Universidade de Aveiro Departamento de Economia, Gestão e Engenharia Industrial
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ROMEU MENDES DA SILVA LOPES

CREDIBILIDADE DOS COMENTÁRIOS ONLINE E QUALIDADE DO WEBSITE: IMPLICAÇÕES NA TOMADA DE DECISÃO DOS TURISTAS

ONLINE REVIEWS' CREDIBILITY AND WEBSITE QUALITY: IMPLICATIONS ON TRAVELLERS' DECISION MAKING

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Tese apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Doutor em Marketing e Estratégia, realizada sob a orientação científica do Professor Doutor José Luís Abrantes, Professor Coordenador do Departamento de Gestão do Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, e da Professora Doutora Elisabeth Kastenholz, Professora Associada do Departamento de Economia, Gestão e Engenharia Industrial da Universidade de Aveiro.

Dedico este trabalho à minha mãe e ao meu filho, e faço votos para que este dê continuidade ao importante legado por ela iniciado.

o júri

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"Porque, enfim, tudo passa;
Não sabe o Tempo ter firmeza em nada;
E a nossa vida escassa
Foge tão apressada.
Que quando se começa é acabada."
(Luís Vaz de Camões)

agradecimentos

Parece incrível mas já passaram 4 anos desde que iniciei este processo de descobrimento, por entre ventos e marés, nem sempre favoráveis, que me permitiram conhecer outros mundos e chegar a bom porto.

Agora que finalizo mais uma etapa e concretizo um importante objetivo pessoal, gostaria de agradecer a todos os que me acompanharam nesta viagem e me fizeram crescer como pessoa.

Começo por expressar a minha gratidão aos meus orientadores, a Professora Doutora Elisabeth Kastenholz e o Professor Doutor José Luís Abrantes, pela exigência, dedicação, incentivo e amizade. Muito obrigado pelas sugestões e orientações, sem as quais este trabalho não seria possível.

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Grato por todo o apoio prestado pelo Instituto Politécnico da Guarda, pela Unidade de Investigação e Desenvolvimento do Interior, e pela direção da Escola Superior de Turismo e Hotelaria.

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Para mim a investigação não acaba aqui. Muito pelo contrário, ainda agora começou…!

palavras-chave

eTurismo, eWOM, credibilidade das opiniões online, qualidade do website, ReWebility, teoria da expectativa-refutação.

resumo

As vendas de viagens online representam uma quota de mercado considerável e um crescimento continuado está previsto para os próximos anos. Com a evolução das tecnologias de informação e comunicação, as plataformas online surgem como importantes fontes de informação para um turista cada vez mais informado e exigente. Na verdade, o número de turistas que preferem e confiam em sites com comentários amadores está a aumentar. Com o surgimento deste processo de interação social, hoje em dia parte do poder do marketing encontra-se nos consumidores.

As mídias sociais e o novo formato digital de passa-a-palavra estão a receber uma atenção significativa dos investigadores, especialmente no contexto do setor turístico. No entanto, há necessidade de explorar melhor o assunto, tentando entender como as opiniões online influenciam a escolha de um determinado hotel, e encontrar a melhor forma de usar as mídias sociais para interagir com os clientes atuais e potenciais. Por outro lado a qualidade do website e a satisfação do cliente surgem como preocupações críticas para o negócio, especialmente no âmbito do comércio eletrónico, devido à baixa percentagem de visitantes do website que compram a partir do mesmo. Neste sentido, constatou-se haver uma carência de pesquisas sobre o grau de avaliação e satisfação dos turistas em relação a sites de reserva de alojamento.

A presente pesquisa tem como objetivo aumentar o conhecimento a respeito destes assuntos. O estudo desenvolve o modelo ReWebility para explorar a qualidade do site e a credibilidade das opiniões online, e a influência destes aspetos no processo decisório dos turista, nomeadamente a fidelidade destes para com o website. Nesta pesquisa usámos uma abordagem quantitativa, com o recurso a um questionário online. A amostra é constituída por 351 usuários da internet que já efetuaram reservas de alojamento através de plataformas online. Inicialmente procedeu-se a uma análise descritiva utilizando o software SPSS, seguida de uma análise fatorial confirmatória e do modelo de equações estruturais. Os resultados confirmam que os turistas leem comentários online antes de reservar um hotel, considerando-os como confiáveis, credíveis e precisos. O modelo proposto sugere uma cadeia entre a credibilidade das opiniões online, a reputação da empresa, e-satisfação e e-lealdade, que pode ser a base para futuras investigações no âmbito do comportamento do consumidor em contexto online. A perceção de valor relativamente ao hotel analisado e reservado é o determinante mais influente para uma experiência de reserva online satisfatória. Para induzir os turistas a reservar online o site deve garantir o melhor preço, mas não necessariamente o mais baixo. No final vamos apresentar as contribuições teóricas e as implicações práticas, bem como algumas sugestões e linhas de investigação futuras.

v

keywords   eTourism, eWOM, online reviews' credibility, website quality, ReWebility, expectation-disconfirmation theory.

abstract   The online travel sales represent a considerable market share and a continued growth is predicted in the coming years. With the evolution of information and communication technologies, the online platforms emerge as important information sources for an increasingly informed and demanding tourist. Actually, the number of tourists who prefer and trust in websites with amateur reviews is growing. Giving the emergence of this social interaction process nowadays part of the power of marketing lies in consumers.

Social media and the new digital form of word-of-mouth (eWOM) are receiving a significant attention by researchers, especially in the context of the tourism sector. However, there is a need to further explore the subject, trying to understand how the online reviews influence the choice of a given hotel, and find the best way to use social media to interact with actual and potential customers. On the other hand, website quality and customer satisfaction emerge as critical business concerns, especially in an e-commerce perspective, due to the low percentage of website visitors that purchase from it. Accordingly, there is a lack of research on the assessment and satisfaction degree of tourists regarding websites targeted for booking accommodation online.

This research aims to increase knowledge concerning these subjects. The study develops the ReWebility framework that explores the website's quality and the credibility of online reviews, and their influence on tourist's decision-making process, especially tourist's loyalty to those websites. In this research we follow a quantitative approach, resorting to an online questionnaire. The sample consists of 351 internet users who have already booked accommodation through online platforms. Initially we proceeded to a descriptive analysis using SPSS software, followed by a confirmatory factor analysis and a structural equation model (SEM). The results confirm that tourists read online reviews before choosing a hotel, and consider them as trusted, credible and accurate. The proposed model suggests a chain between online reviews credibility, company reputation, e-satisfaction and e-loyalty, which might be the basis for further investigations related to consumer behaviour in online settings. The perceived value of the hotel reviewed and booked is the most influential determinant for a satisfactory online booking experience. In order to induce tourists to book online the website should ensure the best price, but not necessary the lowest one. At the end we will discuss the theoretical contributions and the practical implications, some suggestions, and future research lines.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APAC   *Asia and Pacific*

CBA   *Computer-Based Assessment*

CDT   *Cognitive Dissonance Theory*

CRM   *Customer Relationship Management*

CS   *Consumer Satisfaction*

ECM   *Expectation-Confirmation Model*

eCRM   *Electronic Customer Relationship Management*

EDT   *Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory*

EWOM   *Electronic word-of-mouth*

ICT   *Information and Communication Technology*

IS   *Information System*

IT   *Information and Technology*

LATAM   *Latin America*

MIS   *Management and Information Systems*

OTA   *Online Travel Agency*

PDA   *Personal Digital Assistant*

SEM   *Structural Equation Modelling*

TAM   *Technology Acceptance Model*

TPB   *Theory of Planned Behaviour*

U.K.   *United Kingdom*

U.S.   *United States*

UGC   *User-Generated Content*

USD   *United States Dollars*

WOM   *Word-of-Mouth*

CHAPTER 1

1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief background to the thesis, and justify the importance and topicality of the research theme. Additionally, the chapter aims to explain the research objectives, and show an outline of the structure followed in the thesis.

1.1   Relevance and purpose of the research

Tourism is one of the industries that most benefits and takes advantage of the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The impact of the world wide web and other ICTs on tourism started to reveal itself in the mid-90s, contributing to a growing research effort in the field, and completely transformed our daily life (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Hjalager, 2013). Tourism-related services may be considered leaders using the internet, not only for information dissemination and communication purposes, but also for online purchasing (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Kamarulzaman, 2007).

Indeed, the e-commerce revolution has brought a fundamental change in the world of commercial transactions. It is widely referred to as a convenient way for shopping, an easy way to find items, products, services and special offerings. Compared to other distribution channels, internet shoppers can obtain detailed product information, while saving time and effort in their online purchases (Turban, Lee, King, Liang, & Turban, 2009). In the last 15 years retail in general has increased 2.5 percent each year, while e-commerce has grown on average 20 percent annually (Nielsen, 2014).

Tourism is one the largest generators of wealth and employment in the world. Its importance in economic and social terms is undeniable, with significant perspectives of growth for the next two decades (Rita, 2000). The prominence of e-commerce in tourism is evident, creating new business opportunities, driven and boosted by the development of information technologies (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Yoo, Sanders, & Moon, 2013). Nowadays the online channel represents an important opportunity for one of the fastest growing industries in the world (Amaro, 2014; Inversini & Masiero, 2014; Kamarulzaman, 2007; Pan, Zhang, & Law, 2013). According to projections, in 2016 online travel sales will represent almost half of the total travel sales (eMarketer, 2012).

The internet is moving the hospitality sector from a reactive position to a proactive one, in order to meet customers' information demands, which are changing frequently and quickly (Kim, Ma, & Kim, 2006). Tourists are increasingly informed and demanding, expecting a more unique and tailored consumer experience, starting already in the pre-trip phase. When planning their trips, tourists use non-media information sources, in order to find detailed information about lodging companies and services associated (Seabra, Abrantes, & Lages, 2007). The social web is "the right spot" to obtain and share information, experiences and preferences among consumers whether through online travel forums, blogs, twitter or Facebook. Online recommendations, comments and reviews are becoming important information sources for tourists, and the number of customers who prefer and trust in sites with amateur reviews is increasing (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Xie, Miao, Kuo, Lee, & Jimmy, 2011).

Giving the emergence of this new form of social interaction process, part of the power of marketing lies now in the consumer (Pires, Stanton & Rita, 2006). Actually, this electronic word of mouth (eWOM) process has an important role in tourism and interferes in the decision making process (e.g. Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009; Zhou, Ye, Pearce, & Wu, 2014), where "hotels are probably the most affected" (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014, p. 41).

The new digital form of WOM is a key topic for researchers (e.g. Abrantes, Seabra, Lages, & Jayawardhena (2013). Electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media are receiving increasing attention in the tourism sector (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). However, despite the significant body of literature, "little is known about the best way for marketers to use social media…and how eWOM influences consumer decision-making" (Goodrich & Mooij, 2014, p. 103). There is a lack of studies analysing the phenomenon in the context of the hospitality industry, its drivers, conditioning factors and impacts. As stated by Cantallops & Salvi (2014, p.49) "there are ample opportunities for future research to extend the level of knowledge regarding this new phenomenon. This refers both to factors that contribute to the generation of comments as well as to the impacts of reviews on consumer behaviour and purchasing decision".

The present research aims to contribute to the research topic, by improving knowledge concerning the impact of online reviews on tourist's decision-making process, using a website-based approach. Moreover, as far as we know, there is also a lack of research about the assessment of online booking websites, namely consumer's satisfaction concerning those websites, which highlights the topic's relevance, arousing the interest of researchers (Polites et al., 2012; Zhou, Ye, Pearce, & Wu, 2014). Accordingly, we expect to provide academic and practical contributions in the tourism field, especially in the context of the hotel business.

1.2   Main research objectives

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to "all informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers" (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008, p. 461). There are three emergent streams of research, regarding the antecedents and consequences of this interpersonal influence (Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). The first highlights the factors that led consumers to recommend or complain about a given product or service, i.e. refers to the post-experience. Another strand of research tries to explain the greater influence on consumers of personal information sources when compared to other sources. The third research stream focuses on the aspects that lead consumers to trust WOM communications more than on formal information sources, in order to arrive to purchase decision.

The present study does not intend to compare or explain the differences between online and offline information or sources, and their influence on tourists' behaviours, neither explore the reasons for online complaints. Instead, it aims to highlight online reviews as a reliable and important source of information for travellers, and its implications in tourists' decision making processes.

The online reviews are an increasingly important resource for tourists who seek information regarding a given hotel in which they are interested. However, digging in the web may also become a nightmare, due to the amount of information available online. Increasingly, internet users are confronted with blogs, online reviews or other user generated contents, and feel flooded in as much information, a process labelled as 'electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) overload' (Park, Lee, & Park, 2008). Nowadays there is the belief that high-quality information is difficult to find on the Internet, due to the amount of lower quality, unfiltered and sometimes contradictory information, provided by an unlimited number of unknown participants. This may raise suspicion about the credibility of online reviews (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009). Therefore, one of the main purposes of this research is to investigate to what extent the online reviews act as a reliable and important source of information for travellers.

As mentioned previously, the website context will be the background for the present research, enhancing and giving continuity to other studies on tourism and ICT. The academic field shows several research projects focusing on information technology (IT) applications on tourism (see Buhalis & Law, 2008; Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010; Yeh, Leong, Blecher, & Hu, 2005). Some authors present a variety of IT applications related to customer service, satisfaction, and retention, which may be beneficial for tourism providers (see Buhalis & Law, 2008; Law et al., 2010). Nonetheless, website quality and customer satisfaction emerge as critical business concerns, especially in an e-commerce perspective, due to the low percentage of website visitors that effectively purchase from the site, despite the apparent usage as information tools (Polites et al., 2012).

Accordingly, figure 1.1 shows the intervention area of the present research project, represented by the crossing of three main areas: (i) consumer behaviour; (ii) information and communication technologies; and (iii) the online travel market.

Figure 1.1 – Main areas of research
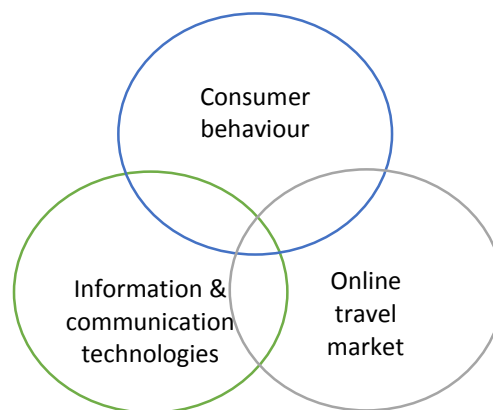
This research project aims to achieve specific objectives related to the research model, apart from pursuing other more generic, in order to understand the online travel market context as conditioned by eWOM. Thus, starting by the last ones, the following research aims to:

(i)   provide evidence for the importance of the online travel market, compared to the traditional or offline market;

(ii)   highlight the influence of social media in the online travel market, which can approximate tourism providers with their current and/or potential customers (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014);

(iii)   explore the new tourist's needs and demands, especially considering the progress in information and communication technologies (ICTs), which has changed the buying patterns, and requires a new positioning for tourism providers in the marketplace (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Cantallops & Salvi, 2014);

(iv)   highlight the online reviews as important sources of information for tourists, and explore their impacts in the decision making process (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009);

(v)   study if the online reviews are fake or manipulated, and if they reflect the reality of the hotels (Cheung et al., 2009; Dellarocas, 2006; Mayzlin, 2006).

The specific objectives of this research, i.e. the hypotheses, are the following ones:

H1: Online reviews credibility has a positive and significant influence on perceived value.

H2: Online reviews credibility has a positive and significant influence on company reputation.

H3: Website quality has a positive and significant influence on company reputation.

H4: Website quality has a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction.

H5: Website quality has a positive and significant influence on e-loyalty

H6: Website quality has a positive and significant influence on price benefits.

H7: Price benefits have a positive and significant influence on perceived value.

H8: Perceived value has a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction

H9: Company reputation has a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction.

H10: Price benefits have a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction.

H11: E-satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on e-loyalty.

1.3   Thesis Outline

The structure of a thesis may depend on the subject or topic of research. Nonetheless there are some key chapters (see Murray, 2011). Generally, the following chapters compose a dissertation thesis: (i) Introduction; (ii) Literature Review; (iii) Research Methodology; (iv) Data Analysis; and (v) Conclusions. Therefore, this research will follow these recommendations. In this sense:

(i)   chapter one is the starting point of this research, intending to frame and justify the relevance of the topic, as well as the research objectives. At the end of the first chapter, it is also possible to understand the structure of the thesis;

(ii)   chapter two presents the foundations for the development of the conceptual model. The literature review addresses the three core areas of this thesis: consumer behaviour, tourism and information and communication technologies;

(iii)   chapter three develops the conceptual model and the research hypotheses, based on the literature review presented previously. A definition of each construct is given, in order to clarify eventual doubts concerning some constructs;

(iv)   chapter four explains the research phases and the methodologies used, namely the structure of the questionnaire, how it was employed, and details concerning data procedures. The chapter also includes the reasons for choosing structural equation modelling, and some of its procedures;

(v)   chapter five reports the results of the web survey, i.e., the online questionnaire, starting with a descriptive analysis based on SPSS. After that LISREL is used for confirmatory factor analysis and for structural equation modelling.

(vi)   chapter six is the last one, and discusses the findings of the study. Moreover, it highlights the theoretical contributions and practical implications, the limitations identified by the researcher, and some ideas or suggestions for future research.

Beyond the references, the thesis has also Appendices with complementary information, namely the questionnaire.

CHAPTER II

2.1   Introduction

This chapter defines the foundations for the development of the conceptual model. The main purpose is to contextualize the area of research and explore the different studies, objectives, findings and implications regarding the word-of-mouth effect on the web. After presenting some statistics towards tourism and e-commerce, we will address the importance of social networks and the word-of-mouth impacts on tourism. Before analysing the tourist satisfaction and loyalty on the web, we will explore some antecedents and determinants, such as credibility, website quality, price benefits, corporate reputation and perceived value. At the end of the chapter are addressed two theories or models that will be the background of this thesis, specifically the expectation-disconfirmation theory, and the attitude-based loyalty model.

2.2 Tourism, E-commerce and Social networks

International tourist arrivals increased 5% in 2013, despite the global economic challenges. According to the World Tourism Organization (2014), the results were above expectations, reaching a record 1,087 million arrivals in 2013. Destinations such as Asia and Pacific (+6%), Africa (+6%) and Europe (+5%), showed a significant increase in tourism demand, when compared with the previous year (http://www.unwto.org). The number of international tourist arrivals worldwide could reach the 1,750 million in 2030, an impressive increase when compared with the values obtained in 1995 (Statista, 2014a). Europe will continue to be the continent that will receive the largest number of tourists, however Asia and Pacific are emerging destinations (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1- Projected international tourist arrivals worldwide by region (millions)
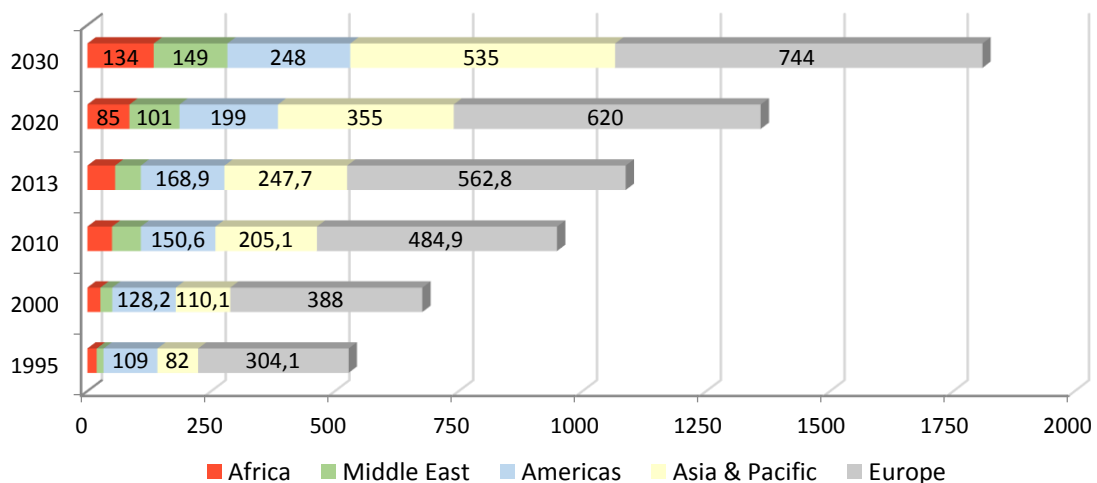
Source: (Statista, 2014a)

We cannot neglect the e-commerce revolution that has brought a fundamental change in the world of commercial transactions. Electronic commerce is widely referred to as a convenient way for shopping, an easy way to find items, products, services and special offerings. Compared to other distribution channels, internet shoppers can obtain detailed product information, while saving time and effort in their online purchases. Convenience, product diversity and economic cost, were some of the dimensions receiving researchers' interest in the field (Ward & Lee, 2000).

10

E-commerce is increasingly important for different industries and business. Nonetheless, one of the industries that most felt the effects of this e-commerce revolution was tourism. The evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) was decisive for the development of e-commerce, namely the internet penetration worldwide, and the social networks, as we shall see.

2.2.1 Information and communication technologies (ICTs)

The number of internet users has grown exponentially in the last decade (see Table 2.1). Europe, Oceania, Australia and North America, stand out in terms of percentage of internet penetration across populations (Internet World Stats, 2013). However, almost half of internet users are in Asia (45,1%).

Table 2.1- World internet usage and population statistics (December 31, 2013)

World Regions	Population (2014 Est.)	Internet users (Dec. 31, 2000)	Internet users (Latest data)	Penetration (% Population)	Growth 2000-2014	Users % of Table
Africa	1,125,721,038	4,514,400	240,146,482	21,3 %	5,219.6 %	8.6 %
Asia	3,996,408,007	114,304,000	1,265,143,702	31,7 %	1,006.8 %	45.1 %
Europe	825,802,657	105,096,093	566,261,317	68,6 %	438.8 %	20.2%
Mid East	231,062,860	3,284,800	103,829,614	44,9 %	3, 060.9 %	3.7 %
N. Amer	352,860,227	108,096,800	300,287,577	84,9 %	117.8 %	10.7 %
Lat/Car	612,279,181	18,068,919	302,006,016	49,3 %	1,571.4 %	10.8 %
Oce/Aus	36,724,649	7,620,480	24,804,226	67,5 %	225.5 %	0.9 %
TOTAL	7,181,858,619	360,985,492	2,802,478,934	39.0 %	676.3 %	100 %

Source: (Internet World Stats, 2013)

The Internet usage should grow approximately 676.3% between 2000 and 2014, and the number of internet users worldwide will be close to 3000 million. According to the forecast (see Figure 2.2), at the end of the current year, 40,4% of the world population will use the internet (ITU World Telecommunication, 2014).

Figure 2.2- Individuals using the Internet (2001-2014)

Note: * Estimate
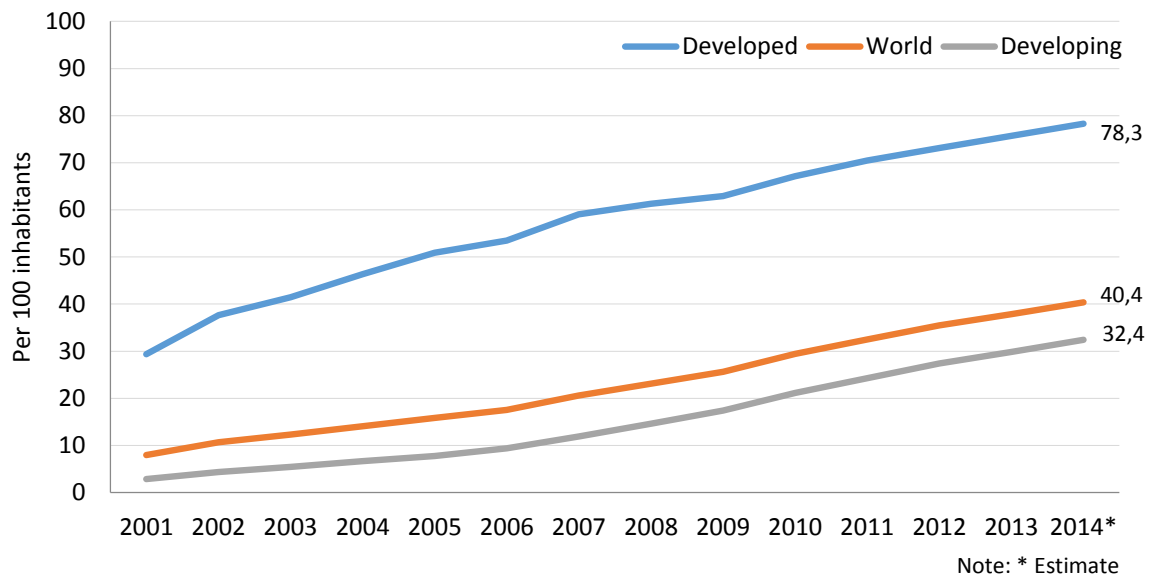
Source: (ITU World Telecommunication, 2014)

Nevertheless, there are still some obstacles for the online penetration in some markets and segments, namely resistance against online credit card adoption, lack of connectivity among suppliers, and poor technology and transportation infrastructure (PhoCusWright, 2011).

Different technologies are also emerging, as shown in Figure 2.3, and the traditional travel agent is no longer the main source of information for travellers. For instance, U.S. travellers use diverse resources to plan leisure travel (Statista, 2014b), like mapping websites (59,1%), mobile phone or PDA to access travel info (40,6%), or destination marketing organization website (31%). Therefore, as we shall see further, e-commerce growth depends largely on availability and access, and not of the appetite of travellers.

Figure 2.3- Internet technologies or services used to help plan leisure travel in U.S. 2013
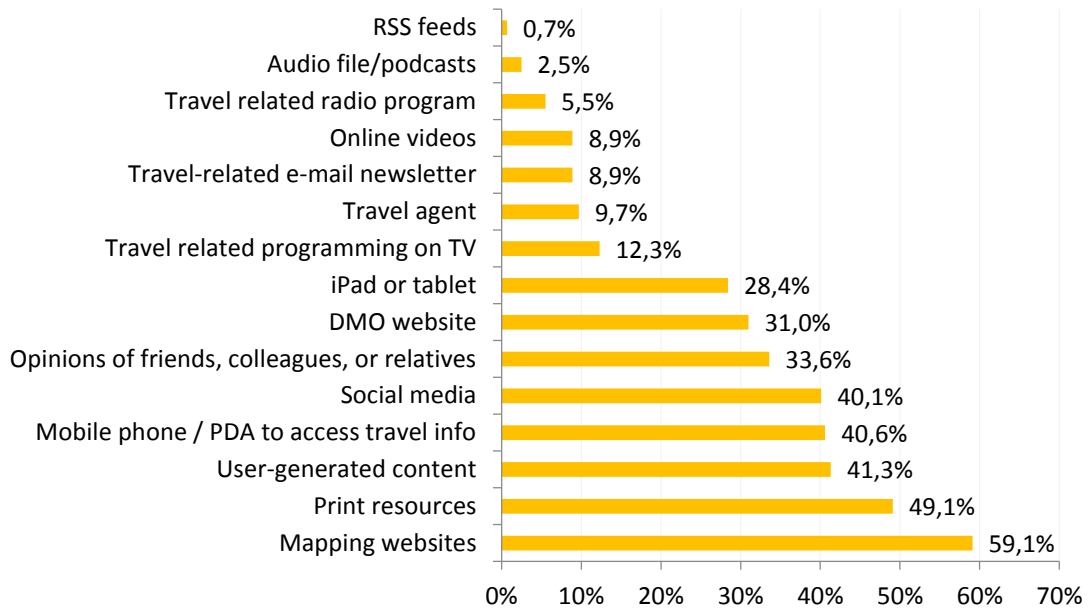
Source: (Statista, 2014b)

2.2.2 Online travel statistics and forecasts

Travel and tourism are good examples of how e-commerce changed the structure of an industry, creating new business opportunities (Buhalis & Law, 2008), driven and boosted by the development of information technologies (Ho & Lee, 2007; Yoo et al., 2013). Tourism-related services were, from early, pioneers for promotion and distribution through the internet (Werthner & Ricci, 2004). Indeed, "in the face of severe competition and continually rising customer expectations, e-commerce companies have necessarily become increasingly interested in identifying, understanding, nurturing, and keeping their profitable existing customers" (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003, p. 132). Consequently, an increasing number of tourists are taking advantage of the many benefits offered by electronic commerce (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Tourists are becoming increasingly comfortable and interested by making purchases on the internet. In 2013, global online travel sales represented 25% of total sales, reaching US$590 billion According to Euromonitor (2014), the leading provider of global strategic intelligence on consumer markets, the numbers include direct sales and sales through intermediaries, in transportation, travel accommodation, car rental

and tourist attractions. North America and Western Europe regions are leading the online travel sales. Asia Pacific leads the total travel sales, but it is in the third place in terms of online sales, which represents a huge potential in terms of online travel sales growth (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4- Travel sales and online travel sales by region in 2013
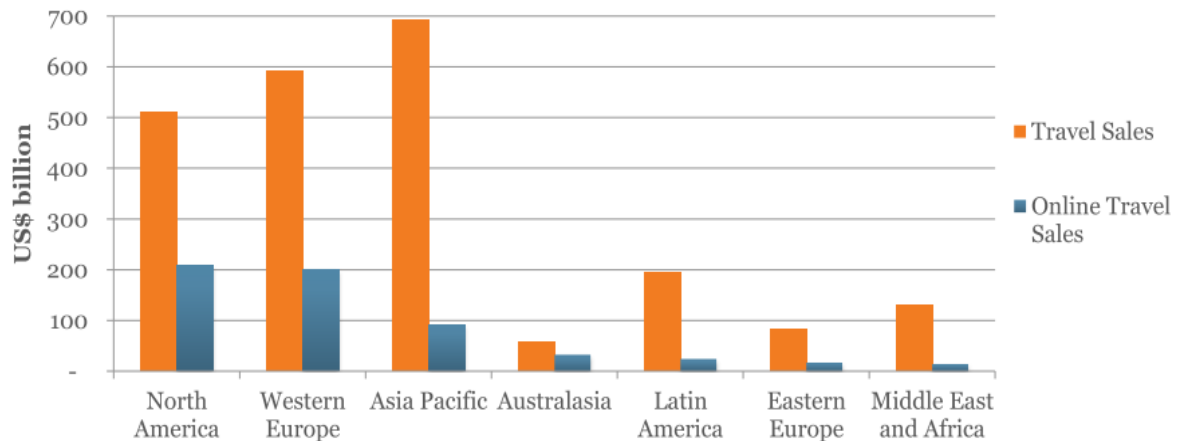
Source: (Euromonitor, 2014)

In 2016 the online travel sales will represent almost half of the total travel sales (eMarketer, 2012). United States and Europe are the regions that present the highest penetration of online travel sales. However, in 2016, in Asia-Pacific and Latin America it is expected that online travel sales may represent 36,8% and 39% of the total travel sales of each region, which is a strong growth when compared to the percentage observed in 2010 (see Table 2.2).

Despite being a smaller market in size, Latin America (LATAM) consumers are discovering the benefits of booking travel online. In this region, the number of offers available for online booking limits the growth potential. On the other hand, in Asia Pacific (APAC) the online travel growth is more than twice the rate of the total travel market. According to PhoCusWright (2011), a global travel market research company, in APAC and LATAM regions, travel companies may take benefit from macro-economic growth, increased travel and increased technology adoption. Therefore, no wonder that for many investors, these regions may represent the next "pot of gold".

Table 2.2- Online Travel Sales, by region (% of the total travel sales)

	2010	**2011**	**2012**	**2013***	**2014***	**2015***	**2016***
United States	54.7%	52.3%	51.5%	51.1%	51.6%	52.6%	53.9%
Europe	40,4%	42,6%	45,1%	46,5%	47,8%	48,8%	50,2%
Asia-Pacific	17,2%	20,1%	23,3%	26,6%	30,1%	33,6%	36,8%
Latin America	13,8%	17,5%	22,2%	26,8%	31,3%	35,1%	39%
TOTAL	35,9%	37,1%	38,9%	40,4%	42,3%	44,2%	46,2%

Source: (eMarketer, 2012)

Countries like Brazil, China, India and Mexico are presenting an impressive growth in terms of digital travel sales. However, digital travel sales are beginning to mature, on a global basis (eMarketer, 2014). In 2017, China (20,0%), Italy (11,5%) and India (11,1%) are the only markets with double-digit growth rates. Beyond those countries, Spain will be, probably, the only country growing faster than 7% in 2017 in terms of digital travel sales.

2.2.3 Online hotel sales - trends and threats

Air transport leads online travel sales, representing 46% of total air travel sales, while accommodation has a 23% penetration rate. Nonetheless, in Western Europe for instance, the hotel online sales could reach US$60 billion by 2017, and represent 40% of total hotel sales. This could be an impressive grow, considering that in 2013 it accounted for US$36 billion (Euromonitor, 2014)

Figure 2.5 shows the top European destinations for online hotel sales. According to it, between 2012 and 2013 all European countries have increased their online hotel sales, specially Italy (+26%) and Spain (+24%). Indeed, in 2013, Spain was the top European destination for online hotel sales, overtaking Germany. France, Italy and United Kingdom complete the top 5 ranking.

Figure 2.5- Top European destinations for online hotel sales (2012-2013)
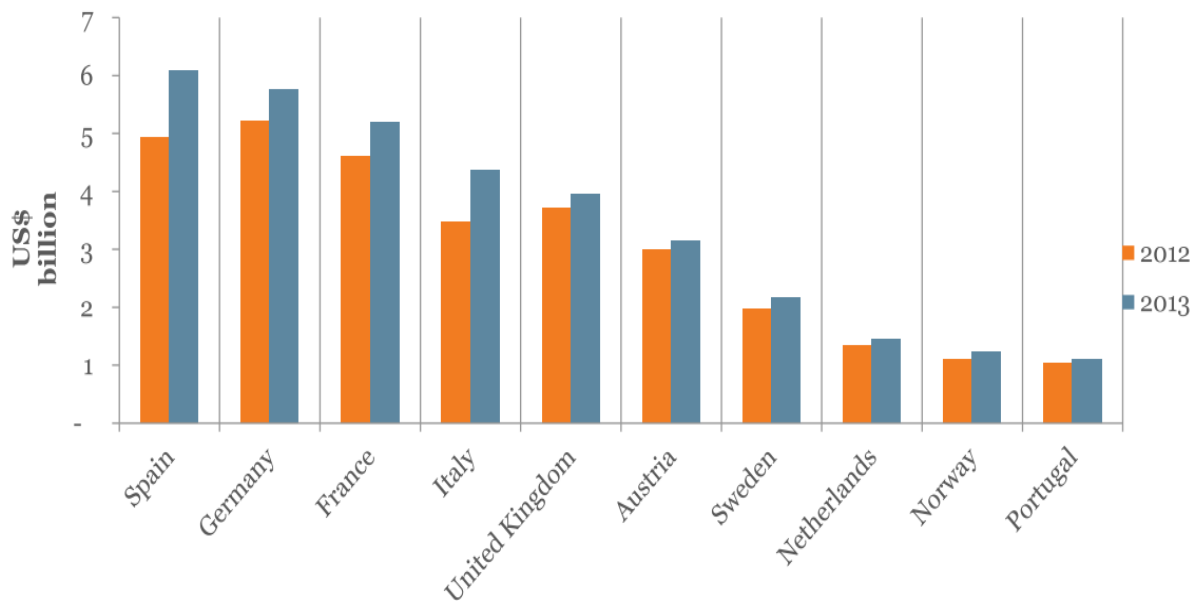
Source: (Euromonitor, 2014)

It is important to bear in mind the role of online travel agencies (OTA's) in this new competitive environment, especially the impact in the hotel companies, which will be analysed later on. Priceline and Expedia are the world's leading online travel agencies, but Chinese and Indian players are growing rapidly (see Figure 2.6). On the other hand, some leading tour operators are also investing heavily in the online channel. For instance, approximately one third of TUI Travel and Thomas Cook's sales in 2013 were from the online channel. Moreover, some new players will emerge in the market, namely specialized mobile travel agencies. Therefore, accommodation providers and hotel companies will continue to face a very competitive environment in the future.

Figure 2.6- Leading global online travel agencies (2011/2012)
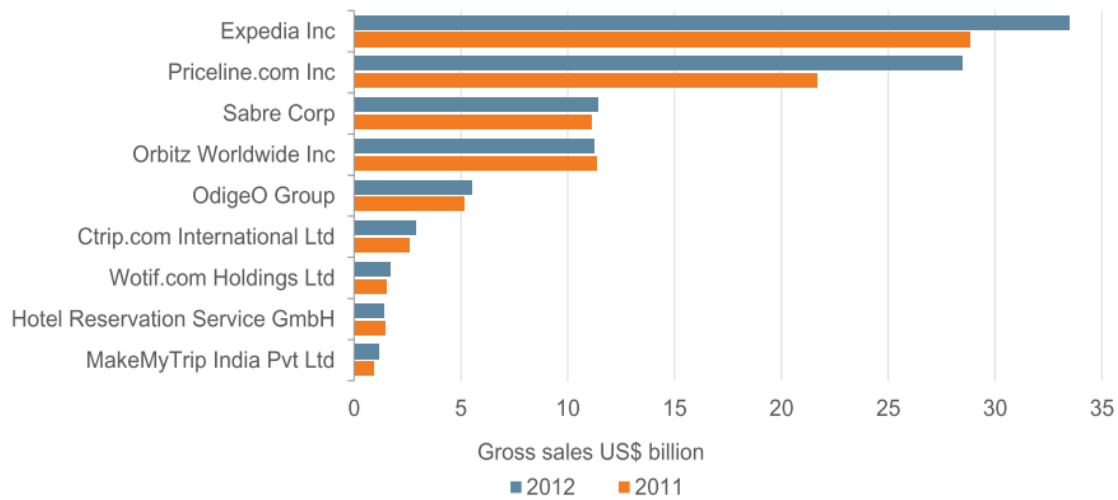
Source: (Euromonitor, 2014)

The new consumer needs and trends is another crucial aspect that deserves a careful and attentive monitoring by the different market players. For instance, U.S. travellers use different sources of information to select leisure destinations. They prefer the World Wide Web (54%), and personal recommendations from friends and family (31%), rather than printed advertising (7%) or information in printed travel guidebooks (12%). Moreover, tablets and mobile phones are emerging as preferential devices to access to travel information. Leisure travellers and business travellers are using their mobile phone increasingly for online travel-related activities, namely: (i) to view maps or get directions; (ii) to explore local activities such as restaurants or travel destinations to visit; (iii) to seek travel products such as hotel rooms or flights; among other motives. In a few years hotel guests may use their mobile devices not only to find and book hotels, but also for check-in or check-out procedures, or to request services such as mobile concierge (Bosselaar, 2012).

Tourists are expecting a more unique and tailored consumer experience. Therefore, tourism companies must be present and monitor the potential customer in all phases beyond the booking procedure, namely: (i) inform; (ii) choose; (iii) book; (iv) assist; (v) share; and (vi) inspire. Social media has an important role in this process, as we shall see.

2.2.4   Social media effect

The trends and predictions referred to previously represent a challenge for any hotel manager, as well as an opportunity to implement an online marketing strategy. However, this brief analysis would be incomplete without a reference to the impact of social media. Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010, p. 61) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Social media and web 2.0 are two popular buzzwords and "mega trends", with a significant impact on the tourism system, especially in travellers decision making (Leung et al., 2013). Therefore, social media effect depends on a social network, i.e., a social structure made up of individuals or organizations, and a set of ties and interactions between them (Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

Nowadays, with the emergence of this social interaction process, part of the power of marketing lies in the consumer. Accordingly, it is important to understand this viral marketing effect and its influence on tourism. Discussions about viral marketing and examples of companies trying to use it are becoming common. Actually, it implies turning customers into a company's/ brand's marketing force, which shows the importance of targeting the right people to any viral effect (Phelps et al., 2004). An example is the well-known viral marketing campaign for "The best job in the world". It was a global online recruitment initiative implemented in 2009, targeted to promote the Great Barrier Reef, a famous place for scuba divers. The winner would experience everything the island had to offer as a holiday destination, and then report the experiences to the world through blog and other social media channels. The agency received more than 34,000 online video applications from 195 countries and 8.5 million website visits over six months, demonstrating the power of viral marketing campaigns (Jones & Damian, 2010).

There are a myriad of social media technologies, applications and services, but Facebook is probably the best known. Table 2.3 presents the most used social media websites all around the world.

Table 2.3- Top 10 social media sites used worldwide, by region, in 2013

	Asian-Pacific	Europe	Latin America	Middle East & Africa	North America
Facebook	48%	43%	51%	52%	55%
Twitter	27%	18%	25%	28%	24%
Google+	26%	16%	24%	31%	17%
Youtube	24%	18%	24%	26%	26%
LinkedIn	13%	6%	11%	18%	11%
Instagram	8%	5%	11%	10%	12%
Orkut	7%	1%	7%	3%	1%
Pinterest	5%	3%	6%	8%	16%
Myspace	5%	2%	5%	4%	4%
Tumblr	4%	2%	6%	5%	6%

Source: (eMarketer, 2013)

As seen previously (see Figure 2.3), social media (40,1%) and user-generated content (41,3%) are at the top of the preferences of U.S. travellers when planning their leisure travel. Social media represent a relevant part of search results, when seeking travel-related content (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The influence on purchasing decisions is evident, either through the influence of friends or of unknown users who spread their opinion in online forums or in travel review websites.

There are different activities conducted through online social networks. French, German and U.K. travellers mentioned the following activities: (i) share updates/pictures/videos about travel experiences; (ii) get recommendations from friends about a destination or local activities; (iii) search for travel reviews written by other tourists; (iv) search for travel deals from companies; among others (Bosselaar, 2012).

The impact of social media channels on tourists' decisions is evident, whether through online travel forums, blogs, twitter or Facebook. Figure 2.7 shows the influence of each of the following features, according to the U.S. online traveller's opinion.

Figure 2.7- Influence of Social Media Channels on Purchasing Decisions in tourism

	Very influential	Somewhat influential	Not at all influential
Company information/promotions on na online social network, such as Facebook or Twitter	9%	31%	61%
Travel blogs or online travel forums	12%	34%	53%
Comments from people in my online social network, such as Facebook or Twitter	14%	34%	52%
Online reviews from travel professionals	16%	44%	40%
Traveler review websites, such as TripAdvisor	22%	42%	36%
Traveler reviews on online travel agency websites, such as Expedia	26%	45%	29%

■ Very influential   ■ Somewhat influential   ■ Not at all influential

Source: (Bosselaar, 2012).

Social media use for travel purposes may be fun and entertaining (Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). However, some authors argue that people do not want buzz or just more information, people want meaning (Kelly, 2007). Nevertheless many researchers and academics highlight the importance of social media in tourism and hospitality, as demonstrated by recent literature reviews (Leung et al., 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). The first publications related with social media and tourism appear in 2007, however from 2010, the number of articles has grown substantially. Initially the research focused on the impacts of social media on tourism business, which shows some industry concerns. Nowadays the focus has been on how it can be used to inform tourists and enrich their experiences, as well as on how to use social media to market tourist destinations and services (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

In conclusion, seems to be no doubts concerning the impact of social media in many facets of tourism, especially in tourists' decision-making process (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Purchasing is part of a social process that involves not only interaction between the customer and the company, but also many information exchanges and interpersonal communication between people who surround the customer, commonly known as word-of-mouth, being decisive in the process.

2.3   Word-of-mouth (WOM)

An important topic within consumer behaviour research is Word-of-mouth (WOM), a concept that is not recent (see Arndt, 1967; Engel, Blackwell & Kegerreis, 1969).   WOM is an oral communication process, person-to-person, which is already used for a long time ago (Arndt, 1967). It is a meaningful interpersonal influence, however in its original form it could vanish instantly (Stern, 1994) because it could not stay registered and available to other consumers. Nowadays the internet has changed this definition. A positive review or a complaint posted online does no longer disappear, and it may not be spontaneous. In fact, many brands and companies are taking advantage of this powerful communication tool, sometimes with a clear commercial focus, either to promote and sell different products or services, or to acquire new customers, among other purposes.

Therefore, we will address this topic, starting to explain the emergence of the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) concept and its implications on consumer behaviour, and the main differences between WOM and eWOM. After that, we will discuss its impacts on the tourism industry, namely the power of social networks in shaping tourists' decision-making choices.

2.3.1   Concept, origins and significance

One of the first attempts to address the influence of WOM on consumer behaviour appears in the late 1960s. According to this view, WOM is an oral person-to-person communication process, involving a receiver and a communicator, perceived as non-commercial, concerning products, services and brands (Arndt, 1967). Since then, many researchers have concluded that WOM can be even more influential in the consumer decision making process than any marketer-controlled source of information (Buttle, 1998; Day, 1971), playing a potentially central role in disseminating information.

WOM allows sharing information and opinions between consumers and potential buyers, about products, services and brands. It has the ability to influence consumer decisions (Day, 1971; Richins, 1983; Tybout, Calder, & Sternthal, 1981), due to the

perceived source reliability and the flexibility of interpersonal communication (Bolfing, 1989; Day, 1971; Engel et al., 1969; Richins, 1983; Tybout et al., 1981). Some studies have shown that negative WOM may have a more significant impact on the consumer's decision making process, than positive WOM (Bolfing, 1989; Tybout et al., 1981), despite being both perceived by the consumers (Buttle, 1998). Apparently, a negative experience ends up being more widespread than a positive one, however, there are different perspectives in terms of WOM valence, as we shall see further.

WOM is one of the most effective and least understood potential tools in enhancing marketing strategy (Misner, 1999). Despite the shift in marketing research during the 1990's from a primary focus on consumer behaviour to strategy, the interest in the topic remained. In the literature different issues are highlighted, such as WOM influence in customer acquisition (e.g. Brown & Barry, 2005; Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007) or its role in maintaining customers (e.g. Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). Others highlight the impact of consumers' perceptions on the consumers' decision making (e.g. Allsop, Bassett, & Hoskins, 2007; Gershoff, Mukherjee, & Mukhopadhyay, 2007), or even the importance of WOM for increasing firm value (e.g. Luo & Homburg, 2007; Luo, 2007; Villanueva, Yoo, & Hanssens, 2008), among others. According to Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels (2009), WOM is two times more effective than radio advertising, four times more effective than personal selling, and seven times more effective than print advertising. However, there are some doubts if one may consider it a marketing communication tool or not.

Moreover, the internet has leveraged this WOM effect. Consumers can now obtain unbiased product information from other consumers, using this means of communication that could be anonymous, directed to millions of individuals and available to other consumers for an indefinite period. The internet provides consumers the opportunity to share their own experiences and consumption-related advices, at an unprecedented scale (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Therefore, the nature of WOM has changed, having an even stronger impact on consumer behaviour and thus on business strategies, which justifies an increasing research interest.

2.3.2 Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (or mouse) (Breazeale, 2009; Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006) is now seen and addressed as a digital form of word-of-mouth or a ramification of it (Dellarocas, 2003). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to "all informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers" (Litvin et al., 2008, p. 461).

EWOM is sometimes labelled as user generated content or online reviews (Cox et al., 2009; Hills & Cairncross, 2011). In the literature we can find a set of related keywords, expressions and variations on the topic, such as eWOM, WOM, online reviews, user-generated content (UGC), consumer generated content (CGC), online recommendation or online opinions, among others (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014).

Consumers can contact with eWOM through websites, chat rooms, blogs or email (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Nonetheless, the eWOM concept refers not only to the online communication process between producers and consumers, but also to communication between consumers themselves. Indeed, nowadays the consumer voice has a much greater impact and reaches a growing audience (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014).

Several types of electronic media have an impact on interpersonal relationships, each one with different characteristics. Their typology is two-dimensional, as shown in Figure 2.8. In terms of communication scope, it can be one-to-one, (e.g. emails), one-to-many, (e.g. review sites), or many-to-many (e.g. virtual communities). Regarding the level of interactivity, the eWOM channels can be asynchronous (e.g. emails, blogs, review sites), or synchronous (e.g. newsgroups, chat rooms, instant messaging) (Litvin et al., 2008).

EWOM is a source of information that is arguably not part of the traditional marketing mix, since it is not controllable by the firm (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). In fact, even resorting to online opinion leaders, companies cannot easily control the interpersonal influence and the feedback created online between consumers. Therefore, when compared with traditional marketing sources of information, eWOM can be seen as more credible, relevant and emphatic (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

Figure 2.8- A typology of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) channels
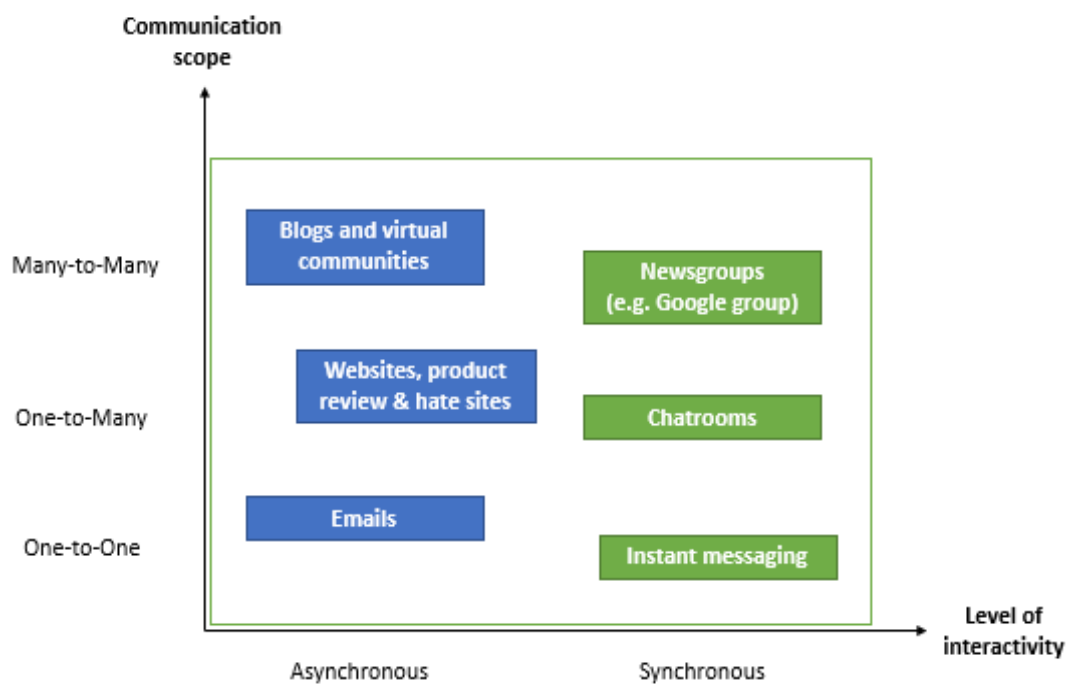
Source: (Litvin et al., 2008)

Some main differences between WOM and eWOM are the speed of interaction and the reach of the reviews' impact, i.e. the number of people exposed to eWOM (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). When comparing to traditional WOM, eWOM has a stronger influence due to its speed, convenience, one-to-many reach, and its absence of face-to face human pressure (Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004). Moreover, in traditional WOM generally information receivers and senders are familiar to each other (Brown & Reingen, 1987). In contrast, in the online context there are no strong ties or connections in this interpersonal informational exchange process.

This characteristic may enhance the tendency for posting and use of fraudulent eWOM (Gupta & Harris, 2010). Furthermore, bearing in mind that information search and dissemination costs are lower online (Bakos, 1991), sometimes consumers end up being "simultaneously exposed to an abundance of both eWOM and extensive objective product information" (Gupta & Harris, 2010), a process sometimes labelled as eWOM overload (Park & Lee, 2008).

Another important dimension in the online environment is the valence or communication direction (positive or negative). The most common examples of WOM activity are the extremes, i.e. extremely positive and extremely negative WOM (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). Some authors indicate that the impact of positive eWOM on people is greater than the impact of negative eWOM, i.e. a positive relationship between them (Charlett, Garland, & Marr, 1995), while others suggest a negative relationship (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). There are researchers arguing that there is "an inconsistent relationship between eWOM valence and consumers' purchase intention/behaviour" (Hao, Ye, Li, & Cheng, 2010, p. 1), while others suggest a non-significant relationship between these factors (Chen, Wu, & Yoon, 2004; Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008).

Despite these different perspectives, eWOM is an important topic of research, as evidenced by the growing number of publications in top level marketing journals in the past decade (Breazeale, 2009). Table 2.4 presents a summary of eWOM articles, in top-level marketing journals, between 2003 and 2013. There are studies highlighting the motives and antecedents of the reading behaviour of consumer reviews (e.g. Khammash, Griffiths, Ciao, & Bing, 2011), gender differences (e.g. Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004), cross-cultural perspectives (e.g. Fong & Burton, 2008), and potential consumer outcomes (e.g. Sen & Lerman, 2007). Researchers also show the impact of eWOM on consumer's consideration and choice of an experience product (e.g. Gupta & Harris, 2010), the eWOM effect on sales (e.g. Liu, 2006), on customer loyalty (e.g .Mithas, Ramasubbu, Krishnan, & Fornell, 2007), its role in building consumer trust (e.g. Awad & Ragowsky, 2008) or even a website's reputation contribute to the eWOM effect (e.g. Park, Min, & Lee, 2009).

Table 2.4- Summary of eWOM articles, in top-level marketing journals (2003-2013)

Author(s)	Purpose of the article
Dellarocas, 2003	Surveys the most important issues in eWOM research and the roles of game theory and economics in understanding the phenomenon.
Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003	Describes several motives that explain why customers utilise eWOM in making purchase decisions.
Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004	Examines the differences between men and women in their perceptions of risk when shopping online and the effect of receiving a recommendation from a friend.
Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004	Understand what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet, using an online sample of some 2,000 consumers.
Phelps et al., 2004	Reports the results of three studies that examine consumer responses and motivation to pass along eWOM e-mails.
Holloway, Wang, & Parish, 2005	Extends the model of service failure and service recovery to the online environment, and investigates the moderating role of cumulative online purchasing experience, using a structural equation modelling approach.
Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006	Examines the effect of online book reviews on relative sales at Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com.
Dellarocas, 2006	Theoretical analysis of the impact of online opinion forums on firm profits and consumer surplus.
Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006	Investigates the effects of customer-to-customer know-how exchange, a specific form of eWOM communication, on customer perceptions of value and customer loyalty intentions.
Liu, 2006	Explores the role of eWOM in explaining box office revenue.
Mayzlin, 2006	Investigates whether eWOM remains credible if consumers know that firms are generating some of it themselves and whether firms choose to devote more resources promoting their inferior or superior products.
Ward & Ostrom, 2006	Analyses consumer intent in the context of Protest Framing Theory to establish motives for online consumer complaints.
Chiu, Hsieh, Kao, & Lee, 2007	Employs a persuasive communication model along with theories of consumer value, personality, WOM, and source credibility in the context of a viral campaign.
Dwyer & Ledru-rollin, 2007	Introduces a new metric to measure the value a community places on eWOM and on its disseminators.
Hung & Li, 2007	Examines eWOM in a consumption-interest virtual community in China, conducting face-to-face interviews.

Table 2.4- Summary of eWOM articles, in top-level marketing journals (2003-2013)
(continued)

Author(s)	Purpose of the article
Mithas et al., 2007	Develops a theoretical model for understanding the effect of site design elements on customer loyalty to a website.
Park, Lee, & Han, 2007	Employs the Elaboration Likelihood Model to explain how level of product involvement impacts the quality and quantity of online reviews.
Riegner, 2007	Discusses the ways that consumer adoption of Web 2.0 can be used to examine the impact that eWOM has on purchase decisions.
Sen & Lerman, 2007	Analyses the negative effect of eWOM on consumer reviews for utilitarian and hedonic products, using an observation study and two laboratory experiments.
Awad & Ragowsky, 2008	Assesses whether the effect of online trust on intention to shop online is moderated by gender.
Bruyn & Lilien, 2008	Develops a model of the role eWOM plays during each stage of a viral marketing recipient's decision process and presents a new methodology for collecting data unobtrusively and in real time.
Duan et al., 2008	An empirical investigation of the movie industry, highlighting the dynamics of online word-of-mouth on product sales.
Fong & Burton, 2008	Examines the differences between US and Chinese posters of online opinion forums.
Hu, Liu, & Zhang, 2008	Tests the effect of online reviews on sales, considering both quantitative and qualitative aspects of online reviews, namely reviewer quality, reviewer exposure, product coverage, and temporal effects.
Park & Lee, 2008	Explores the consequences of consumers' experiences and online reviews on purchasing intention, depending on consumer involvement.
Breazeale, 2009	Analyses the research articles related to ewom published in top level marketing journals until 2009, applying the paradigm funnel technique.
Cheung et al., 2009	Examines the informational and normative determinants of the perceived credibility of online consumer recommendations, resorting to a survey of users of an online consumer discussion forum in China.
Lee & Youn, 2009	Investigates how different online platforms influence consumers' judgements of reviewed products. Additionally, it examines the moderating role of the valence.
Park, Min, & Lee, 2009	Examines how the eWOM information direction (positive vs. negative) and a website's reputation (established vs. unestablished) contribute to the eWOM effect.

Table 2.4- Summary of eWOM articles, in top-level marketing journals (2003-2013)
(continued)

Author(s)	Purpose of the article
Gupta & Harris, 2010	Examines the effects of e-WOM on consumer consideration and choice of an experience product, using a laboratory experiment.
Richard, Chebat, Yang, & Putrevu, 2010	Examines the influence of Internet experience and web atmospherics on consumer online behaviour, in the context of a pharmaceutical website.
Chu & Kim, 2011	Propose and test a conceptual model that identifies normative and informational interpersonal influence as an important antecedent to eWOM behaviour in social networking sites.
Khammash et al., 2011	Explores the motives and antecedents of the reading behaviour of consumer reviews, in online opinion platforms, using a case study approach.
Hsieh, Hsieh, & Tang, 2012	Explores the persuasiveness of online video. It examines how message factors might influence recipients' intentions to forward an online video.
Abrantes, Seabra, Lages, & Jayawardhena, 2013	Propose and empirically test a conceptual framework of key drivers of two types of eWOM, namely in-group and out-of-group, based on the social network paradigm and the uses and gratification theory.

Source: Own elaboration

Some authors highlight the effects of a firm's decision to manipulate eWOM surreptitiously (Mayzlin, 2006). This tendency to manipulate messages in online forums anonymously is an important issue, since it directly affects a key feature of eWOMs relevance – its credibility. For instance, consumers may advise against a particular company, if they note that the firm has a tendency to manipulate eWOM, posting message praising its products and services (Dellarocas, 2006). Moreover, consumers may feel disrespected by firms' lacking response to their complaints. Consequently, consumers engage in a revenge behaviour, attempting to mobilize mass audiences against the firm (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). However, consumers' perceived credibility and/or firms' reputation will be the focus of analysis in a subsequent chapter.

Considering the methods used for studying eWOM there are new methodologies to collect and analyse data, focused on user-generated content and web 2.0 communities (e.g. Verhaeghe, De Ruyck, & Schillewaert, 2008), methods to collect data in real time (e.g. De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008) or new metrics for assessing the eWOM activity (e.g. Dwyer, 2007). There are also conceptual frameworks, proposing two types of eWOM, namely eWOM in-group and out-of-group (Abrantes et al., 2013).

Several theories about persuasion, consumer value and personality are employed to describe a persuasive communication in the context of a viral campaign (Chiu et al., 2007). Likewise, some researchers tested whether a previous online purchase experiences may influence service failure and recovery experiences (Holloway et al., 2005), or the effect of product involvement on both the quality and quantity of online reviews (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007). There are also authors who confront and challenge some assumptions made about the topic of eWOM. For instance, Dellarocas (2003, p. 1407) claims that eWOM mechanisms have been considered "a technology for building trust and fostering cooperation in online marketplaces". He suggests that eWOM has a greater impact on the organizations' marketing activities, namely on brand building, customer acquisition and retention, product development and quality assurance.

In the literature we can find researches in the context of the travel and tourism industry (Litvin et al., 2008), a theme that will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. Therefore, apart from a strong interest in the topic, researchers show a consensual conviction, supported by a substantial body of empirical results, regarding the ability of eWOM to influence the marketing efforts of firms (Breazeale, 2009).

2.3.3   Reviews generating factors

 "Online product reviews provided by consumers who previously purchased products, have become a major information source for consumers and marketers regarding product quality" (Hu, Liu, & Zhang, 2008, p. 201). These recommendations available online are important sources of information because they involve consumer's experiences, evaluations and opinions. Furthermore, they are helpful for decision-

29

making by providing consumers with indirect experiences, playing an information and recommendation role (Park et al., 2007).

Certain online user-generated reviews, depending on the type of the product, could reduce cognitive loads of readers and result in more sales (Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2007), for instance in products such as books, CDs, and movies (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2007; Zhu & Zhang, 2006), among others. The influence of user reviews is particularly important for experience goods, because their quality is only perceived after consumption, which matches with the nature of the hospitality and tourism industry (Ye et al., 2009). However, some authors argue that there is scarce research examining the factors that influence online browsing and consumer response toward online information (Richard et al., 2010).

In the literature two general lines of research emerge. One related to reviews-generating factors, and a second line of research which evaluates the impacts of eWOM (Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Internet users may have different motivations in using or generating eWOM. It can be a question of saving time in the decision making process, risk reduction, convenience and quality seeking, or a way to arrive at a better buying decision (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Kim, Mattila, & Baloglu, 2011). When customers participate in eWOM they derive not only social and economic value (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001). They may also expect some other benefits, like hedonic ones, especially in the tourism environment (Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, & Díaz-Armas, 2011; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004).

In the tourism context, when considering the factors that lead to eWOM, researches highlight aspects mirrored in this kind of communication, such as "service quality and satisfaction", "failure and recovery", "customer dissatisfaction" and "sense of community belonging" (Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2009; Nusair, Parsa, & Cobanoglu, 2011; Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011; Swanson & Hsu, 2009). There is a direct relationship between satisfaction/dissatisfaction and positive/negative reviews, which means an expected and predictable consumer behaviour (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014).

In the literature some different thematic emerge as additional reasons for generating eWOM, such as "commitment", "social identity", "pre-purchase expectations" and "customer delight"(Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2010; Crotts, Mason, & Davis, 2009). Some researchers focus on demographic characteristics as differentiating aspects, namely gender and age (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Nusair et al., 2011). Others conclude that negative reviews can be generated more easily than positive (Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011; Swanson & Hsu, 2009), which matches previous marketing theory, probably to warn others, rather than for revenging purposes (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014).

The motivations for writing reviews online can fit into five different categories: (1) self-directed, (2) helping other vacationers, (3) social benefits, (4) consumer empowerment, and (5) helping companies. According to the findings, the most salient aspect is to help other vacationers (70% of the posters) (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011). Furthermore, considering the profile of these posters, we can say that they are: (1) younger than 55 years; (2) from the high and lower- middle income groups; (3) couples, with or without children (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011). Some authors refer that helpful reviewers do not belong to any specific age or gender groups. There is a trend however for individuals who travel more, actively posting reviews, and giving lower hotel ratings (Lee, Law, & Murphy, 2011).

Internet users may have three different profiles: consumers, participants and producers. Consumers are internet users who read those contents but never participate. Participants refer to user-to-user interaction, and user-to-content interaction. Finally, producers are those individuals who create and publish online different personal contents on the web, whether text, audio or video content (Shao, 2009). According to Nielsen's (2006) propositions, users participation follows the "90-9-1" rule. This means that in online communities, 90% of users are lurkers (i.e., people who read reviews but rarely or never participate actively), 9% of users contribute from time to time, and only 1% are active members, producing new contents.

As a matter of fact, the majority of people who use social media for travel purposes are typically consumers, rather than producers of online contents (Amaro, 2014; Cox et al., 2009; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). The motivation to participate in online travel communities depends on the community characteristics, namely usefulness and ease of use (Casaló et al., 2010). This may suggest that "eWOM is not fully representative as a measure of customers' feelings and value given to a certain tourism service or product" (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Nonetheless, "before travelling, more than 63% of social media users often or always read hotel reviews, which demonstrates the importance of the feedback created online to the Hotel industry" (Amaro, 2014)

2.3.4 Impacts on tourism

After reviewing the eWOM concept and some reviews generating factors, it is important explore this interpersonal influence on tourism. Interpersonal communication between tourists and their peers is considered as influential for shaping tourism demand for some time now, visible in some known conceptual approaches. For instance, in Cohen's (1972) typology of tourist roles (organized mass tourist, individual mass tourist, the drifter, and the explorer), also evident on Plog's (1974) tourist typology, opposing the psychographic dimensions (allocentric and psychocentric), or even in the context of the model of tourism area life cycles, proposed by Butler (1980).

Nowadays researchers pretend to understand the key factors that influence eWOM and their impacts in tourism. Furthermore, despite affecting the entire tourism industry, hotels are probably amongst the most affected sectors (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014), as we shall see. Therefore, it is now time to highlight the role of eWOM, both from the hotel perspective and from the tourist perspective. Considering the impact on the hotel industry, researches highlight different aspects, such as quality control in the online environment, the company-generated online content, the company's interaction with their clients either to solve problems or for marketing actions, and also the possibility of generating a price premium (Dickinger, 2010; Hills & Cairncross, 2011; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011), among other issues.

There is a consensus regarding the significant relationship between online reviews and the business performance of hotels (e.g. Sparks & Browning, 2011; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009). For instance, positive online reviews can increase the number of bookings in a hotel, as found by Ye et al. (2009, p181). "The results further suggested that a 10% improvement in reviewers' rating can increase sales by 4.4% and a 10% increase in review variance can decrease sales by 2.8%", further suggesting a stronger impact of positive than of negative eWOM.

Small accommodation providers do not have the same view regarding the importance and impact of online reviews on their business. Indeed, there are accommodation providers who use innovative and proactive practices, while others have limited awareness of the internet (Hills & Cairncross, 2011). At this level, corporate reputation has an important role in terms of customer's perception of service performance capability (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011), as we shall see further.

Additionally, we have to bear in mind the specificities of the business, namely the intangible characteristic of the tourism and hospitality industry (Lewis & Chamber, 2000). Beyond the emotional influence that may affect the decision to buy a trip to an unknown destination, there is also a high risk involved in booking a hotel room through the internet (Lewis & Chamber, 2000). Moreover, hospitality and tourism products are both seasonal and perishable (Rao & Singhapakdi, 1997), and they operate in very competitive markets.

Naturally, those aspects and characteristics increase tourist's uncertainty. To avoid it, individuals need to use various sources of information (e.g., direct accommodation websites, destination official websites, and customer review websites) and evaluate the different characteristics and attributes (Jun, Vogt, & MacKay, 2010). At this level, we cannot neglect the crucial role of new technologies, creating conditions for an increased market transparency (Jun et al., 2010; Toh, DeKay, & Raven, 2011; Verma, 2010).

Truly, the ICT generate risks and opportunities for tourism providers (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Tourism companies recognize that tourists have a powerful influence upon each other's, and are changing their marketing strategies using much cheaper ways to catch attention, such as blogs or through social media (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Thus, in a company's point of view, the main impacts of eWOM are not threats but opportunities for their business.

Tourism marketers and hotel managers are very keen in devise strategies to monitor these online communities (Litvin et al., 2008). If companies analyse and manage the eWOM impacts adequately, some competitive advantages can be achieved (Dickinger, 2010; Hills & Cairncross, 2011; Ye et al., 2009). For instance, the information provided by eWOM allows the interaction with the customers, helps to identify their profiles and needs, facilitates the solution of potential problem, allows improvements in products or services, or the adoption of new policies (Jun et al., 2010; Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011; Cantallops & Salvi, 2014), among other aspects.

The online information search strategies may include transactional, informational and branding attributes (Jun et al., 2010), and several variables influencing consumer choice. Consequently, it is now important to address the tourist perspective. Tourists might choose a hotel based for instance on its location, price, brand name, facilities, service quality, loyalty program, and quality ratings by past guests (Verma, 2010). However, there are different impacts of eWOM (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014) that could be summarized in the Figure 2.9.

Nowadays tourists can easily compare competitive offerings, by reading comments and recommendations about the hotel on social media sites, as well as ratings provided by professional organizations (Verma, 2010). Online reviews are prevalent in today's lodging market, playing an important role in disseminating information, and have the potential to influence consumer's decision making (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Xie et al., 2011). This interpersonal influence is especially important in the hospitality and tourism industry, given that it manages intangible products, which are difficult to evaluate prior to their consumption (Litvin et al., 2008).

Figure 2.9- EWOM impacts from the consumer perspective
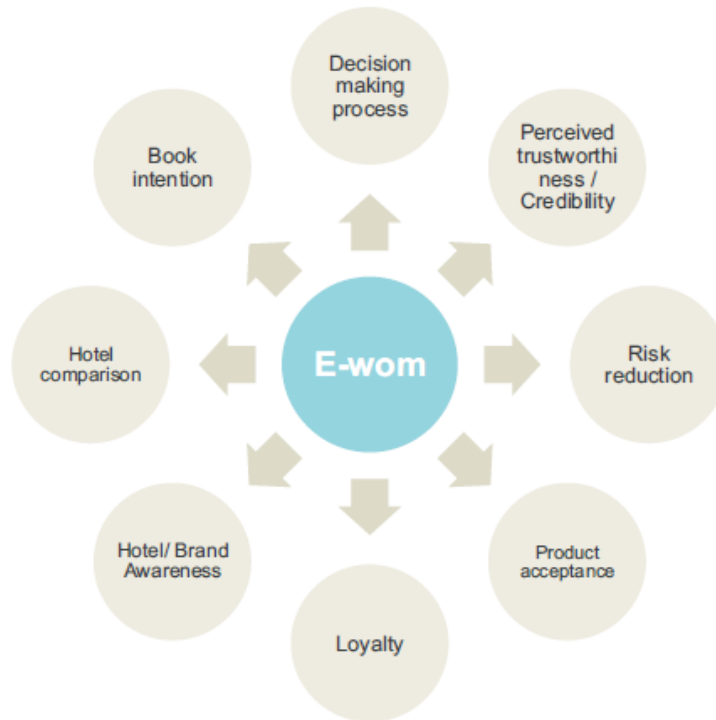
Source: Cantallops & Salvi (2014)

The exposure to online hotel reviews increases consumer awareness of hotels, increasing the probability to consider booking a room in the reviewed hotel. Moreover, positive reviews improve attitudes toward hotels, and this effect is stronger for lesser-known hotels (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). According to the findings, recent positive reviews can reduce, replace, or moderate the effect of negative reviews. Additionally, positively framed information combined with numerical ratings, increases booking intentions and consumer trust (Sparks & Browning, 2011).

Nevertheless sometimes the valence of the reviewing is not clear because there are ambivalent online hotel reviews (Xie et al., 2011). Moreover, the ease of access and processing of the online reviews is another important aspect (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), given the quantity of information available online. Therefore, consumers need to filter, select and analyse this information (Sparks & Browning, 2011).

In terms of the profile, comparing to those who use traditional distribution channels, people who purchase hotel rooms online tend to be younger, have higher incomes, and tend to purchase more room-nights (Toh et al., 2011). When considering gender differences, research indicates that men's use of the reviews depends on their level of expertise. On the other hand, women prefer to read online reviews for the purpose of convenience and quality and for risk reduction (Kim et al., 2011).

Considering the literature regarding the impacts of eWOM on tourism, several variables are included in the analysis, such as reputation, credibility, or perceived trustworthiness, among others (see Table 2.5). Moreover, considering both the tourist and company perspectives, there are some specific and recurrent issues, namely the eWOM impact in the decision making process, or the impact on purchase intention (Lee et al., 2011; Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Xie et al., 2011; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011).

Table 2.5- Impacts of eWOM on tourism

Author(s)	Description	Main results
Litvin et al., 2008	Describes eWOM as a potentially cost-effective means for marketing in hospitality and tourism.	A conceptual model of eWOM, discussing its management strategies, and some ethical concerns.
Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009	Applies consideration set theory to model the impact of online hotel reviews on consumer choice.	The exposure to an online hotel review improves the average probability for consumers to consider booking a room in the reviewed hotel.
Ye et al., 2009	Explores the impact of online consumer reviews on hotel room sales, using data collected from the largest travel website in China.	Positive online reviews can increase the number of bookings in a hotel. A 10% improvement in reviewers' rating can increase sales by 4.4% and a 10% increase in review variance can decrease sales by 2.8%.
Dickinger, 2010	Compares three different online channels (personal, marketing, and editorial), to understand which ones are trustworthy for travel-related information purposes.	Different dimensions of trustworthiness are effective drivers of overall trust, depending on the type of online channel.

Table 2.5- Impacts of eWOM on tourism (continued)

Author(s)	Description	Main results
Jun et al., 2010	Analyses information search strategies that individuals utilized in online travel product purchases. Two products were selected: flights and accommodations.	The online accommodation purchasers utilize various types of sources; they focus on transactional, informational and branding attributes.
Verma, 2010	Summarizes the use of customer choice modelling in the hospitality context. A technique that can be useful for assessing the services and amenities that are market drivers for customers.	The impact of social media and professional ratings on consumer's choices regarding hotels and restaurants.
Xiang & Gretzel, 2010	Investigates if social media appear in search engine results, in terms of travel-related searches.	The study confirms that social media represent a substantial part of the search results in the online tourism context.
Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010	Explores two types of online reviews (consumer-generated reviews and reviews written by professional editors) and the different influences on the behaviour of online users.	Consumer-generated reviews have an impact in online popularity of restaurants. Professional reviews have a negative impact on consumers' intention to visit a restaurant's web page.
Hills & Cairncross, 2011	Explores the perceptions and practices of small accommodation providers in terms of user-generated content (UGC) web sites, using semi-structured interviews.	Some accommodation providers are using innovative practices to respond to UGC web sites, while others have limited awareness of the internet.
Kim et al., 2011	Analyses motivating factors for consumers to seek eWOM.	Differences between male and female internet users regarding their motivating factors. Levels of expertise influence consumers' motivations to read online reviews.
Lee et al., 2011	Examines an online reputation system in TripAdvisor.com and profiled the reviewers who post helpful reviews.	Helpful reviewers are those who travel more, actively post reviews, belong to any age and gender group, and give lower hotel ratings.
Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011	Explores the influence of online reviews in the tourism context.	Online reviews play a complementary role to holiday selection, and they are subjected to a set of heuristics before being adopted by tourists.
Sparks & Browning, 2011	The role of four key factors that influence perceptions of trust and consumer choice: the target of the review; overall valence; framing; and whether a consumer generated numerical rating is provided together with written text.	Positively framed information together with numerical rating and details provided increases both booking intentions and consumer trust. Consumers tend to rely on easy-to-process information, when evaluating a hotel based upon reviews.

Table 2.5- Impacts of eWOM on tourism (continued)

Author(s)	Description	Main results
Toh et al., 2011	Focuses on researching and booking hotels on the internet, and considers many variables, which influence behaviours and attitudes, such as: service quality, low room rate, convenience of location and previous experiences with the hotel.	Eight of ten respondents use the web for a hotel room search. Women conduct much more research regarding potential hotels and rates than do men. The internet dominates search and booking strategies.
Xie et al., 2011)	Investigates how the presence of online reviewers' Personal Identifying Information (PII) may affect consumers' processing of ambivalent online reviews and hotel booking intentions.	The presence of PII positively affects the perceived credibility of the online reviews. When coupled with ambivalent online reviews, the presence of PII significantly lowers consumers' hotel booking intentions.
Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011	Presents a case study in which the Internet plays an important role in improving efficiency in the hotel market.	The online travel agents (OTAs) such as booking.com play an important role in building hotel reputation and encourage hoteliers to put effort into service quality.
Cantallops & Salvi, 2014	Summarizes and analyses published articles regarding the influence of eWOM on the hotel industry.	Identifies two main lines of research: (i) review-generating factors, i.e., factors that motivate consumers to write reviews; and (ii) impacts caused by online reviews.
Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014	Summarizes and analyses research publications focused on social media in tourism.	Suggests that research on social media in tourism is a young phenomenon, and recommends some research lines for future researchers interested in the topic.

Source: Own elaboration

Beyond the online reviews posted online, sometimes by experienced travellers, we cannot neglect the importance of residents in providing information to tourists. According to a research, experienced travellers are more influential in the destination information category, while residents have more influence regarding accommodations and food and beverage recommendations (Arsal, Woosnam, Baldwin, & Backman, 2010). However, the suggestions provided by local residents can only influence tourists who have not booked a room previously. Thus, it becomes important to understand how people evaluate the credibility of online recommendations, which is the next topic.

2.4   Credibility

For decades, researchers in many fields and professionals of different areas, have tried to understand the effect of both information and source credibility in changing peoples' beliefs, attitudes or behaviours. One of the earliest references to the main effects of source credibility on communication effectiveness was proposed by Hovland & Weiss (1951). According to the authors, a highly credible source exerts a stronger persuasion effect than a low-credible one. In the 1960s and 70s different authors have agreed on the same perspective. However, the information source is only one of the five components of the persuasive communication process, complemented by message, channel, receiver and destination (McGuire, 1978).

The next chapter will discuss the main concepts, dimensions and features associated to source, message and channel credibility, specifying further for the online context. Bearing in mind the impact of electronic media in today's communication processes, the chapter stresses the importance of information accuracy in the internet. Finally, we will discuss the significance of online reviews in consumers' decision-making processes, especially in the tourism context.

2.4.1   Source credibility

In the literature different dimensions of source credibility have been proposed and tested, such as competence, trustworthiness, dynamism (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969), objectivity (Whitehead, 1968), authoritativeness and character (McCroskey, 1966), among others. The scales that represent source credibility have changed over time, as well as the number of and type of significant factors assessed and their influence (Applbaum & Anatol, 1973).

Studies in this domain are target of some criticism, for selecting scales randomly, and for using similar concepts for factors containing different scales (Cronkhite & Liska, 1976). Despite the methodological dispute, sources perceived as more credible have been shown to tend to be more influential on the development of product and company

attitudes (Fireworker & Friedman, 1977; Friedman & Friedman, 1979) than those with low credibility.

Source credibility has three sub-dimensions: trustworthiness, expertness, and attractiveness. Trustworthiness is the degree of confidence and acceptance regarding the message sender. Expertness refers to professional knowledge the sender has about the product. Finally, attractiveness refers to the capacity to attract receivers to consume products or services (Ohanian, 1990). The last dimension was initially proposed by McGuire (1985), while expertise and trustworthiness were initially proposed by Hovland, Janis, & Kelley (1953). Considering consumers' purchase intentions, these three dimensions (trustworthiness, expertness, and attractiveness) are equally important and similar across cultures (Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 1998)

Source credibility can be also detailed and divided considering four different characteristics (Tseng & Fogg, 1999). Sometimes people create stereotypes about a person, object or source (presumed credibility), like perceiving a "doctor" or a "professor" as someone credible (reputed credibility). On the other hand, people may also use superficial characteristics, like judging a book only by its cover (surface credibility). However, the most complex and reliable method of making credibility judgements is the user first-hand experience with a source over time (experienced credibility) (Tseng & Fogg, 1999). Despite these different perspectives, the most commonly accepted dimensions of source credibility are expertise and trustworthiness. Furthermore, in the last decades, researchers have shown that a higher source credibility exerts a stronger persuasion effect, in terms of both attitude and behavioural measures (Pornpitakpan, Kolej, & Sunway, 2004).

Generally personal information sources are the most trusted. However, it does not mean that they are necessarily the most expert. When expertise or competence is required, we search for other sources (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). For instance, nowadays, in order to reduce the high social or psychological risk of a purchase, consumers search for credible information such as WOM information, from a source they believe to be reliable (Wangenheim & Bayón, 2004), including via internet.

2.4.2   Information accuracy and web credibility

In the internet-based studies, the most commonly accepted dimensions of source credibility are also expertise and trustworthiness. The attraction sub-dimension is not measured in the eWOM context because the message sender cannot be contacted directly (Wu & Wang, 2011).

As an increasingly important communication tool, the internet has the ability to enhance information provision, by combining the advantages of mass communication channels with the persuasion characteristics of interpersonal channels (Cassell, Jackson, & Cheuvront, 1998). People may use the internet in order to increase knowledge, to learn, to support, to act or to assist in decision-making process. However, sometimes information can increase uncertainty and create dissonance (Wathen & Burkell, 2002).

In the web there is no overall quality control mechanism as occurs in the print world, through different mechanisms such as publishing editors, reviewers, or the reputation of the magazine (Rieh & Belkin, 1998). So, credibility is used as a criterion to filter information in the web (Wathen & Burkell, 2002), and an important antecedent of eWOM adoption (McKnight & Kacmar, 2006). For instance, after checking the URL address, internet users prefer educational, non-profit, and government sources (i.e., .edu, .org or .gov), rating them as more credible than commercial sites (i.e., .com)(Rieh and Belkin 2000). Moreover, information search can become a big nightmare, due to the amount of information available online. Increasingly, internet users may be confronted with blogs or other user generated contents, and feel invaded by too much information, a process labelled as eWOM overload (Park & Lee, 2008).

Consequently, sometimes there is a belief that high-quality information is difficult to find on the Internet, due to the amount of lower quality, unfiltered and sometimes contradictory information, provided by an unlimited number of unknown participants. Naturally, this may raise suspicion about the credibility of online reviews, too (Cheung et al. 2009).

2.4.3 Credibility in the online context

In the last decade different authors have addressed the topic of web credibility. Beyond literature reviews (Wathen & Burkell, 2002), there is a considerable body of empirical research. Some of these studies examine the concept of "trust" in e-commerce situations (Egger, 2000; Lee, Kim, & Moon, 2000), while others prefer to focus on "credibility", i.e., concepts related but not identical (Fogg et al., 2003; Fogg et al., 2001). We can find studies analysing several websites in different industries (Nielsen & Molich, 2000) or gender differences in terms of website credibility (Flanagin & Metzger, 2003).

Online reviews credibility or eWOM credibility, is related to how someone perceives the recommendation as believable or true (Fogg et al., 2001; Tseng & Fogg, 1999; Wathen & Burkell, 2002), being associated to the online recommendation itself (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2007). However, not all reviews have the same influence on consumers. Consumers might be selective and pay attention to the reviews written by someone perceived as more trustworthy and reliable (Hu et al., 2008).

Therefore, when people assess the credibility of opinion/review sites, two issues emerge as important: information bias and information accuracy. Moreover, if the website is in the context of the travel and tourism industry, the customer service characteristics are prominent (Fogg et al., 2003). Therefore, we will now analyse the online reviews' credibility, considering its importance in the tourism field.

2.4.4 Perceived credibility in tourism

As already mentioned, tourism shares the same key characteristics of other services: heterogeneity, perishability, simultaneity of production and consumption, and intangibility (Rust & Chung, 2006). The intangibility of tourist services creates uncertainty and perceived risk in the consumer's mind (Taylor, Hugstad, & Bruce, 1987). Usually, in purchase decisions with a high-perceived risk, service consumers tend to rely on personal information sources, rating them as more reliable (Mitra, Reiss, & Capella, 1999). Thus, consumers try to anticipate the consumption experience,

acquiring a large quantity of information before buying a product/ service or tourism experience. Tourists have been found to use particularly non-media, personal and non-commercial information sources to plan their trips, in order to find detailed information about lodging companies and associated services (Seabra et al., 2007).

Online recommendations are, in this context, "one of the most often sought types of information for people interested in travelling" (Yoon & Uysal, 2005, p. 46). According to the findings, three-quarters of travellers consider online consumer reviews as an information source when planning their trips (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). The extraordinary growth of the usage of this information source is another indicator of the perceived credibility and independence of tourists' opinions, compared to traditional tourist information sources (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

User-generated content "is considered to be extremely informative, but the ability of users to provide high-quality information is doubted" (Dickinger, 2010). Tourists' reviews available on the web will only be accepted if perceived as credible by the reader (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). These reviews are submitted by different persons, with different experiences and sometimes with contradictory opinions, and tourists can compare them easily (Hu et al., 2008). Perceived source credibility plays an important role, when tourists face ambivalent online hotel reviews (Xie et al., 2011). Therefore, tourists are vulnerable to the inaccuracy of web-based information and need to evaluate it critically to avoid misinformation (Iding, Crosby, Auernheimer, & Klemm, 2009).

The impact of online reviews on tourism is difficult to overstate, and a continuous growth is expected for the next years. Nowadays, all electronic travel agency sites offer online consumer reviews, probably to compensate for the inherent weakness of a lack of personal relationship (Litvin et al., 2008). TripAdvisor and some similar websites are playing the role of trusted intermediaries for independent travellers, who pretend to make their own holiday arrangements (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Thus, online travel websites and their hotel ranking systems are becoming prominent, as we discuss next.

2.5 Website quality

Researchers and academics have tried to understand and explain the contribution of information systems to consumers, as well as to supply side organizations. Several system characteristics have been considered, such as system accuracy, the content of the database, human factors (Emery, 1971), system reliability, online response time, ease of use (Swanson, 1974), data accuracy, system flexibility, reliability (Hamilton & Chervany, 1981), among others. Nowadays we need to measure and test new features, after the emergence of the Internet as a new information system. A website is not just an information system, but also an interface with a vendor (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003), that is a potentially relevant relationship marketing tool (Bai, Jang, & Hu, 2003).

Therefore, this chapter starts by addressing the importance of assessing website performance, emphasizing navigation functionality. Afterwards we will explain some measurements tools or scales used to assess customers' perceptions of website quality. Finally, we will analyse studies that evaluate the performance of tourism and hospitality websites.

2.5.1 Website effectiveness and efficiency

There is no globally accepted definition of website evaluation or effectiveness. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2006) website evaluation is the act of determining a correct and comprehensive set of user requirements, in order to provide useful content that meets user expectations and needs. The websites design should encourage and facilitate human-computer interaction efficiently and effectively, including users who have disabilities (such as difficulty in seeing, hearing or making precise movements).

Academic researchers have long advocated the importance of assessing website performance. One of the first attempts in the field was suggested by Lu & Yeung (1998), proposing a framework for evaluating websites in terms of their usability and functionality. Different authors argue that website performance can be evaluated

44

based on specific network statistics such as hit rate or log analysis (Evans & King, 1999; Stern, 2002). However, these network statistics have some limitations, particularly for academic purposes.

In any case, the consumer's perspective is crucial for evaluating the website's effectiveness (Kim & Lim, 2001), which includes different and important characteristics, like perceived navigation functionality. A certain web page can be easy to read and understand, but difficult to navigate. A very long waiting for a page to load is something unacceptable for many internet users. Navigation refers to the process used to find information within a website, allowing users to find and access information effectively and efficiently. It is based on the technical expertise of the website designer, speed of navigation, efficiency and website usefulness. According to Yoon (2002), navigation functionality is significant for website satisfaction, but functionality is not significant to website trust. This may suggest that online users are minimally concerned with site's functional attributes, rather than satisfaction with transactional security. Nonetheless little research has yet been undertaken on the navigation functionality concept of online shopping (Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011).

The role of navigation design, as well as other website design elements such as visual design or information design, implies different evaluations depending on the country. Web users prefer a website that matches their preferences and cultural needs (Cyr, 2008). Indeed, some authors emphasize the concept of website quality in terms of usability and functionality (Bai, Law, & Wen, 2008), but the most relevant aspects are generally related to both system quality (i.e. website design, functionality and usability) and information quality (Polites et al., 2012). Website quality can be conceptualized as "the consumer's judgement about a given site's overall excellence and fitness for use in assisting with the task or goal of making an online purchase" (Polites et al., 2012, p.4).

Therefore, website quality should be a critical business concern, especially in an e-commerce perspective, due to the low percentage of website visitors that purchase from the site (Polites et al., 2012) and the relevance of increasing this number. In the literature there are different scales measuring a website´s quality and effectiveness. In the following, we present a summary of some of these indicators.

2.5.2 Website quality measurements

Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue, (2002) have proposed the WebQual scale in order to measure customers' perceptions of website quality and their intentions to purchase and revisit. The use of a given website goes beyond utilitarian aspects like gathering information and carrying out a transaction. On the other hand, sometimes users might be interested in gathering information and entertainment at the same time. Therefore, grounded on this assumption and for the purpose of the present research project it is important to analyse both management information systems (MIS) and marketing literature to identify useful quality assessment tools.

The WebQual framework comprises four categories: ease of use, usefulness in gathering information, usefulness in carrying out transactions, and entertainment value. Ease of use is related with the website navigation and its operability, as well as to the information content, that needs to be easy to read and understand. The second dimension (usefulness in gathering information) considers that customers might seek information as a pre-purchase search or simply "browsing" without any purchase intentions. On the other hand, internet users might desire to carry out a transaction, and the website's poor response time could be frustrating. The third dimension (usefulness in carrying out transactions) incorporates characteristics such as trust, level of online support or customer service, and the importance of a consistent company image. Finally, the authors consider that a website must be visually appealing, creating pleasant experiences and encouraging continued browsing (entertainment value). As a result Loiacono and her peers (2002) provided a list of recommendations for each concern detected (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6- Website concerns and recommendations

Concerns	Recommendations
Ease of understanding	Design the pages that are easy to read and understand.
Intuitive Operations	Develop an intuitive navigation system that is easy to learn and master.
Tailored communications	Support consumer interaction via the website and the capability to receive tailored information.
Functional fit-to-task	Undertake market research to determine what information consumers want on the website.
Trust	Adopt and promote security and privacy policies and procedures that make customers feel secure in dealing with the company.
Response time	Have sufficient hardware and communications capacity to meet peak demand and avoid large graphics.
Consistent image	Design the website to reflect the company's image.
Online completeness	Allow customers to conduct important business functions in the Web.
Relative advantage	Make the website just as easy, if not easier, for customers to use than other forms of interacting with the company.
Visual appeal	Use colours, graphics, and text that are pleasant to the consumer's eye and avoid cluttered pages.
Innovativeness	Use a creative and differentiating approach to the website.
Emotional appeal	Design the website to provoke a positive customer experience.

Source: Loiacono et al., (2002)

WebQual has provided a valuable and accurate way of measuring website quality, but there are other scales suggested for the same purpose (see table 2.7). Yoo & Donthu (2001) developed the SITEQUAL scale based on nine items and on four dimensions. The authors included the dimension aesthetic design elements and security, beyond other aspects related to the ease of use and processing speed. As a matter of fact, website design is an important dimension proposed in different scales. For instance, Barnes & Vidgen (2002) included the design aspects and usability in their model, composed of five dimensions. Beyond the website design, some authors highlight reliability/fulfilment as another important dimension. For instance, the eTailQ scale

47

refers that reliability/fulfilment involves accurate representation of the product, on-time delivery, and accurate orders (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003).

Table 2.7- Website quality scales and dimensions

Author	Scale	Dimensions
Loiacono, Watson, and Goodhue, 2000	WebQual: for rating websites	Ease of use; gathering information; carrying out transactions; entertainment
Yoo & Donthu, 2001	SITEQUAL: to measure site quality	Ease of use, aesthetic design, processing speed, and security
Barnes & Vidgen, 2002	WebQual: to measure an organization's e-commerce offering	Usability, design, information, trust, and empathy
Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2002	e-SERVQUAL: relevant criteria to e-SQ perceptions	Efficiency, reliability, fulfilment, and privacy (Recovery service scale: responsiveness, compensation, and contact).
Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003	eTailQ: to measure customer perceptions of e-tailing quality	Website design; reliability/fulfilment; privacy/security; customer service
Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005	E-S-QUAL: a multiple-item scale for assessing electronic service quality	Efficiency, system availability, fulfilment, privacy. (E-RecS-QUAL scale: responsiveness; compensation; contact).

Source: Own elaboration

When comparing electronic service quality (e-SERVQUAL) with the traditional or non-internet based models (SERVQUAL), new dimensions arise, such as flexibility, security, site aesthetics, efficiency and ease of navigation, among others. Moreover, the experience during the interaction with the website is not enough to evaluate the website quality. Indeed, it should also include post-interaction service aspects, such as fulfilment as a dimension (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra, 2002). Therefore, Zeithaml and her peers provided a different scale. The measurement involves four dimensions that form the core of the e-SERVQUAL scale (efficiency, reliability, fulfilment, and privacy). Efficiency corresponds to the customers' ability to find on the website all the desired products and the necessary information, easily. Fulfilment represents the service provider's accuracy, namely having products in stock, and

delivering them in the promised time. Reliability is the technical functioning of the site, particularly if it is available and functioning properly. The privacy dimension incorporates the guarantee that all personal data are private, as well as information related with credit cards.

The e-SERVQUAL scale includes three supplementary dimensions (responsiveness, compensation, and contact), which represent the recovery service scale and become salient only when online users have questions or problems. Responsiveness represents the ability to provide information to customers when a problem occurs, and all the necessary mechanisms for handling returns, as well as questions related to online guarantees. Compensation involves the reimbursement for shipping and handling costs. Finally, the contact dimension measures if customers are able to speak to a customer service agent, either by phone, in person, or online (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra, 2002).

Following the extensive debate and different empirical insights, the e-SERVQUAL scale was refined and tested some years after (Parasuraman et al., 2005). The e-S-Qual dimensions are similar to the e-SERVQUAL scale. This scale also includes a sub-scale called E-RecS-QUAL, with items focused on handling service problems and inquiries, predominant only for customers who had non-routine encounters with the sites. However, this scale was only applied in the context of pure-service sites.

Experiential and hedonic aspects, such as fun or pleasure, do not fit in the context of service quality, because they are distinct benefits and may not be relevant in all contexts or to all customers (Parasuraman et al., 2005). According to the E-S-QUAL scale, the most critical aspects of website service quality are fulfilment (i.e., the extent to which the site's promises about order delivery and item availability are fulfilled), and efficiency (i.e., the ease and speed of accessing and using the site). Moreover, according to the authors' findings, the two dimensions have the strongest influence on overall quality perceptions, as well as on perceived value and loyalty intentions. Thus, as a conclusion, "earning a high-quality image for a company's website involves much more than creating an excellent façade for the site" (Parasuraman et al., 2005, p. 18).

2.5.3   Assessment of tourism websites

Law, Qi, & Buhalis (2010) provided an updated overview of research about website evaluation in the tourism field. The authors found 75 published articles considered as important publications in this field, in 23 industrial sectors categorized into 9 main categories, ranging from airline websites, online travel guides, travel blogs, among others. Hospitality websites and destination websites were the most popular categories, covering 37 and 17 publications, respectively. Moreover, Europe was the most investigated region with 24 papers, followed by Asia with 20 publications, and North America with 17 publications. In terms of evaluation instrument, the most adopted were counting method and user judgement, followed respectively in 25 and 11 publications (Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010).

In the early stages of research in the tourism field, most researchers chose a qualitative methodology to analyse specific features of tourism-related websites, considering the different views of consumers, suppliers and academics. However, one of the pioneer studies about the performance of hotel websites emerged in 1996, using both qualitative and quantitative data. It was one of the first attempts to evaluate tourism and hospitality websites, highlighting the internet as an effective management and marketing tool for hotel managers and companies (Murphy, Forrest, Wotring, & Brymer, 1996).

Different methodologies and target samples were adopted, as well as different variables analysed. In the next table (see table 2.8) we summarize some studies focusing on the evaluation of tourism websites. There are approaches in different contexts, such as: (i) hotel websites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006); (ii) airline websites (Elkhani, Soltani, & Jamshidi, 2014); (iii) destination management organization (DMO) websites (Qi, Law, & Buhalis, 2008), or even (iv) rural tourism services (San Martín & Herrero, 2012).

Table 2.8- Summary of research on the evaluation of tourism websites

Author/s (year)	Approach	Sample/Method	Findings
Yeung & Law, 2006	QT	Researchers, Consumer Laboratory Test. Numerical calculation process based on consumer and professional evaluation.	There are some minor problems of usability on the websites of Hong Kong hotels. There are no significant difference between luxury, mid-priced, and economy hotels.
Seyhmus Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006	QT	Laboratory Test. Content analysis.	Hotels in Turkey (4 and 5 star) are not using the internet potential in terms of e-marketing.
Chan & Law, 2006	QT	Laboratory Test. Automated system to evaluate website performance.	There are significant differences regarding multimedia usage in the different Hong Kong hotel categories. There are no significant differences in terms of visual aspects (such as background contrast) or detail of text.
Ho & Lee, 2007	QT	Online purchasers randomly selected.	Identifies five core components of e-travel service quality: (i) information quality, (ii) security, (iii) website functionality, (iv) customer relationships, and (v) responsiveness. It was found that the scale has strong predictive capability regarding the online customer satisfaction and loyalty intention.
Buhalis & Law, 2008	LR		Summarizes and analyses prior studies in the context of Internet applications to tourism, and projects future developments for eTourism.
Qi, Law, & Buhalis, 2008	QT	Consumers, travel industry professionals, and IT professionals.	The research found medium problems on China's DMO websites. Moreover, the usability indices had no significant relationship with website performance.
Schmidt, Cantallops, & dos Santos, 2008	QT	Hotel managers' perceptions about their website's effectiveness.	The results suggest that small and medium size hotels are using their websites as mass media tools, rather than using its potential for interactivity and one-to-one communication.
Rob Law et al., 2010	LR		Summarizes tourism studies from 1996 to 2009, focused on website evaluation. Research can be divided into 5 evaluation approaches: counting, automated, numerical computation, user judgement, and combined methods.

Table 2.8- Summary of research on the evaluation of tourism websites (continued)

Author/s (year)	Approach	Sample/Method	Findings
Li, Wang, & Wiley, 2010	QT	Website analysis by an expert panel composed by professors, students and website practitioners.	Chinese Provincial Tourism Administrations' are not using their websites effectively, especially regarding transaction and relationship dimensions.
Wang & Wang, 2010	QT	Internet users in Taiwan.	Perceived value is a predictor in explaining the customer's adoption of mobile hotel reservation. Perceptions of information quality and system quality may influence the perceived value of mobile hotel reservation.
Golmohammadi, Jahandideh, & O'Gorman, 2012	QT+QL	Airline passengers in Iran, who have used online hotel booking.	Perceived risk and WOM dominate tourists' online behaviour, and may influence online booking adoption. These two factors may also influence the effect of perceived price and quality.
San Martín & Herrero, 2012	QT+QL	Users of rural tourism services.	The online purchase intention is positively influenced by (i) performance and effort expected with regard to the online transaction; and (ii) the level of innovativeness of users.
Roque, Martins, & Lopes, 2013	QT+QL	Website analysis of Portuguese hotels (4 and 5 star).	Overall the websites analysed have a satisfactory quality, especially the 5 star hotels. However, social media is still very little explored.
Elkhani, Soltani, & Jamshidi, 2014	QT	e-ticketing holders via an airline website.	Customer disconfirmations have a positive impact on overall customer e-satisfaction. Moreover, overall e-satisfaction mediate the relationship between customer disconfirmations and consumer e-loyalty.

QT= Quantitative; QL=Qualitative; LR= Literature Review

Source: Own elaboration

The majority of the studies presented followed a quantitative approach. However, there are some studies using both qualitative and quantitative data (Golmohammadi et al., 2012; San Martín & Herrero, 2012). There are researchers who summarize tourism studies from 1996 to 2009, focusing on website evaluation (Rob Law et al.,

2010), or researchers with a literature review on the progress in information technology and tourism managers, in the last decades (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Chan & Law (2006) applied an automatic website evaluation system (AWES), to assess the performance of hotel websites, while Ho & Lee (2007) propose the development of an e-travel service quality scale. There are also studies that use counting methods, using a check-list to verify the existence of specific attributes on a given website (e.g. Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006; Roque, Martins, & Lopes, 2013). For instance, Baloglu & Pekcan (2006) analysed website content of 4 and 5 star hotels in Turkey, regarding certain design characteristics and Internet marketing practices. According to the authors, hotels in Turkey are not using the internet potential in terms of e-marketing. The same idea is expressed by Roque et al., (2013), for whom social media is still very little explored in 4 and 5 star hotels in Portugal.

Some authors use mathematical functions to compute tourism website performance. For instance, Au Yeung & Law, (2006) developed an algorithm for the optimization of mathematic functions, with the purpose of evaluating the usability performance of 77 Hong Kong hotel websites. The authors highlight some minor problems of usability on the websites of Hong Kong hotels, using a sample of consumers, hotel managers, and IT consultants. An expert panel composed by professors, students and website practitioners was also used to analyse Chinese websites (Li et al., 2010), according to which tourism administrators are not using their websites effectively, especially in terms of transaction and relationship characteristics.

Considering the evaluation/measurement aspects, beyond the navigation, functionality or design characteristics, other important criteria were also included in certain research models, such as interactivity (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006), language accuracy (Qi et al., 2008), privacy, security and customer retention (Schmidt et al., 2008), among others. According to Wang & Wang's (2010) findings, perceptions of information quality and system quality may influence the adoption of mobile hotel reservation.

In any case, despite the technology used to search travel content or to book a room, one may conclude that website quality is an important construct in the assessment of tourism websites' effectiveness and efficiency. Beyond the visual attractiveness characteristics, the website needs effective search functionality with accurate information. Making websites more user-friendly should help to improve the number of customers who complete online transactions. It is important to quickly identify consumer needs and reach potential clients with comprehensive, personalized and updated products and services, in order to satisfy these needs. Indeed, it is not only a question of value for money, but also value for time (Buhalis & Law, 2008). "The future of eTourism will be focused on consumer-centric technologies that will support organizations to interact with their customers dynamically" (Buhalis & Law, 2008, p. 619).

2.6 Price benefits

In the online context, price generally implies thinking in terms of saving money online, despite being a critical and complex variable in tourism. The specificities of the tourism industry and the complexity of price setting in this sector are evident in an activity characterized by high seasonality. Therefore, some tourism organizations employ revenue management principles in their activities in order to manage these crucial aspects, as we shall see.

2.6.1 Price complexity in tourism

Generally, tourism involves visiting destinations or places, the choice of hotels, as well as the consumption of products, frequently for the first time. This experience involves a certain level of perceived risk and sometimes relatively high cost. In these situations, price becomes an important key guide in the purchasing process, meaning that customers will expect that the quality matches the price paid (Costa, 2013; Verhoeven, van Rompay, & Pruyn, 2009).

In this sense, price is a complex and relevant issue in hospitality and tourism. The price paid for a hotel stay includes much more than only access to a room. It involves the right to use some facilities the hotel has to offer (e.g. swimming pool, gymnasium, spa), free access to public areas (e.g. reception, lobby, bar), and hotel surroundings (e.g. beach, parks, streets, promenades), among others. This means an integral tourist experience lived at a destination where the hotel is located. The hotels also offer different accommodation regimes, such as bed & breakfast or all-inclusive for instance. There are also intangible elements, such as the hotel brand image or the destination image, signalizing quality and increasing the complexity of the price formation processes. Moreover, in hotel chains sometimes price decisions are taken by distant executives of a globalized business, which are far away from the market and, therefore, may have a different and incorrect perception of the best price for each segment (Costa, 2013).

Regarding to price variations in the hotel business, some authors suggest that it could be set based on the official hotel star classification, implying price ranges according to level of classification (Israeli, 2002; Pastor, 1999). Some hotel managers charge higher prices than the national average, because the hotel is located in important touristic regions, competing in a high range of tourism supply (Espinet, Fluvià, & Rigall, 2004; Prieto-Rodriguez & Gonzalez-Díaz, 2008). As we known, in sun and sea destinations, a traditional choice for many holidaymakers, there are seasonal price changes (Espinet, Saez, Coenders, & Fluvià, 2003).

Each hotel has its own pricing policy. Nonetheless, one should not neglect the influence of intermediaries, such as tour operators (Aguiló, Alegre, & Riera, 2001) or online travel agents (Inversini & Masiero, 2014) which will be analysed further. Most hoteliers define their prices before starting each touristic season and according to their commercial policy. However, naturally, prices follow demand and fluctuate according to the number of bookings (van der Rest & Harris, 2008). This is another important tendency found in any tourist destination characterized by high seasonality (Collins & Parsa, 2006; Pellinen, 2003), reflecting the specificities of the tourism industry and the complexity of price setting in this sector (Costa, 2013).

2.6.2   Revenue Management

When discussing the price variable in the tourism industry, it is important to address the concept of revenue management. The main purpose of revenue management or yield management is to maximize revenue, managing service packages. The starting point of this process began in 1966, when American Airlines implemented a computer reservation system (SABRE), but the true development of revenue management occurred after the Airline Deregulation Act in 1978. This act implied a loss of control over airline prices, which led to a rush of innovation and a rapid change in the airline sector. The new information technologies triggered the quick development of revenue management, allowing its application in different industries (Chiang, Chen, & Xu, 2007), and the benefits are evident. For instance, Marriott Hotels gained US$100 million additional annual revenue, with the implementation of revenue management principles and procedures (Cross, 1997).

Different researchers and practitioners suggest dynamic pricing policies and their relation to revenue management principles (Chiang et al., 2007). Some highlight a successful e-commerce model of dynamic, automated sales enabled by central reservation and revenue management systems. In order to control the sales of inventory, some methods are suggested as well as techniques for optimization and forecasting (Boyd & Bilegan, 2003).

The three major traditional applications of revenue management are in the airline industry, hotel and car rental businesses. These industries show similar characteristics: (i) their products are perishable; (ii) the demand varies significantly over time; and (iii) they have large fixed costs compared with variable costs that are smaller in the short run. Given the success of revenue management in these industries, researchers and practitioners have tried to implement its practices in other tourism-related organizations (see Table 2.9), as well as in other different industries (e.g. internet services, apartment renting, broadcasting and media), including the non-profit sector (Chiang et al., 2007).

Table 2.9- Revenue management practices in tourism organizations

Tourism organizations	Example of practices
Hotels	Provide special rate packages for periods of low occupancy; use overbooking policy to compensate for cancellation, no-shows.
Restaurants	Move customers to off-peak periods by offering discount coupons, or charging reservation fees and higher meal prices on Friday and Saturday nights.
Attractions	Set different admission charge levels, provide joint-entry tickets, group discounts, coupons, membership rates.
Cruise lines and ferry lines	Provide luxury class, economy class; change prices frequently according to demand; sell more tickets than seats to avoid cancellation and no show.
Casinos	Customize offers such as complimentary room, tickets, gifts, discounts, etc., based on customers' profitability.
Conference	Provide different packages and rates to satisfy different customers' requirements.
Golf	Use different prices to reflect the value of different times of the golf course.
Sports events and entertainment events	Determine ticket price for an event based on factors such as customer tastes and area of seating; determine the price of season tickets; determine the number of tickets sold for each seat segment.

Source: Chiang, Chen, & Xu, (2007)

As seen, price is one of the revenue manager's main concerns, bearing in mind the main goal, which is maximizing revenues and profits. The objective is to estimate the best price for each customer group, as well as how to vary prices over time. On the other hand, the accuracy of revenue manager's decisions depends on the forecast capacity and method (Chiang et al., 2007). As an example, Weatherford & Kimes (2003) applied a comparative test on some forecasting methods for hotel revenue management, using data from Choice Hotels and Marriott Hotels. The results showed the most robust method, as well as the statistic method that produces the lowest error.

However, despite the method, "human judgement is still indispensable in forecasting demand" (Chiang et al., 2007, p. 111). A study conducted with 57 experienced revenue managers reveals that the nature of the user interface may influence the way the

revenue managers adjust the computers' forecast (see Schwartz & Cohen, 2004). Thus, revenue management is an auxiliary tool for hotel managers and not a price dictator.

2.6.3   Price benefits of e-commerce

Some authors argue that providing price and product information in online markets would create highly competitive "friction free" commerce (Clemons, Hann, & Hitt, 2002). The majority of hotel brands use multiple web based distribution channels and multiple rates over each distribution channel (O'Connor, 2001). Additionally, in online travel marketing, it was found that different online travel agents (OTAs) offer tickets with substantially different prices and characteristics, despite the same customer request (Clemons et al., 2002). Therefore, one may conclude that there is price dispersion on the web, which may also confuse the customer and lead to dissatisfaction or distrust regarding a certain brand or company. Undoubtedly, the e-commerce has reduced the transaction costs, i.e., the costs associated to all transaction-related activities (Teo & Yu, 2005), making online purchase highly attractive to price-sensitive customers.

On the internet there are sites where tourists can book a room online and save money comparing to offline prices charged (e.g. Booking.com), price comparison sites (e.g. Trivago.com), or even sites where tourists can name their own price (e.g. Priceline.com). Beyond some promotions, special prices or offers, the web has introduced utterly transparency in the price and on the marketplace (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Tourists spend their time comparing prices on different websites, in order to reduce the cost of their travels. Nowadays, tourists may opt for a low-cost holiday, choosing airline companies such as easyJet or Ryanair, and some hotel rooms with special prices and last-minute offers (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Indeed, "price is still an important influence upon online reservation intentions by a large group of potential online hotel customers", due to important perceived saving opportunities provided online (Kim, Ma, & Kim, 2006, p. 898). However, tourists hesitate in the last moment of confirming the purchase on the web. "Many consumers

still tend to be reluctant to purchase tourism products and services online, especially the high-priced or luxury invisible tourism products and services, since they are likely to be less trustful of e-commerce" (Kim et al., 2011, p. 264). The reasons for this reluctance are related with lack of experience, security issues and lack of personal service (Wolfe, Hsu, & Kang, 2005), among others.

2.6.4 Distribution channels

The number of studies highlighting the importance of social media and the online channel for tourism and hospitality continue to rise (e.g., Inversini & Masiero, 2014), as seen previously. In 2010 more than 50 percent of the sales of most important hotel brands was assigned to the online marketing channels (Pan et al., 2013). There is a system of intermediaries that facilitates the sale and delivery of tourism products and services from suppliers to consumers, commonly known as tourism distribution channels (Buhalis & Laws, 2001). In the last decade different authors have analysed the evolution and transformation of those channels. According to Kracht & Wang (2010), the advanced of information and communication technologies brought to the marketplace a wide variety of intermediaries, transforming the tourism industry in a complex global network. Those changes affect not only consumer choices, but also tourism business and marketing strategies, in an increasingly competitive environment.

The eTourism intermediaries (Buhalis & Licata, 2002), are referred in the literature as "cybermediaries" (e.g. Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011), or as online travel agencies (OTAs) (e.g. Chiou, Lin, & Perng, 2011). OTAs emerged in the 1990s, and nowadays are playing a fundamental role in the online distribution (Inversini & Masiero, 2014). A very significant percentage of online bookings for accommodation are made through this specific travel agents (Pan et al., 2013). Perhaps for this reason, the academic debate has changed from the importance of hotel websites (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006), to the effective use of online travel agents (Lee, Guillet, & Law, 2013).

The number of OTAs operating in the tourism field are increasing, but probably some of the best known are Expedia, Travelocity, Kayak, Orbitz and Priceline (Kracht & Wang, 2010). An OTA promotes the hotel, sells hotel rooms via its own website, and receives a commission according to the number of rooms sold. There is a price to pay for conquer visibility on the web. Indeed, sometimes hotel managers need to pay a reasonable commission fee (Ling, Guo, & Yang, 2014), especially when this partnership involves best known or required online travel agencies.

Several studies confirm that travellers use OTAs to search for hotel information. According to Pan et al. (2013), hotels arouse greater interest when ranked near the top of a search results displayed on an OTA webpage. However, tourists end up booking a room via hotel's call center or host website (Wu, Law, & Jiang, 2013). For instance, Toh, DeKay, & Raven (2011) found that, despite the vast use of the internet to search hotels and book a room, there are a clear percentage that continue to make telephone calls to hotels with the same purpose. Earlier research suggests that people seek personal contacts, especially by phone, to negotiate a lower price than the one found on the web. Therefore, in order to induce internet users to make reservations via their own website, normally OTAs provide special discounts or promote travel packages (Toh et al., 2011).

Unavoidably, the cooperation between hotels and OTAs is not always peaceful. "Clearly, channel conflict exists between OTAs' booking systems and hotels' hosted channels, including hotels' host websites, call center, or reception desks" (Ling et al., 2014, p. 235). A comparative analysis regarding the room rates of 45 hotels in Hong Kong found significant differences among seven direct and indirect distribution channels analysed (Tso & Law, 2005). The empirical results revealed that the website of a local travel agent offered the lowest room rates in all hotel categories.

By comparing prices on the web, consumers are focusing exclusively on price, rather than on product/service quality or on the hotel brands (Kracht & Wang, 2010). Moreover, these differences in room rates found in diverse websites are not always common practices (see Guo, Ling, Dong, & Liang, 2013). There are also many cases in

which a hotel room is placed on the market as part of a package deal at a convenient price (Lee et al., 2013). For instance, Expedia's website (http://www.expedia.com) has travel packages comprising flight, hotel, car, and it may include a discount on shopping near the hotel.

For a hotel manager, decisions involving the choice of an OTA, or prices and commissions to be paid are not easy. This is even more complex for a new hotel that aims to initiate an e-commerce strategy by cooperating with OTAs, because it has little information and experience in the online marketplace. In this scenario, according to Ling et al. (2014), the best solution is obtained when the players act as an integrated system, rather than when each one tries to maximize their own objectives. Therefore, when the hotel provides more rooms for sale, the OTA places the hotel in a better position on the webpage, and strive harder to sell the hotel room.

Some authors argue that OTAs success is based on data mining, direct email and loyalty programs, profiling the customers and pushing travel products to them, using different strategies and resources (Toh et al., 2011). These third-party companies are increasingly more powerful than hotels, placing the hotels in a dependence situation (Morosan & Jeong, 2008). They put hotel enterprises in a disadvantage position, considering that hotels end up selling a large percentage of their inventory to these companies with very significant discounts, ie, at lower rates (Carroll & Siguaw, 2003).

Lee et al. (2013) found some agency problems between Choice Hotels and Expedia. On the other hand, Marriott International's brands face less agency problems, given to their greater control over the hotel's inventory supplied to OTAs. Therefore, hotel managers can reduce the over-dependence on OTAs, despite maintaining this important relationship with online distribution channels. Moreover, according to the authors, hotel managers need a more accurate criterion in choosing the partners, avoiding over-reliance on a single OTA. Sometimes regional OTAs are in a better position to understand the supply and the demand from customers (Lee et al., 2013).

Beyond the greater or lesser popularity of the OTA, hotel managers must also rely on its own occupancy rate. Authors recommend the cooperation with an OTA when the hotel has a low occupancy rate, in order to improve its revenues. In the reverse situation, i.e., when the hotel has a high occupancy rate, probably its managers are not interested in new partnerships (Ling et al., 2014). We have also to bear in mind the cancellations and no-shows, which is a common problem that affect the hotel industry. In such situations, it may be worthwhile to take some risks, adequately weighted, and adopt some overbooking strategies (Ling et al., 2014), or dynamic pricing policies related to revenue management (Chiang et al., 2007), as seen previously.

Thus, in the online marketplace, firms need to: (i) make the website memorable, in order to increase the likelihood of internet users go directly to that URL and book a room through it (Kracht & Wang, 2010); (ii) optimize their website, providing information not available in other channels (Toh et al., 2011); (iii) include other options and services for those who decide to book through their website (e.g. newspaper delivery, airport pick-up, spa or restaurant discounts, among others) (Lee et al., 2013); (iv) protect their brands, using for instance customer reward programs, requiring login and password to benefit from special conditions (Kracht & Wang, 2010); (v) give the customer greater flexibility, with reasonable cancellation deadlines and lower fees (Lee et al., 2013); and (vi) share information and adopt a politic of market transparency, which is benefit for the entire tourism industry (Lee et al., 2013).

Concluding, price is one of the decisive factor in this process, not only for revenue generation purposes, but also an important tool for building a long and solid cooperation between hotels and the different actors (Ling et al., 2014). However, price is not the only determinant. For hotels, some issues and challenges in online distribution may also involve: (i) staff education; (ii) customer loyalty; and (iii) control of the hotel image (Christodoulidou, Brewer, Feinstein, & Bai, 2007).

2.7   Corporate reputation

"The importance of a firm's reputation is greater in an online environment as many of the firm's service dimensions are not visible to the customer" (Rust & Chung, 2006, p. 569). The internet is transforming the way companies are building their reputation, which is something that involves time, effort, and it is difficult to trade.

Reputation is an important and highly subjective concept, also widely spread in the tourism and hospitality literature. It represents a significant dimension for tourists' online purchase intention. There are studies highlighting the concept in different contexts, like in rural lodging units, for instance (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011). Therefore, the main goal of this chapter is to explain the importance and complexity of this concept in the online context, particularly in tourism websites.

2.7.1   Concepts and perspectives

Different perspectives have addressed the concept of reputation, such as applied economics (Shapiro, 1983), strategic management (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), or marketing (Kotha, Rajgopal, & Rindova, 2001). Corporate reputation can be defined as how customers perceive the firm, i.e. their vision of the company (Grönroos, 1990), involving impressions, beliefs, and feelings (Barich & Srinivasan, 1993), i.e., implying an affective or emotional reaction (Fombrun, 1996). Reputation mirrors the degree of perceived honesty attributed to the company (Doney & Cannon, 1997), being easier to lose a good reputation than to build it (Herbig, Milewicz, & Golden, 1994).

Corporate reputation is built upon a set of interactions between the company and its customers, enabling them to appreciate more deeply the quality of an offer (Yoon, Guffey, & Kijewski, 1993). It provides important benefits to the firm, including the enhanced intention to purchase tangibles (Grewal, Krishnan, Baker, & Borin, 1998) and intangibles (Yoon et al., 1993) from it. Generally speaking, consumers consider the reputation of the company before a purchase decision (Zeithaml, 2000).

Corporate reputation has an important role in customer's perception of service performance capability (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011). "In marketing there is recognition of the importance of a consistent company image across all points of contact with the customer" (Loiacono et al., 2002, p. 18). In this sense, firms with good reputation are in better conditions to sustain superior profit outcomes over time (Roberts & Dowling, 2002).

2.7.2 Web reputation

In the online environment, the process of sharing information from one user to another acts as an important source of reference for other users, which ultimately affects the retailer's reputation (Jin, Park, & Kim, 2010). The website reputation has also a significant impact on the eWOM effect, specifically a greater effect for websites with established reputation. This impact is greater for experience goods than for search goods (Park, Min, & Lee, 2009).

In the online retailing context, consumers experience transaction risks, as addressed previously, and reputation can be an important risk-reduction mechanism. For instance, when comparing two online retailers, and assuming that everything else is equal, consumers probably prefer to buy over the website with better online reputation (Kotha et al., 2001). The retailer's reputation influences consumer buying decisions, since consumers are more likely to purchase from reputable retailers than from unknown ones (Lee & Shavitt, 2006). In fact, "many customers have difficulty remembering even prominent websites and are reluctant to pay for products from online retailers they know little about" (Caruana & Ewing, 2010, p. 1104).

In an attempt to develop a comprehensive model of consumer experience in the online retailing context, Kim & Lennon (2013) conclude that beyond the website quality characteristics (i.e. internal factors), the retailer's reputation also exerts a significant influence on consumer's emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses, acting as an important external reference.

Moreover, despite the globalization process enhanced by the development of ICT, we have to refer some cultural issues, which are relevant for understanding customers' online behaviour. Thus, in order to test the influence of cultural characteristics, Kim, Yang, & Kim (2013) selected South Korea and United States for their research setting, considering their importance in terms of internet subscribers and online sales, but specially recognizing their cultural differences. According to their findings, the online retailer's reputation has a stronger effect on Korean consumers (from a collectivist culture) than on US consumers (from an individualistic culture). Also, "Korean consumers felt more (less) joyful and less (more) distressed when the online retailer's reputation was high (low), whereas US shoppers were less affected by reputation when developing emotional responses"(Kim, Yang, & Kim, 2013, p. 698).

Thus, a firm's reputation is something that managers cannot create and trade easily. Nevertheless, it is a crucial aspect in the online retailing context, because consumers have fewer risk-reducing references than in physical stores (Jin et al., 2010). In this sense, the online retailers need to create, develop and nurture a good reputation, which can be an important source of competitive advantage (Kim & Lennon, 2013).

2.7.3 Reputation in tourism

Company reputation is sometimes associated with brand name, credibility and product quality and represents a significant dimension for tourists' online purchase intention, especially for inexperienced ones. According to a study about customer's online reservation intentions, it was found that experienced internet users are less likely to depend on reputation for their choices (Kim et al., 2006). In the hotel business, guests may choose different hotels and locations whenever they go travelling, but opt for the same hotel chain in which they trust. On the other hand, after familiar with certain hotel chain, they may recommend it to potential guests, namely friends and relatives (Yacouel and Fleischer, 2011).

However, fictitious reviews, available online in some tourist websites that offer travel advice to their readers/users, are problematic and may affect the company reputation.

Thus, not surprisingly, the main concern is to ensure that reviews are credible (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Some authors have used the TripAdvisor's online reputation system in their settings. According to their findings, these online reputation systems can, in fact, identify helpful reviewers (Lee et al., 2011). Online travel agents (OTAs) such as booking.com for instance, may be an important vehicle in reputation building in the online hotel market. Moreover, by providing useful and reliable information concerning a hotel's quality, OTAs may encourage hotel managers for an additional effort in service quality (Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011).

2.8 Perceived value

The perceived value concept emerged as a business issue in the 1990s, and it continues to receive an extensive research interest nowadays. The concept has become one of the most highlighted in the social sciences, especially in the management literature. Different definitions and perspectives have been suggested (e.g. Holbrook, 1999; Zeithaml, 1988). Indeed, in the last decade, we can find an extensive research regarding the conceptualization and operationalization of perceived value (e.g. Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Therefore, our purpose is to explain the nature of perceived value and the different dimensions, as well as the approaches to assess the concept. Afterwards, we will focus our attention on the hotel sector.

2.8.1 Concepts and dimensions

Both marketing practitioners and academic researchers recognize that perceived value has a major influence on consumer behaviour. It can be linked to market segmentation (Tellis & Gaeth, 1990), product differentiation (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997) or position policies (Kotler, 1999), and is a crucial aspect in strategic management (Mizik & Jacobson, 2003), since it should be recognized as a competitive advantage for companies (Woodruff, 1997). Perceived value is a natural consequence of marketing activities and a first-order feature of successful relationship marketing (Oh & Jeong, 2004; Peterson, 1995; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996).

Considering the nature of perceived consumer value, different definitions emerge in the literature. Some authors use a uni-dimensional perspective, addressing the concept as a trade-off between benefits and sacrifices made (Zeithaml, 1988). However, this traditional perspective is excessively concentrated on economic utility and represents a narrow outlook. Some authors prefer to follow a multi-dimensional approach, distinguishing, for instance, a utilitarian and hedonic perspective/ dimension (Holbrook, 1999). The next table (2.10) briefly compares the two approaches regarding perceived value.

Table 2.10- Comparing approaches to the nature of perceived value

Uni-dimensional nature	Multi-dimensional nature
Roots in economic theory and cognitive psychology	Roots in consumer-behaviour psychology
Utilitarian and economic conception	Behavioural conception
Cognitive approach	Cognitive-affective approach
Simplicity	Richness and complexity
Knowledge of how value is evaluated	Specific direction on how to improve value
Lack of agreement regarding the antecedents of value	Lack of agreement regarding the components of value
Confusion about the relationship among the antecedents	Confusion about the relationship among the components
Direct observation of value	Observation of value through its components
Widely embraced in the literature	Hardly embraced in more recent literature

Source: Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonillo (2007).

One of the pioneer and most universally accepted definitions conceives perceived value as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on the perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14). This conceptual model suggests that people evaluate products based on their perceptions of quality, price and value, rather than based on objective and specific attributes.

Different researchers have followed this idea, conceiving perceived value in terms of benefits received (economic, social and relationship) and sacrifices made (price, time, effort, risk and convenience) by the customer.

Another interesting/ noteworthy approach emerges from Holbrook's work, which has shown a long and consistent interest in the topic of perceived value, by addressing value in the consumption process as both a hedonic and utilitarian experience. The author defines perceived consumer value as an "interactive relativistic preference experience" (Holbrook, 1999, p. 5), because it involves an evaluative or preference judgement among objects, it varies across people, and depends on the situational context. Accordingly, "consumer value resides not in the product purchased, not in the brand chosen, not in the object possessed, but rather in the consumption experience(s) derived therefrom" (Holbrook, 1999, p. 9).

The value typology suggested by the author is divided into four quadrants framed by extrinsic/intrinsic characteristics on one axis (utilitarist vs. hedonist), and self-oriented/other-oriented on the other. Additionally, these dimensions might be active or reactive, depending on the consumer's control of the object. As a result, the author suggests eight separate categories of consumer value: efficiency, excellence (quality), play, aesthetics, esteem, status, ethics and spirituality (see table 2.11).

Table 2.11- Typology of consumer value

		Extrinsic	**Intrinsic**
Self-oriented	Active	Efficiency (output/input, convenience)	Play (fun)
	Reactive	Excellence (quality)	Aesthetics (beauty)
Other-oriented	Active	Status (success, impression management)	Ethics (virtue, justice, morality)
	Reactive	Esteem (reputation, materialism, possessions)	Spirituality (faith, ecstasy, rapture, sacredness, magic)

Source: Holbrook (1999)

This value typology was later adapted in the e-commerce context by different authors (e.g. Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001). Lee & Overby (2004) identified two different types of value: (i) utilitarian value (including price savings, service excellence, time savings, and selection dimensions); and (ii) experiential value (including entertainment, escape, visual and interaction dimensions). According to the authors, both forms of value positively affect customer satisfaction.

This multidimensional perspective was also followed by Sweeney & Soutar (2001). According to these authors' findings, multiple value dimensions perform better than a single-value item such as value for money. Therefore, the authors proposed the PERVAL scale (see table 2.12), composed by four dimensions: emotional, social, quality/performance, and price/value for money.

Table 2.12- Dimensions presented in PERVAL scale

Dimensions	Concept
Emotional value	The utility derived from the feelings or affective states that a product generates
Social value (enhancement of social self-concept)	The utility derived from the product's ability to enhance social self-concept
Functional value (price/value for money)	The utility derived from the product due to the reduction of its perceived short term and longer term costs
Functional value (performance/quality)	The utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of the product

Source: (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001)

Different researchers adopted the multidimensional approach, where both affective and functional dimensions of perceived value are recognized. The functional dimension is the rational and economic valuations made by individuals, which includes the quality evaluations of products/services. Despite being less developed, the affective dimension captures the feelings or emotions generated by the products/services purchased/consumed (Sánchez, Callarisa, Rodríguez, & Moliner, 2006).

69

In conclusion, value is an extremely complex and multi-dimensional concept, since it is cognitive-affective in nature, and perceived differently, because it varies across cultures, customers, and at different times (Sánchez et al., 2006). According to Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonillo (2007), Holbrook's typology (1999) is the most comprehensive perspective of the value concept, because it captures all the economic, social, hedonic, and altruistic components. Moreover, by demonstrating the importance of the hedonic characteristics in the experiences of buying and consuming products, shows that it is a fundamental conceptualization when analysing tourism and leisure activities (Sánchez et al., 2006).

2.8.2   Perceived value in tourism

Value perceptions, both in their rather cognitivist/rationalist and emotional/hedonistic perspective, can be "experienced before purchase, at the moment of purchase, at the time of use, and after use" (Sánchez et al., 2006, p. 394). However, the real value, or the post-purchase perceived value, arises after the consumption of the product (Sánchez et al., 2006).

In the tourism field value is also seen as somewhat vague, due to different meanings and varied users of the concept (Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000). Nonetheless, the concept has been relatively important for the tourism context, especially in the last decade, providing a consistent stream of research (Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006). Some empirical testing of tourism value models adopts a utilitarian perspective, in which perceived value is just perceived quality relative to the price paid (e.g. Tam, 2000) or the very simple view of value for money (e.g. Murphy et al., 2000). However, nowadays the value concept tends to be recognized as multidimensional, as seen previously (e.g. Babin & Kim, 2001). The next table (2.13) presents some studies applied in the tourism context, using a uni-dimensional or a multi-dimensional approach.

Table 2.13- Studies about value perceptions in the tourism context

Authors	U/M	Purpose/Objective	Findings/Output
Murphy et al., 2000	U	Develop a comprehensive conceptual model of the destination product.	The general environmental elements and perceived quality seem more significant than other elements.
Tam, 2000	U	Examines the role of service quality, perceived value and customer satisfaction, in shaping post-purchase behaviour (restaurant context).	Customer satisfaction shows the strongest effect on behavioural intentions, followed by perceived value.
Babin & Kim, 2001	M	Analyse how different characteristics (perceived safety, fun, and educational benefits) create travel satisfaction, through their impact on personal hedonic and utilitarian travel value perceptions.	Hedonic and utilitarian value perceptions have a key role in explaining travel-related consumption choices, experiences and outcomes.
Petrick, 2003	M	Tests the reliability/validity of the SERV-PERVAL scale in a tourism setting. Analyses how well factors of perceived value predict perceived value, satisfaction, and intentions to repurchase.	SERV-PERVAL factors are related to cruise passengers' post-cruise cognitive assessments.
Oh & Jeong, 2004	U	Analyse how lodging consumers process brand and price information, toward an overall value judgement.	Brand class and brand awareness appear to influence value perceptions through different pathways.
Sigala, 2004	M	Study the impact of website design and functionality on e-shopping experiential values.	E-shoppers have different expectations regarding website features and functionality depending on the values and experiences sought online.
Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006	M	Test the dimensionality of consumer value in a travel-related context, namely the relations between consumer perceptual constructs (perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty).	The existence of a quality–value–satisfaction–loyalty chain. The complexity of value dimensions, highly sensitive to the tourism experience.
Wang & Wang, 2010	U	Analyse the adoption of mobile hotel reservations services from the value perspective, by proposing a new research model.	Perceived value was a predictor in explaining the customer's adoption of mobile hotel reservations services.
Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2012	M	Understand tourists' experience values and the causal relationships between motivation, involvement, and the experience value of the destination.	Motivation and involvement are linked to tourists' experience value, and motivation affects the level of involvement.

Source: Own elaboration

Considering the scales used to measure the overall perceived value of a purchase (see table 2.14), Petrick (2002) proposes a value structure of five dimensions (behavioural price, monetary price, emotional response, quality and reputation) designed to work in all services categories. The author also tested the scale measuring cruise passengers' perceived value (Petrick, 2003). Other researchers conceptualize perceived value as consisting of two dimensions: acquisition value and transaction value (Al-Sabbahy et al., 2004). The authors adapted a 12-item scale (Grewal, Monroe, & Krishnan, 1998) and tested it in hotels and restaurant services.

Assuming a holistic approach, Sánchez et al. (2006) propose the GLOVAL scale based on 6 dimensions: (1) functional value of the travel agency (installations); (2) functional value of the contact personnel of the travel agency (professionalism); (3) functional value of the tourism package purchased (quality); (4) functional value price; (5) emotional value; and (6) social value. In order to capture the complexity of adventure tourism experiences, Williams & Soutar, (2009) opt for a scale with 5 dimensions: (1) functional value; (2) value for money; (3) emotional value; (4) social value; (5) novelty value.

Table 2.14- Multidimensional scales used in researches in the tourism context

Authors	Dimensions	Construct
Petrick, 2002	5 dimensions:	(1) behavioural price; (2) monetary price; (3) emotional response; (4) quality; (5) reputation.
Al-Sabbahy et al., 2004	2 dimensions:	(1) acquisition value; (2) transaction value.
Sánchez et al., 2006	6 dimensions:	(1) functional value of the travel agency (installations); (2) functional value of the contact personnel of the travel agency (professionalism); (3) functional value of the tourism package purchased (quality); (4) functional value price; (5) emotional value; and (6) social value.
Williams & Soutar, 2009	5 dimensions:	(1) functional value; (2) value for money; (3) emotional value; (4) social value; (5) novelty value.

Source: Own elaboration

In conclusion, perceived value seems crucial when analysing tourist behaviour and satisfaction, since this behaviour is not purely rational. There are important symbolic aspects in the experience provided and sought, mirroring the hedonic component in leisure and tourism. The complexity of value dimensions was emphasized by Gallarza & Gil Saura (2006), for whom perceived value is highly sensitive to the tourism experience. Thus, "ignoring perceived value in a tourism experience may cause lowered customer satisfaction and reduced repeated business"(Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006, p. 449).

2.9   Customer Satisfaction on the web

Satisfaction is "the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with a consumer's prior feelings about the consumer experience" (Oliver, 1981, p. 29). Satisfaction implies an ongoing evaluation regarding the products' acquisition and/or consumption experience.

Despite a consolidated research about customer satisfaction antecedents in classical contexts (Oliver, 1997; Szymanski & Henard, 2001), for a long period, customer satisfaction in e-retailing was not sufficiently highlighted. This is understandable, since it was a recent topic of research at that time. According to some authors there is a need for systematic research about the determinants of e-satisfaction (Szymanski & Hise, 2000). Therefore the importance of e-satisfaction in the tourism context will be discussed next, bearing in mind the new consumer behaviour patterns. We will start by addressing the satisfaction concept in the online context.

2.9.1   E-Satisfaction

In the online environment customer satisfaction is sometimes referred to as e-satisfaction. Several authors have adopted the e-satisfaction concept in their studies (e.g. Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Szymanski & Hise, 2000; Bansal, McDougall, Dikolli, & Sedatole, 2004). For instance, Anderson & Srinivasan (2003, p. 125) define e-satisfaction "as the contentment of the customer with respect to his or her prior purchasing experience with a given electronic commerce firm".

In order to understand the antecedents of e-satisfaction and its implications, many theoretical frameworks have been used, such as the technology acceptance model (Gefen et al., 2003), transaction cost economics (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000), models of the decision making process (Kohli, Devaraj, & Mahmood, 2004), or the expectation confirmation theory (ECT) (McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002). Nevertheless, there is still some inconsistency in determining how the various pieces fit together (Karahanna, Seligman, Polites, & Williams, 2009). Some authors argue that these theoretical frameworks are only applied in very specific circumstances and only include the most common constructs (Polites et al., 2012), related with the website features (McKinney et al., 2002; Palmer, 2002).

In the information systems (IS) literature, e-satisfaction is often analysed from the perspective of an individual's experience with website features, namely those associated to information quality (IQ) and system quality (SQ) (e.g. McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002; Palmer, 2002). There are researchers examining customer satisfaction with the e-vendor or provider (Chiou, 2004; Ramaswami, 2000), satisfaction with the overall ordering process (Cao, Gruca, & Klemz, 2003), or related with the electronic channel, comparing it to alternative traditional channels used for the same purpose (Kohli et al., 2004).

More than an interface with a vendor (Gefen et al., 2003), a website is a crucial relationship marketing tool (Bai et al., 2003), as addressed before. Beyond the product's brand and the seller's outlet, it is important to consider the degree of acceptability of the seller. Someone with a positive experience with a given vendor in a traditional shopping environment probably will continue to buy the same way, considering it less risky and easier than using the internet to buy the same seller's brand (Kim et al., 2006).

The level of satisfaction with a given website depends also on some online shopper's personal characteristics such as familiarity with e-commerce, prior satisfaction with e-commerce, and the receptivity to innovation. Past online purchase experiences gives important cues to assess the desirability of future purchases (Yoon, 2002).

Therefore, characteristics of the technology, merchant, and product, all influence online consumer behaviour (Cheung, Chan, & Limayem, 2005). Thus, when predicting customer e-satisfaction there are some prominent aspects that should be considered, namely vendor-related factors and product-related factors, such as trust, price and value (Polites et al., 2012).

2.9.2 Online tourist experience

In the services' context, customer satisfaction is an evaluation based on personal experience. Moreover, it drives profitability, and can be seen as an important complement to traditional measures of performance (Storbacka, Strandvik, & Grönroos, 1994).

Customer satisfaction is one of the main review-generating factors in the tourism field (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). The online customer experience, namely the "overall satisfaction with an e-vendor's website" (Polites et al., 2012, p.1), is playing an important role in the tourism field, whether in the accommodation sector, or in the airline industry (Harris & Goode, 2004; Kim et al., 2006; Polites et al., 2012).

It seems that potential online customers are not fully satisfied with hotel websites, which is something critic, considering that the intention to make a reservation online depends on customer's satisfaction with website information (Jeong, Oh, & Gregoire, 2003). Therefore, hoteliers need to pay attention to this issue, in order to avoid losing online bookings and sales.

Despite being something relevant, accurate product information is not enough for an effective distribution and satisfaction level. The receptivity to technological innovation has also a positive relationship with e-satisfaction. A study implemented in the context of online hotel booking intentions, showed that experienced internet users and inexperienced ones have different patterns in terms of e-satisfaction and purchase intentions (Kim et al., 2006). According to the findings, for unexpired customers, "service performance and reputation", "convenience", "price benefits", "technological inclination" and "safety" exert a significant impact on online purchase intentions. For

experienced internet users, "information needs" is the most relevant factor, complemented by "convenience", "technological inclination", and "safety", which both have a significant influence on customers' satisfaction level (Kim et al., 2006).

As a matter of fact, the internet is moving the hospitality sector from a reactive position to a proactive one, in order to meet customers' information demands, which are changing frequently (Kim et al., 2006). Therefore loyalty and repurchase intention need to be addressed as the ultimate dependent variable, rather than satisfaction, because they contribute more to the "company's bottom line" (Polites et al., 2012).

2.10 Customer loyalty on the web

Despite facing an increasingly globalized market, one of the company's main goals is customer loyalty. Thus, in this chapter we will start to address the importance of customer relationship management, bearing in mind the e-commerce context. Consequently, we will focus on the e-loyalty concept, i.e., a company's ability to retain customers to their website, especially considering the tourism and hospitality context.

2.10.1 E-Customer Relationship Management (eCRM)

One of the most accepted definitions of relationship marketing was proposed by Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 22), for whom the concept "refers to all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges [with customers]. There are different definitions; nonetheless, most of them highlight the development and maintenance of long-term relationships with customers. Others go a step further and view relationship marketing in a social context. According to Gummesson (2002, p. 39), "total relationship marketing is marketing based on relationships, networks and interaction, recognizing that marketing is embedded in the total management of the networks of the selling organization, the market and society". The author additionally refers to the concept as a long-term relationship with individual customers, where value creation occurs as a joint act between companies, customers and other stakeholders.

For a long time, the literature regarding this subject had addressed customer relationship management (CRM) as synonymous of marketing one-to-one, targeted to a specific customer, focusing on personalisation and customization as the main goals (Chen & Popovich , 2003; Fjermestad, Nicholas & Romano, 2003). Actually, the new forms of interaction give rise to what many calls as electronic relationships (e-relationships) (Gummesson, 2002). As addressed before, the web2.0 is influencing the way customers search, communicate, share and create information, which has an impact on customer value creation (Sigala, 2011) and might be considered part of it. Therefore, e-Customer Relationship Management (eCRM) refers to the use of these activities and techniques through internet based media (Lee-Kelley, Gilbert, & Mannicom, 2003), and represents a key business strategy.

An effective use of this tool may help increment customer satisfaction, website retention, repeat purchases, and higher profits, while lowering customers' propensity to replace their known website service providers, with whom they feel connected to (Chen & Chen, 2004; Feinberg & Kadam, 2002). Thus, promoting a long and healthy relationship with customers may increase profits. This is due to the effects of customer loyalty, namely the reduction of marketing costs, and an increased "customer share", ie, a higher percentage of customers' spending that goes to a single supplier (Gummesson, 2002).

ECRM is related to relationship quality principles, which means managing relationships with online customers, adding customer value by customizing products and services, which consequently leads to increasing customer loyalty (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007). This implies interactive value-adding characteristics, such as personalized recommendations and services (Lee-Kelley et al., 2003). ECRM has inspired research in different fields, such as e-loyalty (Lee-Kelley et al., 2003; Rauyruen & Miller, 2007), as we shall see next.

2.10.2 E-Loyalty

Generally, the customer's attitude and preference for a given company or product is commonly known as customer loyalty. The concept refers to "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour" (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). These definitions represent the full spectrum of the concept, containing different dimensions, such as cognitive, affective, conative (behavioural intent), and action (repeat purchase behaviour), which shows its multidimensionality (Gommans, Krishnan, & Scheffold, 2001), which will be explained in detail further on.

In the online environment, this secret weapon is generally labelled as e-Loyalty (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000), which is an important dimension to business success in online consumer marketing. E-loyalty implies a perceived intention to revisit or use the website, or to consider purchasing from it in the future (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Cyr, Kindra, & Dash, 2008; Srinivasan, Anderson, & Ponnavolu, 2002). The concept has some similarities with the "store loyalty" concept (Corstjens & Lal, 2000), by promoting a store revisit behaviour and the purchase of established brand name items in the store.

The first studies in the field tried to explain how to build loyalty for commercial websites (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). E-Loyalty has its roots in the main theoretical foundations of traditional brand loyalty, but it also shows some unique features. For instance, when considering the behavioural intentions, we have to bear in mind the relatively compressed buying cycle time in e-commerce. Therefore, the main goal of e-loyalty enhancement is to transform the behavioural intention to immediate purchasing actions (Gommans et al., 2001).

Moreover, behavioural loyalty traditionally refers to repeat buying behaviour. However, the e-commerce context is more complex. A customer may surf in the internet and collect a large amount of information concerning a product/store in a

short period, and this may influence his/her buying decision. In this sens, we have to consider other important aspects, like repeat site visits without any purchases, and extension of time spent on the website (site stickiness) (Gommans et al., 2001).

In the online context literature, consumer's loyalty and intentions to return to the same website is sometimes referred to as "website stickiness" (Khalifa, Limayem, & Liu, 2002; Lin, 2007; Polites et al., 2012). "Sticky" websites lead "netizens" to linger on the site, and motivate them to revisit it in the future, by creating e-loyalty towards the site (Bansal et al., 2004; Bucklin & Sismeiro, 2003; Luna, Peracchio, & de Juan, 2002). Moreover, the intentions to revisit may result in higher online purchases (Khalifa et al., 2002).

"Loyal customers are recognized as those who believe themselves to be important to other customers on the site" (Yoo, Sanders, & Moon, 2013, p. 676). Some strategies like customization of internet services, or the improvements in site interactivity, generally increase a personal identification with the website, which ultimately improves customers' loyalty (Yoo et al., 2013). Therefore, in order to be succeeded in this highly competitive world of online shopping, firms' need to build and maintain e-loyalty towards their websites, as a constant challenge for their businesses. Consequently, e-loyalty will continue to be a crucial factor in e-commerce (Gommans et al., 2001).

2.10.3 E-loyalty in Tourism

In the tourism and hospitality industry, customer loyalty is also becoming a crucial business aspect. It allows an increment on firm's revenue, a reduction of customer acquisition costs, and gives an important competitive advantage (Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2000). However, "the tourism product in particular has to do with emotional experiences; it is not just business" (Werthner & Ricci, 2004, p. 102). Indeed, personalisation and customization are the eCRM main goals. Therefore, when designing tourism websites, it is also important to give some tailor made options, in order to project singularity and uniqueness in the tourists' mind, being appealing to website users (Jang, Hu, & Bai, 2006).

The web has caused a considerable change in tourists needs, "who are increasingly less loyal, take more frequent vacations of shorter duration, and take less time between choosing and consuming a tourism product" (Werthner & Ricci, 2004, p. 103). On the other hand, tourists are booking their hotel accommodations through online travel websites, such as Expedia or Booking, rather than using brand hotel websites, such as Marriot, Starwood or Hilton, among others, which represent an income that hoteliers are losing.

As we know, when conducting business directly with consumers, hoteliers are reducing their costs with distribution. Thus, hotel managers can have more revenue from customers' booking on their websites, and should try to enhance e-loyalty to their own sites (Kim et al., 2011). Furthermore, investing in their own website allows managing customer relationships and profitability, beyond allowing more control on their prices and brand identity. To achieve this goal, hotel managers need to attract customers to their own websites, by improving their technology and adopting eCRM strategies (Kim et al., 2011).

Hotel companies are using their relationship with customers to provide information, rather than to gather information, using some few eCRM elements. For instance, the UK hotels had no intention of being led online as eCRM adopters (Luck & Lancaster , 2003). In the Greek Tourism context, tourism companies are aware of web 2.0 developments, despite declaring to possess limited skills and competencies for using web 2.0 tools. Very few are exploiting the power of user-generated content (UGC) and customers' feedback for improving their business processes. Instead, they manage UGC to determine the profile of their customers, to improve their customer targeting strategy, for marketing campaigns, and for monitoring and protecting their online reputation (Sigala, 2011).

This shows that firms are simultaneously using a defensive mechanism, by managing complaints and protecting their brand, and an opportunistic practice, by using social networks and UGC to increase profits and disseminate marketing materials. Rather, as Sigala (2011) suggests, companies should exploit this tool for proactive purposes, i.e.,

as a customer value oriented eCRM strategy, in order to build and retain customers' relations, conquering their loyalty. Additionally, hotels need to implement eWOM mechanisms and develop communication channels, in order to connect customer-to-customer and promote know-how exchange (Gruen et al., 2006).

2.11 Expectation-(dis)confirmation theory/model

Consumer satisfaction is one of the key topics in the marketing literature. Several authors have analysed the concept in order to understand the causes and effects of satisfaction cognitions. The expectation-disconfirmation theory (EDT) is a frequent model applied to understand consumer satisfaction, repurchase intentions and complaining behaviours, proposed by Oliver (1980). The author is an important researcher in the field of consumer psychology, due to his extensive writings on the psychology of the satisfaction response. Therefore, we will present the theory starting to explain its foundations and applications.

2.11.1 Foundations, concepts and effects

In the late 60's, some authors have begun linking dis/confirmed expectations to subsequent consumer dis/satisfaction(see Howard & Seth, 1969). Nonetheless, at that time there was scant evidence that would help "to support the seemingly obvious conclusion that satisfaction increases as the performance/expectation ratio increases" (Oliver, 1980, p. 460). Subsequent experiments and surveys have shown that satisfaction is a more complex construct. Despite agreeing that expectations are a pre-purchase aspect, researchers differ on the process of expectancy disconfirmation.

Satisfaction was a target of many studies, some of them in the fields of social and applied psychology. Different authors argue that individuals make some comparative judgments, which are an input to their degree of satisfaction (e.g. Weaver & Brickman, 1974), which was the perspective followed by Oliver (1980), in his confirmation/disconfirmation theory. The author also suggests that the effects of expectation and discrepancy perceptions may be additive. According to job satisfaction researchers (e.g., Ilgen, 1971), this additive interpretation can be framed in the

adaptation level theory proposed by (Helson, 1948), according to which someone perceives stimuli only regarding an adapted standard. This standard depends on the context, the individual's psychological and physiological characteristics, and the stimulus itself.

Likewise, this adaptation level can also be framed for the expectations degree concerning a product. Therefore, similarly, expectations depend on: (1) the product itself, namely prior experiences, brand attributes and symbolic elements associated; (2) the context, including the content of communications from salespeople and social referents; (3) and individual characteristics, including persuasion and perceptual distortion. Deviations from the adaptation level occur when the product exceeds, meets, or falls short of one's expectations. Thus, we may have an adaptation level interpretation of satisfaction decisions (Oliver, 1980).

2.11.2 Cognitive Post-purchase consequences

Until the early 1980's, much of the literature regarding post-purchase satisfaction was linked to behavioural aspects related to complaints and repurchase (see Robinson, 1979). At that time, the cognitive view was mainly theoretical and focused on emotional aspects (attitude). Hence, there was a generally accepted view that other cognitions of an emotional nature may interact with satisfaction. According to Howard & Seth (1969), the post-purchase attitude depends on a pre-purchase attitude, and a cognitive comparison between anticipated satisfaction and received satisfaction. Thus, expectations are belief probabilities of attribute occurrence (Olson & Dover, 1976). Following this view, it is evident that these beliefs might be the basis for attitude formation, and they may serve as an adaptation level for subsequent satisfaction decisions. Those assumptions are evident in the cognitive model proposed by the author (see Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10- Antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions (cognitive model)
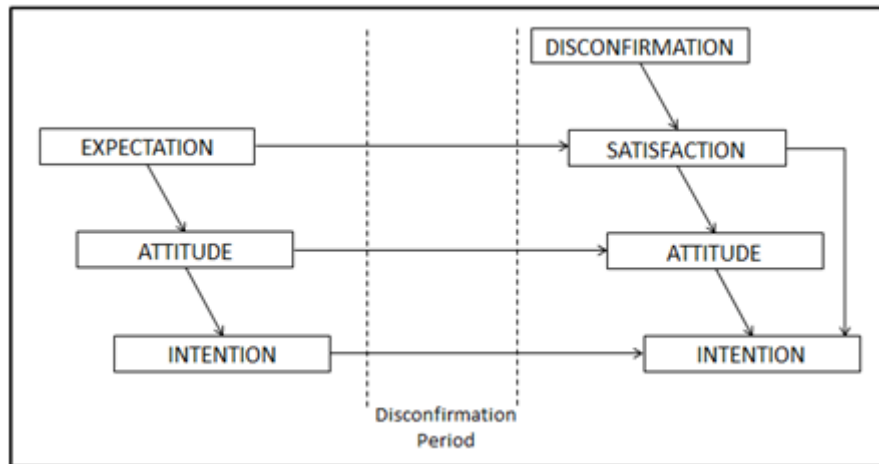
Source: Oliver, 1980

Satisfaction may be a function of the expectation (adaptation) level, and perceptions of disconfirmation. Similarly, the post-purchase attitude can be a consequence of an initial attitude, and the influence of a previous sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1980).

2.11.3 Expectancy-disconfirmation theory (EDT)

According to expectancy-disconfirmation theory (EDT), satisfaction is an "additive combination of the expectation level and the resulting disconfirmation" (Oliver, 1980, p. 461). This was one of the assumptions in the cognitive model proposed by the author, whose main goal was to provide a more consolidated framework for testing the relationships between expectation, disconfirmation and satisfaction. The EDT is an extension of the cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) in the social psychology literature. It was proposed by Festinger (1957) to explain how discrepancies (dissonances) between a person's cognition and reality change their subsequent cognition and/or behaviour. In this perspective, cognition refers to people's values, beliefs, affects, opinions and knowledge about the environment or context. On the other hand, behaviour refers to actions taken in response to these cognitions, and/or a personal evaluation of that behaviour (Festinger, 1957).

According to EDT, consumers judge satisfaction with a given product, comparing it with their (predictive) expectations concerning the product performance. Satisfaction increases if performance is above the expectations, leading to a positive disconfirmation process. In contrast, if performance is below expectations, negative disconfirmation occurs, and dissatisfaction increases. Thus, according to the theory, consumer satisfaction is hypothesized as a function of expectations and disconfirmation, while expectations act as standards of comparison (Oliver, 1980).

In a study targeted to explore the use of Management and Information Systems (MIS), it was found that users who have realistic expectations about a system, prior to its implementation, would be more satisfied and use it more, compared to those users whose pre-implementation expectations are unrealistic (Ginzberg, 1981). Some years after, Lyytinen (1988) presented "expectation failure perception" as a new concept of information system (IS) evaluation, defined as the inability of the IS to meet a stakeholder group's expectations. Some authors argue that users tend to be most satisfied with the information system, by minimizing the difference between expectations and actual experiences lived (Staples, Wong, & Seddon, 2002).

The expectancy-disconfirmation theory (EDT) has been a popular view for measuring customer satisfaction in marketing since its introduction. Despite having its roots in marketing (e.g. Churchill & Surprenant, 1982), different fields of research have used EDT, including service quality management (Cronin & Taylor, 1994), consumer behaviour research (Szymanski & Henard, 2001), psychology (e.g. Phillips & Baumgartner, 2002), human resources management (e.g. Hom, Griffeth, Palich, & Bracker, 1998), or even medicine (e.g. Joyce & Piper, 1998), among others.

Concerning individual-level information systems' adoption, different researchers have also applied EDT, in order to explain users' implementation expectations about an information system, and the likely success of that system. For instance, some identify key constructs and scales for examining the expectation- disconfirmation effects on web-customer satisfaction (McKinney et al., 2002). Others examine the relationship between pre-implementation expectations and their perceived benefits based on post-

implementation experience, regarding the adoption of a new information system (Staples et al., 2002). There are also researches trying to explain the reason why users' beliefs and attitudes change during their IT usage (Bhattacherjee & Premkumar, 2004).

However, given the specificity of the information and technology (IT) context, with constant and rapid changes, EDT may not be the best framework for predicting satisfaction with IT systems, since expectations are based on experiences, while novelty is a basic ingredient in the IT world. Therefore, some authors have developed and empirically tested a distinct model for explaining/predicting satisfaction with Internet-based services (Khalifa & Liu, 2003), e-commerce websites (Hsu, Yen, Chiu, & Chang, 2006), or mobile Internet service (Deng, Turner, Gehling, & Prince, 2010), among others. Table 2.15 presents a summary of IT studies based on EDT.

Table 2.15- Sample IT EDT studies

Author(s)	Focal attribute(s)	Technology
Khalifa & Liu, 2003	Overall offerings	Online knowledge community
Susarla, Barua, & Whinston, 2003	Functional capability, technical service guarantees	Application service provider
Bhattacherjee & Premkumar, 2004	Usefulness	Computer-based training
Hsu, Yen, Chiu, & Chang, 2006	Experience, service level, overall	e-Commerce website
Bhattacherjee, Perols, & Sanford, 2008	Usefulness	Document management system
Premkumar & Bhattacherjee, 2008	Ability, knowledge, flexibility, grades	Computer-based training
Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010	Usefulness	Human resource IS
Lankton & McKnight, 2012	Usefulness, ease of use	Database software
Terzis, Moridis, & Economides, 2013	Usefulness, ease of use, playfulness	Computer-based training
Lankton, McKnight, & Thatcher, 2014	Technology trust	Database software

Source: Adapted from (Lankton et al., 2014)

The expectation-disconfirmation theory "has produced valuable insights into the phenomenon of technology adoption beyond traditional models, such as the technology acceptance model" (Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010, p. 281). Indeed, in the initial perspective of EDT, Oliver (1980) posits that prior expectations and disconfirmation are the only determinants of satisfaction. However, according to subsequent research (see Figure 2.11), the actual performance (i.e., experience) exerts independent effects on satisfaction through its impacts via disconfirmation (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982).

Figure 2.11– Expectation-disconfirmation theory (EDT)
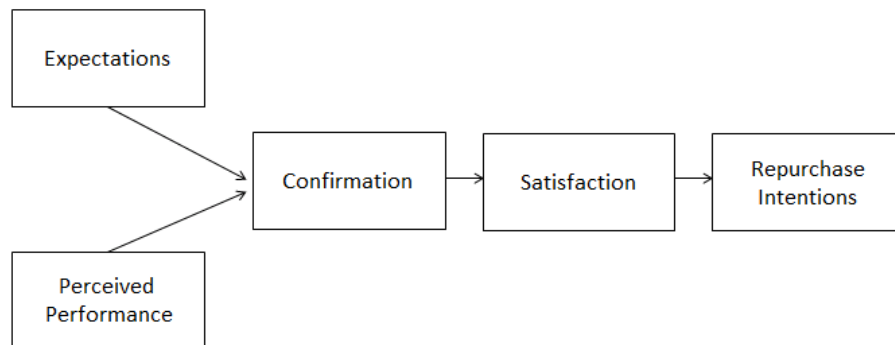
Source: (Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010)

In fact, according to the literature, there are some derivations of the expectation disconfirmation theory, namely the expectation-confirmation model (ECM) proposed by Bhattacherjee (2001), that will be now presented.

2.11.4 Expectation-confirmation model (ECM)

In a critical literature review about consumer satisfaction, we can find mixed findings regarding the antecedents of consumer satisfaction (see Yi, 1990). The "effects of expectation, disconfirmation, performance, and attitudes on CS may be more complex than hypothesized by the original expectation-disconfirmation model (Yi, 1990, p. 88). Some additional studies highlight the affective basis of satisfaction (e.g. Westbrook & Oliver, 1991), that were not well represented in the cognitive perspectives.

Moreover, the overall influence of expectations on satisfaction may be weaker than suggested in some prior research on information systems (e.g. Ginzberg, 1981; Staples et al., 2002; Szajna & Scamell, 1993). Indeed, expectations had a much weaker effect on satisfaction than experiences (Brown et al., 2008). Thus, the "empirical support for existing theories and the emphasis on the role of expectations as an important construct may have an artefact of problems with analysis and measurement" (Brown et al., 2008, p. 62).

As a result, the expectation-confirmation model (ECM) appears as a derivation of the initial theory (Bhattacherjee, 2001), in order to address the criticism regarding the EDT. In the research model, the "disconfirmation" construct appears labelled as "confirmation" (see Figure 2.12). While EDT examines pre-consumption and post-consumption variables, the ECM only highlights post-acceptance variables, namely post-adoption expectations (perceived usefulness), satisfaction and confirmation.

Figure 2.12- Expectation-confirmation model (ECM)
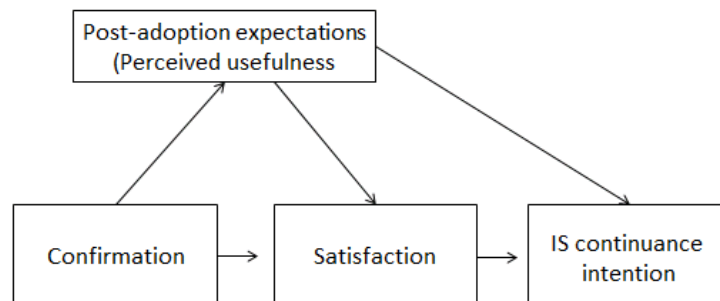
Source: (Bhattacherjee, 2001).

According to Bhattacherjee (2001), pre-acceptance expectations refer to others' opinions, while post-acceptance expectations are more realistic because they depend on consumers' first-hand experience.

2.11.5 Implementation on information systems

An inappropriate or ineffective long-term use of information systems (IS) may contribute to corporate failures and revenue loss. A continued IS use is a critical concern to many business-to-consumer electronic commerce firms, such as online retailers or online travel agencies, for instance. There is a consolidated body of theory-based research on information systems use, namely the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989), the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), the innovation diffusion theory (Rogers, 2003), among others. There are also authors who integrate the theory of individual acceptance of information technology into a unified theoretical model (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). However, "long-term viability of an IS and its eventual success depend on its continued use rather than first-time use" (Bhattacherjee, 2001, p. 351).

According to the ECM, the confirmation or not of the initial expectations is crucial for post-purchase intentions about a product/service. Therefore, the outcome variable (continuance intention) is determined by the level of satisfaction with an IS, and the perceived usefulness of the system. The model is applied in a post-acceptance context, and the perceived usefulness appears as a replacement construct for expectations. In fact, the ECM "emerged from the consumer behaviour and services marketing literature and has proven broadly robust in a number of service contexts" (Barnes & Böhringer, 2011), as evident in next table (see Table 2.16).

There are studies using different settings such as the banking system (Brown et al., 2008), and technologies such as mobile internet services (Thong, Hong, & Tam, 2006) or twitter (Barnes & Böhringer, 2011), among others. Some research synthesizes different theories, such as the technology acceptance model (TAM), the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), the flow theory, and the expectation-confirmation model (ECM) (Lee, 2010).

Table 2.16– Sample IT ECM studies

Author(s)	ECM paths[1]	Focal attribute(s)	Technology
Bhattacherjee, 2001	C→S	Experience, service level, overall	Online banking
Lin, Wu, & Tsai, 2005	C→S	Overall experience and service level	Web portal
Thong, Hong, & Tam, 2006	C→S	Experience and overall service levels	Mobile Internet service
Limayem, Hirt, & Cheung, 2007	C→S	Experience and benefit	Internet
Brown et al., 2008	E→S	Usefulness, ease of use	Common banking system
Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2009	E→C, E→S, C→S, P→C	Experience, service, overall	e-Commerce websites
Lee, 2010	C→S, E→S, C→E	Usefulness	Computer-based training
Barnes & Böhringer, 2011	C→E, C→S, E→S	Experience and benefit	Social networks (twitter)
Venkatesh, Thong, Chan, Hu, & Brown, 2011	E→C, E→S, C→S	Usefulness, ease of use, trust	e-Government system
Terzis et al., 2013	C=P-E[2]	Usefulness, ease of use, playfulness	Computer-based training
Lankton et al., 2014	E→P→S, E→S	Trust, usefulness, ease of use, experience	Computer-based training

Source: Adapted from (Lankton et al., 2014)

Previous research on IS continuance acceptance, underlines "Confirmation" and "Expectation" as fundamental determinants of continued behavioural intentions. However, Terzis and their peers (2013) integrate expectation, interaction (perception) and confirmation into one variable. The research took place in two different times, in order to measure student's expectations before the interaction with a computer system and user's perceptions after the interaction. Therefore, it was applied before the

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[1] E= Expectations, D= Disconfirmation, C= Confirmation, P= Performance, S= Satisfaction
[2] This approach treats user's expectation, confirmation and satisfaction as variables of the same equation

interaction with a computer-based assessment (CBA), and after the interaction. Results showed that the CBA system has to satisfy student's playfulness whenever they interact with the system. This suggests the need to frequent update the system, regarding the information provided, aesthetics, and other add-ins. Moreover, the "main theoretical contribution of this study is that confirmation or disconfirmation of each important determinant of behavioural intention, explains why students would like to continue to use the system" (Terzis et al., 2013, p. 59).

In this sense, despite being a traditional theory and a target of some criticism, the expectation-disconfirmation theory initially proposed by Oliver (1980), and the subsequent derivation suggested by Bhattacherjee (2001), might be a suitable choice for the purpose of this research.

2.12 The attitude-based loyalty model

New models and theories were also proposed and tested by Oliver (1993), showing for instance the cognitive, affective, and attribute bases of satisfaction. Nonetheless, research "should shift its focus away from satisfaction as the ultimate dependent variable, and toward dependent variables such as loyalty and repurchase intention, that may contribute more to the company's bottom line" (Polites et al., 2012, p.9).

Practitioners and academics both recognize a relationship between consumer loyalty and satisfaction. In order to explain this connection, Oliver (1999) proposes different stages of loyalty, following an argument previously proposed by Dick & Basu (1994). Customer loyalty is defined by Oliver (1999, p.34) as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour". Thus, loyalty is composed by a behavioural dimension (action), and an attitudinal dimension, composed by three key stages (i.e., cognitive, affective, and conative). Customers' loyalty level increases through those cognitive, affective, conative, and behavioural/action stages (Oliver, 1997, 1999), which will be explained next.

2.12.1 The four-stage loyalty model

The first phase in this loyalty model is cognitive loyalty, which is a function of previous knowledge or recent information, based on someone's experiences. Individuals develop loyalty by comparing their preferred product with some alternatives, based on earlier knowledge concerning the products/services, its known attributes, performance, or current experience-based information. At this point, one brand is preferable to its alternatives. So loyalty is based on brand belief only (Back & Parks, 2003; Han, Kim, & Kim, 2011; Oliver, 1997, 1999). Some researchers argue that this cognitive stage generally resides on value perceptions involving functional features and quality evaluations (Back & Parks, 2003; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Han & Back, 2008; Oliver, 1997, 1999).

However, product and service providers desire a stronger effect of customer loyalty, since it may be considered weak and somewhat superficial at this stage. Thus, affective loyalty represents a deeper sense of loyalty. Brand loyalty may be conceptualized as the degree of affect felt for (liking of) the brand. It is based on customers' pleasure and fulfilment felt regarding the brand, resulting from positive attitude towards a product or brand, and their overall assessment (Oliver, 1997, 1999). At this stage, loyalty mainly involves emotions and satisfaction, aspects that are crucial in customer attitudinal loyalty formation (Han et al., 2011; Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009; Oliver, 1997, 1999).

Despite being sometimes conceptualized as emotional responses to product or service experiences, customer satisfaction is an evaluation process, based on the perceived discrepancy between expectations and actual product/service consumption experiences, as seen previously (Oliver, 1980, 1997). Emotions are affective responses (pleasurable or unpleasurable), that occur during product usage or consumption experiences (Han et al., 2011; Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009).

At this stage customer loyalty may be affected by the enhancement of attractiveness of competitive offerings of other brands. Therefore, in a company point of view, it is

necessary to push the customers to a deeper level of loyalty (Oliver, 1997, 1999). A behavioural intention starts in the conative stage, and is described as "an intention or commitment to behave toward a goal in a particular manner" (Oliver, 1997, p. 393). Accordingly, it implies a strong specific product/brand commitment, as well as an intention to repurchase (Oliver, 1997, 1999).

Thus, firstly customers focus their attention on the brands' performance aspects (i.e. cognitive loyalty), then they start feeling some emotional fulfilment and satisfactory experiences (i.e. affective loyalty), and after that a deep commitment, where an intention to (re)buy becomes evident (i.e. conative loyal) (Back & Parks, 2003; Han et al., 2011; Oliver, 1997, 1999). Nevertheless, true loyalty only emerges in the last phase, when individuals overcome obstacles to actually purchase, and there is an effective action of rebuying the product/service (i.e. action loyal) (Oliver, 1997, 1999).

2.12.2 Loyalty stages in tourism

Several studies in different areas have addressed loyalty considering some of these stages. Even some consider the entire sequence proposed by Oliver (1999). In the tourism industry there are several researches following this perspective, especially in the accommodation sector (see Table 2.17). Many of them consider that the cognitive phase of loyalty essentially consists of perceived value regarding functional/psychological aspects and quality (Back, 2005; Back & Park, 2003; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Han & Back, 2008; Han, Kim, & Kim, 2011; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007; Oliver, 1997, 1999).

In the same way, focusing on the second stage, many studies have tested the relationship between cognitive and affective loyalty. For instance, in the hotel industry Back & Park (2003) found that cognitive loyalty has a significant influence on affective loyalty, while (Back, 2005) emphasize a positive association between them. This positive influence was confirmed in subsequent researches, such as in a green hotel context, for instance (Lee, Hsu, Han, & Kim, 2010). In those researches, value and quality items were the main characteristics to evaluate cognitive loyalty.

Table 2.17- Attitudinal and behavioural loyalty in Tourism

Author(s)	Loyalty phase	Purpose	Findings
Baloglu & McCleary, 1999	Cognitive Attitudinal	Develop a model that represents the important determinants of destination image formation.	A destination image is formed by both stimulus factors and tourists' characteristics.
Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000	Conative	Identify the factors of image and customer satisfaction that are positively related to customer loyalty.	Hotel image and customer satisfaction with its performance are positively correlated to customer loyalty.
Kim, Han, & Lee, 2001	Conative	Investigates whether relationship quality influences relationship consequences such as commitment, repeat purchase, and word of mouth.	Higher relationship quality results in greater guest commitment, more repeat purchase, and positive word of mouth.
Back & Park, 2003	Attitudinal and behavioural approaches	Investigate the mediating effects of attitudinal brand loyalty on the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural brand loyalty.	Customer satisfaction had a significant indirect effect on behavioural brand loyalty when mediated by attitudinal brand loyalty, including cognitive-affective- conative brand loyalty stages.
Back, 2005	Cognitive, Affective, Conative	Explores the effects of image congruence on customers post-purchasing behaviours, focusing specifically on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in the lodging industry.	Social and ideal social image congruence has significant direct effects on customer satisfaction and indirect effects on attitudinal brand loyalty.
Han & Ryu, 2007	Conative	Investigate the relationships among overall service quality (OSQ), customer satisfaction (CS), and behavioural intentions (BI), such as repeat visit intention (RVI) and word-of-mouth intention (WOMI).	OSQ was an antecedent of CS, and CS was a significant predictor of RVI and WOMI. The strength of the relationships among study constructs was, in general, influenced by personal characteristics.
Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, & Hou, 2007	Cognitive	Examines the role of cognitive and affective destination-image components in the formation of destination preferences.	Cognitive and affective components of overall destination image influence tourists' destination preferences and that cognitive image impacts affective image.
Han & Back, 2008	Cognitive, Conative	The relationship between image congruence and consumption emotions and the possible influence of this relationship on customer loyalty.	The results showed that the model, which links image congruence, consumption emotions, and customer loyalty, was generally supported.

Table 2.17- Attitudinal and behavioural loyalty in Tourism (continued)

Author(s)	Loyalty phase	Purpose	Findings
Kim & Han, 2008	Conative	Examines the relationships among perceived quality, perceived value, relationship quality (customer satisfaction and trust), and loyalty intentions.	Results supported the hypothesized relationships among study constructs. Relationship quality was found to be a partial mediator in the relationship between perceived value and loyalty intentions.
Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008	Affective	Explain the relationships among overall quick-casual restaurant image, perceived value, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions.	Overall quick-casual restaurant image, perceived value, and customer satisfaction are significant predictors of customers' behavioural intentions.
Lee, Hsu, Han, & Kim, 2010	Affective	Explores how to develop the image and branding of a green hotel using the concepts of cognitive, affective and overall images.	Cognitive image components exert a positive influence on a green hotel's affective image. The affective image can affect a green hotel's overall image, which in turn may contribute to more favourable behavioural intentions.
Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010	Affective, Conative	Explores the role of emotional associations or meanings tourists attach to the places they visit, in predicting satisfactory holiday experiences and destination loyalty.	Positive emotional and cognitive bonds with a place could indeed affect an individual's critical assessment of a destination and his/her loyalty to the place.
Han, Kim, & Kim, 2011	Attitudinal and behavioural approaches	Provide a clearer understanding of hotel customers' loyalty-formation process.	Results support the 4 stages of loyalty (cognitive, affective, conative and action), as well as the moderating role of inertia.

Source: Own elaboration

There are studies in the context of hotels and restaurants, or applied to destinations. For instance, it was found that travellers' cognitively loyalty about a given destination contributes to increasing their affective loyalty (Yuksel et al., 2010).

Tourism researchers also highlight that affective loyalty is preceded by cognitive loyalty factors, such as perceived value and service quality (Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008). Affective loyalty has an important role in building conative loyalty, which is the third stage of Oliver's model (1999). A research performed in the hotel setting highlighted the role of consumption emotions in forming customer loyalty (Han & Back, 2008). According to Kim & Han's (2008) findings, satisfaction enhances customers' loyalty intentions toward a restaurant.

Indeed, some studies demonstrate the role of satisfaction, as an important predictor of commitment and behavioural intentions such as repurchase, in the hotel industry (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; Kim, Han, & Lee, 2001) or in a restaurant context (Han & Ryu, 2007; Kim & Han, 2008; Ryu et al., 2008). Therefore, affective loyalty, induced by cognitive loyalty, has an enormous influence and contribution to the generation of hotel customers' conative loyalty (Back, 2005). This strong association between affective and conative loyalty was also supported in subsequent studies (Yuksel et al., 2010).

However, as seen before, the loyalty sequence proposed by Oliver (1999) is only complete with the action loyalty stage. Numerous studies in marketing and consumer behaviour confirm that conative loyalty is crucial for determining behaviour. In the tourism industry, it was found that hotel guests' behavioural brand loyalty is a positive function of conative brand loyalty, that is built through the cognitive and affective stages (Back & Park, 2003).

Han and his peers (2011) tested and validated the connection between cognitive, affective, conative, and action loyalty. The authors examined loyalty by using both attitudinal and behavioural approaches. According to their findings, inertia has a significant moderating role in forming action loyalty. Apparently, "this research was the first attempt to broaden and deepen Oliver's (1997) four-stage loyalty theory in the hospitality industry" (Han et al., 2011, p. 1017).

2.12.3 Expectation-(dis)confirmation and loyalty

As far as we know, very few studies have addressed the expectation (dis)confirmation theory for analysing customer loyalty and recommendation behaviour in the online travel market. According to the literature review, we found a study that focuses precisely on these aspects, using the critical incident technique in the context of the online travel and tourism services (Serenko and Stach, 2009).

The critical incident technique (CIT) suggests the collection of information from direct observation of human behaviour. Different researchers have used the CIT in the travel and tourism context (e.g. Warden, Liu, Huang, & Lee, 2003; Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Serenko & Stach, 2009), in order to explain tourist's behaviour.

Serenko and Stach (2009) obtained 64 positive and 40 negative critical incidents, from 94 users of Expedia, one of the world's largest online travel communities, as seen previously. The main purpose was "to determine the effect of these highly significant events on both consumer loyalty to the service provider and future service promotion through word-of-mouth" (p. 26). They applied a paper-based questionnaire to a convenience sample of 94 individuals. Despite these methodological limitations, it is important to summarize the findings, given the context of our research.

Accordingly, all users had very positive pre-purchase expectations. They planned to obtain the required information and/or successfully complete a transaction online. Respondents chose the online travel community based on advertising, word-of-mouth, or based on a good prior experience, and they expected a low price. Many of them have checked prices for a few weeks, in order to get the best price. The next table (Table 2.18) resumes the critical incidents (positive and negative), the incident cause, actions done during the incident, as well as the impacts on both user loyalty and on recommendation.

According to the results, during the positive incident, most people made a purchase (53%), searched for information (27%), or comparison-shopped (20%). All users expressed positive feelings and perceptions, as expected. The majority booked a

service (70%), specifically a hotel, a flight, or a travel package. Some Expedia users did not make any purchase or booking (23%). Even though, they declared that their online search reached its intended purposes, namely by obtaining relevant information.

Table 2.18- Critical incidents – Impact on user loyalty and recommendation

	Positive critical incidents	**Negative critical incident**
Incident cause:	Made purchase (53%); Searched for information (27%); Comparison-shopped (20%).	Issue with prices (35%); Post-purchase service delivery problems (25%); Issue with information (23%); Cancellation problems (16%).
Action during the incident:	Booked a service (70%); Booked an original item and then an additional item (7%); Made no transaction (23%).	Made no transaction (58%); Contacted customer service to ask for assistance (22%); Contacted customer service to complain (8%); Completed the transaction, as intended (12%).
Impact on Loyalty:	Increased loyalty (69%); No impact on loyalty (31%).	Decreased loyalty (67%): No impact on loyalty (33%).
Impact on WOM:	Recommend the company service (64%); May or may not recommend (26%); Recommend online booking in general (5%); Feel no need to recommend (5%)	Do not recommend the company service (65%); Recommend the company service (19%); Recommend to shop around before making a final transaction (8%); May or may not recommend (8%).

Source: (Serenko & Stach, 2009)

When considering negative incidents, researchers found four types of problems: (i) incorrect pricing; (ii) post-purchase service and delivery problems; (iii) insufficient, unclear, deceiving or missing information provided by Expedia; and (iv) problems regarding the process of cancellation of reservation.

According to the results, a negative expectation disconfirmation generally decreases loyalty and leads to negative word-of-mouth, for most customers. On the other hand, a positive expectation disconfirmation facilitates online transactions, leads to positive word-of-mouth, and instils loyalty in most, but not all customers (Serenko & Stach, 2009).

CHAPTER 3

3   CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

3.1   Introduction

One insightful and rigorous theoretical analysis should be the basis for a solid conceptual model (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Models are "simplified descriptions of a system or a structure that are devised to assist the process of making calculations concerning the relationships between key variables and of making predictions" (Kent, 2007, p. 56). The literature review presented previously explored the current state of knowledge regarding the eWOM concept and the online travel market in tourism. It provided the foundations for the development of the conceptual model that will be the focus of this chapter. However, before explaining the conceptualization of the model, it is important to start with a definition of the constructs that will be measured (Durrheim & Painter, 2008).

The constructs explored and shown in the conceptual model (see Figure 3.1) are present in several researches and publications in top-level journals, based on solid theories, especially in the context of consumer behaviour, giving evidence for a strong

and solid analysis from both academics and practitioners. After the conceptual definitions, it becomes easier to understand the relations between constructs and formulate the hypotheses. Hypotheses are formal statements that present the expected relationships between independent and dependent variables (Neuman, 2011). They are the basis of scientific research, by providing the indispensable relationship between theory and investigation, allowing the addition of knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Therefore, we will identify the concepts, explore and explain the relationships between them, and then operationalize the hypotheses that lead to the conceptual model.

Figure 3.1- Conceptual model
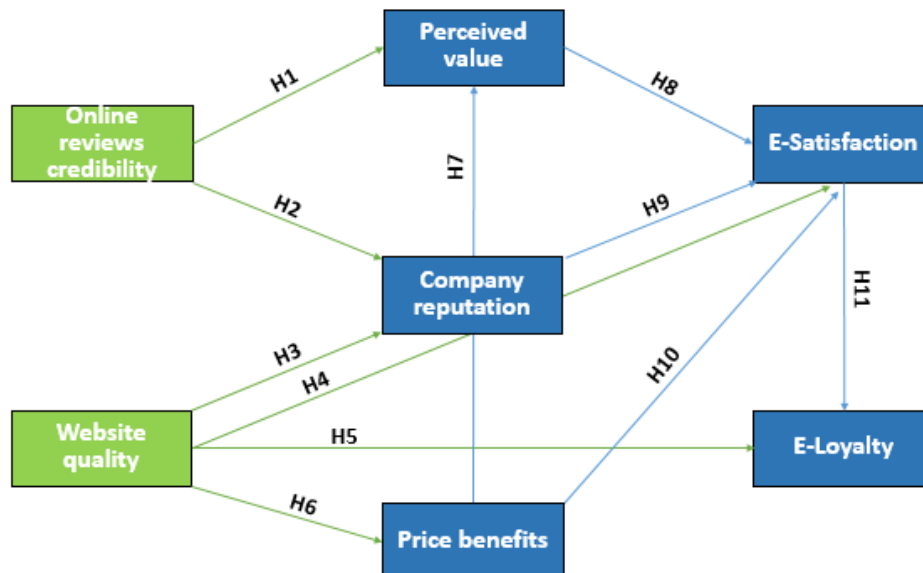
The model integrates constructs with some complexity, such as perceived value, company reputation or e-loyalty. There are crucial constructs considering the research settings, namely online reviews credibility, price benefits and website quality. Furthermore, the model includes a construct that emerge as an important behavioural outcome in the online context that is e-satisfaction. Therefore, the model has seven constructs and eleven hypotheses.

3.2   Perceived value

There is an extensive research concerning the conceptualization of perceived value, giving evidence to the complexity and multidimensional nature of the concept (Sanchez-Fernandez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). It is more than a trade-off between what is received and what is given (Valarie A Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived value is either a hedonic and utilitarian experience, since it involves an evaluative or preference judgement among objects; it varies across people, and depends on the situational context. Accordingly, "consumer value resides not in the product purchased, not in the brand chosen, not in the object possessed, but rather in the consumption experience(s) derived therefrom" (Holbrook, 1999, p. 9).

Beyond a comparative evaluation between what is purchased and the other options meanwhile discarded, the concept involves other dimensions. The PERVAL scale (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001) considers the (i) emotional value (derived from the feelings or affective states triggered by the product); (ii) social value (i.e, the product's ability to enhance social self-concept); (iii) and functional value (an approach based on the utility of the product, sometimes addressed in terms of value for money).

Perceived value is crucial when analysing tourist behaviour, considering the hedonic component in leisure and tourism experiences. Beyond its complexity, the concept is highly sensitive to the tourism experience, since this behaviour is not purely rational (Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006). For instance, perceived value of a given hotel may depend on tangible features (e.g., hotel room size) and person-based service (e.g., the sympathy of a hotel receptionist) (Danaher & Mattsson, 1998).

Indeed, value is an extremely complex and multi-dimensional concept, since it is cognitive-affective in nature, and perceived differently across cultures, customers, and at different times. It can be "experienced before purchase, at the moment of purchase, at the time of use, and after use" (Sánchez et al., 2006, p. 394). However, the real value, or the post-purchase perceived value, arises after the consumption of the product (Sánchez et al., 2006).

3.3   Company reputation

Corporate reputation can be defined as the way customers perceive the firm, i.e. their vision of the company (Grönroos, 1990). The concept reflects the degree of perceived honesty attributed to the company (Doney & Cannon, 1997), and depends on the company image (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). This is a highly subjective concept, that implies impressions, beliefs, and feelings (Barich & Srinivasan, 1993), and an affective or emotional reaction (Fombrun, 1996). It takes time to build and manage a solid corporate reputation (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Some authors argue that it is easier to lose a good reputation than to build it (Herbig et al., 1994).

In the traditional marketplace, firms have built their reputation through media exposure, customer WOM, and branding. However, the paradigm has changed. Cybermediaries such as online travel agencies are now playing an important role in reputation building (Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011). The internet has influenced and transformed the way corporate reputation is built (Kim & Ahn, 2006), by providing various "new" ways to disseminate a complaint worldwide, i.e., to spread word-of-mouth globally. Indeed, nowadays "consumers have the potential to impact the standing of a brand or a firm's reputation" (Sparks & Browning, 2010, p. 797).

3.4   Online reviews credibility

In the literature online reviews can be addressed as user generated content, or electronic word-of-mouth (e.g. Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009; Hills & Cairncross, 2011; Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). These reviews, comments and recommendations provided online, are a crucial information source for consumers regarding product quality (Hu, Liu, & Zhang, 2008, p. 201). For instance tourists use non-media information sources when planning their trips, in order to find detailed information about lodging companies and services associates (Seabra et al., 2007), namely online travel reviews (Gretzel, Yoo, & Purifoy, 2007).

Negative reviews available online can have a huge impact upon a destination or hotel's image, because dissatisfied visitors spread negative comments about their

experiences, sometimes unfounded (Burgess et al., 2009). The negative reviews can be generated more easily than positive (Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011; Swanson & Hsu, 2009), probably to warn others, rather than for revenging purposes (Cantallops & Salvi, 2014).

The online reviews are provided by an unlimited number of unknown participants, sometimes with contradictory information, which may raise suspicious about the credibility of the online reviews (Cheung et al., 2009). Not all reviews are helpful or may deserve the same trust (Lee et al., 2011). They need to be perceived as credible, in order to be accepted by the reader. Some authors argue that online reviews are subjected to a set of heuristics, before being adopted by tourists (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Tourists might be selective and pay attention to comments written by reviewers more trustworthy and reliable (Hu *et al.,* 2008). Therefore, credibility acts as a criterion to filter information in the web. (Wathen & Burkell, 2002).

Perceived credibility of online reviews affects participants' intention to book the hotels reviewed on the web (Xie *et al.,* 2011). However, positive reviews can also increase users expectations (Díaz-Martín *et al.,* 2000), i.e. tourists' predictions and beliefs (Spreng & Page, 2001) concerning the hotel reviewed. Thus, beyond its influence in the way tourists' search, communicate, share and create information, the online reviews can have an impact on customer value creation (Sigala, 2011), which may influence the perceived value of the service provider. Moreover, the online communities have a strong influence on the image and the marketing of hotels. They have the potential to influence consumer's decision making (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Xie et al., 2011), and affect the company's reputation. Therefore, the online reviews may influence the reputation of the online travel agency, or similar website chosen to book accommodation. In this sense, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1: Online reviews credibility has a positive and significant influence on perceived value.

- H2: Online reviews credibility has a positive and significant influence on company reputation.

3.5   Price benefits

Buying a tourism experience online involves some risky decisions. Tourists may choose an online travel agency, a destination, or a hotel for the first time. Moreover, the price paid for a hotel stay includes an integral tourist experience. The hotel surroundings, as well as the other tourism suppliers at the destination, they both exert their influence on tourist perception. We have also to bear in mind some intangible elements, like the destination or the hotel brand image. In this sense price is a complex determinant in hospitality and tourism (Costa, 2013; Verhoeven et al., 2009), especially considering some tourism specificities like seasonality (Collins & Parsa, 2006; Pellinen, 2003). Generally hotel prices follow demand and fluctuate according to the bookings (van der Rest & Harris, 2008). However, it is suggested the adoption of dynamic pricing policies, revenue management principles (Chiang et al., 2007), and multiple web based distribution channels (O'Connor, 2001).

As seen, e-commerce has reduced the costs associated to all transaction-related activities, providing some differences in tourist's buying behaviour (Teo & Yu, 2005). For many e-shoppers the world wide web generally implies thinking in terms of saving money online. Tourists believe that buying online is more attractive than buying offline, considering that they can get some discounts and save money (Kim et al., 2006). Thus, if tourists "perceive high transaction cost in online buying, they will be less willing to buy online" (Teo & Yu, 2005, p. 463).

This may suggest that e-commerce is highly attractive to price-sensitive tourists, for whom booking a room online could be the best way to guarantee a given hotel and its services for a lower price (Quan, 2002). Nowadays tourists opt to buy through a channel that provide the cheapest price, considering all the available choices (Teo & Yu, 2005). There are low-cost airline companies (e.g. Ryanair) or several online travel agencies where tourists can book a hotel room and save some money (e.g. Booking.com). There are price comparison websites (e.g. Trivago.com), last-minute offers, or websites where tourists can name their own price (e.g. Priceline.com) (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

For a large group of potential online hotel customers, price is a key determinant upon online booking intentions, due to important perceived saving opportunities provided online. As a matter of fact, price benefits and technological inclination are key determinants in explaining the internet users' online booking intentions (Kim, Ma, & Kim, 2006). Therefore, tourists who book accommodation through the website may benefit from a lower price than usually practised by the hotel, sometimes a very significant reduction. This may affect the tourist's perception regarding the hotel value. Hence, it is expected that:

- H7: Price benefits have a positive and significant influence on perceived value.

3.6 Website quality

Different criteria were used to evaluate website quality, such as interactivity (Seyhmus Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006), navigation functionality (Kim et al., 2011), privacy, security and customer retention (Schmidt et al., 2008), language accuracy (Qi et al., 2008), among many others. Nonetheless, the most relevant aspects are generally related to both system quality (i.e. website design, functionality and usability) and information quality (Bai et al., 2008; Polites et al., 2012). Moreover, the internet user's perspective is crucial for evaluating the website's effectiveness (Kim & Lim, 2001). Thus, website quality can be seen as "the consumer's judgement about a given site's overall excellence and fitness for use in assisting with the task or goal of making an online purchase" (Polites et al., 2012, p. 4).

The website quality is a critical business concern, bearing in mind the low percentage of website visitors that purchase from the website, after the e-commerce revolution (Polites et al., 2012). This concern is also evident in the tourism context, given the number of researches regarding website quality of tourism businesses (Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010). According to the findings, hotels are not using the internet's potential in terms of e-marketing (Baloglu & Pekcan, 2006). Some hotels are using their websites as mass media tools, instead of using its potential interactivity and one-to-one communication (Schmidt et al., 2008), taking advantage of its transaction and

relationship dimensions (Li et al., 2010). There are also some minor problems of usability found in some hotel websites (Yeung & Law, 2006).

Many tourists are reluctant to book hotels through a given website (Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011), not only for security reasons, but also due to lack of product information and availability, price (Law & Leung, 2000), lack of personal service, lack of experience (Wolfe et al., 2005), and trustworthiness in e-commerce (Kim et al., 2011). Thus, if a tourist recognizes quality in a given website that sells accommodation online, it is more likely to notice and recognize the price benefits it offers.

Moreover, given that a website is an interface with a vendor (Gefen et al., 2003), and a relevant relationship marketing tool (Bai et al., 2003), it contributes for the company's image and reputation (Loiacono et al., 2002). "Especially for online retailers offering products that provide symbolic value to consumers, reputation not only affects cognitive and affective inner states, it might also add positive value to the website quality itself" (Kim & Lennon, 2013, p. 49). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H3: Website quality has a positive and significant influence on company reputation.

- H6: Website quality has a positive and significant influence on price benefits.

3.7 E-satisfaction

Satisfaction implies an evaluation regarding the products' acquisition and/or consumption experience. Thus, customers' satisfaction is an evaluation based on their personal experiences with regard to their needs and expectations (Oliver, 1980, 1997). In researches conducted in the online context the e-satisfaction concept emerge as an important behavioural outcome (e.g. Bansal, McDougall, Dikolli, Sedatole, & Karen, 2004). Thus, e-satisfaction is the outcome of an overall experience and satisfaction concerning a given e-vendor's website (Polites et al., 2012). It symbolizes "the contentment of the customers with respect to their prior purchasing experiences with a given electronic commerce firm" (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003, p. 125).

The assessment of customer's online experience is playing an important role in the tourism field, whether in the accommodation sector, or in the airline industry (Harris & Goode, 2004; Kim et al., 2006; Polites et al., 2012). Tourism providers need to know how their potential customers conduct the online information search, to evaluate their online purchase intentions, and understand the factors that stimulate a purchase. Thereby, they may customize the online reservation channel, in order to satisfy customers' needs, improving service quality and customers e-satisfaction(Kim et al., 2006).

As seen previously there is some ambiguity when considering the relationship between website quality and satisfaction with the website (Polites et al., 2012). Nonetheless, as we know, the e-commerce adoption implies the use of information and communication technologies. Thus, the receptivity to online environment is a crucial aspect in order to form a positive relationship with satisfaction (Kim et al., 2006). However, website quality and satisfaction are distinct concepts.

Many authors consider that website quality is antecedent to satisfaction (e.g. McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002; Polites et al., 2012; Rodgers et al., 2005). Positive perceptions regarding the website and its content increase the level of online satisfaction (Rodgers et al., 2005). Researches indicated that emotional and cognitive evaluations concerning the website exert an influence on e-satisfaction (Ha & Im, 2012). Moreover, system quality, perceived usefulness and information quality are important determinants of e-satisfaction (Polites et al., 2012). There is a positive relationship between website quality (functionality and usability) and customer satisfaction regarding travel websites (Bai et al., 2008). It is not only a question of value for money, but essentially value for time (Buhalis & Law, 2008). In this sense, the website quality is a crucial determinant and the starting point for an entirely online booking experience.

On the other hand, beyond some promotions, special prices or offers, the web has introduced utterly transparency in the price and on the marketplace (Buhalis & Law, 2008). As seen, price is still an important influence upon online reservation intentions

by a larger group of potential online hotel customers. Despite being an important aspect to the new tourists, which are increasingly informed and demanding, price should not be the only basis of competition. As a matter of fact, "price should be tied to value to the customer, not to costs" (Kim et al., 2006, p. 898)

"Thus the price does not only act before the purchase, but after consumption it plays a fundamental role in the evaluation of the overall experience, and hence, foreseeably, in satisfaction and loyalty" (Sánchez et al., 2006, p. 405). The transaction cost has a highly significant and positive relation with satisfaction (Kim et al., 2011). In this sense, any perceived savings obtained with an online booking may contribute to assess an online booking experience as positive or satisfactory. Thus, we suggest:

- H10: Price benefits have a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction.

- H4: Website quality has a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction.

Some authors consider "value as the best and most complete antecedent of satisfaction" (Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006, p. 440). Indeed, several researches have confirmed the existence of a quality-value-satisfaction-loyalty chain, suggesting a strong correlation between satisfaction and value (see Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006). Naturally, tourists may disregard some online reviews they have read. However, after arriving at the hotel, namely after the check-out procedure, they have a more grounded view of the product/service provided. Therefore, the perceived value of the hotel could affect the level of satisfaction regarding the overall online booking experience.

Furthermore, in terms of customer's perception of service performance capabilities, we cannot neglect the important role of corporate reputation (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011). Reputation may be one of the first sources of consumer evaluation concerning an online retailer (Kim & Lennon, 2013). Online travel agents such as booking.com can be an important vehicle in reputation building in the online hotel market (Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011). In this situation, the retailer's reputation exerts a significant influence on consumer's emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses, acting as an important external reference (Kim & Lennon, 2013). Actually, there is a significant positive

relationship between company reputation and e-satisfaction (Jin, Park, & Kim, 2008). Therefore we propose:

- H9: Company reputation has a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction.

- H8: Perceived value has a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction

3.8 E-Loyalty

Research "should shift its focus away from satisfaction as the ultimate dependent variable, and toward dependent variables such as loyalty and repurchase intention, that may contribute more to the company's bottom line" (Polites et al., 2012, p.9). Customer loyalty is a multidimensional concept that represents customer's attitude and preference for a given company, product or service, and a commitment to rebuy or recommendation (Gommans, Krishnan, & Scheffold, 2001;Oliver, 1999). In the online context, e-loyalty represents a perceived intention to revisit or use the website, or to consider purchasing from it in the future (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Cyr, Kindra, & Dash, 2008; Srinivasan, Anderson, & Ponnavolu, 2002).

The main goal of e-loyalty is to transform a behavioural intention into purchasing actions, namely a repeat buying behaviour. However, in the e-commerce context, someone can be a frequent website user of a given company, despite not buying anything through the website. As a matter of fact, we have also to consider the frequent website visitors as an important dimension (Gommans et al., 2001), sometimes referred as website stickiness (Khalifa, Limayem, & Liu, 2002; Lin, 2007; Polites et al., 2012). Consequently, the intention to revisit the website may increase the probability of online purchases (Khalifa et al., 2002).

This concept is very important in tourism because tourists are expecting a unique, tailored and innovative experience, which needs to be take into account when designing tourism websites (Jang et al., 2006). In this sense, tourists are less loyal and take less time between choosing and consuming a tourism product or experience, considering the number of alternatives available online (Werthner & Ricci, 2004).

Therefore, online travel agents and similar websites need to attract tourists to their own websites, by improving their technology and implementing relationship marketing strategies (Kim et al., 2011).

As seen, websites are crucial components for succeed e-commerce strategies for any tourism organization. An effective use of this tool may increment customer satisfaction, website retention and repeat purchases, as well as lowering customers' tendency to switch to another website service provider (Chen & Chen, 2004; Feinberg & Kadam, 2002). Different features (e.g., content, functionality) affect customer loyalty to the website, depending on the website domain. For instance, the relationship between functionality and loyalty is stronger for transaction-oriented websites, rather than for information-oriented websites. Additionally, the results confirm a reverse situation regarding the relationship between website content and customer loyalty (Mithas et al., 2007). Therefore, loyalty results from positive attitudes regarding the website. Different researches confirm the relationship between website characteristics and loyalty intentions (e.g. Caruana & Ewing, 2010; Cyr et al., 2008; Ha & Im, 2012; Valvi & West, 2013). So, in this sense:

- H5: Website quality has a positive and significant influence on e-loyalty

In the e-commerce context, there is significant empirical support for the positive relationship between satisfaction and constructs related to e-loyalty, such as site stickiness, repurchase intentions, and continuance intentions (e.g. Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Bai et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2006; Polites et al., 2012). As a matter of fact, "e-satisfaction is considered an important factor in encouraging site stickiness, or loyalty, to an e-vendor's website" (Polites et al., 2012, p. 2). For some authors the link between them is evident and "intuitive" (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003). Thus, we propose:

- H11: E-satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on e-loyalty.

CHAPTER 4

4 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS

4.1 Introduction

Any research report should include the introduction, problem definition and objectives, methodology, results, findings and limitations of the study (Hair, Bush, & Ortinau, 2003). Therefore, this chapter pretends to explain the research methodology. Initially it describes the research process and explains the data collection. After that, this chapter addresses the procedures used in order to design the questionnaire, and presents an explanation of the statistical procedures used to analyse the data.

4.2 Research process

Methodology encompasses the methods and procedures used to collect and analyse data, and needs to be in line with the research objectives. The quality of secondary data collected depends on the methodology employed to gather them. Incorrect methodological procedures could result on invalid or unreliable results, which prevents its generalization, beyond the study itself (Hair et al., 2003). Within the social sciences' literature, we can find different classifications of research. Nonetheless, the most common classify and organize a research based on: (i) purpose; (ii) process; (iii)

logic; (iv) and outcome (Collis & Hussey, 2010; Jennings, 2010), as evidenced in the next table table 4.1.

Table 4.1- Main research types

Basis of Classification	Type of Research	Description
Purpose of the research	Exploratory	The aim is to look for patterns, ideas or hypotheses, rather than testing or confirming hypothesis.
	Descriptive	Used to identify and obtain information on the characteristics of a particular problem or issue. The research describes the phenomena, as they exist.
	Analytical or Explanatory	Involves analysing and explaining how or why something is happening. Thus, researcher goes beyond merely describing the characteristics of something.
	Predictive	Aims to generalize from the analysis, by predicting a given phenomenon based on hypothesized, general relationships.
Process of the research	Qualitative	Involves examining and reflecting on perceptions, in order to understand social and human activities. It is subjective in nature.
	Quantitative	The empirical observation is the basis for the conceptual and theoretical structure. Thus, is more objective.
Logic of the research	Deductive	The conceptual and theoretical structure is developed and then tested by empirical observation.
	Inductive	The observation of empirical reality is the imput for the theory development. Researcher induces some general inferences from particular instances.
Outcome of the research	Applied	Applies existing theoretical knowledge to specific and particular problems or issues.
	Basis (pure) research	Research from which theories, frameworks and models are constructed.

Source: (Amaro, 2014; Collis & Hussey, 2010; Jennings, 2010)

Concerning the process of research, there are two different and useful perspectives followed for researchers in different fields, including in tourism: qualitative and/or quantitative (Walle, 1997). Researchers could combine both methods; however, they usually select and follow one of these approaches (Jennings, 2010). Generally, the descriptive and causal research design follow a quantitative approach. This methodology uses formalized standard questions and pre-determined response

options in questionnaires or surveys, targeted to numerous respondents. Researchers use statistical, descriptive, causal predictions and relationships to analyse data. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, are usually exploratory designs. They use small samples, and the time of execution is relatively short. The generalization of results is very limited and subjective, because it implies interpretative skills (Hair et al., 2003).

The interpretative social sciences' paradigm underpins the qualitative research, while the post/positivist sciences' paradigm underlies the quantitative researches (Jennings, 2010). The positivist approach applies logical reasoning, precision and objectivity, as a way of investigating research problems, avoiding experience, intuition or hunches (Collis & Hussey, 2010).

Market researchers suggest a qualitative approach for developing an initial understanding of a given topic. This is not the case of e-commerce, eWOM, or the online travel market. As seen previously, several studies have addressed these topics, providing a solid theoretical basis. Moreover, given the practical applications of this study, marketers and tourism providers probably will prefer precision, objectivity and causal predictions, as well as the generalization of the results from a large sample.

Accordingly, this research will follow a quantitative approach, developing an analysis of causality between the factors described in the research model, using a deductive logic. The deductive logic implies the development of the conceptual and theoretical structure. After that, the researcher use the empirical observation to test the model and the predicted hypothesis, collecting primary data, which allows studying the appropriate population (Jensen, 2009). Concerning the purpose of research, the thesis is predictive, since it aims to predict online travel behaviours.

Research is a systematic and methodical process of investigation involving different procedures. There is no consensus on the number of procedure or phases, ranging from four (e.g. Jennings, 2010) to nine (e.g. Veal, 2006). The current research followed similar procedures proposed by Veal (2006) and Neuman (2011), represented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1- Research Phases
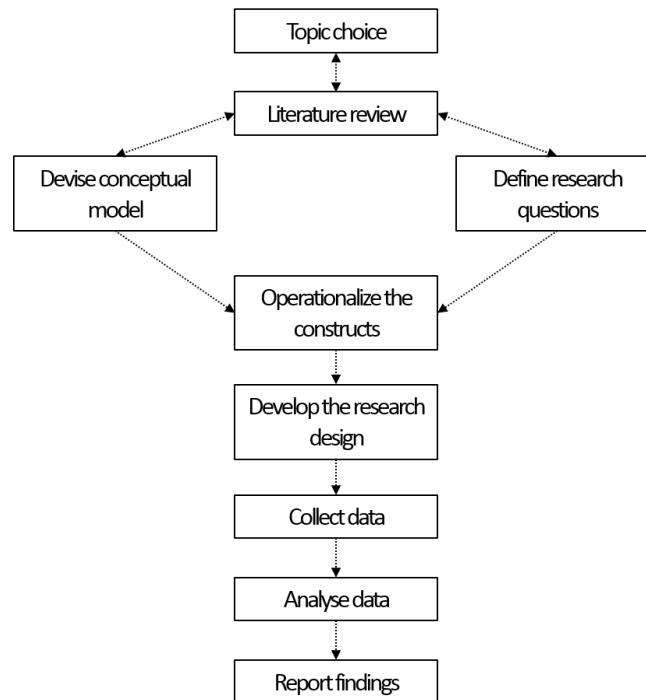
Source: Veal (2006) and Neuman (2011)

The choice of the topic for the present research was a relatively easy process. It arose from the researcher's graduation and experience in the field of tourism, as well as the personal interest in ICT's. The literature review contributed to clarify the topic. The next step was to conduct a literature review, in order to explore the topic, provide the foundations for the conceptual framework, and specify the research questions.

Initially, the literature review was targeted to examine research papers published related to eWOM, as a way of identify research gaps. The focus was on leading journals with a reputation for quality, as suggested by Webster & Watson (2002). The researcher analysed the top-level journals[3] in the fields of marketing and tourism such as: Journal of Marketing; Marketing Science; Journal of Consumer Research; European Journal of Marketing; Journal of Business Research; Tourism Management; Annals of Tourism Research; among others.

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[3] Based on Thomson Social Sciences Citation Index impact factors

This first analysis was crucial for a comprehensive view of the thematic, as well as to identify the research gaps in e-WOM researches. After this initial approach, the purpose of the second phase of literature review was to understand the social media phenomenon, especially the impact of online reviews on tourism. The researcher searched in online database for academic journals, namely ScienceDirect (http://www.sciencedirect.com), Scopus (http://scopus.com) and Google Scholar (http://www.scholar.google.com). Moreover, the Mendeley software[4] (http://www.mendeley.com) was useful not only to organize the numerous papers and conference proceedings, as well as to interact with some researchers and find other relevant papers. Other relevant sources were books, namely related to Research procedures and Data Analysis, and some websites, providing updated statistics about the online travel market (e.g. Statista, eMarketer, or Euromonitor)

The literature review was fundamental for the development of the conceptual model, and the definition of the research questions and hypothesis. This second phase of the research process was useful to determine more specifically the focus of research, namely the constructs and possible influence or impact between each other. One important input to refine the model and the research questions resulted from the public presentation of the thesis project, occurred in 2011 and 2012, and the advices of professors and other researchers. The presence in some conferences was also crucial in this process, namely the INVTUR International Conference held in 2012 and in 2014 in Aveiro, and the 6th and the 7th World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure, held in 2012 and 2014 in Turkey.

After operationalizing the constructs, the next concern was the development of the research design. This stage involved mainly the design of the questionnaire and the procedures for data collection. The next sections highlight this crucial stage for the success of any research (Veal, 2006).

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[4] A free reference manager and academic social network

4.3   Questionnaire structure and constructs

In order to design the questionnaire properly and accurately, the researcher follow some guidelines for evaluating the adequacy of questions and recommendations from several authors (e.g. Hair et al., 2003; Jennings, 2010; Malhotra, 2008; Veal, 2006). Therefore, whenever possible, the questions were expressed clearly and without technical or sophisticated language, to avoid ambiguity. Descriptive words and qualifying phrases were also avoided. At the same time, the questions were grouped and presented in a logical sequence. The questionnaire was written and implemented in English, after the necessary corrections and revisions from a native English speaking lecturer (Appendix I). As predicted, the large number of respondents would be from Portugal. Even so, the questionnaire was not translated to Portuguese, to avoid eventual inaccuracy in the words and meanings.

The questionnaire started with two small sentences, used to: (i) identify the researcher and the organization doing the study; (ii) explain the scope and purpose of the study; (iii) appeal the participation with honest and conscious answers; (iv) guarantee confidentiality in data processing; (v) and to estimate the time required to complete the questionnaire. It also included an email address for eventual doubts. Several authors recommend these procedures to increase respondent's perceived credibility on the research process (e.g. Hair et al., 2003; Jennings, 2010; Malhotra, 2008). No compensations or extra incentives were given to respondents.

The structure of the questionnaire was based on four main sections. The first section consisted of two questions very simple and objective (questions number 1 and 2). It was important to ensure that only the target audience could complete the questionnaire, considering that a web survey might be available online to other respondents. Consequently, those starting questions were important to understand whether respondents were part of the target audience of the study (table 4.2). Accordingly, the questionnaire ended for those who responded negatively to the second question, since they were not part of the target audience.

Table 4.2– 1ˢᵗ Section of Questionnaire

Number	Aim/Purpose	Type
1	If consumers usually read online reviews before choosing an accommodation	Dichotomic
2	If consumers have already booked accommodation online	Dichotomic

The second section (questions 3 to 6, questions 11, 15 and 16) intended to give some additional information in terms of respondents´ online booking experience, criteria used to choose accommodation, type of accommodation booked online, and propensity to write online reviews. Therefore, questions number 11, 15 and 16 are also part of this section, despite appearing more forward, due to the logical sequence of the topics covered in each question (see table 4.3).

Table 4.3– 2ⁿᵈ Section of Questionnaire

Number	Aim/Purpose	Type
3	Consumer web experience and technological inclination	7 pt Likert scale
4	Number of online bookings in the last 12 months	Dichotomy
5	Website/platform used to book accommodation	Open
6	Criteria used to choose an accommodation	Selection of 5 (at most)
11	Type of accommodation booked online	Selection of 1 (6 types)
15	Propensity to write online reviews	Dichotomy
16	Reasons to write online reviews	7 pt Likert scale

The purpose of the third section was to collect data in order to test the hypotheses presented previously. Thus, it was intended to understand respondents' attitudes regarding the constructs, namely how they act and/or evaluate: (i) the online reviews' credibility; (ii) the website quality; (iii) eventual price benefits by booking accommodation online; (iv) the reputation of the company chosen; (v) the perceived value of the hotel booked online; and (vi) the overall online booking experience. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents should indicate the likelihood to continue to book accommodation in the website and/or to recommend it.

Table 4.4 resumes this section of the questionnaire, presenting the indicators used to measure the constructs, the respective source and the measurement scale implemented. All constructs were measured using multi-item scales, in order to increase reliability. Therefore, all constructs have at least three items, while some have six. For each item, respondents had to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, considering a series of statements. This technique for measure attitudes or feelings is the so-called Likert scale. The original scale consists of a set of a five scale descriptors, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". However, the modified Likert scale expands the original five-point to either a six-point forced-choice format, or a seven-point free choice format (Hair et al., 2003).

The majority of the authors referred in the table 4.4 have used 5-point Likert scale (e.g. Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009; Cyr, Kindra, & Dash, 2008; Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011; Kim, Ma, & Kim, 2006). Nevertheless, in the online context, many others have used 7-poin Likert scales (e.g. Burgess, Sellitto, Cox, & Buultjens, 2009; Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006; Wu & Wang, 2011; Yoon, 2002). There is no agreement regarding which one is the best. There are authors using both scales in their researches (e.g. Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2010). In online reviews websites both scales are also used to rate the service providers (Racherla, Connolly, & Christodoulidou, 2013). Therefore, given the purpose of the study, the researcher opted for a 7-point Likert scale in the questionnaire, since it may provide a more suitable range of levels of agreement and more diversified responses, which may be beneficial for the subsequent analyses.

Table 4.4– 3rd Section of Questionnaire

Question nº	Construct	Indicators	References	Measurement
7		**Considering the online reviews you have read in the website /platform, please tell us:**		7 point Likert scale
		Tourists who left reviews are knowledgeable to assess the quality of accommodation	Wu & Wang (2011)	
		Tourists who left reviews are trustworthy		1- Strongly disagree
	Source credibility	Tourists who left reviews are reliable		2- Moderately disagree
				3- Slightly disagree
8		**Overall, I consider that the online reviews presented in the website …**		4- Neutral
		... are accurate	Cheung, Luo, Sai & Chen (2009)	5- Slightly agree
		... reflect the reality of the service provider	Xie, Miao, Kuo & Lee (2011)	6- Moderately agree
		… are credible		7- Strongly agree
9		**Regarding the website/platform you use to book an accommodation, please tell us**		
		The website can be easily navigated		
	Website quality	The information is presented consistently and logically	Cyr, Kindra & Dash (2008)	
		The screen design is harmonious and well presented (i.e. colours, boxes, menus, …)	Kim, Chung & Lee (2011)	
		The website presents different room types and facilities	Kim, Ma & Kim (2006)	
		The website is user friendly		
		The website presents updated content		
		I save money by booking an accommodation through the website	Kim, Chung & Lee (2011)	7 point Likert scale
	Price benefits	The website can provide more discount than offline purchasing		
		Booking an accommodation through the website is an economical transaction		
10		**Please, give us your opinion about the company reputation**		
		The company is credible and has good reputation		
	Company reputation	The brand name is well known	Kim, Ma & Kim (2006)	
		The company's products & services have good quality		

Table 4.4– 3ʳᵈ Section of Questionnaire (continued)

Question nº	Construct	Indicators	References	Measurement
12	**Perceived value (hotel)**	**… please give us your opinion about the accommodation provider:** The people/staff were able to satisfy my wants and needs. It provided good infrastructures and facilities compared to other options I had The experience satisfied my needs and wants It offers good value for money	Gallarza & Saura (2006) Sweeney & Soutar (2001)	
13	**e-Satisfaction**	**Overall, considering the online booking experience, please tell us:** My choice to purchase through this website was a wise one I did the right thing when I purchased this experience through this website This website met my expectations	Gallarza & Saura (2006) McDougall & Levesque (2000)	7 point Likert scale
14	**e-Loyalty**	**Overall, regarding the degree of loyalty, please tell us:** I prefer this website to competitors' website I would visit the website again I would consider purchasing from this website in the future I would consider this website to be my first choice I would definitely recommend this website	Cyr, Kindra & Dash (2008) Ghane, Fathian & Gholamian (2011)	

Finally, the last section of the questionnaire contains questions regarding respondents' demographic characteristics, namely gender, age, country, education level and income (table 4.5). The data collected in this section are useful essentially for descriptive purposes. However, they might be used as control variables, if it is found that those variables might be related with the respondents' intentions to book accommodation online. At the end of the questionnaire, there was a small sentence to thank the effort and to request respondents to send the URL link to their friends and relatives.

Table 4.5– 4th Section of Questionnaire

Number	Variables	Measurement
17	Gender	Male or female
18	Age	Interval variable (6 options)
19	Country of residence	Selection of all countries
20	Education level	Selection of 6 levels
21	Income	Interval variable (6 options)

4.4 Data collection

Considering the topic of research and the advantages of the internet, the questionnaire was distributed online (web survey) and it was available in a specific website (Questionários UA). Web surveys or online questionnaires are an increasingly used tool, even for tourism research (Veal, 2006), and present many advantages and characteristics suitable for the purpose of this research:

- Data collection through the internet tend to be more appropriated for studies focusing the online travel market (Chen, 2006);

- Researcher can reach a significant number of respondents (Malhotra, 2008);

- Web surveys are easy to conduct and allow cost saving (Jennings, 2010);

121

- Respondents can chose his/her own schedule for completing the survey (Hair et al., 2003; Jennings, 2010);

- Researcher can accurately measure response times to questions (Hair et al., 2003);

- Online questionnaires allow faster data collection and encoding process, compared to other survey methods (Hair et al., 2003; Jennings, 2010);

- Errors in data are less likely to happen, compared to manual methods (Hair et al., 2003).

Before distribution, the questionnaire was pretested using a convenience sample of 30 questionnaires, to ensure that the questions were clear and perceptible by the respondents. Given the feedback received from colleagues, students and other consumers, it was necessary to adjust and improve some questions, making them more clear and objective.

As seen previously, one of the purposes for this research was to test respondents' experience using the online booking procedures and evaluate their satisfaction degree. Some online travel agencies (OTA) like booking.com have reviews in their websites provided by tourists' who have made their reservations through the website. Generally, those tourists receive a link by email some days after the check-out, to give their evaluation, comments and opinions about the accommodation provider.

Therefore, the population comprises all internet users aged 18 or more, that have already booked and accommodation online. It is not possible to select our sampling elements from the population directly, since there is no list of Internet users. As a result, it was used a non-probabilistic sampling method. This technique implies that the basis for sample selection is convenience, and the ease to access participants. Convenience samples might offer no guarantee of a representative and unbiased sample. Nonetheless, it is the most employed method in social and behavioural sciences

(Gravetter & Forzano, 2011), namely in the online travel market (e.g. Abrantes et al., 2013; Amaro, 2014; Kim et al., 2011). This method has been recommended by many scholars as a suitable, fast and economical method to get a significant number of questionnaires (Jennings, 2010).

Internet users were invited for a websurvey in the online travel context. The invitation, objectives and respective URL link were posted in online travel communities and websites related to tourism destinations, hotel chains, hostels or airline companies, through LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter or Reddit. The questionnaire was available online between April 10th and July 29th of 2013. During this period, we received a total of 351 valid questionnaires (table 4.6).

Table 4.6- Data collection process (summary)

Population	Internet users with online booking experience (>= 18 year old)
Data collection method	Web survey
Sampling method	Non Probabilistic - Convenience
Data collection period	April, 10th 2013 – July 29th 2013
Number of valid responses	351

The non-existence of univariate normality of the variables is not a statistic that might prevent the development of a multivariate analysis. In fact, the existence of normality - by combining two or more variables - means that there is normality in each of the variables considered in a univariate level. Thus, if a variable has a normal distribution in a multivariate analysis, the same is expected in a univariate analysis. Nevertheless, the reverse situation is not necessarily true (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

The relationship between the number of questionnaires and the number of parameters estimated should be at least 5:1, considering the assumptions of ordinary or elliptic theories. Nonetheless, it should be more appropriate to use a 10:1 ratio, assuming an eventual arbitrary distribution of the variables (Bentler, 2006). The questionnaire has 7 constructs and 30 variables. Therefore, the number of valid responses respect the range or ratios referred.

4.5   Data analysis procedures

The data was firstly analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics version 20 (SPSS) for descriptive analyses. Some statistical indicators were extracted, namely univariate analysis, testing normality of the variables through statistical analysis of Kurtosis and Skewness. After that it was important validate the internal consistency and reliability, evaluating the strength of each factor by determining the Cronbach's alphas. A high alpha value assumes that the scores of all items within a construct have the same range and meaning (Cronbach, 1951). The values should be higher than 0.7, but in exploratory studies 0.6 is acceptable (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

Subsequently, the next step was to implement a confirmatory factor analysis, to test the relationships established from the theory. The objective was to test whether the data fit a hypothesized measurement model. Finally, the causal analysis and the structural equation modelling, in order to test the proposed conceptual model, using Lisrel (version 8.8).

The statistical procedure used to validate the measures developed and test the hypotheses was Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). These statistical models try to "explain the relationships among multiple variables" [by examining the] "structure of interrelationships expressed in a series of equations" (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010, p. 608). SEM has been accepted as a method of data analysis in the most refereed journals in different areas such as communication (Holbert & Stephenson, 2002), marketing (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996), or information management (Gefen, Straub, & Boundreau, 2000), among many others.

Actually, SEM presents several distinguishing features and a lot of potential for researchers. In fact, research questions can be answered in a single, systematic and comprehensive analysis, by modelling the relationships among multiple independent and dependent constructs simultaneously (Gefen et al., 2000; Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, it has the ability to represent unobserved concepts in these relationships, and the measurement error in the estimation process (Hair et al., 2010).

Therefore, SEM has the ability to test the full range of advanced hypotheses, instead of using multiple statistical approaches (Henley, Shook, & Peterson, 2006). SEM is also widely used in researches in a similar context of the present one, namely: ewom (Abrantes et al., 2013), social media (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014); tourism (Seabra et al., 2007); online travel communities (Casaló et al., 2010); online hotel reservations (Polites et al., 2012); hotel websites effectiveness (Schmidt et al., 2008); among others. Consequently, SEM represents a suitable methodology given the purpose and context of this research.

When applying SEM we opt for the covariance-based analysis (CB-SEM), which provides some measures for overall model fit. In fact, the variance based approach, commonly known as partial least squares (PLS), does not provide any global goodness-of-fit criterion (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, in order to assess a model's goodness of fit, researchers should analyse multiple fit indices, namely: (i) the chi-square value (X2) and the associated degrees of freedom (df); (ii) one absolute fit index (e.g. Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) or Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)); (iii) one incremental fit index (e.g. Comparative Fit Index (CFI) or Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)); (iv) one goodness of fit index (e.g. GFI, CFI, or TLI); (v) and one badness of fit index (e.g. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), or RMSEA) (Hair et al., 2010). The next table (table 4.7) presents and briefly explains these key indicators.

The Chi-Square analysis is the most popular index for assessing the overall goodness of fit. However, this indicator depends largely on the sample size, as well as RMSEA. Therefore, it is important to use and combine other measures (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). Following these guidelines, we will present and analyse these key indicators in the next chapter.

Table 4.7- Goodness of fit statistics

Likelihood – Ratio Chi-Square Statistics	Compares the estimated variance-covariance matrix and the sample variance-covariance matrix. A low value of chi-square means that the sample matrix is not statistically different from estimated matrix (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996).
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	The values range from 0 (poor fit) to 1 (perfect fit). However, there is no agreement among researchers about the minimum and maximum values to accept the model adjustment (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Holbert & Stephenson, 2002).
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	Estimates how well the fitted model approximates the population covariance matrix per degree of freedom(Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996). An RMSEA of 0,05 or less indicates a low value for the population, while 0.80 to 0,10 indicates a satisfactory value, and values above 0,10 are unacceptable (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Steiger, 1980).
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	It is an extension of the GFI value. The generally recommended value is greater than or equal to 0,90 (Hair et al., 2010).
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	It is another popular measure, ranging from 0 (no fit) to 1,0 (perfect fit). There is no minimum value, however values above 0,90 are accepted as good indicators (Hair et al., 2010).
Relative FIT Index (RFI)	The relative fit index value varies between 0 and 1. Higher values mean larger adjustments (Hair et al., 2010).
Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	It is equal to PRATIO value multiplied by NFI value. The PRATIO is the parsimony ratio, i.e., the ratio between the degrees of freedom of the model and the null model (independent) (Hair et al., 2010).

CHAPTER 5

5 RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to show the results obtained after the statistical procedures. The presentation and analysis has three distinct but complementary parts. It will start with the univariate analysis, namely the descriptive analysis concerning respondents' demographic profile, their online travel behaviour and experience. Subsequently, the confirmatory factor analysis, which aims to define the constructs to be included in the final model, starting with the analysis of Cronbach's alphas, and the convergent validity. Finally, the structural equation model, using the explanatory power of the ReWebility model, the hypotheses test, the relative importance of each construct, as well as the indirect effects.

5.2 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis starts by showing the respondents' demographic profile, namely: (i) gender; (ii) age; (iii) education level; (iv) income; and (v) country of residence. After that, the descriptive analysis will be useful to examine participants'

online travel behaviour and experience, namely: (i) technological inclination and online booking experience; (ii) number of online bookings; (iii) preference for a given website; (iv) criteria for choosing accommodation; (v) type of accommodation booked online; and (vi) propensity to write online reviews and main motives. Finally, we will present the measurement scales for each construct and variable.

5.2.1 Sample profile

The table 5.1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of survey respondents. In terms of gender, 64,4% are males and only 35,6% are females. The majority of the participants are aged below 45 years old (81,4%). In fact, 16,2% are younger than 25 years old, 35,9% are aged between 26-35, and 29,3% are aged between 36-45. The sample is composed by highly educated individuals, considering that 64,1% of respondents have a post graduate degree, and only 2,6% have 12th grade or less. The respondents' income is usually a sensible question to answer. Indeed, 22,8% prefer not to answer, choosing the respective option. Nonetheless, 34,8% declare a net income between 1000-1999€, and only 4,0% above 4000€.

Table 5.1- Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	% of Responded
Gender	Male	64,4
	Female	35,6
Age	<= 25	16,2
	26-35	35,9
	36-45	29,3
	46-55	12,0
	56-65	5,4
	> 65	1,1
Education level	12th grade or less	2,6
	Graduated high school or equiv.	8,5
	Some college, no degree	4,0
	Associate degree	2,6
	Bachelor's degree	18,2
	Post graduate degree	64,1
Income	< 1000€	23,9%
	1000-1999€	34,8%
	2000-2999€	10,8%
	3000-3999	3,7%
	>= 4000	4,0%
	Prefer not to answer	22,8%

Table 5.1- Demographic Profile of Respondents (continued)

Variable	Category	% of Responded
Country of residence	Portugal	68,7
	United States	6,8
	United Kingdom	4,3
	Brazil	3,1
	Australia	2,3
	Poland	2,3
	Germany	0,9
	Greece	0,9
	Indonesia	0,9
	Macau	0,9
	Others	9,1

When considering the country of residence, most participants are from Portugal (68,7%), as expected, because most contacts of the researcher are in this country where he lives and works. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that 31,3% are from other countries, namely United States (6,8%), United Kingdom (4,3%) or Brazil (3,1%), among others.

5.2.2 Online travel behaviour and experience

As addressed before, the questionnaire also contained general questions, beyond indicators related with the constructs and demographic questions. Accordingly, some questions were included to understand participants' online travel behaviour and experience.

According to the sample (table 5.2), participants agree that the internet is easy to use (96%). They refer to themselves as competent internet users (95,4%), and are receptive to technological innovations (95,4%). Moreover, in terms of online booking experience, the majority are familiar with booking procedures (96,4%) and are satisfied with previous online booking experiences (97,1%). Nevertheless, some do not classify their previous experiences as positive (2,9%) and are unfamiliar with online booking procedures for accommodation (2,3%).

Table 5.2. Internet and Online booking experience

	1.STD	2.MD	3.SD	4.N	5.SA	6.MA	7.STA
I feel that the web is easy to use	1,7%	0,9%	0,6%	0,9%	2,6%	20,2%	73,2%
I fell competent using the web	2,3%	0 %	0,3%	0,6%	2,8%	17,1%	76,9%
I am receptive to technological innovation	1,7%	0,6%	0,9%	1,4%	5,4%	20,8%	69,2%
I am familiar with online booking procedures for accommodation	2,3%	0%	0%	1,4%	4%	21,1%	71,3%
Overall, my previous online booking experiences were positive	1,4%	0,6%	0%	0,9%	3,7%	25,9%	67,5%

Note: the scale of all the variables is 1.STD - Strongly disagree; 2.MD - Moderately disagree; 3.SD -Slightly disagree; 4.N - Neutral ; 5.SA - Slightly agree; 6.MA - Moderately agree; 7.STA - Strongly agree.

The next table (table 5.3) presents a descriptive analysis regarding respondents' online booking behaviour. According to the data analysis, 94,9% of respondents' usually read online reviews before choosing accommodation to stay hosted. This means there are some, even few (5,1%), who book accommodation online, but usually do not read the reviews provided in the website regarding the accommodation provider. The majority of respondents are frequent online booking users. In fact, 35,9% of respondents have booked accommodation 12 times or more in the last 12 months. There is also a very similar percentage of users (35,3%) who reported having booked online 1 or 2 times, during the same time period. Moreover, 2,8% did not perform any online booking in the last 12 months.

When questioned about the website usually used to book accommodation, 67,8% refer booking.com company. Respondents could refer more than one single option. Nonetheless, this is a very significant percentage, given that it was an open question, which means that there were not any options previously defined. On the other hand, the other websites/companies have very few references, when compared with booking.com. Thus, 5,4% of respondents use the hotel website, 5,1% prefer the hostelworld website, and 4,8% opt for Expedia.

Table 5.3- Online booking behaviour

Variable	Category	% of Responded
Read online reviews before	Yes	94,9%
	No	5,1%
Number of online bookings in the last 12 months	Never	2,8%
	1-2	35,3%
	3-5	13,7%
	6-8	4,8%
	9-11	7,4%
	>=12	35,9%
Website usually used to book Accommodation	Booking.com	68,4%
	Hotel website	5,4%
	Hostelworld	5,1%
	Expedia	4,8%
	Tripadvisor	4,6%
	Trivago	2,8%
	Agoda	2,8%
	(*)	(*)
Criteria used to choose an accommodation	Cleanliness	67,8%
	Comfort	47,0%
	Location	90,0%
	Facilities	41,9%
	Staff	6,3%
	Atmosphere	19,1%
	Value for money	86,0%
	Other	9,7%
	(**)	(**)
Type of accommodation booked online	Hotel	74,9%
	Apartment	9,4%
	Guest house	5,1%
	Hostel	9,4%
	Other	1,1%
Write online reviews after staying hosted	No	0%
	Sometimes	48,4%
	Yes	51,6%

(*) open question and more than one reference was accepted; (**) more than one reference was accepted

Considering the most important criteria used to choose accommodation, respondents had to select at most 5 criteria in pre-defined list of 8 items (cleanliness, comfort, location, facilities, staff, atmosphere, value for money). The most selected items were location (90%); value for money (86%); and cleanliness (67,8%). Some participants also included other important criteria to choose accommodation, such as reviews or ratings, free wi-fi, children facilities, design, reputation, among others. The majority of respondents booked Hotels online (74,9%). A small percentage have booked Apartments (9,4%), Hostels (9,4%) and Guest Houses (5,1%).

All respondents refer that they usually write online reviews in the website, after staying hosted. Some respondents indicate that they do it sometimes (48,4%), depending on different circumstances. Among the reasons given in an open question, the majority refer that it depends on extremely positive or negative experiences. A significant number also refer that they would do it if they had time, or if asked by service provider in the check-out procedure, or after an email received with this request.

In a subsequent question, participants face 4 different reasons to write online reviews, for which they had to indicate the level of agreement. According to the results (table 5.4), the factors that generated the highest degree of concordance among participants, are related to some kind of reciprocity effect. Therefore, they strongly agree that, as consumers, they should also provide their advice to others, since they also searched for others' opinion, either to choose accommodation or to decide to make any other online purchase.

Table 5.4 Reasons to write online reviews

	1.STD	2.MD	3.SD	4.N	5.SA	6.MA	7.STA
I like to provide people with information about my personal experiences.	2,3%	1,7%	2,0%	8,8%	17,6%	28,8%	38,7%
I like to share information about my touristic experiences with different users.	3,7%	2,6%	4,6%	14,2%	18,8%	27,1%	29,1%
I also seek the advice of others regarding which accommodation should I book online.	09%	0,6%	1,1%	6,8%	11,7%	32,2%	46,7%
I also seek the advice of others before deciding to make an online purchase.	2,0%	1,1%	1,1%	6,6%	12,8%	33,3%	43,0%

Note: the scale of all the variables is 1.STD - Strongly disagree; 2.MD - Moderately disagree; 3.SD -Slightly disagree; 4.N - Neutral ; 5.SA - Slightly agree; 6.MA - Moderately agree; 7.STA - Strongly agree.

5.2.3 Online reviews credibility and website quality

Regarding the Online Reviews Credibility and Website Quality (Table 5.5), respondents' consider that tourists' who left reviews are knowledgeable to assess the quality of accommodation (91,5%), and are trustworthy (76,7%). They agree that the online reviews presented in the website are accurate (87,2%) and reflect the reality of the service provider (92,1%). Respondents' agree that the website can be easily navigated (98,6%) and the information is presented consistently and logically (98,3%).

Table 5.5- Descriptive Analysis for Online Reviews Credibility and Website quality

	1.STD	2.MD	3.SD	4.N	5.SA	6.MA	7.STA
Online reviews credibility							
Tourists who left reviews are knowledgeable to assess the quality of	--	0,3%	1,1%	7,1%	23,1%	46,2%	22,2%
Tourists who left reviews are trustworthy.	0,3%	1,1%	2,8%	19,1%	24,8%	41,9%	10,0%
Tourists who left reviews are reliable.	0,3%	1,4%	4,3%	19,1%	28,8%	36,8%	9,4%
Overall I consider that the online reviews presented in the website… are accurate.	--	0,9%	3,4%	8,5%	26,2%	47,9%	13,1%
… reflect the reality of the service provider.	--	--	3,1%	4,8%	24,8%	51,9%	15,4%
… are credible.	0,3%	0,6%	0,9%	4,6%	27,6%	52,5%	13,7%
Website Quality							
The website can be easily navigated.	--	0,6%	0,6%	0,3%	8,0%	32,2%	58,4%
The information is presented consistently and logically.	0,3%	--	0,6%	0,9%	7,1%	40,2%	51,0%
The screen design is harmonious and well presented (i.e. colours, menus, tools ,…)	--	1,1%	1,1%	3,4%	15,7%	43,1%	35,6%
The website presents different room types and facilities.	--	1,4%	0,6%	2,6%	9,4%	32,2%	53,8%
The website is user friendly.	--	0,3%	0,6%	3,4%	12,5%	40,4%	42,7%
The website presents updated content.	--	--	0,6%	5,1%	12,3%	38,2%	43,9%

Note: the scale of all the variables is 1.STD - Strongly disagree; 2.MD - Moderately disagree; 3.SD -Slightly disagree; 4.N - Neutral ; 5.SA - Slightly agree; 6.MA - Moderately agree; 7.STA - Strongly agree.

5.2.4 Price benefits and company reputation

Table 5.6 presents the descriptive analysis for Price Benefits and Company Reputation. Regarding the website used to book accommodation, participants agree that booking accommodation through it allows economical transactions (90,1%). Moreover, they feel that the company is credible and has good reputation (95,1%) and the brand name is well known (97,1%).

Table 5.6- Descriptive Analysis for Price Benefits and Company Reputation

	1.STD	2.MD	3.SD	4.N	5.SA	6.MA	7.STA
Price benefits							
I save money by booking accommodation through the website.	1,1%	0,6%	1,4%	6,8%	13,7%	29,7%	46,7%
The website can provide more discount than offline purchasing.	1,4%	1,4%	2,0%	8,5%	17,4%	30,2%	39,0%
Booking accommodation through the website is an economical transaction.	--	0,9%	1,4%	7,7%	12,0%	28,2%	49,9%
Company reputation							
The company is credible and has good reputation.	--	0,3%	--	2,8%	8,3%	35,2%	51,6%
The brand name is well known.	--	0,3%	0,3%	2,3%	8,8%	28,2%	60,1%
The company's products/services have good quality.	--	--	--	3,4%	11,4%	38,2%	47%

Note: the scale of all the variables is 1.STD - Strongly disagree; 2.MD - Moderately disagree; 3.SD -Slightly disagree; 4.N - Neutral ; 5.SA - Slightly agree; 6.MA - Moderately agree; 7.STA - Strongly agree.

5.2.5 Perceived value, e-satisfaction and e-loyalty

The next table (Table 5.7) shows the descriptive statistics about Perceived Value, E-Satisfaction and E-Loyalty. Therefore, when considering respondents' evaluation concerning the accommodation provider, the majority agree that it offers good value for money (93,6%). Respondents agree that it provided good infrastructures and facilities compared to other options they had (89,5%) and the experience satisfied their

needs and wants (95,4%). According to the data, respondents consider that they did the right thing when they purchase through the website (96,5%). They definitely recommend the website (96,1%), will visit it again (98,1%), and probably will purchase through the website once more in the future (97,7%).

Table 5.7- Descriptive Analysis for Perceived Value, E-Satisfaction and E-Loyalty

	1.STD	2.MD	3.SD	4.N	5.SA	6.MA	7.STA
Perceived value							
The people/staff were able to satisfy my wants and needs.	--	0,9%	2,3%	2,3%	12,8%	33,1%	48,7%
It provided good infrastructures and facilities compared to other options I	0,6%	0,9%	2,6%	6,6%	14,0%	36,5%	39,0%
The experience satisfied my needs and wants.	0,6%	0,6%	1,4%	2,0%	10,5%	30,5%	54,4%
It offers good value for money.	--	0,3%	2,0%	4,3%	12,3%	31,7%	49,6%
E-Satisfaction							
My choice to purchase through this website was a wise one.	0,3%	0,3%	0,3%	3,7%	9,4%	28,2%	57,8%
I did the right thing when I purchased this experience through this website.	0,3%	--	1,1%	2,0%	8,8%	30,2%	57,5%
This website met my expectations.	0,6%	--	1,1%	1,7%	7,7%	33,6%	55,3%
E-Loyalty							
I prefer this website to competitors' websites.	0,3%	0,6%	0,9%	16,5%	14,5%	35,0%	32,2%
I would visit the website again.	--	--	0,3%	1,7%	5,1%	21,7%	71,3%
I would consider purchasing from this website in the future.	0,3%	--	0,3%	1,7%	6,3%	22,5%	68,9%
I would consider this website to be my first choice.	--	--	0,9%	12,0%	10,3%	25,1%	51,9%
I would definitely recommend this website.	--	--	--	4,0%	6,6%	24,2%	65,3%

Note: the scale of all the variables is 1.STD - Strongly disagree; 2.MD - Moderately disagree; 3.SD -Slightly disagree; 4.N - Neutral ; 5.SA - Slightly agree; 6.MA - Moderately agree; 7.STA - Strongly agree.

The descriptive analysis also included other statistics, despite not being part of the table. Thus, for instance, in all variables presented in table 5.7, the mode is 7 (which is the number that is repeated most often), representing strongly agree in the Likert scale used. The exception is the first item in the e-loyalty construct, in which the mode is 6, representing moderately agree. The median (which is the middle value) varies between 6 and 7 throughout the different variables. Calculate the mean of an ordinal variable is inappropriate, because data is not normally distributed.

5.3 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

In order to assess the measures' validity, the items were subjected to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation procedures in LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1999). The confirmatory factor analysis objective is to define the constructs to be included in the final model and the measuring properties of the new scale. This analysis will be done in 4 steps, namely evaluate the: (i) internal consistency; (ii) indicator reliability; (iii) convergent and discriminant validity; and (iv) goodness of fit statistics.

5.3.1 Internal consistency

As addressed, Cronbach's alpha is a criterion used to test the model validity and internal consistency. The value must be higher than 0.7, which implies that the scores of all items related to the construct have the same range and meaning (Cronbach, 1951). We should exclude all variables that prevented obtaining an optimal solution. This procedure involved removing a variable in each of the following constructs: online reviews credibility, website quality, and e-loyalty. According to the Table 5.8, all alpha values in the ReWebility model are above 0.80.

Composite Reliability is an additional criterion used to test internal consistency and reliability, and quantifies how well each indicator measure the respective construct. Values should be above 0.7 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988) but in exploratory research 0.60 to 0.70 is acceptable (Hair et al., 2010). In the ReWebility model all seven constructs have acceptable levels of composite reliability, and 0.80 is the minimum value obtained.

5.3.2 Indicator reliability

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the CFA model with standardized coefficients and with the t-values, respectively. The standardized values or indicator loadings represent the indicator's validity and reliability, and specifies which part of an indicator's variance can be explained by the respective latent variable. Values should be higher than 0.7, although it is permissible to obtain 0.6 as a minimum value (Chin, 1998). All indicator loadings are higher than 0.7, except five of them. The exceptions are two items of Online Reviews Credibility, the fifth item of Website Quality, the fourth item of Perceived Value and the third item of E-Loyalty, which loadings varied between 0.65 and 0.69. These loadings are under the ideal 0.7, but above the 0.6 cut-off. Moreover, the average loading size was 0.77, validating the indicator reliability. In this sense, there was no exclusion of any item for the ReWebility model.

5.3.3 Convergent and discriminant validity

The average variance extracted (AVE) is an important criterion to assess the convergent validity. The AVE should be above 0.5, and measures the extent to which the average variance of the indicators is explained by the construct (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results support the convergent validity, since they all exceed 0.50, ranging from 0.54 to 0.73.

In order to assess the discriminant validity, it was followed the Fornell & Larcker (1981) criterion. The AVE evaluates if a construct is more strongly related to its own measures, than with any other construct. Therefore, it examines the overlap in variance by comparing the AVE of each construct with the squared correlations between constructs.

Table 5.8– Reliability Measures

Construct	Indicators	Std. values	t- values	Cronbach's alfa	Composite reliability	Av. Variance Extracted (AVE)
Online reviews credibility (F2)	**Considering the online reviews you have read in the website /platform**			0.846	0,85	0,54
	Tourists who left reviews are trustworthy	0.66	13.01			
	Tourists who left reviews are reliable	0.72	14.64			
	Overall, I consider that the online reviews presented in the website …					
	... are accurate	0.75	15.58			
	... reflect the reality of the service provider	0.68	13.57			
	… are credible	0.85	18.48			
Website quality (F6)	**Regarding the website/platform you use to book accommodation …**			0.854	0,86	0,55
	The website can be easily navigated	0.73	15.19			
	The information is presented consistently and logically	0.74	15.40			
	The screen design is harmonious and well presented (i.e. colours, boxes, …)	0.76	16.03			
	The website is user friendly	0.82	17.84			
	The website presents updated content	0.66	13.26			
Price benefits (F9)	I save money by booking accommodation through the website	0.74	14.59	0.802	0,80	0,58
	The website can provide more discount than offline purchasing	0.80	16.06			
	Booking accommodation through the website is an economical transaction	0.74	14.69			
Company reputation (F12)	**Please, give us your opinion about the company reputation**			0.833	0,84	0,63
	The company is credible and has good reputation	0.86	18.79			
	The brand name is well known	0.71	14.52			
	The company's products & services have good quality	0.81	17.24			
Perceived value (F15)	**Please give us your opinion about the accommodation provider**			0.869	0,87	0,64
	The people/staff were able to satisfy my wants and needs.	0.83	18.27			
	It provided good infrastructures and facilities compared to other options I had	0.78	16.90			
	The experience satisfied my needs and wants	0.91	21.38			
	It offers good value for money	0.65	13.07			
e-Satisfaction (F13)	**Overall, considering the online booking experience, please tell us**			0.884	0,89	0,73
	My choice to purchase through this website was a wise one	0.81	18.00			
	I did the right thing when I purchased this experience through this website	0.94	22.65			
	This website met my expectations	0.80	17.62			
e-Loyalty (F14)	**Overall, regarding the degree of loyalty, please tell us**			0.845	0,87	0,62
	I would visit the website again	0.82	18.06			
	I would consider purchasing from this website in the future	0.73	15.29			
	I would consider this website to be my first choice	0.69	14.26			
	I would definitely recommend this website	0.89	20.61			

Figure 5.1. Confirmatory factor analysis (standardized values)

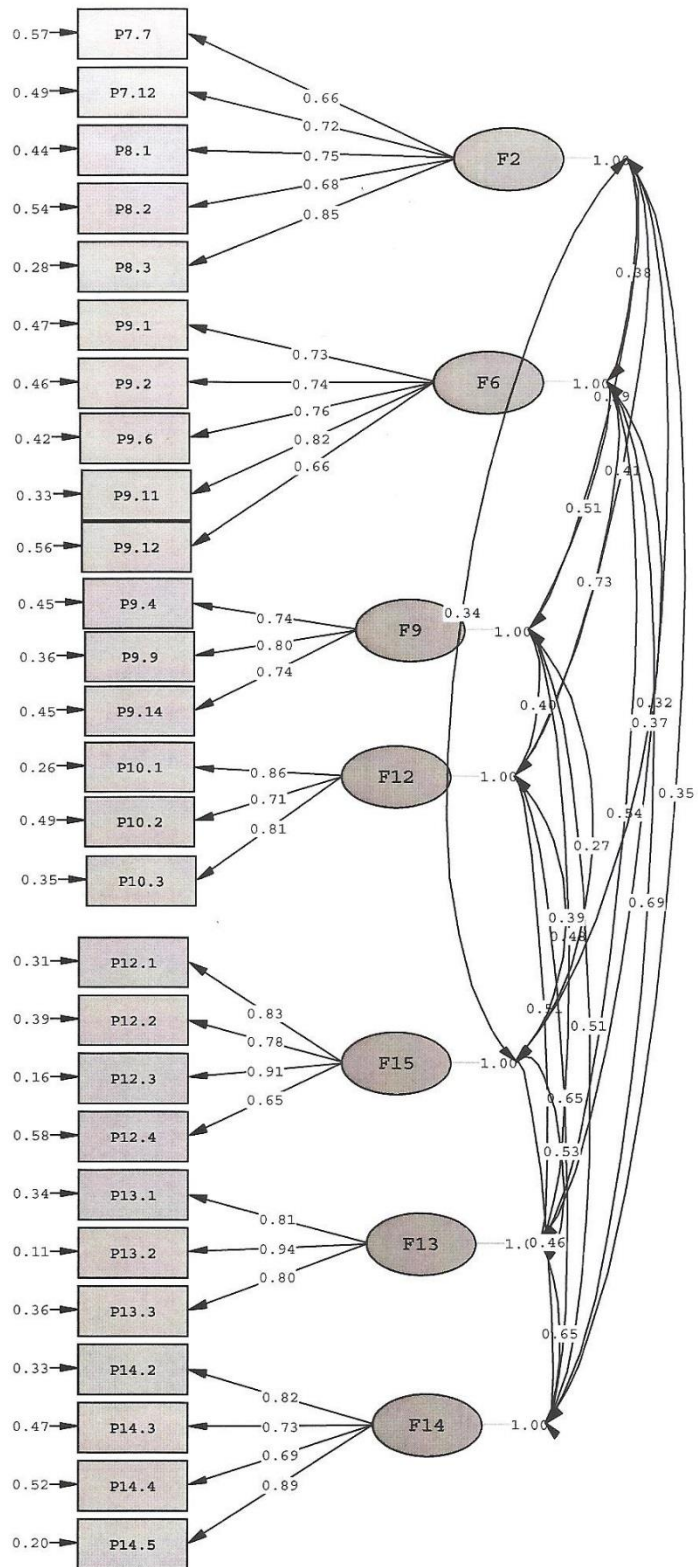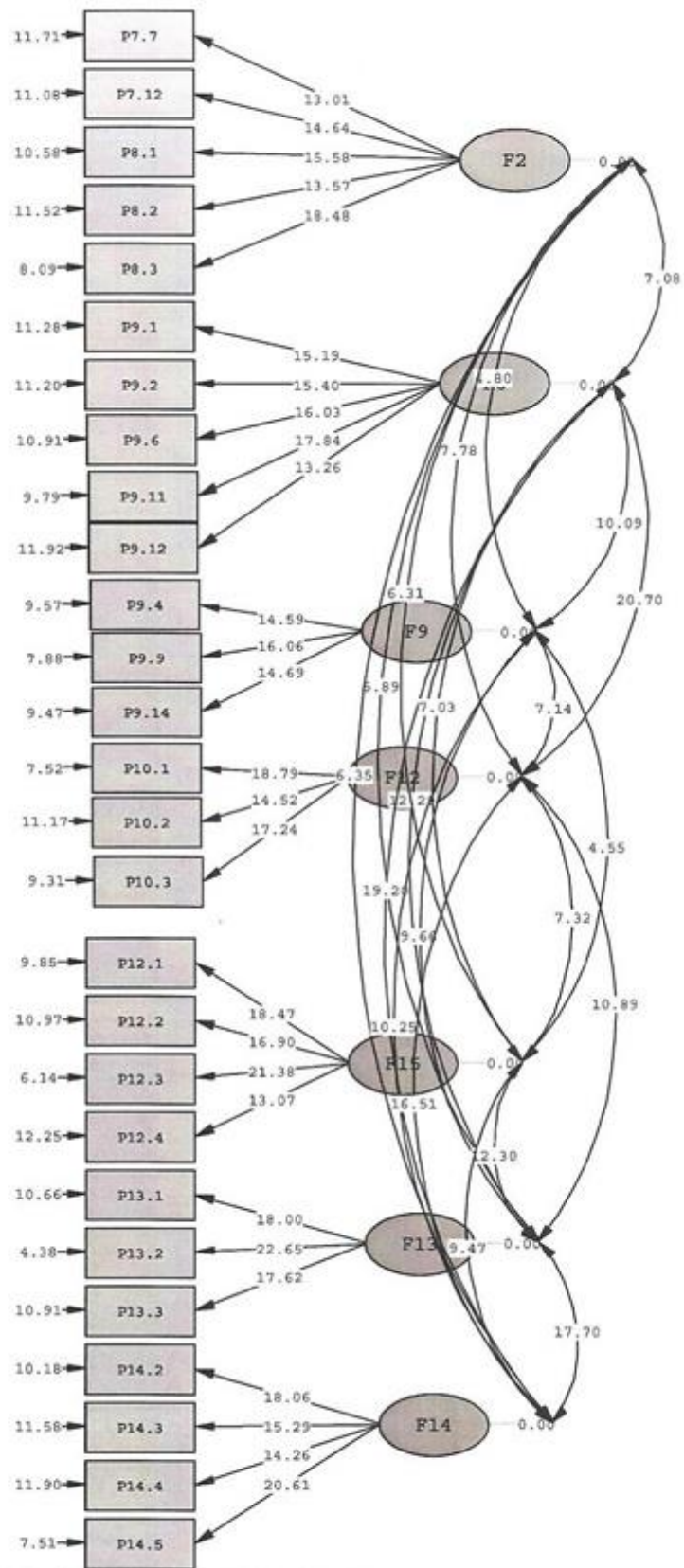Chi-Square=891.48, df=303, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.074

139

Figure 5.2. Confirmatory factor analysis (t-values)

Chi-Square=891.48, df=303, P-value=0.00000, RMSEA=0.074

The next table (table 5.9) presents the correlation matrix of independent variables, where the diagonal elements are the square roots of AVEs. The square root of each construct's AVE is larger than its correlations with any other construct. Moreover, each indicator do not have a stronger connection with another construct, supporting the discriminant validity of the scales (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Table 5.9– Correlation matrix of independent variables

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1- Online reviews credibility	0.54						
2- Website quality	0.38	0.55					
3- Price benefits	0.29	0.51	0.58				
4- Company reputation	0.41	0.73	0.40	0.63			
5- Perceived value	0.32	0.54	0.48	0.51	0.64		
6- E-Satisfaction	0.35	0.69	0.51	0.65	0.65	0.73	
7- E-Loyalty	0.34	0.37	0.27	0.39	0.53	0.46	0.62

5.3.4 Goodness of fit statistics

All constructs have passed the different criteria validating the internal consistency, the indicators' reliability, the convergent validity, and finally the discriminant validity. The chi-square for the ReWebility model is significant (X2= 891.48, df=303, p<0.00, and X2/DF<3). However, the chi-square statistic is sensitive to sample size. Therefore, we need to assess additional fit indices, such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Incremental Fit Index (IFI). The CFI and IFI of this model is 0.96, for both indicators.

In order to estimate how well the fitted model approximates the population covariance matrix per degree of freedom(Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996), we also assessed the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), which assesses fit and incorporates a penalty for lack of parsimony. An RMSEA of 0,05 or less indicates a low value for the population, while 0.80 to 0.10 indicates a satisfactory value, and any score over 0.10 indicates an unacceptable fit (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Steiger, 1980). The RMSEA of this measurement model is 0.074 (see table 5.10).

Table 5.10 CFA - Goodness of Fit Statistics

Likelihood – Ratio Chi-Square Statistics	891,48
Degrees of Freedom (df)	303
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0,074
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0,96
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0,96
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0,84
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0,80
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0,061
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0,94
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	0,93
Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	0,81

When considering all the values or criteria discussed above, the only that may be slightly below the recommendations is the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). However, it is a very sensitive indicator and depends on the sample size. Moreover, there are no "magic" values for each indicator in order to accept or reject the model. The quality of fit depends heavily on model characteristics, including sample size and model complexity. Simple models with small samples, should analyse the data based on strict fit standards. On the other hand, larger samples and more complex models, should not use strict rules (Hair et al., 2010).

5.4   Structural equation model estimation

The structural equation model was the procedure chosen to estimate the conceptual model, using FIML estimation technique in LISREL 8.80. Firstly it was evaluated the explanatory power of the model, followed by the analysis regarding the level of support of each hypothesis. Finally, it was evaluated the relative importance of each construct and the indirect effects.

5.4.1 Explanatory power of the model

Figure 5.3 shows the structural equation model, the standardized coefficients, and the t-values. The ReWebility model contains seven constructs, and twenty-seven observable indicators, measurement and latent variable errors, and inter-correlations between the latent constructs. Table 5.11 resumes the Goodness of Fit Statistics after SEM. According to it, the model has a chi-square of 923,96 (X2= 923.96, df=312, p<0.00, and X2/DF<3). The additional parameters suggest a good model fit (NFI=0.94; PNFI=0.84; CFI=0.96; IFI=0.96; RMSEA=0.075). Therefore, the ReWebility model reproduces the population covariance structure, and the observed and predicted covariance matrices have an acceptable discrepancy between them.

Table 5.11 SEM - Goodness of Fit Statistics

Likelihood – Ratio Chi-Square Statistics	923,96
Degrees of Freedom (df)	312
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0,075
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0,96
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0,96
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0,84
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0,80
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0,074
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0,94
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	0,93
Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	0,84

Figure 5.3 The ReWebility model
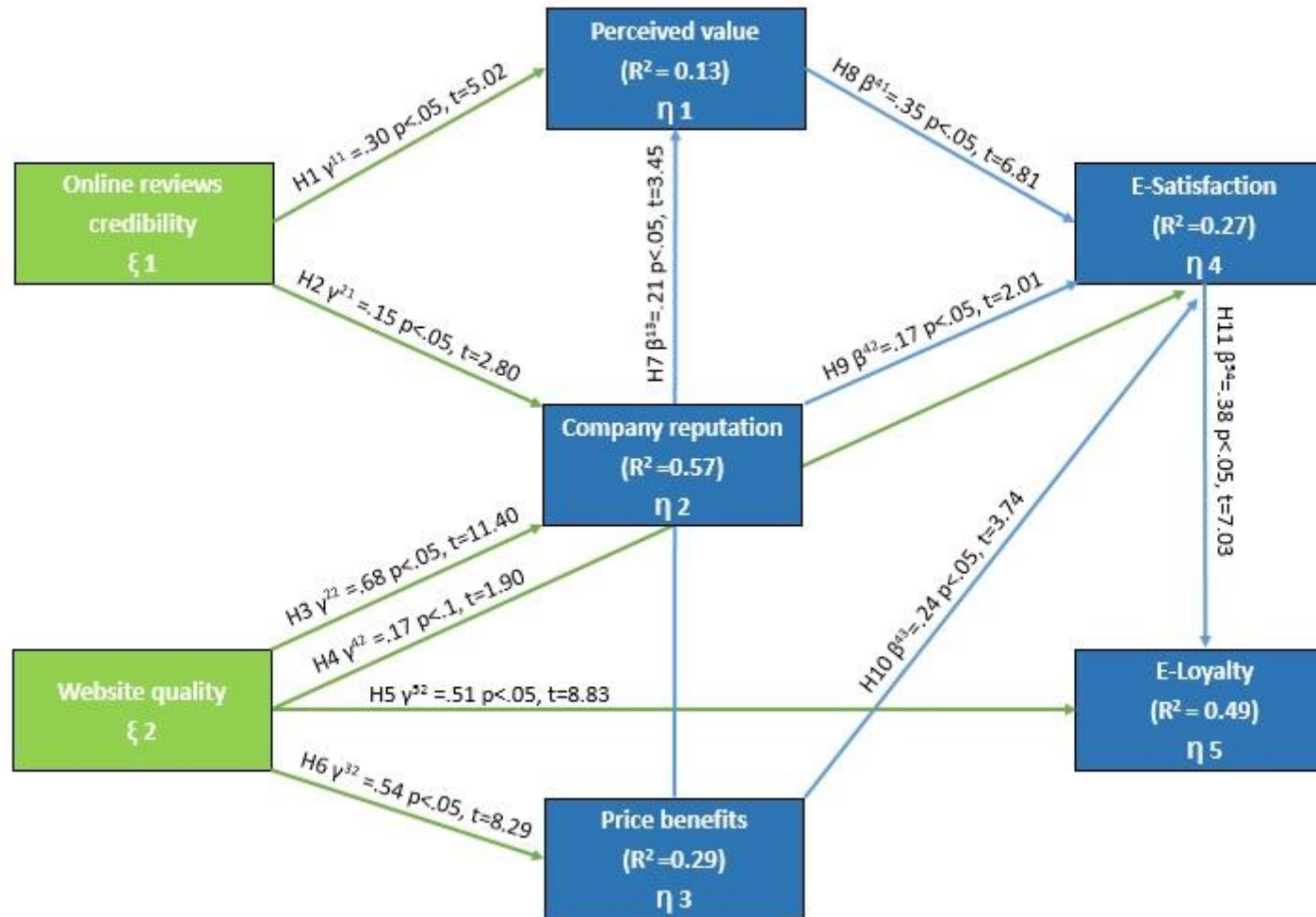
5.4.2 Level of support of the hypotheses.

All constructs passed the different criteria, showing internal consistency and model validity. Hypothesis 1 indicated that online reviews' credibility would have a positive influence on perceived value. Moreover hypothesis 2 indicated that online reviews' credibility would have a positive influence on company reputation. According to the result both relationships are significant, supporting H1 (γ^{11}=.30 p<.05, t=5.02) and H2 ($\gamma 21$=.15 p<.05, t=2.80).

Hypothesis 3 argued that website quality would have a positive influence on company reputation. Moreover hypothesis 4 indicated that website quality would have a positive influence on e-satisfaction. The relationships were significant, confirming both hypotheses, i.e., H3 (γ^{22}=.68 p<.05, t=11.40) and H4 (γ^{42}= .17 p<.1 t=1.90).

Hypothesis 5 suggested that e-loyalty would be positively influenced by website quality. On the other hand, hypothesis 6 suggested that website quality would have a positive influence on price benefits. Both hypothesis were supported, i.e. H5 (γ^{52}= .51 p<.05 t=8.83) and H6 (γ^{32}=.54 p<.05, t=8.29).

Hypothesis 7 pointed out that price benefits would have a positive influence on perceived value. The findings confirm that price benefits obtained by booking accommodation online has a positive and significant impact in the perceived value of the hotel reviewed and booked. So H7 was supported (β^{13}=.21 p<.05, t=3.45).

Hypothesis 8 stated that perceived value would have a positive influence on e-satisfaction. The results confirmed H8 (β^{41}=.35 p<.05, t=6.81). Hypotheses 9 (β^{42}=.17 p<.05, t=2.01) and 10 (β^{43}=.24 p<.05, t=3.74) were both supported. The first one stated that company reputation would have a positive influence on e-satisfaction. Hypothesis 10 suggested that price benefits would have a positive influence on e-satisfaction.

Finally, hypothesis 11 indicated that e-loyalty would be positively influenced by e-satisfaction. The results confirm also H11 (β^{54}=.38 p<.05, t=7.03). In this sense the results supported all the hypotheses defined for the ReWebility model.

5.4.3 Relative importance of each construct and indirect effects

One of the main advantages of using a causal relationship model is the ability to estimate not only the direct effect, but also the indirect and total effects among latent variables (Lages & Lages, 2004; Seabra et al., 2007). Table 5.12 shows that all indirect effects are statistically significant, which reinforces in a more sustained way the final model. Therefore, price benefits has direct (.24 p<.05 t=3.74) and indirect effects (.08 p<.05 t=3.18) on e-satisfaction, reinforcing the overall effect (.32 p<.05 t=4.68). Website quality has direct (.17 p<.1 t=1.90) and indirect effects (.28 p<.05 t=3.94) on e-satisfaction, which reinforces the overall effect (.46 p<.05 t=7.97). The same is true regarding the relationship between website quality and e-loyalty. Thus, website quality has direct (.51 p<.05 t=8.83) and indirect effects (.18 p<.05 t=5.73) on e-loyalty, significant and positive, reinforcing the overall effect (.68 p<.05 t=11.80).

Additionally, e-loyalty has indirect effects with several constructs, namely regarding online reviews credibility (.05 p<.05 t=3.74), price benefits (.12 p<.05 t=3.92), company reputation (.06 p<.05 t=1.91), and perceived value (.14 p<.05 t=5.08). There are also indirect effects between e-satisfaction and online reviews credibility (.13 p<.05 t=4.39), as well as between perceived value and website quality (.11 p<.05 t=3.29).

On the other hand, in terms of variance explained and according to Figure 5.3 presented previously, website quality explains 29 per cent of price benefit's variance. Online reviews credibility and website quality they both explain 57 per cent of company's reputation variance. The percentage of variance in perceived value, explained by its antecedents, is 13 per cent. Moreover, in the same sense, the variance in e-Satisfaction and e-Loyalty explained by their respective antecedents, is 27 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively.

We can highlight other important findings, when comparing the standardized values and the t-values between constructs. Therefore, regarding the principal determinant of company reputation, according to the results, the most relevant is website quality (γ^{22}=.68 p<.05, t=11.40), rather than online reviews credibility (γ^{21}=.15 p<.05, t=2.80). In the same sense, the principal component of perceived value is online reviews credibility (γ^{11}=.30 p<.05, t=5.02), which has a stronger effect rather than price benefits (β^{13}=.21 p<.05, t=3.45). Moreover, in terms of e-satisfaction, we can conclude that perceived value has a stronger effect on it (β^{41}=.35 p<.05, t=6.81), when compared to price benefits (β^{43}=.24 p<.05, t=3.74), company reputation (β^{42}=.17 p<.05, t=2.01), and website quality (γ^{42}=.17 p<.1, t=1.90).

The principal determinant of e-loyalty is website quality (γ^{52}=.51p<.05, t=8.83), rather than e-satisfaction (β^{54}=.38 p<.05, t=7.03). Finally, in the ReWebility model website quality is the unique determinant of price benefits (γ^{32}=.54p<.05, t=8.29).

Table 5.12 Direct and indirect effects

Effects of/on	Online reviews credibility ξ¹			Website quality ξ²			Perceived value η1			Company reputation η2			Price benefits η3			E-Satisfaction η4			E-Loyalty value η5		
	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total	Direct	Indirect	Total
Online reviews Credibility ξ¹							0.30		0.30	0.15		0.15									
							5.02		5.02	2.80		2.80									
Website Quality ξ²							0.68		0.68	0.54		0.54	0.17	0.28	0.46	0.51	0.18	0.68			
							11.40		11.40	8.29		8.29	1.90	3.94	7.97	8.83	5.73	11.80			
Perceived value η1					0.11	0.11										0.35		0.35			
					3.29	3.29										6.81		6.81			
Company Reputation η2																0.17		0.17			
																2.01		2.01			
Price Benefits η3							0.21		0.21							0.24	0.08	0.32			
							3.45		3.45							3.74	3.18	4.68			
E-Satisfaction η4		0.13	0.13																0.38		0.38
		4.39	4.39																7.03		7.03
E-Loyalty η5		0.05	0.05					0.14	0.14		0.06	0.06		0.12	0,12						
		3.74	3.74					5.08	5.08		1.91	1.91		3.92	3,92						

Note: The first values in each cell are the standardized values, followed by the t-values

CHAPTER 6

6   DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present research was motivated by a desire to gain a better understanding of the impact of online reviews on tourist's decision-making process. As previously defined during this work (i) the development of social media technologies, (ii) the exponential grow of the online travel market, ((iii) the new tourist's needs and demands, and (iv) the credibility given to the online reviews, give evidence of the importance and topicality of this research.

As previously observed in this research, the social media technologies have a huge impact in tourists' day life, and represent "the right spot" to obtain and share information, experiences and preferences among consumers. Nowadays the online reviews are a reliable and trustworthy source of information for tourists, which are increasingly informed and demanding, expecting a more unique and tailored experience. On the other hand, the online travel sales represent a considerable market share, which will quickly reach half of the total travel sales. Countries like Brazil, China, India and Mexico are presenting an impressive growth in terms of digital travel sales, but the Asia Pacific and Latin America regions will represent the next "pot of gold" for investors.

In this sense, we employed a website-based approach in order to understand the online reviews posted in different travel websites, for tourists who seek information. Our findings offer insights into these topics, providing significant implications for tourism providers, especially hotel companies. The present chapter highlights the theoretical and managerial contributions, as well as the limitations and guidelines for future research.

6.1   Theoretical implications

For the present research we adopted the expectation disconfirmation theory (Oliver (1980) and the attitude-based loyalty model (Oliver, 1999) as theoretical backgrounds. Satisfaction and loyalty emerge as important dimensions in each of the theories mentioned. To some extend in our research e-satisfaction is a key element, and e-loyalty represents the outcome of the ReWebility model. As far as we know, this study was precursor one applying to both theories in the context of online travel market. Therefore, these theories, although originally proposed in the 80's and 90's, are still updated, providing an important background to understand the specificities of the consumer behaviour in the digital era. Nonetheless, the ReWebility model suggests an improvement to the expectation-disconfirmation theory. Accordingly, company reputation has a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction. Therefore, based on Oliver's model (1980), expectations (online reviews credibility) and perceived performance (website quality) impact on confirmation (reputation), which in turn influence satisfaction (e-satisfaction) and repurchase intentions (e-loyalty). Moreover, in the digital context the website quality has a direct, positive and significant impact on e-satisfaction and on e-loyalty.

We confirm the relationship between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty, previously supported by various researchers (e.g. Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Bai et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2006; Polites et al., 2012). Therefore, the higher the overall satisfaction concerning the online booking experience, the higher the tendency to recommend or visit the website again, to consider purchasing through it in the future, or even to define it as the first choice for online booking procedures.

The results show that website quality, price benefits, company reputation and perceived value have a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction. Thus, in order to be considered as the right choice or a wisdom choice, providing the expectations fulfilment, i.e., to obtain e-satisfaction experiences, a travel website that provides guests reviews and allows booking accommodation online, needs to increase or assure:

- its design, operational efficiency and user friendliness, providing appropriate and updated information concerning its products/services;

- the discounts or price reductions, allowing tourists to save money;

- the company's reputation, credibility, brand awareness and product's quality;

- the hotel's perceived value in terms of infrastructures, facilities and staff competence, providing an excellent experience, and a good choice in terms of value for money invested;

In line with the research of Gallarza & Gil Saura (2006, p. 440) value is "the best and most complete antecedent of satisfaction", and we confirm that assumption. Indeed, perceived value is the stronger determinant of e-satisfaction, when compared to price benefits, company reputation and website quality. On the other hand, the previous results contribute to clarify some ambiguity when considering the relationship between website quality and satisfaction. More than being different constructs, the results confirm that website quality is antecedent to satisfaction, as suggested by other researches (e.g. McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002; Polites et al., 2012; Rodgers et al., 2005).

This research tests and suggests the "ReWebility" model as an important basis for understanding e-consumer behaviour, emphasising credibility and reputation as important dimensions for the website context. In fact, credibility and reputation are key influences of consumer evaluation regarding an online retailer, as seen previously (e.g. Kim & Lennon, 2013; Wu & Wang, 2011; Xie et al., 2011; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011). Our findings show that the online reviews' credibility has a positive influence

on company's reputation, which in turn influences e-satisfaction. Therefore, in order to increase the tourists' perception regarding company's overall reputation, its product quality and brand awareness, it is necessary assure the accuracy, reliability, credibility and trustworthiness of the online reviews, and of those who have posted them. Therefore, the present research suggests a chain between online reviews credibility, company reputation, e-satisfaction and e-loyaty. We believe that this sequence can be the basis for further investigations related to consumer behaviour in online settings.

The existence of a link between value, satisfaction and loyalty was already tested and supported in a travel-related background (e.g. Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006). As seen, the present research confirm the relationship between the referred constructs, applied in the online context. However, giving the importance of credibility in the web, the ReWebility model proposes and gives evidence for a new construct in this sequence, suggesting a chain between online reviews credibility, perceived value, e-satisfaction and e-loyalty. Therefore, it is important to increase the accuracy, reliability, credibility and trustworthiness of the online reviews in order to increase positive perceptions regarding the hotel.

Beyond e-satisfaction, the quality of the website chosen to read reviews influence also the perception about company's reputation, its price benefits, and e-loyalty. In this sense, the higher the website design, its operational efficiency and user friendliness, as well as appropriate and updated product/service information, the greater:

- the company's overall credibility and reputation, namely brand awareness and quality perceptions concerning its products or services;

- the tendency to recommend, revisit or repurchase through the same website, or to define it as the first choice for online booking procedures.

- the perception of price benefits obtained, considering the website as an economical transaction, which provides a higher discount than offline purchasing, allowing saving some money;

In line with the previous referred, the ReWebility model also shows that price benefits has a positive and significant influence on perceived value. In this sense, the higher the discount or price reduction obtained, allowing some cost savings, the best the perceptions regarding the hotel in terms of infrastructures and human resources, considering the hotel as a good choice in terms of value for money invested, and the experience as satisfactory.

The ReWebility model presents loyalty as the ultimate dependent variable, rather than satisfaction, as suggested by other researchers (e.g. Polites et al., 2012), because we think that it is more important to establish a long term relationship, than just providing a momentary satisfactory experience. Accordingly, our research model enables us to know whether someone will: (i) prefer the website to competitors' websites; (ii) visit the website again; (iii) recommend it; (iv) define it as the first choice; or (v) consider purchasing from it in the future.

Finally, this research provides continuity to the studies linking tourism with information and communication technologies, namely studies focusing on the evaluation of tourism websites, as well as studies addressing the impacts of eWOM on tourism. In this sense, we believe that this research has contributed to a better understanding of these complex phenomena.

6.2   Managerial implications

In terms of managerial contributions this research provides valuable implications and insights about customer perceptions relative to e-commerce and IT applications in tourism. The ReWebility model aims to pique the attention of tourism providers for the feedback available online and free of charges, and for the new tourist behaviour, trying to clarifying the significance and importance of some e-loyalty antecedents.

First of all, tourism providers need to understand that the online travel reviews are a reliable and credible information source, increasingly important for tourists regarding product quality, since they involve other's experiences, evaluations and opinions, playing an important information and recommendation role. According to the results

the credibility given to reviews, comments and complaints posted online affect tourists' perceived value regarding the hotel reviewed. This shows that beyond its influence in the way tourist search, communicate, share and create information, the online review's credibility can have an impact on customer value creation, as suggested by Sigala (2011). Therefore, hotel managers should be attentive to what is being said about their companies in online travel agencies, and similar websites that provide hotel information, answering to some negative reviews and complaints. Companies can achieve some competitive advantages by analysing and managing the online travel reviews adequately. For instance, the information provided helps to identify tourists' profiles and needs, facilitates the solution of potential problem, and allows improvements in products or services, or the adoption of new policies, among other aspects.

Moreover, online communities have a strong influence on the image of hotels. Nowadays "consumers have the potential to impact the standing of a brand or a firm's reputation" (Sparks & Browning, 2010, p. 797). Indeed, according to the results, online reviews credibility has a positive and significant impact on company's reputation. So, in their own websites, hotel companies should avoid posting fraudulent eWOM concerning their company, which may affect the company's reputation. Instead, they should try to ensure that the reviews are credible and accurate, so that the information source is taken as trustworthy and reliable (Jeacle & Carter, 2011).

Companies should understand that their reputation also depends on the quality of the website. In this sense, OTA and similar companies that provide travel information should have efficient and informative websites, with and appealing design and easy to use. Tourism providers should understand that a website is much more than just an information system. In fact it is a powerful interface with the market, and a potentially relevant relationship marketing tool (Rob Law et al., 2010; San Martín & Herrero, 2012).

As suggested by Amaro (2014), the website should provide the best price in the marketplace for booking accommodations. Acting this way is fundamental to increase sales in this channel. If the price difference between booking online and offline is not sufficiently appealing, people will continue to book offline, despite seeking information and reviews in the website. Therefore, in order to induce tourists to book online, the website should guarantee the best price, but not necessarily the lowest price. The website should promote and sell some packages and special promotions by aggregating several services of the hotel. Thereby, hotel can promote some services lesser known or lesser used by the tourists. Moreover, by selling a set of services for one price, hotels are hiding the value assigned to each service. This strategic decision can be crucial to avoid competitive rivalry in terms of price, by allowing the optimization of internal resources and the sale of a distinctive service. Furthermore, charging a room night online at very significant lower prices that usually charged by the hotel unit, may affect tourists' expectations and perceived value regarding the hotel service. This situation may prevent the online booking or imply the choice of other hotel unit.

As seen, price is still an important influence upon online reservation intentions by a larger group of potential online hotel customers. Our results support this assumption, given that price benefits has a positive and significant influence on e-satisfaction. Nonetheless, despite being an important aspect for the new tourists, which are increasingly informed and demanding, price should not be the only basis of competition. As a matter of fact, "price should be tied to value to the customer, not to costs" (Kim et al., 2006, p. 898). Indeed, in our "ReWebility" model the perceived value of the hotel reviewed and booked online is the principal determinant of e-satisfaction. This result may be in line with Ha & Im (2012) propositions, for whom there are emotional and cognitive evaluations concerning the website that exert an influence on e-satisfaction. Nonetheless, company reputation, website quality, price benefits and perceived value, they all influence the overall satisfaction concerning the online booking experience. Therefore, in order to be seen as a wisdom choice or the right choice to achieve tourist's expectations, an online booking company needs:

155

- An efficient and well-presented website, user friendly, providing appropriate and updated information;

- A well-known brand name, whose products/services have good quality to achieve a credible and reputable stage;

- To provide reduced purchase-related costs and discount price in order to allow saving money by booking accommodation online;

- To be selective in the choice of hotels to promote and sell online, considering that they must have (i) competent staff available to satisfy tourists wants and needs, (ii) good infrastructures and facilities; (iii) provide a pleasant and satisfactory stay; and (iv) offer a good value for money experience.

In addition to the relationship between e-satisfaction and e-loyalty, frequently demonstrated in previous studies, our results show that the higher the website quality the greater the tendency to recommend, revisit or repurchase through it, or to consider the website as the first choice. This is not surprising, considering that the main goal of e-loyalty is to transform a behavioural intention into purchasing actions, namely a repeat buying behaviour. Consequently, the intention to revisit the website may also increase the probability of online purchases. However, in an extremely competitive environment, it is increasingly difficult to retain customers, especially considering the growth of the online channel that brings out new companies to the marketplace, with appealing and intuitive websites, for technologically informed and dependent customers. Therefore, as suggested by Hjalager (2010), hotel managers should innovate and give strategic priority to the implementation of technologies designed to improve guest services, as well as the introduction of loyalty programs, transforming interaction with the customer to a long-term affair.

Finally, as a conclusion and beyond the hypotheses and research models implications, this study also sought to draw the attention of tourism providers for social media technologies and online travel communities. Before expecting to increase revenues and online bookings, they need to define a clear strategy for an active presence in the online

travel market. Truly, hotel managers are trying to exploit the potential of the social web and other peer-to-peer referrals. Nowadays companies are using social media to satisfy the objective of influencing WOM, but such efforts are superficial and carried out without a clearly established social media strategy. For some of these companies the online activity boils down to merely establishing websites and emailing customers. More than setting up a website, Facebook page, twitter accounts or YouTube channels, a real social media engagement involves a two-way communication process through co-creation and collaborative problem solving. Moreover, the purposes must be clearly defined and integrated in the company's marketing strategy, as suggested by Kimmel & Kitchen (2014). In this sense, hotel companies must establish a truly cooperative network with the online travel agents and similar stakeholders, as well as a more direct and instantaneous dialogue with their actual and potential customers, in order to be succeeded in the online marketplace.

Tourism providers need to improve their marketing strategy, especially their relationships with actual and potential customers, in order to exceed tourists' expectations, instead of simply providing a satisfactory service. Indeed, as stated by Lopes, Abrantes, & Kastenholz (2013), after recognizing the importance of the feedback created online and free of charge, and beyond revenue generation purposes, hotel managers might use their booking websites in order to:

(1) interact with actual customers or potential ones;

(2) understand tourists' expectations, experiences and satisfaction levels;

(3) solve problems and avoid or respond to negative comments;

(4) analyse competitors' strategies;

(5) monitor the company's image and reputation;

(6) obtain information from customers which can be very innovative.

6.3 Limitations and future research

This research was based on a rich and solid theoretical background. However, this study has its own limitations, as occurs in any research project. Therefore, we should now present and analyse the limitations of the study, as well as some guidelines for future research projects.

The first limitation lies in the process of data collection. The data was obtained through a convenience sample regarding internet users, as verified in other similar research projects (e.g. Abrantes et al., 2013; Amaro, 2014), which limit the generalizability of the results. According to the demographic profile of respondents, the majority are from Portugal, have higher education levels, and are aged under 45 years old. In this sense, we should be cautious in generalizing the results, even for the Portuguese population. Future research should use a more balanced proportion of internet users and larger samples, allowing a comparison between young, middle-aged and older internet users.

Secondly, the questionnaire might have created common method variance, which in turn might have inflated the relationships between the constructs. However, respondents were not informed of the purpose of the study, and all of the constructs' items were separated and mixed, making it difficult for respondents to detect the items that measure the factors. Nonetheless, the questionnaire was available online, and so any internet user that eventually had access to the websurvey link could respond to the questionnaire, even not corresponding to the target audience. Thus, future researchers should try to request the cooperation of an online travel agency or a similar booking website, to limit the access to the questionnaire only to tourists who have booked accommodation through that website.

This research follows a quantitative approach. Despite being subjective and requiring interpretative skills, the qualitative data could complement and contribute for a broader perspective of the phenomenon. Thus, for a broader understanding of the thematic, future studies could combine quantitative and qualitative methods, as used

by other researchers (e.g. Golmohammadi, Jahandideh, & O'Gorman, 2012; San Martín & Herrero, 2012).

On the other hand, the "ReWebility" model only explains 13 per cent of perceived value's variance. One possible reason can be related to the complexity and multidimensional nature of the construct. As seen, perceived value is crucial when analysing tourist behaviour, since experiences related to tourism and leisure activities have a hedonic component. The concept (i) is highly sensitive to the tourism experience, (ii) depends on tangible features (e.g., hotel room size) and person-based service (e.g., the sympathy of a hotel receptionist), and (iii) is perceived differently across cultures. Furthermore, it can be "experienced before purchase, at the moment of purchase, at the time of use, and after use" (Sánchez et al., 2006, p. 394). Therefore, perceived value deserves a deeper analysis in future studies.

The study did not consider cross cultural issues and comparisons. As stated by Litvin et al. (2008), a service provider may be reviewed by numerous customers with diverse backgrounds. There are significant cultural differences in the online behaviour (e.g. Fong & Burton, 2008; Kim, Yang, & Kim, 2013). In fact, "the use of information sources that influence online purchase decisions strongly varies by culture" (Goodrich & Mooij, 2014, p. 103). On the other hand, naturally, tourists prefer a website that matches their preferences and cultural needs (Cyr, 2008). Therefore, future researches could replicate this study across a different sample and in various cultural contexts, namely characterized by different internet access and usage. Moreover, a multi-group analysis may be useful to identify if there is homogeneity or different profiles and behaviours, bringing new insights from the field.

Internet users may have different motivations for searching and booking a given hotel online, different expectations, satisfaction levels and standards. Business travellers and leisure travellers may differ in terms of information needs and hotel facilities requirements (Jeong et al., 2003). For business travellers, for instance, price may be less important than hotel distance to meeting points or conference venues (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010). On the other hand leisure travellers tend to believe that a hotel quality

is low if they perceive that the price offered is cheaper than internal price standard or competing prices (Chiang & Jang, 2006), which may affect the company reputation. This is a critical aspect, given some price benefits' perceptions in the online context. As a result, the evaluation of tourists' satisfaction regarding an online booking experience may need to be considered in multiple dimensions (Yoon & Uysal, 2005), which may imply consider different profiles/segments or adding new dimensions and constructs to the ReWebility model.

Eventually it might be worthy testing the ReWebility model considering different types of eWOM, such as those proposed by Abrantes et al. (2013), namely eWOM in-group and out-of-group, testing the difference between strong ties and weak ties. It may be an interesting line of investigation, namely to "tap both explicit and silently noted WOM effects" (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014, p. 14). Some online reviews could be seen as either a recommendation or a complaint. As evidenced by Xie *et al.* (2011), the valence of the review is sometimes not clear when ambivalent reviews are posted online. Therefore, the WOM valence (positive, negative or mixed) may have a significant moderating role, as it occurs in other researches (e.g. Matos, Rossi, Alberto, & Rossi, 2008).

Considering the technology advances, it might be necessary to include other dimension in the website quality construct, or test the present research model in a different setting. For instance, leisure travellers and business travellers are using their mobile phone increasingly for online travel-related activities. According to the findings, one third of mobile users are planning on the go (Koumelis, 2012). There are already some researches in the mobile hotel reservation context (e.g. Wang & Wang, 2010), which might be another interesting line of investigation.

Despite a rich literature regarding WOM, there is not a deep insight on how WOM communication works, as suggested by Bruyn & Lilien (2008). This situation can be due to different research objectives, contexts or data collection processes. On the one hand, researches are mostly focused on WOM that have influenced the decision-making process, and/or researches exploring only situations in which WOM recipients are actively seeking information. Moreover, the data is collected retrospectively,

sometimes years after the WOM effect, which can be another explanation. Finally, another reason mentioned lies in the survey process, emphasizing buying behaviour as the outcome. In our research e-Loyalty is the outcome of the ReWebility model. However, recommend the website or set it as first choice for booking accommodation online does not mean that someone will write a review after the hotel stay. As we know, many of these sites need to be fed by user generated content (UGC). In this sense, future researches could test if those loyal customers tend to generate reviews on the website or not, and the reasons for this decision.

As referred, some consumers are reluctant to purchase tourism products and services online, namely high-priced or luxury invisible tourism products (Kim et al., 2011, p. 264), due to lack of experience and security issues (Wolfe et al., 2005). As suggested by Amaro (2014), despite a considerable effort to inspire trust, security and confidence in computer systems, perceived risk is still an important determinant of intentions to purchase online. Therefore, when testing purchase intentions on the web, researchers should include risk, perceived security, experience or technological inclination in their research models (Amaro, 2014; Kim et al., 2006).

It is necessary to continue investigating the topic, in order to clarify some common assertions in the marketing literature, and other widely held beliefs. For instance, according to the findings and contrary to widely diffused: (i) satisfaction/dissatisfaction represents a small proportion of WOM; (ii) positive WOM is more common than negative WOM; (iii) and people generally do not limit themselves to transmitting either positive or negative WOM. Moreover, the assumption that negative WOM has a greater impact than positive WOM cannot be supported. The impact on consumer behaviour is multifaceted, depending on different factors and settings (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014).

The human behaviour is complex and difficult to predict, especially considering the emergence of different technologies and new social interaction structures in the web, challenging tourists for new patterns of consumption online. Furthermore, the online travel market is of considerable size, a continuing growth is predicted over the coming

years, and so, many new avenues and opportunities are likely to arise for future research. Finally, as stated by Zhou and his peers (2014, p. 7), there is always "a pathway for future work in hotel satisfaction to provide a welcoming, hospitable and successful service".

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE

Online Reviews Research

This questionnaire is part of a research project about the online travel market, and is being carried out in the scope of a PhD in Marketing & Strategy at the University of Aveiro, Portugal.

Your collaboration will be extremely helpful for the success of this research. Please complete this questionnaire consciously and honestly. It will take no more than 15 minutes. Your answers will be treated anonymously and confidentially. Thank you.

Romeu Lopes
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There are 23 questions in this survey

INTRODUCTION

1. Do you usually read online reviews before choosing an accommodation to stay hosted? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ Yes
◯ No

2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings? *

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ Yes
◯ No

ONLINE BOOKING EXPERIENCE

3. Considering your internet and online booking experience, please tell us: (according to the scale that is presented below) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
I feel that the web is easy to use	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel competent using the web	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am receptive to technological innovation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am familiar with online booking procedures for accommodation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, my previous online booking experiences, were positive.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

4. Could you please specify the number of online bookings in the last 12 months: (Choose one of the following answers) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

○ never
○ 1-2
○ 3-5
○ 6-8
○ 9-11
○ >= 12

5. What is the website / platform you usually use to book an accommodation? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please write your answer here:

[   ]

6. Please select the most important criteria you use to choose an accommodation: (Please select at most 5 answers) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please select at most 5 answers

Please choose **all** that apply:

☐ Cleanliness

☐ Comfort

☐ Location

☐ Facilities

☐ Staff

☐ Atmosphere

☐ Value for Money

☐ Other (which?): [   ]

ONLINE REVIEWS CREDIBILITY

7. Considering the online reviews you have read in the website / platform, please tell us: (according to the scale that is presented below) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
The online reviews are useful for choosing an accommodation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tourists who left reviews are knowledgeable to assess the quality of accommodation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The arguments presented in the reviews are convincing.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The reviews supported my previous impression.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, the reviews are similar.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The reviews are helpful for booking an accommodation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tourists who left reviews are trustworthy.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The arguments presented in the reviews are strong.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information gathered from the reviews contradicts my prior knowledge.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, the reviews are consistent.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The reviews enhances my effectiveness in purchasing an accommodation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tourists who left reviews are reliable.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The arguments presented in the reviews are	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

relevant.

	Strongly disagree		Moderately disagree		Slightly disagree		
The reviews contradicted the image I had about the service provider.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, the reviews have the same sense.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

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8. Overall, I consider that the online reviews presented in the website... (please complete the sentence according to the scale presented below): *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
... are accurate.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... reflect the reality of the service provider.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... are credible.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

WEBSITE CHARACTERISTICS

9. Regarding the website/platform you use to book an accommodation, please tell us (according to the scale that is presented below) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
The website can be easily navigated.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The information is presented consistently and logically.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I save a lot of time by booking an accommodation through the website.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I save money by booking an accommodation through the website.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The website presents an easy payment procedure.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The screen design is harmonious and well presented (i.e. colours, menus, tools, ...)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The website presents different room types and facilities.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Booking an accommodation through the website is a pleasant experience.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The website can provide more discount than offline purchasing.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Making payments in the website is risk free.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The website is user friendly.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
The website presents updated content.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The website is a convenient way to book an accommodation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Booking an accommodation through the website is an economical transaction.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My privacy would be guaranteed in this website.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

10. Please, give us your opinion about the company reputation (according to the scale that is presented below) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
The company is credible and has good reputation.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The brand name is well known.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The company's products/services have good quality.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

PERCEIVED VALUE

11. Considering your last trip, what kind of accommodation you booked through the website/platform?
Choose one of the following answers *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

○ Hotel

○ Apartment

○ Guest house

○ Hostel

○ Couchsurfing

○ Other (which one?) [   ]

12. Bearing in mind your last stay, please give us your opinion about the accommodation provider:
(according to the scale that is presented below) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
The people/staff were able to satisfy my wants and needs.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It provided good infrastructures and facilities compared to other options I had.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The experience satisfied my needs and wants.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It offers good value for money.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

e-SATISFACTION AND e-LOYALTY

13. Overall, considering the online booking experience, please tell us: (according to the scale that is presented below) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
My choice to purchase through the website was a wise one.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I did the right thing when I purchased this experience through this website.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The website met my expectations.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

14. Overall, regarding the degree of loyalty, please tell us: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
((p2.NAOK == "Y"))

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
I prefer this website to competitors' websites.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would visit the website again.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would consider purchasing from this website in the future.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would consider this website to be my first choice.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would definitely recommend this website	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

15. Usually do you write online reviews in the website/platform after stay hosted? Choose one of the following answers *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

○ No

○ Sometimes

○ Yes

15.1. If No, why?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'No' at question '15 [p15]' (15. Usually do you write online reviews in the website/platform after stay hosted? Choose one of the following answers)

Please write your answer here:

15.1 if Sometimes, in which circumstances?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Sometimes' at question '15 [p15]' (15. Usually do you write online reviews in the website/platform after stay hosted? Choose one of the following answers)

Please write your answer here:

EWOM

16. I like to write online reviews because:
(please, complete the sentence according to the scale presented below): *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?) *and* Answer was 'Sometimes' *or* 'Yes' at question '15 [p15]' (15. Usually do you write online reviews in the website/platform after stay hosted? Choose one of the following answers) *and* Answer was 'Sometimes' *or* 'Yes' at question '15 [p15]' (15. Usually do you write online reviews in the website/platform after stay hosted? Choose one of the following answers)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
... I like to provide people with information about my personal experiences.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... I like to share informations about my touristic experiences with different online users.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... I also seek the advice of others regarding which hotel/ guest house /hostel should I book online.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... I also seek the advice of others before deciding to make an online purchase.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC

Finally, a brief information about you. This information will just be used to categorize your survey responses.

17. Gender: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

○ Female

○ Male

18. Age:
Choose one of the following answers *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

○ <= 25

○ 26 to 35

○ 36 to 45

○ 46 to 55

○ 56-65

○ > 65

19. Country of residence:
Choose one of the following answers *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

○ Afghanistan

○ Albania

○ Algeria

○ Andorra

○ Angola

○ Antigua and Barbuda

○ Argentina

○ Armenia

○ Australia

○ Austria

○ Azerbaijan

○ Bahamas, The

○ Bahrain

○ Bangladesh

○ Barbados

○ Belarus

○ Belgium

○ Belize

○ Benin

○ Bhutan

○ Bolivia

○ Bosnia and Herzegovina

○ Botswana

○ Brazil

○ Brunei

○ Bulgaria

○ Burkina Faso

○ Burma

○ Burundi

○ Cambodia

○ Cameroon

○ Canada

○ Cape Verde

○ Central African Republic

○ Chad

○ Chile

○ China

○ Colombia

○ Comoros

○ Congo, Democratic Republic of the

○ Congo, Republic of the

○ Costa Rica

○ Cote d'Ivoire

○ Croatia

○ Cuba

○ Curacao

○ Cyprus

○ Czech Republic

○ Denmark

○ Djibouti

○ Dominica

○ Dominican Republic

○ East Timor (see Timor-Leste)

○ Ecuador

○ Egypt

○ El Salvador

○ Equatorial Guinea

- ○ Eritrea
- ○ Estonia
- ○ Ethiopia
- ○ Fiji
- ○ Finland
- ○ France
- ○ Gabon
- ○ Gambia, The
- ○ Georgia
- ○ Germany
- ○ Ghana
- ○ Greece
- ○ Grenada
- ○ Guatemala
- ○ Guinea
- ○ Guinea-Bissau
- ○ Guyana
- ○ Haiti
- ○ Holy See
- ○ Honduras
- ○ Hong Kong
- ○ Hungary
- ○ Iceland
- ○ India
- ○ Indonesia
- ○ Iran
- ○ Iraq
- ○ Ireland
- ○ Israel
- ○ Italy
- ○ Jamaica
- ○ Japan
- ○ Jordan
- ○ Kazakhstan
- ○ Kenya
- ○ Kiribati
- ○ Kosovo
- ○ Kuwait
- ○ Kyrgyzstan
- ○ Laos
- ○ Latvia
- ○ Lebanon
- ○ Lesotho
- ○ Liberia
- ○ Libya

- ◯ Liechtenstein
- ◯ Lithuania
- ◯ Luxembourg
- ◯ Macau
- ◯ Macedonia
- ◯ Madagascar
- ◯ Malawi
- ◯ Malaysia
- ◯ Maldives
- ◯ Mali
- ◯ Malta
- ◯ Marshall Islands
- ◯ Mauritania
- ◯ Mauritius
- ◯ Mexico
- ◯ Micronesia
- ◯ Moldova
- ◯ Monaco
- ◯ Mongolia
- ◯ Montenegro
- ◯ Morocco
- ◯ Mozambique
- ◯ Namibia
- ◯ Nauru
- ◯ Nepal
- ◯ Netherlands
- ◯ Netherlands Antilles
- ◯ New Zealand
- ◯ Nicaragua
- ◯ Niger
- ◯ Nigeria
- ◯ North Korea
- ◯ Norway
- ◯ Oman
- ◯ Pakistan
- ◯ Palau
- ◯ Palestinian Territories
- ◯ Panama
- ◯ Papua New Guinea
- ◯ Paraguay
- ◯ Peru
- ◯ Philippines
- ◯ Poland
- ◯ Portugal
- ◯ Qatar

- ○ Romania
- ○ Russia
- ○ Rwanda
- ○ Saint Kitts and Nevis
- ○ Saint Lucia
- ○ Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- ○ Samoa
- ○ San Marino
- ○ Sao Tome and Principe
- ○ Saudi Arabia
- ○ Senegal
- ○ Serbia
- ○ Seychelles
- ○ Sierra Leone
- ○ Singapore
- ○ Slovakia
- ○ Slovenia
- ○ Solomon Islands
- ○ Somalia
- ○ South Africa
- ○ South Korea
- ○ South Sudan
- ○ Spain
- ○ Sri Lanka
- ○ Sudan
- ○ Suriname
- ○ Swaziland
- ○ Sweden
- ○ Switzerland
- ○ Syria
- ○ Taiwan
- ○ Tajikistan
- ○ Tanzania
- ○ Thailand
- ○ Timor-Leste
- ○ Togo
- ○ Tonga
- ○ Trinidad and Tobago
- ○ Tunisia
- ○ Turkey
- ○ Turkmenistan
- ○ Tuvalu
- ○ Uganda
- ○ Ukraine
- ○ United Arab Emirates

○ United Kingdom

○ United States

○ Uruguay

○ Uzbekistan

○ Vanuatu

○ Venezuela

○ Vietnam

○ Yemen

○ Zambia

○ Zimbabwe

20. Education level:
(Please select the highest degree you achieved) *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

○ 12th grade or less

○ Graduated high school or equivalent

○ Some college, no degree

○ Associate degree

○ Bachelor's degree

○ Post-graduate degree

21. Income:
(Could you please indicate your net income in a regular month)

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question '2 [p2]' (2. Have you ever booked an accommodation through a specific website / platform for online bookings?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

○ < 1000 €

○ 1000-1999 €

○ 2000-2999 €

○ 3000-3999 €

○ =>4000 €

○ Prefer not to answer

Thank You!

Thank you very much for your collaboration. If you have any queries about the survey please contact:
Romeu Lopes (RMSL@ua.pt)

Please, share the survey with your friends!
http://questionarios.ua.pt/index.php/125193/lang-en

08-25-2013 – 09:45

Submit your survey.
Thank you for completing this survey.