

## How does Social Media influence the Behaviour of Hotel Consumers?

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### ABSTRACT

People have easy access to the internet, social media and the information there. In just a matter of seconds, the consumer can obtain information about accommodation in any part of the world, including advertising and reviews. This research investigates social media in hospitality by analysing its effects on consumer behaviour: accommodation booking in the digital environment. Data were collected from Portuguese tourists spending holidays between 2018 and 2020 using a questionnaire shared on social networks. A structural equation model was employed to test the relationships among variables. The results show that advertising and the quality of testimonials shared on social media influence consumer behaviour when booking hotel accommodations. The more positive the comments on the online review sites, the more influence they have on consumer behaviour.

### KEYWORDS

Social Media, Consumer Behaviour, Accommodation Reservation, Hospitality, Online Reputation, Review Websites.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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## 1. Introduction

Advances in technology have changed the way in which tourists search for information about the hotel industry (O'Connor, 2010), while social media is increasingly an essential tool that also influences consumer behaviour. The various platforms that coexist on the internet, especially social media, can influence consumers in the different stages of a trip and play a prominent role in the stages before the trip (Limberger, Dos Anjos, de Souza Meira, & dos Angels, 2014). These platforms continue to be used in the next stages. They affect the customer's journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) because the range of available information, as well as reservation and purchase systems, has grown and this has stimulated consumer behaviour towards a purchase (Soifer, Choi, & Lee, 2020).

It is in the interest of tourism professionals to know how a tourist's opinion can affect the image of their product for people who may become future consumers of the same product, such as hotel accommodation. In this context, we aim to improve communication between the hotel industry and its consumers by identifying those aspects that will help to foster a behaviour change, which will enhance their involvement in the communication associated with the hotel product.

This study analyses how social media can influence a tourist in the decision-making process when reserving their future hotel accommodation. Given that social media can enhance the hotel industry capabilities to increase their performance, this study aims to answer the following research questions: What influence does social media have in the sector? And, what are the effects on consumer behaviour and how do they contribute to decision making when booking accommodation? (Tajvidi & Karami, 2021; Ferreira & Sousa, 2022). This study will help to improve communication with consumers through engagement in this medium. The specific research objectives are as follows: (i) identify the effects of social media when the consumer books accommodation; (ii) identify whether electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation; (iii) identify whether social media advertising has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation; (iv) identify whether the search for information has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation; (v) identify whether the use of social media has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation; (vi) identify whether ICTs for hotel reservations have a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation, and (vi) identify whether the quality of testimonials through social media has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation.

To achieve the specific objectives, and thus to answer the research questions, this article is divided into three sections (in addition to the introduction and conclusion). The first section presents the literature review, which focuses concepts associated with tourism and hotel marketing, the potential of e-WOM, and the effect that comments posted on social media have on consumer behaviour. The second section presents the methodology that we used, which includes the conceptual model and the research hypotheses. The third section performs the analysis and discusses the results. It also includes the characterisation of the sample, crossing variables and the structural equation model. Finally, the conclusions, the main difficulties encountered, and possible future work will be presented with a view to developing new avenues of investigation on this topic.

## 2. Literature Review

The tourism sector is one of the largest economic activities in many countries (Maricato, 2012). However, it requires greater investment in marketing strategies because it is still in a development phase, where the market is increasingly competitive.

The increasing number of tourist companies makes competition between them more significant and consequently reduces profit margins. For a company to arouse interest in the consumer (i.e., to increase its competitiveness), it must offer something different and unique when compared to its competitors. In addition, according to Dias (2018), companies need to direct their efforts to the interests of the consumers and to satisfy their needs so that their products and services are more effective.

In short, the economic tourism sector is very competitive, and marketing has contributed by defining appropriate strategies to allow organisations to add value to themselves. According to Dias (2018), de-

veloping a market segmentation a priori is essential to define a tourism marketing strategy, whether at a traditional or digital level. This helps to determine which target markets will be the future objectives, this will help to define appropriate strategies and effective action plans to improve marketing performance.

Tourism marketing currently focuses more on awakening the five senses so that the consumers feel more involved. Consequently, a new concept has emerged, the marketing of tourist experiences (Larocca, Ladeira, Silva, & Mello, 2020). This is concerned with creating good experiences throughout the process (from purchase, consumption and post-consumption) to help with the creation of emotions, sensations and thoughts, seeking to create a relationship between the consumer and the product.

With the increased use of the internet, due to its interactive and dynamic characteristics (Law, 2014), the tourism sector must invest in creative marketing strategies that use information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a means of dissemination because this sector of activity was one of those that most adopted technological innovations to increase its productivity and the communication of tourist information.

## **2.1 The Importance of Digital Marketing in Hospitality**

The characteristics of the internet contribute to the implementation of effective marketing strategies when applied to the hotel industry (Bavik, Ngan, & Ekiz, 2017). However, this can sometimes be difficult to achieve, such as differentiation or how to create a marketing strategy for a hotel unit that highlights its differences from others, stands out from the others due to its unique factor, and affects and prompts desire in the consumer so that it is selected from among the alternatives.

Many companies have started to realise the potential of the internet in increasing their notoriety in the market (Oliveira, & Panyik, 2015), communicating directly with their customers, increasing sales volume and making their products known, that is, they began to implement marketing strategies in the digital environment. One of the great advantages of using technologies in the tourism and hotel sector is that they reduce costs and response times, as well as fees and commissions. Currently, companies generally have their own websites where they share information about themselves and their products (Remondes, Serrano, & Mena, 2015), which they use to deepen the relationship with their customers and provide complementary information about their offers.

One of the objectives of the marketer is to publicise companies and their services to their audience (Gold, 2014), thus boosting sales and making consumers or clients loyal. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to their needs and their preferences. In this context, social media has made it possible for companies to get to know their customers better and allowed entrepreneurs to recognise where their potential consumers are. Consequently, it is essential that the promotion of a hotel company is carried out through social media in an appropriate way—that is, in an appealing and efficient way that reaches the largest possible number of people (Leung, 2017)—because the tourist will select the room based on this type of information.

## **2.2 The Role of Social Media in Hotel Accommodation Marketing**

The large and diverse amount of information that can be found in social media means that customers have become more demanding of tourist and hotel organisations or companies. Tourists want authenticity, greater transparency, commitment, real-time responses, and a long-term more personal/close relationship (Pereira, 2014). Given that there is a lot of information available online, the amount of time that a tourist spends online doing their research is increasing because they want to make sure that they identify the comments that best suit their needs and make the best choices.

A study by Marktest (2020) on the use of social media by the Portuguese found that Facebook was the social network that leads in spontaneous notoriety. However, its popularity has been decreasing, with other platforms standing out. Instagram continues to become more popular, and has increased its number of users, unlike Facebook. In 2016, a new social network emerged, TikTok, which is already starting to have an effect on younger individuals, and is gaining users very quickly.

It is currently essential for hotel companies to have a presence on social networks (Amundaray, 2019), with a marketing strategy that is in line with their business objective and the segment in which they op-

erate. This allows them to establish a closer connection with their consumers, with the aim of obtaining potential customers. According to Pereira (2014), it is necessary to establish communication channels with your consumers based on trust and not just with the purpose of trying to get people to purchase a product or service. Amundaray (2019) sees social media as very important because it has changed the way in which people and companies communicate with each other and with people who may become potential customers because they allow the exchange and sharing of experiences between them. Amundaray (2019) also adds that companies use social media to strengthen their image and gain trust. However, because this is done in a virtual space, constant attention must be paid to what is being seen.

Social media in general involves a shift in the way in which people discover, read and share news, information and content. It is a fusion of sociology and technology that transforms a monologue (i.e., one to one) into dialogue (i.e., many to many). Social media has become extremely popular (Xavier et al., 2020) because it allows people to connect in the online world to create personal and business relationships, and to produce and share content with other users. Social media has become a highly valued means of communication because any individual can be considered to be an online content creator. It is thus necessary to verify the credibility of those who pass on information (Pop et al., 2021), as well as those of those who read and interpret it (Stein, Nodari, & Salvagni, 2018).

In short, the new tools that exist today in the online world mean that consumers, instead of playing a passive role as simple content readers, have started to play an active role and are able to write and create content, which was not previously possible. User-generated content can be seen as more authentic than what is “sold” on the websites themselves because it works as e-WOM. The website that has the most effect on the tourism sector is TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor, 2021).

### 2.2.1 e-WOM

Although e-WOM works in the same way as traditional word of mouth, it does so through online means. Both are based on the same principle, which is the exchange of information between people (as shown in Table 1).

**Table 1.** Differences between e-WOM and WOM

	Traditional Word of Mouth (WOM)	Electronic Word of mouth (e-WOM)
Meeting	Face to face	Online
Moment of meeting	Meeting at the same time	Meeting is not simultaneous
Number of participants	Few	Many
Restrictions	Geographical	Internet use
Information direction	Bidirectional	One-way/Bidirectional
Relationship between the transmitter and the receiver	Limited/Restricted	None
Volume of information	Small	Big
Relationship with the company	None	Uncertain

Source: Adapted from López and Sicilia (2013, p. 11)

Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron, and Marticotte (2010) note that word-of-mouth (WOM) is probably the oldest method of exchanging opinions about various goods and services offered by markets. They add that communication via this medium can take several forms, including by telephone or in person, or by email or any other means of communication. Word-of-mouth is considered a way to obtain truer information than that found in the online world (O'Connor, 2010). Often, individuals only see the advertisements and marketing campaigns that companies undertake to reach the largest number of people and persuade them to buy their products. In addition, many of these future consumers feel that information given by companies is not always the most truthful (Kumar et al., 2020; Pop et al., 2021), so they often turn to the opinions of the people closest to them, such as friends and family. Meanwhile, e-WOM takes place online,

where the exchange of information is not only in a familiar environment, as in WOM, but can reach anyone, anywhere in the world, provided that they have access to the internet (Dias, 2018), thus reaching a greater number of people who are potentially interested in the same hotel products and services.

Following López and Sicilia (2013), in the field of marketing, word-of-mouth communication can be defined as a conversation between consumers about the experiences of a particular product or service. The continuous monitoring of online review platforms is one of the main tasks that is used to control what customers say about a particular hotel establishment. It can thus positively or negatively influence future customers (Dias, 2018). Hotel units frequently cannot control all of the comments that are written on their pages or online review websites. These sites are widely used (Dias, 2018) because access to information is quick and easy and allows consumers to deliberate on a subject in a more independent and contextualised way. According to Santos, “eWOM has a high weight in consumer choice, as the search for information nowadays is essentially done through the Internet” (2019, p. 28), it also has an effect on booking tourist accommodation. The consumers can now share their opinions and knowledge about products and services, including tourism, which are called comments or reviews.

### **2.2.2 Online Reviews**

Online review sites can be consulted by any tourist when looking for and collecting truthful and reliable information about a tourist destination or hotel. Any comment or recommendation that is made on these types of sites has become an essential tool. The increase in the number of reviews available online can have advantages and disadvantages (O'Connor, 2010)—they help to publicise the hotel in a positive or negative way, allowing any individual to give their opinion. If it is a positive comment, then it is advantageous, but it can be harmful if there are complaints (Acosta, Danielce, & Bidarte, 2019).

A future consumer, before purchasing a product or service, seeks to collect as much information as possible and tends to take into account the opinions of other people who have registered their feedback on these sites. Comments written by other individuals are important for those looking for more information beyond what is provided by a brand's own website. User-generated content can be seen as more authentic than what is sold on the websites themselves because it works like e-WOM.

## **2.3 The Effect That Comments on Social Media Have on Hotel Accommodation**

According to Kotler and Keller (2012, p. 164), “consumer behaviour is the study of how individuals, groups and organisations select, buy, use and dispose of goods, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and desires”. Kotler and Keller (2012) also note that consumer behaviour depends on cultural, social and personal factors. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), there are several theories about human motivation, but the three best known are by Sigmund Freud, Abraham Maslow, and Frederick Herzberg. Maslow's Theory stands out the most (Reis, 2004). For example, according to Maslow's pyramid, a tourist may have several preferences during the hotel reservation process (e.g., that the hotel is close to the beach, breakfast is included, there is free parking, Wi-fi, and a swimming pool, etc.) but some are higher priority options than others depending on which needs are considered most important, and will thus contribute to their satisfaction and consequently their behaviour as a consumer. This will affect the decision-making process for a particular destination or tourist product.

According to Giaretta (2011), the purchase decision process is composed of five phases: identification of the need; information search; evaluation of alternatives; the buying decision; and post-purchase evaluation. According to Schinaider, Fagundes, and Schinaider (2016), the five stages of the purchase decision process are fundamental for the choice of a product or service. The fact that a tourist can identify the need to buy a product means they will immediately seek information about it and choose the best alternative for them, making a comparative analysis between quality and price. After choosing the product or service that most caught their attention or with which they identified the most, tourists then try it out and analyse whether or not their initial need was satisfied.

Consumers tend to search for information they believe to be true when purchasing unfamiliar products. The increased use of online review sites is a fundamental means for consumers looking to find out about the quality of the product (Costa, 2019). According to Santos (2019, p. 28), “a satisfied customer will

be able to repeat the experience. A delighted customer will certainly repeat and propagate a positive image of the company/product/service. A dissatisfied customer can spread a negative image”.

## 2.4 Social Media is Increasingly Influencing Tourists and Their Choices

Most tourists today do not book accommodation without first consulting reviews by other tourists on on-line review sites such as TripAdvisor. In accordance with the work of Assis (2011), a tourist company needs to have a product or service that is of good quality and capable of satisfying all the needs of its customers in order to retain them. Internet has a great influence on a consumer's decision to book hotel accommodation (Sotiriadis, 2017). It has become the first choice in consumer searching for information about services and products. Customer satisfaction should be seen as a priority for companies in such a competitive scenario. Customer satisfaction is seen as a strategy to keep customers loyal and even to expand a customer base through word of mouth. When a customer is satisfied with a company, they maintain a longer and healthier relationship (Souza, 2018), where both parties end up benefiting each other. Online review sites have a high level of trust compared to other sources of information (Mateus, 2015) because consumers trust the words of other tourists more than they trust traditional marketing messages made by companies that are only aiming for profit.

Mateus (2015) also mentions that positive reviews increase consumer opinions of hotel accommodation and affect their booking or purchase behaviour—trust in the hotel increases and, at the same time, decreases the risk in the hotel during the process of booking accommodation. This phenomenon occurs because a satisfied consumer who speaks well about the product does not receive any benefit when they do so and may influence the behaviour of others when they intend to choose and book tourist accommodation. Social media and its user-generated content are essential source for searching and collecting information when reserving a hotel unit. Therefore, it is important to investigate its effects on the hotel sector and how they influence consumer behaviour in the decision-making process for booking tourist accommodation.

## 3. Methodology

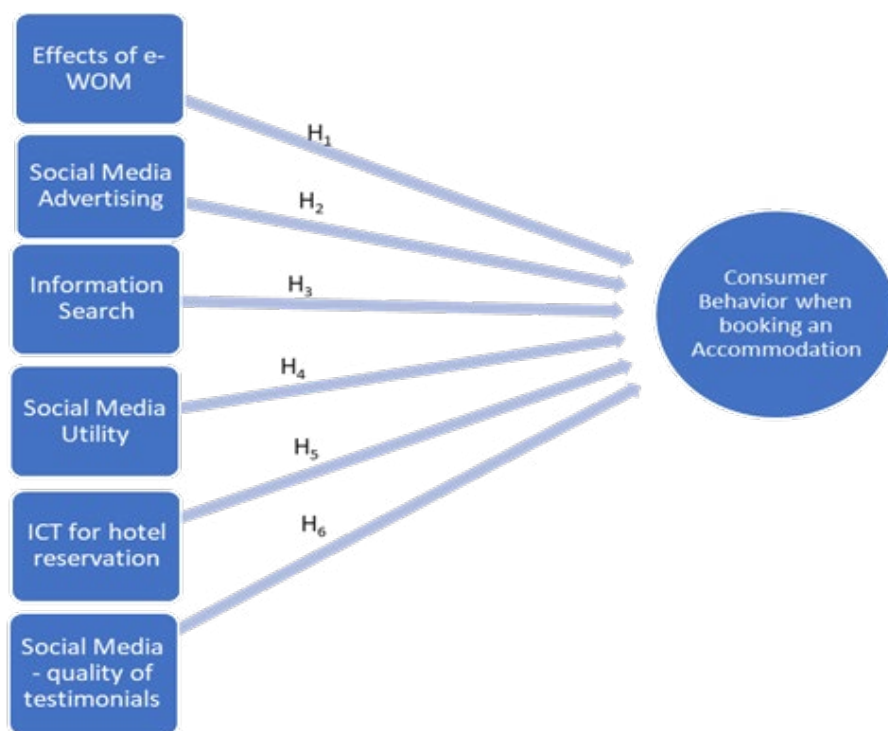
### 3.1 Context

Tourism activity in Portugal is very focused on the traditional products of “sun and sea”, which are also known in English as tourism of the three Ss (i.e., sun, sand and sea) (Daniel, 2010). The importance of this economic sector can be ascertained by analysing the balance of payments, the gross domestic product (GDP), and the role it plays in the creation of jobs, investments and income, which is why it is used in developing various economic activities (Maricato, 2012). According to the Turismo de Portugal website (TP, 2020), 27 million guests were registered in 2019, which represents a growth of 7.2% compared to the previous year (16.3 million foreign guests). The total number of overnight stays in 2019 was 69.8 million, and the main outbound markets were United Kingdom, Germany and then Spain (TP, 2020). According to the same source (TP, 2020), the tourism sector is the largest economic activity in the country, and tourist revenues contributed 8.7% to Portuguese GDP and consequently generated 336,800 jobs in 2019.

### 3.2 Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses

Scientific articles were collected, and then a selection of those considered crucial for the development of the same was made, with a view to defining the model and the research hypotheses. The objective of this research is to understand the effects of social media on the hotel sector through an analysis of the effects that it can have on consumer behaviour when booking hotel accommodations, as per the model presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model and its Hypotheses

Source: Own Elaboration

The model presented in Figure 4 was developed by taking into account the literature review, which was designed to analyse the impacts that social media have on consumer behaviour when booking hotel accommodation, whose hypotheses follow:

- H1:** e-WOM has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation.
- H2:** Advertising on social media has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation.
- H3:** The search for information positively affects on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation.
- H4:** The usefulness of social media positively affects on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation.
- H5:** ICT for hotel booking positively affects on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation.
- H6:** The quality of testimonials through social media positively affects on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation.

### 3.3 Questionnaire Design

After the elaboration of the questionnaire based on the variables and indicators presented in Table 2 and before its application in social media, a pilot test was carried out. Five people from the tourism area were invited to answer this test and see if all the questions were properly formulated and clear. After carrying out the test, the final questionnaire was prepared.

**Table 2.** Indicators used to Measure Consumer Behaviour when Booking Hotel Accommodation

Latent Constructs/ Variables	Indicators/Issues	Sources
The Effects of E-WOM on Choosing a Hotel (E-WOM)	Do you often change your initial preference after searching for relevant information through social media? Are you likely to change your mind about accommodation after reading positive reviews online about it? Do comments made by other users influence a consumer's purchasing decision? Can comments from certain satisfied customers influence your purchasing decision?	Adapted from Kumar et al. (2020)
Social Media Advertising (SMA)	Generally, does social media encourage you to visit specific accommodations? Does the use of social media help you in choosing accommodation? Do you find advertisements on social media appealing? Can the notification of the promotion of accommodation through social media influence your purchasing decision?	Adapted from Kumar et al. (2020)
Information Search (IS)	Do you trust the information on social media if you have uncertainties about an accommodation purchase? Do you use social media to see comments about accommodation? Do you think it is easier to find information on social media than through mass media (e.g., TV, radio, newspapers, etc.)? Are you likely to share your experience by leaving a comment on an accommodation page after visiting it?	Adapted from Kumar et al. (2020)
Social Media Utility (SMU)	Does the use of social media make it easier to choose accommodation? Does the use of social media improve your ability to choose accommodation? Does the use of social media bring advantages during the process of choosing accommodation (e.g. information advantages, discounts, etc.)? Does the use of social media allow you to choose accommodation more quickly?	Adapted from Xavier et al. (2020)
ICT for Hotel Reservation (IHR)	Do you look for related information on social media before booking accommodation? Do information technologies help check the availability of accommodation in order to make an online booking? Do you think social media helps you make your reservations online? Do you think social media helps you compare prices between various accommodations?	Adapted from Kumar et al. (2020)
Social Media – the Quality of Testimonies (SQT)	Do you think the content about accommodation that you find on social media is reliable? Do you think that the content you find on social media about accommodation is of good quality? Do you think you are dependent on people's comments before making a reservation? Do you think that content shared on social media creates a closer relationship between tourists and accommodation?	Adapted from Pop et al. (2021)
Consumer Behaviour in Booking an Accommodation (CBA)	Does the interactive promotion of social media accommodation booking influence consumer purchasing decisions? Do reminders about a promotion for accommodation through social media influence a consumer's purchasing decision? Do you think that more technological accommodation can influence the consumer's purchasing decision? Can housing that uses technology to increase its sustainability influence a consumer's purchasing decision?	Adapted from Kumar et al. (2020)

Source: Own Elaboration



### 3.4 Social Media

The TripAdvisor website ([www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)) claims to be the largest travel platform in the world and helps 463 million travellers and tourists every month with the aim of making the most of their trip. (TripAdvisor, 2021). TripAdvisor is used by people all over the world and covers various areas, including accommodation, restaurants, and airlines, among others. It also allows users to compare prices between various hotels, flights, restaurants, and other actions.

Platforms such as TripAdvisor are in high demand because the comments made on them can play a key role in the tourist decision-making process, given that they involve the personal opinions of people who have already used the product or service in question. There will always be positive and negative comments about the products and services that each accommodation offers, and hoteliers must determine which strategy to apply in these situations. If a tourist has a bad experience, then this does not mean that everyone else who chooses that service or product will have the same experience.

### 3.5 Population and Sample

An online questionnaire was applied through Google Forms. It was shared on Facebook from May 3 to May 5, 2021. The target population were Portuguese tourists who were on vacation between 2018 and 2020. A total of 338 questionnaires were collected. The sample was obtained through convenience because the questionnaire was shared on social networks (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Technical Datasheet

Universe of Research	Portuguese tourists who were in hotels between 2018 and 2020
Sample size	338 questionnaires
Method of obtaining data	Online questionnaire applied on social networks (Facebook)
Sample procedure	Convenience sample
Program used	Google Forms
Software for data analysis	SmartPLS (version 3.3.3) for Windows and PowerBI (Version: 2.94.921.0 64-bit (June 2021))
Start of the inquiry	03/05/2021
End of inquiry	05/05/2021

Source: Own Elaboration

### 3.6 Research Methods and Data Collection

#### a) Cleaning and Processing the Collected Data (Power BI)

After collecting all of the data, filtering was performed where the responses were cleaned and the number of valid responses was verified. In terms of cleanliness, there were some problems with the locales, and it was necessary to standardise names in terms of spelling accents and uppercase and lowercase. In addition, Power BI assumed locations for places that were not the correct ones because this required changing and specifying the cities and locations to be correct. Ages also underwent a data cleaning process because there were people who only entered the number corresponding to their age and others who wrote in full in addition to the number (e.g., 73 and 73 years old).

#### b) Organisation of the Data for Analysis in Power BI for Descriptive Analysis

Data analysis in Power BI characterises the sample using methods that allow a descriptive analysis, such as the average age of the respondents, their location, and gender, among others. At this point, analyses will also be carried out on the data regarding habits when using social media, as well as behaviour when searching for and reserving hotel accommodation, following the exploration of the crossing of variables that characterise the sample with others considered relevant for the present study.

### c) Estimation of the Structural Equations Model

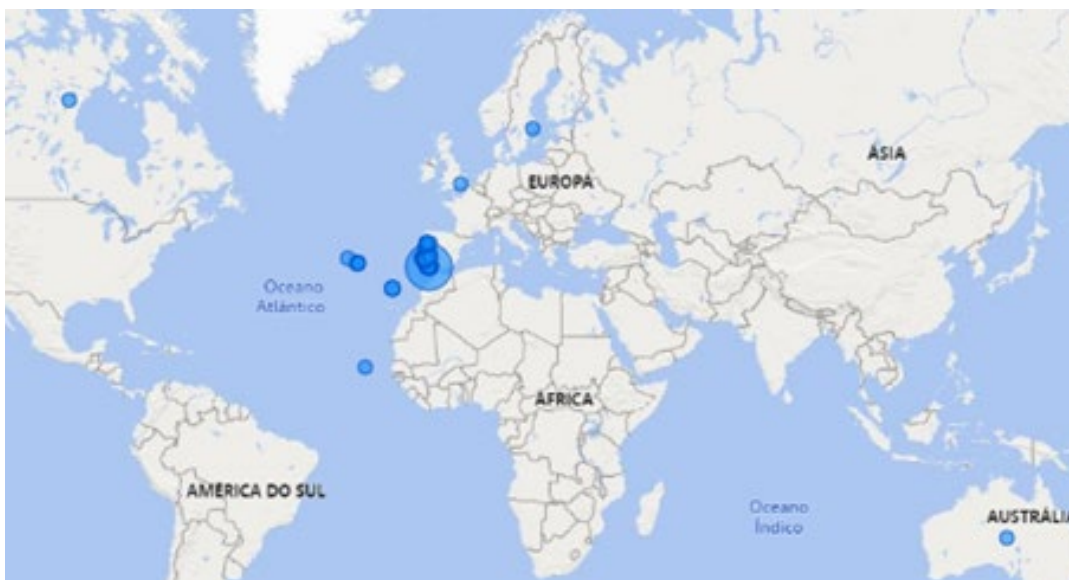
Structural equation modelling was considered to obtain an estimation of the research model using the SmartPLS software. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was considered because the model indicated to overcome the need to measure multidimensional and not directly observable concepts, which are also called constructs or latent variables (Hoyle, 1995). Modelling with SEM includes two steps: an assessment of the goodness of fit of the model and an estimation of the structural model (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2014).

## 4. Analysis and Discussion of the Results

### 4.1 Sample Characterisation

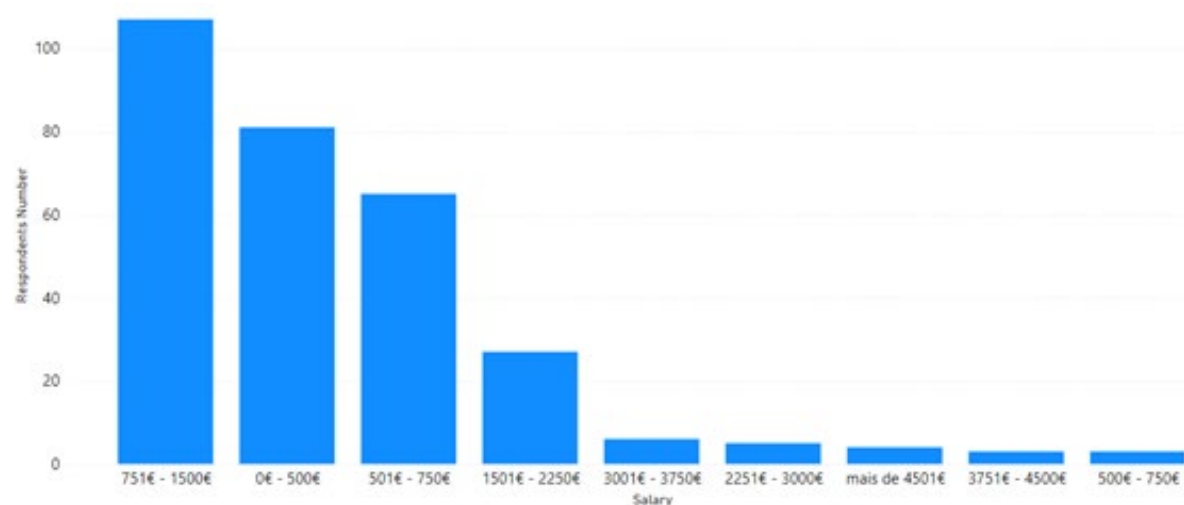
The sample was characterised using Microsoft's Power BI, which is a business intelligence (BI) tool that allows for the personalised and comprehensive management of data, making it easy to obtain more detailed information. (Power BI, 2021). The analysis with descriptive statistical methods considers measures of central tendency. The mean age was 29.06 years, the median was 24 (referring to the middle value), and the mode was 23 (the value that appears most frequently). The standard deviation for the age of respondents was 11.87 years, which represents the variability in relation to the average age: the maximum was 73, and the minimum was 15. Most respondents were female (65.7%), 33.7% were male, and only 0.59% did not know or did not want to answer. More than half the respondents (58.6%) had a Bachelor's degree, 19.8% had secondary education, and 14.8% had a Master's degree. Those with a Bachelor's degree corresponded to 4.4%, a doctorate to 1.5%, and finally, basic education to 0.89%. Most respondents were employed (54.4%), 30.2% were students, 6.8% said they were unemployed, 6.5% were self-employed, and 2.1% of respondents were retired. The geographical distribution of respondents can be seen in Figure 2, which shows that most respondents were Portuguese.

**Figure 2.** Map of Respondent Locations



Source: Own Elaboration

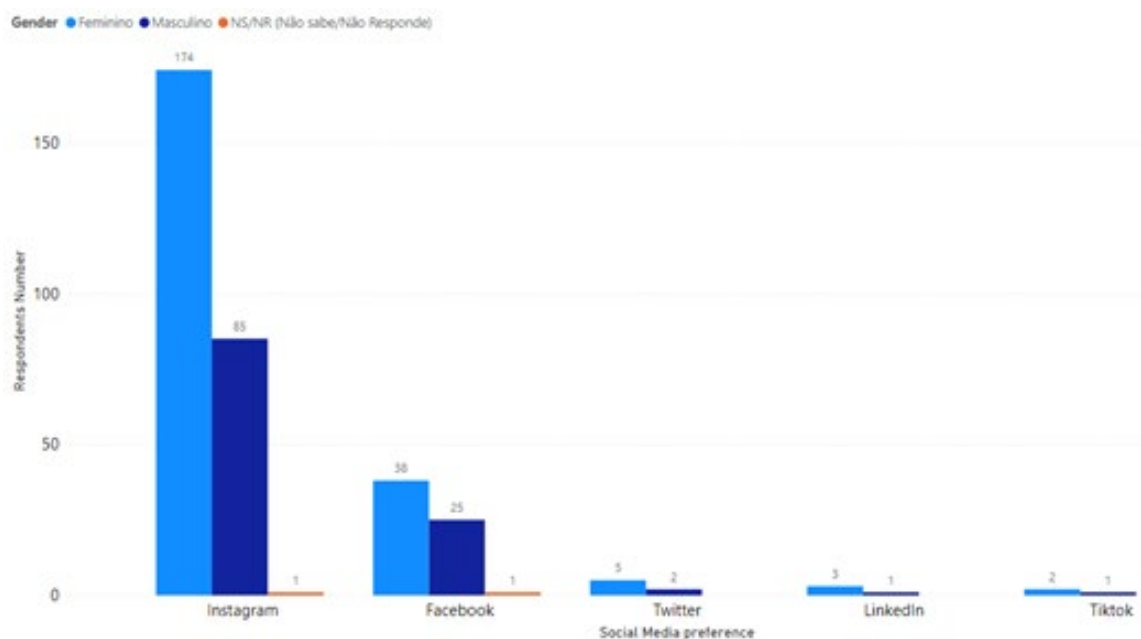
The salaries of the respondents who answered this question can be seen in Figure 3: 107 people answered that they received between €751 and €1500, 81 between €0 and €500, and finally, 65 between €501 and €750. The question about salary was a non-mandatory one, and we obtained 301 responses out of a total of 338 respondents.

**Figure 3.** Salaries of the Respondents

Source: Own Elaboration

## 4.2 Habits of Social Media Use and Behaviour when Searching and Booking Hotel Accommodation

The analysis of social media usage habits related to consumer behaviour when searching for information and booking hotel accommodation, as shown in Figure 4, allows us to conclude that the social media most answered by respondents was Instagram, by both females (174 responses) and by males (85 responses), and the most commonly used social media platform was Facebook, with 38 female responses and 25 male responses.

**Figure 4.** Which Social Media do you use the Most

Source: Own Elaboration

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, 31.9% of respondents reported staying in accommodation twice a year, 26.9% stayed only once, and 17.8% stayed more than three times on average. As shown in Table 4, most of

the respondents preferred hotels (196 responses), followed by tourist apartments (77 responses), hostels (57 responses) and finally, Pousadas (8 responses).

**Table 4.** What Type of Accommodation do you usually Choose?

What Type of Accommodation do you usually Choose?	Number of Responses	% Type of Accommodation
Hostels	57	16.86%
Hotels	196	57.99%
Pousadas	8	2.37%
Tourist Apartments	77	22.78%
Total	338	100.00%

Source: Own Elaboration

### 4.3 Cross-Analyses: Sample Characterisation, Social Media Use Habits and Behaviour When Searching for and Booking Hotel Accommodation

The social networks most used by respondents were Instagram for those up to the age of 40 and Facebook for those from 41 to 90. Table 5 shows the cross-referencing of data between the variables: gender, age, and the social media they use the most. Instagram is the most commonly used social network up to the age of 20 by both females and males, and those who do not identify with either gender do not know/did not respond.

**Table 5.** Analysis of the most used Social Media by Age and Gender

Which social media do you use the most?	0 to 20 years	21 to 30 years	31 to 40 years	41 to 50 years	51 to 60 years	61 to 90 years	Total
Facebook		3.25%	2.07%	3.85%	7.99%	1.78%	18.93%
Female		1.18%	1.78%	3.25%	5.03%		11.24%
Male		2.07%	0.30%	0.59%	2.96%	1.48%	7.40%
DK/DA						0.30%	0.30%
Instagram	4.44%	67.16%	3.55%	0.59%	0.59%	0.59%	76.92%
Female	3.55%	44.97%	2.37%		0.30%	0.30%	51.48%
Male	0.59%	22.19%	1.18%	0.59%	0.30%	0.30%	25.15%
DK/DA	0.30%						0.30%
LinkedIn		0.59%	0.59%				1.18%
Female		0.30%	0.59%				0.89%
Male		0.30%				0.30%	0.30%
TikTok		0.59%			0.30%	0.30%	0.89%
Female		0.59%				0.30%	0.59%
Male					0.30%		0.30%
Twitter	0.30%	1.18%		0.30%	0.30%		2.07%
Female	0.30%	0.89%			0.30%		1.48%
Male		0.30%	0.30%	0.30%			0.59%
Total	4.73%	72.78%	6.21%	4.73%	9.17%	2.37%	100.00%

Legend: DK/DA - Don't know/Don't answer

Source: Own Elaboration

From 21 to 30 years old, the most used social media is Instagram by both genders (female with 44.97% and male with 22.19%). Although all the social media mentioned in the questionnaire were chosen (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok and Twitter) by the respondents, some have very low values, so they did not show much relevance to others. However, this segment knows and uses different social media. From 31 to 40 years old, the social media chosen by the respondents was Instagram (3.55%) and then Facebook (2.07%). From 41 to 50 years old, Facebook (3.25%) was the most requested social media by females, and among males, there is a tie between Facebook and Instagram, both with 0.59%. From 51 to 60 years old, all social media were chosen except for LinkedIn. However, the most used by both genders is Facebook (female with 5.03% and male with 2.96%). From 61 to 90 years old, only Facebook and Instagram are used by the respondents. The female gender uses Instagram more, with 0.30% while the male gender and those who do not know/do not respond prefer Facebook (male gender with 1.48% and do not know/do not respond with 0.30%).

Table 6 presents an analysis that shows that up to 40 years of age, all types of accommodation mentioned are chosen by the respondents. However, from the age of 41, some are no longer chosen, such as inns. Regardless of age, the preferred accommodation by respondents is always the hotel, with the highest values, followed by tourist apartments, then hostels and finally inns.

**Table 6.** Analysis of the Type of Accommodation usually chosen by Age and Gender

What type of accommodation do you usually choose?	0 to 20 years	21 to 30 years	31 to 40 years	41 to 50 years	51 to 60 years	61 to 90 years	Total
Pousadas	0.59%	1.48%	0.30%				2.37%
Male		0.59%					0.59%
Female	0.59%	0.89%	0.30%				1.78%
Hotels	2.66%	39.35%	4.14%	3.55%	6.80%	1.48%	57.99%
DK/DA						0.30%	0.30%
Male	0.30%	14.20%	1.18%	1.18%	2.66%	0.89%	20.41%
Female	2.37%	25.15%	2.96%	2.37%	4.14%	0.30%	37.28%
Hostels	0.59%	14.50%	0.59%		0.59%	0.59%	16.86%
Male		4.14%			0.30%	0.59%	5.03%
Female	0.59%	10.36%	0.59%		0.30%		11.83%
Tourist Apartments	0.89%	17.46%	1.18%	1.18%	1.78%	0.30%	22.78%
DK/DA	0.30%						0.30%
Male	0.30%	5.92%	0.30%	0.30%	0.59%	0.30%	7.69%
Female	0.30%	11.54%	0.89%	0.89%	1.18%		14.79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.73%</b>	<b>72.78%</b>	<b>6.21%</b>	<b>4.73%</b>	<b>9.17%</b>	<b>2.37%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Legend: DK/DA - Don't know/Don't answer  
Source: Own Elaboration

#### 4.4 Structural Equation Models

The SmartPLS program was used to in the analysis of the structural equation models (SEM). According to Nascimento and Macedo (2016), this program and MEE enable us to understand latent phenomena, such as perceptions, judgment, and attitudes, but are mainly used to measure their influence on measures such as satisfaction. Nascimento and Macedo (2016, p. 3) also mention that MEEs have some advantages when compared to other models, such as:

More flexible assumptions; ability to analyse multiple relationships simultaneously; working with latent variables; analyse time series data; ability to test for non-normal data; test models with a large number of equations as a whole, obtaining global measures of fit; ability to model mediating and moderating variables; ability to model error terms; etc.

According to Pinto (2016, p. 19), in an MEE model, “the relationships established between the latent variables and the respective indicators represent the so-called measurement model”, which “seeks to test a theory that establishes relationships between the latent variables” that constitute the structural model.

According to Hair et al. (2014), SEM include two moments: (i) evaluation of the measurement model and (ii) evaluation of the structural model. At first, when the measurement model is studied, a factor analysis of the indicators is carried out in order to understand the relationships between them and the latent variables or constructs. In the second moment, the structural model is estimated through a regression observation, where the existing links between the constructs are estimated.

#### 4.4.1 Assessment of Model Fit Measures or Measurement Model Assessment

The adjustment measures for the model to be evaluated are shown in Table 7. Only when the measurement model is considered acceptable, meaning that its adjustments have been completed, can we move on to the next element (i.e., the evaluation of the structural model).

##### e) Convergent Validity

Table 8 presents the results of the PLS algorithm, according to the AVE criterion, which is only considered adequate when the value is greater than 0.5. We can thus demonstrate that all variables are considered adequate for the study. Hypothesis 3—The search for information has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking an accommodation, as represented by the construct - Information Search (INS)—did not pass the convergent validity test and was not included in the final model.

**Table 7.** Assessment of Model Adjustment Measures

Steps	Measurement criterion	Values considered appropriate	References
Convergent Validity	AVE (average variance extracted)	> 0.5	Henseler, et al. (2009)
Internal Consistency	Alpha Cronbach's	> 0.6 (acceptable) > 0.7 (desirable)	Hair et al. (2014)
	Rho A	> 0.7 (desirable) > 0.9 (desirable)	Hair et al. (2014)
	Cross Loadings	An indicator should have the highest correlation with its latent variable.	Henseler et al. (2009)
Discriminant Validity	Fornell-Larcker Criterion	The square root of the AVE of each construct must be greater than the correlation with another construct.	Fornell and Larcker (1981)
	Rácio Heterotrait-Monotrait	< 1 < 0.9 (Satisfactory)	Hair et al. (2014)

Source: Own Elaboration

**Table 8.** Construct Reliability and Validity

Latent variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CBA	0.772	0.789	0.851	0.589
SMA	0.765	0.770	0.850	0.586
SQT	0.797	0.822	0.867	0.620
IHR	0.797	0.863	0.868	0.632
SMU	0.915	0.916	0.940	0.796
e-WOM	0.750	0.753	0.842	0.574

Source: Own Elaboration



### f) Internal Consistency

Table 8 shows the measurement criterion for Cronbach's Alpha, which is considered adequate because it is greater than 0.6, and is therefore acceptable. This table also verifies that the second criterion of this internal consistency step is also considered adequate because all the values present in the column referring to Rho A are greater than 0.7, and are therefore acceptable.

### g) Discriminating Validity

The third stage to be studied was the discriminant validity, which can be evaluated according to three different measurement criteria: 1) cross loadings, 2) Fornell-Larcker criterion, and 3) Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio. The cross-loadings measurement criterion was considered to be adequate because the indicator has the highest correlation with its respective latent variable. For the Fornell-Larcker criterion to be considered valid, the square root of the AVE of each construct must be greater than the correlation with another construct. According to Table 9, we can verify that this is demonstrated and is considered valid; that is, the first value of each column is always the highest.

**Table 9.** Discriminant Validity - Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	<b>CBA</b>	<b>SMA</b>	<b>SQT</b>	<b>IHR</b>	<b>SMU</b>	<b>e-WOM</b>
CBA	<b>0.767</b>					
SMA	0.545	<b>0.766</b>				
SQT	0.613	0.517	<b>0.788</b>			
IHR	0.520	0.500	0.545	<b>0.795</b>		
SMU	0.589	0.628	0.603	0.761	<b>0.892</b>	
e-WOM	0.441	0.419	0.515	0.348	0.460	<b>0.757</b>

Source: Own Elaboration

The last criterion is the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio. For it to be considered valid, it must always be less than 1, although less than 0.9 is acceptable, as shown in Table 10, because all values shown in the table are less than 1.

**Table 10.** Discriminant Validity - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	<b>CBA</b>	<b>SMA</b>	<b>SQT</b>	<b>IHR</b>	<b>SMU</b>	<b>e-WOM</b>
CBA						
SMA	0.680					
SQT	0.748	0.649				
IHR	0.607	0.601	0.653			
SMU	0.668	0.740	0.693	0.865		
e-WOM	0.559	0.537	0.662	0.443	0.542	

Source: Own Elaboration

These test values, according to the measurement model, present a satisfactory result. This means that it is possible to move on to the evaluation of the structural model, where we can test the hypotheses considered in the present investigation.

### 4.4.2 Structural Model Assessment

The evaluation of the structural model must be initiated by the analysis of the coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ) of the most important endogenous latent variables of the model (Pinto, 2016), as shown in Table 11.

**Table 11.** Model Evaluation

Model fit quality indicators	Measurement criterion	Values considered appropriate	References
General model adjustment indicator	$R^2$	Ranges from 0 to 1 (20% in the area of consumer behaviour is considered high)	Hair et al. (2014)
Test of the significance of correlations and regressions	t-test	$T \geq 1.96$	Hair et al. (2014)
Predictive validity (Stone-Geisser indicator)	$Q^2$	$Q^2 > 0$	Hair et al. (2014)
Cohen indicator (evaluates the quality of a construct for model adjustment)	$F^2$	Values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 are considered small, medium and large.	Hair et al. (2014)

Source: Own Elaboration

**a) Goodness of Fit of the Model**

To evaluate the structural model, Pearson's coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicates the quality of the adjusted model because it represents the proportion of variance of the dependent variable that is explained by the independents (Hair et al., 2014). However, the interpretation must be carried out within the framework of the study area. According to Hair et al. (2014), values above 20.0% are considered high in studies of consumer behaviour, where the present investigation fits, so  $R^2 = 48.4\%$  is considered high.

**b) Significance of Correlations and Regressions**

In the individual analysis of the model coefficients, the absolute value, the sign of each coefficient and its statistical significance must be analysed. These values are obtained through the bootstrapping method (Hair et al., 2014), where the absolute value of the t bootstrap obtained must be greater ( $>$ ) than 1.96, or the p-value must be less ( $<$ ) than 0.05 in a two-sided test for it to be considered valid. As we can see in Table 12, the only hypotheses that are considered valid are the first two, in this case,  $H_6$  and  $H_2$ . The others are not considered to be valid, and therefore will be rejected.

**Table 12.** Direct Effects on the CBA Variable

Hypothesis	Indicators	Coefficient	Average	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( $ O/STDEV $ )	P Values
$H_6$	SQT $\rightarrow$ CBA	0.317	0.313	0.062	5.094	0.000
$H_2$	SMA $\rightarrow$ CBA	0.194	0.197	0.060	3.226	0.001
$H_4$	SMU $\rightarrow$ CBA	0.160	0.155	0.085	1.879	0.061
$H_5$	IHR $\rightarrow$ CBA	0.098	0.105	0.074	1.320	0.188
$H_1$	e-WOM $\rightarrow$ CBA	0.088	0.097	0.055	1.600	0.110

Source: Own Elaboration

$H_6$ , which corresponds to the social media – the quality of testimonials (SQT) indicator, and  $H_2$ , which refers to the social media advertising (SMA) indicator, have a positive effect on consumer behaviour in booking accommodation (CBA) because these relationships are statistically significant. It is also observed that the quality of testimonials (coefficient of 0.317) has a higher effect than advertising on social media (coefficient of 0.194) has on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation because the absolute value is higher.

**c) Predictive Validity ( $Q^2$ )**

The blindfolding method in the SmartPLS program was used to obtain the predictive validity or the Stone-Geisser indicator.  $Q^2$  evaluates how close the model is to the expected, whose value must be positive (Chin, 2010), and is applied to the endogenous latent variable (CBA). The value of predictive quality  $Q^2 = 0.266$  demonstrates the predictive quality of the latent variable CBA, which has a large mean relevance according to Pinto (2016, p. 58).

#### **d) Size of the Effect of One Construct on Another Construct**

Finally, the values of the effects that a particular construct has on another construct will be analysed to identify whether this effect is weak or strong using the Cohen indicator (Hair et al., 2014). “The impact of an independent latent variable on an endogenous latent variable” will be studied (Pinto, 2016, p. 59). We can conclude that the values of the effects are practically large in the latent variable CBA, at 0.312 (SMA) and 0.370 (SQT). In fact, the effect of the quality of the testimonies is greater than 0.35 (i.e., the value at which the effect is considered large).

## **5. Discussion of the Results**

From the specific objectives and research hypotheses considered, hypotheses two and six were confirmed, while the remaining hypotheses were not confirmed. In summary, the first hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) (i.e., e-WOM has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking an accommodation) was not confirmed in the present investigation. The second hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) (i.e., advertising on social media has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking an accommodation) was confirmed. This is in line with the study by Kumar et al. (2020), which confirms that advertisements on social media are considered appealing. The advertisements encourage consumers to visit specific accommodation, help in choosing accommodation, and offer promotions for accommodation through social media, which influence the consumer's purchasing decision when booking hotel accommodation. The third hypothesis ( $H_3$ ) (i.e., search for information has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation) did not pass the measurement model evaluation tests, so it was not analysed in the final model. The fourth hypothesis ( $H_4$ ) (which investigates whether the use of social media has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation) was not confirmed. Nor was the fifth hypothesis ( $H_5$ ) (which aimed to ascertain whether the use of ICT in a hotel booking has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking an accommodation). Finally, the sixth hypothesis ( $H_6$ ) was confirmed; that is, the quality of testimonials through social media has a positive effect on consumer behaviour when booking accommodation, as considered in work by Pop et al. (2021). Consumers consider that the content about the accommodation they find on social media is reliable, of good quality, and depends on people's comments before making a reservation. Content shared on social media creates a closer relationship between tourists and accommodation.

Taking into account the definition of the latent variables used to investigate the hypotheses associated with the model, it is clear that advertising in social media, when encouraging a tourist to visit specific accommodation, can influence the choice and booking of accommodation because advertising in this digital medium helps tourists choose accommodation, mainly through appealing advertisements and sending notifications of hotel accommodation promotions. The quality of testimonials shared on social media influences the consumer's behaviour when booking hotel accommodations because they are considered reliable and of good quality, which allows a closer relationship between the tourist and the accommodation to be established. This consequently contributes to developing a feeling of dependence, which leads people to consult reviews before making a hotel reservation.

## **6. Conclusion**

Satisfied customers contribute to the excellent image of accommodation and at the same time are a free marketing campaign for that accommodation and become an agent of the hotel itself, sharing true testimonies of their tourist experience. This investigation, through the application of an online questionnaire, the collected and analysed data, confirms that the comments on online review sites can effectively influence a consumer's purchase decision when booking accommodation, especially comments of good quality. The trustful reviews create a link between those who post and those who read and engage the potential future tourist of hotel accommodation. The comments posted by other tourists in this social media environment create a further desire to look for real testimonies before booking tourist accommodation.

Advertising on social media also plays a prominent role because it influences the behaviour of tourists when they want to book accommodation. There is a positive relationship between appealing advertising

and the effects on the consumer, and sending promotions also contributes significantly to this influence. The other research hypotheses did not confirm that e-WOM, the search for information, and the usefulness of social media do influence consumer behaviour in the decision-making process when booking hotel accommodations.

A value of  $R^2 = 48.4\%$  is considered very high in the structural model. According to Hair et al. (2014), values above 20.0% are considered high in studies of consumer behaviour, which is where the present investigation fits and represents the proportion of the variance of the CBA variable that is explained by the other variables. The results indicate that the model applied has a predictive capacity of 26.6%, which means that the more positive, high-quality, and appealing comments convey confidence and create a connection between the tourist and the accommodation.

In theoretical terms, the results of this study have implications for the need to include the effect of advertising on social media and the quality of testimonials in future investigations that analyse consumer behaviour in booking hotel accommodations. On the supply side, it raises awareness of the need to create new theoretical models for communicating information associated with the hotel product, including advertising on social media. In addition, on the supply side, the theoretical models should include the quality and trust attributed to testimonials generated by tourists on social media to analyse consumer behaviour.

In practical terms, the implications of this study highlight the need to include social media marketing strategies in plans and budgets, to enhance the promotion and dissemination of hotel products among the most significant number of potential tourists, and focus on testimonials given by tourists about accommodation in the region because they are considered credible and reliable, making these consumers agents of the product or brand on social media.

This study was limited in terms of the application of questionnaires, given that the country found itself in a very serious pandemic situation in March 2020, which meant changing the way in which the application of questionnaires was planned. They then had to be disclosed and shared only online. Another limitation was related to the sampling method, which employed non-probabilistic convenience, which means that the study sample may not be representative of the population.

It is intended to develop a holistic model in the future, which addresses issues in other areas, such as catering and gastronomy, transport and/or events (expanding the model). This will allow the effect of social media to be investigated in different areas. It will also allow us to investigate how it influences or will influence consumer behaviour in the decision-making process regarding the acquisition of these complementary products.

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