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The role of Internet and social media  
on travelers' decision-making and  
booking processes

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# The role of Internet and social media on travelers' decision-making and booking processes

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## ABSTRACT

Travel contexts and tourist behaviors are influenced by technological advancements in the last decades. Online travel industry offers its consumers a wide range of tourism goods and services and travelers evaluate these products with online travel information gathered through internet and social media. Consumer-generated content (CGC) shapes these sources with reviews, user-ratings, photos, videos. In this study, we aim to understand travelers' perceptions towards this content and intention to use these sources regarding their travel planning and booking processes. We measure the perceived attributes of Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), Travel Review websites and social networks and evaluated socio-demographic profile of the participants in our survey. We have implemented one-way ANOVA test for making comparisons among CGC sources. We have also explored the perceptions of these information sources under Multiple Regression Model. Based on our results, we can emphasize that OTAs are the most widely used platform by travelers. Besides, female travelers and younger travelers are more likely to use social media for planning and booking their trips.

## 1. Introduction

Internet and its technologies have been increasingly affecting the world economy in many aspects. Tourism sector is one of the most affected sectors by advancements of internet-based innovations in the world. Global travel industry is driven by advancements in the e-commerce and online travel shopping in the last decade. Today, most of hotel reservations, flight ticket bookings, transfers or car rentals are made through online channels. Also, we all realize that searching and gathering travel information is mostly processed through resources on the web. In this manner, we can remark that global travel activities are done on the internet from planning till the purchasing phase.

When we have mentioned “internet” as a word for tourism industry, undoubtedly we emphasize numerous websites in tourism and travel field on the internet. Some of these are travel companies’ own websites where they demonstrate and sell their goods and services online. Furthermore, we know that online travel agencies (OTAs), online travel and leisure communities and social media play an important role on tourism activities globally.

Particularly, emergence of Web 2.0 technologies has resulted in opening numerous travel communities, forums, blogs, travel review websites and social networks in the global travel market (Ayeh et al., 2013).. All these platforms provide vast of travel-related information for travelers all around the world. Main features of this online travel information are based on user-generated content (UGC) and consumer-generated content (UGC) or media (CGM), easily accessible and use, categorized in terms of type of goods and services and these information can be found on both commercial and non-commercial platforms.

Additionally, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, Google+ have grown enormously with enhancing Web 2.0 applications for wide range of purposes, including travel consumer-generated media or content (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). People have started to generate reasonable amount of online travel information and travel-related content in these social networks. Travelers have started to share with each other numerous posts, comments, photos, videos and other content about travel activities. This interaction among people has created an impressive impact on tourism industry and traveler behaviors parallel to increase in use of social network by people worldwide.

Now, it is assumed that social media has become a major source of information similarly user-generated content websites for travelers (Cox et al., 2009). While we talk about online travel information resources, online or virtual travel communities, UGC and CGC websites with travel reviews and social networks together, it can be wise to use “Travel 2.0” term to describe today’s global travel industry (Elci et al., 2017).

Beside the attributes of different online travel information sources, general profile of internet users and the data related to socio-demographic profile of these people can affect their perceptions regarding characteristics of these online travel portals and information sources (Bonn et al., 1999; Weber and Roehl, 1999).

In this study, we will try to understand impacts of internet and social media on travelers’ decision-making and booking processes. We aim to observe the relationships among socio-demographic information of travelers with perceived characteristics of information and such technology as described in Davis’s Technology Acceptance Model (1986).

**2. An overview of Online Travel Industry**

When we consider the volume of online travel market in the world, we observe high number of growth per year in sales through various distribution channels. In 2016, online travel sales generated 564.9 billion US dollars. This number shows that market is increased by 6% globally compared to previous year. In terms of projections and steady growth rate in the travel industry, online travel sales are expected to reach 693.91 billion US dollars in 2018 and 817.54 billion US dollars in 2020 (eMarketer, 2016)

Figure.1 – Digital travel sales worldwide from 2014 to 2020 (in billion US dollars)



Source: eMarketer, 2016a

People use Online travel agencies (OTAs) to book travel goods and services online. There are two global players in the Online Travel Agencies sector today; Booking Holdings and Expedia Inc. These two companies dominate digital travel sales in the world, particularly in accommodation and lodging services. When we have a look at 2017 annual report of Booking Holdings Inc. (previously known as Priceline Group), it is mentioned that total revenue of the company is \$12.68 billion, increased by 18% percent compared to previous year, 2016. Gross bookings have reached \$81.22 billion with 673.1 million room nights (Booking Holdings Inc, 2017).It is the parental company of big travel portals like Booking.com, Kayak and the company is the leading online travel agency in the online travel market. As of December 31, 2017, Booking Holdings group lists 1.58 million properties consisting of hotels, rental apartments and other lodging places.

TripAdvisor and similar consumer-generated content travel review websites enormously have changed online tourism market in last decade as well. According to official report released by the TripAdvisor, User-reviews and opinions on TripAdvisor has grown 24% year-over-year and reached 661 million at June 30, 2018 and has listed 7.7 million places to stay, places to eat and things to do. There are 1.2 million accommodation places, 855,000 rental properties, 4.7 million restaurants and 975,000 travel activities shown on the website. TripAdvisor, its parent company websites and mobile apps are used by 456 million average monthly unique visitors. TripAdvisor’s last year revenue is \$433 million and it is increased by 2% compared to previous year (TripAdvisor, 2018).

In contemporary marketing applications, social networks are considered as a crucial marketing instrument to promote your products or services. All companies have intention to appear and gain more presence in social networks with increasing their number of followers to get in touch with larger populations and inform them about promotions deals through these social media channels. When we look at statistics of number of active users of social networks as of July, 2018, Facebook is in the most popular one with 2.2 billion users. In second place, we see online video sharing website Youtube by 1.9 billion active users. Instagram is in third place (1 billion) and Twitter (336 million users) comes in 4<sup>th</sup> place respectively (Statista, 2018).

Additionally, traditional travel marketing approaches are replaced by digital travel marketing in the recent years. In the USA, investment in digital advertising will reach \$ 107.30 billion in 2018, an 18.7% increase from \$90.39 billion in 2017 (eMarketer, 2018). It is projected travel industry will cover 8.1% of this spending among other industries (eMarketer, 2016b)

Table-1.Digital Marketing Spending share by industry in the US, from 2014 to 2020

<b>US Digital Ad Spending Share, by Industry, 2014-2020</b>							
<i>% of total</i>							
	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Retail	22.1%	22.0%	21.9%	21.9%	21.9%	21.9%	21.9%
Automotive	12.3%	12.5%	12.7%	12.8%	13.0%	13.2%	13.4%
Financial services	12.4%	12.3%	12.2%	12.2%	12.0%	11.9%	11.8%
Telecom	11.2%	11.1%	11.0%	10.9%	10.8%	10.7%	10.6%
CPG & consumer products	8.4%	8.5%	8.7%	8.8%	8.9%	9.0%	9.1%
Travel	8.3%	8.3%	8.3%	8.2%	8.1%	8.0%	7.9%
Computing products & consumer electronics	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%
Media	5.6%	5.8%	5.9%	5.8%	5.8%	5.8%	5.8%
Entertainment	4.7%	4.8%	4.8%	4.9%	5.0%	5.1%	5.2%
Healthcare & pharma	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.9%	2.9%	3.0%
Other	4.8%	4.5%	4.3%	4.3%	4.2%	4.0%	3.9%

Source, eMarketer, 2016b

Furthermore, number of internet users in emerging markets primarily in Asia-Pacific region, have been constantly increasing annually all around the world. This situation offers still big opportunities for tourism companies and user-generated content travel portals if they will be able to enhance their presence also in mobile-based technologies and platforms. Internet

penetration in the world is increasing with higher rates due to internet access through mobile networks. Online travel industry will continue to increase their popularity among the internet users and travelers who are constantly connected to the internet during the day.

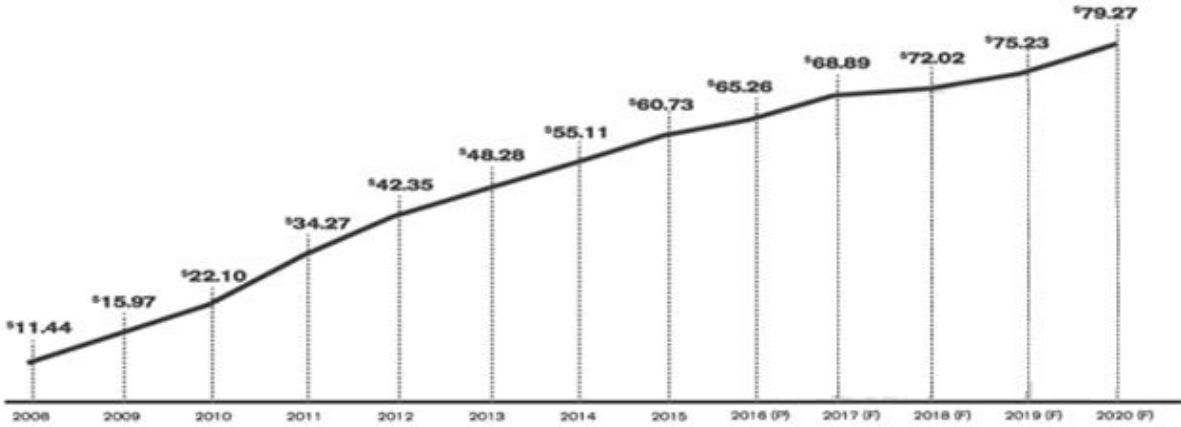
Table.2 – Devices used by Leisure Travelers for various travel processes

	Computer/ Tablet	Smartphone
<b>Used during any phase (Net)</b>	94%	67%
<b>Inspiration</b> The time when you identified you wanted or needed to book travel	73%	31%
<b>Research</b> The time when you actively looked and researched your trip or travel plans	88%	27%
<b>Purchase/booking</b> The time when you booked your trip	81%	14%
<b>Experiencing/traveling</b> Any behavior you may have participated in <i>during</i> your trip	57%	50%
<b>Post traveling</b> Any behavior you may have participated in <i>after</i> you took your trip	63%	37%

Source: Google Travel Study, 2014

Search Engines are also important tools for connecting travelers and tourism businesses. They have become one of primary tools for tourism companies to gain and retain tourism consumers (Buhalis & Law, 2008). There are some investigations to explain the role of search engines on tourism information search and vacation planning activity (Pan & Fesenmaier 2006; Xiang et al., 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Many tourism companies employ digital marketing professionals and this staff is appointed to accomplish related tasks such as search engine marketing (SEM) and optimization (SEO). For instance, a report regarding search engine optimization spending in the U.S. economy indicates that it is expected to reach nearly \$80 billion in U.S. by 2020 (Borell Associates, 2016).

Figure.2 – Total U.S. Spending For SEO from 2008-2020, in \$ Billions



Source: Borell Associates, 2016

### **3. Theoretical Background**

Numerous explorations and academic studies on tourist behaviors show that decision-making and booking processes of travelers are significantly influenced by online travel information gathered through search engines, online travel portals and social networks.

#### **Online Travel Information**

It can be remarked that rapid development of technology increased the number of information sources available for prospective travelers in the world (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Today, we can define that tourism consumers rely on review websites and social networks more for gathering travel information (Li et al., 2009). Undoubtedly, customers aim to reduce risks and get an objective third party opinion before their purchasing or booking by following these ways (Riegelsberger et al., 2005). Compared to the past, the number of “last minute” travelers is increasing as well (Scott, 2004).

#### **Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM)**

Electronic-word of mouth (e-WOM) is an electronic form of word of mouth which has taken place on the internet. Travel reviews can be regarded as e-WOM for tourism. Some scholars suppose that e-WOM as a key source of information about particular goods and services in tourism (Litvin et al., 2008). Some studies aimed to emphasize the reliance and importance of e-WOM on the tourism sector (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Litvin et al., 2008; Sparks & Browning, 2011).

#### **OTAs, Travel Review Websites and Social Media**

OTAs are signification distribution channels in travel industry. They establish sale platforms of goods and services. Ku and Fan (2009) remark three primary reasons for using OTAs: privacy, safety and product quality. Furthermore, they provide consumer-generated content on their websites such as consumer reviews, user-ratings. It is found that suggestions of other consumers induce more influence on customers' choices than did reviews from expert or firm related advisors (Chen, 2008). Regarding studies on OTAs, bhotel's positive ratings and reviews increase in hotel bookings (Ye et al., 2009). Some scholars explain that customer tend to post negative reviews more when they feel disappointed with tourism services (Smith et al., 1999; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Additionally, some studies investigate weighting of negative feedbacks when customers face service failures as well. Similar studies consider that negative reviews are submitted more than positive reviews (Gregoire et al., 2009). Besides, negative feedbacks create higher impact on customer preferences than positive reviews (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Lee et al., 2008).

In the beginning of Travel 2.0 era, Gretzel (2006) states that many travel companies adopted the growing importance of travel reviews and they tried to handle it with edited testimonials in those times. In the following years, travel consumers had started to use user-generated-

content (UGC) and travel review websites such as TripAdvisor increasingly for travel information search and travel-related decisions (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Cox et al., 2009).

Some studies also can be revised to consider the impacts of consumer reviews on hotel industry (O'Connor, 2010; Sparks et al., 2013). We can tell that consumer-generated media (CGM) travel portals allow travelers to bypass tour operators and travel agencies to get travel-related advices such as destination choosing (Filieri et al., 2015; Arsal et al., 2008). In travel review websites, travelers can review the most recommended restaurants, accommodations places to stay, tourist attractions to do, historical and cultural sites to visit with user-ratings by various rankings (Dickinger, 2011; Sparks et al., 2013; Filieri & McLeay, 2014).

One of the most significant functions of these websites is providing credible, independent and non-commercial reviews regarding those goods and services to the consumers. There are prominent journals on questioning credibility of these reviews published on websites (Smith, 2013; Streitfield, 2011; Turtle, 2012). There have been important debates around reliability of this content some companies are accused of posting fake praising reviews for their companies and negative reviews for competitors.

We need to add that social media plays an increasingly significant role in many aspects of tourism today, particularly in travel planning and travel-related decision processes (Fotis, 2012). We can define social media websites as one of the most powerful online networking platforms in this century (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). We should express that social media is constantly evolving with its consumer-generated content (CGC) and continues to impact various fields of our lives (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Consumer-generated media has affected tourism and hospitality sector in three central ways. First, number of online communities for travel discussions is increased. Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter started to use some apps for establishing travel discussion platforms. Secondly, travelers' behaviors and travel arrangements are affected with respect to gathered information through online resources. Thirdly, tourism companies have started to implement marketing strategies integrated into social networks (Ayeh et al., 2013).

Emergence of free and independent travel forums, blogs and social networks such as MySpace.com allowed people to share travel experiences with each other in a honest and unedited way (Gretzel, 2006). Today, social media plays a critical role as information source for tourists (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Arsal et al., 2008). Users have chance to digitize and share their experiences by posts, tweets, photos, videos and so on (Volo, 2010). Furthermore, tourism companies try to gain competitive advantage by developing new marketing strategies in the social media (Akehurst, 2009; Huang et al., 2009). Some authors, who discuss effects of social media on travelers, mention that travel-related content on social networks is perceived more credible than the content exists in official destination websites, travel agents and mass media (Dickinger, 2011; Fotis et al., 2012).

Additionally, we can comment that social media is perceived as tool of destination marketing in tourism. It can be beneficial to interact with potential visitors of one destination and monitor their opinions related to their holiday (Kiralova & Pavlicecka, 2015; Hays et al., 2009). We should also underline important investigations about the importance of online



marketing and establishing new communication channels through social media for the airline industry (Hvass & Munar, 2012).

### **3.1 Variables of Our Research**

We have adopted some variables for our research from Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1989). We have also used socio-demographic information of respondents of our survey as independent variables to apply related statistical tests. We have considered age, gender, marital status, education level and frequency of internet usage as socio-demographic variables. Other variables we have used: Perceived ease of use, Perceived usefulness, Perceived trustworthiness and Behavioral Intention to use

#### **3.1.1 Socio-Demographics of Travelers**

When we have reviewed previous researches about the relationship between socio-demographic attributes of people and their travel-related activities on the internet, we can realize some vital indicators. For instance, Bonn et al.(1999) describes people who use internet for travel information are like to be people younger than 45 years old and college educated. Moreover, Weber and Roehl (1999) describe their age between 26 and 55 with higher income.

Ayeh et al. (2013) points out the importance of age on using intention to use travel review websites. It is stated that younger travelers are more likely to engage consumer-generated content when planning their vacation. It is not surprising that young people has grown up with latest technological advancements in the last decades and interact with these information sources more (Correa et al.,2010). Some authors pay attention to information about marital status of travelers. Jensen and Hjalager (2013) states that couples tend to search travel information online more than singles

When we look gender of travelers, some scholars describe that male tourist with higher income more likely to be an internet user and utilize internet for travel information (Luo et al, 2005). Munoz and Amaral (2012) explain that women may have slightly higher propensity for searching travel information and booking travel related products online.

Regarding the education level, it is found that segments with higher education and higher incomes are more likely to search online travel information (Jensen et al., 2013). Online information search is also explored among travelers with college degree and without it. As a result, no significant difference was found (Luo et al., 2005).

In terms of online information sources preferences, Kim et al. (2007) state that female travelers gives more importance of travel portals and official destination websites. Based on another study regarding using social media for travel-related information, it is explained that females tend to use it more than males (Jensen et al., 2013). Some studies suggest that females use social media for travel planning more than males, whereas they do not find significant difference between two genders in terms of perceived influence of social media on travel-related decisions (Fotis et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Munoz and Amaral (2012) define that frequency of internet usage is significantly related with travel-related decision such as travel planning and booking. It is stated that due to increase in internet penetration rate influences travel-related activities online.

### **3.1.2 Perceived Ease of use**

“Perceived ease of use” is one of variables mentioned in Davis’s Technology Acceptance Model (1989). It is explained that individuals will adopt a technology if they need to show efforts at a minimum level to accomplish a task (Ayeh, 2013). The influence of ease of use in terms of TAM model has been explored in numerous studies as well (Casalo et al., 2010; Huh et al., 2009).

The easiness of use in our research can be defined as less time-consuming and low efforts needed for information search by travelers. Features of resources such as webdesign, interface, language options, fast loading, are evaluated by users while having opinion about easiness of use. In a research carried out by Burgess et al. (2009), consumer-generated media websites are clarified as some terms such as “user friendly”, “convenient”, “easy to use”, “accessible”, and “saving time”.

When consumer is in goal-oriented mode like making a reservation, easy information processing is preferred (Van Schaik & Ling, 2009). Thus, we can evaluate “perceived ease of use” as one of the variables for our research. We will explore the relationship between perceived easiness of use and other variables in terms of demographic data of our respondents.

### **3.1.3 Perceived usefulness**

It is defined in Technology Acceptance Model that perceived usefulness as the degree to which a person believes that the use of a particular system enhances his or her work (Davis, 1989). In our study, we evaluate “perceived usefulness” as the feature of the information gathered through different resources and how travelers enhance their travel planning and decision-making processes with this information. Some studies emphasize “perceived usefulness” as a primary factor of utilization of technology in tourism and hospitality industries (Huh et al., 2009). For prospective travelers, the usefulness of consumer-generated content helps them in travel planning and decision-making (Ayeh et al., 2013).

User stars and ratings on the travel related consumer-generated content (CGC) websites, affect consumers’ evaluation in decision-making process. This kind of highly affected customers called as “cognitive misers” (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). It is argued that “cognitive misers” more tend to be affected by ready accessible information cues like user-ratings, stars and use shortcuts when making evaluations or decisions (Pennington, 2000). Thus, we have evaluated “perceived usefulness” as one of the major variables to explore relationships between consumers’ travel planning and intention to use CGM websites and social networks like many prominent studies (Huh et al., 2009; Pavlou, 2003; Pavlou & Fygenon, 2006).

### **3.1.4 Perceived trustworthiness**

In many studies, it is said that trust is one of the main factors which affects customer's online purchase intentions (Flavian et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2001; Yoon, 2002). On the other hand, some explorations have showed that credibility of user-generated or consumer-generated content on the travel websites is not questioned enough by customers or low attention has been paid to trust towards CGM (Ayeh et al., 2013; Yoo & Gretzel, 2009). Also, Olhanian (1991) has proposed items used in improved models of TAM. "Perceived Trustworthiness" variable is used to inspect credibility of the information in these models. Therefore, "perceived trustworthiness" is another variable which needs to be measured to understand consumers' decision-making and booking processes in tourism and in our research as well.

### **3.1.5 Behavioral Intention to use**

"Behavioral intention" term describes how individual is likely to behave in a certain way (McKnight et al., 2002). "Intention to use" is confirmed as a variable to measure related to consumer behavior towards technology (Venkatesh, 1999). It is considered that if one good or service is perceived as easy to use and useful, it results in higher behavioral intentions to use that product or service (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Besides, Jeong et al. (2003) explains the relationship between online information and behavioral intention to use it in terms of trustworthiness of information and underlines trustworthiness of information is the major factor that influences the degree of intention to use as well. Additionally, some scholars aimed to explain the correlation between behavioral intention to use and actual use (Sheppard et al., 1988; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). In the modified and developed research models parallel to Technology Acceptance model, "behavioral intention to use" has been considered as one of the major variables to analyze and evaluate related data (Davis et al., 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Therefore, we have adopted this variable in our research to observe the impacts of consumer generated content on travel related decisions.

## **4. Methodology**

Experimental designs are useful for observing effects of various indicators or variables rather than generalizing statistical applications to larger samples or populations (Highhouse, 2009). In this respect, we have conducted one survey to investigate the role and impacts of online travel information, exists on consumer-generated content platforms such as OTAs, travel review websites and social networks, on travel planning and booking processes. We measure weightiness of these information resources on travel planning in terms of characteristics of information: ease of use, usefulness and credibility. We also explore intention of participants to use this information for decision-making.

While many scholars try to explain the impacts of technological innovations on consumer behaviors, the widest accepted model is Technology Acceptance Model (TAM, Davis, 1986). In this manner, we have analyzed features of travel-related content and intention to use online information sources with some variables provided by TAM such as perceived ease of using, perceived usefulness, perceived trustworthiness and behavioral intention to use these sources.

We have also aimed to determine relationships among these variables and socio-demographical information of the participants with related statistical tests.

There are two sections in the questionnaire. In the first part, participants are asked to answer demographic data questions such as age, gender, marital status, level of education, the frequency of internet use.

In second part, they are asked to evaluate some statements regarding online travel information they gather through Online Travel Agencies (OTAs), Travel Review websites (UGC or CGC travel websites) and social media platforms. They have responded these twelve statements according to Likert Scale – 7 point:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Moderately disagree
- 3 = Slightly disagree
- 4 = Neutral
- 5 = Slightly agree
- 6 = Moderately agree
- 7 = Strongly agree

In the second part of the survey, twelve items have been divided into three parts under subtitles: OTAs, Travel Review websites and Social networks. They are assumed as three main information resources of travelers for gathering travel consumer-generated content.

Each part has four items to measure attributes of this information and users' intention to use it. These four items are obtained from previous prominent researches related to TAM. "Perceived easiness of use" and "Perceived Usefulness" scales were measured with a statement collected from the study of Davis et al. (1989). "Perceived Trustworthiness" scale was analyzed with an item adopted from Olhanian (1990, 1991). "Behavioral intention to use information" scale is tested with the statement derived from the study of Venkatesh et al. (2003).

There have been 105 participants for this research. Respondent travelers were selected randomly in arrivals and departures terminals of Istanbul Atatürk International Airport between dates of 20-24 August, 2018. In order to communicate with travelers from different nations in an international airport, the questionnaire is written in English. Some copies also have been translated into Turkish as well.

In order to help participants to understand some categorical names of information resources, some popular website names were expressed while questions were asked. For instance, OTA term is explained by mentioning Booking.com and Expedia. TripAdvisor and Yelp were suggested to them as examples of UGC Travel Review websites. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Youtube were used to remind popular social network platforms.

#### 4.1 Statistical tests and variables

We have related socio-demographic information of the participants in our survey with attributes of online travel information they perceive on three main sources on the internet. Also, we have analyzed their intention to use this information for their travel planning

In first part of the statistical tests, we have applied One-way ANOVA test for examining relationship between independent variable, socio-demographic features of the participants and dependent variable, intention to use each source of online travel information. In second part of analysis, we have used Multiple Regression Model to analyze relationships among the existing variables and outcome variables which were created by merging three dependent variables on related information sources. Data analyses and statistical tests were carried out by IBM SPSS Data Editor Program (version 24.0).

#### 5. Results

We have categorized our findings in two main parts in terms of used statistical applications to analyze data we gathered through our survey. We have employed two convenient statistical tests to measure effects of our variables on using three information sources: One-way ANOVA and Multiple Regression Model. Now, we can start to review our results.

Table.3 – Profile of the participants

Gender	Male	71	67,6
	Female	34	32,4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Marital Status	Single	42	40,0
	Married	60	57,1
	Other	3	2,9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Age	Less than 18	6	5,7
	18-30	25	23,8
	31-40	31	29,5
	41-50	26	24,8
	51-60	11	10,5
	60>	6	5,7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Education Level	High School / Secondary School	10	9,5
	Diploma / Associated degree	43	41,0
	Bachelor degree	30	28,6
	Graduate/Postgraduate degree	17	16,2
	Other	5	4,8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Frequency of Internet Usage	A few times a month or less	2	1,9
	A few times a week	6	5,7
	About once a day	20	19,0
	Several times each day	77	73,3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Table.4 - Descriptive statistics of items used in Part-2 of the survey

Constructs and items	Mean	Std. Dev
<b>OTAs</b>		
I believe that searching online travel information through OTAs' websites is easy	5,52	1,057
I believe that online travel information and UGC on OTAs' websites are useful.	5,41	1,269
I believe that online travel information and UGC on OTAs' websites are credible.	4,78	1,293
I intend to use content of OTAs for my travel planning and booking decisions.	5,25	1,524
<b>Travel Review Websites</b>		
I find that searching online travel information through Travel Review websites is easy.	5,16	1,202
I find that online travel information and UGC on Travel Review websites are useful	5,24	1,431
I find that online travel information and UGC on Travel Review websites are credible.	4,65	1,286
I intend to use content of Travel Review websites for my travel planning and booking decisions.	4,70	1,825
<b>Social Media</b>		
I consider that searching online travel information through social networks is easy.	5,03	1,578
I consider that online travel information and UGC on social networks are useful.	4,41	1,621
I consider that online travel information and UGC on social networks are credible.	3,50	1,653
I intend to use content of social networks for my travel planning and booking decisions.	4,08	1,960

### One-Way ANOVA

One-way ANOVA is usually used for determining where there are any statistically significant differences between means of two or more independent variables. In this respect, we have used it to measure significant differences among socio-demographic variables and intention to use three information sources. We have analyzed test results respectively regarding the specific information source.

Table.5 – One-way ANOVA: Gender and Intention to use

Gender	Male	Female	F	<i>p</i>
	M (SD)	M(SD)		
OTAs	5.50(1.05)	5.11 (0.98)	3.52	.064
Travel Review	5.50 (0.87)	4.66 (1.25)	12.07	.001
Social Media	4.82 (1.26)	3.98 (1.52)	7.77	.006

The results have indicated that gender is significantly associated with using travel review and social networks. It is showed that females are more likely to use travel review websites (M=5.50, SD= .87; M=4.66, SD=1.25, F= (1, 103)=12.07,  $p < .01$ ) and social networks (M=4.82, SD= 1.26; M=3.98, SD=1.52, F= (1, 103)=7.77,  $p < .01$ ) than males. However, related analysis tells that gender is not significantly associated with using online travel agency among travelers (M=5.50, SD= 1.05; M= 5.11, SD= .98, F= (1, 103)=3.52,  $p=.06$ ).

Table.6 – One-way ANOVA: Marital Status and Intention to use

Marital St.	Single	Married	Other	F	<i>p</i>
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)		
OTAs	5.26 (1.41)	5.22 (0.95)	5.25 (0.90)	.026	.975
Travel Review	5.07 (1.21)	4.88 (1.21)	4.08 (1.01)	1.06	.349
Social Media	4.38 (1.52)	4.20 (1.48)	3.50 (1.39)	.583	.560

The results emphasize that marital status of participants is neither significantly associated with intention to use online travel agency ( $F = (2, 102) = 0.26, p = .97$ ), nor travel review websites ( $F = (2, 102) = 1.06, p = .34$ ), nor social networks;  $F = (2, 102) = 0.58, p = .56$ ).

Table.7 – One-way ANOVA: Age and Intention to use

Age	Less than 18	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	F	<i>p</i>
	M (SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
OTAs	6.04 (1.07)	5.03 (0.80)	5.47 (0.96)	5.17 (1.07)	5.22 (1.01)	4.41 (1.38)	2.20	.060
Travel Review	6.37 (0.46)	5.10 (0.93)	4.95 (1.15)	5.00 (1.08)	4.20 (1.56)	3.79 (1.38)	4.24	.002
Social Media	6.08 (0.73)	4.45 (1.21)	4.57 (1.52)	3.79 (1.32)	3.59 (1.26)	3.16 (2.14)	4.31	.005

When we look into relationship between age groups of travelers and intention to use these sources, the results indicate that some age groups are significantly associated with using travel review websites and social networks ( $F = (5, 99) = 4.24, p < .01$ ;  $F = (5, 99) = 4.31, p < .01$ ), whereas it is not significantly associated with online travel agency usage. ( $F = (5, 99) = 2.20, p = .06$ ). Post-hoc analysis indicates that participants who are in age group of 51-60 ( $M = 4.20, SD = 1.56$ ) and 60 years old and older ( $M = 3.79, SD = 1.38$ ) are less likely to use travel reviews than participants who are less than 18 ( $M = 6.37, SD = 0.46$ ). Additionally, participants who are 41-50 years old ( $M = 3.79, SD = 1.32$ ), 51-60 ( $M = 3.59, SD = 1.26$ ) and 60 years old and older ( $M = 3.16, SD = 2.14$ ) are less likely to use social media than participants who are less than 18 years old ( $M = 6.08, SD = 0.73$ ).

Table.8 – One-way ANOVA: Education level and Intention to use

Education	1	2	3	4	5	F	<i>p</i>
	M (SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
OTAs	5.55 (1.09)	5.23 (0.90)	5.20 (1.04)	5.23 (1.29)	4.90 (0.89)	.36	.832
Travel Review	5.67 (1.06)	5.25 (0.98)	4.70 (1.17)	4.44 (1.47)	3.80 (1.05)	4.24	.003
Social Media	5.37 (1.20)	4.52 (1.20)	3.98 (1.57)	3.44 (1.74)	4.05 (1.35)	3.63	.008

The results also indicate education level of participants is significantly associated with using travel review websites and social networks ( $F= (4, 100)=4.24, p< .01$ ;  $F= (4, 100)=3.63, p<.01$ ), but it is not significantly associated with online travel agency ( $F= (4, 100)=.36, p=.83$ ). Post-hoc analysis indicated participants with education level labeled as “Other “ ( $M=3.80, SD=1.05$ ) are less likely to utilize travel review websites than participants with high school/secondary school education ( $M=5.67, SD=1.06$ ). Besides, participants with graduate and post graduate level education ( $M=3.44, SD=1.74$ ) are less likely to use social media than high school/secondary school graduates ( $M=5.37, SD=1.20$ ).

Table.9 – One-way ANOVA: Frequency of Internet use and Intention to use

Internet	1	2	3	4	F	<i>p</i>
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)		
OTAs	6.75 (0.00)	4.16 (0.62)	5.37 (1.22)	5.25(0.93)	4.12	.008
Travel Review	5.50 (0.70)	3.37 (0.49)	4.90 (1.29)	5.05 (1.16)	4.03	.009
Social Media	6.26 (0.17)	2.20(0.90)	4.18(1.55)	4.37 (1.37)	6.49	.000

The results of applied One Way Anova test, we also need to indicate the frequency of use of internet was significantly associated with using online travel agency ( $F= (3, 101)= 4.12, p<.01$ ) travel review websites ( $F= (3, 101)= 4.03, p<.01$ ) and social media;  $F= (3, 101)= 6.49, p<.01$ ). Post-hoc analysis has remarked that participants who uses Internet a few times a month or less are ( $M= 6.75, SD=0.00$ ) more likely to prefer online travel agency than participants who use Internet a few times a week ( $M= 4.16, SD=0.62$ ). Participants who have used internet a few times a week ( $M=3.37, SD=0.49$ ) are less likely to use travel review websites than participants who use internet about once a day ( $M=4.90, SD=1.29$ ) and several times a day ( $M=5.05; SD=1.16$ ).

### Multiple Regression Model

In our study, we have applied Multiple Regression Model to analyze perceptions of travelers about three platforms which we analyze. In second part of our survey, first three items of each subcategory are questioning travelers’ perceptions regarding three characteristics of information source: perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and perceived trustworthiness (Davis et al., 1989). In this respect, we have created three outcome variables with summing the scores of answers of these three questions in each subcategory. We have called these dependent variables: “Perception of OTAs”, “Perception of TRW” and “Perception of SM” for using in these categories. Independent variables will be socio-demographic information and intention to use each source

Table.10 in the below indicates the new outcome variables and their associated Cronbach’s Alpha scores. According to scale reliability analysis, the Cronbach’s Alpha values of newly created scales (Result of summing first three questions’ answers of each subcategory) should



be around 0.70 or above. In this context, creating new scales by merging three answers is appropriate.

Table.10 – Reliability of Outcome Variables

Outcome Variables	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Perception of OTAs	0.692
Perception of TRW	0.807
Perception of SM	0.827

In the following tables, we will be able to observe the values of Multiple Regression Analysis regarding three online travel information sources.

Table.11 – Multiple Regression Model for OTAs

Perception of OTAs	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Std. Error	St. B	p
	.54				
Gender		.30	.13	.148	.007
Marital status		-.02	.12	-.015	.840
Age		-.10	.07	-.138	.154
Education Level		.01	.07	.015	.858
Internet use Freq.		-.14	.11	-.104	.192
Intention to use OTA		.43	.04	.691	.006

A multiple regression model was conducted to determine the effects of demographic variables, frequency of internet usage and intention to use online travel agency on perceived characteristics of gathered information from online travel agency. These results on Table.11 has indicated that some variables are significantly associated with perceptions about online travel agency ( $F= 19.74, p<.01$ ). The predictor variables explained 54% of the variance,  $R=.74, R^2=.54$  in the outcome variable. Examination of standardized beta coefficient has indicated, when other predictor variables were controlled, only gender ( $B=.14, p<.01$ ) and intention to use online travel agency ( $B=.69, p<.01$ ) are significantly associated with perceived features of online travel agency as an information source.

Table.12 – Multiple Regression Model for Travel Review Websites

Perception of TRW	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Std. Error	St. B	p
	.25				
Gender		.58	.20	.248	.004
Marital status		-.10	.19	-.049	.600
Age		-.08	.11	-.096	.435
Education		-.30	.10	-.275	.009
Internet use Freq.		.11	.16	.067	.509
Intention to use TRW		.10	.06	.137	.123

Also, we have employed multiple regression model to determine the effect of demographic variables, frequency of internet usage and intention to use travel review websites on perceptions regarding these websites. Table.12 shows that the variables are significantly associated with evaluating of information on travel review websites ( $F = 5.65, p < .01$ ). The predictor variables explained 25% of the variance,  $R=.50, R^2=.25$  in the outcome variable. Examination of standardized beta coefficient remarks that when other predictor variables were controlled, only gender ( $B=.24, p < .01$ ) and education level ( $B=-.27, p < .01$ ) are significantly associated with perceptions of characteristics of travel review websites.

Table.13 – Multiple Regression Model for Social Media

Perception of SM	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Std. Error	St. B	p
	.27				
Gender		.72	.25	.243	.008
Marital status		.04	.23	.018	.846
Age		-.36	.13	-.325	.008
Education		-.17	.14	-.128	.230
Internet use Freq.		-.19	.20	-.095	.345
Intention to use		.19	.07	.216	.015

Results of third multiple regression model are shown on Table.13. It is conducted to determine the effects of socio-demographic variables and intention to use social media on evaluating travel information on social media. The results had indicated that the variables are significantly associated with perceptions about social media ( $F = 6.31, p < .01$ ). The predictor variables explained 27% of the variance,  $R=.52, R^2=.27$  in the outcome variable. Examination of standardized beta coefficient emphasizes that when other predictor variables were controlled, gender ( $B= .24, p < .01$ ), age ( $B= -.32, p < .01$ ), and intention to use social media ( $B= .21, p < .01$ ) are significantly associated with people’s views about travel information on social media.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

### 6.1 Key Findings

When we have reviewed the results, we can mention that both two statistical measurements have provided us significant insights related to use of internet and social networks as major information resources for travel planning and booking your trip. Particularly, we have observed higher values related to participants’ opinions about OTAs and it tells us that it is widely used by travelers’ regardless of significant difference among their socio-demographic attributes.

Based on our first test results, we can talk about importance some of socio-demographical features of participants have influence on deciding and using these sources for their travels. Primarily, we can notice some findings based on gender differences. We have acknowledged in our study that female travelers tend to use travel review websites and social networks more than males. These results are similar with Fotis et al.(2012) and Munoz and Amaral (2012),

however the information provided by Luo et al. (2013) is not supported that male tourists tend to use online information resources more than females.

Another variable we have related with using information sources is age. When we have checked obtained results with age groups in our survey, we observe that people from age group between 51-60 and 60 years and older have less tendency to use travel review websites and social networks for online travel information than youth travelers whose age is 18 and smaller. We can make similar assumptions about related to age groups for 41-50 and 60 and higher are less likely to use social media for online travel information than travelers are 18 years old and younger. We observe similar indication in some previous studies (Ayeh et al.,2013; Correa et al.,2010).

When we review the level of education of participants and their intention to use information sources, we can tell lower educated people which is labeled as “Other” in our survey is less like to use travel review website for travel planning than High School/Secondary school graduates. Moreover, when we compare high school/secondary school graduates with graduates and post graduate level education, we see that graduates have less intention to use social media than high school or secondary school graduates. This suggests same results alike the study of Jensen and Hjalager (2013).

When we have observed marital status of the participants, contrast to study of Jensen et al. (2013), our test results do not show any statistical difference for using any of these information resources.

We should also mention some results regarding the frequency of internet use. Participants, who use internet a few times a month or less, prefer to use online travel agencies more than people who use internet a few times a week. We have observed similar findings in the study of Munoz and Amaral (2012). Furthermore, we have reviewed that people who use internet several times a day and once a day have more intention to use travel review websites than travelers who use internet a few times a week.

In first multiple regression model we have applied, we have used socio-demographic data and intention to use OTAs as predictor variables. We observed that, only gender and intention to use OTAs are significantly associated with perceptions of travel content exists on OTAs. In the second multiple regression model, we have kept same five socio-demographic variables and added intention to use travel review websites as predicting variables. We have seen that gender and education level are significantly associated with defined perceptions regarding travel review websites as a travel information source. In last regression model we have employed, we consider socio-demographic variables with intention to use social media as predictor variables. We have observed that gender, age and intention to use social media are significantly associated with evaluating travel information found on social networks.

## **6.2 Implications**

When we overview the findings from our research, we can make some assumptions about online travel industry and travel consumers’ opinion about it. In our findings, we have seen

that OTAs are the most widely used information source for travel planning and booking decisions regardless of socio-demographic features of the participants in our study. In this respect, we can also remark that some features of OTAs such as providing user-ratings, reviews, categorization touristic goods and services help travelers' decisions for their travel plans and these facilitate related processes including booking stage. It also points out that high level of competition among online travel agencies will continue to get share from huge travel market worldwide.

When we have focused on travelers' opinions about travel review websites, our research gives us remarkable insight. We can mention that women put more effort and spend more time to use travel review websites and take advantage of content of these websites. Particularly, information on these websites regarding destinations such as places to visit, is important for making daily sightseeing plans for women travelers.

Furthermore, we can tell that younger travelers tend to use travel review websites more than travelers from higher age groups. It indicates that when people travel to one destination first time, they need to search and utilize more travel information regarding their trip. We can describe that older travelers are more experienced for more destinations and they prefer to access information resources less before booking. Besides, we should underline the fact that higher level of education and more frequent internet usage encourage travelers to benefit from travel review websites.

Social media is another online travel information resource for travelers and due to results; women tend to use social media more for travel planning and booking decisions. We can assume that general content of social media particularly photo and video sharing attracting women travelers and they pay more attention to posts of their contacts, some celebrities, and some popular social media accounts. Undoubtedly, participants from younger ages such as late generations Y (millennials) and Z are more familiar with technological advancements (Ayeh, 2013) and they accept that social media is a vital resource for finding travel information and inspiration.

We should also express that participants, who have higher level of education, are questioning credibility of social networks as an information resource, particularly for travelling decisions. In this manner, they tend to use social media less for travel planning.

### **6.3 Limitations and future research**

In our research, we can declare some incidents as limitations of our study. As total number of participants of our survey, 105 responses form a smaller sample size than expected. Collecting related data from larger sample size could allow us to observe more diversified groups of travelers with enhanced socio-demographic structure and we could obtain more remarkable findings that are statistically significant.

We also need to explain that some adopted items from Davis's Technology Acceptance Model were not fully included in our survey to measure specific variables described in the model. Due to nature of location where we have processed the questionnaire, we could

request minimum time duration from participants to answer survey questions before and after their flights at the airport. By this respect, we have omitted some items in the survey to learn opinions of the travelers regarding travel information resources.

Additionally, we should point out some facts for future studies. In our study, we have focused on socio-demographical features of respondents and applied some prominent statistical tests to relate determined variables with each other. It can be useful to propose more hypotheses including relationships among the dependent and independent variable in TAM model with appropriate statistical analyses.

In order to have larger sample size and integrating more items into the newly designed questionnaire, online survey method can be applied by researchers. In order to promote this survey, some travel forums and social media platforms can be employed to reach bigger audiences.

Based on some significant findings regarding our research, new researches can be focus on of these three information resources particularly in terms of target groups. We should mention that evaluating three information resources at the same time in one study have led to more time-consuming processes regarding the decision of the general structure of the study and related research instruments. At this point, specifically defined title and content can help researchers to evaluate and notice some significant details more comprehensively regarding the research topic.

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## APPENDIX

### Master Thesis Questionnaire

Hello,

My name is Alper Ak. I am a student in Tourism Management and Planning Master's Degree programme in the University of Balearic Islands, Spain. We conduct one survey for Master's thesis study with a subject of "The role of internet and social media travelers' decision making and booking processes".

Please take a moment to fill out this survey with me and we will be able to review your previous travel planning and booking experiences on the internet and social media. Your answers will be processed only for statistical applications related to subject of our study. Your name-surname and other responses will be confidential.

#### Name-Surname

.....

#### Part-1

Please mark the following answers about your demographic information

#### Gender

- Male (....)  
Female (....)

#### Marital Status

- 1) Single (....)  
2) Married (....)  
3) Other (....)

#### Age

- Less than 18 (....)  
18-30 (....)  
31-40 (....)  
41-50 (....)  
51-60 (....)  
60+ (....)

#### The highest level of formal education you have completed?

- 1) High school/ Secondary School (....)  
2) Diploma/Associate degree (2 years) (....)  
3) Bachelor degree (....)  
4) Graduate/post graduate degree (....)  
5) Other (....)

#### How often do use the Internet?

- 1) A few times a month or less (....)  
2) A few times a week (....)  
3) About once a day (....)  
4) Several times each day (....)

## Part-2

Please indicate your opinion about the statements with the most appropriate phrase used among 7-points scale in the below.

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Moderately disagree
- 3 = Slightly disagree
- 4 = Neutral
- 5 = Slightly agree
- 6 = Moderately agree
- 7 = Strongly agree

### Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) (such as Booking.com, Expedia)

- 1- I believe that searching online travel information through OTAs' websites is easy (Davis et al., 1989)
- 2- I believe that online travel information and UGC on OTAs' websites are useful. (Davis et al., 1989)
- 3- I believe that online travel information and UGC on OTAs' websites are credible. (Olhanian, 1990, 1991)
- 4- I intend to use content of OTAs for my travel planning and booking decisions. (Venkatesh et al., 2003)

### User-Generated content (UGC) Travel Review Websites (such as TripAdvisor)

- 5- I find that searching online travel information through Travel Review websites is easy. (Davis et al., 1989)
- 6- I find that online travel information and UGC on Travel Review websites are useful (Davis et al., 1989)
- 7- I find that online travel information and UGC on Travel Review websites are credible. (Olhanian, 1990, 1991)
- 8- I intend to use content of Travel Review websites for my travel planning and booking decisions. (Venkatesh et al., 2003)

### Social Networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube)

- 9- I consider that searching online travel information through social networks is easy. (Davis et al., 1989)
- 10- I consider that online travel information and UGC on social networks are useful. (Davis et al., 1989)
- 11- I consider that online travel information and UGC on social networks are credible. (Olhanian, 1990, 1991)
- 12- I intend to use content of social networks for my travel planning and booking decisions. (Venkatesh et al., 2003)