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## **Instagram: A Gimmick or a Serious Reputation Builder in the Airline Business?**

### **Abstract**

The purpose of the research is to shed light on the interrelatedness between Instagram and corporate reputation on the one hand and customer service expectations on the other. A conceptual model is proposed to be tested in the context of the civil aviation economy. A national flagship airline company was chosen in which to conduct the research. An online questionnaire was made available and 283 responses were collected. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test research hypotheses derived from the literature. The novelty of the work is in the scarce research found when scrutinizing the literature on possible links between Instagram and airline corporate reputation. The study found there to be a positive correlation between social media usage and corporate reputation in the airline sector. Future research needs to replicate this study across other airlines to ascertain the external validity of the current study and its potential for extrapolation.

**Keywords:** Instagram, airlines, corporate reputation, service expectations, engagement

## 1. Introduction

There is a new generation out there, one whose colloquial means of interrelating is via Instagram. Many of these people are not familiar with traditional communications media (Edosomwan et al., 2011). They have never posted a letter, faxed something, or even used a regular household telephone. This in itself provides ample justification for the undertaking of research in this area, as it is a novel world we are entering into, not only because the technology has not been around for long, but because personal interdependency and its arbitration through interpersonal communications has found new media and new mechanisms, but also new codes of conduct, both explicit and implicit as well as new processes and consequences (Safko, 2010). It is within the realm of consequence that we are delving into. Does Instagram impact customer service expectations? What about organizational reputation? Because if it does, then companies need to pay more than lip service to Instagram and social media within their communications budget and understand its true importance in the inbound vs outbound mix.

Any noteworthy business needs to know what it is doing with respect to social media for a myriad of reasons, of which perhaps the most poignant are communicating (inside and outside the organization), managing stakeholder relationships and their interface with corporate reputation, monitoring customer involvement and engagement through a constant adaptation to and improvement of service standards and for a variety of other latent reasons, which only the future will disclose (Bergström, & Bäckman, 2013).

Social Media was defined by Russo et al. (2008, p. 22) as “those [*infrastructures and platforms*] that facilitate online communication, networking, and/or collaboration”, or “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow for the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Howard and Parks (2012) presented a more exhaustive definition of social media as consisting of three parts: “(a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content; (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and (c) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume digital content” (p. 362). Boyd and Ellison (2007) conceptualize a social network definition by following two distinctive approaches. A C2C perspective (consumer to consumer) which implies that social networks act as virtual consumer communities on the one hand and on the other a more technological perspective, where social networks allow individuals to create a public or semi-public (approval-based) profile, which includes personal information and history, within a bounded system. The profiles are part of a larger ecosystem of similar profiles, allowing for connections to be established and information exchanged.

There is a shift away from the traditional tools of communicating and brand building mechanisms that have been around for decades, often with dubious results (Schultz & Schultz,

1998). Firms have had to think long and hard their investments on corporate communications with a view to finding the optimal balance between tradition and cutting-edge, between above the line, below the line and through the line digital marketing, often working in the realm of the unknown as the efficacy of digital is yet to be proved for most sectors of economic activity (Fournier, 1996; Sinha, 2008).

Previous studies are scarce on possible connections between Instagram and corporate reputation as they are on customer service expectations. There are also no known works on the same in the specific context of the airline industry. Therefore, the current study aims to understand the impact of Instagram on corporate reputation and customer service expectations in the airline business. In particular, the current research aims to establish the following:

1. Does the presence on Instagram of an airline company influence customer expectations of the organization and its reputation?
2. Are there any relevant links between customer digital engagement and corporate reputation? How do they manifest themselves?

A national flagship company was chosen to operationalize the research. The airline under scrutiny here, TAP Air Portugal, is a long-established one with an undisputable track-record for credibility and worldwide reputation conquered over years of activity in the sector. It is one of the traditional airline carriers, alongside the likes of Air France, Lufthansa, British Airways and other national aviation household names.

As with any other industry, tourism may also be the beneficiary of a brave new world of online platforms, offering a plethora of new marketing tools and opportunities. Social media is only one of the most recent such tools and its functioning and marketing potential is yet to be fully realized and indeed discovered.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Instagram and Brand Relationships**

Services which are consumed before they can be fully evaluated (Dijkmans et al., 2015) are typically those offered in the airline transportation industry, which begs the question of the adequacy of digital strategy in building a relationship between the brand and its current or potential customers, and its role in expectations setting and the accumulation of positive reputational capital for the organization.

According to Dhote and Kumar (2019) storytelling, especially from a long-duration perspective, can help to improve efficiency in brand communication in reaching an intended target audience. “As a creative strategy, the format is gaining an immense prominence primarily due to its potential to hold audiences and leave an enduring impact on their minds.” (Dhote & Kumar,

2019, p. 31).

Instagram has, according to its CEO, become an important place for everyone, from celebrities to anonymous people who express themselves through photographic storytelling. This is a departure from the mission of Facebook, which is to optimize communications for everyone. The clear distinction here is in that storytelling is at the core of Instagram. Not so for Facebook. Instagram envisages the platform and its usage as one for storytelling and everything about Instagram and in particular its new tools corroborate this.

From the very beginning, Instagram was the photo-sharing platform, with square filtered photos, posted on a personal timeline for followers to interact with. They would express their thoughts by posting “Like” on the photo or by leaving a “Comment” on it. Photos have also changed considerably over the years, with landscape and portrait formats prevailing. Creators and brands have taken advantage of this trend, as it implies a wider screen coverage of intended content.

Instagram Stories is one of its most recent tools. Launched in 2016 this tool allows for the creation of short-timespan pieces, as they are deleted 24 hours after posting. It allows for a more raw, unedited, but captioned content that has the potential of short message diffusion. This format also allows for an easier and more prompt engagement by potential customers. It possesses a “Send message” feature, allowing anyone to send a direct message to the content creator in a matter of seconds. Figure 1 presents two Instagram stories of TAP Air Portugal.

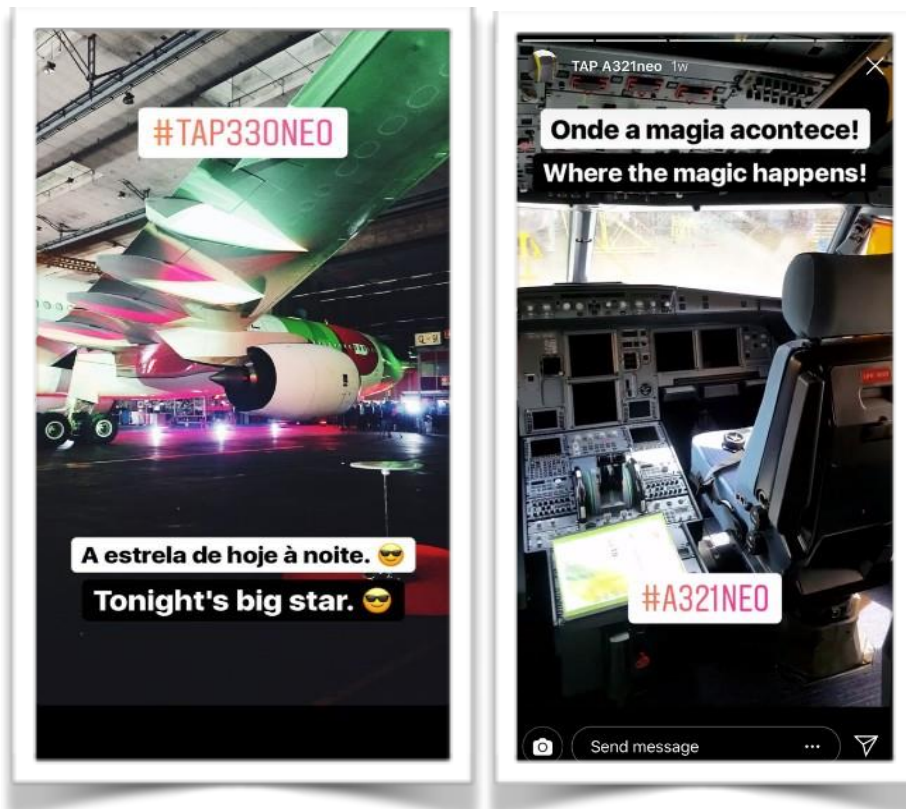


Figure 1. TAP’s Instagram stories

With the prevalent paradigm of social media comes the increasing presence of brands in the online environment but this is by no means indicative of a rising importance of these brands (Holt, 2016). On the contrary, brands may in effect decrease in significance to the consumer to the point where the sheer online clutter render brands meaningless to consumers. This is attributable to brands failing to generate meaningful interest next to consumers. Online engagement may thus lead to a false sense of success, as there is viewership of the brand, but little in the way of interest and intention to purchase, let alone brand loyalty. Loureiro, Ruediger and Demetris (2012) define brand attachment as a stage before brand love and both affective commitment and brand trust as go-betweens brand love and loyalty.

Consumers now rely on social networks as integral components of a prevailing social media paradigm, integrating them into their day to day lives, and using them as important aids in complex decision-making processes (Oracle, 2013). The only link between social networks and corporate success occurs when users are engaged and committed to being active and creating content on the platforms of which they are members. However, social media allow consumers to easily share positive or negative information or experience, affecting brand reputation (Hornikx & Hendriks, 2015). In this context, it is essential to understand how the different social media work and how is used to evaluate brands and to communicate these evaluations with others.

The influence some of the members may exert is also only possible given the number of connections they have with other members (Trusov et al., 2010) implying that they will adapt their own behaviour and beliefs accordingly.

Most studies suggest that this mob-like dynamic that typifies user interaction and communication may have a meaningful impact on user intentions and not only on the intentions of people we hold in our “friend” circle (Katona et al., 2011; Gensler et al., 2013). The authors conclude that with regards to demographic profiling, female members have a stronger peer influence than male members in shaping and inducing subsequent behaviour. Also, this peer influence exerts itself in that the higher the number of connections acquiring a given product, the higher the likelihood of a non-customer member acquiring the same product. Same ethnicity users also have a greater persuasion power within their peers than outside their ethnic group. Lastly older members are less prone to be influenced by these forums. All of these demographics are relevant when marketers are developing Instagram strategies, as how close one pays attention to key demographics will translate into a higher or lower efficiency in divulging one’s own content.

## **2.2. Engaging with brands**

Hvass and Munar (2012, p.b99) refer to social media content in civil aviation organisations, alluding to focused advertisement as the typical content to be found in this context, which “fails

to exploit the interactivity and development with customers[...]”.

A shift needs to occur in social media content in the airline sector, towards relationship-building, with social media content not necessarily related to service provision or product sales performance. If this is to happen, consumers “will feel a closer connection to the airline and the poster and this in turn may help build a relationship with the company and eventually loyalty” (Hvass & Munar, 2012, p. 99). A social media platform may thus aid the airline industry in building relationships with potential customers.

Organisations in the civil aviation business cannot be oblivious to this shift and dissociated from its managerial and reputational outcomes. It is an imperative that companies manage social media. There is evidence (example follows below) of the severe detrimental effects to reputation that derive from a careless approach and a (mis)management of social media, in particular, an approach of the kind that fails to treat pro-actively and with strategic intent, the whole business of managing stakeholder expectations. Given the nature of the airline business, the fact that it provides sensitive services, where rumour and innuendo may deeply affect business outcomes, it would be expected that airline companies should pay more attention to their online environment and the social media banter, with a view not to control it, as by definition this is uncontrollable, but to monitor it and to treat it pro-actively and use it as a strategic tool in stakeholder management.

Evidence of the detrimental effects to the reputation of an airline of the kind described above is that of Dave Carroll, a Canadian musician. He posted a set of three music videos, which he aptly named “United Breaks Guitars” (Carroll, 2009). These videos went online and were perceived as protest songs, featuring real-life chronicles of the musician’s travelling woes, when flying from Halifax to Nebraska with United Airlines.

The videos portrayed an event that occurred as luggage was being boarded onto the plane. Dave managed to film the tarmac operators throwing luggage about, with no due care. To Dave’s dismay when he collected his luggage, his customized guitar was broken. It didn’t take him long to put two and two together. The video drew a lot of attention from the mass media, but United Airlines remained oblivious to the whole thing. Not only, did they not do anything about it, they felt that the situation would just go away. It would sort itself out.

Dave Carroll however had other ideas and he took it upon himself to write a book, start a website and even participate in a TED Talk as a speaker (TED, 2013). All these initiatives were of course undertaken with a view to divulge the “United Breaks Guitars” theme. This was the umbrella project, the name, the common denominator for every action he decided to undertake to ensure that people knew of his predicament. Dave was fully aware of the power of social media and he made good use of it for his intents and purposes.

The outcome to United Airlines was not without dire consequences. The company failed to

act, and its absence led to an immediate 10% loss in market-share, calculated at approximately 180 million dollars (Gulliver, 2009). This is a real-life exposition of the role and impact of social media on civil aviation and how the wrong type of exposure may translate into reputational damage leading to negative corporate financial performance.

### **2.3. Instagram content and brand engagement**

Social media play a critical role in the endorsement of products and services, particularly when it comes to divulging intangible dimensions, such as brand or reputation. Logan (2010) refers to digital media that are interactive and incorporate two-way communication, allowing for some computing. Sheldon (2015) argues for the use of social media as a means for attaining the satisfaction of individual needs and self-gratification. The author goes on to claim that as Instagram is a mobile photo and video sharing platform, individual gratification is commonly the motive for its usage.

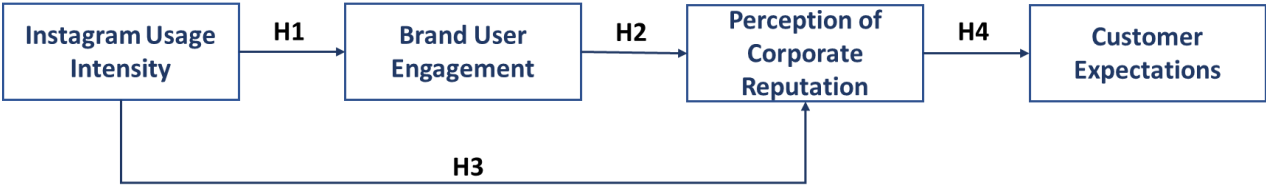
This is important in eliciting an understanding on the use of social media platforms in their interrelatedness with the airline business, the interaction between a brand and its publics, information exchanges and the shedding light on the relationship between Instagram content, brand engagement and corporate reputation (Davies, Chun, Da Silva & Roper, 2003; Dijkmans, kerkhof & Beukeboom, 2015). Engagement is not consensual, in the sense that it is multi-disciplinary in its origins and conceptualization. However, the construction of a relationship between a brand and consumers produces positive results for both parts (Loureiro, 2013). Hollebeek (2011) looked into the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional ramifications in the context of this debate. In the current research, the stance taken was to approach engagement from the viewpoint of its most rudimentary interpretation, that of “the consumer's familiarity with a company's social media activities (i.e., cognition) and the online following of these activities (i.e., behaviour). Engagement is in this context about one being familiar with a company's online activities, which leads subsequently to their systematic scrutiny and following by individuals, interacting with these online activities and in the final analyses to a desired outcome of loyalty to the brand. For Boateng and Feehi Okoe (2015) factors such as credibility, value corruption and corporate reputation have effect on consumers’ attitudes towards social media advertising. Likewise, online brand engagement can result in loyalty and brand love (Loureiro, Gorgus & Kaufmann, 2017).

Online engagement manifests itself through different types of behaviour, experiences, expressions of interest/emotions, interactions, contributions and participation (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Thus, the nature and intensity of the relationship between social media usage and brand engagement at an airline company and the interface with the organization’s reputation is the crux of this research.



Sama (2019) analyses how advertisements on different media platforms have implications on consumer behaviour. The study shows that it that the internet plays an important role in creating awareness, interest, and conviction. In addition, Leung and Bai (2013) suggest that the intensity of use of a social media platform and engagement with a company’s social media content are related (see figure 2). Therefore, the first hypothesis is defined as:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between Instagram usage and engagement with an airline company’s Instagram content.*



**Figure 2. Conceptual model and hypotheses**

**2.4. The Futile Yet Critical Attempt to Manage Social Media and Corporate Reputation**

Airlines are becoming quickly aware of the importance of digital marketing and in particular the role of social media in contemporary business. The way in which airlines look at the world of online banter is quickly changing. Companies in the civil aviation business are undoubtedly becoming more engaged in the online game and leaving nothing to chance as what someone says about you on social media is way too important to leave at the whim of just about anyone out there.

There is also a widely held belief that corporate reputation is indeed a vital source of value to a company. It can also be key for the purposes of establishing a direct communication channel with consumers. Fombrun (1996) looks at the decisive role of reputation in attracting latent consumers, capturing future customers. The work produced by Dijkmans et al. (2015) considers of the utmost importance that a company should establish a connection with its members online, in that if it so does it is able to improve substantially its relationship-building abilities.

Aula (2010) states that not every engagement situation is necessarily beneficial, as this dynamic takes place in an environment that may be characterized as one of minimal control over both participant and content, leaving open the possibility of just about any individual out there jeopardizing reputation of any organization. Nonetheless, it is believed that the use of social media in the airline industry generates positive vibes for the company and generally enhances its reputation. In effect, the higher the intensity of online consumer engagement, the higher the number of users engaging in exchanging company content, the more favourable their take on the company, or to put in other words the more positive is the corporation’s reputation. Thus, the second and third hypotheses are defined as follows.

*H2: There is a positive relationship between consumer level of engagement with an airline*

company's social media activities and its corporate reputation.

*H3: There is a positive relationship between customer intensity of engagement with an airline company via Instagram and corporate reputation.*

## **2.5. Airlines and the Management of Customer Expectations**

A good reputation is indeed a gateway to positive organisational outcomes. These may be derived from what a favourable reputation does to consumer expectations of the company's product offering as well as its services. Corporate reputation is thus a very valuable asset and certainly one worth managing and preserving (Schmalensee, 1978; Shapiro, 1983; Yoon et al., 1993). Tellis and Fornell (1988) corroborate this thinking by building the notion that the seller's reputation should be utilized as a significant ingredient in corporate communication, thus augmenting buyer response to advertising and marketing effectiveness generally.

The very notion of expectations is conceptually defined differently depending on whether one searches it under service quality or consumer satisfaction (Teas, 1993). Expectations as a concept does not represent the idea of predicting or forecasting service performance, but instead a notion of how such service should perform, or what it 'should' offer. It is not in this sense the idea of guessing what to expect, but an *a priori* definition of what should be there. Thus, the following hypothesis ensues:

*H4: Customer perceptions of a brand's reputation will induce expectations as to that brand's offerings.*

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Data Collection**

The study has been conducted in the TAP Air Portugal. Although TAP Air Portugal was created in March 1945 only in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the company manages to just about breakeven and indeed attain a modicum of profit. Its fleet reaches the hefty heights of 40 aircraft. A 5<sup>th</sup> brand makeover is launched - "TAP Air Portugal" – aligned with modernity, brightness and a Portugal kind of feeling expressed via the brand. This is the time when TAP Air Portugal entered to one of the biggest and most significant airline alliance networks in the world- Star Alliance – and became a case study at Harvard Business School. Across the years, TAP has continued to receive distinguished accolades from its industry peers, receiving several awards and prizes.

As the main aim of the research is to provide useful insights regarding the impact of Instagram on corporate reputation and customer service expectations, an online questionnaire was administered to those who use social media platforms. It was thus distributed via social media platforms, mainly Instagram and Facebook, and by email.

The questionnaire was split into four main parts. The first part included questions regarding

travelling habits, frequency of travel, travelling with TAP Air Portugal with a view to ascertaining brand awareness. The second part of the questionnaire aimed to query respondents on issues related to online activity and engagement, more precisely the amount of time spent on Instagram, as well as the level of engagement during the time punters spend on that social network, the awareness generated by TAP's Instagram and its level of engagement. The third part of the questionnaire included Service Expectations and Corporate Reputation scales. The last part consisted of a demographic characterisation with questions drawn for the purposes of profiling the sample. The questionnaire was built and divulged via the *Qualtrics* tool.

After concluding the design phase of the questionnaire, a pre-test with 25 Instagram users was conducted. Certain loopholes, ambiguities in language and translations as well as questionnaire logic flow issues were identified and corrected. The sample was collected during August 2018. A total of 292 respondents compose the sample, from which 283 are valid answers, in a valid rate of near 97%.

### **3.3. Measures**

The measures for each of the model constructs are chosen from the literature as follows. Instagram Intensity of Use - Previous work from Dijkmans et al. (2015) was used as a basis to assess the level of intensity of Instagram usage. Six questions measured on a Likert type scale ranging from 1-totally disagree through 5-totally agree were used.

Instagram User Engagement - Hollebeek (2011) described engagement not only as a behavioural construct but also as cognitive. This notion blends with the concept of Awareness. In this study, engagement will be measured through interaction (behavioural component), rather than cognition, as suggested by Hollebeek (2011). According to numerous unofficial reports, Instagram will greatly empower those users (brands or people) who have a higher interaction with it (likes, shares, comments), consequently projecting their content further than others. Engagement was therefore measured by way of observation of users' frequency in posting 'likes' on the platform and 'commenting' on publications. Variables such as "How often do you 'like' an Instagram post" and "How often do you comment on an Instagram post?" were doubled to obtain the respondents' rating for Instagram general publications and TAP Air Portugal contents. They were rated on a 5-point Likert scale of frequency ranging from 1-Never to 5-Always.

Expectations for TAP Air Portugal - The instrument used for measuring Expectations was taken from Gilbert and Wong (2003), which in turn was based on an adapted SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al., 1991) for the airline industry. Pakdil and Aydin (2007) adopted the same strategy to measure expectations for a Turkish airline. The scale measures the expectations of the airline service quality in terms of seven dimensions: reliability, assurance, facilities, employees,

flight patterns, customization, and responsiveness. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 26 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1- Not at all important to 7- Extremely important.

Perception of Corporate Reputation – To measure this construct the corporate personality scale proposed by Davies et al. (2004) was used. The scale presents seven dimensions and 49 items; however, two of these dimensions were not used. The scale adopts the organization as person metaphor and the dimensions Ruthlessness and Machismo were identified as potentially not useful as characterisations of an airline company, as these dimensions have been used more in the context of financial institutions or construction businesses (Davies et al., 2004). Respondents were asked to answer the following question: “Imagine that TAP Air Portugal comes to life as a person. Would he/she be?” by rating the personality trait items using a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. A two-stage process was considered (Anderson & Gerbing, 1982). In the first stage, Confirmatory Factor Analytical (CFA) models were estimated in order to assess the construct validity of the scales. CFA models were estimated through covariance-based SEM. In the second stage, the structural model was estimated to test the hypothesised relationships between the latent constructs. As followers of the TAP Instagram page were limited to begin with, in terms of sheer numbers, sample size was an issue. The last stage of the process consisted of using variance-based SEM and Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2017). AMOS and SmartPLS were used in the first and second stage, respectively.

## **4. Data Findings**

### **4.1 Sample profile**

The sample consists of 283 individuals. More than a half of respondents have age between 18 and 24 years old and 70% are younger than 35. Most respondents are also females (70%). Over half of the sample has a university degree (71.2%) and is currently employed (62.1%) or still studying (33.8%). Almost every respondent is Portuguese.

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents per frequency of travelling. The results indicate that respondents that travel by air are just 9.9% of the sample. In addition, only 25.4% said that they had never flown TAP Air Portugal before. With regards to the main reason for travelling, most respondents stated that they had travelled due to family related issues, holidays, or other non-business purposes (73.3%). This may be explained by the relatively young profile of the population surveyed.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents' Travel Habits and Instagram usage

		N	%
<b>Respondents' Travel Habits</b>			
Number of trips since 2015 (n=283)	Never	28	9.9
	1 - 3 times	83	29.3
	4 - 6 times	76	26.9
	7 - 9 times	31	11
	10 or more	65	23
Reasons for travelling (n=255)	Business	13	5.1
	Family/Particular	187	73.3
	Both	55	21.6
Number of trips with TAP since 2015 (n=248)	Never	63	25.4
	1 - 3 times	115	46.4
	4 - 6 times	35	14.1
	7 - 9 times	14	5.6
	10 or more	21	8.5
<b>Respondents' Instagram Usage</b>			
Do you have an Instagram account? (n=276)	Yes	247	89.5
	No	29	10.5
Last week, how much time did you spend on Instagram per day? (n=238)	Less than 10 minutes	21	8.8
	10 - 30 minutes	43	18.1
	31 - 60 minutes	49	20.6
	1 - 2 hours	1	17.2
	2 - 3 hours	29	12.2
	More than 3 hours	55	23.1

#### **4.2. Instagram Use and Engagement**

Most respondents have an Instagram account (89.5%) (see [Table 1](#)), implying a strong likelihood of being in contact with TAP Air Portugal's content. Also, the respondents who have an Instagram profile, spend an average of 30 minutes every day using the app (81.9%). Analysing the mean distribution for the variable of Instagram Intensity of Use ([Table 4](#)) there is an overall high intensity of use and high sense of belonging to the Instagram community.

Regarding TAP Air Portugal's Instagram profile awareness, over half of the sample (51.9%) is unaware of the existence of the profile and, within those, only 53% (n=61) are followers of TAP Air Portugal's Instagram page.

Engagement levels at Instagram were also measured. [Table 2](#) shows the respondents' distribution of 'likes' and 'comments' on Instagram general contents and specifically on TAP-related content. Instagram interactions are on average very low and are even lower in TAP's Instagram page, where 93.4% of the respondents never comment a post and 57.5% put a 'like' in some posts.

#### **4.3. Construct validity assessment**

Confirmatory factor analysis was first conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model of each construct. An overview of the assessment measures applied is presented in Table 2 for the Instagram Usage and Engagement Constructs, Corporate Character Model and Customer Expectations Model. Some items were removed during the purification procedure, because of low item reliability values or to improve the corresponding construct Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value.

The AVE and Composite Reliability (CR) values of the constructs are clearly placed above the recommended thresholds of 0.5 and 0.7, respectively, for all latent constructs. Additionally, all loadings are significant and greater than 0.5 which indicates that there is item reliability. Consequently, convergent validity and reliability are verified. Regarding the discriminant validity assessment, the Fornell and Larker's (1981) criterion is verified for almost all constructs as per Tables 3 and 4. Therefore, it can be argued that each construct is unique and distinct from other constructs.

Table 2. Descriptive and validity assessment for items of model constructs

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Loading
Instagram Usage and Engagement (Sample n=201; Model Fit Statistics: Chi-square= 35.886, df=13, p<0.05; CFI=0.964; IFI=0.964; RMSEA=0.094, 90%CI=(0.058; 0.131))			
Instagram Usage Intensity (AVE=0.539; CR=0.851)			
Instagram is part of my daily activity	3.89	1.101	0.875
I feel proud when I tell people I'm on Instagram	2.94	1.003	0.668
Instagram is part of my routine	3.74	1.101	0.914
I feel part of the Instagram community	3.25	1.010	0.647
I would feel sorry if Instagram shut down	3.58	1.168	0.631
Instagram Engagement (AVE=0.679; CR=0.807)			
How often do you "Like" a post	3.00	0.592	0.703
How often do you "Comment" a post	2.06	0.554	0.565
TAP Instagram Engagement (AVE=0.539; CR=0.700)			
How often do you "Like" a post	2.10	1.012	0.708 (a)
How often do you "Comment" a post	1.10	0.396	0.759(a)
Corporate Character scale (Sample n=255; Model Fit Statistics: Chi-square=651.083, df=161, p<0.05; CFI=0.855; IFI=0.857; RMSEA=0.097, 90%CI=(0.090; 0.107))			
Enterprise (AVE=0.510; CR=0.838)			

Trendy	5.15	1.214	0.801
Up-to-date	4.76	1.229	0.811
Innovative	4.68	1.201	0.828
Extrovert	4.33	1.292	0.740
Daring	4.13	1.180	0.713
Competence (AVE=0.582; CR=0.729)			
Reliable	5.52	1.257	0.890
Secure	6.09	0.889	0.602
Chic (AVE=0.503; CR=0.721)			
Charming	4.42	1.390	0.821
Stylist	5.03	1.316	0.787
Agreeableness (AVE=0.516; CR=0.905)			
Pleasant	5.38	1.092	0.727
Straightforward	4.88	1.221	0.644
Concerned	4.71	1.440	0.756
Reassuring	4.74	1.260	0.763
Supportive	4.64	1.320	0.802
Honest	4.66	1.297	0.902
Sincere	4.60	1.299	0.876
Trustworthy	5.00	1.308	0.859
Open	4.87	1.164	0.707
Socially Responsible	5.04	1.307	0.794
Informality			
Casual	4.48	1.146	0.998

Service Expectation scale (Sample n=255; Model Fit Statistics: Chi-square= 325.757, df=131, p<0.05; CFI=0.902; IFI=0.904; RMSEA=0.081, 90%CI=(0.070; 0.093))

Reliability (AVE=0.519; CR=0.764)

TAP Air Portugal provides good ground/in-flight services constantly	6.39	0.801	0.760
TAP Air Portugal performs the service right the first time	6.07	1.044	0.699
TAP Air Portugal provides quality food and beverages	5.71	1.102	0.700
Assurance (AVE=0.647; CR=0.844)			
The behaviour of TAP Air Portugal employees gives you confidence	6.41	0.902	0.850
TAP Air Portugal makes you feel safe	6.64	0.785	0.785
Employees of TAP Air Portugal have the knowledge to answer your questions	6.15	0.840	0.591
Facilities (AVE=0.503; CR=0.752)			
The aircraft has clean and comfortable interior and seats	6.40	0.813	0.705
TAP Air Portugal has up-to-date in-flight entertainment facilities and programmes	4.91	1.265	0.733
TAP Air Portugal has comfortable waiting lounges	5.30	1.249	0.744
Employees (AVE=0.511; CR=0.774)			
Employees of TAP Air Portugal are consistently courteous with you	6.23	0.910	0.808
Employees of TAP Air Portugal appear neat and tidy	5.71	1.126	0.646

Flight Patterns (AVE=0.545; CR=0.780)			
TAP Air Portugal has non-stop service to various destinations	5.88	1.037	0.768
TAP Air Portugal has convenient flight schedules and enough frequencies	5.91	1.046	0.809
TAP Air Portugal has global alliance partners in order to provide a wider network and smoother transfers	5.92	0.929	0.615
Customization (AVE=0.549; CR=0.709)			
Employees of TAP Air Portugal understand your specific needs	5.11	1.222	0.842
Employees of TAP Air Portugal give you individual attention	4.46	1.411	0.808
Responsiveness (AVE=0.586; CR=0.809)			
Employees of TAP Air Portugal give your prompt service	5.40	0.973	0.748
TAP Air Portugal has efficient check-in and baggage handling service	6.31	0.786	0.683
Employees of TAP Air Portugal are never too busy to respond to your request or complaint	5.03	1.336	0.783

(a) loadings obtained by PLS-SEM.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of Corporate Character Factors (a)

	Enterprise	Competence	Chic	Agreeableness	Informality
Enterprise	<b>0.714</b>				
Competence	0.601	<b>0.763</b>			
Chic	0.829	0.653	<b>0.709</b>		
Agreeableness	0.671	0.807	0.745	<b>0.718</b>	
Informality	0.514	0.411	0.509	0.582	---

(a) Diagonal values represent the square root of AVE values.

Table 4. Correlation matrix of Service Expectation Factors (a)

	R	A	F	E	FP	C	RS
Reliability (R)	<b>0.720</b>						
Assurance (A)	0.759	<b>0.804</b>					
Facilities (F)	0.761	0.705	<b>0.709</b>				
Employees (E)	0.777	0.865	0.794	<b>0.715</b>			
Flight Patterns (FP)	0.607	0.512	0.634	0.578	<b>0.738</b>		
Customization (C)	0.418	0.419	0.640	0.527	0.485	<b>0.741</b>	
Responsiveness (RS)	0.607	0.560	0.679	0.720	0.621	0.666	<b>0.766</b>

(a) Diagonal values represent the square root of AVE values.

#### 4.4. Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested by estimating the construct regression coefficients and their significance using PLS-SEM. The current study set out to understand how a brand like TAP Air Portugal can derive reputational benefits from using efficient Instagram strategies. There is theoretical background to support the idea that the concepts are positively related and, consequently H1 was derived. Two models were estimated - one just for followers of TAP Air Portugal's Instagram page (model M1) and another for followers of general content (model M2)



with the aim of comparing effects.

Figure 3 presents the path diagram of the structural model, including the standardised regression coefficient estimates using the subsample of followers of TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram page. Nonsignificant path estimates are represented in dotted lines.

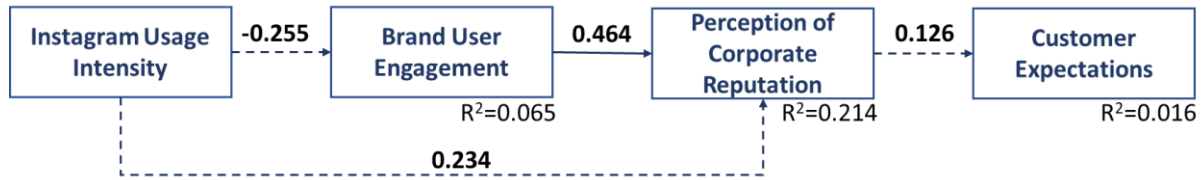


Figure 3. Path diagram of the structural model M1 with standardized regression estimates (SRMR=0.1; d\_ ULS=36.522)

Results from the structural equation model show that only one hypothesis is supported. As the estimated coefficient of the relationship between brand user engagement and perception of corporate reputation is the unique significant coefficient (0.464,  $p < 0.05$ ), there is only support for H2. Consumer perception of Corporate Reputation is only explained through the level of engagement with brand content ( $R^2=0.214$ ), since the influence of the intensity of use of the platform is not significant (total effect estimate = 0.115,  $p = 0.643$ ); Therefore, H3 is not verified. H4 was defined to understand how the perception of reputation influences service expectations. Thus, the estimated model allows for the conclusion that there is no relationship between the two constructs (coeff.= 0.126;  $p = 0.464$ ).

Results regarding H1 and H2 differ when users of general content of Instagram are considered instead. Figure 4 presents the results of model M2.

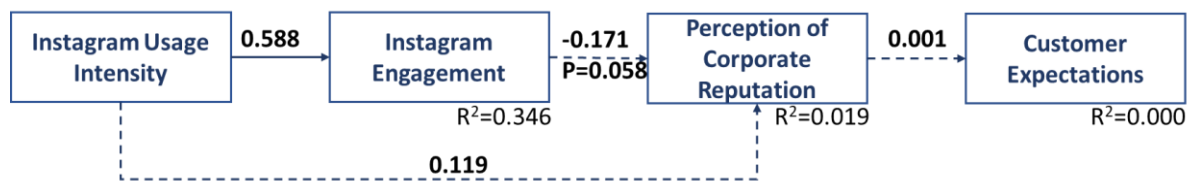


Figure 4. Path diagram of the structural model M2 with standardized regression estimates – Using Instagram Universal Engagement (SRMR=0.149; d\_ ULS=80.957)

Comparing the M1 and M2 models, it is possible to say that users that have a higher intensity use of Instagram will also be driven to interact at a higher level with general content from their feed and network (coeff.=0.588,  $p < 0.05$  (Model M2)). However, as mentioned above, there is no relation between the intensity of use of Instagram and the level of Engagement with the content of TAP Air Portugal (coeff.= -0.255,  $p = 0.469$  (Model M1)); therefore, H1 is not verified.

It is worthwhile noting that user interaction with the general content of Instagram has no effect on brand reputation (coeff.=-0.171, p=0.058), although it may exist and be negative, if the reference level of significance is 6% or higher; In this case, the higher the user interaction, the lower their evaluation as to corporate reputation.

## 5. Conclusions

The current study aims to provide useful insights regarding the influence of an Instagram strategy on perceived Corporate Reputation and consequently on customer service expectations. Two models were tested in an airline business, more precisely in the context of TAP Air Portugal, one just for followers of TAP Air Portugal's Instagram page and another for followers of general content.

99.3% of the respondents know the TAP Air Portugal brand. 89.5% have an active Instagram account but only 47% of respondents are aware of TAP Air Portugal's presence in Instagram. TAP needs to therefore capture a new audience and increase its brand awareness through Instagram engagement.

With respect to engagement levels, the sample presents conservative levels of Instagram engagement, with mean values of likes and comments being just under mid-scale for general engagement on Instagram, even lower when we shift towards engagement with TAP Air Portugal. Thus, TAP Air Portugal's Instagram profile is yet to be a broad channel for communication. This may indicate that TAP Air Portugal is not investing in sponsored content, failing to capture potential followers. Although it is true that awareness does not mean followers, the investment on sponsored content, and paid promotion, using Instagram available tools is of great value in attaining positive brand image and general awareness.

The first hypothesis refers to the relationship between the intensity of use of the Instagram platform and engagement with TAP Air Portugal's Instagram content. Dijkmans et al. (2015) had already proven this relationship, as there is in effect an influence of intensity of use on the level of engagement, although this is true for certain types of engagement. The work of Dijkmans et al. (2015) measured engagement mainly through a cognitive approach. However, Hollebeek (2011) proposed a different approach to this concept, as engagement should be considered as interaction and not just as awareness or familiarity. Results from the model are different between general engagement with Instagram and engagement with the brand. Users that have a higher intensity use of Instagram's general contents are also driven to interact at a higher level with general content from their feed and network. In contrast, this relationship does not occur within the followers of TAP's Instagram page.

The second and third hypotheses state that the customer's level of engagement and its intensity

of use of the Instagram platform influence their perception of corporate reputation. Engagement and corporate reputation were predicted to have a positive relationship according to Dijkmans et al. (2015). Our study shows that users who interact at a higher level with TAP Air Portugal's Instagram contents tend to have a better perception of its brand reputation. However, user interaction with the general content of Instagram has no effect on perceived brand reputation. In addition, the influence of the intensity of use of the platform on the perception of corporate reputation is not significant.

The fourth hypothesis regards the relationship between Perception of Corporate Reputation and Service Expectations. Yoon et al. (1993) point to a positive influence of reputation on service expectations, albeit in a different industry (insurance). Contrary to what was expected, the study results show that airline service expectations are not influenced by any of the model constructs, particularly that of brand reputation.

The question is then how can TAP Air Portugal strategically benefit from its presence on Instagram? Is there a connection between the latter and customer digital engagement and the relationship between all of this and corporate reputation? If recommendations were to be drawn as to TAP's Instagram page strategy, the key one would be to shift strategy towards low level of awareness pundits. The brand could benefit long-term if awareness levels were to increase, as awareness can be linked to engagement, in that active users with high levels of intensity do engage more with the brand.

A possible way forward strategically for TAP is also to promote the brand via "ambassadors" with employees taking over the brand page, a week at a time. Such an approach may prove successful, if done with consistency and cohesion (much like Swiss airlines has been doing since 2018). The constant shift of content type may also diversify the type of audience targeted, but it may also disperse engagement levels across the same audience, with no strongly defined trend pursued

Regarding recommendations on reputation and service expectations, TAP Air Portugal is not benefiting from a possible relationship between these two variables, but corporate reputation enhancement goals need to be kept in mind as communication priorities.

### 5.1 Theoretical and practical contributions

The academic and practical contributions may be aggregated for the purposes of convenience here and can best be summarized in a few key points: (1) Users who interact at a higher level with TAP Air Portugal's Instagram content tend to have a more positive perception of the brand's reputation. (2) Users that have a higher intensity of use of Instagram's general contents are also driven to interact at a higher level with general content. (3) User interaction with the general content of Instagram has no effect on perceived brand reputation. (4) Airline service expectations are not influenced by any of the model constructs.

In this context, we conclude that the way companies communicate in social networks, especially via Instagram, where the study was developed, is critical to the effectiveness of communication. The study allows companies to define concrete means and tools in which to reach different consumer segments and increase the effectiveness of communications with their target groups.

Companies must take into account that social networks are a tool of excellence for targeted communications but must be worked properly in order to achieve the purposes and aims at hand. Consumers are subject to numerous and constant approaches and companies must be effective in their communications in order to achieve distinctiveness and reach consumers.

## 5.2 Limitations and future research

As all researches, this study presents limitations, specifically in regard to the availability of data. The subsample of followers of TAP Air Portugal's Instagram page is small (n=61). Future research should guarantee that more data be collected. Future research could also gauge knowledge on travel habits, including travel frequency, with a particular airline, and its impact on varying perceptions of reputation, thus incorporating the moderating role of travel frequency in model building. The incorporation of other variables that are not directly related to the flight experience, but relate to other organizational dimensions, is seen as desirable and worthy of future scrutiny. Also, the type of content produced by TAP Air Portugal, could trigger different patterns of response, not all of them conducive to, or aligned with organizational strategy. It is also suggested that a more in-depth qualitative analysis with regards to content could be performed. The same study may be replicated in different areas of activity, particularly within the tourism sector. Despite its distinct traits and characteristics, the same analytical frameworks may be utilized, leading to social media pathways and the application of social media tools that are more effective in reaching relevant consumer segments. More and more consumers seek differentiated communications that are directed at their choice criteria and requirements, leading them to obtain information which they consider unique and specific. Those companies that manage to excel at managing social media effectively are capable of differentiating themselves, access their potential customers better and enhance loyalty with their customer-base, a critical advantage in today's cut-throat markets.

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