of theories and concept models reviewed in the literature that is the basis of the study. Besides, the foundations of the study are the formulated hypothesis, which derive from the conceptual model elaborated on the research, and its emphasis is on the creation of a causality between certain behaviors and concepts.

The survey developed for this study is composed by three sections. The first section, after showing a short clarification about the nature of the research and its objectives, aims to analyze the connection between the demographic questions and the tourists' behavior and habits towards the tourism experience co-creation. This means that this block of the questionnaire intents to analyze if tourists use the information available through ICTs to plan their own trips, the main reasons why they do it, which demographic

characteristics those tourists present and if tourists link an active participation in the creation of a tourism experience to a higher level of happiness and satisfaction. The second section of the survey includes a measurement of the use of social media platforms by the tourists, that are fully or partly involved in the planning of their own trip, of their awareness of the value co-created and a measurement of the impact that social media platforms have on travel related decisions and actions and which type has a greater impact. Finally, in the final stage of the questionnaire a five-point Likert scale is used in order to measure what motivates the travelers to post on social media about their tourism experiences or what is keeping them from doing so on a regular basis. This scale, also used in the first two sections of the survey to measure the constructs in which the research questions are based (along with several other questions with multiple choice), ranges from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5), thus adapting scales present in the literature to the topic of tourism experience co-creation. According to Revilla, Saris, and Krosnik (2014), five-point scales give data with a greater quality than other scales with more points. The use of five-points also came from the fact that, this way, the results of the research are going to be comparable with the results of studies related to the topic of tourism experience co-creation and the use of social media, from which the items were adapted (Peterson *et al.*, 2005; Wang *et al.*, 2014; Mathis *et al.*, 2016; Buonincontri *et al.*, 2017). The online survey was previously examined by a university professor with precise knowledge of co-creation and the field of tourism.

When it comes to the analysis of the results from the data collection, tables and figures about the percentages, means and standard deviations of the several variables being studied were built through excel, word and Qualtrics, after the analysis, which then lead to interpretation of the data and allowed the making of comparisons and conclusions to achieve the objective of the research.

3.2. Data analysis

Based on the literature review made in chapter II and on the objectives of the dissertation defined in chapter I, research questions are articulated as follows. Later the data collected through the online survey will be analyzed and will constitute prove that the research question are supported or not.

1. How does social media influence the way in which potential tourists actively design, produce and consume their own tourism experience (i.e., the co-creation of the tourism experience)?
2. How are social media used during the different stages of the tourism experience (before, during and after the trip)?
3. How does the co-creation of tourism experience using social media contributes to the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards it and to the tourists' memorability towards the destination and trip?
4. Which type of social media platform (User Generated Content) influences the most the decision-making before and during the tourism experience and the motivation to share the tourism experiences after the trip?
5. What are the main motivations that make a tourist share their experiences and pictures on social media during and after the trip?

To conceptualize the tourism experience co-creation, and construct the previously mentioned research questions, seven hypotheses, derived from the conceptual model used in studies and papers developed by several authors in the tourism field, were taken in consideration, leading to the creation of the conceptual model followed in this dissertation, as seen in Figure 2.

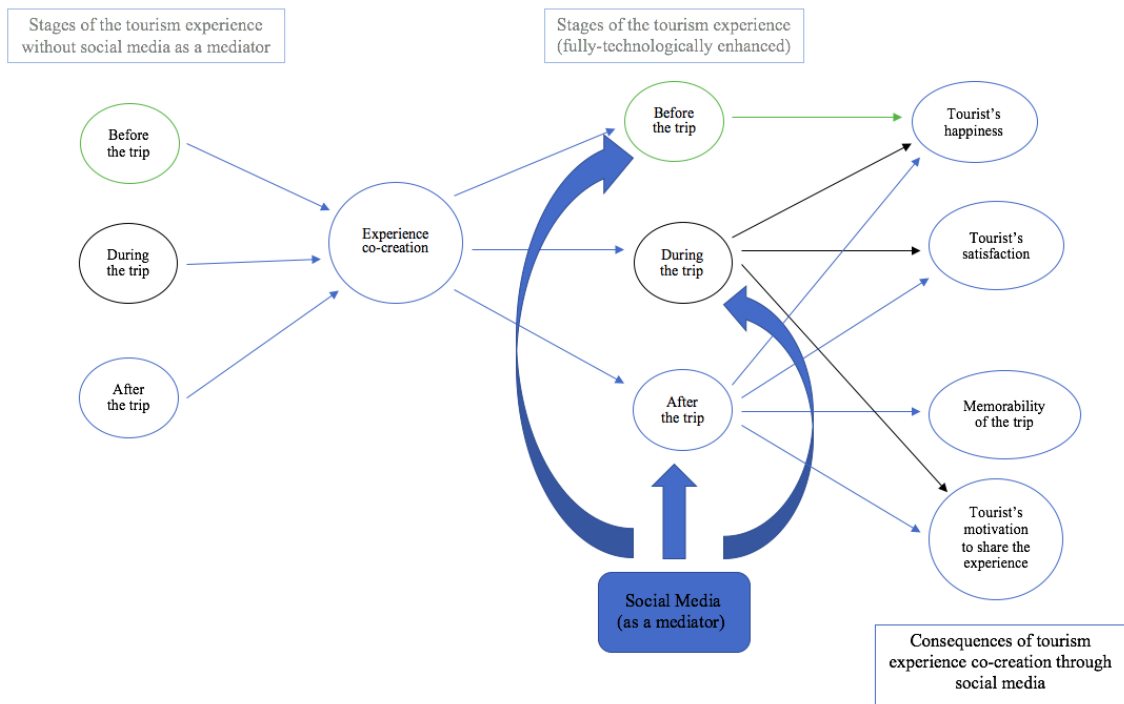


Figure 2 – Conceptual model of the study

Source: Author's elaboration, based on the conceptual model of the study made by Buonincontri *et al.* (2017), and the studies of Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2013a), Fotis (2015) and Berrada (2017)

The studies that influenced the conceptual model used in this dissertation were the ones conducted by Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2013a), Fotis (2015), Buonincontri *et al.* (2017) and Berrada (2017).

The previously mentioned hypotheses are:

H1: For the consumer, tourism must be experiential, i.e., an escapist tourism experience.

H2: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience **before the trip**, i.e., during the planning stage (serving as an important mediator).

H3: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience **during the trip**, i.e., during the tourism stage (serving as an important mediator).

H4: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience **after the trip**, i.e., during the memory stage (serving as an important mediator).

H5: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to share their tourism experience and information, they gathered about the destination, online.

H6: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's satisfaction towards the trip.

H7: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's happiness towards the trip.

H8: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to experience a unique and memorable trip.

For instance:

- The studies and research conducted by Pine and Gilmore (1998), Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012), Mathis *et al.* (2016) and Buonincontri *et al.* (2017) on the topics of experience co-creation and use of ICTs in the context of tourism lead to the formulation of the hypothesis that for the current consumer of the tourist industry, tourism must be experiential, i.e., it must be an escapist experience, caused by his active participation (**H1**). The support that the data might provide might allow the answer to the first research question (How does social media influence the way in which potential tourists actively design, produce and consume their own tourism experience (i.e., the co-creation of the tourism experience)?).
- The studies constructed by Peterson *et al.* (2005), Mathis *et al.* (2016), Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2013a), Berrada (2017) and Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015), on the active participation of tourists during the three phases of the tourism experience (through the use of social media), and the revision that lead to the second research question (How are social media used during the different stages of the tourism experience (before, during and after the trip)?) lead to the

formulation of the hypotheses that the use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience **before the trip**, i.e., during the planning stage (**H2**), **during the trip**, i.e., during the tourism stage (**H3**) and **after the trip**, i.e., during the memory stage (**H4**) (serving as an important mediator). This research question and the fifth hypothesis (**H5**), which formulation will be further address on the final bullet point of this section, are also based on the tourists' attitude towards sharing their experience on social media and how that attitude differs in each stage of it, deriving from studies from Watson *et al.* (2004), Andrades and Dimanche (2014) and Fotis (2015).

- Furthermore, the construct of the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards a trip that they actively planned and designed, adapted from Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012), Brakus, Zarantonello & Schmitt (2013), Tan *et al.* (2014), Peterson *et al.* (2015) and Buonincontri *et al.* (2017), and also of the tourists' memorability towards a unique trip they actively organized, which was based on the studies from Kim (2010), Marschall (2012), Munar and Jacobsen (2014), Andrades and Dimanche (2014) and Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle and Scott (2018), brought upon the formulation of the hypotheses that tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's satisfaction (**H6**) and happiness (**H7**) towards the trip and, also, that social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to experience a unique and memorable trip (**H8**), which will allow the answer of the third research question (How does the co-creation of tourism experience using social media contributes to the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards it and to the tourists' memorability towards the destination and trip?).
- The forth research question (Which type of social media platform (User Generated Content) influences the most the decision-making before and during the tourism experience and the motivation to share the tourism experiences after the trip?) and the second to forth hypotheses (**H2 to H4**) also derive from studies developed by Xiang and Gretzel (2010), Hoffman *et al.* (2013), Munar and Jacobson (2014) and Fotis (2015), on the influence and utility of the different types of social media platforms on the tourist's decision-making throughout the different stages of the tourism experience.
- Finally, the main motivations that make a tourist share the tourism experience on social media (throughout the different stages of the experience), are a construct

based on studies conducted by Sun *et al.* (2012), Wang *et al.* (2014) and Caldito, Dimanche and Ilkevich (2015), on the tourists' attitudes towards sharing their tourism experience with others (specially through social media). These construct and studies lead to the formulation of fifth research question (What are the main motivations that make a tourist share their experiences and pictures on social media during and after the trip?) and of the subsequent hypothesis that social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to share their tourism experience and information, they gathered about the destination, online (**H5**).

All the mentioned research questions and hypotheses were carefully reviewed by an academic expert in tourism and can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 – Measurement model of the study

Construct	Research Questions and Hypotheses	Authors
Experience co-creation and the use of ICTs in the context of tourism	How does social media influence the way in which potential tourists actively design, produce and consume their own tourism experience (i.e., the co-creation of the tourism experience)? H1: For the consumer, tourism must be experiential, i.e., an escapist tourism experience.	Pine and Gilmore (1998) Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) Mathis <i>et al.</i> (2016) Buonincontri <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Active participation of the tourists during the creation and consumption of the tourism experience (through the use of social media)	How are social media used during the different stages of the tourism experience (before, during and after the trip)? H2: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience before the trip , i.e., during the planning stage (serving as an important mediator). H3: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience during the trip , i.e., during the tourism stage (serving as an important mediator). H4: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience after the trip , i.e.,	Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2012) Caldito, Dimanche and Ilkevich (2015) Peterson <i>et al.</i> (2015) Mathis <i>et al.</i> (2016) Berrada (2017)

	during the memory stage (serving as an important mediator).	
Tourist's satisfaction towards the trip	<p>How does the co-creation of tourism experience using social media contributes to the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards it and to the tourists' memorability towards the destination and trip?</p> <p>H6: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's satisfaction towards the trip.</p>	<p>Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) Tan <i>et al.</i> (2014) Buonincontri <i>et al.</i> (2017)</p>
Tourist's happiness towards the trip	<p>How does the co-creation of tourism experience using social media contributes to the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards it and to the tourists' memorability towards the destination and trip?</p> <p>H7: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's happiness towards the trip.</p>	<p>Brakus, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) Peterson <i>et al.</i> (2015) Buonincontri <i>et al.</i> (2017)</p>
Tourist's sharing of the experience with others through the different stages of the tourism experience	<p>How are social media used during the different stages of the tourism experience (before, during and after the trip)?</p> <p>What are the main motivations that make a tourist share their experiences and pictures on social media during and after the trip?</p> <p>H5: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to share their tourism experience and information, they gathered about the destination, online.</p>	<p>Watson <i>et al.</i> (2004) Andrades and Dimanche (2014) Fotis (2015)</p> <p>Sun <i>et al.</i> (2012) Wang <i>et al.</i> (2014) Caldito, Dimanche and Ilkevich (2015)</p>
Tourist's memorability towards a unique trip	<p>How does the co-creation of tourism experience using social media contributes to the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards it and to the tourists' memorability towards the destination and trip?</p>	<p>Kim (2010) Marschall (2012) Munar and Jacobsen (2014) Andrades and Dimanche (2014) Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle and Scott (2018)</p>

	H8: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to experience a unique and memorable trip.	
The influence and utility of the different types of social media platforms on the tourist's decision-making throughout the tourism experience	<p>Which type of social media platform (User Generated Content) influences the most the decision-making before and during the tourism experience and the motivation to share the tourism experiences after the trip?</p> <p>H2: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience before the trip, i.e., during the planning stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>H3: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience during the trip, i.e., during the tourism stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>H4: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience after the trip, i.e., during the memory stage (serving as an important mediator).</p>	Xiang and Gretzel (2010) Hoffman <i>et al.</i> (2013) Munar and Jacobson (2014) Fotis (2015)

Source: Author's elaboration

3.3. Data collection and analysis

This survey was conducted on a sample of tourists, in all the age groups, who regularly travel and that have visited Portugal. Portugal was selected as a destination to be analyzed in this study because of the fact that the city of Lisbon has received, in 2019, the award for leading city break destination, and that Portugal was voted Best Destination in Europe for the third year in a row (Visit Portugal, 2019), which is why it is relevant to better understand how the social media affects the tourists' satisfaction and loyalty towards the destination and the reasons that motivate tourists to share their experiences and pictures. According to an article in the journal *Negócios*, Lisbon is the second European city with a bigger growth in tourism, with an increase of 10,6% between 2009

and 2017, and according to a study made by *Mastercard*, called the Global Destination Cities Index, is one of the top European cities chosen to travel in leisure, due to the gastronomic culture, traditions, monuments, and natural beauty (Murgeira, 2018). The survey was written in English to facilitate the process of collecting precise information from the national and international tourists.

3.4. Findings

3.4.1. Demographic analysis

In total, the online survey was answered by 410 participants, with all age groups being represented and a predominance of the 18 to 24 (38,29%), 25 to 35 (23,17%) and 35 to 44 (11,95%) age group. As seen in Table 7 (found in section A of the appendix), 70,98% of the participants were female, and 29,02% were male. When it comes to the nationalities of the participants, the great majority were Portuguese (81,91%), English (5,87%), German (3,67%), Spanish (2,69%), and Italian (2,20%). When it comes to the occupation of the participants, the great majority were employees (57,46%) and students (22,25%).

3.4.2. Travel behavior analysis

Regarding the travel behavior, 81,42% of the respondents travel, and of those 333 respondents 43,31%, usually, travel 3 to 4 times *per* year. When it comes to the reasons for the trips made throughout the year (Table 8 found in section A of the appendix), the main ones selected by the participants in the survey were sun and sea (leisure) (26,56%), meeting friends/relatives (16,75%), art and culture (19,38%), and nature (12,08%). Approximately 37,68% of the participants travel with friends, 36,61% travel with family members and 16,96% with their significant other. The great majority of the respondents have already visited Portugal (98,39%), being that, for the Portuguese respondents, this concerns travelling to a location in Portugal outside of their usual environment, for business, leisure or other personal purpose.

3.4.3. Behavior towards Social Media analysis

Furthermore, 90,58% of the respondents, that claimed to travel at least one or two times *per* year, confirmed the use of social media platforms. According to the results of the survey (Table 9 found in section A of the appendix), amongst the several types of social media platforms explored in the literature review (Fotis, 2015), the great majority of the participants said to use social networking sites, namely Instagram (28,80%) and Facebook (25,93%). Additionally, TripAdvisor, a Consumer Review Website (Fotis, 2015), is used by 15,04% of the respondents that use social media platforms. Besides, YouTube, a Content Community (Fotis, 2015), is used by 16,62% of the social media users that responded to the questionnaire. Finally, between the social media platforms more followed by the respondents are the blogs (5,01%). When it comes to the time spend by the participants, *per* week, on social media, most respondents claimed to spend more than 12 hours on these platforms. In the survey, information about the way that participants use these platforms was also collected. In fact, 75,61% of the respondents who use social media post photos, videos or other content on Instagram or other Social Networking Sites occasionally (i.e., weekly or on a special occasion, like on a vacation or a meeting with friends), 49,59% occasionally post reviews of restaurants, hotels and places they have visited on TripAdvisor or other Consumer Review Websites (CRW). When it comes to reading reviews of restaurants, hotels and other places they visited on TripAdvisor or other CRW, 51,22% make it occasionally and 43,50% make it frequently (i.e., daily).

3.4.4. Analysis of the process of co-creating a trip through Social Media

Through the analysis of the responses to the survey it was possible to conclude that most people that travel nowadays finds social media platforms helpful when it comes to planning their own trip (93,93%). Furthermore, when asked about the way in which social media platforms can be more helpful, in the context of tourism experiences, the respondents said to use platforms like Instagram, travel blogs or TripAdvisor more when they want more information about the destination (i.e., schedules, costs, best places to visit, eat, etc.) (72,63%), to give feedback to other potential tourists/followers about the places they have visited or experiences that they had (12,63%), and to share the

experiences (photos/stories) that they are living during the trip (11,58%) and after returning from the trip (3,16%).

In fact, between the respondents that frequently travel, about 83,33% have claimed to predominantly plan the trips by themselves, i.e., co-create their tourism experiences, manifesting the desire to be highly involved. Of these 83,33%, 75,10% have assumed that, while planning the trip, they directly interact with tourism service providers (by phone, e-mail, their website, etc.) to reserve a hotel, a museum entry, etc., which means that these participants usually plan and book the trip entirely by themselves.

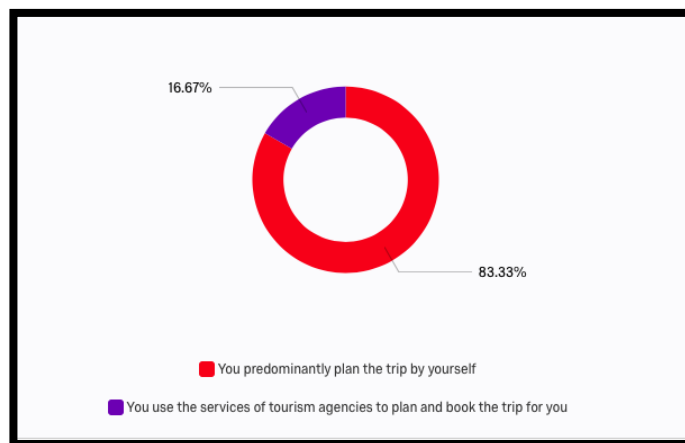


Figure 3 – Findings on the process of creating a travel experience

Source: Author's elaboration

When it comes to the reasons that make tourists prefer to plan a trip by themselves, according to what was seen in previous studies, like Berrada's (2017) and Chathoth *et al.* (2014a), the main ones selected by the respondents were the fact that they have online access to all the information they need to plan the trip, the fact that they feel like they can use their experience and knowledge from former trips to better plan the current one, and the fact that they enjoy being in control of the trip and its itinerary, since they know better than anyone what they like and the rhythm at which they set their days in a trip. The reasons selected as less relevant for the decision of co-creating a trip were the fact that the process tends to be cheaper if they plan they plan the trip and the fact that they trust their skills and abilities to plan it.

On the other hand, regarding the reasons presented by the 16,67% of the respondents that travel and prefer to use the services of tourism agencies to plan and book the trip for them, the main reason was the fact that the process is more convenient that

way, since they do not have to spend time planning the trip, they trust the tourism agent professionals better than their own and do not mind paying for the service.

However, the fact that the great majority of the travelling respondents chose to actively participate in the process of creating a trip shows that most tourists nowadays prefer personalized trips, rather than traditional deals provided by travel agencies, since they prefer unique experiences that go according to their needs and expectations, as seen in the literature (Berrada, 2017).

Thus **Hypothesis 1** is supported by this data, since it shows that for the consumer of the tourism experience, the uniqueness of the personalized trips, only obtained through the active participation of the tourist in the process, is highly important for its success.

Concerning the type of social media platform that the respondents found more reliable when it comes to being a source of information for them to use before and during the trip (Table 18 found in section A of the appendix), most of them chose TripAdvisor (Consumer Review Websites – Fotis, 2015) (49,56%), followed by the travel blogs (24,12%). The least chosen as a reliable source of information was Facebook (Social Networking Site – Fotis, 2015) (5,70%). When asked about what makes a post or review on a social media platform reliable, most participants in the survey claimed that it happens when the user of the platform/generator of travel-related content has previously visited the destination and shows travel and planning experience (71,37%).

3.4.5. Analysis of the use of Social Media in the different stages of the trip

As Caldito, Dimanche and Ilkevich (2015), Mathis *et al.* (2016), and Berrada (2017) showed on their studies, the positive effect that social media, serving as a mediator, has on the process of co-creating a successful tourism experience, is different on the different stages of the trip.

As a matter of fact, when asked in which stage of the trip the respondents, that use social media for

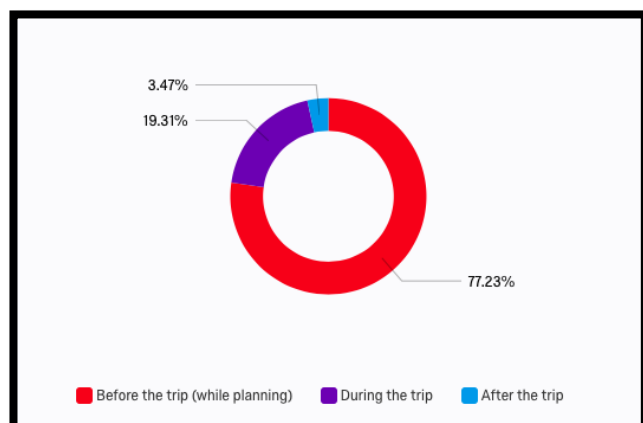


Figure 4 – Findings on the analysis of the use of Social Media in the different stages of the trip

Source: Author's elaboration

travelling reasons (86,59%), use these platforms the most, the great majority answered that they predominantly use social media platforms before the trip (during the planning stage) (77,23%) and during the trip (19,31%).

3.4.5.1. Use of Social Media before the trip

As mentioned before, this is the stage of the trip in which most of the tourists, inquired on the survey, find social media more useful. When questioned about the ways in which social media is helpful in the active creation of a successful and satisfactory trip (in a scale from 1 – strongly disagree - to 5 – strongly agree), the most agreed options were linked to this stage. In fact, as seen in table 3, the most popular ways in which social media platforms may be helpful were when they act as a tool that provides all the information and ideas that a tourist needs about the destination (e.g.: the best attractions and landmarks, more affordable accommodations, etc.) (with a mean of 4,28), when the tourist is discovering new destinations and types of experiences, i.e., before making the decision to make the trip (with a mean of 4,07), when they are trying to limit their selection of destinations, and when they want to make sure they made a good decision selecting the destination by seeing other people’s experiences (the two latter being the less relevant use of social media at the planning stage for the participants, with a mean of 3,68 and 3,67, respectively).

This information supports **Hypothesis 2**, since the social media platforms used during the stage, when the tourist plans the trip, help to gather all the information that the tourist needs to select the destination that matches their current needs and expectations towards the trip, as well as to select and book all the accommodations, restaurants, landmarks and attractions that will make the trip personal, unique and satisfactory, thus **affecting the process of co-creating a trip in a positive way, serving as a mediator.**

Social Media is useful:	Mean	St. Deviation
At the planning stage, when the tourist is looking for information about a certain destination	4,28	0,72
At the planning stage, to search for ideas and reliable information about the destination	4,07	0,70

When the tourist is trying to limit the selection of destinations	3,68	0,84
When the tourist wants to make sure he made a good decision selecting a certain destination	3,67	0,87

Table 3 – Findings on the use of social media before the trip

Source: Author's elaboration

3.4.5.2. Use of Social Media during the trip

The second stage of the tourism experience, i.e., when the trip is taking place, was considered, by the respondents, to be the second stage in which social media can be more useful (19,31%) as a mediator in the process of co-creating a trip. As a matter of fact, according to table 4, the second most relevant way in which these platforms can be useful regard the period when the trip occurs, namely, when the social media platforms are used to get information about schedules, costs and other information about attractions, restaurants, etc., on the spot, i.e., while the trip occurs (with a mean of 4,21, in a scale from 1 – strongly disagree - to 5 – strongly agree). Besides, participants in the survey also pointed out that, during the trip, social media platforms are also very useful to share stories and photos of their tourism experience with friends and other followers (with a mean of 3,75).

Thus, **Hypothesis 3** is supported by this information, since the social media platforms help in the correction of aspects that might have failed during the planning stage of the trip, and in the gathering of information essential on the spot (which is possible thanks to the presence of social media on mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets), hence contributing to a successful tourism experience and **affecting the process of co-creating a trip in a positive way, serving as a mediator.**

Social Media is useful:	Mean	St. Deviation
During the trip, to get information about the local attractions or restaurants	4,21	0,78
During the trip, to share the experience with potential travelers and followers	3,75	1,03

Table 4 – Findings on the use of social media during the trip

Source: Author's elaboration

3.4.5.3. Use of Social Media after the trip

The third and later stage of the tourism experience, i.e., the stage after the trip, is the stage in which the respondents consider social media platforms to be less relevant as mediators in the process of co-creation (3,47%). In fact, as seen in table 5, the ways in which these platforms can be helpful in the context of tourism are considered to be less relevant, namely, the use of social media after the trip, to share the experience with potential travelers and friends (with a mean of 3,55, in a scale from 1 – strongly disagree - to 5 – strongly agree) and to compare the tourist’s trip to other travelers’ ones (with a mean of 2,80).

Hence, **Hypothesis 4** is partially supported, since on one hand social media is still considered to be helpful in the process of co-creating a tourism experience, since it generates content and information for other potential tourists to the same destination (when the tourists share their stories and photos about the trip), but on the other hand these platforms only **partially contribute to the success of the current trip** by reinforcing the good memories and images that the tourists has about the destination (when they compare their experiences to others’ ones on social media or when they relieve the experience by sharing it).

Social Media is useful:	Mean	St. Deviation
After the tourism experience, to share the experience with potential travelers and friends	3,55	0,93
After the trip, to compare the experience with other travelers’ ones	2,80	1,03

Table 5 – Findings on the use of social media after the trip

Source: Author’s elaboration

3.4.6. Consequences of using Social Media as a mediator in tourism experience co-creation

3.4.6.1. Motivations to share the tourism experience on Social Media

In order for tourists to co-create their own tourism experiences, the information about the trip and the destination that can be found on social media platforms, like TripAdvisor, travel blogs or Instagram, is key (Berrada, 2017). That key aspect depends

largely on the level of knowledge shared by the tourists, which depends on social or personal motivations (Sun *et al.*, 2012). According to data, most of the word-of-mouth related to the tourism experience is made online, i.e., by posting photos and stories on social media (53,02%), followed by word-of-mouth generated by talking in person (46,98%).

When asked on how their motivation to create content online varies while they are travelling, the great majority of the respondents (56,02%) claimed to post (or visit) Instagram, TripAdvisor and/or other types of social media more often than on their daily routine (Table 19 found in section A of the appendix).

Regarding the main motivations to post photos or stories about their trips on social media platforms, the most popular reasons are in line with the six types of motivations that lead to self-expression of tourists on social media presented in a study developed by Fotis (2015). Indeed, the most agreed reason was the use of social media to reflect on the trip (with a mean of 3,82, on a scale from 1 – strongly disagree – to 5 – strongly agree, as seen in Table 20 found in section A of the appendix) and relieve the good memories made on a unique and memorable trip (with a mean of 4,06), by sharing pictures and stories, even after some time as passed, as a personal and intrinsic motivation (Sun *et al.*, 2012; Wang, Li, Li & Peng, 2014). Furthermore, a large portion of the respondents post on social media platforms:

- To keep in touch with friends and relatives (with a mean of 3,97), i.e., to show-off the happy moments to their followers who take pleasure in knowing what they are doing on the trip (Fotis, 2015);
- Because the process is convenient, social media is easily accessible and helps document the travel experience through the storage of important content (with a mean of 4,85);
- When the tourists liked the service on a certain local accommodation, restaurant, museum, etc. and wish to give them visibility (with a mean of 3,71) and when they want to share practical information with other potential travelers (thus contributing to their successful tourism experience co-creation and providing “solutions” to them through travel-related content) (with a mean of 3,67), which are social motivations since they are linked to the provision of advice, a sense of belonging, etc. (Sun *et al.*, 2012), and personal and extrinsic (Wang, Li, Li & Peng, 2014), since they share to gain a compensation, a compliment or a good reputation;

- Because it is something that they enjoy and that satisfies them (with a mean of 3,87) and to express themselves creatively (with a mean of 3,43), i.e., personal and intrinsic (altruistic) motivations (Wang, Li, Li & Peng, 2014).

The more disagreed reasons to post on social media are because they might get a reward for the post from a social media page or from the tourism service providers (with a mean of 2,21), to get more followers or make more money (with a mean of 2,27), to influence the way in which other people think (with a mean of 2,72), to be acknowledge by others socially (with a mean of 2,82), and to express negative feelings about an experience (with a mean of 3,06). This shows that social media platforms are mainly altruistic, i.e., to keep in touch with others and store important memories, and social, since tourists seek to share useful information to help the service providers and other potential tourists, making it less important the gain of a reward or the gain of social recognition.

To sum up, **Hypothesis 5** is supported by this data, since it shows that a great majority of travelers share their experiences and stories about the trip on social media because it is a convenient and accessible way to relieve and store memories and with social (to give recommendations and validate the tourism service providers) and personal (because it is something that satisfies the tourists and because of the show-off factor) motivations, thus creating travel-related content that might provide the needed information for another potential tourist that is planning a trip to the same destination.

3.4.6.2. Satisfaction towards the trip

One of the main objectives of the current study were to analyze if the co-creation of a tourism experience using social media as a mediator throughout the different stages of trip increases the satisfaction towards this experience and why.

When questioned if the respondents felt that their satisfaction towards the tourism experiences increased with their

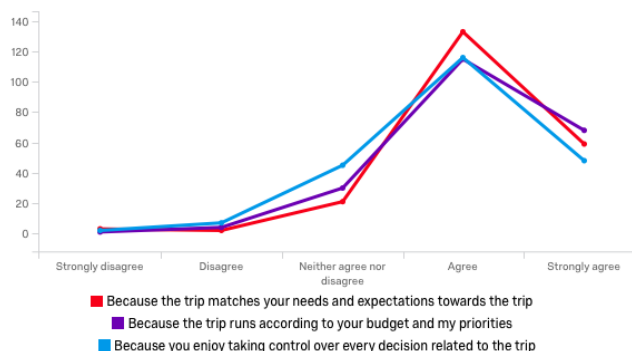


Figure 5 – Findings on the main reasons for satisfaction towards the trip

Source: Author’s elaboration

active involvement, with social media platforms as mediators, in the planning, booking and consumption of the trip, 93,67% answered affirmatively. Furthermore, concerning the main reasons for this was the fact that the trips co-created by the participants ran according to their budget and priorities (with a mean of 4,12, on a scale from 1 – strongly disagree – to 5 – strongly agree, as seen in Table 10 found in section A of the appendix) and matched their needs and expectations (almost perfectly) towards the trip (with a mean of 4,11), which is according to the studies of Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015). Besides, most respondents agreed that the level of satisfaction towards the trip increased because they enjoyed taking control over every decision related to the trip (i.e., what to visit, what to eat, etc.) (with a mean of 3,92).

To sum up, the previously mentioned data retrieved from the surveys supports **Hypothesis 6**, since the majority of the respondents agreed that the information and other aspects that make social media an important mediator in the co-creation of a trip lead to an almost perfect match between what they were expecting towards the trip and what actually happened, because they were in control of every decision and already knew what they were going to find (due to the active involvement in the planning), i.e., to an **increase in the level of satisfaction towards the trip**.

3.4.6.3. Happiness towards the trip

One other goal of the current dissertation was the study on how the co-creation of a tourism experience, using social media as a mediator, can influence the happiness that a tourist feels towards the trip, which affects its perceived value, the image of the destination and willingness to return (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

Most of the participants on the survey, who predominantly plan the trips by themselves, responded positively when asked if they felt that the happiness, i.e., emotional

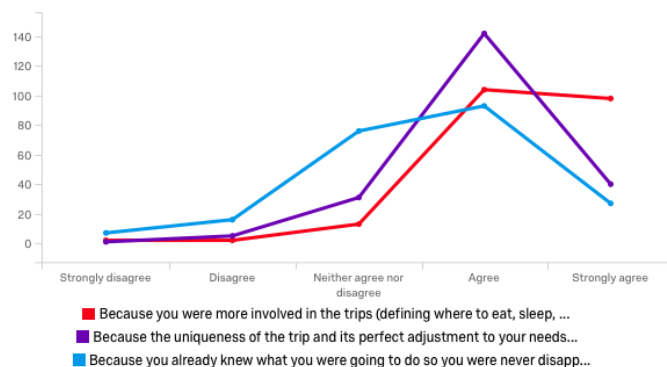


Figure 6 – Findings on the main reasons for happiness towards the trip

Source: Author's elaboration

connection that determines how a tourist feels about the trip (Hellen, 2010), increased with the active participation in the process of creating the trip (92,53%).

The great majority of the previously mentioned respondents highly agreed that the main reason why this occurs is because they were more involved in the trip since the beginning (defining where to eat, sleep, etc.) thus creating more anticipation and excitement (with a mean of 4,34, on a scale from 1 – strongly disagree – to 5 – strongly agree, as seen in Table 11 found in section A of the appendix). In addition, the participants on the survey agreed that the happiness towards the trip increases because the uniqueness of the trip and its almost perfect adjustment to their needs made it memorable (with a mean of 3,98) and because they already knew what they were going to do so they were never disappointed and their expectations were constantly met (with a mean of 3,53), leading to a series of satisfactory experiences that generate a valuable and memorable trip. The fact that the later was the less agreed reason means that even though the active participation leads to a much bigger chance of expectations being met, unexpected things may happen and plans may fail.

Thus, **Hypothesis 7** is sustained by this data since it shows that a most of the tourists that co-create their tourism experiences, using social media platforms as mediators in the process, felt happiness and excitement towards the trip even before it started, i.e., during the planning stage, and that the series of satisfactory experiences they experienced, which came from an almost perfect adjustment to their needs, made the trip unique, meaning that the process (co-creation) and the mediator (social media) **increase the happiness the tourists feel towards the trip**, throughout the different stages.

3.4.6.4. Memorability and uniqueness of the trip

When it comes to the consequences of co-creation of tourism experiences, using social media platforms as mediators, the last to be analyzed in this thesis is the memorability and uniqueness of a trip, concepts essential for the perceived value of the trip and the willingness to return to the destination and recommend it to others (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

The data collected from the answers to the survey showed that 95,24% of the respondents, who plan most of their trips by themselves, with the help of information and content retrieved from social media platforms, believe that co-creating their own tourism experiences contributes to a more memorable and unique experience.

The main reason that justifies this consequence, for the respondents, is the fact that, thanks to the high level of involvement from planning the trip and the high access to information and other content about the destination via social media platforms, they were looking forward to the trip even before it started, making it unique from the beginning (with a mean of 4,22, on a scale from 1 – strongly disagree – to 5 – strongly agree, as seen in Table 12 found in section A of the appendix). Additionally, the participants agreed that the memorability also comes from the fact that they were so happy with the trip that they remember several sensations and unique moments (with a mean of 4,08), i.e., a greater level of happiness towards the trip leads to a more memorable and unique one. Lastly, the respondents agreed that the memorability and uniqueness derives from the fact that they enjoyed every (or almost) moment of the trip since it matched their taste and expectations (with a mean of 3,93), i.e., a greater level of satisfaction towards the trip leads to a more memorable and unique one.

Besides, in the analysis of the motivations to share the experience on social media, it was shown that most respondents agreed that social media is an accessible tool to relive and store important content (like photos or stories) from a unique trip, thus contributing to its memorability, even after some time has passed after the trip (with a mean of 4,06).

In conclusion, **Hypothesis 8** is supported, since the data collected and previously analyzed shows that a greater level of happiness and satisfaction leads to a more memorable and unique trip and, and as Hypothesis 6 and 7 were previously were supported, it is safe to say that the co-creation of a tourism experience, using social media platforms as mediators, **make it more likely for tourists to experience more memorable and unique trip** (as it also contributes to a higher level of happiness and satisfaction).

A summary of the findings of the study can be found in Table 6.

Table 6 – Summary of the findings of the study

Topics	Findings
Tourism as a co-created experience	<p>H1: For the consumer, tourism must be experiential, i.e., an escapist tourism experience.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, since it shows that for the consumer of the tourism experience, the uniqueness of the personalized trips, only obtained through the active participation of the tourist in the process, is highly important for its success.</p>
Planning stage and impact of social media as mediator	<p>H2: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience before the trip, i.e., during the planning stage (serving as an important mediator).</p>

	<p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, as the social media platforms used during the stage, when the tourist plans the trip, help to gather all the information that the tourist needs to select the destination that matches their current needs and expectations towards the trip, as well as to select and book all the accommodations, restaurants, landmarks and attractions that will make the trip personal, unique and satisfactory, thus affecting the process of co-creating a trip in a positive way, serving as a mediator.</p>
<p>Stage during the trip and impact of social media as mediator</p>	<p>H3: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience during the trip, i.e., during the tourism stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, since the social media platforms help in the correction of aspects that might have failed during the planning stage of the trip, and in the gathering of information essential on the spot (which is possible thanks to the presence of social media on mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets), hence contributing to a successful tourism experience and affecting the process of co-creating a trip in a positive way, serving as a mediator.</p>
<p>Stage after the trip and impact of social media as mediator</p>	<p>H4: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience after the trip, i.e., during the memory stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>This Hypothesis was partially supported by the findings, since on one hand social media is still considered to be helpful in the process of co-creating a tourism experience, since it generates content and information for other potential tourists to the same destination (when the tourists share their stories and photos about the trip), but on the other hand these platforms only partially contribute to the success of the current trip by reinforcing the good memories and images that the tourists has about the destination (when they compare their experiences to others' ones on social media or when they relieve the experience by sharing it).</p>
<p>Motivation to share the travel experience</p>	<p>H5: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to share their tourism experience and information, they gathered about the destination, online.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, since it shows that a great majority of travelers share their experiences and stories about the trip on social media because it is a convenient and accessible way to relieve and store memories and with social (to give recommendations and validate the tourism service providers) and personal (because it is something that satisfies the tourists and because of the show-off factor) motivations, thus creating travel-related content that might provide the needed information for another potential tourist that is planning a trip to the same destination.</p>
<p>Satisfaction towards the trip</p>	<p>H6: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's satisfaction towards the trip.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, as the majority of the respondents agreed that the information and other aspects that make social media an important mediator in the co-creation of a trip lead to an almost perfect match between what they were expecting towards the trip and what actually happened, because they were in control of every decision and already knew what they were going to find (due to the active involvement in the planning), i.e., to an increase in the level of satisfaction towards the trip.</p>
<p>Happiness towards the trip</p>	<p>H7: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's happiness towards the trip.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, as it shows that a most of the tourists that co-create their tourism experiences, using social media platforms as mediators in the process, felt happiness and excitement towards the trip even before it started, i.e., during the planning stage, and that the series of satisfactory experiences they experienced, which came from an almost perfect adjustment to their needs, made the trip unique, meaning that the process (co-creation) and the mediator (social media)</p>

	increase the happiness the tourists feel towards the trip, throughout the different stages.
Memorability and uniqueness of the trip	<p>H8: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to experience a unique and memorable trip.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, since the data collected shows that a greater level of happiness and satisfaction leads to a more memorable and unique trip and, and as Hypothesis 6 and 7 were previously were supported, it is safe to say that the co-creation of a tourism experience, using social media platforms as mediators, make it more likely for tourists to experience more memorable and unique trip (as it also contributes to a higher level of happiness and satisfaction).</p>

Source: Author's elaboration

3.4.7. Types of Social Media platforms

As mentioned in the literature review, there are different types of social media that positively affect the co-creation of a tourism experience, each type influencing the decision-making throughout the process in a different way (Fotis, 2015).

On this study, the following social media platforms were analyzed in the context of tourism: TripAdvisor (Consumer Review Website), Instagram (Social Networking Site), a travel blog, YouTube (Content Communities Website) and Facebook (Social Networking Site).

When it comes to **TripAdvisor** (Table 14 found in section A of the appendix), most respondents agreed that it is most useful as a platform that provides trustworthy information, though posts and reviews from other travelers, that they need to plan the trip to the chosen destination (what to eat, where to sleep, what to visit, costs, etc.) (with a mean of 4,01, on a scale from 1 – strongly disagree – to 5 – strongly agree). According to the participants, it also helps them confirm that they made a good choice in terms of destination (with a mean of 3,61). This means that this platform is more often used during the planning stage and, sometimes, during the trip (when looking for a restaurant nearby, for example).

Furthermore, **Instagram** (Table 13 found in section A of the appendix) was considered by most respondents to be the social media platform that inspires them the most to find a new destination and tourism experience (with a mean of 3,66), through the photos of friends, influencers, etc. found in the platform. Besides, it motivates the tourists to post photos to show-off to their followers and keep in touch with friends (with a mean of 4,30). That being said, it is used throughout the different stages of the trip.

Travel blogs (Table 15 found in section A of the appendix) were considered to be a very good source of information that is necessary to plan the trip to the chosen destination (with a mean of 4,06), a good source of inspiration to find a new destination (with a mean of 3,80) and a good way to confirm that the chosen destination was a good selection (with a mean of 3,68). Thus, it is safe to assume that travel blogs are mostly used during the planning stage, as a source of information for the best places to visit, to eat and sleep during the stay at the destination.

YouTube (Table 16 found in section A of the appendix), more exactly, its travel-related channels, are mainly seen as good source of inspiration (with a mean of 3,76) to find a new destination and of the required information to plan the trip to a certain destination (with a mean of 3,77), hence being also mainly used before the trip.

Facebook (Table 17 found in section A of the appendix) was the platform considered to be the least relevant as a mediator for the co-creation of a tourism experience. In fact, the most agreed ways in which respondents consider Facebook to be useful were as a motivator to post photos to show-off or keep in touch with friends (with a mean of 3,62) and to inspire them to find a new destination (with a mean of 3,18).

Chapter IV – Conclusions

4.1. Conclusions

This research aimed to explore the way in which co-creation and social media affect a tourism experience throughout its different stages, i.e., how these concepts enhanced the value created through the experience. When it comes to the main antecedents of the process the studied concepts were the effects of social media, as a mediator in the process of co-creating a trip, and how it differs in each stage of it (before, during and after). Furthermore, regarding the consequences of co-creating a trip through social media, the studied concepts were the tourist's happiness, satisfaction, and motivations to share the experience on social media, as well as the memorability and uniqueness of the tourism experience. The findings show that the positive effect that the active participation that the tourist has on the process of planning, designing and consuming a trip is highly enhanced by the use of social media as a mediator in the process. Additionally, the study highlights the fact that there are significant differences in the way social media platforms are used in the different stages of the co-creation of a

tourism experience (even though some similarities were also showcased) and the way in which different types of social media contribute to a successful experience. One other fact highlighted by the research was how much the satisfaction towards the trip increases once the tourist is involved (by using social media platforms) in the process of co-creation, even before he has lived the experience, which causes an increase in the tourist's happiness (since it comes from a succession of satisfactory experiences). Hence, this research contributes to literature by delivering detailed insights into how different types of social media platforms can influence the process of co-creating a tourism experience, throughout its different stages.

Moreover, all the eight-proposed hypothesis were supported, some more than others, by the analysis of the results, provided by the online survey conducted on this study.

Firstly, the findings of the study showed that, for most of the tourists, a trip is a highly experiential thing (thus supporting Hypothesis 1), since its success and their satisfaction towards it depends on how unique and memorable the tourism experience was. Indeed, most of the participants on the survey claimed to prefer to be independent and in control of their choices throughout the trip, since they consider this to be the only way to a personalized tourism experience. Furthermore, they affirmed that the involvement that provides control over the process is highly facilitated by social media platforms since, when it comes to the **design and production of the trip**, they provide all the information that the tourist needs during this stage of the experience and a platform to establish a connection between them and the tourism service providers, supporting previous studies (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015; Mathis *et al.*, 2016 and Berrada, 2017) The study showed that this happens because the control and involvement that tourist have on the trip, provided by social media that acts as a mediator in the process, leads to a customized trip, in a way that it is planned according to their needs and expectations, i.e., they visit what they like, at the pace they enjoy and know exactly what to expect, leading to less disappointment and a greater happiness (value created), making this the way in which social media platforms affect the **consumption of the travel experience**.

Then, as for how social media is used through the different stages of the trip, the research showed that:

- The planning stage (i.e., **before the trip**) is the phase where social media platforms have a greater influence on the success of the tourism experience. In

fact, during this stage the platforms act as a tool that provides all the information, about the chosen destination, needed to plan and design the trip, including which landmarks, monuments and museums to see, the best restaurants to eat and accommodations to sleep, etc. Besides, they help the tourist when it comes to the selection of the next destination, the confirmation that they made a good decision and the provision of a platform where they can get in touch with tourism service providers (e.g., when making a reservation at a hotel). The fact that that tourists are involved in the planning generates excitement before the trip, since they are aware of what they are going to experience.

- **During the trip**, the convenient and easy access to social media, wherever the tourist is, due to mobile technology, allows the tourist to check information about local restaurants, museums, etc. whenever a part of the plan fails or they need additional information on the spot. Besides, most tourists that participated on the survey claimed that social media platforms are very useful during the trip when they desire to share the experience with friends and other followers.
- The stage **after the trip** was considered to be the least relevant as a mediator in the process of co-creating a travel experience. Nevertheless, tourists consider these platforms to be very important when it comes to being a convenient way to store and relive important memories of the trip and to share stories and photos with others.

Concerning the different types of social media platforms, as seen in studies like Fotis's (2015), the research shows that the ones that influence the decision-making before and during the trip, i.e., when it comes to the design and consumption of the experience, were the **Social Networking Sites** (like Instagram), mainly when it comes to providing inspiration for the next destination, the **Consumer Review Websites** (like TripAdvisor) and **Travel Blogs**, predominantly as sources of the required information to properly design a customized and unique trip. In this study, the results revealed that TripAdvisor and other Consumer Review Websites, are the most reliable sources of information, for travelling reasons, since the reviews and the posts are made by users of the platform/generator of travel-related content that have previously visited the destination and shows travel and planning experience. Regarding the type of social media platforms that influence the sharing of the tourism experience (after the trip) the most are the Social Networking Sites (like Instagram and Facebook), because of the show-off factor and the social norm, i.e., the fact that the users of these platforms are expected to post these

experiences (Fotis, 2015). This means that, as proposed in Hypothesis 2 to 4, social media affect the different stages of the process of co-creating a trip.

The next hypothesis proposed that a trip designed, planned and consumed by the tourists themselves, with social media platforms as mediators throughout the process, lead to an increase in the tourists' satisfaction, happiness and willingness to share the experience on social media, as well as an increase in the memorability and uniqueness of the trip. Indeed, the great majority of tourists who design their own trips feel a significant increase in the level of satisfaction towards the travel experience, mostly because the experience that they planned and consumed ran according to their established budget and their priorities when visiting a certain destination. This happens because they took control over every decision related to the trip, leading to a perfect (or almost) perfect match to their personal needs, tastes and expectations, i.e., a unique and customized trip. Besides, satisfaction is a concept defined as a successful match between expectations and the perception of what occurred on the experience (Giese & Cote, 2000), thus, if through the augmented access to information and of control over the decision-making process provided by tourism experience co-creation, using social media, the tourists already know what is going to happen, the probabilities of a mismatch between what they are expecting and what they experience is significantly lower (leading to a significantly increased satisfaction).

Furthermore, when it comes to the level of happiness, the findings showed that this also increases substantially with the co-creation of a trip using social media as a mediator in the process. In fact, most of the tourists, who are actively involved in the creation of their trip, said that the growth in the happiness they feel towards the travel experience happens because they already knew what they were going to do and see, so they were never (or almost never) disappointed and their expectation were met, which happens because happiness is the predisposition to live several satisfactory experiences (Helen, 2010). Besides, the fact that the tourists were more involved in the trip since the beginning (defining where to eat, sleep, etc.) generates more anticipation and excitement, which increases the level of happiness towards the trip. Furthermore, the uniqueness of the trip and its perfect adjustment to the tourist's needs made it memorable, leading to a greater sense of happiness towards it, which is in line with the studies of Carter & Gilovich (2010) and Howell *et al.* (2012).

Moreover, the memorability towards the trip also increases with co-creation and the use of social media platforms, which is essential, since a memorable trip lead to a

positive image about the destination and a higher willingness to return and to recommend it to others (Bigné *et al.*, 2001, Chen & Tsai, 2007). The findings show that this occurs predominantly because of the excitement and anticipation that being involved in the creation of the tourists' own trips generates, even before the trip started, and because the tourists felt so happy with the trip that they remember several sensations and unique moments. Likewise, the set of satisfactory experiences that they lived lead to match to their needs and tastes, generating a unique character to the trip.

About the motivations to share the tourism experience, social media makes it more likely because of the convenience of sharing photos and stories through these platforms, which are easy to access, according to the findings, which are in line with the main motivation to share presented by Fotis (2015). Furthermore, the main motivations that make tourists share their experiences and pictures on social media during and after the trip shown on this research are in line with the studies of Sun *et al.* (2012) and Wang, Li, Li and Peng (2014), i.e., they are either social or personal (intrinsic or extrinsic). Indeed, the main motivations found on the study were: the desire to keep in touch with friends and family (personal and extrinsic motivation), when they want to give visibility to good tourism providers and share practical information with other potential tourists (social motivation), and because it is something that they enjoy and that satisfies them, since it allows them to express themselves and to store memories (personal and intrinsic motivation).

It is important to highlight that this increase in the level of motivation to share photos, reviews and stories about the travel experience is crucial for the success of the co-creation of tourism experiences. This is due to the fact that, it is through the travel-related content created in social media pages, like TripAdvisor, Instagram, travel blogs, etc., that tourists gather the inspiration and information they need to actively design and plan their own trip. Indeed, when a tourist posts a picture he took in front of Fontana di Trevi, for example, on Instagram or Facebook he might inspire a certain follower that is looking for ideas for a destination for his next trip, or when a tourist posts a review on TripAdvisor about a certain hotel or restaurant he attended in Paris, he might help a future tourist to that destination that is choosing is accommodation there for the duration of the trip, or that is looking for the best or most affordable place to dine. To sum up, the process of co-creating a travel experience creates a cycle that contributes to its success, as when a tourist, who actively plans his trips, is looking for inspiration for the next destination or information that he needs to plan the trip he looks for it on social media pages, like

Instagram, TripAdvisor or a travel blog. Later, once he is consuming the travel experience, that fact that his expectations and personal needs are met by what he experiences (since he had control over the decisions made while planning the trip), leads to a greater level of satisfaction and happiness, like the findings showed, which conducts to a positive image about the destination, a higher perception of value created and a higher willingness to return, recommend the destination to friends and family (as seen in studies of Bigné *et al.* (2001) and Chen and Tsai (2007)) and to share the stories, photos and reviews, during and after the travel experience, about what was experienced during the trip. Finally, all the travel-related content generated by that tourist will be seen by another potential tourist who is looking for information about the destination to better plan and design his own future trip.

In conclusion, Portugal is becoming a large emerging tourist market, since Portugal was voted Best Destination in the Europe for the third year in a row (Visit Portugal, 2019). Indeed, there is a great potential for growth, as between January and May of 2019, the number of guests in Portugal has increased by 6,6% and the revenues, from the tourism industry in Portugal, by 5,9% (Turismo de Portugal, 2019). That being said, this research is valuable because of the important role that social media platforms and co-creation have on the satisfaction and happiness towards the trips, the motivation to share the experience and the uniqueness of the experience, which lead to a positive image and a higher willingness to return and recommend the destination to friends and family (Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007). This makes it significant for Portuguese tourism service providers, marketers and tourism department to better understand how the social media affects the tourists' satisfaction and loyalty towards the destination. Furthermore, the analysis of the reasons that motivate tourists to share their experiences and pictures, thus influencing their friends and relatives to become potential tourists, and the way in which Portugal and local tourism is being represented on social media pages is also crucial.

4.2. Academic implications

This study supports the previous research that each type of social media platform positively influences the success of a co-created travel experience, through its different stages, and leads to the satisfaction and happiness that gives the perception of value created, and also leads to the generation of travel-related content on social media, which perpetuates the cycle that allows the co-creation of this kind of experience (e.g., Sun *et*

al., 2012; Tan *et al.* (2014); Caldito, Dimanche, & Ilkevich, 2015; Fotis, 2015; Buoincontri *et al.*, 2017; Berrada, 2017).

As demonstrated, different social media platforms have distinctive impacts on the process of co-creating a trip, and are more relevant in some stages than others. Since there is a lack of research connecting the different types of social media and the way they are used before, during and after the trip, the current findings give empirical support for the study concerning which stage and social media affects the success of the active planning of the trip the most and which one influences the motivation to share the experience the most.

Furthermore, the present research empirically supports the theoretical theory of Tourism Consumption System (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002), in a way that it showed that the travel-related variables are interdependent, as they can affect other variables to a certain degree. For example, the level of satisfaction towards the trip influences the level of happiness, which impacts the image of the destination and the motivation to share the experience with friends, family and other followers.

The need to attend and analyze the travel-related variables is very important since it strongly affect the willingness to return to a destination, recommend it and share stories and photos about the travel experience. These variables are key to the continuous success of the co-creation process in the tourism market and the continuous generation of travel-related content (which fuels the process by providing information that allows the tourists to actively plan their trips).

4.3. Managerial implications

The research conducted on this dissertation proved that, nowadays, tourism service providers must keep track of the trends that influence the tourism market the most, being the technological ones the most important and that change at a faster pace, like the use of social media as a mediator that leads to a better outcome in the co-creation of a tourism experience, as demonstrated on the current study. So, it is crucial to know how the latest digital trends influence the current tourists and their travel behaviors, from the design to the consumption of the tourism experience. Furthermore, the digital channels, i.e., the social media platforms should be used to draw the attention of potential tourists and engage them, the content generated by the tourists that visit the destination should by

monitored and assure that the platforms allow them to actively plan a trip that fulfills their needs and expectations, thus generating a satisfying level of travel quality.

As seen in this study, different types of social media platforms affect the different stages of the trip in a different way, and those differences are worthy of attention. For instance, in the planning stage of the trip, when tourists are searching for inspiration for the next destination, airlines and travel companies, like TAP, should post inspirational photos and videos of the destinations to which they fly on their Instagram page (since the study showed that this is one of the platforms where tourists find more inspiration), as a part of their communication campaign, to generation travel motivation amongst potential customers, to put emphasis on the possibility of and hedonic and escapist experience.

When it comes to the platforms used as a source of inspiration, online information proved to be crucial and TripAdvisor demonstrated to be one of the most used during the planning stage. This means that restaurants and hotels should assure their presence on the platform, monitor the reviews written on the page about their services, thus adjusting the service to the tourists' needs and expectations, and establish a partnership with the platform in order to get highlighted on the page or be a part of a promotional activity or recommended tour (touristic offering). This is important because current tourists, who create their trips, give a lot of importance to others' reviews and evaluations. The pictures and videos posted under the hashtag (#) of the name of the city or country (i.e., #Rome) should also be monitored in social media pages, like Instagram, Travel blogs or Facebook, to have a perception of quality of the destination image on the tourists' mind, maintain a good connection between tourists and destination and service providers, and guarantee that tourists are disseminating a positive word-of-mouth. In conclusion, tourism service providers and marketers must be attentive when it comes to the message propagation on the advantageous online channels used by the target customers and monitor it to develop the quality of the tourists' tourism experience and the perceived image.

Furthermore, since the tourism industry is growing at a fast pace and tourists are always searching for innovations and new experiences, tourism service providers, like hotels or other accommodations, should develop diverse activities, like city sightseeing and adventure activities (like surfing or biking), by establishing partnerships with local providers of such services. This will allow an increased perception of quality and a greater chance of posting good reviews or photos online, thus generating positive word-of-mouth.

4.4. Limitations and Future research

Even though this study delivers insights about the way in which co-creation and social media platforms (as mediators in the process) positively influence the tourism experience and its consequences, like happiness and satisfaction towards the trip, the research also demonstrates some limitations that need to be considered and could be enhanced in future studies.

For instance, when it comes to the nationality of the respondents of the survey used in this study, even though there were several different ones amongst them, the great majority of the participants are Portuguese (81,91%), which calls for a more in-depth analysis of the travel-related variables studied for international tourists. Besides, the studied stages of tourism experience co-creation could be reduced to one or two, namely to the planning stage and during the trip, since these are the phases more relevant for the success of the process, and this reduction could lead to a more specific and insightful analysis of the connection between co-creation and social media platforms (as mediators) at these stages, instead of being too general.

When it comes to the chosen methodology, since this a behavioral and exploratory study, it could be complemented with a qualitative analysis, since this approach has proven to be useful when analyzing tourist behaviors (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002; Hung & Petrick, 2012). This comes from the fact that the in-depth interviews used in this approach could fulfil the limitations of the current research, as the interviews provide meaningful and distinct information, through direct observation of the consumers and their thoughts. Hence, an approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods (mixed approach) may provide enhanced leverage and make the study more precise and less generalized.

Moreover, Generation Z is coming of age, and technology, such as social media platforms, plays an even bigger role in their daily routine, making it imperative for the tourism industry to study them and how social media influences them and the travel decisions they will make, analyzing how they need to adapt their strategies and presence on the social media (Cohen *et al.*, 2014). For instance, online influencers, that create online content, are gaining importance and this generations listens to what they have to say, so maybe a partnership with them, recommending it to the followers, might be a good approach for the tourism department and tourism service providers. Also, since customers in general are currently more complex, there is a need to associate this research with a

study of the current trends (in terms of behaviors, preferences and attitudes) and detect possible changes to said trends.

Finally, this research studies the process of co-creation of tourism experiences, using social media platforms, in a general way, despite the fact that the respondents, selected for the study, have already visited Portugal, thus having used this process of co-creation having this country as a destination. So, in future studies might there could be a better and more detailed analysis on how Portuguese cities are represented on several social media platforms, how Portuguese tourism service providers (hotels, restaurants, etc.) are being reviewed online, i.e., if the online word-of-mouth about Portuguese cities, generated on social media is being seen by future potential tourists and if it needs to be better managed.

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Appendix

A) Tables

Table 1 – Summary of the key concepts analyzed in the Literature Review

Tourism Context	
Consumer Behavior	<p>Mathieson & Wall (1982); Smallman & Moore (2010); Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015)</p> <p>The tourism experience can be portrayed as a “<i>sequential process which starts when tourists feel the desire or need for travel, and which is followed by an information quest, an evaluation of that information and finally the travel decision.</i>” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015, p.107).</p> <p>The decision-making process in the tourism context is more complex and sophisticated, it includes not only the planned and thought process in all decisions made before the trip but also the unplanned ones made before and during the trip and have a higher level of uncertainty and risk.</p> <p>Tourists are more involved in the process.</p>
	<p>Morgan & Pritchard (2012)</p> <p>Tourism experiences are more heterogeneous, intangible, inseparable and not perishable.</p>
	<p>Martin & Woodside (2012)</p> <p>Steps to the travel decision-making process: the detection of the need and desire to travel, the planning that occurs before the trip, the experiences that happen at the destination and, finally, the evaluation of the trip at the post-travel stage and the future intentions that come with it.</p> <p>This key concept might not be entirely rational.</p>
	<p>Fodness & Murray (1999)</p>

Information sources can be:

External sources, i.e., online word-of-mouth, books and advertisement, or **internal sources**, i.e., the tourist's knowledge and memories from former experiences and past information explorations, about the same or a comparable destination.

Choi et al. (2012)

The information search is crucial to decrease the perceived uncertainty, risks and the cognitive dissonance.

After the destination choice and the initial phase, the post-purchase search of information is more meticulous and specific to the chosen destination. For example, searching information about local events, museums, weather, food, etc.

Chen & Tsai (2007)

A **positive behavioral intention** in the tourism context is connected to the desire to return to the same place, recommend it to potential tourists and state optimistic things about the destination, in person and online.

Solomon (2015); Li & Cai (2012)

The tourist perception on a travel experience is strongly affected by the five basic senses, which are sight, smells, taste, touch, and hearing.

Perception is also influenced by expectations and prior experiences (personal elements), which lead to different behaviors and reactions towards the same sensations and stimuli.

Mathis et al. (2016)

The tourism experience can be defined as “*an individual perception generated in the context of interactions and resource integration in a tourism context*” (Mathis et al., 2016: 63).

Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin (2012); Tan et al. (2014); Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015); Buonincontri et al. (2017); Berrada (2017)

Co-creation

Co-creation processes lead to the creation of unique, personal and memorable tourism experiences. It is “*an innovative way to live differently the tourist experience*” (Berrada, 2017: 18).

There are several elements (antecedents) that need to exist:

Active Participation: the tourist is active in the process of designing and planning the trip throughout the stages of tourism experience, according to their goals and expectations.

Interaction between tourists and Tourism Service Providers: Pre-exchanged discussion through a tourist-interaction platform, to know the tourists’ needs and expectations.

Share the experience with others: influence potential tourists and give them the knowledge they need to actively participate in the design of their own trips, “*when tourists come back to a destination and recommend it to their peers, they heavily contribute to a destination sustainability and competitiveness*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 112).

One of the consequences is the **tourist’s satisfaction**, which is accomplished “*if the overall tourist experience matches the expectations that have been formed by personal needs, previous experience and various marketing messages*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 114).

Hellen (2010); Howell et al. (2012)

Another consequence is the tourist’s happiness which is based on the predisposition to live positive emotions and satisfactory experiences.

More engaging experiences lead to a higher level of satisfaction, which becomes even more positive as time passes by and it gets enhanced in the tourist’s memory, leading to an increase in the tourist’s happiness.

Uysal, Li & Sirakaya-Turk (2008); Prebensen et al. (2012); Li & Cai (2012); Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015)

The “push and pull” model is a well-accepted theoretical framework regarding the concept of motivation in the tourism context.

Motivation

Push: Connected to the internal wishes and emotions that made tourists want to travel, like the personal desire to escape the routine, develop relationships, etc.

Pull: External factors like the local culture, climate, history, attractions, etc.

Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich (2015)

Tourists are influenced by different types of motivations towards the different stages of the tourism experience co-creation process:

In the **initial stage** of planning the trip the motivations “*work as initiators of the purchasing phase*” (Caldito, Dimanche & Ilkevich, 2015: 112).

At the **second stage** of the process, i.e., when the tourist experiences the planned trip at the destination, different motivations might lead the tourists to choose certain activities and cultural locations to visit.

Lastly, during the **post-travel stage** the motives that make the traveler want to communicate about the tourism experience also differ, from the desire to give advice, to the need to share important memories with friends and family.

Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin (2012); Fotis (2015); Berrada (2017)

In contemporary times, tourism motivations are strongly affected by information and other content generated on ICT (e.g. social media).

Travel experiences can be enhanced, generate a higher level of value and be more personalized not only by experience co-creation but also by using technology. This may also lead to the creation of a new kind of tourism experiences.

Tourists are using the information and communication technologies to analyze, compare, evaluate, and choose the destination that better suits their expectations, thus gaining control over the process.

Information systems bring a chance for organizations in the tourism industry to establish a closer and more meaningful collaboration with the consumers, leading to the development of personal experiences.

Social Media

Wang, Park & Fesenmaier (2012)

ICTs simplify and mediate the process by allowing the consumer to be more involved in each step of the consumption (chain).

Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2003)

It was due to the appearance of Web 2.0, social networking and mobile internet that value co-creation started to gain more relevance and the customers stopped being a passive subject of the producers.

Watson et al. (2014)

ICTs are a crucial tool when it comes to comprehending the **three major stages of tourism experience:**

Planning: the tourist gathers new information about the touristic destination by using the diversified web sources and the interactions with friends, family members or other tourists and, also, to interact with the reservation systems and other service providers.

Tourism: tourists use their mobile devices to access information anywhere and in real time about the destination and the available services, to adjust activities and give recommendations.

Post-travel: tourists extend their trips in time and space by sharing their stories and experiences at the destinations, in person or using ICTs, after reflecting on the experience they lived and thinking about the good memories the destination has brought them.

Buhalis & Foerste (2015)

Social media allows the tourist to share thoughts, recommendations, questions, and memories of the trip that they consider relevant and to respond to the environment in an accurate way.

Blackshaw & Nazzaro (2006)

Consumer generated media, a term used to describe social media, is “*a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumer’s intent on educating each other on products, brands, services, personalities and issues.*” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006: 2).

Solis (2007)

Social media can be defined as “(...) *online tools that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people.*” [online].

Buhalis & Law (2008)

Social media platforms provide fast and detailed information about the destination and its tourism products, experiences and services, provided by experts and other travelers, thus creating well informed tourists.

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010)

Social media can also be described as “*a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.*” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61).

Xiang & Gretzel (2010)

The social media comprise different people, content, practices and technologies and constitutes a key aspect to facilitate the value co-creation in tourism experience, both in B2C and C2C. It clearly influences the decision making of other tourists who have access to the information shared by tourists who have previously visited the destination. This also applies to the performance of the tourism suppliers and destinations.

Ye *et al.* (2011)

The information encountered in social media is more trustworthy, contemporary and pleasurable to read than the information provided by travel agencies.

Sun *et al.* (2012); Wang, Li, Li & Peng (2014)

The level of knowledge shared by the tourists depends on a crucial behavioral aspect, the motivations, whether they are personal or social (sense of belonging, a social identity).

The personal motivations can be:

Intrinsic: sharing information for the tourists' satisfaction and interest.

Extrinsic: the gain of monetary recompenses, receiving compliments, the establishment of a reputation or a new friendship.

Fotis (2015)

Fotis's (2015) study claims that that, amongst all the types of existing social media applications, the social networking sites, content community websites, blogs and microblogs, consumer review websites, and Internet forums have a bigger influence on the tourism experiences.

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 2 - Measurement model of the study

Construct	Research Questions and Hypotheses	Authors
Experience co-creation and the use of ICTs in the context of tourism	<p>How does social media influence the way in which potential tourists actively design, produce and consume their own tourism experience (i.e., the co-creation of the tourism experience)?</p> <p>H1: For the consumer, tourism must be experiential, i.e., an escapist tourism experience.</p>	<p>Pine and Gilmore (1998) Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) Mathis <i>et al.</i> (2016) Buonincontri <i>et al.</i> (2017)</p>
Active participation of the tourists during the creation and consumption of the tourism experience (through the use of social media)	<p>How are social media used during the different stages of the tourism experience (before, during and after the trip)?</p> <p>H2: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience before the trip, i.e., during the planning stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>H3: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience during the trip, i.e., during the tourism stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>H4: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience after the trip, i.e., during the memory stage (serving as an important mediator).</p>	<p>Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2012) Caldito, Dimanche and Ilkevich (2015) Peterson <i>et al.</i> (2015) Mathis <i>et al.</i> (2016) Berrada (2017)</p>
Tourist's satisfaction towards the trip	<p>How does the co-creation of tourism experience using social media contributes to the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards it and to the tourists' memorability towards the destination and trip?</p> <p>H6: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's satisfaction towards the trip.</p>	<p>Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) Tan <i>et al.</i> (2014) Buonincontri <i>et al.</i> (2017)</p>
Tourist's happiness towards the trip	<p>How does the co-creation of tourism experience using social media contributes to the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards it and to the tourists' memorability towards the destination and trip?</p>	<p>Brakus, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) Peterson <i>et al.</i> (2015) Buonincontri <i>et al.</i> (2017)</p>

	<p>H7: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's happiness towards the trip.</p>	
<p>Tourist's sharing of the experience with others through the different stages of the tourism experience</p>	<p>How are social media used during the different stages of the tourism experience (before, during and after the trip)?</p> <p>What are the main motivations that make a tourist share their experiences and pictures on social media during and after the trip?</p> <p>H5: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to share their tourism experience and information, they gathered about the destination, online.</p>	<p>Watson <i>et al.</i> (2004) Andrades and Dimanche (2014) Fotis (2015)</p> <p>Sun <i>et al.</i> (2012) Wang <i>et al.</i> (2014) Caldito, Dimanche and Ilkevich (2015)</p>
<p>Tourist's memorability towards a unique trip</p>	<p>How does the co-creation of tourism experience using social media contributes to the tourists' satisfaction and happiness towards it and to the tourists' memorability towards the destination and trip?</p> <p>H8: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to experience a unique and memorable trip.</p>	<p>Kim (2010) Marschall (2012) Munar and Jacobsen (2014) Andrades and Dimanche (2014) Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle and Scott (2018)</p>
<p>The influence and utility of the different types of social media platforms on the tourist's decision-making throughout the tourism experience</p>	<p>Which type of social media platform (User Generated Content) influences the most the decision-making before and during the tourism experience and the motivation to share the tourism experiences after the trip?</p> <p>H2: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience before the trip, i.e., during the planning stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>H3: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience during the trip, i.e., during the tourism stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>H4: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience after the trip, i.e.,</p>	<p>Xiang and Gretzel (2010) Hoffman <i>et al.</i> (2013) Munar and Jacobson (2014) Fotis (2015)</p>

	during the memory stage (serving as an important mediator).	
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Source: Author's elaboration

Table 3 - Findings on the use of social media before the trip

Social Media is useful:	Mean	St. Deviation
At the planning stage, when the tourist is looking for information about a certain destination	4,28	0,72
At the planning stage, to search for ideas and reliable information about the destination	4,07	0,70
When the tourist is trying to limit the selection of destinations	3,68	0,84
When the tourist wants to make sure he made a good decision selecting a certain destination	3,67	0,87

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 4 - Findings on the use of social media during the trip

Social Media is useful:	Mean	St. Deviation
During the trip, to get information about the local attractions or restaurants	4,21	0,78
During the trip, to share the experience with potential travelers and followers	3,75	1,03

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 5 - Findings on the use of social media after the trip

Social Media is useful:	Mean	St. Deviation
After the tourism experience, to share the experience with potential travelers and friends	3,55	0,93
After the trip, to compare the experience with other travelers' ones	2,80	1,03

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 6 – Summary of the findings of the study

Topics	Findings
Tourism as a co-created experience	H1: For the consumer, tourism must be experiential, i.e., an escapist tourism experience.

	<p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, since it shows that for the consumer of the tourism experience, the uniqueness of the personalized trips, only obtained through the active participation of the tourist in the process, is highly important for its success.</p>
<p>Planning stage and impact of social media as mediator</p>	<p>H2: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience before the trip, i.e., during the planning stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, as the social media platforms used during the stage, when the tourist plans the trip, help to gather all the information that the tourist needs to select the destination that matches their current needs and expectations towards the trip, as well as to select and book all the accommodations, restaurants, landmarks and attractions that will make the trip personal, unique and satisfactory, thus affecting the process of co-creating a trip in a positive way, serving as a mediator.</p>
<p>Stage during the trip and impact of social media as mediator</p>	<p>H3: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience during the trip, i.e., during the tourism stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, since the social media platforms help in the correction of aspects that might have failed during the planning stage of the trip, and in the gathering of information essential on the spot (which is possible thanks to the presence of social media on mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets), hence contributing to a successful tourism experience and affecting the process of co-creating a trip in a positive way, serving as a mediator.</p>
<p>Stage after the trip and impact of social media as mediator</p>	<p>H4: The use of social media platforms has a positive effect on the co-creation of the tourism experience after the trip, i.e., during the memory stage (serving as an important mediator).</p> <p>This Hypothesis was partially supported by the findings, since on one hand social media is still considered to be helpful in the process of co-creating a tourism experience, since it generates content and information for other potential tourists to the same destination (when the tourists share their stories and photos about the trip), but on the other hand these platforms only partially contribute to the success of the current trip by reinforcing the good memories and images that the tourists has about the destination (when they compare their experiences to others' ones on social media or when they relieve the experience by sharing it).</p>
<p>Motivation to share the travel experience</p>	<p>H5: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to share their tourism experience and information, they gathered about the destination, online.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, since it shows that a great majority of travelers share their experiences and stories about the trip on social media because it is a convenient and accessible way to relieve and store memories and with social (to give recommendations and validate the tourism service providers) and personal (because it is something that satisfies the tourists and because of the show-off factor) motivations, thus creating travel-related content that might provide the needed information for another potential tourist that is planning a trip to the same destination.</p>
<p>Satisfaction towards the trip</p>	<p>H6: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist's satisfaction towards the trip.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, as the majority of the respondents agreed that the information and other aspects that make social media an important mediator in the co-creation of a trip lead to an almost perfect match between what they were expecting towards the trip and what actually happened, because they were in control of every decision and already knew what they were going to find (due to the active involvement in the planning), i.e., to an increase in the level of satisfaction towards the trip.</p>

<p>Happiness towards the trip</p>	<p>H7: Tourism experience co-creation through the use of social media (as a source of information) improves the tourist’s happiness towards the trip.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, as it shows that a most of the tourists that co-create their tourism experiences, using social media platforms as mediators in the process, felt happiness and excitement towards the trip even before it started, i.e., during the planning stage, and that the series of satisfactory experiences they experienced, which came from an almost perfect adjustment to their needs, made the trip unique, meaning that the process (co-creation) and the mediator (social media) increase the happiness the tourists feel towards the trip, throughout the different stages.</p>
<p>Memorability and uniqueness of the trip</p>	<p>H8: Social media platforms make it more likely for tourists to experience a unique and memorable trip.</p> <p>This Hypothesis was supported by the findings, since the data collected shows that a greater level of happiness and satisfaction leads to a more memorable and unique trip and, and as Hypothesis 6 and 7 were previously were supported, it is safe to say that the co-creation of a tourism experience, using social media platforms as mediators, make it more likely for tourists to experience more memorable and unique trip (as it also contributes to a higher level of happiness and satisfaction).</p>

Source: Author’s elaboration

Table 7 – Findings on the demographic variables

Variable	Percentage (%)	Variable	Percentage (%)
Gender:		Nationality:	
Female	70,98	Portuguese	81,91
Male	29,02	English	5,87
Age:		German	3,67
Under 18	1,46	French	0,73
18-24	38,29	Spanish	2,69
25-34	23,17	American	0,24
35-44	11,95	Italian	2,20
45-54	6,59	Chinese	0,49
55-64	6,10	Brazilian	0,98
65-74	1,95	Dutch	0,24
75-84	4,15	Hungarian	0,24
85 or older	6,34	Irish	0,24
		Guinean	0,49
Occupation:			
Employee	57,46		
Self-Employed/Entrepreneur	3,67		
Retired	12,96		
Student	22,25		
Housewife	0,49		
Unoccupied	2,20		
Employee/Student	0,73		

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 8 – Findings on the travel behavior variables

Variable	Percentage (%)	Variable	Percentage (%)
Motivations for the trip:		Travel party:	
Sun and sea (leisure)	26,56	Family members	36,61
Business/studies	8,13	Friends	37,68
Meeting friends/relatives	16,75	Significant other	16,96
Nature	12,08	Alone	6,43
Health and well-being	2,27	Organized groups	2,32
Art and culture	19,38		
Religious tourism	0,36	Trips made per year:	
Nautical tourism	0,24	1-2	28,03
Surfing	0,24	3-4	43,31
Gastronomy	2,27	5 or more	28,66
Outdoor activities	3,11		
Short break	8,61		

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 9 – Findings on variables linked to the behavior towards Social Media

Variables	Percentage (%)	Variables	Percentage (%)
Most used Social Media platforms:		Hours spend per week on Social Media:	
Instagram	28,94	Less than 1 hour	8,54

Facebook	25,93	1-5 hours	22,36
Twitter	2,44	6-12 hours	29,67
YouTube	16,62	More than 12 hours	39,43
TripAdvisor	15,04		
Zomato	0,29	Frequency with which the tourists post content on Social Networking Sites:	
Blogs	5,01	Occasionally	75,61
Snapchat	0,86	Frequently (i.e., daily)	17,07
LinkedIn	3,15	Never	7,32
Pinterest	1,72		
Frequency with which the tourists post reviews on Consumer Review Websites:		Frequency with which the tourists read reviews on Consumer Review Websites:	
Occasionally	49,59	Occasionally	51,22
Frequently (i.e., daily)	10,57	Frequently (i.e., daily)	43,50
Never	39,84	Never	5,28

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 10 – Findings on the reasons for the increased satisfaction

Reasons for increased satisfaction:	Mean	St. Deviation
Because the trip matches the tourist's needs and expectations towards the trip	4,11	0,72
Because the trip runs according to the tourist's budget and priorities	4,12	0,74
Because the tourist enjoys taking control over every decision related to the trip	3,92	0,79

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 11 – Findings on the reasons for the increased happiness

Reasons for increased happiness:	Mean	St. deviation
Because the tourist was more involved in the trips (defining were to eat, sleep, etc.) since the beginning, thus creating more anticipation and excitement	4,34	0,71
Because the uniqueness of the trip and its perfect adjustment to the tourists' needs made it memorable	3,98	0,68
Because the tourist already knew what he was going to do so he was never disappointed and his expectations were always met	3,53	0,91

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 12 – Findings on the reasons for the memorability of the trip

Reasons for the memorability of the trip:	Mean	St. Deviation
Because the tourist was looking forward to the trip even before it started	4,22	0,80
Because the tourist enjoyed every moment since it matched his taste and expectations	3,93	0,75
Because the tourist was happy with the trip and remembers several sensations and unique moments	4,08	0,67

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 13 – Findings on Instagram

Instagram	Mean	St. Deviation
It inspires the tourist to find his new destination or experience	3,66	1,20
It helps the tourist confirm that he made a good choice in terms of destination	3,28	1,09
It gives access to the information the tourist needs to plan the trip to the chosen destination	2,75	1,05
It motivates the tourists to post photos or other travel-related content	4,30	0,80

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 14 – Findings on TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor	Mean	St. Deviation
It inspires the tourist to find his new destination or experience	3,53	0,88
It helps the tourist confirm that he made a good choice in terms of destination	3,61	0,95
It gives access to the information the tourist needs to plan the trip to the chosen destination	4,01	0,97
It motivates the tourists to post photos or other travel-related content	3,53	0,92

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 15 – Findings on Travel Blogs

Travel Blogs	Mean	St. Deviation
It inspires the tourist to find his new destination or experience	3,80	0,83
It helps the tourist confirm that he made a good choice in terms of destination	3,68	0,91
It gives access to the information the tourist needs to plan the trip to the chosen destination	4,06	0,90
It motivates the tourists to post photos or other travel-related content	2,60	0,95

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 16 – Findings on YouTube

YouTube	Mean	St. Deviation
It inspires the tourist to find his new destination or experience	3,76	0,86
It helps the tourist confirm that he made a good choice in terms of destination	3,71	0,89
It gives access to the information the tourist needs to plan the trip to the chosen destination	3,77	0,91
It motivates the tourists to post photos or other travel-related content	3,01	0,93

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 17 – Findings on Facebook

Facebook	Mean	St. Deviation
It inspires the tourist to find his new destination or experience	3,18	0,99
It helps the tourist confirm that he made a good choice in terms of destination	3,13	0,95
It gives access to the information the tourist needs to plan the trip to the chosen destination	3,06	0,98
It motivates the tourists to post photos or other travel-related content	3,62	0,85

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 18 – Findings on the reliability of several social media platforms as sources of information

Reliability (as a source of travel-related information) of:	Percentage (%)
TripAdvisor	49,56
Instagram	11,84
Travel Blog	24,12
YouTube	8,77
Facebook	5,70

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 19 – Findings on the behavior of the tourists towards posting on social media while travelling

When the tourist travels he:	Percentage (%)
Less often	19,44
About the same amount of times	16,67
More often	56,02
He does not post on social media while travelling	7,87

Source: Author's elaboration

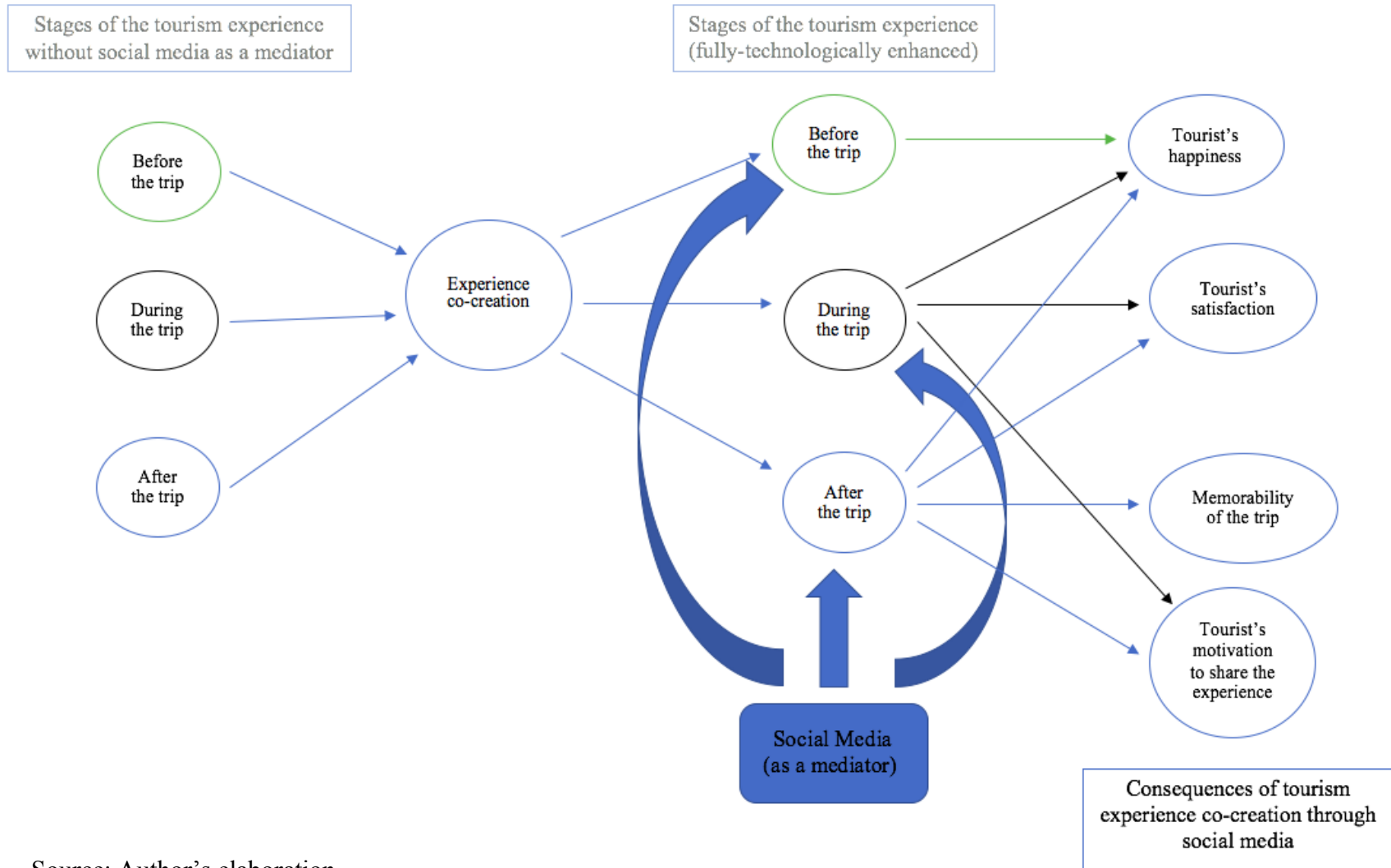
Table 20 – Findings on the motivations to share the travel experience online

Motivation to share the travel experience online	Mean	St. Deviation
To reflect on the trip after coming home	3,82	1,00
To relieve the good memories made on a unique trip	4,06	1,02
To keep in touch with friends, family and other followers	3,97	0,86
Because the process is convenient, social media is easily accessible and helps document the trip	4,85	0,95
When the tourists liked the service on a certain local accommodation, restaurant, museum, etc. and wish to give them visibility	3,71	0,84
When the tourist want to share practical information with other potential travelers	3,67	0,92
Because it is something that they enjoy and that satisfies them	3,87	0,72
To express themselves creatively	3,43	0,95

To get a reward for the post from a social media page or a tourism service provider	2,21	1,02
To get more followers or make more money	2,27	1,05
To influence the way in which other people think	2,72	1,04
To be acknowledge by others socially	2,82	1,09
To express negative feelings about an experience	3,06	1,09
To entertain and share experiences with followers on the tourists' social media pages	3,24	1,11

Source: Author's elaboration

B) Conceptual Model of the Study



Source: Author's elaboration

C) Online Survey

1st Section

1. Gender

- Male
- Female

2. Age

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75-84
- 85 or older

3. Nationality

- Portuguese
- English
- German
- French
- Spanish
- American
- Italian
- Chinese
- Brazilian
- Dutch
- Belgian
- Greek
- Japanese
- Austrian
- Other_____

4. Occupation (see which one is better)

- Employee
- Self-employed/Entrepreneur
- Retired
- Student
- Housewife
- Unoccupied
- Other_____

5. Do you travel?
- Yes
 - No (**stop here**)
6. If so, which are the main motivations for the trip (Select the option that applies to your case the most):
- Tourism/leisure
 - Business
 - Meeting friends/relatives
 - Other _____
7. How many times do you, usually, travel *per* year?
- 1-2
 - 3-4
 - 5 or more
8. When you travel, who do you usually travel with? (Select the **two** options that apply to your case)
- Family members
 - Friends
 - Significant other
 - Alone
 - Organized groups
 - Other _____
9. When you travel:
- Do you predominantly plan the trip by yourself? (If so, move on to question 10)
 - Do you use the services of tourism agencies, like Abreu Agencies, to plan the trip for you? (If so, move on to question 11)
10. What are the main reasons that make you plan the trip by yourself? (**put here a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**)
- You can use your experience and knowledge from former trips to better plan the current one
 - You have online access to all the information you need to plan a trip
 - The process is cheaper this way, since you plan it yourself
 - You enjoy being in control of the trip and its itinerary, since you know better than anyone what you like and the rhythm at which you set my days in a trip
 - You trust my skills and abilities to plan the trip so you do not feel the need to (exclusively) request the service of a tourism agency/service provider

11. What are the main reasons that make you prefer to organize your trips through a tourism agency? (**put her a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**)

- It is more convenient this way, since you don't have to spend time planning the trip
- You trust the tourism agent professional skills and resources better than your own
- You don't have a lot of experience planning trips and wouldn't know what to do
- You do not mind paying to get this service

(The ones that answer to 11 carry on to the end of the section)

12. While planning the trip, have you directly interacted with tourism service providers (by phone, e-mail, their website, etc.) to reserve a hotel, a museum entry, etc.?

- Yes
- No

13. Do you feel that planning your trip increases your happiness (emotional connection that determines how a tourist feels about the experience, i.e., several satisfactory experiences that lead to a valuable and memorable trip) with the experience, even before the beginning of the trip?

- Yes
- No (go to question number 15)

14. If you believe that your happiness with the experience increases with the active planning, is it: (**scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**)

- Because you were more involved in the trips (where to eat, sleep, etc.) since the beginning, thus creating more anticipation and excitement?
- Because the uniqueness of the trip and its perfect adjustment to your needs made it memorable?
- Because you already knew what you were going to do so you were never disappointed and your expectations were always met?

15. Do you feel that planning your trip contributes to a greater satisfaction (the perfect – or almost perfect - match between the expectations about the experience and what you experienced) with the tourism experience?

- Yes
- No (go to question number 17)

16. If you believe that your satisfaction with the experience increases with the active planning, is it: (**scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)**)

- Because it perfectly matches your needs and expectations towards the trip?
- Because the trip runs according to your budget and my priorities?

- Because you enjoy taking control over every decision related to the trip?
17. Do you feel that planning your trip contributes to a more memorable and unique experience?
- Yes
 - No
18. If you believe that your trip was more memorable and unique with the active planning, is it: **(scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree))**
- Because I was looking forward to the trip even before it started?
 - Because I enjoyed every moment since it perfectly matched my taste and expectations?
 - Because I was so happy with the trip that I remember every sensation and moment?
19. Do you think that social media platforms (Instagram, travel blogs, TripAdvisor, etc.) help in planning of a trip by yourself?
- Yes
 - No
20. Do you think that social media platforms (Instagram, travel blogs, TripAdvisor, etc.) are more helpful when:
- You use it to get more information about the destination (Schedules, costs, best places to visit, eat, etc.)
 - You use it to give feedback to other potential tourists/followers about the places that you visited/experiences that you had
 - You use it to share the experiences that you lived
 - You use it to share the experiences that you are living during the trip
 - Other _____

2nd Section

In the second stage of this online survey we want to understand the use of social media for traveling reasons and the perception of the travel-related content posted on social media.

21. Do you use social media platforms?
- Yes
 - No (stop here)
22. Which social media platforms do you use more? **(Select the three options that apply to your case the most)**
- Instagram
 - Facebook

- Twitter
- YouTube
- TripAdvisor
- Yelp
- Blogs
- Snapchat
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Other_____

23. Usually, how many hours do you spend *per* week on social media platforms?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-5 hours
- 6-12 hours
- More than 12 hours

24. How often do you post photos, videos or other content on Instagram or other Social Networking Sites?

- Occasionally (i.e., weekly or on a special occasion, like on a vacation or a meeting with friends)
- Frequently (i.e., on a daily basis)
- Never

25. How often do you **post** reviews of restaurants, hotels and places you visited on TripAdvisor or other Consumer Review Website?

- Occasionally
- Daily
- Weekly
- Never

26. How often do you **read** reviews of restaurants, hotels and places you visited on TripAdvisor or other Consumer Review Website to make a decision?

- Occasionally
- Daily
- Weekly
- Never

27. Do you use Instagram, TripAdvisor and/or other social media platforms for travelling motives?

- Yes
- No (go to question 8)

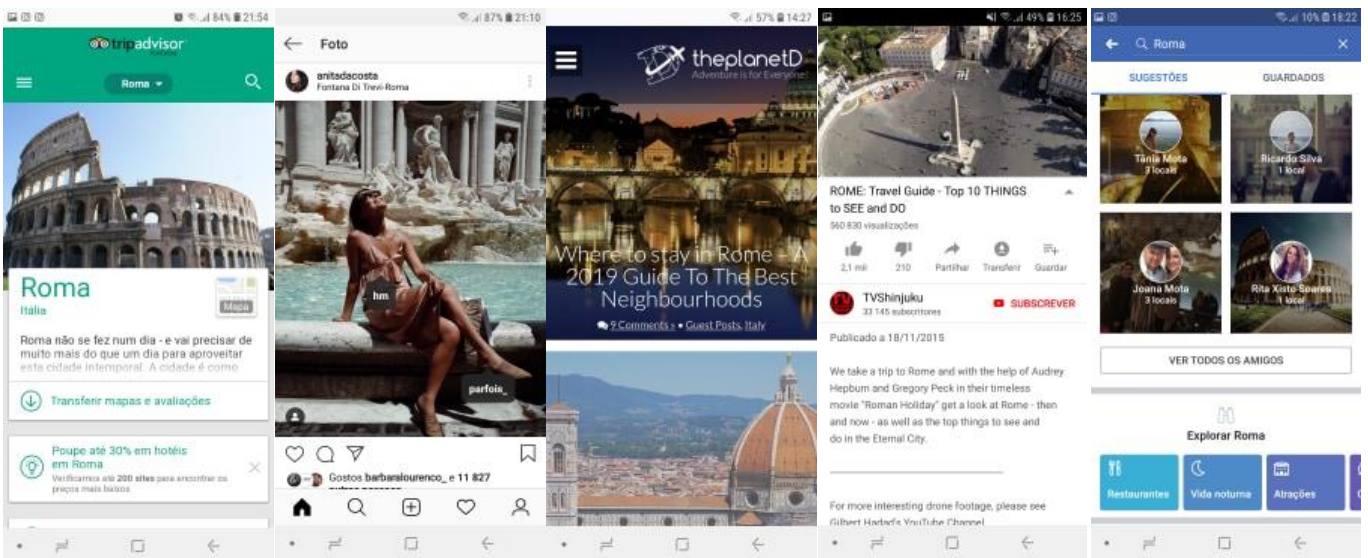
28. If you use social media platforms, when do you use it the most?

- Before the trip (while planning)
- During the trip
- After the trip

29. Social media platforms are more useful for traveling reasons: **(scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree))**

- When you are discovering new destinations and types of experiences, i.e., before making the decision to make a trip
- At the planning stage, when you are looking for information about a certain destination (e.g.: accommodation and attractions)
- When you are trying to limit your selection of destinations
- When you are planning the trip, to search for ideas and reliable information about the destination
- When you want to make sure you made a good decision selecting your destination by seeing other people's experiences
- During the trip, to get information about the local attractions or restaurants
- During the trip, to share the tourism experience with friends and other followers
- After your tourism experience, to share the experience with potential travelers and friends
- After your tourism experience, to compare your trip to other travelers' ones

You are going to be presented with 5 pictures, each with the same destination posted in different types of social media. Take some time to examine each post to simplify responding the question.



(Show picture of a post about Rome on TripAdvisor (Q30), Instagram (Q31), Travel Blog (Q32), YouTube (Q33), Facebook (Q34))

Q30 to Q34 - Beneath each picture put several items with a scale from 1 to 5:

- This post inspires you to find your new destination or experience
- This post helps me confirm that you made a good choice in terms of destination

- This post gives you access to the information you need to plan the trip to your chosen destination (what to visit, where to sleep, where to eat; costs; etc.)
- This post motivates you to post photos or other travel-related content

35. Which of the previously shown social media platforms (TripAdvisor, Instagram, Travel Blog, YouTube, Facebook) is more reliable to you, when it comes to being a source of information for you to use before and during the trip?

- TripAdvisor
- Instagram
- Travel Blog
- YouTube
- Facebook

36. In the previous question, why did you select that social media platform?

- In that picture, the information about the travel experience seems more reliable
- In the picture, the travel experience seems more appealing
- The information is more trustworthy, since you think that the user who generated the content is more honest and sincere
- Other _____

37. A post or review is more trustworthy and reliable (as a source of information) when:

- The user of the platform has a paid partnership with a tourism service provider at the destination
- The user of the platform has visited the destination and shows travel and planning experience
- The platform where the user posted the review, photo or video is trustworthy and honest because it has a lot of followers/users
- Other _____

3rd Section

Now, in this final section of the online survey, we are going to analyze the main motivations that lead tourists to post about their travels on social media (and contribute to the co-creation process of other potential tourists) or what is stopping them from doing so.

38. When you are travelling, would you say that you post on (or visit) Instagram, TripAdvisor and/or other types of social media (in comparison with how you post on your daily routine):

- Less often
- About the same amount of times
- More often

- I do not post on social media while traveling

39. What are the main reasons that motivate you to post about your trips on Instagram or any other social media (i.e., create travel-related content)?

(scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree))

- Because it is something that you enjoy and that satisfies you
- To share practical information with other potential travelers (thus contributing to their successful tourism experience co-creation and providing “solutions” to them through travel-related content)
- To express negative feelings about an experience that you had and state how to overcome them
- To get more followers or make more money
- To entertain and share experiences with your followers on your social media pages
- Because you might get a reward for the post from the user of the social media or from the tourism service provider
- When you liked the service on a certain local accommodation, restaurant, museum, etc. and you wish to give them visibility
- To reflect on your trip after coming home
- To keep in touch with friends and relatives
- To influence the way in which other people think
- To express yourself creatively
- To be acknowledged by others socially
- To relieve the good memories you made, on the unique and memorable trip, by sharing pictures and stories, even after some time as passed since the trip
- Because the process is convenient, social media is easily accessible and helps document the trip