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Travel content creation: The influence of travelers' innovativeness, involvement and use of social media

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Travel content creation

The influence of travelers' innovativeness, involvement and use of social media

Travel content
creation

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine factors that affect the likelihood to create travel content online. Research has shown that there are far more people consuming social media than generating it. However, online travel marketers need to pay attention to travelers that share their experiences online, as they have the potential to drive sales.

Design/methodology/approach – An online survey was conducted to collect data for this study, by sending e-mail invitations to colleagues, students, personal contacts and other email contacts composed of Portuguese Internet users. A total of 244 complete responses were considered valid to test the hypotheses through partial least squares structural equation modeling.

Findings – The results reveal that travelers' level of involvement with tourism products, innovativeness and use of social media directly influences writing reviews about travel experiences online.

Research limitations/implications – First, the data used in this study were based on a convenience sample containing only the Portuguese population. Therefore, generalization of the results should be made with caution. The replication of this study in other countries would be desirable. Second, the study used a quantitative approach to examine the effect of personal characteristics on travel content creation. A research using also a qualitative approach could shed new light on the understanding of the research hypotheses.

Practical implications – This study provides useful insights for travel social media websites and travel-related organizations, as they can adapt their marketing strategies to the type of travelers that are more likely to write about the travel services that they offer online.

Originality/value – From a theoretical perspective, there are few studies that focus on the personal characteristics of travelers that create content online. The intention of this study is to help close this gap, providing useful insights with respect to this matter.

Keywords Innovativeness, Travel, Social media, Involvement, User-generated content

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

The term user-generated content (UGC) achieved popularity in 2005 and describes the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users

(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This new method of communication, that has also been referred to as online word of mouth (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2006; Gretzel *et al.*, 2008; Pan and Crotts, 2012; Pan *et al.*, 2007), has revolutionized the way people search for information, as consumers are no longer dependent on what companies have to say, because they can access information provided by their own peers (O'Connor, 2008). Consumers play such an important role creating and controlling information that TIME magazine nominated "You" as person of the year in 2006 (O'Connor, 2008; Yoo and Gretzel, 2012). Indeed, social media empowers consumers (Pan *et al.*, 2007) that now have more power than vendors (O'Connor, 2008).

Different statistics evidence the importance of social media in the travel context. PhocusWright, one of the leading travel industry research firms, found that unique monthly visitors to social travel sites increased 34 per cent between the first half of 2008 and the last half of 2009 (Fairlie, 2010). The World Travel Market Industry Report (2010) revealed that 36 per cent of travelers from the United Kingdom used social media before booking a holiday. Gretzel *et al.* (2007) report that looking at other consumers' comments/materials is the most frequent travel-related activity online. In a different study, 73 per cent of the respondents find it better to read consumer reviews about a hotel than to rely on a hotel's description of itself (Cox *et al.*, 2009). Several sources have indicated that travelers consider UGC more credible and trustworthy than reviews from professionals or marketer information (e.g. Compete Incorporated, 2007; Fotis *et al.*, 2012; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008).

As search engines are a popular tool used to search for travel information, travelers will inevitably stumble across social media websites because they are search-engine friendly (Gretzel, 2006). Xiang and Gretzel (2010) found that when using Google to plan for a trip, 10 per cent of the results were social media websites. Likewise, in a similar study conducted more recently by Walden *et al.* (2011), almost 28 per cent of the hotel search results from search engines lead to a social media website.

While some individuals actively participate in creating travel-related content by posting comments, photos and videos, others do not demonstrate such an active role. Indeed, the gap between those who use travel-generated content and the actual number of content creators is large (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). According to Forrester Research, 75 per cent of Internet users use social media, but less than half actively participate (Osborn, 2009). Online travel marketers need to pay attention to travelers that create travel content, as they will influence others and, consequently, have the potential to drive sales. Research has found that motivations to create travel-related content are altruistic and hedonic benefits (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). However, few studies have focused on personal characteristics of those who create travel-generated content. Therefore, the main objective of the current study is to analyze the influence of travelers' personal characteristics – innovativeness, travel involvement and their use of social media – on the creation of travel content online. As Yoo and Gretzel (2011) point out, it is crucial to find out what influences travel content creation, from both a theoretical and practical points of view. Indeed, content creators are an attractive target group for travel marketers (Gretzel *et al.*, 2011), thus understanding their personal characteristics is of paramount importance.

The next section begins with a literature review on travel content creation, the use of social media for travel purposes, innovativeness and travel involvement that support the hypotheses proposed in this study. The research methodology is presented in the

following section, before the section devoted to the analysis of the data and the discussion of findings. Finally, limitations, implications and future research directions are discussed.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Travel content creation*

Individuals deal with UGC in three ways: by consuming, by participating and by producing (Shao, 2009). Consuming refers to the individuals who only read, or view but never participate. Participating includes both user-to-user interaction and user-to-content interaction (such as ranking the content, adding to playlists, sharing with others, posting comments, etc.). Producing encompasses creation and publication of one's personal contents, such as text, images, audio and video. Most travelers are just consumers or participators (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). While some individuals actively participate in travel-related social media by posting comments, photos and videos, others do not demonstrate such an active role. According to Forrester Research, 75 per cent of Internet users use social media, but less than half actively participate (Osborn, 2009). Pan and Crotts (2012) report that travel blogs and social media sites have long recognized that there are far more people consuming information than generating it. Indeed, Yoo and Gretzel (2011) found that only 17 per cent of the surveyed online travelers that use travel-related consumer generated media have ever posted travel materials online.

The aim of this study is to examine the personal characteristics that influence writing reviews online. Hence, travel content creation is the main variable in the proposed model of this study.

2.2 *Social media use*

Even though Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) believe that the era of Social Media started 20 years earlier, with a social networking site named "Open Diary", the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com) posits that the first known use of social media dates from 2004 and is defined as "forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (as videos)". Social Media was enabled by Web 2.0, a term used to describe a new platform that provides users with the ability to publish content easily and for free. Web 2.0 allows content and applications to be created and published in a collaborative and participatory way and to be continuously modified (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

The increase in social media use is remarkable. Indeed, according to the Pew Internet Project's research (2013) as of September 2013, 73 per cent of online adults use social networking sites, while in 2005, this percentage was only 8 per cent. Despite the recent growth of other social networks such as Pinterest and Instagram, Facebook remains the dominant social networking platform.

Research has found that social media use is linked to extroversion and openness to experiences (Correa *et al.*, 2010). People who are extroverted are more sociable, talkative, enthusiastic and active (Barnett, 2006). Hence, it is expected that those who are more open to experiences and are extraverted will be more likely to create travel content online. A different study found that travel review writers were more likely to use a social

networking site (Gretzel *et al.*, 2007). Based on these arguments, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1. The use of Social Media positively influences travel content creation.

2.3 Innovativeness

Innovativeness is a personal characteristic that many researchers consider when examining consumer behavior (San Martín and Herrero, 2012). Rogers (1995) defines innovativeness as the degree to which an individual is relatively earlier in adopting new ideas than others. For example, research supports that consumers' innovativeness has a positive relationship with online travel shopping adoption (Kamarulzaman, 2007; Li and Buhalis, 2006). In a similar vein, McDonald (2002) defines innovativeness as the willingness and ability to adopt new technologies. This study takes Agarwal and Prasad's (1998) view that innovativeness is the willingness of an individual to try new information technologies.

Research has found that innovativeness is not only associated with the use of social networks to browse and to read content, but is also positively associated with using social networks to actively create comments and updates (Pagani *et al.*, 2011). Innovative users of online social networks are more likely to use these networks as an interaction tool (Nusair *et al.*, 2013). With this in mind and considering that creating travel content and using social media are new technologies, the following hypotheses emerge:

H2. Innovativeness positively influences travel content creation.

H3. Innovativeness positively influences the use of social media.

2.4 Travel involvement

Although a commonly accepted definition of involvement does not exist Rothschild's (1984, p. 217) broad definition as "a state of motivation, arousal or interest" paved the way for the concept to be applied in multiple contexts, including tourism. As Ferns and Walls (2012) stress, most tourism studies have focused on examining tourists involvement with general travel experience or with specific touristic activities, but travelers' involvement with travel itself has received little attention.

Grounded on Rothschild's (1984) definition of involvement, the current study considers travel involvement as the state of motivation and interest toward travel. Tourist products are by nature highly engaging, especially in what regards to the destination choice, as high-involvement processes are required, due to its intangibility and inseparability (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999).

When consumers are involved, they give attention, perceive the importance and behave in a different way than when they are not (Zaichkowsky, 1986). In the context of travel, for example, research has shown that highly involved tourists are more likely to spread information (Jamrozy *et al.*, 1996). A different study also found a link between involvement and travel content creation (Gretzel *et al.*, 2011). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. Travel Involvement positively influences travel content creation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Measurement development

The hypotheses presented in the previous section represent relationships between the various constructs. These constructs cannot be measured directly and can only be measured using observable (manifest or measurable) variables commonly known as indicators (Gallagher *et al.*, 2008; Hair *et al.*, 2010). The indicators used to operationalize the constructs came from several sources and are shown in Table I. In all cases, a 5-point Likert scale was used to obtain responses from the participants.

The relationship between an indicator and a construct that is unobservable is expressed as being either formative or reflective (Chin *et al.*, 2008; Hair *et al.*, 2010). The most commonly used are reflective where indicators are considered to be functions of the latent construct (Hair *et al.*, 2010; 2011). Therefore, changes in the underlying construct cause changes in the indicators (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2008; Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). Travel content creation, social media use and innovativeness were operationalized as reflective constructs.

Regarding involvement, several scales have been used to operationalize this construct in the tourism field. Most of the scales used consider that involvement is composed of different facets: traveler's knowledge, pleasure/interest, risk and perceived sign value (Gursoy and Gavcar, 2003; Park *et al.*, 1994). Therefore, involvement was

Constructs	Indicators	Sources
Travel content creation	TCC1 – I post travel-related content online ^a TCC2 – I rate hotels and attractions visited during my trip ^a	Adapted from Yoo and Gretzel (2011)
Social media use	SMU1 – I use Facebook ^a SMU2 – I use Youtube ^a SMU3 – I have a profile on more than one social network ^b SMU4 – I read/ follow blogs ^a SMU5 – I have an updated profile on a social network ^a	
Innovativeness	INVT1 – I use technologies in everything I do ^b INVT2 – I feel incomplete without new technologies ^b INVT3 – I was born and raised a digital native ^b INVT4 – I like to be the first among my peers to explore new technologies ^b	Adapted from Agarwal and Prasad (1998) and Lu <i>et al.</i> (2005)
Involvement	INVL1 – Compared to most people, I know a lot about travel destinations ^b (Travelers' Knowledge) INVL2 – Travel interests me a lot ^b (Pleasure/Interest) INVL3 – When one purchases a vacation, one is never certain of one's choice ^b (Risk) INVL4 – You can really tell about a person by the trip that they take ^b (Perceived sign value)	Adapted from Gursoy and Gavcar (2003) and Laurent and Kapferer (1985)

Notes: ^a1 – Never; 2 – rarely; 3 – sometimes; 4 – very often; 5 – always; ^b1 – strongly disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 – neither agree, nor disagree; 4 – agree; 5 – strongly agree

Table I.
Indicators used to measure the constructs

conceptualized as a formative construct, as the indicators are assumed to cause the latent construct (Chin *et al.*, 2008; Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). In opposition to the reflective constructs, involvements' items are interchangeable.

3.2 Data collection

Theoretically, the population comprises all Portuguese Internet users aged 18 years or more, as they exhibit the probability of writing travel reviews online or of using social media. However, since there does not exist a list of Portuguese Internet users, it is impossible to select our sampling elements from the population directly. Consequently, a non-probabilistic sampling procedure – convenience sampling – was used to collect data. Therefore, an online survey was conducted in the months of April and May of 2012 to collect data for this study, by sending e-mail invitations to colleagues, students, personal contacts and other email contacts. The email invitation explained the purpose of the study and requested respondents' participation. These contacts were composed of Portuguese Internet users. Therefore, the questionnaire was available in Portuguese. The last part of the questionnaire contained questions regarding respondents' demographic characteristics, namely, age, gender and education level. A total of 244 complete responses were considered valid to test the hypotheses.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive analysis

A demographic profile of survey participants is summarized in Table II. The age group with the most significant number of responses was the group under 25 years of age, with 44.3 per cent of the total of responses, while only approximately 16 per cent are aged over 46.

In terms of gender, there is a slight skew toward a higher proportion of female participants (63.1 per cent). The sample seems to be a highly educated group, with approximately 89 per cent of the respondents holding at least a college degree.

On average, the sample population travels 3.4 times a year for leisure purposes.

4.2 Measurement validation

Partial least squares (PLS), a component-based structural equation modeling (SEM) technique, was used to test the hypotheses. To analyze the data obtained for the purpose of this study, the PLS approach was chosen for several reasons. First and foremost, in

Variable	Category	N	% of responded
Age	Under 25	108	44.3
	26-35	59	24.2
	36-45	37	15.2
	46-55	33	13.5
	+ 56	7	2.9
Gender	Male	90	36.9
	Female	154	63.1
Education level	Less than 12th grade	6	2.5
	12th grade	20	8.2
	Higher education	218	89.3

Table II.
Demographic profile of respondents

contrast to covariance-based structural equation modeling, PLS readily incorporates both reflective and formative measures (Hair *et al.*, 2013; 2012). Moreover, in contrast to a covariance-based analysis, the sample size can be considerably smaller in PLS path modeling (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Henseler *et al.*, 2009).

The evaluation of a research model using PLS analysis consists of two distinct steps. The first step includes the assessment of the measurement (outer) model and deals with evaluation of the characteristics of the latent variables and measurement items that represent them. The second step involves the assessment of the structural (inner) model and the evaluation of the relationships between the latent variables as specified by the research model. The parameters of the outer and inner model were estimated using SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle *et al.*, 2005).

Assessment of constructs with a reflective measurement involves determining indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity, as described by Hair *et al.* (2013).

The results shown in Table III indicate that the measures are robust in terms of their reliability, as all Cronbach's alpha are higher than 0.7. The composite reliabilities, that many researchers consider more suitable for PLS-SEM than Cronbach's alpha (e.g. Hair *et al.*, 2011; Henseler *et al.*, 2009; Garson, 2012), range from 0.85 to 0.90, exceeding also the recommended threshold value of 0.70 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988, Nunnally, 1978). Furthermore, all indicator loadings are higher than 0.6 and most are ideally over 0.7 (Chin, 1998a; Henseler *et al.*, 2009) and are significant at the 0.001 level, as shown by the *t* values obtained through bootstrapping. Convergent validity was also confirmed by the average variance extracted (AVE) that are all above 0.5 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant validity was assessed with two measures that are typically used, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the cross-loadings (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). The former assesses if a construct is more strongly related to its own measures than with any other construct by examining the overlap in variance by comparing the AVE of each construct with the squared correlations among constructs (Chin, 2010). Table IV shows the correlations between constructs. The diagonal elements are the square roots of the AVEs that exceed all corresponding off diagonal elements. Therefore, each construct

Construct	Indicators	Indicator loadings	<i>t</i> -statistic	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alfa	AVE
Travel content creation	TCC1	0.91	68.73***	0.90	0.78	0.82
	TCC2	0.90	65.82***			
Social media use	SMU1	0.85	35.70***	0.87	0.80	0.56
	SMU2	0.74	18.51***			
	SMU3	0.65	15.17***			
	SMU4	0.70	16.42***			
	SMU5	0.81	21.94***			
Innovativeness	INVT1	0.86	44.72***	0.85	0.77	0.59
	INVT2	0.80	22.64***			
	INVT3	0.63	10.03***			
	INVT4	0.77	21.68***			

Note: ***Significant at the 0.001 level based on 5,000 bootstrap samples

Table III.
Reliability and convergent
validity measures of
reflective constructs

shares more variance with its own block of indicators than with another latent variable representing a different block of indicators (Henseler *et al.*, 2009), supporting the discriminant validity of the scales.

Discriminant validity was further assessed by extracting the factor and cross loadings of all indicators to their respective constructs. Not only should each indicator be strongly related to the construct it attempts to reflect, but should also not have a stronger connection with another construct (Chin, 2010). The results, presented in Table V, show that all indicators loaded on their respective construct more highly than on any other, confirming that the constructs are distinct.

The Assessment of the involvement construct, with a formative measurement, involves assessing its indicators validity by examining indicators weights and bootstrapping to verify their significance (Hair *et al.*, 2011; Henseler *et al.*, 2009) (Table VI).

Although all the initial weights are higher than 0.1, as suggested by Andreev *et al.* (2009), INV4, regarding perceived sign value is not significant and, therefore, was eliminated. These results show that traveler's involvement can be conceptualized as a function of traveler's knowledge, interest/pleasure and risk.

The nomological validity of the involvement construct was also assessed, by examining whether the formative construct behaves as expected, i.e. if the relationships with other constructs in the path model supported in literature are significant (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). The expected relationship between involvement and travel content creation

Table IV.
Discriminant validity of
the constructs

Constructs	1	2	3
1 – Innovativeness	<i>0.77</i>		
2 – Travel Content Creation	0.38	<i>0.91</i>	
3 – Social Media Use	0.38	0.40	<i>0.75</i>

Note: The italic values represent the square roots of the AVE

Table V.
Factor loadings (bolded)
and cross loadings

Indicators	INVT	TCC	SMU
INVT1	0.86	0.38	0.33
INVT2	0.80	0.28	0.28
INVT3	0.63	0.19	0.29
INVT4	0.77	0.32	0.28
TCC1	0.34	0.91	0.42
TCC2	0.35	0.90	0.31
SMU1	0.29	0.32	0.85
SMU2	0.27	0.27	0.74
SMU3	0.33	0.28	0.65
SMU4	0.26	0.34	0.70
SMU5	0.28	0.36	0.81

Notes: INVT – Innovativeness; TCC – travel content creation; SMU – social media use

was supported, as will be discussed in the next section, evidencing involvements' nomological validity.

4.3 Structural model

As the inner model evaluation provided evidence of reliability and validity, the inner model estimates were examined (Hair *et al.*, 2012) to assess the hypothesized relationships among the constructs in the conceptual model.

The standardized path coefficients and significance levels provide evidence of the inner model's quality (Chin, 1998b; Hair *et al.*, 2012). They also allow researchers to test the hypotheses. Figure 1 provides the results of testing the structural links of the proposed research model using PLS.

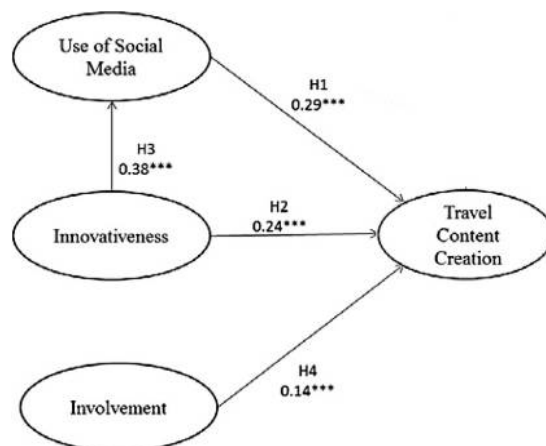
The first hypothesis that predicted that the use of Social Media would positively affect travel content creation was supported ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$). Moreover, the use of social media is the construct with the strongest effect on travel content creation. To create travel content online, it makes sense that the creators use social media. What this study demonstrates is that the more individuals use social media, the more likely they will create travel content online.

The empirical data also confirmed *H3* and *H4*, that innovativeness influenced travel content creation ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.001$) and social media use ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$),

Involvement	Initial weight	<i>t</i> -statistic	Final weight	<i>t</i> -statistic
INV1	0.72	4.01***	0.77	4.37***
INV2	0.45	2.093***	0.49	2.24***
INV3	0.27	1.645*	0.31	1.72*
INV4	0.21	ns	–	–

Notes: *Significant at the 0.01 level based on 5,000 bootstrap samples; ***significant at the 0.001 level based on 5,000 bootstrap samples; ns – non-significant; INV – involvement

Table VI.
Indicator validity of the formative construct



Note: ***Significant at 0.001 level

Figure 1.
PLS results

consistent with the general belief that people with higher degree of innovativeness are more prone to engage in innovative behaviors. It should be noted that even though innovativeness has a direct effect of travel content creation smaller than social media use, its total effect is 0.35. Therefore, innovativeness is crucial to the creation of travel content online.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis that predicted travel involvement to have a positive impact on travel content creation was supported ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$). Indeed, individuals more involved with travel will be more likely to write about their travel experiences. However, this characteristic has a weaker effect on travel content creation than innovativeness and social media use.

To evaluate the predictive power of the research model, a major emphasis in PLS analysis is to examine the explained variance (R^2) of the endogenous constructs (Chin, 2010) that indicate the amount of variance in the construct, which is explained by the model (Barclay *et al.*, 1995). The main dependent variable in the current model is travel content creation, with a R^2 value of 0.25, indicating that the theoretical model explains a substantial amount of variance of that construct. It should be noted that in the consumer behavior discipline, several researchers consider that R^2 values of 0.20 are considered high (Hair *et al.*, 2013; Henseler *et al.*, 2012).

5. Implications, limitations and future research

From a theoretical perspective, there are few studies that focus on the personal characteristics of travelers that create content online. The intention of this study is to help close this gap, providing useful insights with respect to this matter that will serve as a basis for future research concerning travel content creation online.

Travel social media websites (e.g. Tripadvisor, Virtual Tourist and Holiday Check), can only thrive if travelers create content about their trips on those websites. This study has provided evidence that travel content creators are more innovative, involved with travel and use social media more often. Thus, travel review sites should develop strategies to reach these travelers based on these characteristics and incentive them to write reviews.

The findings of this study are also important for travel service providers that now know which travelers will be more likely to write an online travel review. This is an important aspect, as UGC is considered to be more credible and trustworthy than reviews from professionals or marketer information (Fotis *et al.*, 2012; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008) and will have a significant impact on sales (Sparks and Browning, 2011; Ye *et al.*, 2011). Travel service providers can encourage travelers to create content online on their own websites by facilitating social interaction and providing appealing websites (Abrantes *et al.*, 2013). Knowing that travelers are more innovative, involved with travel and use social media more often is crucial in designing such websites.

On the other hand, knowing some of the personal characteristics of travel content creators is also useful to travel-related organizations, as they can adapt their marketing strategies, such as segmentation, positioning and promotion knowing which type of travelers are more likely to write about the travel services that they offer. Indeed, a deeper understanding of the personal characteristics of travel content creators will help travel providers assess the revenue opportunities that the various social media channels might provide (Noone *et al.*, 2011). Travel marketers

need to carefully nurture this segment, as they often act as advocates of a brand or an online travel provider.

As in any research project, this study has several limitations. First, the data used in this study were based on a convenience sample only containing the Portuguese population. Therefore, generalization of the results should be made with caution. The replication of this study in other countries would be desirable. It would also be worthwhile to conduct cross-cultural research on this matter as suggested by researchers (e.g. Gretzel *et al.*, 2011).

Second, the study used a quantitative approach to examine the effect of personal characteristics on travel content creation. A research using also a qualitative approach could shed new light on the understanding of the research hypotheses. For instance, it may be useful to better understand why travel involvement has a weak effect on travel content creation, as it would be expected that people more involved with travel would have a higher probability to write about their travel experiences.

Another limitation of this study was that it did not consider the use of other popular social media websites, such as LinkedIn and Twitter, to measure social media use. Since the authors intended a short questionnaire to increase the response rate, they were not included. However, further research could include more items to measure social media use.

The personal characteristics that affect travel content creation considered in this research only explain 25 per cent of its variance. Therefore, there are other important factors which have not been included in the model, representing an opportunity for further research. For instance, a future line of investigation is to consider the effect of travelers' online personality, as this is a relatively unexplored field in the tourism and hospitality context (Leung and Law, 2010) that may affect the creation of travel content online.

In spite of several limitations, academic researchers, tourism practitioners and marketers can take advantage of this study to better understand the creation of travel content online and consequently improve marketing strategies. The recommendations for further investigations also provide researchers with challenging directions for future research.

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