

Travel Decisions: The Effect of Facebook Posts According to Gender

Dina Ramos¹, Manuel Au-Yong-Oliveira^{1,*}, Rogelio Flores Jr.¹, Ana Malta² and Carlos Costa¹

¹GOVCOPP, Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

²Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

Abstract: Supporting Ferreira (2012), Mariani *et al.* (2016) and Rodríguez-Vázquez *et al.* (2017), it is essential to study the impact of social networks in the tourism sector, as they constitute innovative practices, with a substantial number of users involved. We aimed to understand the impact that Facebook posts have on the choice of a tourist destination. We thus prepared an online questionnaire, which obtained 361 answers, from a convenience sample involving international contacts of the authors, from 22 countries. This study revealed that men are much more influenced by Facebook posts, related to travel destinations, than women. We did inferential statistics, namely the chi square test, and we conclude that there does seem to be an association between gender and the influence of Facebook posts, at the 0.1% level. This may mean that tourism marketing firms may need to adjust their approach. We suggest that future research investigate further this phenomenon.

Keywords: Innovation, Tourism, Social Networks, Facebook, Travel information.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is a major economic driver and considered a strategic development tool for a number of countries. The growth potential of tourism triggers the need for destinations to adapt the market supply through innovation and differentiation. Consequently, there is also a growing demand from tourists who want to know more about the destination or activities to be done, to share information and have the information available, anytime and anywhere. These are some of the premises that drive the current tourism market. In this context, we need to understand the tourists' profile, who use new technologies (in this case Facebook), a widely used innovation tool, and how they choose a destination, as well as how social networks influence the selection of a destination. A survey was conducted, using an online questionnaire, to which 361 individuals from 22 countries responded, with the prevalence of Portuguese and Brazilian respondents. After the data collection, the data was processed, in order to obtain answers to the proposed questions. The study emphasizes the necessity for systematic innovation in order for companies to survive (Estevão *et al.*, 2010; Gorni *et al.*, 2009).

The article continues below with sections on travel motivation, innovation, innovation in tourism and on

tourism and social networks; sections about methodology and results of the study then follow; and the final section of the article includes the discussion and conclusions reached herein.

2. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

2.1. Travel Motivation

Today, travel has become a necessity for many people due to various reasons. People are motivated to travel for leisure or relaxation, food, religion, adventure, business, nature, medical purposes or visiting friends and relatives, among others. According to a World Tourism Organization Report (2016), more than half of the international tourist arrivals for 2015, (53% or 632 million) were motivated by holidays, recreation and leisure-related travel, while 14% were for business and professional travel, 27% for other reasons such as visiting friends and relatives (VFR), religious reasons and health treatments, and 6% was unspecified. Given that tourism is considered one of the most valuable traded commodities that connects nations and people (UNWTO/GTERC, 2014), it generates millions of jobs, creates economic opportunities, alleviates poverty and helps protect the environment. International tourism has generated US\$ 1.6 trillion in export earnings in 2017 and by 2030, international tourist arrivals are expected to reach 1.8 billion. This trend can be attributed to solid travel demand, increased purchasing power, improved transport connectivity, affordable

*Address correspondence to this author at the GOVCOPP, Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal; Tel: +351 234 370 361; Fax: +351 234 370 215; E-mail: mao@ua.pt

travel, better technology and enhanced visa facilitation (UNWTO, 2018).

The need for travel has been widely explained in various studies and theories. Maslow's Five-Level Hierarchy of Needs (1943) can be best associated to the concept of travel, that helps to clarify travellers' varied motivations as well as travel behaviours (Yousaf *et al.*, 2018). It explains the different levels of needs that include: basic needs that travellers expect destinations to meet; travellers' safety-related issues; forming relationships with people; for self-esteem or to gain higher social status; and self-actualization by doing something that benefits society (Maslow, 1943). Another theory that best explains travel motivation is the one proposed by Dann in 1977. His framework presents multiple factors that motivate tourists to visit destinations that can be categorized either as push or pull motivators (Dann, 1977). Push factors are those intrinsic factors or internal drives that urge individuals to travel, usually towards socio-psychological needs; while pull factors are mostly associated with the destination's attributes such as amenities, infrastructure, price, among others (Yousaf *et al.*, 2018). However, at present, the emergence of the internet, digital technology and social media has led to changes in communication and information delivered between organizations, communities and individuals (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). The internet, particularly social media, are considered as one of the most important means to get information, an organic source with a high level of credibility (Llodra-Riera *et al.*, 2015); and a 'game changer' on how tourism promotion is disseminated (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). It has also become a resource tool, very different from conventional sources where, nowadays, people can create new contents, publish or share information through their reviews, opinions or experiences (Dickey & Lewis, 2011). Some of these examples are Google, Youtube, Snapchat and Facebook, which are becoming tourists' main sources of information.

For tourists, the more available sources of information are about a destination, the better for them to be able to make the right travel decisions (Ho *et al.*, 2012). People gain and understand more about a destination through social networks, developing an interaction that creates opportunities for individuals to explore beneficial travel experiences (Molz, 2010). However, in an extant research with students, it is revealed that social networking sites are used daily by most students yet few of them use these platforms for their travel plans. The study also reveals that relatives

and friends are important and the most reliable source of information (Asvikaa & Gupta, 2018). This could be attributed to building trust, that may require greater effort and time (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). Using social media or networks is crucial in making a travel decision for any tourist.

2.2. Innovation in the Tourism sector and on Social Networks

2.2.1. Innovation

The term "innovation" comes from the Latin word "*innovatio*" which means "the creation of something new" (Peters & Pikemaat, 2006). Innovation is a process that reveals complexity and is fundamental for economic development (Brandão, 2014). Innovation can be a process, a result and an attribute (Morris, 2011); as a process it involves, "[...] not just an intention to change, but a collective effort in coordinated movements between knowledge and action" (Gorni *et al.*, 2009, p. 1). Innovation processes are, often, risky, expensive and unpredictable, and show some level of complexity (Morris, 2011).

Moscardo (2007) explains that innovation is different, depending on the situation, but that creativity, an approach to problem solving and the existence of a new way of thinking are common factors.

There are a variety of definitions for the term "innovation" (Peters & Pikemaat, 2006). In a 2009 study, Baregheh *et al.* (2009) identified around 60 definitions of innovation from various areas and at certain time periods. Joseph Schumpeter made a very important contribution to researching entrepreneurship and innovation in regional development and technological advances in business and economic development (Fritsch, 2017; Lemos, 2000) by defining five areas where innovation can be used (Schumpeter, 1983). This understanding is also shared in Peters & Pikkemaat (2006) and Lemos (2000).

Morris (2011) highlights the importance of knowing how to drive innovation since it stimulates an organization's competitiveness, by directing them to the "virtuous cycle model". The increasingly competitive market worldwide promotes the emergence of innovative and value-added products as compared to competitors. This is crucial in knowing the current and future market needs and trends, the structure and resources required for innovation (Gorni *et al.*, 2009; Hjalager & Nordin, 2011). Business innovation strategies need to focus on meeting customer needs,

while focusing also on the promotion of quality of service in order to enhance or maintain their participation in the markets in which they operate and to gain competitive advantage (Jacob *et al.*, 2003).

Weiermair (2006) says that, according to some economists, “innovation” should be considered as an investment if there are effective and enough dividends to support the additional costs and risks that innovation entails.

2.2.2. Innovation in Tourism

Tourism, in terms of innovation, according to Vieira (2011), can have catalytic effects on national, regional and local development (Oliveira, 2014). Innovation “[...] is one of the most important engines of regional growth, development and competitiveness” (Brandão, 2014, p.26) and tourism, combined with innovation has the ability to boost destinations and make them more competitive. Thus, generating new opportunities and new forms of tourism needs to be a priority. The importance of innovation in services is yet to be valued and properly used (Decelle, 2004) and tourism innovation still has a long way to go due to limited research in the area (predominantly launched as part of the defensive strategies of the tourism industry – see Hjalager, 1997).

Vieira (2011) states that the process of business innovation in the tourism sector must focus on being a development enhancer, an active factor as well as providing for differentiation. Differentiation was also emphasized by Peters & Pikkemaat (2006) as a crucial strategy for sustainable growth, especially in tourism as it is a globalized activity and where markets are beginning to show signs of saturation. Sørensen (2007) enumerates the importance that innovation has for the survival of tourism-related companies and suggests as well the apparent lack of knowledge on how innovation processes are created and implemented.

In the case of tourism, customers play a key role in the innovation process, whereby new products for a specific market are likely to be more successful in delivering consumer value (Baglieri & Consoli, 2009). Tourists’ needs are constantly changing and there is a need for the regeneration of the products offered. In tourist destinations, innovation must be represented in all of the stages of its development, as a way for keeping up with the trends (Brandão, 2014). Tour operators must perceive innovation as a contributor to the whole travel experience and innovation attributes can increase the overall value of the perceived tourist

experience (Liu *et al.*, 2019), since innovation is considered “[...] an important source of competitive advantage [...]” (Lopes *et al.*, 2014, p.151).

The OECD (2006) points out that innovation is fundamental for increasing productivity and tourism growth, identifying how the relationship between tourism and innovation can be enhanced for the development of tourism. Innovation in the service sector directs companies towards a quality and diversified offering in meeting the demanding expectations of consumers (Gorni *et al.*, 2009). According to Faché (2000), consumers are becoming less and less dependent on travel agencies for planning their trips. Estevão *et al.* (2010) state that “Tourism companies, if they want to ensure their survival in the medium and long term, must promote innovative practices in a systematic way” (Estevão *et al.*, 2010, p.1077). Gorni *et al.* (2009) also says that companies need to market new products and know what their customers’ demands and needs are.

At present, in improving market reach and product offering, tourism companies are keeping themselves tuned in with the latest information technology. The use of e-commerce portals by tourism companies allows consumers to organize their travel plans better (e.g. flight purchase, accommodation, etc.), social networks allow them to create communities for sharing information about a destination as well as through eWOM (online word-of-mouth marketing), tools that help in shaping current tourist behavior (Souza *et al.*, 2016). The authors also mention the importance of knowing the most specific needs of consumers. Technology aids service providers through potential marketing and advertising tools since they help “sell” the destinations. Lino (2012) reports about social networks and how they are important as information diffusers for companies, and to help in spreading what the company is willing to offer to a specific audience. The author also says that it is fundamental to create strategic plans for the content sharing process, which must be done in a careful, dynamic, fun and appealing way for the target consumers.

2.2.3. Tourism and Social Networks

Sousa (2014) confirms that consumers are becoming more and more informed, nowadays. The internet, as an innovative tool, through travel platforms, blogs, forums and other social networks, have constant alerts, notices, promotions, among others, thus becoming an environment where tourists’ opinions about their experience and future trips proliferate.

Social networks are considered excellent tools for interaction and communication and Facebook is, currently, the social network that has the largest number of users in the world (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Oliveira *et al.*, 2017). Through social networks, users expose their professional and personal lives (Rosa, 2010) and there are platforms and social networks directed to specific purposes (professional or personal). Ferreira (2012) explains that nowadays, registration of experiences is instantaneous, and visitors' experiences are recorded and shared on social networks, through images or other means that help destination promotions (Santos *et al.*, 2017). For Alves (2012), "[...] the role that social networks have for tourism agencies is basically to promote the marketed products (packages, tickets) [...]" (Alves, 2012, p.88). Sousa (2014) also supports this idea, where "changes, technological innovations and the need for new strategies make the internet a vital tool for spreading information about "tourist destinations"" (Sousa, 2014, p.143).

According to Oliveira (2015) and Alves (2012), the creation of pages on social networks is not enough for commercial purposes, as companies must create and adopt appropriate destination marketing strategies and programmes through these means. Social media have an essential role in tourism destination promotions and must become a part of destination marketing communication strategies (Rodríguez-Vázquez, Martínez Fernández, Armijos-Valdivieso & Mahauad-Burneo, 2017). It is increasingly becoming a more relevant marketing tool where DMOs (destination marketing organizations) can create a sustainable competitive advantage (Pike & Page, 2014) whilst developing social media strategies (e.g. Facebook) which are effective at promoting engagement and interaction with users of the Internet (Mariani, Di Felice & Mura, 2016). Facebook has billions of users and is still growing; therefore, it is significant to study certain social networks' impact on the tourism sector since this is an effective way to share product information with target segments (Ferreira, 2012). Facebook and other social networks changed the way how users communicate and engage with others. Users can easily get primary information and make decisions based on travel experiences or stories (Kaldeen, 2019). Furthermore, travel sites such as Booking.com, TripAdvisor and Agoda are a big help to travellers when it comes to their travel and accommodation preferences.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research was developed in order to understand the impact that Facebook posts have on the choice of a tourist destination. We prepared a questionnaire, with a total of 20 questions, both in Portuguese and English, divided into two parts; one that allowed us to understand the travel motivation of the respondents, and another which made it easier for us to understand the influence that Facebook had in choosing a destination. The survey was developed in Portuguese and translated to English by native speakers. The survey was tested with three respondents before being administered. During the month of October 2019, we posted the survey on Google Docs and shared it on Facebook. We obtained a total of 361 valid answers. In order to obtain answers to our questions, data was processed using descriptive as well as inferential statistics. The sample was a non-probability convenience sample, as the survey was distributed amongst the authors' contacts. Convenience samples are very popular in business and management (Bryman and Bell, 2015), however the results may not be generalized to a population. Albeit, our study may serve as "a springboard for further research" (Bryman and Bell, 2015, p.201). The inferential statistical analysis performed involved the chi square test (Oakshott, 2016).

4. RESULTS

Based on the survey data, an analysis and discussion of relevant results is hereby presented.

In statistical terms, the majority of the 361 respondents aged between 18 and 25 years old (143 respondents or 40% of the sample) and of these 77% are female. They are mostly of Portuguese (54.8%) and Brazilian (25.2%) nationalities, while the third group with the highest number of respondents is Timorese with 8.3% (Figures 1 and 2).

The main reason for travel is varied and for these answers, we made a cross data analysis that allowed us to establish the relationship between the variables. We noticed that the Portuguese and Brazilian respondents made their last trips motivated by "Leisure and Relaxation" (31% and 48%, respectively) followed by "Culture" (17% and 12%, respectively). The third most relevant motivation differs between respondents of Brazilian and Portuguese origin, 15% of Portuguese are motivated by "Visiting Friends and Relatives" while respondents of Brazilian origin are divided between

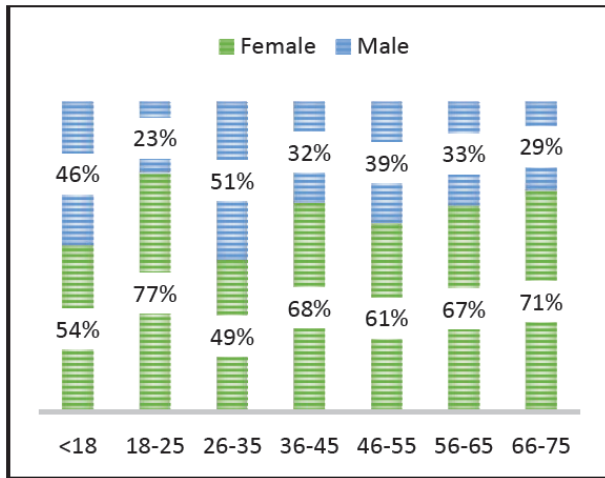


Figure 1: “Gender” and “Age” of the sample.

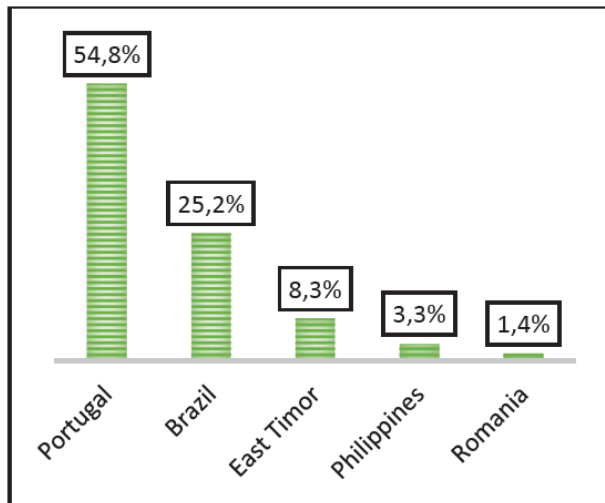


Figure 2: Nationality of the sample.

“Studies” and “Visiting Friends and Relatives,” both with 11%. The third country with the most number of respondents was East Timor, and this group responded with “Leisure and Relaxation” (23%) and “Studies” (23%), followed by “Visiting Friends and Relatives” with 17% (Figure 3).

The most popular answer by the respondents was a stay at the destination from 3 to 5 nights (31,3%) and 22,2% from 6 to 9 nights (Figure 4). Most of the time was spent “With family” (32%) or “With friends” (24%). However, we observed that many people (21%) also travelled “Alone” (Figure 5).

We obtained 361 answers to the question “Do you use other social media or networks to choose your travel destination?”, where about 94.5% of the respondents answered that they used other social networks too.

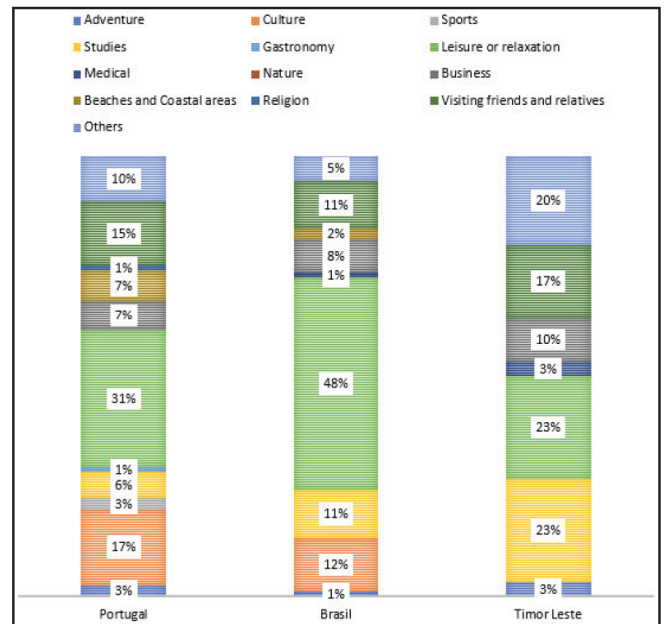


Figure 3: “Nationality” and “In your last trip, what was the reason to travel outside your usual residence?”

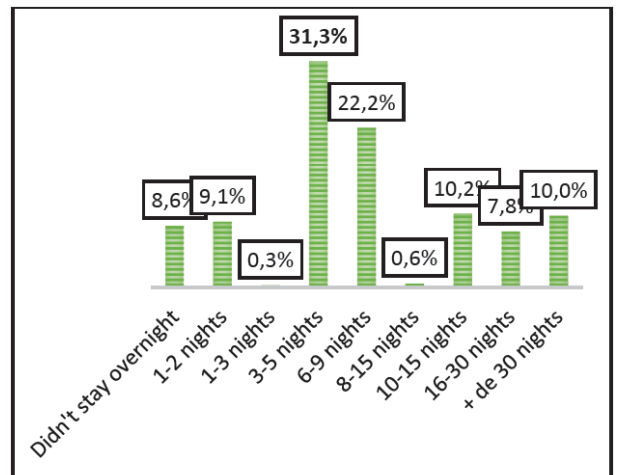


Figure 4: “How long did you stay (in nights) at the destination?”

Regarding the average time spent on Facebook, we noticed that many respondents (40%) usually spend “Daily up to 1 hour a day” on this social network, however 32% say they do not access it every day (Figure 6).

Based on this analysis, we tried to understand if there was a gender difference in the use of this social network and we found out that female respondents use the social network Facebook longer than male respondents – and quite significantly so (Figure 7).

Tables 1 and 2 show the calculation of the chi square statistic (Oakshott, 2016). The null hypothesis

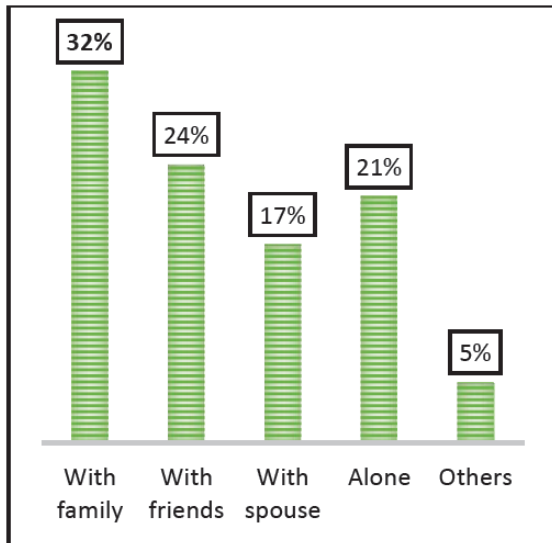


Figure 5: “Did you travel alone or with company?”

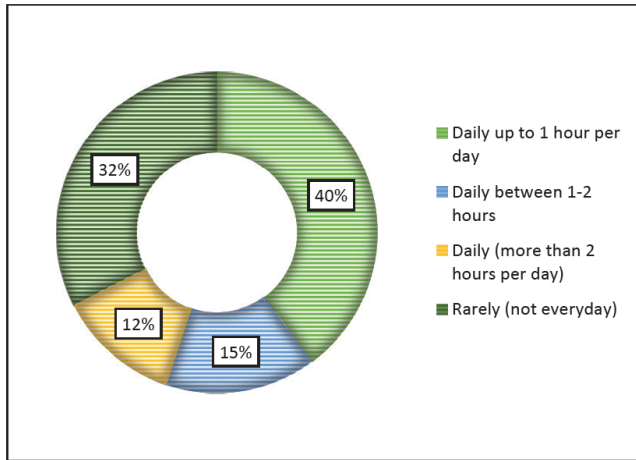


Figure 6: “What is the average time you spend on Facebook?”

How is that there is no association between gender and the influence of Facebook posts on travel destination. The alternative hypothesis H1 is that there is an association between gender and the influence of Facebook posts on travel destination. In effect, at the 0.1% level, we conclude that there does seem to be an association between gender and the influence of Facebook posts.

The sum of the chi square values is 159.2067 and this is the test statistic for this problem. There is 1 degree of freedom, as there are two columns and two rows, in Table 1.

The critical value for one degree of freedom at the 5% significance level is 3.841; and at the 1% significance level is 6.635; and at the 0.1% significance level is 10.827. All values are less than 159.20665, so

we conclude that there does seem to be an association between gender and the influence of Facebook posts, at the 0.1% level.

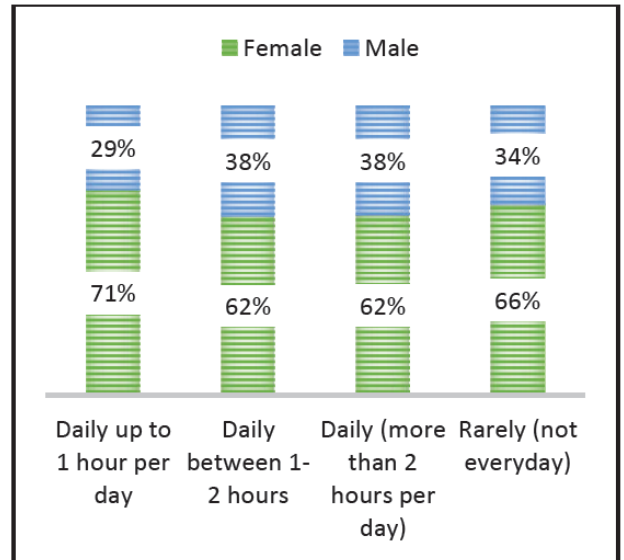


Figure 7: “Gender” and “What is the average time you spend on Facebook?”

Table 1: The Chi Square Test on Question 13 of the Survey – Did the Facebook Post(s) that you Saw Regarding your Last Travel Destination have an Influence on the Choice of your Destination?

Gender	Yes	No	Total
Feminine	32	209	241
Masculine	97	23	120
Total	129	232	361

Table 2: The Chi Square Test Calculations (Based on Oakshott, 2016)

O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
32	86.12	-54.12	2928.97	34.0107
209	154.88	54.12	2928.97	18.9111
97	42.88	54.12	2928.97	68.3049
23	77.12	-54.12	2928.97	37.9799
			Sum	159.2067

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Supporting Ferreira (2012), Mariani *et al.* (2016) and Rodríguez-Vázquez *et al.* (2017), it is essential to study the impact of social networks in the tourism sector, as they constitute innovative practices, with a

substantial number of users involved. Many opportunities may be found in social media (Shih *et al.*, 2014) and “companies that ignore social media in the hope that they are a passing fad do so at their own peril” (Parent, Plangger and Bal, 2011, pp. 219-220). Estevão *et al.* (2010) and Gorni *et al.* (2009) argue that the need for survival of tourism-dependent companies means that they must systematically promote innovative practices, including the use of Facebook for destination promotion. The internet is an innovative tool and Facebook, according to Sousa (2014), functions as a main source of travel destination information.

The analysis allowed us to conclude about travel motivations. For example, motivation is quite different based on the origin of the respondents, while “Leisure and Relaxation” trips are the main reasons for travel. Most people travel “with family” and spend between 3 and 5 nights at their chosen destination. We also noticed that 40% of the respondents spend an average of up to 1 hour daily on Facebook. Furthermore, female respondents use the social network Facebook longer than male respondents – and quite significantly so.

Regarding the tourism market and its evolution, travelling “Alone” (chosen in 21% of the cases) is an indicator of new market niches that may be perceived in the near future and a search allows us to say that there is an increasing supply in this market niche – more competitive pricing for people travelling alone – to hotels, on cruises, doing sports and adventure, and attending social events to get to know new people; as well as other programs focusing specifically on this group. Increasingly, and especially those who are tech savvy (Matos *et al.*, 2019), may spend time abroad, up to one week in fact, without feeling lonely at all.

Finally, this study revealed that men are much more influenced by Facebook posts, related to travel destinations, than women. We did inferential statistics, namely the chi square test, and we conclude that there does seem to be an association between gender and the influence of Facebook posts, at the 0.1% level. This may mean that tourism marketing firms may need to adjust their approach. We suggest that future research investigate further this phenomenon.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The survey we performed was based on a convenience sample, and we thus suggest that, in the future, another study be performed based on a sample

which is representative of a specific population. This will thus allow for the generalisation of the results. Albeit, we are satisfied that our research may serve as a starting point, indicating which issues it may be interesting to research. Namely, how the influence of Facebook posts varies according to gender and regarding travel destination choices.

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