



Measuring the Influence of Social Media and Online Review Sites on
Generation Z Decision-Making Concerning their Hotel Choices

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Abstract

This investigation analyzes and compares the influence of the characteristics of eWOM information of both social media and review websites on Gen Zers' purchase decisions in the context of hotel preference. The impacts of these two online platforms are analyzed by adapting the structure of information adoption model by Sussman and Siegal (2003) and incrementing other key factors of online information: eWOM quality, source credibility, eWOM volume, information usefulness, information adoption and consumers' purchase decisions.

This study was developed through a quantitative approach. An online survey was developed and distributed, resulting in 434 valid answers from Gen Zers who already participated in the decision process of booking a hotel.

The results of the data analysis of social media and review websites are similar in terms of the weight of the message characteristics (independent variables) on information adoption. However, results shown that when comparing both online platforms, Gen Zers tend to act more in terms of purchase decisions when the information is adopted from review websites. This means the information of review websites, when adopted by Gen Zers, have more influence on their purchase decisions than the information of social media.

This study complements existing literature on online information and their impact on consumer behavior by comparing the results of both types of online platforms and by modifying and extending the structure of IAM, in order to include eWOM characteristics that are proven to be important for consumers. Moreover, it also contributes to marketers and hotel managers, who have a better perspective of Gen Zers' behavior in terms of hotel booking and a comparison study on the impact of online information in two major types of online platforms. As this study also sheds lights on the message characteristics of eWOM information that consumers value the most, this helps them understand their expectations. All this information helps them to improve their eWOM marketing and online communication.

Keywords: Generation Z; social media; review websites; purchase decisions; consumer behavior; hotel preference; hotel booking; eWOM information; message characteristics.

Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar e comparar a influência das características das informações de eWOM das redes sociais e dos sites de reviews nas decisões de compra da Geração Z, no contexto da preferência de hotéis. Os impactos dessas duas plataformas online são analisados adaptando a estrutura do modelo de adoção da informação de Sussman e Siegal (2003) e incrementando outros fatores-chave da informação online: qualidade do eWOM, credibilidade da fonte, volume do eWOM, utilidade da informação, adoção da informação e decisões de compra dos consumidores.

Este estudo foi desenvolvido através duma metodologia quantitativa. Os dados foram recolhidos através dum questionário online, resultando em 434 respostas válidas de Gen Zers que já tenham participado no processo de escolha da marcação de hotéis.

Os resultados da análise de dados das redes sociais e sites de reviews são similares em termos do peso que as características das mensagens (variáveis independentes) têm na adoção de informação. No entanto, os resultados mostraram que ao comparar as duas plataformas online, os Gen Zers tendem a agir mais em termos de decisões de compra quando as informações são adotadas de sites de review. Isso significa que as informações dos sites de review, quando adotadas pela Geração Z, têm mais influência nas suas decisões de compra do que as informações das redes sociais.

Este estudo complementa a literatura existente sobre a informação online e o seu impacto no comportamento do consumidor, comparando os resultados de ambos os tipos de plataformas online e modificando e estendendo a estrutura do IAM, com a finalidade de incluir características de eWOM que se comprovam importantes para os consumidores. Além disso, também contribui para profissionais de marketing e gerentes de hotéis, que têm uma melhor perspectiva do comportamento da geração Z em termos de influência na reserva de hotéis e um estudo comparativo sobre o impacto da informação online em dois grandes tipos de plataformas online. Como este estudo também esclarece as características da mensagem das informações eWOM que os consumidores mais valorizam, isso ajuda a gestão a entender as suas expectativas. Todas essas informações ajudam-nos a melhorar o marketing de eWOM e a comunicação online.

Palavras-chave: Geração Z; redes sociais; sites de review; decisões de compra; comportamento do consumidor; preferência de hotéis; marcação de hotéis; informação de eWOM; características da mensagem

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1. Introduction

Generation Z (commonly known as Gen Z) is the generation that came after the Millennials, who were born between the period of 1996-2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Most of Gen Zers (name given to the members of generation Z) were born during the economic globalization and global digital revolution, raised using internet and technologies (Thangavel et al., 2022). Therefore, they are connected at all times and believe in the accuracy of online information. Many of them developed what is known as FOMO, or “fear of missing out”, which is considered a consequence of excessive internet use (Chareewan et al., 2020).

They are becoming an important part of the global economy, as they are growing up and entering the labour market, voting for the first time and influencing the society (Caraballo, 2019). They can be characterized as impatient, confident, often craving immediate action (Bencsik et al., 2016), social (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019) and overall more independent in their decision-making and seeking information (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014). As the predominant workforce nowadays is consisted by a different generation, the world market is now molded to a different type of behavior, needs, values, culture and mentality. As Gen Zers get older, the global market (including the tourism industry) evolves and will eventually be transformed in a new developed era, adapted by the characteristics of Gen Z – the Industry 4.0.

Generation Z will become, in the coming years, the central consumer segment in the tourism and hospitality industry (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019). Nowadays, they are already influencing the market and forming brand ties and relationships that will affect their buying intentions and behavior when they will acquire purchasing power (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019).

Our way of life has been changing drastically, impacted by how we are constantly adapting to information and communications technology (ICT) developments such as social media. This brings an urge of production, dissemination and consumption of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Filieri & McLeay, 2014; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). The strong influence that word of mouth (WOM) has on decision-making purposes was first mentioned approximately 50 years ago (Arndt, 1967; Brown & Reingen, 1987). The advent and continuous evolution of the internet brought its online variant, eWOM, and treating/taking value from these online data is a necessity and a must

for successful businesses (Saarijarvi et al., 2015). Tourism marketing, as many other industries, has been experiencing dramatic changes with the evolution of technology. Hotels have been specially affected by digital advancements, as several studies have highlighted the importance of consumer opinions and reviews on digital platforms. Attracting good reviews is a huge challenge that managers should focus given the current era of technologies. Despite the acknowledgement and implementation of systems and applications that manage and monitor online reviews, there are still few hotels that do it efficiently, and many fail to improve the reviews and attract consumers' attention (Baka, 2016). The flood of customer generated content in websites has made quite an impact on how the consumer behaves (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). This influence of online reviews and user generated content can be different across generations. There has been found that online reviews have a stronger impact in generation Z compared with millennials, which proves that they react different on this matter (Ruiz-Equihua et al., 2021). Literature suggests that online reviews, as a form of eWOM, has a huge effect on the attitude of people toward a service, influencing their buying behavior and intention (Huang et al., 2010; Jalilvand et al., 2013; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013). The large scope and its easy reach makes eWOM an extremely important tool for companies, as it has the power to affect their performance significantly. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what drives the use of eWOM and its effects (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020).

From an academic perspective, eWOM has been a hot topic for the past couple of decades, with a large amount of studies about its impact on consumer behavior (Maslowska et al., 2017; Matute et al., 2016; Pihlaja et al., 2017) and in tourism and hospitality in particular (Chen et al., 2021; Lata & Rana, 2021; Lee, 2018; Litvin et al., 2008, 2018; Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Sann et al., 2021; Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020). The impact of online information on purchase intention has been studied throughout the years, with several studies addressing this field in the context of social media and review websites (Andriani et al., 2021; Cheung et al., 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2018; Hussain et al., 2017; Lata & Rana, 2021; D. H. Park et al., 2007; Song et al., 2021; Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Tjongirir et al., 2020). However, there is still lack of comparative studies about the influence of eWOM information on consumers' decision-making between social media (social eWOM) and review websites (anonymous eWOM) (Erkan & Evans, 2018), despite the influence of both eWOM platforms were separately verified in prior studies and found significant (Alhidari et al., 2015; Elwalda et al., 2016). Furthermore, there are

still studies that only use slightly adaptations of the information adoption model as conceptual model (Shu & Scott, 2014) and don't extend the model to measure the impact of eWOM information on purchase decisions (Andriani et al., 2021). On one hand, some studies consider anonymity as good for eWOM, as it makes individuals to share opinions more at ease (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). In contrast, other studies consider social media as more beneficial for eWOM, as less anonymity leads to a more credible eWOM information and social media eWOM mostly occurs between people who knows each other (Chu & Choi, 2011; Moran & Muzellec, 2017; D.-H. Park et al., 2007; Wallace et al., 2011). Thus, there is a need to understand which type of eWOM is more influential on consumers' purchase decisions, as which type of eWOM has more influence on consumers' purchase decision in the hotel market remains uncertain, according to literature. Additionally, there was a comparative study conducted about social and anonymous eWOM (without a specific context), which highlighted the need for future research to focus on one product/service type in specific (for example hotel market) (Erkan & Evans, 2018). Given all the above mentioned arguments, and due to the importance of e-commerce, the online world (Maryska et al., 2012) and consumers' opinions in the growth of the hotel market (Dwivedi et al., 2021), a need to further expand the literature of the impact of online information both in social media and review websites on Generation Z behavior and decision-making in the industry of hotels was identified, as a comparison study between those two online platforms still hasn't been studied on this field and with this cohort. In an attempt to fix this gap and contribute to synthesize this enormous body of literature, this paper brings together a range of topics within and past the field of WOM, and its research objective is to understand the differences and compare how review websites and social media affect Gen Zers' purchase decisions regarding their hotel preference. From this starting point, two other specific objectives emerge: to compare review websites (comments/reviews in an anonymous environment) and social networking sites (comments/posts of friends and influencers) to see if Gen Zers are affected differently depending on the eWOM source; to try to understand which type of eWOM should hotel managers focus when promoting its business. Empirical evidence is referenced to support the literature and research in this study.

In terms of a management point of view, hotels need to be constantly active on eWOM channels, as it is a source of revenue generation and it strengthens their brand image (Chen et al., 2021). Therefore, a well-done analysis and selection of eWOM

strategies can maintain the competitiveness of companies in the tourism industry (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020). Hotel industry consumers rely more and more on comments made in travel websites and tend to share their dissatisfaction – spreading Negative Word-of-Mouth (NWOM) – more than writing positive experiences. This constitutes a big challenge for companies to fight.

Thus, to develop this study and having in consideration the context given before, a quantitative methodology will be used. The hypotheses framed were developed following the information adoption model (IAM) (Sussman & Siegal, 2003), that was commonly associated with eWOM studies. An inquiry will be made that aims to answer the following questions to further study how eWOM affects Generation Z in the hotel market in terms of preference: (RQ1) Which eWOM characteristic has more influence in the adoption of the information in social eWOM and in anonymous eWOM? (RQ2) Is there a difference of influence on Gen Zers' purchase decision regarding hotel stays if the eWOM comes from friends and influencers on social media or if it comes from anonymous people on review websites?

Structurally speaking, in the next sections, besides literature review, matters of investigation and methodology will be developed, and bibliographic references that support this study will be presented, organized under APA 7th model, using EndNote.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview

This chapter is organized to theoretically describe and sum previous research about subjects that compose this study. It is, thus, divided in the next sub-chapters: A brief description of the cohort of this study – Generation Z – and how they behave online and as tourists; Characteristics of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and its difference from the traditional word of mouth; Anonymous eWOM, Social eWOM and its differences; Online source credibility, eWOM volume and quality and its importance on online businesses and consumers' opinions; Hospitality marketing and management and key factors that consumers value; The influence eWOM has in the hospitality industry; and finally, a critical analysis of the theory presented in this chapter is made, to touch key aspects of the literature review and identify opportunities to further improve our study.

2.2. Generation Z

Born in the same year the internet surfaced – Gen Z people have access to a range of information much bigger than others were used to (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Also known as Click'n go kids, Connected generation, Zees, Zeds, iGen (Budac, 2015), Gen Zers and Post Millennials (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014), they are the largest generation alive, with a whopping 2 billion people that represent 26% of the global population (Issuu, 2022).

With the letter Z driving from *zapping* (the act of constantly changing TV channels in search of something that fill their needs, which shows their short attention span), they are characterized as “screen addicts”. A recent report shows that 98% of Gen Zers own a smartphone, while 79% of them claim it is their main device of internet usage (GlobalWorldIndex, 2022). Thus, they are strong enthusiasts of smartphones, Wi-Fi, online gaming, social media and tablets and can't live without internet and their technologies that are rooted in their daily-routine since they were born (Barclays, 2013; Meirinhos, 2015).

The use of cohorts like Generation Z and other existing generations is to try to identify a range of people who grow in similar environments and experience the same

main events, that face the same challenges and chances. This leads to a better probability of the cohorts having similar attributes, concepts, values, beliefs, way of socializing and communicating, skills, purchasing methods and overall characteristics (Srinivasan et al., 2016). Thus, it is a good way to study consumers' behavior and gather information about what's important in each cohort.

This generation is used to live in a world characterized by its constant struggle, roughness and unfairness, which can be the reason why they usually feel very anxious (Hertz, 2016). They grew up and developed themselves in an era marked by job insecurity, economic crisis, uncertainty, terrorism, war, a boom of information, the emergence of social media (Read & Truelove, 2018; Sparks & Honey, 2014) and, more recently, a pandemic and inflation. This helped Gen Zers to develop the capacity to easily adapt to constant changes in society, politics and overall environment (Corbisiero & Ruspini, 2018).

2.2.1. Characteristics and purchase behavior of Gen Zers

Generation Z has a set of particular nuances in their decision-making and way of thinking that diverges from prior generations (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019).

They are characterized by being self-conscious, open-minded, fast reactors, humanistic, technology enthusiasts, intelligent, disruptors, highly creative and qualified, young entrepreneurship driven by ethical and deontological principles, respect and morality (Flippin, 2017; Priporas et al., 2017; Salleh M. et al., 2017),

Their behavior patterns as consumers are also different from previous generations. As Gen Zers are young, they are very demanding and have a stressful and fast way of life, making it difficult to understand how they behave as consumers (Vizcaya-Moreno & Perez-Canaveras, 2020). They are highly critical and can easily change their opinion (Toledo et al., 2012). Gen Zers are always connected through social media, where they like to express their opinions, experiences, consumption desires and talk about their favorite products/services. On the other hand, when they are unhappy with their purchase they use the internet to express their dissatisfaction and objections (Budac, 2015). Good value for money is also important for this cohort, as they are wise on how they spend their money, often doing extensive research to choose which option is the best for them (Posner, 2015). Thus, they value all reviews, ideas and opinions of other consumers and

seek to share information on the internet (Berkup, 2014). They are driven and value unique, customized experiences and products more than previous generations such as millennials (Topic & Mitchell, 2019). Traditional channels are outdated for Gen Zers, as most of them are no longer driven by traditional marketing techniques (Mangles, 2017). However, marketing continues to be important in captivating this cohort, as their purchasing power is gradually improving and they get older (Törocsik et al., 2014). One good way to get their attention is to appeal to visual communication, such as videos, photos, dynamic and rich content instead of static ads and text (Marks, 2016).

Price and quality are still the most important aspects to Gen Zers, as they don't consider environmentally friendly companies and initiatives enough to make them buy a product (Toksoy & Ariker, 2017), but it's enough to form a bond with the brand, as they often look out and show interest in the positive or negative impacts companies have on society (Deloitte, 2019). Value consciousness and convenience are also key to this cohort, which explains why they are avid users of e-commerce retailers (Thangavel et al., 2022).

2.2.2. Gen Zers as tourists

Segmentation is being used and studied in the tourism industry and it is considered a very important tool for marketers. In this particular field, the most used criteria is demography (Horneman et al., 2002; Shoemaker, 1989), however there are other types of segments such as socioeconomic or nature of travel (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2004). As demography plays an important role, this type of generational cohort analysis present in this study is being used by tourism marketers so they can target and study the behavior of a specific tourist segment (Gardiner et al., 2013).

As tourists, Gen Zers have different ways to organize and plan trips when comparing from previous generations. There is no doubt of the importance of this generation as future travelers and tourists (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019). One can argue that tourism has been seeing drastic changes which allow the development of new options, mostly because of how better the transportation has become, the appearance of new communication methods and how globalized the society is nowadays (Monaco, 2018).

Despite the importance of Gen Z for the tourism industry and global market in general, there is still a lack of literature and research on this cohort considering the

importance of the field in question. Specially because the importance of this area will only increase as Gen Zers get older and gain even more purchasing power and influence.

If we analyze the purchasing tendencies of this cohort in the tourism and hospitality industry, we can say that Gen Zers represent a golden opportunity for regions in economic and political struggles. The reason why is that they don't search nor care for social, political and environmental problems when they're picking a destination, because such problems are not a barrier for them. Additionally, they spend more in the destination itself, rather than on transports and hotels (Cavagnaro et al., 2018; Monaco, 2018).

Managers and marketers need to consider generational change if they want to be prepared for the future of the tourism and hospitality industry. Gen Z will gradually replace previous generations and considering they are currently the biggest generation on earth suggests that it will happen sometime in the near future. In 2030, the needs, behaviors, and desires of the average tourist won't be the same as nowadays (Cavagnaro et al., 2018). So, there is a need for tourism businesses to adjust their strategies to a new reality that follows the way of thinking of Gen Zers. Being present in several platforms, customize marketing services and strategies, improve brand communication and overall value and being more dynamic and respectful is appreciated by this cohort. This shift should be thought and executed fast, as these group of people are already the most active on the tourism market (Monaco, 2018).

They are used to travel, as they do it since they were kids. This shows how experienced they are, being open and comfortable in today's globalized world. When they travel, most value how "*instagramable*" places are (TrendWatch, 2017). They are driven by realistic, authentic, possible to recreate content, so using photos of models on a beach or other traditional way to sell a destination does not attract Gen Zers' attention (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019).

2.3. Characteristics of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

As eWOM comes from peoples' opinions and experiences instead of publicity and other kinds of information generated by companies, it is considered to be one of the most reliable information sources by consumers (Brown et al., 2007; Mazzarol et al., 2007; Munnukka et al., 2015). It is, additionally, considered to be one of the most crucial source of intel when a person is making a purchase decision (Sırma, 2009). However, eWOM

platforms have their differences: while on review websites most of the content and communications are done anonymously, on social media people interact with others they already know (Kozinets et al., 2010; Moran & Muzellec, 2017).

ICT developments have been playing a role in customers' reliance on customer reviews (Schuckert et al., 2015) and online booking (Rianthong et al., 2016), affecting their behavior and promotion channels in the tourism industry (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Nowadays, Word-of-Mouth breaks its conventional barriers, as it is present in different online platforms like Websites, online review sites, blogs and social media (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Whilst WOM was done by people who speak with each other or in small groups, nowadays with the evolution of digital there was a change of scenario. WOM is now present on mass media, in selected groups, friends and millions of strangers connected through online platforms, who disseminate electronic word-of-mouth – also known as eWOM (O'Connor, 2010).

This phenomenon of eWOM was well-defined by a study as “any positive or negative statement by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) (page 39). User-generated-content (UGC) can be seen as a form of eWOM, because content they generate on websites is considered an effective form of marketing (Cox et al., 2009; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2012; Schetzina & Jain., 2012). On online communities, consumers share positive and negative experiences. When they are making a review/comment, satisfied consumers tend to spread Positive Word-of-Mouth (PWOM) (Bitner, 1990), while disappointed customers spread Negative Word-of-Mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Given the larger scope of online dissemination channels, eWOM has the power to store opinions and reviews for longer periods of time and reach a larger audience than WOM. eWOM is also more efficient in spreading information, creates convenience and eliminates the need of face-to-face interactions (Lee, 2014). WOM, on the other hand, relies on face-to-face interactions (Sundaram et al., 1998). Lack of context in some cases and the absence of physical interactions/body language can complicate interpretation, understanding and applicability of eWOM (Dellarocas, 2003). eWOM is often asynchronous, and rather than one-to-one as traditional WOM, it usually is one-to-many (Jeong & Jang, 2011). There are multiple forms of eWOM such as social media, online community and online forum. All of them have the ability to be stored online, breaking

spatial, temporal and personal social barriers. Another benefit of eWOM is the fact that it comes from consumers, so it is generally less biased than marketer-controlled information (Bickart, 2001) as the message comes from people who are independent from the market (Brown et al., 2007). Thus, eWOM communication might have a decisive role on influencing consumer behavior, doing it better than company publicity (Kozinets et al., 2010).

Moreover, literature shows that existing ratings and reviews of a product/service can have an influence, subconsciously or deliberately, on how a consumer will rate and review the same product/service (Hu & Li, 2011; Moe & Schweidel, 2012; Moe & Trusov, 2011). eWOM about a service affects consumers' expectations when they are making a decision, so their satisfaction after buying is linked to the existing reviews. Thus, a service with good ratings and reviews makes the perceived level of performance higher, which leads to dissatisfaction and lower reviews and ratings (Hu & Li, 2011; Lorenz, 2009).

Nevertheless, the majority of consumers already read and search for online reviews before buying products or services (Poddar et al., 2019). Nowadays, eWOM management does not only affect the consumers who make reviews and ratings, but also possible customers who read them (Xie et al., 2017). Negative eWOM is more prominent than positive eWOM (Xie et al., 2011), so companies have a chance to strengthen and build their online reputation while recovering service failures by managing negative reviews and comments (Gu & Ye, 2014; Wei et al., 2013).

2.4. Anonymous eWOM vs Social eWOM

These different types of eWOM share certain characteristics, such as having both online presences. Therefore, they are in some ways related, despite diverging in terms of concept and possessing different benefits from each other. Those differences should be taken into account when developing an online marketing strategy.

2.4.1. Anonymous eWOM (online reviews)

Anonymous eWOM such as online reviews and ratings are considered an effective form of marketing. Studies have shown the impacts of eWOM through online reviews, particularly on shopping websites. Results reveal that despite the anonymity of online reviews, they still have a strong influence on purchase intention (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Gu et al., 2012; Li & Zhan, 2011; D. H. Park et al., 2007). Anonymous eWOM is defined as any content that comes from an unknown source, therefore being ambiguously trustworthy (Mayzlin et al., 2014). In the hotel industry, most of consumers rely more on information provided by other consumers rather than trusting in the hotels' own descriptions (Cox et al., 2009). eWOM platforms like discussion forums (Chiou & Cheng, 2003), review websites (Cheung et al., 2008) and blogs (Lin et al., 2012) have been impacting consumers' purchase intentions. Several studies of the eWOM influence through review websites have found that despite the reviews being anonymous, they play a significant paper on purchase intention (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Gu et al., 2012; Li & Zhan, 2011; D. H. Park et al., 2007).

The quality of a service in the hotel industry is complex to measure and analyze, due to its intrinsic characteristics. Its intangibility, heterogeneity, ephemerality and inseparability makes them harder to evaluate than the quality in the manufacturing industry (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2005). Thus, the inherent characteristics of the hotel market makes this service more vulnerable to flaws (Hess et al., 2003), and, therefore, subject to more complaints. The heterogeneity of hotel services makes it impossible to continuously reach 100% of quality perfection (Lovelock & J., 2007).

Online reviews and complaints offer an opportunity for consumers to let companies know of the service components that they enjoyed and others that didn't match their expectations (Goetzinger et al., 2006). It is important that hotel companies try to answer reviews appropriately and on schedule, specially the negative ones. Otherwise, it can lead to a potential loss of business (Leung et al., 2011), as clients don't tolerate when they fail to answer their comments (Au et al., 2014).

TripAdvisor.com is a good example of this, as it is one of the most famous tourism online review websites, being the top community for online travelers with millions of reviews and opinions about millions of hotels, B&B and lodging (Phillips et al., 2015;

Raguseo et al., 2017). Community platforms like this allow consumers to have access to tons of information, ratings and reviews fairly easy, helping them to make decisions (Tan et al., 2018).

Its purpose is to promote social interaction in the tourism industry, encouraging users to share their stories and experiences in various domains of hospitality. Those comments can be rated, as there is a voting system working to rate users' opinions. This makes them as reliable as they can be, turning this type of eWOM into valuable business assets, valued by their peers (Munar et al., 2013).

However, despite being promoted as “authentic and genuine”, TripAdvisor was fined for not taking measures to prevent false reviews (CNBC, 2014). Basically everyone can write a review regardless of having experienced the service in question or not (Dodson, 2007; McCartney, 2012). In 2014, it was estimated that 20 per cent of hotel reviews that are in TripAdvisor were fraudulent, posted either by hospitality providers or haters that have something against the reviewed hotel (Cordato, 2014).

There are many studies that correlate TripAdvisor and eWOM, studying different fields like content analysis, factors that lead to satisfaction such as rating, sentiment and volume of reviews (Xiang et al., 2017). However, there is a lack of studies dedicated to the behavior of the complainers in the hotel and tourism industry (Au et al., 2014).

2.4.2. Social eWOM (social media)

Social networking sites are a rich source of product/service opinions and information that has been changing consumers' purchase decisions (Graham & Havlena, 2007), eliminating the temporal and geographical constraints and being able to read opinions from known people. Therefore, these sites have been gaining popularity and social eWOM has emerged as an important communication strategy for brands and businesses (Chu & Kim, 2011). It can be defined as content created online by credible sources and shared in their own social network (Liang et al., 2011).

The constant changes and trends in social media marketing makes it hard for marketers to keep up-to-date. While different applications and interfaces are appearing in a fast pace, enabling more possibilities for companies to interact with their clientele,

marketers struggle to adapt to effectively use those new platforms and reach their target (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Followed by trends, some SNS platforms are in their peak, such as Tik Tok, Twitter and Instagram, while others like Hi5, Orkut and Friendster become outdated. As trends go by, the importance of keep studying to understand the latest trends, new features and best ways for marketers to meet their goals (Alalwan et al., 2017).

2.4.3. Differences between social media and review websites

We can describe the differences between social eWOM and anonymous eWOM through four factors: The first one is *target*, as eWOM is generally thought of as easy to access by everyone but social eWOM has a specific group of people that is in focus. The second is *content validity*, that refers to the ability consumers have to determine the veracity of the content they see. The third factor is *willingness to share*, which in social eWOM is higher because of the possibility of building relationships by sharing. The last factor is *source validity*, which is hard to verify in anonymous eWOM, given that there isn't enough information of who provided the review/rating. Whereas in social eWOM, the consumer often knows the reviewer, and this bound is a powerful benefit that eases decision-making processes (Pihlaja et al., 2017).

Social media allows communication between people who know each other, while review websites allow anonymous communication (Kozinets et al., 2010; Moran & Muzellec, 2017). Consequently, users turn to social media when they are unaware about brands and want to search for information about them (Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Naylor et al., 2012).

Both social media (See-To & Ho, 2014; Wang et al., 2012) and review websites (Cheung et al., 2008) were considered influential eWOM platforms on consumers' purchase intentions. Despite the anonymity of online reviews, research finds anonymous eWOM and social eWOM as effective on purchase intention (Gu et al., 2012; Li & Zhan, 2011; D. H. Park et al., 2007).

2.5. Information adoption model

In online platforms, the information shared has different effects depending on the person. It is possible that the same message results in different outcomes from de

receivers, depending on different factors such as past experiences, perceptions and beliefs (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976). In order to understand how people process online information, researchers have studied its adoption process (Nonaka, 1994). Sussman and Siegal (2003) were successful on applying a dual-process theory named Information adoption model, that explains how people are affected in an online communication context.

This model is based on two theories: technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis et al., 1989; Sussman & Siegal, 2003) and elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty et al., 1981), that concludes there are two routes (peripheral and central) by which a message can affect people. The peripheral route involves issues which are indirectly associated with the message core, while the central route is referring to the core argument (Cheung et al., 2008; Sears, 1988; Shu & Scott, 2014). IAM is based on the premise that information quality has a central influence, whilst source credibility is a peripheral factor influencing the adoption of information. These two elements have a direct relation to the usefulness of the information, which leads to its adoption by the consumers (Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

IAM explains how influential information on online communication platforms is. Therefore, researchers have applied it to eWOM studies, covering multiple areas such as social media, online forums and review websites (Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Shu & Scott, 2014). As this dissertation studies eWOM in the form of social media, blogs, review websites and other online platforms, the appliance of IAM on the development of its hypotheses is suitable. The premise of the model was used to incorporate variables used in the framework: source credibility, eWOM quality, information usefulness and information adoption.

2.5.1. Source credibility

Despite all the benefits of eWOM, there are also downsides such as the veracity of the content itself. Several authors point the direct link between online source credibility and how probable an individual is to believe and utilize the information presented by a certain source (Cheung et al., 2008; Huang & Chen, 2006; Kiecker & Cowles, 2001). Thus, source credibility can be defined as how a person/group is perceived to be credible, trustworthy and knowledgeable (Petty et al., 1981). For a review/opinion/comment be considered credible, studies indicate that its author (or source) need to both have the

knowledge and information (expertise) to judge the service/product (Cheung et al., 2008; Huang & Chen, 2006; Park & Kim, 2008) and don't have an underlying motive for writing the comment (be trustworthy) (Cheung et al., 2008; Huang & Chen, 2006; Kiecker & Cowles, 2001). So, perceived credibility supports the validity of the comment/message/review and makes it worth to be accepted and adopted (Sweeney et al., 2008).

A huge consequence of anonymous postings is that certain nefarious behaviors have appeared, such as manipulate reviews and the use of aliases by consumers (Mayzlin et al., 2014), which constitutes a problem of trust and credibility in online user generated content (Pan & Chiou, 2011; Xie et al., 2011). This consequence of nameless online posting breaks trust, known to be of extreme importance in traditional WOM (Xie et al., 2011). Having consumer trust is crucial in several areas of online business (Hajli et al., 2013), and if it is broken it constitutes a major issue, since it is one of the lead causes of e-commerce failures (Jones & Leonard, 2008).

Ultimately, it is all about what consumers are looking to ease their choice. Key factors that contribute to review helpfulness are source trustworthiness and source expertise (how well can the review present options and how well is the experience described) (Li et al., 2013; O'Reilly et al., 2016). Those two key dimensions of source credibility (given the current digital environment of anonymity) affect the impact of eWOM (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Harmon & Coney, 1982), but there are more factors that affect the impact of eWOM on Gen Zers' decision-making. Anonymous eWOM often fails to meet these indicators, but social eWOM does not. Social media is built to increase the usefulness and truthfulness of eWOM, as closed social groups form interactions with stronger ties than that of anonymous eWOM, which affects source credibility (Brown et al., 2007; Hung & Li, 2007; Pan & Chiou, 2011; Xie et al., 2011). Thus, social eWOM provides content that should be perceived as more reliable than anonymous eWOM (such as TripAdvisor.com) as on social media platforms the content creators have a face and identity and are usually known to other people (Nielsen, 2012). When this happens and the consumer recognizes the reviewer as a credible person, they tend to believe the information they are giving is credible (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). However, the credibility of eWOM messages is measured by consumer to consumer (C2C) communications within online comments and reviews, making it

harder to evaluate in terms of trustworthiness and expertise (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994).

Early studies involving credibility and the influence of information shown discrepancies on the number of opinion changes when the content was connected to a highly credible source rather than a low credible source (Hovland, 1951). The impact of source credibility on information adoption was already indirectly measured through a mediator (information usefulness) before (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). In some of those studies, it was mentioned that ELM helps to predict the impact of certain factors (including source credibility) on information adoption (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). ELM researchers found that the impact of source credibility on attitude change depends on how involved people are with the message topic. Furthermore, source credibility is considered a major factor that determines consumers' information adoption in the online environment (Zhang & Watts, 2008). In this case, source credibility is defined as how a person perceives the information sources' credibility, instead of the content itself (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984).

When people aren't involved with the topic in question, source credibility is considered a great attitude change predictor (Petty et al., 1981). More studies also pointed the positive influence source credibility has with the acceptance of recommendations (Mak & Lyytinen, 1997). A credible source can be seen as a good argument that serves an advocated position, playing an important paper in informational influence (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994).

Literature has shown that credibility can impact the adoption of information (Rauniar et al., 2014). The positive impact of source credibility on information adoption was proven, with researchers referring that consumers are more probable to adopt online reviews from sources that are credible (Shen et al., 2014; Watts & Zhang, 2008; Yang, 2010). Considering this proven impact, in this study it is also assumed that source credibility affects information adoption in two different contexts: social media and in review websites

Taking into account the previous arguments, the following hypotheses was framed:

H1: In social media and in review websites, good source credibility is a key element that positively affects information adoption.

2.5.2. eWOM volume

eWOM volume means the quantity of posted comments/messages/opinions that people found online about a service/product (Wang & McCarthy, 2021). More comments/reviews mean consumers' behavioral intentions are affected, as they perceive the eWOM as more informative (D. H. Park et al., 2007) and, therefore, tend to adopt the information easily.

Quantity is one of the key elements of eWOM. The internet allows users to find a huge number of comments, opinions and reviews about products/services, which is important in e-commerce (Chen et al., 2009; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). The amount of comments in a website and the involvement of the consumer helps other customers to have access to more information critical to their decision-making (Moldovan et al., 2011). The more reviews/opinions/recommendations a consumer has looked up about a service, the bigger the influence of eWOM has on their decision-making (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014) and, in consequence, on the adoption of the information they assess. In the tourism industry, the internet has become the major source of information for those planning a trip (Wu et al., 2008). Moreover, the volume of ratings and reviews in a product/service/website is considered as representative of how popular the product/service is (Chatterjee, 2001; Park & Lee, 2008). Some studies have been done that conclude that the volume of information present in a website positively affect the behavior and attitude among customers (Wang et al., 2007) and contribute to boost the seller's reputation (Moldovan et al., 2011). The more recommendations a product/service has, the higher the trustworthiness and the lower the perceived risk is (Park & Lee, 2008).

The abundance of websites related to the travel and hospitality industry has led to a huge number of posted reviews. The amount of user generated content available is crucial for the quality of eWOM and further impacts consumers' purchasing decisions (Ruiterkamp, 2013). The relation between quantity and information adoption, credibility and purchase intentions has been studied before with satisfying results (Bataineh, 2015). Literature also shows that the more recommendations/reviews/comments an individual has consulted about a service, the more impact eWOM has on them (adoption) and on their decision-making (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). High eWOM volume gives consumers a clearer vision about the consequences of choosing a service, as they predict more individuals have experienced it (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). Thus, it increases the chances of getting useful information (Filieri et al., 2018), consequently improving the chances of

information adoption. In fact, this correlation has been studied before in previous papers (Andriani et al.), and it was proven that there is a correlation between eWOM volume and the consumers involvement with the information (D. H. Park et al., 2007).

Some would think that when the number of reviews increase, the less the value of each individual review has, the literature suggests otherwise. It appears that the bigger the number of reviews gets, the greater the influence is collectively upon consumers (Molinillo et al., 2016). In this sector, volume of eWOM also impacts consumer preferences, as it increases with the quantity of comments/reviews made (Viglia et al., 2014). Various studies suggest that eWOM volume significantly impacts consumer behavior (Blal & Sturman, 2014; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Filieri & McLeay, 2014) and influences its adoption (Rani & Shivaprasad, 2018) and purchasing decisions (Adjei et al., 2010; Ionica, 2014).

Considering that, in general, eWOM volume affects information adoption, it is also assumed in this study that in social media and in review websites, eWOM volume affects whether the consumer adopts the information or not. Thus, the following hypotheses was framed:

H2: In social media and in review websites, high eWOM volume is a key element that positively affects information adoption.

2.5.3. eWOM quality

Former information adoption studies show concerns about how persuasive an argument is to the receivers. It was proven that higher quality and detailed arguments help to improve the respective information usefulness (Cheung et al., 2009; Fang, 2014; Sussman & Siegal, 2003) and, therefore, its adoption.

The internet is a global system where people are allowed to share their opinions and experiences with freedom, which often harms information quality (Xu & Yao, 2015; Yeap et al., 2014). The definition of eWOM quality is how good the content of a review/comment/post/recommendation is, based on four elemental factors (understandability, sufficiency, relevance and objectivity) (Lin et al., 2013).

The quality of eWOM can be measured in four dimensions: relevance/appropriateness, accuracy (if the information is reliable), comprehensiveness

(if it is complete) and timeliness (if the information is not obsolete). The quality of the information available in a certain website can influence its adoption and consumers' purchasing intentions/decisions, contributing to the perceived usefulness of the website (Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

It is known that when developing a point of view, consumers seek powerful convincing arguments rather than poor and fictional ones (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). It is also proven that when in digital communities, the quality of an argument is a huge contributing factor to consumers' information adoption (Zhang & Watts, 2008). When conducting online searches for comments/reviews/UGC (eWOM), consumers tend to develop a positive attitude about the product/service discussed when they feel the review is more credible, increasing their purchase intention (Banerjee, 1992; Tsao, 2014; Tsao et al., 2015). Also, the impact of information quality on information adoption has been empirically proven before (Rauniar et al., 2014).

Accessibility-diagnostics theory discloses the before-mentioned literature, as it explains that quality eWOM improves credibility, thus increasing the probability of consumers adopt the information under discussion, thus choosing the product/service reviewed (Jimenez & Mendoza, 2013; Zhao et al., 2012). In three studies regarding online communities, the connection between high argument quality and information adoption was made, proving consumers tend to adopt information from reviews that have good argument quality (Hussain et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2014; Watts & Zhang, 2008; Yang, 2010).

Taking this into account, in this study it is also considered that, both in social media and in review websites, eWOM quality influences information adoption. Thus, the following hypotheses was proposed:

H3: In social media and in review websites, high quality eWOM is a key element that positively affects information adoption.

2.5.4. Information usefulness and adoption

Information usefulness is related to how valuable, helpful and detailed the information is (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Studies show that perceived usefulness influences the individuals' decision to adopt a behavior (Gefen et al., 2003). It is defined

as how people consider the information received as helpful and it highly impacts information adoption and its subsequent purchase decisions (Cheung et al., 2008; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). The influence of information usefulness/adoption on consumers' purchase decision was studied by several authors and proven in their research (Chiang & Jang, 2007; Liu & Zhang, 2010; Xia & Bechwati, 2008). Consumers are used to adopt information if they found it helpful and useful in the process of purchase decision (Flanagin et al., 2014).

Literature shows that individuals tend to adopt information which is more relevant, comprehensive and useful in helping them with their research (Rebecca et al., 2012; Tam & Ho, 2005), affecting their purchase decisions. Researchers have also studied the impact of information adoption on purchase intentions/decisions (Andriani et al., 2021; Erkan & Evans, 2018; Song et al., 2021; Tjongirin et al., 2020).

Moreover, the relationship between information usefulness and information adoption is an intrinsic part of IAM, and its correlation was already tested in various studies (Andriani et al., 2021; Cheung et al., 2008; Horst et al., 2007; Hussain et al., 2017; Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020; Pillay, 2021; Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Tjongirin et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2016). Thus, in this study we also consider that in social media and in review websites, information usefulness impacts information adoption. Thus, the following hypothesis was framed:

H4: In social media and in review websites, information usefulness is a key element that positively influences information adoption.

People who analyze and adopt eWOM information tended to have the intention to buy. Nevertheless, the process of adopting the information could change depending on the platforms (Cheung et al., 2009; Fang, 2014). Thus, it is predictable that the adoption of information could vary on its influence on consumers' purchase decisions in social media *versus* review websites, as the platforms also differ. Considering this, the subsequent hypothesis was proposed:

H5: In social media and in review websites, information adoption is a key element that positively influences consumers' purchase decision.

Researchers consider eWOM from social media less anonymous, therefore being more credible and beneficial for eWOM information (Chu & Choi, 2011; Wallace et al.,

2011). Moreover, there is also literature that argue that as social media eWOM is conducted between known people and friends, it is more influential on consumers' purchase decisions (Moran & Muzellec, 2017; D. H. Park et al., 2007).

Considering the previous arguments, the following hypotheses was framed:

H6: Information adoption is more influential on consumers' purchase decision in social media over review websites.

2.6. Hospitality marketing and management

Hospitality marketing and management has been growing in terms of academic studies in recent years. From the beginning of the 2000's we have been seeing a shift from product development, planning and impacts to try to understand how the consumer sees and perceives a certain product and several other factors in terms of the decision-making process (Bogicevic et al., 2017; Lu & Gursoy, 2017; Shin et al., 2017). Thus, researchers have been focusing on examining marketing strategies used by hospitality companies to interact with their consumers and understand how consumers choose between the existent supply.

The new generation of hospitality consumers (Millennials and Generation Z) are dependent of mobile devices for their everyday routine. It is understandable that the academic research on the current hospitality marketing and management trend focuses on consumers' presence in social media and online websites (Gursoy, 2018). The internet has changed how people make business, and hospitality and tourism were no exceptions (Lee et al., 2011). The industry evolved significantly, not only because of ICT developments, but also due to the massive flow of information and UGC that modified consumer behavior (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). They rather prefer to gather intel about their destinations through social media, search engines and review websites than going through the traditional way. Thus, every tourism employer need to rethink their online dynamics and implement strategies and features based on UGC that consider this consumer behavior shift (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015).

In terms of the hotel industry, it has been a competitive market for years due to the increasing globalization (Sin et al., 2005). Literature has shown the customers' perception of quality in the hotel market can be influenced by their attributes. Different

types of travelers can also value different attributes. For example, business travelers give more importance to convenience, while leisure travelers value more the reservation and check-in/out process (Yavas & Babakus, 2005). Despite core attributes being mostly tangible in the hotel market, such as lounge or swimming pool, there is more to it. The intangible services like the interaction between customers and service providers, for example, are crucial to the experience (Slevitch & Oh, 2010). Thus, the before-mentioned attributes can affect eWOM activities like intention and periodicity (Sparks & Browning, 2010).

2.7. Influence of eWOM on tourists' purchase decisions

In services like hospitality, given its intangibility and sensory characteristics, consumers are more open to value interpersonal communications such as online reviews (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Social media has been changing the way businesses and consumers interact, clearly influencing sales, brand image and, therefore, consumers' decisions (Chan et al., 2017; Dijkmans et al., 2015; Gao et al., 2018). Three quarters of global travelers use eWOM as their main source of information for trip planning (Manes & Tchetchik, 2018). Hence, the impact of online reviews in hospitality has been increasing in recent years (Moro et al., 2017). It is expectable that eWOM will continue to play an important role as a pool of valuable information for costumers and businesses (Sann et al., 2021). Consumers are used and like to share and seek experiences. Online media and review sites are used for trip planning, comparing services and prices, search for information and to make decisions about overall places, activities and services available (Chan et al., 2017). This allows the creation of online communities that gather people whose interests align (Jeong & Jang, 2011).

eWOM is key in influencing hotel customers' purchase intention and decision-making (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Wen, 2009; Ye et al., 2009). We can define purchase behavior as the stages involved when a person or group uses, buys, choses or discards services, products and experiences to meet their needs and wishes (Schiffman et al., 2012). Consumer decision-making, refers to the description of how a consumer behaves and makes choices based on their thought process (Durvasula et al., 1993). In this study, we are assessing if social and anonymous eWOM have the power to influence

Gen Zers' preference of hotels and which one holds more influence. Thus, we are interested in the stages involved when a person chooses hotels that meet their needs and wishes. This means that we are focusing on the influence on consumers' purchase behavior, or if social media and review websites influence their intentions to purchase the hotel stay or not. Purchase intention increases the odds of the consumer buying the service, which is important in the hotel business (Rudyanto, 2018). It is the most important variable that affects how likely it is for consumers to purchase a product or not. As we seen earlier, the purchase intention is highly dependable of the information and its characteristics (Erkan & Evans, 2018). It is important to note that intentions are the key indicator to purchase online, but purchase intention doesn't always lead to purchase action (Orus et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2018). Thus, hotel preference doesn't always mean hotel stay purchase, because, by definition, preference refers to certain aspects/features a consumer wants to have in a service to make it more desirable to him. This explains why and how a consumer ranks a group of services (in this case, hotels) they search, and why they prefer one over the other (Guleria & Parmar, 2015).

Rating, ratio of positive and negative reviews, review detail and reviewer status are the four factors people take most in consideration when reading online reviews (Guerreiro & Moro, 2017). But why do travelers continue to care about what other people think online, despite knowing there is a large portion of the reviews that are staged? One good answer to this question is that consumers feel they can differentiate whether the reviews are fake or not (Ayeh et al., 2013; Filieri et al., 2015).

The importance of eWOM in this sector is unquestionable. There are several reasons why eWOM is so important in the hospitality industry: consumers cannot rate and comment how good a service is before experiencing it; the customer is highly involved in hospitality services, influencing their outcome; being seasonal and perishable, services are harder to market by providers; competitive advantages can be created by successfully manage online interpersonal influence, making companies stand out in the fierce competition of this industry (Litvin et al., 2008).

eWOM can take several shapes in the hotel market, being online reviews, comments and ratings in opinion sites (online communities, hotel websites, online agencies) the most important (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). The bigger the number of hotel reviews is, the better the ratings of these reviews are (Blal &

Sturman, 2014; Melián-González et al., 2013), so businesses such as hotels often encourage this type of eWOM and also blogs, comments, videos and pictures on consumers' social media (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011).

Tourists nowadays are constant producers of content and avid users of SNS and online review sites when they are travelling, as they like to share their experiences (Dwivedi et al., 2021). They post everything about their travels, from opinions on review sites to photos on social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), and when they are planning a trip they rely and trust more on the information shared by other tourists on SNS and review websites rather than the traditional marketing channels (Alves et al., 2016). Thus, it is reasonable to say opinions, ratings and reviews from other customers are important for tourists' decision-making (Park et al., 2017). This is why destination managers, agencies and tourism public organizations invest in SNS marketing to sell their destinations and get the attention of tourists and stakeholders (Dwivedi et al., 2021). With the ICT advancements, tourists' decision-making when planning a trip might be entirely online, in multiple websites/applications (Gale, 2015). Their decision-making process is also faster, so marketers have less time to attract the attention and persuade their target (Dimitriou & AbouElgheit, 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1. Overview

After the literature review, which allowed to know the “state of the art” of key aspects of this study, this chapter presents and describes the methodology adopted in this dissertation, showing what will be used to accomplish the objective and answer the research questions of the study.

The sections of this chapter discuss the research methodology used, the objective and research questions that the study will answer, the research process and conceptual model, the target/sample whose study is directed and how the data was selected, the survey structure and measurement scales of the constructs and the pre test conducted to check the validity and reliability of the survey.

3.2. Research methodology

This dissertation follows a quantitative methodology, as it pretends to study behavioral patterns, establishing a representation of what consumers think or do (Barnham, 2015). The objective is to set up and analyze relationships between variables, identifying the factors that lead to a certain consumer behavior. In order to do that, the study is based on previously established hypotheses (before mentioned in the literature review) that will be confirmed, or not, in the end of the analysis (Brewer, 1999).

Inside quantitative research, there are two common methodologies adopted by researchers – experimental research and survey research (Creswell, 2009). Due to the nature of this dissertation, a survey research is the appropriate (and chosen) method, as it helps to gather information used to describe variables and to analyze relationships between them (Malhotra & Grover, 1998).

3.3. Objective and Research questions

This study was constructed with the primary objective to understand the differences in how review websites and social media affect Gen Zers' purchase decisions regarding their hotel preference. From this starting point, two other specific objectives emerge: to compare review websites (comments/reviews in an anonymous environment) and social networking sites (comments/posts of friends and influencers) to see if Gen Zers are affected differently depending on the eWOM source; to try to understand which type of eWOM should hotel managers focus when promoting its business.

With this in mind, two questions of investigation have emerged:

RQ1) Which eWOM characteristic has more influence in the adoption of the information in social eWOM and in anonymous eWOM?

RQ2) Is there a difference of influence on Gen Zers' purchase decision regarding hotel stays if the information is adopted from social media or if it comes from review websites?

3.4. Research process and Conceptual model

Based on the hypotheses mentioned in the literature review, a conceptual model is presented to represent the relationship between variables (Figure 1). Each variable of the conceptual framework is measured two times in the online survey – once in the context of social eWOM (social media) and another in the context of anonymous eWOM (review websites).

Each measurement items that define the variables are originated from constructs validated in previous studies. In order to ensure that items are adapted to the context of this research (not compromising the meaning/wording of the scales), minor adaptations to the original measurement scales are done. The online survey validity, suitability and reliability is accessed by the development of a pre study.

Subsequently, the data will be analyzed using *partial least square (PLS)*, a *Structural Equation Method (SEM)* technique, through the *SmartPLS* software. The SEM is relevant to the present study as it allows studying complex models measuring direct and indirect relationships between distinct variables (Nitzl et al., 2016). It allows

researchers to check and analyze how adequate the model is and to test it structurally (Gefen et al., 2000).

The online survey was developed on *Google Forms*, as it has a user-friendly interface, making it easy to design and develop web-based surveys. Despite the fact that *Google Forms* allows graphical presentation and data analysis, this data management tool was only used to gather data and export to *Microsoft Excel*, which was further imported to the software *SmartPLS* for a more detailed analysis.

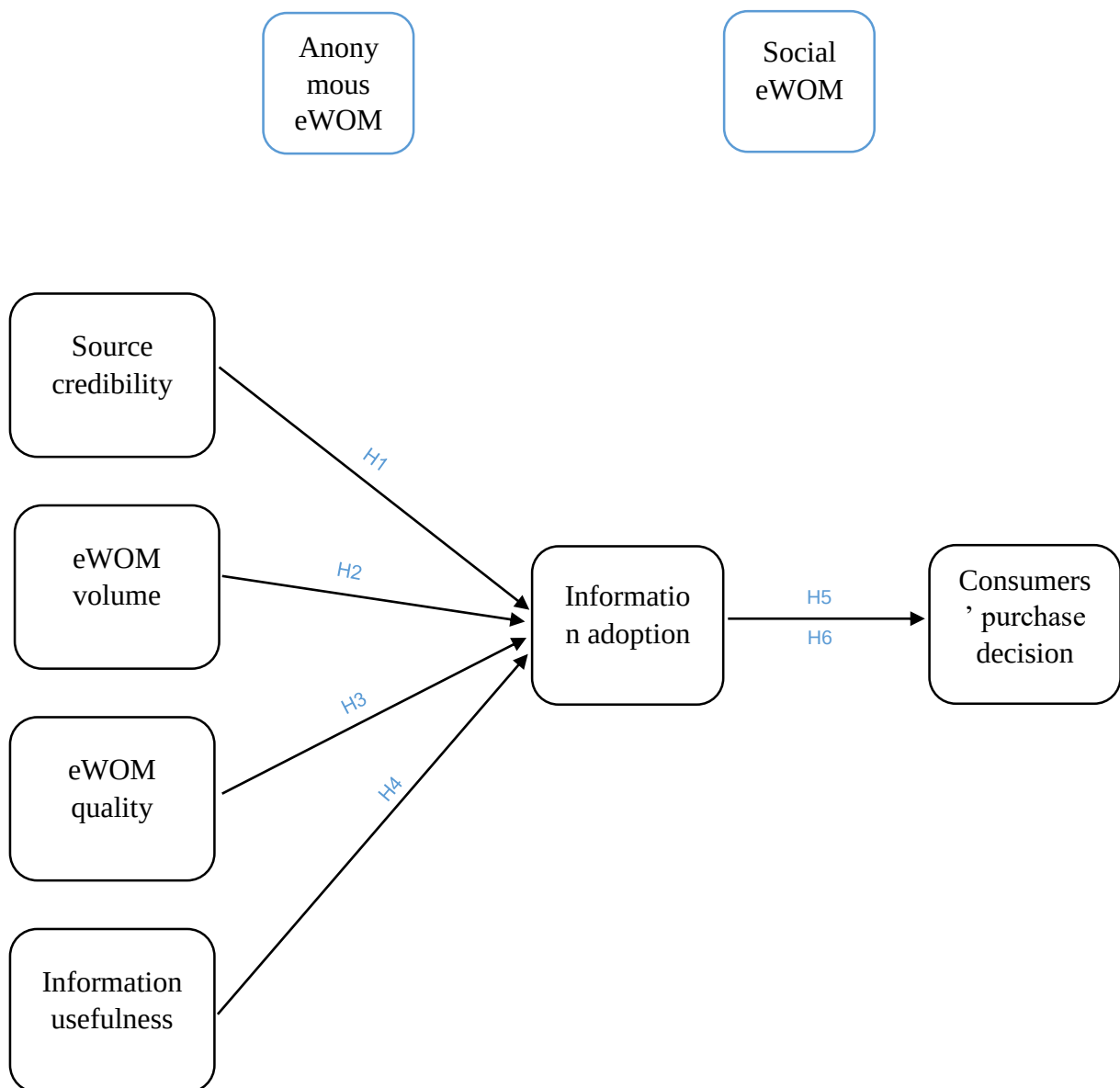


Figure 1 – Conceptual framework with the hypotheses presented.

3.5. Sample and Data collection

The online survey was conducted in two languages – Portuguese and English. It was available in various online platforms, as it is believed that it provides data from samples that are more diverse and representative (Behrend et al., 2011). In this digital era, the use of technology for the development of data collection platforms and methods has increased, changing the way people gather data. Crowdsourcing (acquiring services, information and ideas online from engaging with a crowd or group of people) (Howe & Jeff, 2006) has been increasingly used online as a way to obtain data in a wide range of study fields (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014).

The data from the Portuguese version of the survey was collected by sharing it on the institutional university e-mail, Instagram and Facebook; The data from the English version was collected by sharing it on Instagram and Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk).

MTurk is an online data collection panel used by many researchers in the social sciences (particularly in management) (Aguinis et al., 2021) fields for research purposes (Lovett et al., 2018). It is the most used method for collecting data online (Porter et al., 2019). The respondents of this platform (also known as MTurkers) tend to be more diverse, resulting in broader, more representative outcomes of data (Buhrmester et al., 2011). Other benefit of using MTurk is that the data collection is faster than sharing in other online platforms, requires little physical resources and allows researchers to delete entry errors (Behrend et al., 2011) and answers that aren't valid, by approving or not their answers. The survey was posted for MTurkers to answer, however there were qualifications they needed to meet to be able to answer. Their approval rate on MTurk tasks needed to be higher than 95% and they had to have a minimum of 100 surveys approved.

This study, as mentioned before, is directed to Generation Z, which is one of the generations more familiarized with the internet and the online world, spending more time on social media and online review websites than older generations. Gen Z have an active role on influencing the purchase decisions of their families (Vasan, 2021). As mentioned before, they will become, in the coming years, the central consumer segment in the tourism and hospitality industry (Robinson & Schanzel, 2019), making them an interesting sample to study in this field.

The participants of this study had to meet specific criteria to answer the survey, in order to obtain a bigger percentage of relevant answers. The qualifications were presented to the respondents in the beginning of the survey. People were required to be from 1995 to 2010, which is the age that comprehends the cohort of the study (Generation Z). As the cohort includes minors of age, according to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) one needs to have a lawful basis to be able to collect and process personal data of minors (respondents who are less than 18 years old). As consent is a possible lawful basis, minors needed a signed authorization from their parents or legal guardians in order to participate in the study (Commission, 2022). Surveys from people that answered they never took part in the hotel choice decision process were disregarded, as it is impossible for them to express opinions about something they never experience. In those cases, the impact on their purchase decision can't be measured, because they never participated in the decision to buy a stay in a hotel.

3.6. Survey structure and Measurement scales

The Survey is divided into three parts: demographic data, social media data and review websites' data. Initially, a question was made to check if the respondent was born between 1995 and 2010, which is when Gen Zers are born. If the respondent was minor of age, the survey ended by saying there is a need for parental/legal guardian consent and a PDF link with an authorization document was available for parents to fill, to let their minors participate in the online survey. If the respondent answered "other", it meant they were older than 27. Thus, in those cases, the survey was also directed to the end, with an explanation on why the survey ended.

A total of 52 questions were made. The constructs measured by those questions were source credibility, eWOM volume, eWOM quality, information usefulness, information adoption and consumers' purchase decision. All questions were presented using a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) (Joshi et al., 2015). The number of validated answers of a survey should be, at least, 4 to 5 times bigger than the number of items present on the survey (Malhotra, 2012). Thus, this online survey needed to have a minimum number of answers of 208. The survey was available from August 4th 2022 to August 19th 2022 and had a total of 541 answers.

As mentioned before, each variable (or construct) was measured two times. Once in the context of social media usage, and another in the context of online review usage. Thus, the items used to measure each construct were adapted from the respective authors and were adapted twice, once in social media and another in online review usage. The survey was also translated to Portuguese and the translation of the items were cautiously and attentively made to respect the original scales and maintain the validity and reliability of the study. The construction of the questions needed to be slightly adapted in the translation to ensure phrases were well-made, but never compromising the content of this study and always respecting the original scales.

As the adaptations made weren't significantly different, the table 1 is an overview of the variables/constructs measured in this study, the scales/items of the survey measuring the respective constructs and the references/authors whose respective items were adapted.

Constructs/Variables	Items of this study used to measure the respective constructs	Authors whose respective items were adapted
Source Credibility	In general, the information about hotels available and shared on social media...	
	It comes from people who perceive well the service characteristics	(Sussman & Siegal, 2003)
	It comes from people who are knowledgeable about the hotel and its services	(Sussman & Siegal, 2003)
	It comes from people who are trustworthy	(Sussman & Siegal, 2003)
	It comes from people who are credible	(Sussman & Siegal, 2003)
eWOM Volume	About the comments/posts/recommendations related to hotels on social media...	
	The number of comments/posts/videos of the hotel is huge, so the hotel is popular	(Lin et al., 2013)
	Because it has many ratings/recommendations on social media, the hotel has a good reputation	(Lin et al., 2013)
	The more the hotel is mentioned on social networks, the more I am aware of its existence	(Mohamed, 2016)
	The more the hotel is discussed on social media, the more it influences my purchase decision	(Mohamed, 2016)
	The quantity of online posts/comments information is great, inferring that the hotel has good sales	(Lin et al., 2013)
eWOM Quality	In general, the information about hotels available and shared on social media...	

	I think it's supported by facts	(D. H. Park et al., 2007)
	I think it's presented objectively	(D. H. Park et al., 2007)
	I think it's understandable	(D. H. Park et al., 2007)
	It's credible	(D. H. Park et al., 2007)
	I think it's clear	(D. H. Park et al., 2007)
	In general, I think the quality of the information is high	(D. H. Park et al., 2007)
Information usefulness	I consider the information about hotels available and shared on social media...	
	Valuable	(Sussman & Siegal, 2003)
	Informative	(Sussman & Siegal, 2003)
	Useful	(Sussman & Siegal, 2003)
Information adoption	The information about hotels available and shared on social media...	
	Contributes to my knowledge about the hotels discussed	(Cheung et al., 2009)
	Makes my decision to purchase a stay at the hotel easier	(Cheung et al., 2009)
	Improves my effectiveness to make my decision to purchase a stay at the hotel	(Cheung et al., 2009)
	Motivates me to decide which hotel to choose	(Cheung et al., 2009)
Consumers' Purchase Decision	After reading the posts/comments about hotels on social media...	
	Comments about hotels on social media affect my willingness to make a reservation	(Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015)
	When I believe hotels offer the same good and bad services that social media posts/comments describe, it influences my decision to make a reservation	(Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015)
	I choose my hotel accommodation upon reviews which I read on social media	(Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015)
	The information I receive on social media about hotels influence my purchase decision of hotel services	(Yaylı & Bayram, 2012)

Table 1 – Constructs measured, items of the survey and references.

3.7. Pre testing

To confirm the survey was understandable and clear for the respondents, a pre test was conducted. This helped to predict the average time people took answering the

survey, to see if it was too long or not. The objective of this pre test was also to search for errors (typography and poor sentence construction) and to see if the respondents had difficulties understanding what was being questioned.

Five individuals participated in this preliminary test. The survey was distributed by *URL* link and they answered in the platform *Google Forms*, as it was equally intended to be done in the official survey distribution.

In the end, there were some minor changes done, specifically on sentence construction in some of the questions. Overall, everyone understood what was being asked and the objective of the study, despite founding some of the questions extremely similar. However, these last observation was predictable, as it is a characteristic of the constructs' measurement scales. The average response time was eight minutes.

4. Data analysis and Results

4.1. Overview

The results of the analyses conducted are presented in this chapter, following the methodology and software mentioned above, in chapter 3. The data analysis and results is developed following the reporting style of *PLS* analysis, used on previous studies (Chin & Dibbern, 2010).

Firstly, data preparation/selection was made, then the data is imported to the software *SmartPLS* and a sample characterization and descriptive analysis are conducted using *Microsoft Excel* and *SmartPLS*. Next, the analysis of the measurement model is checked, establishing the reliability and validity of the constructs.

As the constructs were measured in the survey in the context of social media and review websites, there were two conceptual models. Therefore, the analysis is done twice, one considering the constructs regarding social media and another considering the constructs regarding review websites.

Lastly, the results of the structural model are analyzed, which consists in the assessment of the relationship between the constructs of this study, to see if the hypotheses purposed are accepted.

4.2. Data preparation

The surveys were closed and all the data was exported to *Microsoft Excel* when the Portuguese version of the survey reached 450 answers and the English version reached 91. As there were two separate surveys, the data was in two excel sheets. To have all the answers in one Excel document, all the Portuguese answers were exported to the English document. Then, all the responses were coded and the data was filtered to find and delete invalid answers.

Out of 541 answers, 39 (7,2%) answered “Other” in the age question, meaning they were older than 27 and, therefore, don’t belong to Generation Z, not being eligible for this study. Additionally, 18 of those 541 (3,3%) answered they were between the age of 12 and 17 but didn’t have their parents’ consent to participate in the study. Their answers were also discarded. The rest of the 484 answers (89,5%) were between the age of 18 and 27, as shown in figure 2.

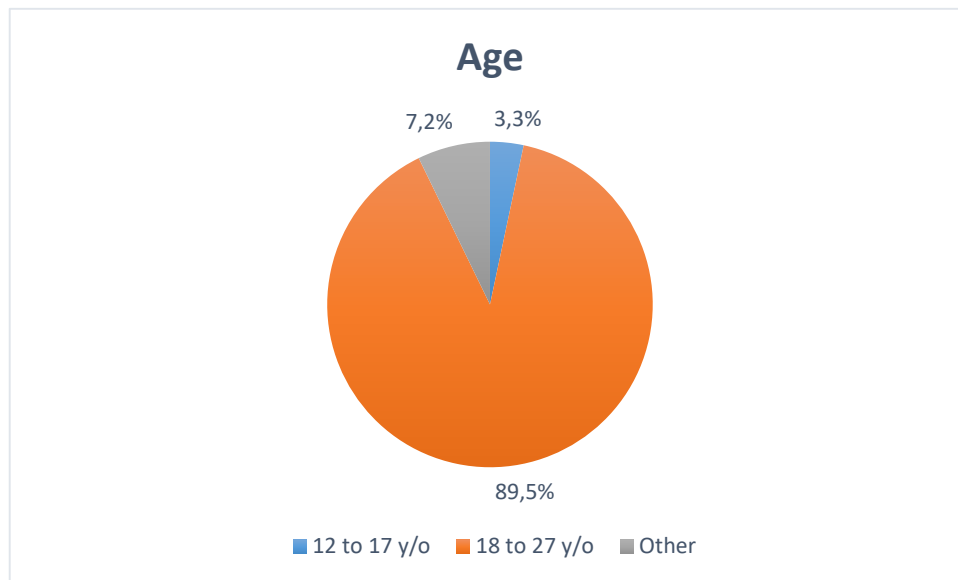


Figure 2 – Age of all 541 unfiltered answers.

From those 484 answers, 50 (10,3%) never took part in the hotel choice decision process. As they never bought a stay in a hotel, neither participated in the decision process of choosing one, those answers were discarded, along with the respondents that stated they don’t use any review website or social media. Their opinion wasn’t valid nor based on their experience.

The answers that had the same responses for all questions (for example, individuals that answered “strongly agree” for all questions, showing lack of attention and interest when conducting the survey) were also discarded before all the data was extracted to *Microsoft Excel*.

In the end of the selection, 434 answers (80,2% of all answers) were valid, matching all the requirements/criteria for this study. The next subchapters include the valid survey answers’ socio-demographic characterization and descriptive analysis, that were developed in *Microsoft Excel*.

4.3. Sample characterization

This subchapter highlights the descriptive statistics of the respondents who participated in the survey, tracing their demographic profiles. The valid answers (434, as mentioned earlier) are the ones that are being analyzed from now on. Out of those respondents, 63,6% (276) are female individuals and the remaining 36,4% are males. The results can be checked in Figure 3

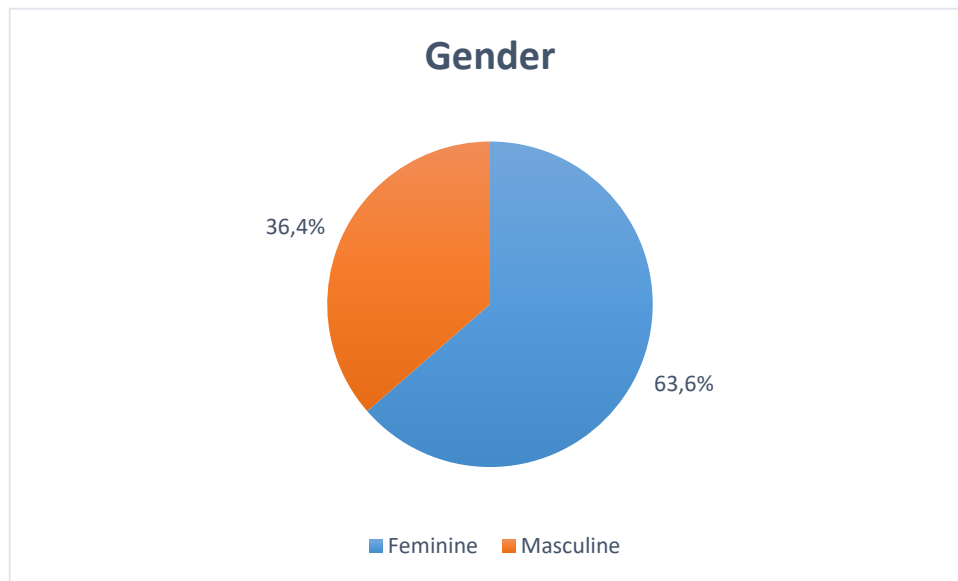


Figure 3 – Gender.

Since the cohort of this study is Generation Z, all the respondents needed to be between the age of 12 and 27, which comprise the ages of those born between 1995 and 2010. According to GDPR, there was a need to have parents' permission for minors of age to answer the survey. Thus, the age profile was divided in three groups: From 12 to 17 years old; From 18 to 27 years old; Others (in this case, the survey ended as they don't belong to Generation Z). All the respondents that answered "From 12 to 17 years old" didn't submitted the authorization as requested, therefore their answers were discarded. Those who answered "Others" were also discarded. This means that 100% (434) of the respondents are Gen Zers between the age of 18 to 27.

The majority of individuals (79% or 344) are Portuguese. 14,3% (62) are American and the remaining 7,4% (28) answers are from other nationalities. Regarding their residence, the majority of the respondents (77,9% or 338) also live in Portugal. 14,7% (64) live in the United States of America and the rest 7,4% (32) have their homes in other countries. This data can be consulted in Figures 4 and 5.

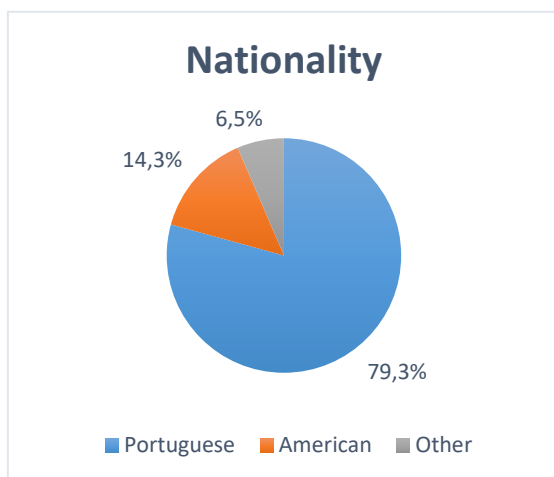


Figure 4 – Nationality.

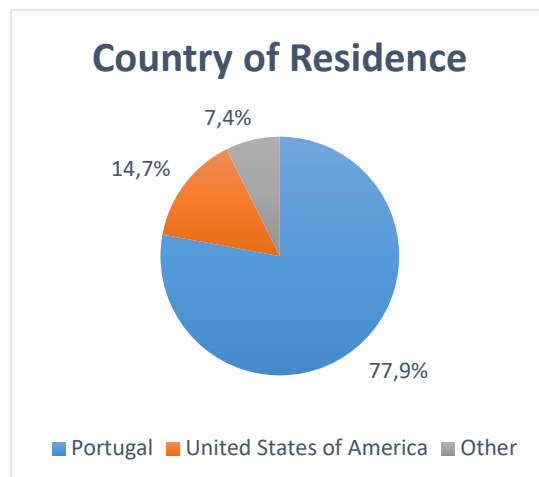


Figure 5 – Country of residence.

Regarding their education, Figure 6 shows that half of the respondents (50,9%, or 221 individuals) are undergraduate, 25,1% (109) have master's degrees, 23,3% (101) of them have completed high school, 0,5% (2) finished middle school and only 1 person (0,2%) have a PhD.

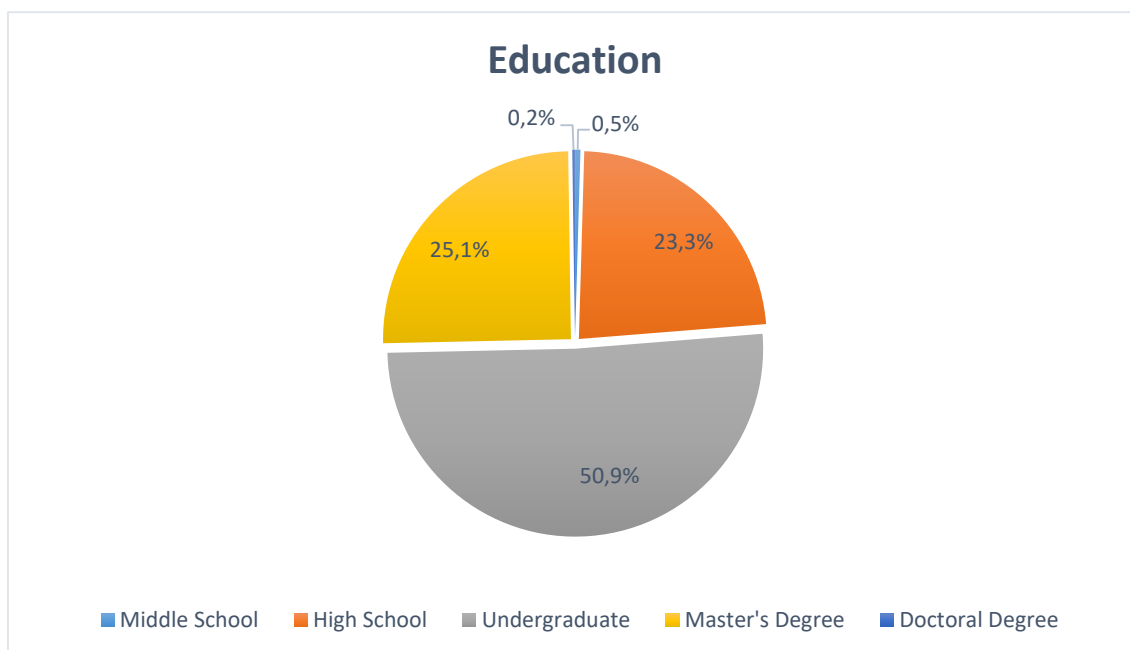


Figure 6 – Education.

As described in Figure 7, almost half of the respondents (45,9%, which constitutes 199 individuals) are employees. 39,9% (173) are students, 10,8% (47) are self-employed and the remaining 3,5% are unemployed.

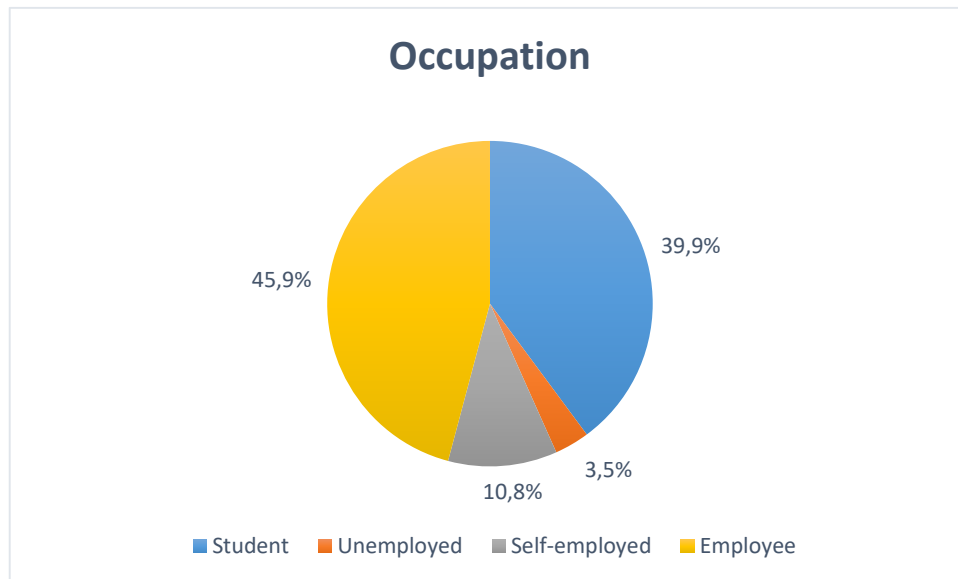


Figure 7 – Occupation.

Concerning the subjects' income levels, more than half of them (58,8% or 255) earn less than €1.000 per month. 21,7% (94) of individuals are in the range of €1.000 to €1.500. 9,2% (40) are amidst those who earn €1.501 to €2.000, 6,5% (28) receive from €2.001 to €3.000 and the lasting 3,9% (17) make more than €3.000. Figure 8 pictures the above-mentioned data.

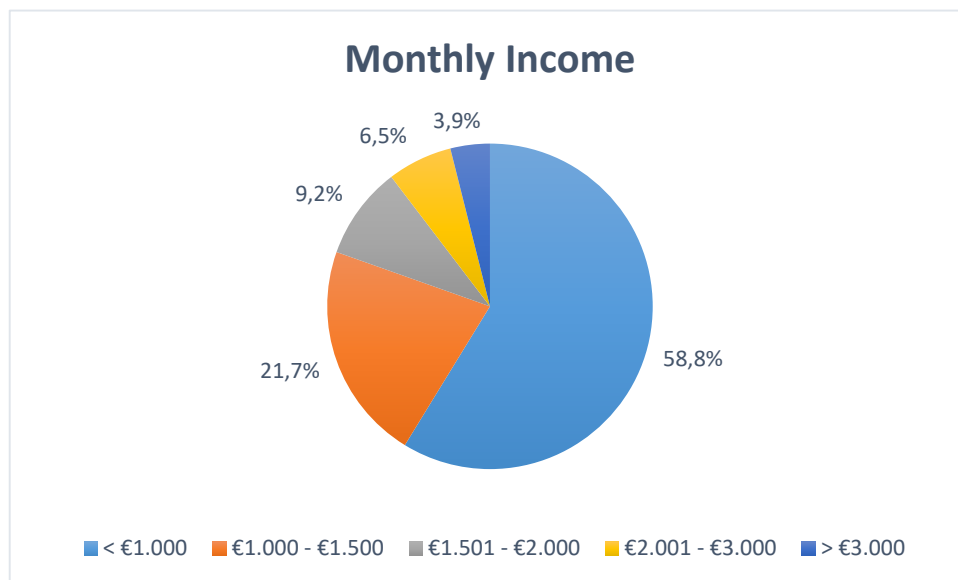


Figure 8 – Monthly income.

When it comes to social media usage, there is a clear preference in favour of Instagram. The overwhelming majority (87,6% or 380) of individuals use Instagram everyday. YouTube, Facebook and TikTok are also frequently used amongst the sample

studied with 45,2% (196), 39,6% (172) and 31,1% (135) of respondents using the platforms everyday, respectively.

On the other hand, Snapchat and Twitter are the least used platforms, as more than half of the sample (62,4% or 271) never use Snapchat and 41,7% (181) never use Twitter in their daily life. Table 2 shows more data regarding the time respondents spend on social media.

Social Media	Frequency	Relative frequency (%)
Instagram		
Everyday of the Week	380	87,6
4 to 6 times per week	19	4,4
1 to 3 times per week	14	3,2
Less than once per week	13	3
Never	8	1,8
Facebook		
Everyday of the Week	172	39,6
4 to 6 times per week	83	19,1
1 to 3 times per week	83	19,1
Less than once per week	58	13,4
Never	38	8,8
Snapchat		
Everyday of the Week	34	7,8
4 to 6 times per week	34	7,8
1 to 3 times per week	34	7,8
Less than once per week	61	14,1
Never	271	62,4
Twitter		
Everyday of the Week	100	23
4 to 6 times per week	44	10,1
1 to 3 times per week	42	9,7
Less than once per week	67	15,4
Never	181	41,7
YouTube		
Everyday of the Week	196	45,2
4 to 6 times per week	91	21
1 to 3 times per week	93	21,4
Less than once per week	43	9,9
Never	11	2,5
TikTok		
Everyday of the Week	135	31,1
4 to 6 times per week	65	15
1 to 3 times per week	39	9
Less than once per week	49	11,3
Never	146	33,6
Other Social Media		
Everyday of the Week	32	7,4
4 to 6 times per week	43	9,9
1 to 3 times per week	36	8,3
Less than once per week	66	15,2
Never	257	59,2

Table 2 – Social Media usage.

In terms of review websites consultation, Booking is the favorite website respondents check when conducting their research, with more than half of them (57,1% or 248) using it everytime they look for hotels. Trivago and TripAdvisor are also used,

but the difference to Booking is significant. 20% (87) use Trivago and 19,1% (83) use TripAdvisor everytime they search for hotels.

Those three websites are the most used and are also the platforms that have the least percentage of people who never used them. Only 16 out of the 434 respondents (3,7%) never use Booking, 79 (18,2%) never use TripAdvisor and 91 (21%) never use Trivago.

Expedia and Hotels.com are not frequently consulted. More than half of the respondents (66,6% or 289; 56,7% or 246) never use Expedia and Hotels.com, respectively.

The remaining data regarding the frequency of review websites usage can be checked in Table 3.

Review Websites	Frequency	Relative frequency (%)
TripAdvisor		
Everytime I look for a hotel	83	19,1
Almost everytime I look for a hotel	97	22,4
Some of the times I look for a hotel	175	40,3
Never	79	18,2
Booking		
Everytime I look for a hotel	248	57,1
Almost everytime I look for a hotel	92	21,2
Some of the times I look for a hotel	78	18
Never	16	3,7
Trivago		
Everytime I look for a hotel	87	20
Almost everytime I look for a hotel	99	22,8
Some of the times I look for a hotel	157	36,2
Never	91	21
Expedia		
Everytime I look for a hotel	25	5,8
Almost everytime I look for a hotel	35	8,1
Some of the times I look for a hotel	85	19,6
Never	289	66,6
Hotels.com		
Everytime I look for a hotel	38	8,8
Almost everytime I look for a hotel	46	10,6
Some of the times I look for a hotel	104	24
Never	246	56,7
Other Review Websites		
Everytime I look for a hotel	41	9,4
Almost everytime I look for a hotel	41	9,4
Some of the times I look for a hotel	78	18
Never	274	63,1

Table 3 – Review websites consultation.

Almost half of the subjects' sample (205 or 47,2%) always partake in the hotel choice decision process. 30,4% (132) of the respondents frequently took part in the hotel choice process and the rest 22,4% (97) only participate sometimes.

This shows that all of the people already chose or participated in the process of choosing a hotel to stay. Figure 9 represents the aforementioned data.

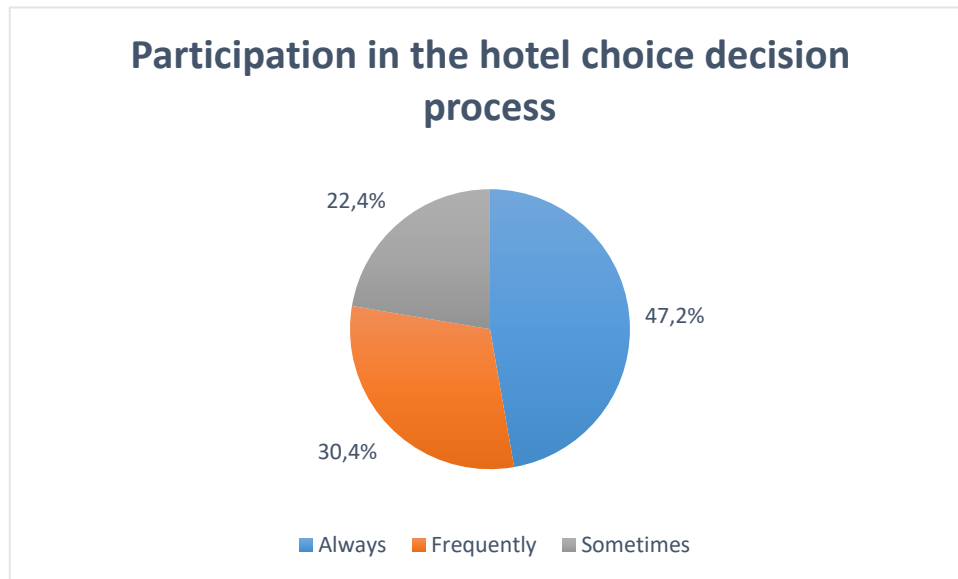


Figure 9 – Participation in the hotel choice decision process.

4.4. Descriptive analysis

After importing the data file to *SmartPLS*, the mean and standard deviation of the survey questions were collected for a preliminary descriptive analysis. All survey questions analyzed are representative of the constructs that constitute the conceptual model of this study. Table 4 presents the results of the statements that define the constructs in the context of social media, whereas Table 5 presents the results of the statements that define the constructs in the context of review websites.

It is acceptable to say that most of the respondents agreed or are neutral with the affirmations of the study. All of the sentences presented on the tables 4 and 5 was done on a scale from 1 to 5, with 3 being the neutral answer. All the answers have a mean higher than 3, with the lowest being SMCPD3 (“I choose my hotel accommodation upon reviews which I read on social media”) with a mean of 3,182 and the highest being RWIU3 (“Useful”) with 4,147.

It is also possible to observe that respondents agreed more with the sentences related to review websites and were more neutral on the sentences related to social media. Most of the statements of social media have a mean in the range of 3 to 4. The only

statement that exceeded 4 was SMIU3 (“Useful”), with a mean of 4,002. When analyzing table 5, it is possible to see that most of the mean values are close or exceed 4.

Concerning standard deviation, the values of different statements were close to each other with the exception of four items that surpassed 1, thus showing a higher divergence amid the answers:

SMeWV1 – “The number of comments/posts/videos of the hotel is huge, so the hotel is popular” (1,089);

SMeWV4 – “The more the hotel is discussed on social media, the more it influences my purchase decision” (1,074);

SMeWV5 – “The quantity of online posts/comments information is great, inferring that the hotel has good sales” (1,048);

SMCPD3 – “I choose my hotel accommodation upon reviews which I read on social media” (1,104).

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation
(Social Media) eWOM Quality		
SMeWQ1 - I think it's supported by facts.	3.585	0.805
SMeWQ2 - I think it's presented objectively.	3.514	0.921
SMeWQ3 - I think it's understandable.	3.882	0.704
SMeWQ4 - It's credible.	3.422	0.823
SMeWQ5 - I think it's clear.	3.687	0.811
SMeWQ6 - In general, I think the quality of the information is high.	3.530	0.823
(Social Media) Source Credibility		
SMSC1 - It comes from people who perceive well the service characteristics.	3.279	0.897
SMSC2 - It comes from people who are knowledgeable about the hotel and its services.	3.429	0.911
SMSC3 - It comes from people who are trustworthy.	3.249	0.844
SMSC4 - It comes from people who are credible.	3.272	0.806
(Social Media) eWOM Volume		
SMeWV1 - The number of comments/posts/videos of the hotel is huge, so the hotel is popular.	3.311	1.089
SMeWV2 - Because it has many ratings/recommendations on social media, the hotel has a good reputation.	3.677	0.968
SMeWV3 - The more the hotel is mentioned on social networks, the more I am aware of its existence.	3.945	0.849
SMeWV4 - The more the hotel is discussed on social media, the more it influences my purchase decision.	3.429	1.074
SMeWV5 - The quantity of online posts/comments information is great, inferring that the hotel has good sales.	3.256	1.048
(Social Media) Information Usefulness		
SMIU1 - Valuable.	3.717	0.867
SMIU2 - Informative.	3.975	0.772
SMIU3 - Useful.	4.002	0.726
(Social Media) Information Adoption		
SMIA1 - Contributes to my knowledge about the hotels discussed.	3.864	0.769
SMIA2 - Makes my decision to purchase a stay at the hotel easier.	3.779	0.891
SMIA3 - Improves my effectiveness to make my decision to purchase a stay at the hotel.	3.707	0.848
SMIA4 - Motivates me to decide which hotel to choose.	3.608	0.905
(Social Media) Consumers' Purchase Decision		
SMCPD1 - Comments about hotels on social media affect my willingness to make a reservation.	3.880	0.869
SMCPD2 - When I believe hotels offer the same good and bad services that social media posts/comments describe, it influences my decision to make a reservation.	3.986	0.817
SMCPD3 - I choose my hotel accommodation upon reviews which I read on social media.	3.182	1.104
SMCPD4 - The information I receive on social media about hotels influence my purchase decision of hotel services.	3.694	0.916

Table 4 – Descriptive analysis (mean and standard deviation) of the constructs related to social media.

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation
(Review Websites) eWOM Quality		
RWeWQ1 - I think it's supported by facts.	3.726	0.735
RWeWQ2 - I think it's presented objectively.	3.682	0.812
RWeWQ3 - I think it's understandable.	3.938	0.639
RWeWQ4 - It's credible.	3.622	0.800
RWeWQ5 - I think it's clear.	3.839	0.670
RWeWQ6 - In general, I think the quality of the information is high.	3.675	0.779
(Review Websites) Source Credibility		
RWSC1 - It comes from people who perceive well the service characteristics.	3.521	0.846
RWSC2 - It comes from people who are knowledgeable about the hotel and its services.	3.636	0.867
RWSC3 - It comes from people who are trustworthy.	3.417	0.805
RWSC4 - It comes from people who are credible.	3.491	0.838
(Review Websites) eWOM Volume		
RWeWV1 - The number of comments/posts/reviews of the hotel is huge, so the hotel is popular.	3.548	0.940
RWeWV2 - Because it has many ratings/recommendations on review websites, the hotel has a good reputation.	3.608	0.945
RWeWV3 - The more the hotel is mentioned on review websites, the more I am aware of its existence.	3.859	0.801
RWeWV4 - The more the hotel is discussed on review websites, the more it influences my purchase decision.	3.710	0.882
RWeWV5 - The quantity of online review/comments information is great, inferring that the hotel has good sales.	3.509	0.926
(Review Websites) Information Usefulness		
RWIU1 - Valuable	3.940	0.769
RWIU2 - Informative	4.118	0.704
RWIU3 - Useful.	4.147	0.683
(Review Websites) Information Adoption		
RWIA1 - Contributes to my knowledge about the hotels discussed	4.030	0.690
RWIA2 - Makes my decision to purchase a stay at the hotel easier	4.002	0.745
RWIA3 - Improves my effectiveness to make my decision to purchase a stay at the hotel.	4.005	0.731
RWIA4 - Motivates me to decide which hotel to choose.	3.993	0.736
(Review Websites) Consumers' Purchase Decision		
RWCPD1 - Comments about hotels on review websites affect my willingness to make a reservation.	3.988	0.736
RWCPD2 - When I believe hotels offer the same good and bad services that review websites comments describe, it influences my decision to make a reservation.	4.005	0.753
RWCPD3 - I choose my hotel accommodation upon reviews which I read on review websites.	3.728	0.926
RWCPD4 - The information I receive on review websites about hotels influence my purchase decision of hotel services.	3.949	0.810

Table 5 – Descriptive analysis (mean and standard deviation) of the constructs related to review websites.

4.5. Measurement model

To evaluate the conceptual model developed in this study, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is used to test if the constructs measured in the study are representing well the number of constructs, in order to confirm or reject the hypotheses presented in literature review.

The quality of the constructs that constitute the conceptual model of this study is checked by analyzing the measurement model. The analysis starts with the assessment of the factor loadings and the establishment of the construct reliability and validity.

4.5.1. Reliability analysis

Reliability accesses the extent to which a construct is consistent and stable. If the construct is measured over and over again and held the same outcome/results, then its reliability is confirmed.

4.5.1.1. Indicator reliability

The indicator Reliability is measured by analyzing the items loadings. The factor loadings measure the correlation between each items presented in the model and the latent common factors. It can range from -1.0 to +1.0, the higher the value is, the higher the correlation of the item with the core factor is (Pett et al., 2003).

Table 6 and 7 shows the factor loadings of social media and review websites constructs, respectively. All the items of this study had factor loadings higher than the recommended value of .50 (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, no items were removed.

	SMCPD	SMIA	SMIU	SMSC	SMeWQ	SMeWV
SMCPD1	0.788					
SMCPD2	0.753					
SMCPD3	0.754					
SMCPD4	0.849					
SMIA1		0.669				
SMIA2		0.852				
SMIA3		0.868				
SMIA4		0.816				
SMIU1			0.835			
SMIU2			0.758			

SMIU3	0.868	
SMSC1	0.817	
SMSC2	0.803	
SMSC3	0.883	
SMSC4	0.853	
SMeWQ1	0.692	
SMeWQ2	0.702	
SMeWQ3	0.605	
SMeWQ4	0.739	
SMeWQ5	0.772	
SMeWQ6	0.772	
SMeWV1		0.665
SMeWV2		0.656
SMeWV3		0.690
SMeWV4		0.794
SMeWV5		0.804

Table 6 – Factor loadings of social media constructs and items.

	RWCPD	RWIA	RWIU	RWSC	RWeWQ	RWeWV
RWCPD1	0.832					
RWCPD2	0.815					
RWCPD3	0.782					
RWCPD4	0.865					
RWIA1		0.822				
RWIA2		0.856				
RWIA3		0.885				
RWIA4		0.885				
RWIU1			0.854			
RWIU2			0.840			
RWIU3			0.890			
RWSC1				0.840		
RWSC2				0.857		
RWSC3				0.900		
RWSC4				0.899		
RWeWQ1					0.725	
RWeWQ2					0.767	
RWeWQ3					0.727	
RWeWQ4					0.784	
RWeWQ5					0.756	
RWeWQ6					0.807	
RWeWV1						0.737
RWeWV2						0.753
RWeWV3						0.761
RWeWV4						0.800
RWeWV5						0.782

Table 7 – Factor loadings of review websites constructs and items.

4.5.1.2. Internal consistency

In this study, it is important to measure the internal consistency, which is how consistent respondents are in their answers across the items. The used methods for evaluating internal consistency are Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach Alpha. The recommended values of both Composite Reliability and Cronbach Alpha are over .70 (Hair et al., 2011).

Tables 8 and 9 show the results of the aforementioned values. Cronbach's Alpha registered values are from .759 to .897, while Composite Reliability went from .846 to .928. All values are over the recommended value of .70, which means the construct reliability is proven.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
SMCPD	0.795	0.867
SMIA	0.815	0.880
SMIU	0.759	0.861
SMSC	0.860	0.905
SMeWQ	0.809	0.862
SMeWV	0.776	0.846

Table 8 – Social media internal consistency

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
RWCPD	0.842	0.894
RWIA	0.885	0.921
RWIU	0.827	0.896
RWSC	0.897	0.928
RWeWQ	0.855	0.892
RWeWV	0.828	0.877

Table 9 – Review websites internal consistency

4.5.2. Convergent validity

Convergent validity is established when the items converge to define and represent their intrinsic constructs. The construct should not correlate with unrelated items of other constructs, but rather with its own items (McDonald, 2005).

It is measured using the value of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which requires to be above or equal to the recommended value of .50 for the establishment of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE of the constructs related to social media and review websites are presented in tables 10 and 11, respectively. Results show that all values are above the recommended threshold of .50, hence confirming the presence of convergent validity.

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
SMCPD	0.620
SMIA	0.648
SMIU	0.675
SMSC	0.705
SMeWQ	0.513
SMeWV	0.525

Table 10 – Social media constructs convergent validity

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
RWCPD	0.680
RWIA	0.744
RWIU	0.743
RWSC	0.765
RWeWQ	0.580
RWeWV	0.588

Table 11 – Review websites constructs convergent validity

4.5.3. Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity is the degree of which a construct is distinct of others. It can be measured using three different criteria: Fornell and Larcker, Cross Loadings and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio.

In this study, it discriminant validity was measured using Fornell and Larcker criteria, which is tested through the square-root of AVE (presented in bold in the diagonal on Tables 12 and 13) and the correlation between constructs (the remaining values of the before mentioned tables). In this analysis, all square roots of AVE should be higher than the values of the correlation between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

By checking the results in tables 12 and 14, it is possible to see the condition is respected, hence meaning that the constructs measure different aspects and don't overlap (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), proving there is discriminant validity.

	SMCPD	SMIA	SMIU	SMSC	SMeWQ	SMeWV
SMCPD	0.787					
SMIA	0.615	0.805				
SMIU	0.456	0.675	0.821			
SMSC	0.296	0.356	0.407	0.839		
SMeWQ	0.363	0.489	0.492	0.632	0.716	
SMeWV	0.515	0.526	0.459	0.305	0.340	0.725

Table 12 – Social media constructs' discriminant validity – Fornell and Larcker criteria

	RWCPD	RWIA	RWIU	RWSC	RWeWQ	RWeWV
RWCPD	0.824					
RWIA	0.720	0.863				
RWIU	0.548	0.660	0.862			
RWSC	0.324	0.368	0.429	0.874		
RWeWQ	0.447	0.476	0.544	0.734	0.762	
RWeWV	0.545	0.547	0.434	0.433	0.429	0.767

Table 13 – Review websites constructs' discriminant validity – Fornell and Larcker criteria

4.6. Validation of the structural model

After the analysis of the measurement model, the analysis of the structural model is conducted. This is critical to understand the relations between the existing constructs that compose the conceptual model of this dissertation. Different variables were considered in the analysis of this model: Standardized Path Coefficient (β), T-Value, P-Value, coefficient of determination (R^2).

R^2 values explain the change in the independent variable explained by the dependent variable(s) and it is a good indicator of how well the data fits the structural model (Jianlong et al., 2015). It also helps to compare models with the same data, equal scales and measures of variation (IBM, 2021). Statistically speaking, this value determines how the independent variables describe the dependent variables. The larger the R^2 , the better explanatory strength the model has (Jianlong et al., 2015). It is proven that R^2 value increases whenever a dependent variable is added to the model, which proves this value is not a proper indicator of goodness of fit (Jianlong et al., 2015). Instead, adjusted R^2 should be considered because: First, it focuses on comparing models; Second, it decreases if the model is already adequate and a new redundant dependent variable is added (Jianlong et al., 2015).

In this particular study, the models measured are identical (same variables, same indicators, same scales and same sample). Additionally, studies were developed that use R^2 values and standardized path coefficients to compare results of identical models in different contexts (Pauliene et al., 2020), similar to what is intended in this study. Therefore, it is considered appropriate the comparison between R^2 values and standardized path coefficients of both social media and review websites' structural models, in order to meet the objectives and draw the conclusions of this study.

The recommended values of the variables used to measure the structural model are presented in table 14.

Variables to measure the structural model	Recommended values	References
T-Value (T statistics)	$\geq 1,96$	(Chin & Marcoulides, 1998)
P-Value	$< .05$	(Hair et al., 2014)
Coefficient of determination (R^2)	0,19 (weak), 0,33 (moderate), 0,67 (substantial)	(Chin & Marcoulides, 1998)

Table 14 – Recommended values for the variables used to measure the structural model.

The quality of the relationship between constructs is checked by ensuring that the P-value is lower than the recommended threshold of .05, showing a confidence level of 95% or higher, and T-Value is significant ($\geq 1,96$).

Analyzing table 15, which presents the results of the structural model in the context of social media, it is possible to observe the relations between the constructs that coincide with the conceptual model of this study.

Some important results to highlight is that information usefulness explains 47,9% of information adoption, while eWOM quality defines 19% and eWOM volume stands at 25,4%. Additionally, source credibility shows no meaningful impact towards information adoption.

The second part of the conceptual model was also confirmed, as information adoption affects consumers' purchase decision by 61,6%. All results were accepted, except the connection between source credibility and information adoption, as t-value was lower than 1,96 and p-value was higher than 0,05.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Results
(Social Media) Information Adoption	(Social Media) Consumers' Purchase Decision	0.616	13.120	0.000	Accepted
(Social Media) Information Usefulness	(Social Media) Information Adoption	0.479	9.417	0.000	Accepted
(Social Media) Source Credibility	(Social Media) Information Adoption	-0.037	0.707	0.480	Not accepted
(Social Media) eWOM Quality	(Social Media) Information Adoption	0.190	4.006	0.000	Accepted
(Social Media) eWOM Volume	(Social Media) Information Adoption	0.254	6.785	0.000	Accepted

Table 15 – Results of the structural model in the context of social media.

Note – Accepted if T-Value $\geq 1,96$ (P-Value < 0.05).

Moving to table 16, where the results of the structural model in the context of review websites are described, it is possible to observe similar results as the ones obtained in the social media structural model.

Information usefulness explains 48,3% of information adoption, while eWOM quality defines 13% and eWOM volume stands at 31,1%. Moreover, source credibility shows no meaningful impact towards information adoption, which was also the case when analyzing the relationship between the construct regarding social media usage.

The second part of the model was also confirmed, as information adoption affects consumers' purchase decision by 72%. All results were accepted, with the exception of the connection between source credibility and information adoption, as t-value was lower than 1,96 and p-value was higher than 0,05.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Results
(Review Websites) Information Adoption	(Review Websites) Consumers' Purchase Decision	0.720	18.580	0.000	Accepted
(Review Websites) Information Usefulness	(Review Websites) Information Adoption	0.483	8.573	0.000	Accepted
(Review Websites) Source Credibility	(Review Websites) Information Adoption	-0.071	1.183	0.237	Not accepted
(Review Websites) eWOM Quality	(Review Websites) Information Adoption	0.132	2.107	0.035	Accepted
(Review Websites) eWOM Volume	(Review Websites) Information Adoption	0.311	4.975	0.000	Accepted

Table 16 – Results of the structural model in the context of review websites.

Note – Accepted if T-Value $\geq 1,96$ (P-Value < 0.05).

By analyzing the R Square (R^2) values displayed in figure 10, it is possible to conclude that in the context of social media, 53,7% change in information adoption can be explained by the four independent variables (source credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM volume and information usefulness). This value is relatively close to a substantial value, according to the recommended R^2 value referenced by Chin & Marcoulides (1998).

Additionally, 37,9% change in social media consumers' purchase decision can be attributed to information adoption, a value that is considered moderate.

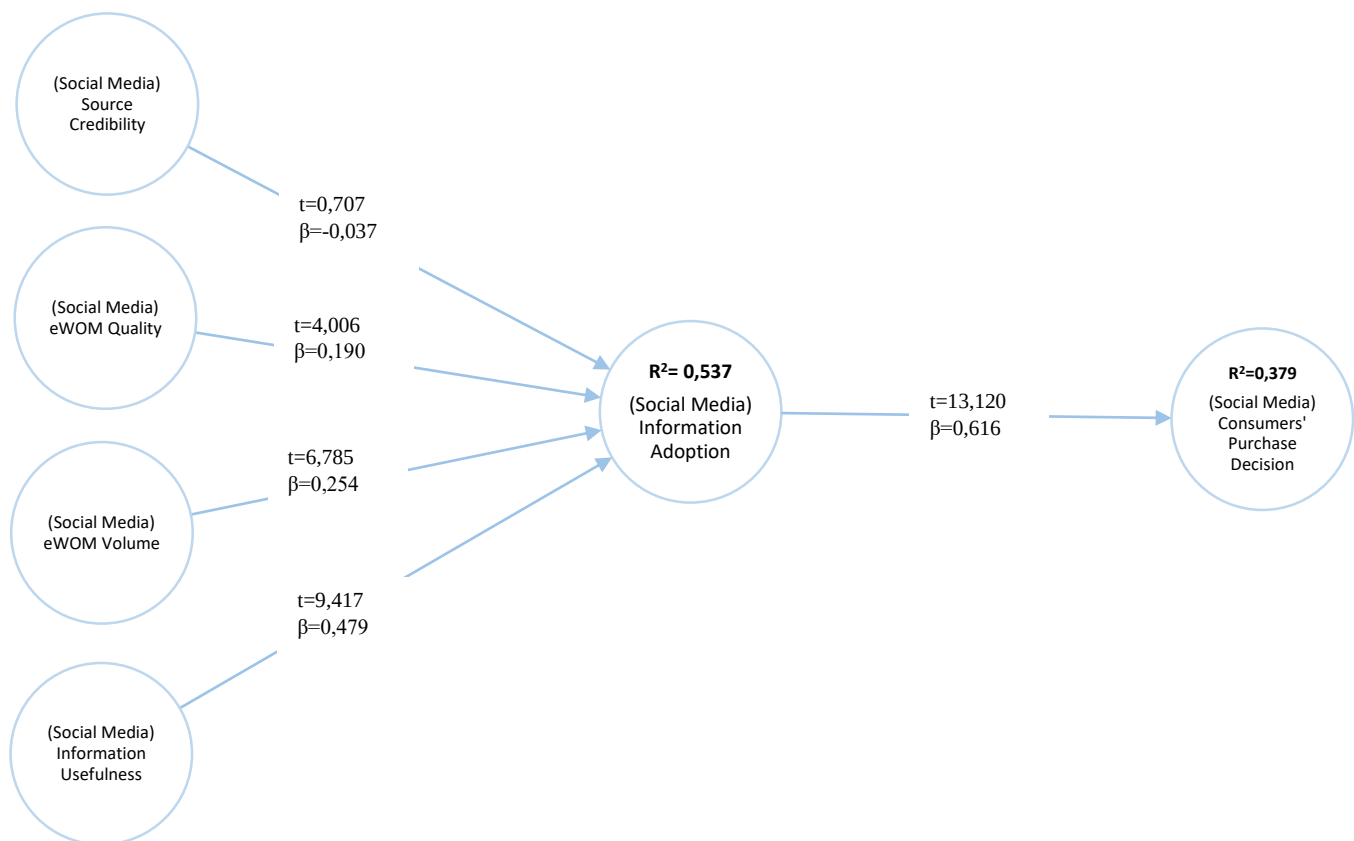


Figure 10 – Structural model with the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5, in the context of social media.

Taking into consideration the poor performance of source credibility on information adoption, a new test was conducted to evaluate if source credibility has an indirect effect through information usefulness. Table 17 shows the results and figure 11 illustrates the aforementioned indirect effects.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Correlation
(Social Media) Information Usefulness	(Social Media) Information Adoption	0.678	22.361	0.000	Significant
(Social Media) Source Credibility	(Social Media) Information Usefulness	0.408	9.576	0.000	Significant

Table 17 – Results of the indirect constructs' test in the context of social media.

Note – Significant if T-Value $\geq 1,96$ (P-Value < 0.05).

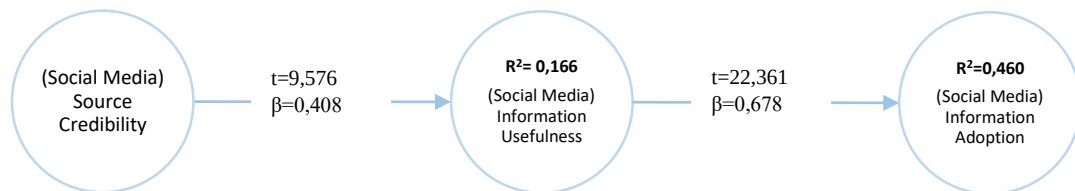


Figure 11 – Indirect effect of source credibility on information adoption regarding social media.

Table 17 shows positive results regarding the presence of an indirect effect of source credibility on information adoption. Despite source credibility holding poor performance when measuring its direct effect on information adoption (IA), it holds an indirect impact on IA through information usefulness (figure 13).

Moving to the results of the structural model in the context of review websites (figure 12), the R Square values are close to substantial according to the recommended values. 52,5% change in information adoption can be attributed to source credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM volume and information usefulness. Moreover, information adoption impacts consumers' purchase decision by 51,8%.

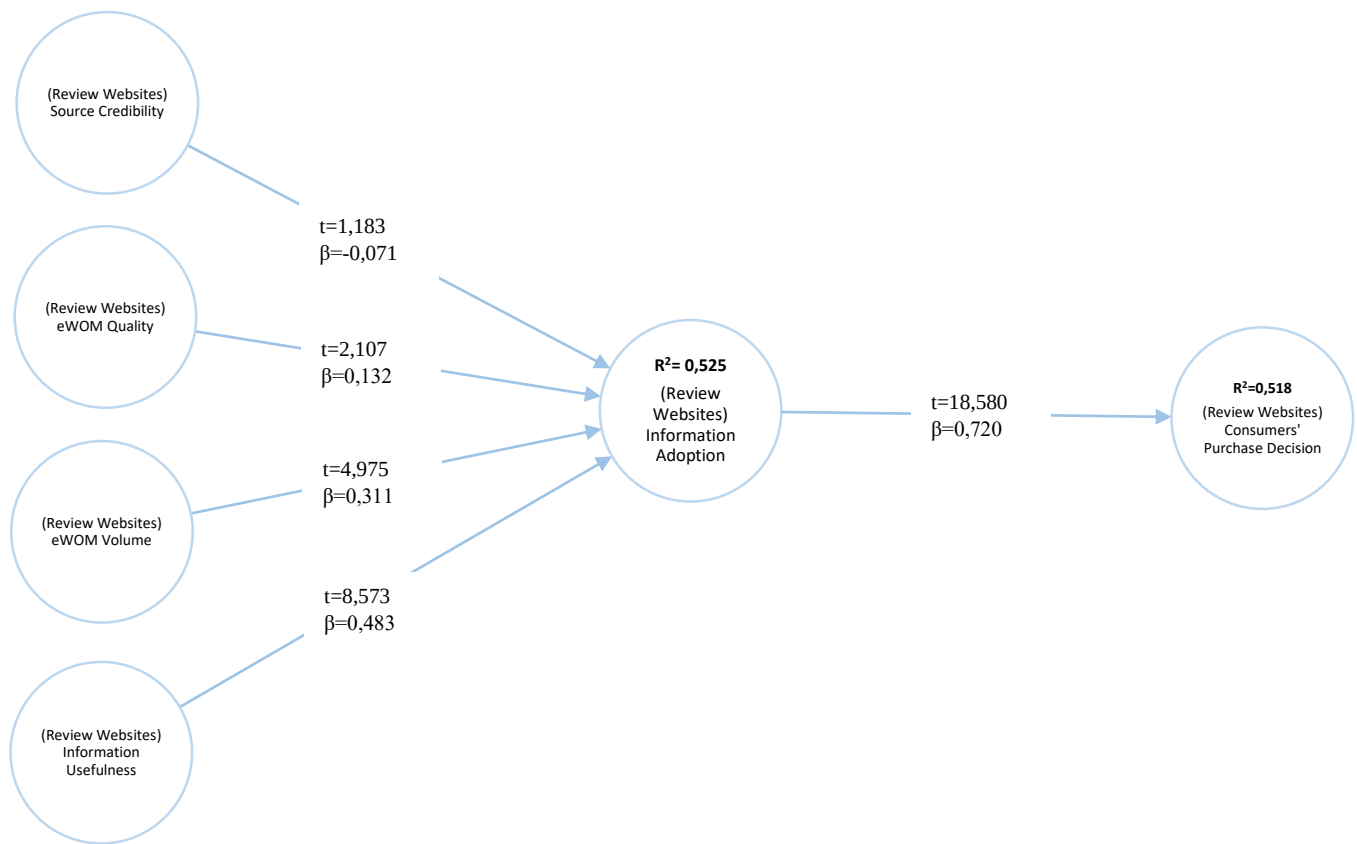


Figure 12 – Structural model with the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5, in the context of review websites.

Source credibility continues holding poor outcomes when in direct connection to information adoption, similarly to the results of the social media structural model. In an attempt to understand if source credibility can have an indirect effect on information adoption, a new test with indirect variables was made, following what was conducted in the prior social media indirect constructs' test. Table 18 and figure 13 present the results of the above-mentioned assessment.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Correlation
(Review Websites) Information Usefulness	(Review Websites) Information Adoption	0.660	17.739	0.000	Significant
(Review Websites) Source Credibility	(Review Websites) Information Usefulness	0.430	8.581	0.000	Significant

Table 18 – Results of the indirect constructs' test in the context of review websites.

Note – Significant if T-Value $\geq 1,96$ (P-Value < 0.05).

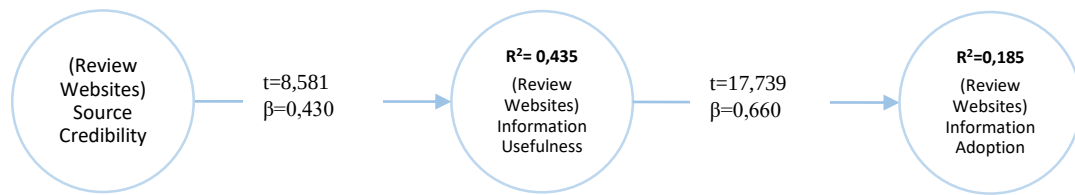


Figure 13 – Indirect effect of source credibility on information adoption regarding social media.

The presence of an indirect impact was proven, based on the results of table 18. While source credibility does not affect information adoption directly, there is an indirect effect between those two variables through information usefulness (figure 13).

4.6.1. Comparison of both structural models

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Review Websites			Social Media		
		Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value
Information Adoption	Consumers' Purchase Decision	0.720	18.580	0.000	0.616	13.120	0.000
Information Usefulness	Information Adoption	0.483	8.573	0.000	0.479	9.417	0.000
Source Credibility	Information Adoption	-0.071	1.183	0.237	-0.037	0.707	0.480
eWOM Quality	Information Adoption	0.132	2.107	0.035	0.190	4.006	0.000
eWOM Volume	Information Adoption	0.311	4.975	0.000	0.254	6.785	0.000

Table 19 – Comparative table between the regression analysis of both review websites and social media structural models.

Table 19 compares both structural models. The results show that in both review websites and social media, the impact of source credibility on information adoption is inexistent. Additionally, $P\text{-Value} > 0,05$ and $t < 1,96$ in both structural models, so the hypothesis 1 is rejected, as the results show source credibility does not affect information adoption both on review websites and social media.

By comparing eWOM volume and information adoption in different contexts, it is notable that eWOM volume is considered more influential on information adoption in review websites ($\beta = 0,311$) rather than in social media ($\beta = 0,254$). This shows that eWOM Volume in review websites is more prominent than in social media. Nevertheless,

both P-Values are less than .05 and $t > 1,96$. This means eWOM Volume affects information adoption both on social media and on review websites, therefore hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

In social media, the impact of eWOM quality on information adoption is stronger ($\beta = 0,190$) than in review websites ($\beta = 0,132$), as shown in table 19. This shows that in social media, the quality of the information and the arguments made have more influence on other users adopting the information, while on review websites the influence is comparatively weaker. Both P-Values are less than .05 and $t > 1,96$, which means hypothesis 3 is accepted and eWOM quality affect information adoption on both models, despite the correlation on social media structural model holding better results.

When comparing information usefulness and adoption in terms of social media and review websites, the results were similar to each other (table 19). The influence of information usefulness on information adoption is identical in social media ($\beta = 0,479$) and in review websites ($\beta = 0,483$). Which means if the information is equally useful on both online platforms, there is close to no difference on the impact of the usefulness on information adoption when comparing social media and review websites. Both P-Values are less than .05 and $t > 1,96$, which means hypothesis 4 is accepted in both structural models and there is significant correlation between those constructs.

Finally, when comparing the correlation of the information adoption with consumers' purchase decisions on both structural models, the results are positive. However, the influence of information adoption on consumers' purchase decisions is significantly higher in review websites ($\beta = 0,720$), rather than in social media ($\beta = 0,616$). This means, when the information is adopted by the consumer, it influences their purchase decision 72% of the times when the information comes from review websites, and 61,6% of the times when it comes from social media. Both P-Values are less than .05 and $t > 1,96$, which means hypothesis 5 is confirmed and information adoption impacts consumers' purchase decisions in both contexts.

		Review Websites	Social Media
Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R Square (R^2)	R Square (R^2)
Source credibility, eWOM quality, eWOM volume and information usefulness	Information adoption	0.525	0.537
Information adoption	Consumers' purchase decision	0.518	0.379

Table 20 – Comparative table between the R square value of both review websites and social media structural models.

Table 20 presents the comparison between the R square values in review websites and social media context. The values of information adoption are identical in both structural models. In social media, 53,7% change of information adoption is explained by the four independent variables (source credibility, eWOM volume, eWOM quality and information usefulness), while in review websites the value is 52,5%. However, the difference in the R^2 of consumers' purchase decision is more significant. While in social media, 37,9% change of consumers' purchase decision is explained by information adoption, in review websites the value is a little more than half (51,8%). This means that on review websites, the information adoption is more influential on consumers' purchase decision than in social media, which rejects hypothesis 6.

5. Discussion

Taking into account the data analysis and comparison of both structural models conducted in the previous chapter, it is now possible to assess if the hypotheses presented in literature review are accepted or not. As mentioned before, the hypotheses were measured in terms of social media (social eWOM) and review websites (anonymous eWOM). In this chapter the results are compared to previous findings, explained and discussed. Table 21 is a compilation of the results.

Hypotheses	Result
<i>H1: In social media and in review websites, good source credibility is a key element that positively affects information adoption.</i>	Rejected
<i>H2: In social media and in review websites, high eWOM volume is a key element that positively affects information adoption.</i>	Confirmed
<i>H3: In social media and in review websites, high quality eWOM is a key element that positively affects information adoption.</i>	Confirmed
<i>H4: In social media and in review websites, information usefulness is a key element that positively influences information adoption.</i>	Confirmed
<i>H5: In social media and in review websites, information adoption is a key element that positively influences consumers' purchase decision.</i>	Confirmed
<i>H6: Information adoption is more influential on consumers' purchase decision in social media over review websites.</i>	Rejected

Table 21 – Validation of research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 “In social media and in review websites, good source credibility is a key element that positively affects information adoption” was rejected, contradicting the findings of Shen et al. (2014) and Rauniar et al. (2014) that state consumers are more

willing to adopt the information present in online review when they come from credible sources. Sussman and Siegal (2003) studied the indirect effect between source credibility and information adoption through information usefulness, consistent with this study's indirect constructs test, which confirms the presence of an indirect relationship between the aforementioned variables in both structural models. Zhang and Watts (2008), who also found empirical evidence of the correlation between SC and IA, argues that the results weren't as strong as anticipated, but the interface of online communities seems to affect the level of reliance of source credibility. Furthermore, the rejection of this hypothesis could be influenced by several factors: firstly, the people's involvement with the topic of the message. It was found that source credibility is a great attitude change predictor when people aren't involved with the topic in question (Petty et al., 1981). Moreover, as all individuals that constitute the sample analyzed participated in the hotel choice decision process and are familiarized with the topic in question, this could negatively affect the impact of source credibility on Gen Zers' attitude of adopting the information. Another factor that could explain this outcome is the cohort of this study, Generation Z. They are familiarized with the online world (Barclays, 2013; Meirinhos, 2015) and are used to social media and review websites, in a way older generations aren't, because of their internet exposure. This could affect their behavior and attitude to online information, causing them to be less sensitive to some characteristics such as credibility. Considering the consequence of anonymous postings and their negative impact on source credibility (Pan & Chiou, 2011; Xie et al., 2011), it could be expected that this correlation would be more significant in social media (social eWOM) rather than review websites (anonymous eWOM). However, results show inexistent correlation in both structural models, contradicting the given argument of source anonymity.

Hypothesis 2 "In social media and in review websites, high eWOM volume is a key element that positively affects information adoption" was confirmed in both structural models. This correlation is in line with what was already proposed by Rani and Shivaprasad (2018), in a study conducted with the objective of pointing different crucial factors in efficient eWOM communication and how they correlate with eWOM adoption. This study by Rani and Shivaprasad was developed without cohorts, meaning the results were valid to all generations. The present study confirms the correlation between eWOM volume and information adoption specifically in Generation Z, which complements existing literature. Furthermore, D. H. Park et al. (2007) findings help to confirm this

study's results, as it confirms that eWOM volume impacts both low involvement and high involvement consumers' behavior, with the impact being present regardless of the information quality. Lopez and Sicilia (2014) also studied the impact of several factors, including source credibility and eWOM volume, on the influence eWOM has on consumers decision-making, and found significant results. The sample of the investigation consisted in travelers over the age of 16 who had searched for reviews and opinions before planning their trip. This population, despite not being age restricted, has some similarities with the cohort of this study, as respondents from this investigation also use social media and review websites and the context of the study is also tourism and hospitality, specifically the hotel market. All those studies corroborate what was found in the previous chapter, however none of them measured the direct correlation between eWOM volume and information adoption, as all of them skipped one step, connecting eWOM volume directly to purchase decisions (Adjei et al., 2010; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Ionica, 2014; Lopez & Sicilia, 2014).

The confirmation of the correlation between eWOM volume and information adoption might have an explanation through several arguments and factors. For example, the connection between higher volume of reviews/comments and the product/service popularity and importance may affect/lead consumers to analyze their purchase decisions. Another possibility is the number of opinions/reviews makes consumers perceive eWOM as more informative, leading to an impact on their behavior (D. H. Park et al., 2007). Additionally, Lopez and Sicilia (2014) stated that the more reviews/opinions a consumer has looked up about a service, the bigger the influence of eWOM has on their decision-making. As Gen Zers are characterized by being wise on how they spend their money, doing extensive research to choose the best option for them (Posner, 2015), they look for a big number of reviews/comments before opting for a service, leading to a bigger influence of eWOM on their decision-making. Thus, this study confirmed the connection between those variables that had already been proposed and validated by Rani and Shivaprasad (2018).

Hypothesis 3 "In social media and in review websites, high quality eWOM is a key element that positively affects information adoption" was accepted both in social media and review websites' structural models, similar to before mentioned literature cited in literature review. This connection between both variables was initially conducted indirectly, through the mediation of information usefulness, according to the findings of

Sussman and Siegal (2003). Those findings stated that the quality of the argument is associated with information usefulness, however a connection with information adoption wasn't found. Further, Watts and Zhang (2008) (in a study about two online communities), Shen et al. (2014) (in a study about online review communities) and Rauniar et al. (2014) (in a study about social media usage, particularly *Facebook*) confirmed the correlation between argument quality and information adoption, arguing that consumers are more predisposed to adopt online reviews that have good argument quality. Moreover, Yang (2010) also reinforced this argument, stating that in the digital world, information quality is crucial for individuals as most of them are aware of their needs and know what to seek. The validation of the influence of eWOM quality on information adoption goes in line with several arguments and statements made: firstly, when consumers are developing an opinion, they tend to look for good arguments that can persuade them. Moreover, the close-proximity relation of Gen Zers with the online world (specifically the online communities such as social media and review websites) might be an important factor. This is because, in online communities, the quality of an argument is considered a huge contributing factor to consumers' information adoption (Zhang & Watts, 2008).

Hypothesis 4 "In social media and in review websites, information usefulness is a key element that positively influences information adoption" is valid according to results, which confirms the outcomes of several authors that study different contexts, such as Sussman and Siegal (2003), Cheung et al. (2008) (in a study about consumer reviews on online communities), Tjongirin et al. (2020) (in a study about purchase intention in social media, directed to college students as the central demographic, which are of similar age to the cohort of this study) and Hussain et al. (2017) (in a study about food products). Most of the studies that analyzed this correlation were based on information adoption model, developed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), which connects both variables. The impact of information usefulness on information adoption proven in this study is in accordance with the model, sustaining existing literature. This goes in line with Andriani et al. (2021), which highlighted the importance of information usefulness as a determinant of information adoption. The connection between these two variables is well-sustained in literature, being studied in different contexts and generations. Andriani et al. (2021) studied this correlation in the context of online video streaming, but their sample is not

age restricted to one generation, meaning the results may not be specifically significant to Generation Z nor to the context of the hotel market.

Hypothesis 5 “In social media and in review websites, information adoption is a key element that positively influences consumers’ purchase decision” was validated in both structural models, corroborating past studies (Andriani et al., 2021; Erkan & Evans, 2018; Song et al., 2021; Tjongirin et al., 2020). Song et al. (2021) argued young consumers have adopted eWOM information to boost their knowledge and to encourage them to make prudent purchase decisions, which goes in line with the findings of this study. Thus, this correlation has been confirmed among young consumers, which goes in line with the findings of this study, that confirmed the correlation of both variables on Generation Z. Moreover, the influence of information adoption on purchase intention have been proven in all generations. Erkan and Evans (2018) studied the influence of information adoption on online purchase intentions of consumers in general, in the context of social media and shopping websites. Their findings were significant in the context of shopping websites, but poor regarding its correlation in the context of social media, contradicting the present investigation. Tjongirin et al. (2020) found the correlation between information adoption and purchase intentions in the context of social media significant. As its sample were composed by college students, the cohort generation is similar to this investigation. Andriani et al. (2021) found the results acceptable in the context of online video streaming and their sample is not restricted to a specific generation, proving that the correlation is not specific to Generation Z. The results show Gen Zers have used eWOM information available on social media and review websites to improve their knowledge and to help them making better purchase decisions.

Lastly, hypothesis 6 “Information adoption is more influential on consumers’ purchase decision in social media over review websites” was rejected. When comparing both structural models (table 19), some discrepancies between the correlation of both variables in social media *versus* in review websites are visible. The influence of information adoption on consumers’ purchase decision is higher in review websites ($\beta = 0,720$), when comparing over social media ($\beta = 0,616$). Thus, the information adopted from review websites have more influence on Gen Zers’ purchase decision than information adopted from social media. Additionally, according to R Square values (table 20), in social media, 37,9% change of consumers’ purchase decision is explained by

information adoption. In review websites the value is a little more than half (51,8%). This means that on review websites, the information adoption is more influential and has more weight on consumers' purchase decision than in social media. This answers research question number two "Is there a difference of influence on Gen Zers' purchase decision regarding hotel stays if the information is adopted from social media or if it comes from review websites?" and fulfills the main and the first secondary objectives of the study. This outcome is similar to the research of Erkan and Evans (2018) (with a sample constituted by college students between the age of 18-29, very similar to Gen Zers' age), that found shopping websites (anonymous eWOM) to be more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than social media (social eWOM). This can be explained by the effect of review length on purchase intention (Park & Lee, 2008), as online reviews tend to be more detailed and provide more information than social media comments and posts. Nevertheless, this hypothesis rejection contradicts the premise that less anonymous eWOM is more beneficial for eWOM information (Chu & Choi, 2011; Wallace et al., 2011). It is also against the argument that eWOM information between known people and friends is more influential on consumers' purchase decisions (Moran & Muzellec, 2017; D. H. Park et al., 2007).

Furthermore, all path coefficients of the four independent variables were analyzed to understand which message characteristic is more influential on information adoption (table 19). The conclusions were that both in social media and review websites, the variable that holds more influence on information adoption is information usefulness, as the path coefficients are higher than in the other independent variables ($\beta = 0,479$ in social media; $\beta = 0,483$ in review websites). This answers the first research question "Which eWOM characteristic has more influence in the adoption of the information in social eWOM and in anonymous eWOM?".

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, a final balance is conducted. The main conclusions are presented, as well as the contributions of this study for theory and management, the limitations encountered and suggestions for future research.

6.1. General conclusions

The number of studies analyzing the importance of eWOM on purchase intentions and its role on consumer decision-making is huge. Thus, online information has been one of the major spotlights for marketers and researchers, as customer behavior is greatly impacted by the recommendations, reviews and opinions other customers give on social media and review websites, even more than in conventional ads. The present investigation gathers and crosses results of online information from two major online platforms: social media and review websites. Gen Zers, the cohort of this study, are avid users of those platforms and are, in comparison with other generations, more conscious of social networking. They will also become, in the near future, the most important customer segment in tourism and hospitality. Therefore, the analysis of the impact of eWOM on Gen Zers' purchase decisions within the scope of the hotel market is a much needed addition to the existing literature.

As discussed before, this study was developed with the main objective of understanding the differences and compare how review websites and social media affect Gen Zers' purchase decisions regarding their hotel preference. Two other secondary objectives emerged: to compare both online platforms to see if Gen Zers are affected differently depending on the eWOM source; to try to understand which type of eWOM should hotel managers focus when promoting its business.

With this in mind, adopting a quantitative methodology, an online survey was developed and distributed. The data analysis gathered through the survey allowed to compare the results of the same conceptual model with two different contexts: social media and review websites.

The data analysis results show eWOM quality, eWOM volume and information usefulness have a positive impact over information adoption in both social media and review websites. The direct influence of source credibility on information adoption

wasn't confirmed on both structural models, however its indirect impact through information usefulness was tested and confirmed, according to the information adoption model. In both online platforms, the independent variable that has more influence on information adoption is information usefulness. This answers the first research question "Which eWOM characteristic has more influence in the adoption of the information in social eWOM and in anonymous eWOM?". The analysis of the impact of information adoption on consumers' purchase decisions showed some discrepancies between the two online platforms. Through the comparative analysis of path coefficients (β) and R Square values (R^2), it was possible to conclude that the influence of information adoption on consumers' purchase decisions is stronger in review websites (path coefficient value is higher than in social media) and the information adoption has more weight on the change of consumers' purchase decisions in review websites (R Square value is higher than in social media). Thus, the results show that when comparing both online platforms, Gen Zers tend to act more in terms of purchase decisions when the information is adopted from review websites. All the aforementioned comparison results lead us to conclude that review websites are more influential on Gen Zers' purchase decisions than social media in terms of hotel choice. This answers research question number two "Is there a difference of influence on Gen Zers' purchase decision regarding hotel stays if the information is adopted from social media or if it comes from review websites?" and fulfills the main and the first secondary objectives of the study.

The findings of this study help to understand how strong the impact of message characteristics is on the adoption of information and consequent purchase decision, both in social media and review websites. It helps both marketers and hotel managers to understand the best type of eWOM to invest, depending on the situation (last secondary objective). Although the research findings are leaning towards review websites, social media mustn't be ignored, since the results of the study regarding social media were also promising and the two platforms must be equally acknowledged by hotel managers in order for the businesses to succeed.

6.2. Implications for theory and management

This study analyzes and compares the impact of the information present on two major online platforms in Gen Zers' purchase decision regarding hotel choice, which

helps marketers and hotel managers to develop a better thought out marketing strategy for this specific cohort. Despite the impact of online information on consumer behavior being a field that has triggered a lot of interest on researchers in recent times, a big portion of the studies don't narrow the research to one specific cohort (Erkan & Evans, 2018; Salehi-Esfahani et al., 2016; Tjongirin et al., 2020), with only a few being about Generation Z (Pillay, 2021; Song et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2022). Additionally, only a small portion of them compare the influence of online information in both online platforms (Erkan & Evans, 2018) and are specifically about the hotel market (Lata & Rana, 2021; Lee, 2018). With this in mind, the present investigation enriches the literature about online information, as it analyzes both social media and review websites' information characteristics and compares them to see how it impacts Gen Zers' purchase decisions regarding their hotel preference. This contributes to the lack of literature that combine all three factors present in this study: comparison of online platforms, studying Generation Z as a cohort and specifically focusing on the hotel market.

Additionally, this study's conceptual model can be seen as an extension and adaption of the information adoption model developed by Sussman and Siegal (2003). The eWOM Volume was added as an independent variable and some modifications were made, firstly regarding the role of information usefulness in the model. Similar adjustments were already tested by other researchers (Erkan & Evans, 2018). Secondly, consumers' purchase decision was added as a dependent variable, also similar to what is conducted in other studies, where the variable purchase intention was incremented (Lata & Rana, 2021; Song et al., 2021; Tjongirin et al., 2020). We deliberately preferred to study consumers' purchase decisions over purchase intentions to complement existing literature, as the biggest share of the related studies address consumer behavior in the form of purchase intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2018; Song et al., 2021; Tjongirin et al., 2020).

For management, this study also brings contributions, specially to marketers and hotel managers who are interested in improving their online communication and marketing. Firstly, this study elucidates the favorite, chosen online platforms Gen Zers use, shedding lights about the frequency of usage and their habits as information seekers. Due to the nature of this world, where online platforms play a major role in everyone's life, this is particularly valuable for marketers and hotel managers who are eager to invest in eWOM marketing, as studying consumers' habits and behavior is extremely important

to know what their needs are and meet their expectations. Secondly, this investigation found what are the message characteristics of eWOM information that consumers value the most both in social media and in review websites. This helps management to improve their marketing strategies by taking Gen Zers' behavior into account and anticipating their behavior towards certain message characteristics such as quality, volume, credibility and usefulness and what leads them to adopt the information. Lastly, comparing the models showed better results on the influence of information adoption on consumers' purchase decisions on review websites. This conclusion is meaningful in terms of management, as it points marketers and managers into a direction which, theoretically, is more influential on consumers' purchase decision. Even though management should not ignore social media online information and management, this research can help establishing priorities and underline the importance of complementing the investment of social media management with online reviews management.

Moreover, another aspect marketers and hotel managers should be increasingly aware is the importance of managing online reviews in the hotel industry. This was further underlined by our research, as the results revealed review websites are the type of online platform which the adoption of information impacts more the Gen Zers' purchase decision.

6.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Concerning the limitations of this research, one of the main points to mention is the convenience of the sample. Although parts of the survey's answers were acquired through MTurk and social media ads, there were answers coming from the author's network in order to attain faster, inexpensive answers in an easier way. Additionally, although some answers are from other countries, the majority of them are Portuguese. Gen Zers of other countries who seek online information when booking a hotel might have a different awareness and decision-making process. Future studies should opt for a more cross-cultural research in order to obtain better representability. Moreover, the research focused on Generation Z due to their characteristics as consumers. Thus, the results of the study don't represent all potential individuals and their behavior towards hotel preference. Another aspect that should be taken into account is the impossibility of collecting data from minors without their parents' approval. This constituted a problem,

as minors required a signed permission from their parents in order to participate in the survey and there weren't any signed permissions sent.

A quantitative methodology was adopted and applied in this study, so future research could go for an alternative approach. Meaning that, for example, instead of a survey, a qualitative methodology could be adopted, in form of interviews to consumers. It is possible that when following other approaches, the results could be different.

This research analyzed all the types of social media and review websites together, rather than studying in one platform of each type, such as Instagram and TripAdvisor. Future research could focus on one platform of each type, in order to achieve more specific results.

Finally, the present study was centered in the hotel market, and discarded local accommodation, which can be an interesting field to study in future investigations.

7. References

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